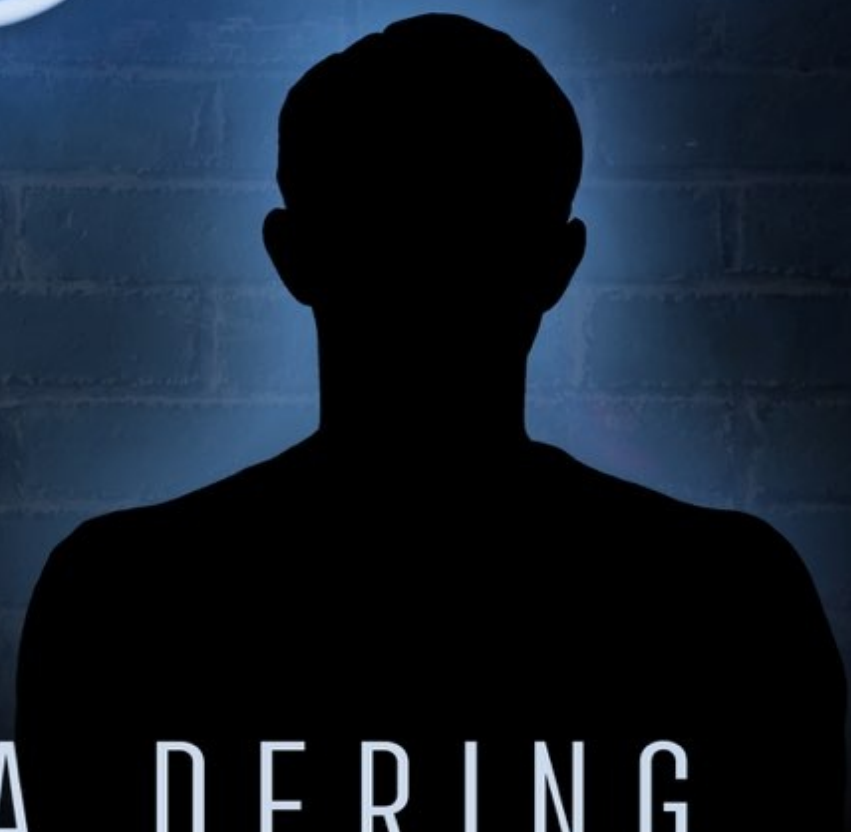




how to tame a
GOD



LYSSA DERING

HOW TO TAME A GOD

LYSSA DERING



Copyright © 2018 by Lyssa Dering

Published by Lyss.Press

Cover art by Lyss.Press Designs

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events 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.

CONTENTS

[About How to Tame a God](#)

[Content Warnings \(Possible Spoilers!\)](#)

[Quote](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[A Freebie For You](#)

[Enjoy this book?](#)

[Also by Lyssa Dering](#)

[About the Author](#)

ABOUT HOW TO TAME A GOD

— **What if your dark side had a body?** —

With his superpower of will, Wish can create or modify almost anything, including his own dimension, Wish City, a place for people with superpowers to go when they die on Earth. After wrestling the dimension back from a monster he unwittingly created, Wish is still **struggling to control his subconscious**.

Lake kills himself to get to the specials' heaven he's heard so much about. After hiding his power of emotional manipulation in life, he **yearns to use it on a lover now that he's free**. Meeting the charismatic and alluring Wish brings unexpected chemistry, but the two part on awkward terms.

When Lake meets **Wish's dark doppelgänger** in a club, he finds himself **swept up in a torrid love affair**. Meanwhile, the "real" Wish might be ready to give Lake what he wants. But can he learn how to give up control before it's too late?

How to Tame a God is the second book in the Wish City series. It is a gay erotic horror romance with an HFN ending.

Word count: 25,000

CONTENT WARNINGS (POSSIBLE SPOILERS!)

The following book contains:

- brief descriptions of suicide
- brief descriptions of involuntary medical procedures
- characters using a fictional drug and having sex under the influence
- BDSM edgeplay including emotional sadomasochism and rape play

QUOTE

“Let me tell you what I do know: I am more than one thing, and not all of those things are good.”

—Richard Siken

LAKE

I spend my last few hundred bucks on a crisp button-down, black slacks, a tie, and some dress shoes—a good outfit to die in, I think. When I'm ready, I roll the shirtsleeves up to my elbows so whoever finds me will see the tattoo on my forearm: a black and gray partial portrait of eyes crying. In a perfect universe, I'd get to wait out my final moments watching real eyes well with tears. But the Rohypnol will have dulled my powers by now, and I'm not that much of an asshole.

I glance at the bedside clock—6:02 p.m. Only a minute or two now until I go unconscious. I get comfortable on my bed, pull the bag over my head, and tie it snugly around my neck. I breathe in and out, in and out.

The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion. Camus said that. Unfortunately, the only way for a special to be free in this world is to leave it.

I wake gasping and open my eyes to a gray-blue twilight sky.

Did it work? Am I dead?

Cool grass cushions me and tickles my palms, and cicadas chirp in my ears. It's beautiful here, and the air smells fresh and clean.

But as lovely as this place seems to be, fear swirls in my gut; couldn't it be a near-death brain hallucination? I sit up, and the breeze chills my dew-soaked back. I take several deep breaths—unrestricted by black plastic—and get to my feet.

The textures are so crisp, the colors muted but clear...

Honk—hooooonk! The ear-splitting sound comes from behind me. On an otherwise empty stretch of road sits a vehicle with a neon sign attached to it reading “WELCOME WAGON!” The car honks again. I glance around, taking in endless grass and just the one street. Looks like my only choice is to approach the vehicle.

The driver's seat is empty.

“Hello, hello!”

I jump at the sudden shout.

“Welcome to Wish City, your second chance at a special life.” The voice—male—is coming from the door mirror, which has little holes in it signifying a speaker. “Please do not be afraid. You're safe here, I promise. I'm still working out the details of this whole welcome thing, but please get in the car. It'll take you into the city. This is a recording.”

“Obviously.” I walk around to the driver's side and yank on the handle, but it's locked. Rolling my eyes, I go back to the passenger's side. Not locked. I get in.

Immediately, the car starts moving—at about ten miles an hour.

“Really?” I turn on the radio, and “Mr. Sandman” by the Chordettes starts playing. I try to change the station, but apparently, this is the only one. Better than nothing, I guess. There are a lot worse oldies out there.

After a minute or two, the car speeds up, turning the grass outside the window into a shadowy green blur. I search the increasing darkness for signs of what's coming, but I can't make anything out. There's just the music. “*Sandman, I'm so alone/ Don't have nobody to call my own/ Please turn on your magic beam/ Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream...*”

I drop my head against the headrest and take more deep breaths. I can't quite shake the feeling that I might not be dead yet. I could still be sleeping inside that bag with the Rohypnol making me have crazy dreams as I run out of air.

I clamp my eyes shut. *Breathe. Think.* I roll down the window and let that fresh, clean air batter my face and bangs.

I just need to test if I'm dreaming. Doesn't it go that you should pinch yourself? Fingers trembling, I squeeze the skin on my arm until I can't take the pain.

Test one passed, I guess. I think I heard somewhere that text is supposed to be scrambled in dreamland, so I glance around and spot a scrolling marquee on the car's digital clock reading "MR. SANDMAN - THE CHORDETTES." I look away and back, and the moving letters slowly spell out the same words once again.

These don't feel like foolproof tests, but I'll have to go with this being reality, or I'll lose it. So, if this is the dimension Wish allegedly created for specials—the one I was trying to get to when I put that bag over my head—then the voice in the recording is probably his.

I've only heard him speak once, on a video someone took on their phone when the government captured him. He yelled "This is not the end!" over and over until the government goons paid to round up specials tranquilized him. The video didn't make the mainstream news, of course, but it was all over the internet, and I watched it several times. It was in one of the comments sections that I first heard about this place. I admit, I was expecting something a little more—

Dots of light filter in through the car windows. City lights. It's full-on nighttime now, but the sky glows pink and blue behind several gleaming skyscrapers. No more grass except for in a few spots, such as along the sidewalk. Other cars use the street now, none of which boast neon signs or drive on their own.

Cool. I thought this Heaven might hold a hilly landscape, meadows filled with flowers, stuff like that. A quaint little town. Anyplace I don't have to

hide what I am is fine by me, but this is much more interesting.

The radio cuts out to static, then: “This car is going to take you to my house because to be honest, I haven’t gotten together a welcome team yet. Sorry. But I’m psyched to meet you. This is still a recording,” Wish adds at a lower volume.

At a red light, I glimpse a sign reading “LIVE NUDE MEN.” Of course, Wish would make a place like that. I bite my lip and grin.

The car stops next to a tall gray curb.

“You’re here,” says Wish. “Please get out now.”

I push open the door. As soon as I’m standing on the sidewalk, the car whizzes away and disappears around the corner, leaving the street empty and quiet. I swallow and push my bangs out of my eyes. So, this is Wish’s house.

It stands three stories tall. Surrounded by a raised yard edged in concrete, it’s a dreamy little cut-out between two brick buildings, both dark and lifeless. The house, in contrast, glows invitingly, lit inside and out. The path leading from the edge of the lawn to the door has diamond-shaped lights embedded on either side of it. I ascend some steps and make my way along the path and up onto the porch. The air smells like honeysuckle.

I ring the doorbell. The blinds are closed, which means I can’t get a peek at Wish yet. In the video I saw of him, he had matted dirty-blond hair and bags under his eyes, but he was still attractive. I remember thinking it was bullshit he got to have such an interesting power *and* good looks, but I bet he suffered for them. He got caught, anyway.

A soft brushing comes from behind the door before it opens. Golden curls emerge first on a head looking down. Then Wish glances up.

Wow. His curls aren’t matted anymore, that’s for sure. And the skin under his eyes is smooth and blemish-free. He’s like a Michelangelo sculpture brought to life.

He opens the door wider, revealing a smooth, lightly muscled torso between the flaps of a bathrobe and plaid boxer shorts. I slide my gaze lower and find fuzzy pink bunny slippers. Adorable.

I raise a brow.

“Hi,” says Wish. “Can I help you?”

“Yeah. A car brought me here?” I point my thumb behind me where the car used to be. “No driver?”

“Oh!” Wish smiles and stands taller. With his back against the door, he pushes it open and beckons me inside. “Welcome, welcome. I’m Wish, if you didn’t know.”

I step into the house and put my hands into my pockets. “Yeah, I guessed.”

We’re standing in a pleasantly lit foyer/living room. An extremely large, flat-screen TV stands frozen on an animated frame of the Joker from the *Batman* cartoon. On an orange sectional sofa sits a huge bowl of popcorn and a bunched-up multicolored afghan.

I smirk. “Movie night?”

Wish scratches the back of his neck. “Yeah, kinda, but it can wait. Come sit.” He sets the popcorn bowl on the coffee table and takes a seat with his afghan.

I sit, too, leaving one cushion between us.

“So.” Wish’s eyes pick up the glow from an ornate lamp on the end table. “Tell me about yourself.”

I scan the room, finding wood-paneled walls and shag carpeting. In the far corner, gelatinous pink blobs float in a lava lamp.

“Is this a job interview?” I joke.

“Could be. I run everything.” Arrogance drips from Wish. But I guess he did create an entire dimension by himself. At least, I don’t believe anyone has an ability like his, and if they did, wouldn’t they want to make their own paradise instead of helping out with this one?

“I’m Lake,” I say.

“How old are you, Lake?”

“Does age really matter now that I’m dead?”

Wish cocks his head and stares at me for a few seconds. Then he smiles. “Not really. Tell me anyway. How old are you?”

I hesitate. Sharing personal details used to be a game of risk. *Will they figure out I’m different? Will they turn me in?* But the government can’t get me here. “I’m twenty-three.”

“Aw, so young!”

Wish’s condescending tone has me biting my tongue to keep it in check.

“Do you want to be older?” Wish asks. “I can change you. Can make you taller, too. You’re like what, 5’6””? Adorable.”

I take a breath through my nose and stare at the Joker freeze-frame for a second. “No, thanks. Did you change yourself? Were you a crusty old man before?” I know he wasn’t, but that’s not the point.

Wish smiles bigger.

I squint.

“I was twenty-seven,” he says. “I shaved off a couple years. Why not?”

“Cool. But I’m perfectly fine the way I am.”

Wish gets a certain gleam in his eye. “Yes, you are.”

Oh Universe, is he flirting with me? Maybe he’s thinking I’m the perfect size to bend over for him. I fight the urge to roll my eyes. Men always think that at first.

We have a little staring contest.

Wish blinks before me. “What’s your power?”

It’s a question I’ve never been asked, not even online. “Do you want to guess?”

“No. Just tell me.”

“How about I show you?” I won’t really do it, but it’d be nice to get under Wish’s skin. He’s too beautiful. That statue exterior needs some cracks. I

might even like him a little better with anguish in his eyes.

The idea of being able to indulge in my power without the risk of being discovered makes my heart lift. I dig my fingers into my knee.

Wish's gaze grows grave. "Look, I need to know if whatever it is will interfere with my city. That's all."

My urge to ruffle him subsides, but I'm distracted by images of tears creeping down flushed cheeks, and—

I shake my head. I should be nicer to Wish. I should be grateful I had this place to escape to at all. "I can manipulate other people's emotions. Shouldn't affect any of your stuff."

Wish takes a while to respond. His expression is so guarded that I can't tell if he's afraid, confused, or something else.

"Interesting," he says at last. "Does it have to be on purpose?"

I furrow my brow. "Of course."

He laughs. I get the sense it's at an inside joke with himself. "So, you decide you want someone to cry, and they cry? Like that?"

"Sort of." *Crying's my favorite.* And I have to do more than want it. I have to *will* it, picture it. Then it happens.

I bet Wish's blue eyes would look gorgeous welling with tears. I try to make my mind blank so I don't do it to him on accident.

I clear my throat. "So. What happens now?"

"I get you someplace to live and a job. Any idea what you'd like to do?"

Before I died, I worked as a pharmacy tech, but I definitely don't want to do that in my afterlife. "Not really."

"Okay. You don't have to answer now, but think about it. I want you to be happy here, Lake. That's the whole point."

"What am I supposed to do right now? Do I go off on my own?" The idea of exploring doesn't sound appealing at the moment. My body isn't tired, but my mind feels...heavy. And I want. Tears and anguish and hands clawing

desperately at me... Once I start thinking about using my power, it's hard to stop.

"You can stay here for tonight," Wish says. "I've been creating every day for a long time, and I don't have the energy to do you justice right now." He touches my shoulder.

I rear back.

"Whoa. I was—" Wish chuckles, but it's clear he's nervous and not amused.

I clench my jaw and huff out my nose. "I don't like to be touched by strangers." I almost apologize, but why should I? Does dying mean I don't get boundaries anymore? "You need to ask permission."

Wish locks eyes with me. He's so serious, so present in this moment—focused entirely on me—that I understand why people would want to follow him (beyond wanting to get close to his magnificent power, of course). But he should stay away from me. He shouldn't look at me right now.

"Understood," he says. "I was going to ask if those were the clothes you died in."

The memory of crinkly plastic over my head returns in a sickly, visceral wave. I need fresh air, but I force myself to stay seated. I'd rather not have Wish think I can't handle change or something. That I can't handle death or the idea of freedom or my power. "Yes, I died in these."

"Are they clean?"

"I don't know. I woke up in some grass. It was wet. Dewy?"

"Hmm." Wish curls a finger under his chin and appraises me. All of a sudden, I'm not dressed in my button-down, slacks, and dress shoes anymore. I've got a bathrobe and boxers like Wish's and fuzzy slippers in the shape of hedgehogs. At least their spines appear to be plush.

Wish's eyes glitter. "You get hedgehogs because you're prickly."

I purse my lips in an effort to keep from scowling, but I can't help a tightening around my eyes. It seems Wish doesn't know how to ask for

permission before doing *anything*.

“What do the bunnies mean?” I ask. “You can’t keep it in your pants?”

Wish cackles. “I can’t! But okay, that’s the last thing I’m creating tonight. Back to *Batman*.” Sans remote, the TV show resumes.

At a loss, I relax against the sofa. It’s comfortable—extremely so. I assumed there wouldn’t be sleep or physical exhaustion after death, but if even Wish himself needs a night off, this place must be similar to... I don’t know what to call it. Life? St. Louis? I want to sleep. I want to unleash my power, but I also want to sleep.

Wish holds the popcorn bowl in front of me. “Want some?”

“No, thanks.”

“If you’re hungry or thirsty, there’s all kinds of stuff in the fridge. Water, wine, beer, cheesecake—”

“I said no.”

Wish gives me a tight smile. “Okay. You’ve been through a lot, so I’ll forgive you for being snappy.”

On the TV screen, Harley Quinn appears and does a running jump into the Joker’s arms.

I wrap my robe tightly around myself.

Wish

Lake's power gives me the willies. He's looking pretty non-threatening right now, though, curled up on the couch with his hands under his cheek, dozing. I drape my afghan over him and tuck it under his chin, and he doesn't stir.

Probably safe to pull up my database then. If he sees it, oh well. It doesn't necessarily need to be a secret.

I replace my *B:TAS* episode with a menu of all the specials I know about so far. This requires creative energy, since I haven't bothered to make a remote or a keyboard, and I told myself I was going to rest my brain all night tonight. But a new person showing up in my city is kind of an extenuating circumstance, especially since I never met Lake before we died.

I wonder how he survived on his own in the Earth dimension and managed not to get caught. At least, I'm pretty sure the government never caught him, because if they had, he would have died on an operating table like I did, undergoing their shit surgery that never works—in a gown instead of his Sunday best.

I add a new entry in my database, complete with a picture of Lake as he is right now, sleeping. The entry is mostly incomplete at the moment, with only the Age and Power fields filled in. If he's anything like the rest of us, he won't know much about his own abilities, how to control them, the side effects, etc. I guess I should be grateful he can't manipulate matter or

something.

“Storing information on me?”

I jump, and so does my heartbeat. “Yeah. Been trying to gather as much info on all of us as I can.”

Gaze still a little dreamy from sleep, Lake runs his fingers through his bangs. With his arm lifted, the sleeve of his robe falls back, revealing some ink.

I almost grab his wrist so I can get a look, but I don’t want to freak him out again. “Can I see your tattoo?”

Lake shows me his forearm. From the underside, a pair of androgynous grayscale eyes, twisted with emotion and spilling crocodile tears, stare up at me.

I can only imagine it’s some kind of specials’ pride tattoo. “Pretty dangerous to have a tattoo like that showing what your power is.”

Lake shrugs. “When people ask about it, I say it’s a reminder to stay in touch with my emotions.”

Looking into Lake’s cool eyes, I can’t see anybody buying that story. “Why tears? Why not a picture of somebody grinning?”

Lake’s gaze goes straight-up icy, and we stare at each other for several seconds as tension shrouds the room. Touchy subject, I guess. Lake seems touchy about a lot of things. But I know he’s probably stressed about dying and being in a new place and all.

“Don’t want to talk about it?” I ask.

“We shouldn’t.” He looks at my screen. “You took a picture of me sleeping?”

I replace the photo with what he looks like now, all mean and narrow-eyed. “Better?”

He shakes his head. “What are you using this information for?”

“To keep track of who comes here and what they can do so I don’t run

into problems.”

Lake’s shoulders straighten. “You mean like the U.S. government does? With you and me?”

If I were a violent person, I’d slap Lake. Really. And if I weren’t trying to be a good leader, I’d turn his nose into a dick. “Yeah, just like the government. Except, I don’t know, I’m not going to fucking give people lobotomies.”

Stiffly, Lake shrugs. “Just checking.”

“Help me fill this out.”

“Why do you need it? I already told you I won’t cause problems.” Lake stares at my screen for a while. “Sexual orientation? Really?”

“I don’t like to assume.”

“Well here are your answers. Ready?”

“Mhm.”

“I’m into everyone and no one.” Lake talks with his hands. “Gender is just arbitrary categories I can’t be bothered with. You don’t need to know my height and weight because I can’t think of anything more irrelevant.” He pauses, his slightly sunken cheeks reddening. “Want to know my star sign, too?”

He’s obviously being sarcastic, but I can’t help but poke at him. “Yeah, sure. And your Myers-Briggs, if you don’t mind.”

Lake meets my gaze, unblinking, and I refuse to blink first this time. A few seconds tick by before he gives in with a theatrical sigh. “Aquarius, ISTJ. Happy?”

“Thrilled.” I add both to Lake’s entry for the hell of it. “I’m a Gemini. Pretty sure that means we’re compatible.”

Lake bursts into a hearty laugh. The abrupt change in mood puts me on alert, but the way his eyes crinkle at the corners and underneath gives me a punch to the gut with how unexpectedly cute it makes him. He has an interesting face otherwise—strong jaw, high cheekbones, prominent ears and

nose. Like his cheeks, his eyes are a bit sunken. But when he smiles, everything stretches or folds, and he looks like a mischievous imp.

I like him.

“You know astrology is fake, right?” he asks.

“Mmm, I don’t know. If I can create a dimension just by thinking it up, astrology being real doesn’t seem that far off a possibility. I mean, reincarnation is real.”

“No, it isn’t.”

I know for a fact reincarnation is real, but it seems like a lot of work for no benefit to prove it to Lake. Which is a type of thought I’ve never had in my life. Ugh, I’m running out of mental juice. I shouldn’t have started messing around with my database just because the excitement of a new visitor gave me an energy boost.

I get up and switch off the TV manually then linger in front of its expansive blackness. “Anyway, Aquarius and Gemini are both quick-witted signs and both air. We could form a strong mental connection. Theoretically.”

“I think this is the second time you’ve hit on me.” I can hear the smile in Lake’s voice.

I look at him over my shoulder. “I like to flirt, but if you’re uncomfortable, I’ll stop.” Either way, it’s nice to talk to someone I didn’t make. My creations have personalities of their own, but their knowledge is limited to what I know. Aside from myself, my ex-possession Seraphim is the only soul from the Earth dimension here in Wish City. And while we’re on friendly terms, our past together is...bumpy. I like to give him space.

“If I was uncomfortable, I’d tell you,” Lake says. “Are you okay?”

I turn around. “Why? Do I not look okay?”

“You look tired. Not like...normal people look tired. But I can sense something.”

In the Earth dimension, my face used to get uglier the more tired I got. I hated it. Now, it stays fresh all the time. “Does your power include enhanced

empathy?”

“I wish. But if I want to know what someone’s feeling, I have to observe it like everyone else. Or I have to make them feel what I want.”

Lake’s words turn over in my stomach. I hope he hasn’t gotten the idea that I’d be up for changing more than his appearance. “I don’t mess with other people’s powers, FYI. Only if I absolutely have to.”

His brow creases. “I wasn’t asking you to. I like my power.”

“Good.” I hover awkwardly in front of the couch. “Your power kind of scares me, personally.”

Lake gets an intense look in his eyes, then he gets up and stalks toward me. He stops too close for a casual conversation but not close enough to touch. “You think people aren’t scared of your power?”

“Some are, but you don’t look scared.”

Lake shrugs. “It must be hard having a power so big.” His voice is soft, swirling around me like vapor. Is this him flirting back? I’ve been with a lot of guys, and some of them get like this: intense, focused. “Do you have to keep track of a lot of things?” he asks.

“Yeah.” And I’m not doing a great job of it. Too many people, too many places, both of them either not doing enough on their own or doing way too much without me knowing. But I won’t tell Lake that.

He smirks. “Maybe you should clone yourself. Then you could do all the work with half the effort.”

Ha! Clone myself? And have another me running around doing Universe-knows-what? No, thanks!

I must be laughing like a crazy person because Lake isn’t smiling anymore.

“Sorry,” I say.

Lake is still standing a little too close, and even though he’s shorter than me, something about him makes me want to seek comfort like a child—tell him I’ve scraped my knee and have him clean it up. He’s focusing so hard on

me that it's making me a little weak in the knees.

It hasn't been a long time since I've had sex, but for months, it's been with people I've made. No one from Earth.

"You laugh without telling me what's funny, Wish."

"Maybe I don't want to tell you."

We stare at each other—another contest. I should just come out with an offer. Otherwise, Lake might stare at me all night without doing anything. "If you're up for it, we could fool around. It wouldn't have to mean anything. Wouldn't make things awkward later, anyway."

Lake doesn't flinch. "Mmm, I don't work like that, unfortunately."

"How do you work?"

Lake's jaw ripples beneath his faintly freckled skin. "Always means something with me. I'm not good at casual."

It's refreshing to hear someone say that *before* the sex. On Earth, it often seemed like the other person was into it for the same reasons I was—feeling good—but later, they'd be surprised I didn't have the energy for love while I was busy trying to make a world. I'm not sure I have the energy now, but it might be nice to pretend for a while. And if Lake tries to get too intense, I can always pull us back. I'm good at that.

"I'll allow for the possibility of it meaning something." I trace the plush edge of one of Lake's bathrobe flaps, careful not to make contact with his body.

He glances down at my finger. Then he looks into my eyes with his moody brown ones, his brow wrinkled like this is the hardest decision he's ever made.

It's cute.

"Alright," he says. "Go ahead and touch me."

I slide my hand under his robe, and just feeling his skin against my palm has me burning up. This is what I need: sex with a real man, a fellow special. Universe, I hope he's good.

Lake pets the back of my neck, sending a rush of tingles over my scalp, and gets close enough for our noses to touch. “Show me to your bedroom.”

My cock swells. “This way.”

* * *

Lake

Wish takes me down a dark hallway. This is such a bad idea. Nothing good can come from getting involved with the guy in charge of my afterlife—my *soul*. But I’ve been drawn to him for a while. In fact, he’d probably think I’m a stalker if he knew how I combed through the internet, looking for information on him. One commenter boasted he’d hooked up with Wish in a club, but under scrutiny, he’d admitted he couldn’t prove it because Wish could change his appearance. I’ve heard of specials who can *only* do that, but Wish can do everything. He’s like a god.

I try to get my head in the game. Sex. Right now. Wish’s hand gripping mine and yanking me into the bedroom.

Neon strips line the woodwork, lending the space a bluish glow.

“Look up,” says Wish.

Above us, the night sky gleams as if we’re standing outside, yet the temperature is as even as it was in the living room and the air as still. Peaceful. The tension drains from my shoulders.

“Wow,” I say. “Like magic.”

“I’m magic.”

A rustling at my feet has me forgetting about stars and invisible ceilings. Wish is kneeling, tugging my boxer shorts down to my ankles.

Alright then.

“I got rid of my gag reflex,” Wish says.

I don't go apeshit over blowjobs like a lot of guys do, and an easy throat isn't as interesting as a willing body despite whatever discomfort I put it through, but I can understand why Wish would tell me this. "Did you? When?"

"Right after my first blowjob." Wish rubs my naked thighs—does he like the fur, the shape? I've tried to make myself muscular and intimidating, but compact muscles are the best I can achieve.

Wish cradles my cock in his warm hand and strokes, sending me hardening a little. Though it's nearly dark, I can see Wish's eyes like glass staring up at me. He really is a stunning thing. This is like being in a museum after dark and slipping past the ropes to touch forbidden stone. I trace his perfect cheekbone.

"Do you like to boss your lovers around?" Wish asks.

What I like are lovers made raw and defenseless, zeroed in on me, moving on endorphin-soaked instinct. I like psychobabble pouring from their lips and desperation—at first tightening them up then making them loose when I gift them with my attention.

Wish probably isn't into that, which is...fine.

"I like to boss them sometimes," I say. "Maybe not in the way you think."

"I'm used to doing the bossing."

I stroke Wish's full bottom lip, and he sucks my thumb into his mouth. Unfortunately, he might as well be a sex doll right now. His expression is pleasant, but his armor is impenetrable; I can't see inside him at all. And as much as I hate myself for it, it's a turnoff.

Control is less important than what someone willing to give in the moment.

"Do you get tired of being in charge?" I ask. "Ever want to let go?"

"No." Wish fondles my balls. "Will you let me top you?"

I shrug. "I don't care too much about the mechanics."

Wish looks at my still half-hard dick and bites his lip. "Great. You wanna

fuck my mouth first?”

I put my hand in Wish’s curls, which are unbelievably soft, and will myself to get harder. Wish wants to give me pleasure. He wants my cock on his tongue. And it’s a nice idea, but I need more. Wish wants this to be a transaction—his mouth for my hole, but I...

Nervous sweat pricks my temples. I need to connect with him, or this won’t be worth anything. I’ve always found lovers in the kink scene and wrapped my power in the disguise of emotional sadism, and I don’t need that here. But at the least, I need to feel something. I need Wish to feel something.

I turn away. “Let’s lie down.”

“Um. Okay, sure.”

I head for the bed, discarding all of my clothing on the way. Wish follows, and once I get seated in the middle of the huge mattress, he settles between my legs. He rests a hand on my thigh and knits his brows together.

“What do you need?” he asks. “Do you still want this?”

Anxiety makes my face and neck hot. When I start things, I’m always hoping my body will react like everyone else’s, and in the kink scene, it usually does. But with vanilla partners, I’m rarely as lucky. Do I know why I’m doing this? But of course, I do. This is Wish, leader of the specials, man with the biggest power, and I have a chance at seeing him bare it for me in the dark.

“Please be patient with me,” I say. “I told you I can’t do casual.”

Wish huffs. “But what does that mean?” He kneads my thigh, buzzing with nervous energy. He’s so different from what he was like earlier. I bet not many men stay soft around him, and the emotionally sadistic parts of me love that I’ve made him unsure.

I reach between his legs and find boxers full of a stiff cock. “Can you tell me what you like when you’re giving a blowjob? What you like the guy to do for you?”

Wish swallows audibly and meets my gaze. “It doesn’t matter what I

want. He's the one getting sucked."

I find hot skin at Wish's boxer slit and stroke gently. "It matters to me. I'm interested in your thoughts and feelings."

"But I don't want to think or feel." Wish pushes my hand away from his crotch.

I grip his wrist and hold it firmly, rubbing the underside with my thumb. "Do you have trouble keeping a clear head during the day?"

Wish scowls. "I can't have a clear head, Lake. I have to take care of everyone and everything, and my head is the epicenter of it all." He glances at where I'm touching him, and my cock gives a twitch.

"So, you were lying. You do get sick of being in charge."

Wish bares his teeth, a flash of shiny white amongst blue-toned shadows. "Yeah, I guess." He flexes his fingers. "What is this? What do you want?"

"I want to feel you. Kiss me."

Wish stares daggers at me. Maybe he'll call this travesty off. But then he dives for my mouth and slams our lips together, shoving me onto my back with the weight of his body. The flaps of his robe tickle my obliques as he sits up. "You're weird, you know that? Every other guy would have loved for me to blow them, but you'd rather argue." Wish gives me another hard peck on the mouth. "And kiss."

"Yeah." There's nothing else to say.

Wish shrugs off his robe, exposing toned shoulders. I run my hands over them, and Wish rubs his barely-clothed cock against mine. My semi-erection turns full-blown at last, and a moan escapes me.

"You want to know what I'm feeling, right? You're hot." Wish ruts against me in a rhythm. "I love your whole vibe, especially this undercut." He rubs the buzzed part of my head. "I want to get off on you."

My scalp tingles where he touched me. "I know." I trace the knobs of his spine. "I want to cut you open."

Wish scoffs softly. "That's intense."

“Yeah.”

“You’re hard as a rock now.” Wish buries his fingers in the longer strands of my hair and tilts my head to the side. He kisses my cheek with an open mouth. “Ready for me to fuck you?” he whispers, and I can feel his breath on my face.

Nervousness flutters through me. But it’ll be easier for me if he fucks me because I won’t have to worry about what my dick is doing. “Yeah. Fuck me.”

Wish massages my hip bone. “There aren’t STDs here. Do you still want me to wear a condom?”

I’ve never had anyone inside me bare. “I... I guess not.”

“You’re sure? ’Cause I’m gonna touch you deep.” He mouths lightly at my earlobe. “Be all over you, in you. A stranger.”

Wish doesn’t feel like a stranger. Part of me wants to push him away, but part of me wants to go limp and let him do whatever he wants. Which is dangerous, but I still rut and catch my dick on the band of his boxers.

“I give you permission to fuck me without a condom,” I say.

Wish fishes his cock out of his boxer slit, and his knuckles brush my shaft in the process.

I shudder. I pull Wish down by the back of the neck and taste the corner of his mouth, his tongue, his teeth. Wish’s breaths are shaky and warm against my damp lips.

“I can make your hole wet with my power,” he says. “We wouldn’t have to use any other lube. Is it too weird?”

“No.”

Wish kisses me. My hole tingles and warms and makes moisture dripping out of me like fresh cum.

“Oh,” I breathe.

“You like it?”

My face is burning. I nod as I bend my legs back for Wish.

“Me, too.” Wish slips his hand into my crack and massages around my wet hole. “I keep creating people to fuck, but you’re different. You don’t do what I want.” He nudges me with his finger. “I like it. You’ve got me so hard.” The way his voice breaks over the word *hard* makes my stomach tumble. Wish works me open, and I wonder if he could make my hole bigger with his power. The idea twists through me like wire. He could do anything to me.

Wish slides his fingers out of me and meets my gaze. “Look at you. You’re a mess.” He trails a slick finger along my jaw. “You still in there, babe?”

I nod and reach out to him. We kiss, and his tongue meets mine, languid and gentle. I want to keep him close, but he fights my hold, and he brings his hand to his dick.

“I’m going to fuck you now.”

“Fine.”

With one hand pressing against my chest, Wish pushes in. Not for a single second does it burn. I love Wish City. Once Wish is fully seated—

Oh, Universe. I moan, and Wish laughs.

“I made my dick a little longer for you.” My legs are jelly as he thrusts into me, never fully moving away from my sweet spot.

It’s almost too much, like I’m strapped to a sex machine with nowhere to go. I shake uncontrollably and make embarrassing noises.

Wish grabs my dick with a magically slick hand and stares into my eyes, and for a second, I’m outside myself, floating above the room and watching myself in my past partners’ place, so overwhelmed with sensation I can barely function.

“Is this what you wanted?” Wish asks in a strained voice.

Almost, my mind answers. I fall back into my pleasure-soaked body, and that familiar pain twists through my chest again. Why am I like this? Why? I need to be hurting Wish, or at least affecting him, but he’s back to being the

confident lover who thinks he can make me melt with no effort.

I touch Wish's face and stroke the lines of phantom tears. "Wanted—" I scowl. Talking is hard.

Wish kisses me on the temple, and some of the pressure inside me lets up as he pulls out a fraction. "Tell me, babe. It's okay." He trails his mouth over my ear. "I know you like kisses, but what will make you crazy?"

I laugh. Crazy? That's easy. But it's a naïve thing to ask for. Wish will say no.

"I— I wanted—" A voice in the back of my mind tells me to shut up. Why ruin this moment with something Wish probably won't be into? I haven't prepared for this. I haven't put it in the framework of kink, Dom and sub, limits and needs. There hasn't been a negotiation.

But I strangle that dissenting voice in the end. I gag it with hope. "I wanted to make you cry. With my power."

Wish

Lake's answer hardly comes as a surprise. It's what every special wants—to use their power freely, even better if they can do it in front of someone who will accept it as the world didn't do.

I continue to shove my cock in and out of the tight, slick grip of Lake's hole. He quivers every time I move. I could milk him like this if I wanted, probably: slow and steady until he erupts with a strangled cry, but maybe another time.

I give him a particularly hard thrust. “Me blubbering on top of you? That'll get you off?”

Uncertainty flashes in Lake's gaze, but then he nods. “Please.”

I figure it can't be that bad. A few tears, a quivering bottom lip. Then maybe Lake will adore me as my followers used to, and I won't feel like a failure for not controlling my city.

“Do it then,” I say. “Show me your power.”

Lake grips my arm, his gaze a little more lucid than before. “Really?”

“Yeah.” I lean down and nuzzle his ear. “Make me cry, Lake.”

Lake makes a sweet little noise. Has he ever done this with someone, or has he only harbored the desire in secret, never acting on it for fear of the

government coming after him? I get harder thinking I might be his first.

He pulls my head back by the hair, sending a little burst of pain through my scalp. He holds the sides of my face with eager, trembling hands and stares into my eyes as if he's trying to reach into them.

I curl my toes and force myself not to shove his hands away. This might not feel good. It might—

I burn. My chest, nose, tear ducts. My eyes well, tears spill, and my stomach roils with an extreme sadness that makes me cry out. I crumple against Lake's body and hug him like an anchor as I can't help but sob. This is way worse than I expected. Amazingly, my erection doesn't wilt. I cry as I fuck Lake, gripping his shoulders and digging my nails in.

"It hurts," I say.

"Shh." Lake rubs my back. His legs interlock around my waist, and he pants against my ear. "It's okay." His words are at odds with the wrecked quality of his voice. He's loving this, isn't he?

I chase pleasure like an antidote to the pain inside me. Is Lake keeping it up, making my sadness last? I sob louder and fuck harder, a part of me wanting to hurt Lake back. But even in duress, I make sure we're lubed up, willing Lake's hole to make more slick and my cock to pour precum.

Lake grips my upper arms. "Please let me see your eyes."

I push myself up. One of my tears falls onto Lake's cheek, and he moans, his face going slack with ecstasy. Is he coming? But no, his cock is still begging for release, hard and dark and dry.

I stroke it for him and pound into him with all my strength. I must be hitting his prostate. But the ecstasy on his face turns slowly into creased-brow frustration. He grunts and rolls his eyes like it's all just useless.

"Hey." I grip his jaw.

He shoves my hand away and covers his eyes. "Don't."

I stop thrusting and wipe at my cheeks. No new tears are coming, at least. "Don't what? Give a shit about your pleasure?"

Lake uncovers part of one eye. “It won’t work. Just fuck me until you come.”

It’s almost as if I didn’t try to convince him to do the same thing to me a few minutes ago, and Lake refused. He wanted to make it good for me, and dammit, I’ll make this good for him.

I grab Lake’s hand and kiss the back of it. “Why won’t it work?”

Lake groans. “You’re not into it.”

I can feel the arousal slipping out of my skin, but as a rule, I don’t mess with my own pleasure. There’s no fun in it. “What does it matter? You’re into it. This isn’t just about me.”

Lake shakes his head.

“Would you like me to use my power to make you come?” I ask.

Lake snaps all his attention onto me—as if there isn’t a single other process going on in his complex mind. “You can do that?”

“Mhm.”

Lake licks his lips. “Um. No. No, I’d rather...” He touches my face, and I understand now that he’s tracing tear tracks. He said earlier he wanted to cut me open, and here we are. “Can you handle more crying?” he asks.

I grit my teeth. I want to ask him why, and what the fuck is wrong with him that he wants to hurt me? *Who is* into this? But that isn’t what you do when somebody has a fetish, and I won’t make him feel shitty for wanting to use his power. At least, I’ll try not to.

“Yeah.” I glance down at where our bodies remain connected. I’ve never felt unsure with my dick in another guy, but...

“I can get on top,” Lake says. “Allow you to let go. Ride you. It still feels good even if I don’t come.” There’s a glimmer of enthusiasm in Lake’s eyes. So, I get on my back.

Lake crawls on top of me and lowers himself onto my cock. “You’re really beautiful.”

“Thank you.”

His gaze locks on mine. He rides me, and I wait for the tears, but for a while, it’s just fucking. I can’t believe he won’t be able to come with how stiff his dick is, bobbing in the air as he moves his hips, sending pleasure radiating through my bottom half. I start to relax into it.

Then, Lake leans down close, and I know the pain’s coming. It starts as sinus pressure between my brows and in my nose. Then my chest twists, and my eyes well, and Lake turns blurry as he keeps riding me and looking at me.

I sob like before. I clench my hands in the sheets and ache all over as pleasure takes a back seat to Lake’s power tearing into me like an animal.

Lake kisses me. I put my hand in his hair and pull hard enough to make him whimper, but he doesn’t seem fazed. He nuzzles my tear-streaked face and whispers, “Thank you, thank you, thank you.” Then he licks my cheek.

I don’t know how it happens. I end up on top of Lake again with my hand at the base of his throat. Sadness is still winding through me like angry vines, their thorns catching on my insides, but I’m the animal now, growling and showing my teeth. “Cut it out!”

Lake drops his arms above his head in a show of innocence. “I-I’ve stopped.”

I want to choke him until his whole head gets as dark as his cheeks are right now, but I won’t. “I’m ready to come, and I want to fuck you rough to get there. Do you consent?” I fucked him pretty hard earlier, but that was when I was intent on making him come. Now, this is for me. Tit for tat.

Lake’s eyes get big. “How rough?”

I lean down and drag my teeth over the shell of his ear. “Hard fucking. A little choking, but I won’t really hurt you.” I kiss his ear. “You can say no.”

“It’s okay.”

“Can I cover your mouth, too?”

His hair brushes my temple as he nods. Power takes the place of whatever sadness Lake left behind in me as I put my hand over his mouth and shove my

cock into him.

“Fuck.” He feels fantastic. It’s as if he’s been teasing my body for hours, and my cock is so ready to erupt inside him. I grunt and growl and rut like a dog, relentlessly climbing toward the peak of pleasure.

Lake wraps his arms and legs around me and makes little noises against my hand.

I slide that hand lower and grip him under the jaw, squeezing him in a blood choke as I ram into him. I lay off the choking and pound—pound— Oh, Universe, I’m close. So close. “I’m gonna come.”

“Come,” says Lake in a sweet, broken voice.

A moan leaves me as my orgasm hits. I empty my balls into Lake with a few ragged thrusts and pant into his neck. He’s so sturdy. I could fall asleep right here...

Lake taps my shoulder. “Get off.”

“But I don’t wanna move,” I slur petulantly.

“Come on. I need to jerk off.”

My endorphin-soaked brain can’t quite comprehend the words, but I pull out and drop onto my back next to Lake.

Lake rolls onto his stomach and lifts his hips. He spits into his hand and reaches beneath him, and Universe, he really is jerking off right next to me. It’s bullshit he won’t let me help. If I was a more sensitive guy, it’d probably fuck with my afterglow.

But I didn’t ask Lake for sex because I wanted to be lovey-dovey. That was what *he* wanted. Hypocrite.

I let my eyelids droop as drowsiness licks at me. Lake makes a muffled noise and collapses, sending the mattress squeaking.

I wave my hand in the air. “There are tissues here...somewhere...” Under the bed, probably. “Bathroom’s across the hall.”

The mattress jostles as Lake scoots to the edge of the bed. “You want me

to sleep with you?”

I glance up to find Lake’s gaze as cold as it was when he first showed up here. Maybe this sex didn’t mean anything to him after all.

“Up to you,” I say. “There’s a bedroom next door.”

“I’ll sleep there.” He goes to get his clothes and walks out of the bedroom naked.

I couldn’t have made a better ass myself.

* * *

Lake

I laugh at myself in the bathroom mirror.

That could have gone worse. I feel vaguely nauseous, my fingers are shaking, and I came in front of another person for the first time in like six months, but all in all, I’m not dead or anything.

Except I am dead.

I laugh harder.

I need to get clean. It can’t be healthy to want to scrub someone off you after making love, but I want it all gone. The dew from earlier, Wish’s breath against my ear, that perfect, magical tear that dripped from Wish’s eye and landed on my cheek. It doesn’t feel right, or it was too much too soon. I don’t know.

In the claw-foot bathtub, I find a bottle of shampoo/conditioner/body wash that purports to smell like rain-soaked stone. It does, I think. I run a hot bath, sink into the steaming water, and clean every bit of cum and sweat from my skin. That’s better. I relax into the wet warmth and close my eyes and try not to think about the syringe with the Rohypnol and the plastic bag.

I’m dead. No, I’m alive again in Wish City. I met the man himself, and I let him come inside me, and I made him cry. I tasted his salty tears. He didn’t

like that. Got defensive, dominant. Fucked me hard in retaliation. I don't like my men like that—too Dom to let me at them, or too vanilla. I don't know. Wish doesn't want to step down from his pedestal; he wants to stay powerful all the time.

I get out of the bathtub. Wish has the softest, fluffiest towels in existence, and they're almost as big as a blanket. I wear one into the hallway even though I've got the robe and hesitate at Wish's open door. He's asleep beneath the stars, all spread out on his king-sized mattress. I could still join him, probably, but even though I warned Wish I don't do casual sex, I didn't come here for a megalomaniac boyfriend. I came for freedom, and sometimes my vision of freedom includes a sweet boy who loves to cry and get comforted afterward, but Wish isn't that. He's left me...cold.

The bedroom next door has a ceiling. It also has a desk, and I leave the towel draped over the chair in front of it and set my boxers and robe on the seat.

There's something on the desk: paper folded in half and standing like a place card. I snatch it up and fumble with a nearby lamp until yellow light illuminates the card, which bears my name in an elegant metallic script. The inside reads:

Hello and welcome to Heaven, Lake. You're invited to explore a part of Wish City you won't be able to see with Wish breathing down your neck. As soon as you're out of his house, come to the Crimson Room inside Club Neon.

Signed, A Friend

P.S. Don't tell Wish anything about this, or he'll ruin our fun. See you soon.

I flip over the card and find an address stamped on the back: Club Neon, 200 Wonderland Drive, Wish City.

Interesting. If what this "friend" says is true, there are things going on in

Wish's own city that he doesn't know about. After everything that transpired tonight, it makes my head hurt trying to figure out how that could work. Wouldn't the Universe personified be aware of everything happening in every nook and cranny at once? But Wish is human, I guess. He isn't the Universe. He just has a power bigger than anyone else's.

I take the card with me to bed and hide it underneath my pillow. I could slip away tonight, maybe. Leave the inevitable, impending awkwardness between Wish and me behind. But no, no. I'm not going anywhere in a robe and boxers, and this bed... It feels so good...

* * *

Wish

I'm dreaming again—one of these lucid ones I can never wake up from on purpose. I'm standing in front of a gilded mirror inspecting my face. Why do I have eyeliner on?

"I want to impress Lake," I say. Stylized floods of black tears tattoo themselves beneath my eyes. "Do you think he'll like this? Or is it too much?"

Romy, an acquaintance of mine, is in the room with me. She used to have green hair, but it's purple now and cut in a severe pixie.

She tilts her head. "It's maybe a little on-the-nose, but it's thoughtful."

"Hmm. I need to be subtler. Don't want to come on too strong and freak him out." I trace one of the tattoos before they both disappear. "Lake is going to love fucking me, though. He won't have to jack off to come like he did with *him*."

Romy appears behind me in the mirror. "What was it he said? That he didn't do casual?"

"Yeah."

"Neisha's like that. The first time we hooked up, we had to stop in the

middle. It was awkward.”

I scowl. “How long did it take for her to come around?”

Romy shrugs. “A few months?”

“Wow. I won’t be waiting *that* long. I’ll give Lake everything he desires, and he won’t be able to resist me.” I give my reflection a cheeky smile.

“I didn’t mind waiting, though,” says Romy. “When we had sex the second time, it was...” She giggles. “Well, it was good. And Neisha’s into it all the time now.”

I wake to my alarm’s shrill beeping. The dream I was having slips into the recesses of my mind as I blink up at the pink-tinged sky. Sunrise. In my world, it happens at 9 a.m. so nobody has to miss it.

I go find Lake. He’s serene as fuck asleep in my guest bed, but I’m not one of my creations working a job in an idyllic bakery or cafe. I have things to do besides getting Lake settled. I guess I could manifest someone to do it for me so I don’t have to wake him...

Surprisingly, that doesn’t sound like a chore. Who knew getting laid by a man I didn’t make could give me this much mental energy? Maybe it was the crying—a cathartic release.

Lake stirs. “Hey.” His voice comes out rough with sleep and utterly sexy. After last night’s weirdness, would he be up for round two? Am *I* up for round two? Probably not. Not if I have to cry.

“Look...” I sit down on the edge of the bed and smile down at Lake’s prone form.

He tenses and pushes himself into a sitting position, holding the edge of the blankets up to his chin.

“I was planning to create a custom house for you, or at least customize an apartment I’ve already built, but, uh...” Who am I kidding? Lake’s looking at me like I’m a suspicious shopper or an enemy ready to strike.

A feeling I don't recognize flutters in my belly. Not nervous butterflies—something worse.

“I don't need anything special,” Lake says. He's dying to get away from me; I don't need powers of empathy to tell.

I cough, trying to make that bad feeling go away. I'd try to use my power to command it, but for whatever reason, it never works on my emotions. Just my appearance and pain caused my physical exhaustion.

I take a deep breath. “In that case...” I materialize a key to the apartment building I've been working on for new arrivals and hold it out to Lake. “This belongs to an apartment in a teal building two blocks East, which is toward Grover Street. Corner of Tenth and White Pine.”

Lake takes the key. “And my clothes?”

I gesture toward a nearby closet. “They're in there.” I smirk. “You can keep the robe and slippers. There'll be more clothes for you in the apartment.”

Lake's face remains stoic aside from a slight pursing of his lips.

“Oh, and also, there'll be a phone waiting for you. I think I put it on the bedside table... Anyway, contact me anytime.” If he doesn't contact me, I'll contact him. Check up on him. “And you don't have to pay for a wireless plan or anything. Everybody here has one for free. I send out messages.”

“Okay.”

“Make sure you read them.”

Lake's gaze hardens a fraction. “Okay.”

Is there something else I should say? The fluttering in my stomach builds and spreads to my limbs. “I'm sorry the sex wasn't mind-blowing for you.”

Lake looks away and back again. “It was fine.”

Wow. I've never gotten such an underwhelming review in my life. Better luck next time, I guess. Statistically, Lake won't be the only queer guy to cross over into Wish City, and there are a couple I'm looking forward to in particular. Sweet, fawning men who'll be trying not to come from the moment I start touching them.

Not like Lake.

I give Lake a smile before taking my leave. I've got things to do, people to see, and dark corners of Wish City to watch like a hawk.

LAKE

It's colder outside than I remember, and blustery. Trudging in my uncomfortable dress shoes from Wish's street toward Grover, I hug myself against the chill. I might have asked Wish for a coat if he'd been in the house after I finished showering and getting dressed, but he was nowhere to be found. And for some reason, I have to wait until I get to this apartment to get the phone he promised.

My teeth are chattering by the time I make it to the building at Tenth and White Pine. Universe, it has to be one of the ugliest pieces of architecture I've ever seen. The exterior is turquoise brick. Why? Why not just brown? Lights at the perimeter illuminate purple windows—ugh—and a golden roof. I retrieve the key Wish gave me from the pocket of my trousers. It's gold, too and has a number one on it. Of course, the door nearest to me has a number twenty-four.

The building is shaped like an open staple with a fenced-in center. I go to the opposite end and find apartment one. Its metallic number gleams from its place on the heliotrope door. I slide my key into the lock and walk into the dark interior.

I skim my hand along the wall until I find a light switch. I expect a pleasant glow like in Wish's house to illuminate the apartment, but instead, stark white fluorescents buzz to life. I squint at the harsh light. The large

space is half living room and half kitchenette with a table outfitted in the ugliest of picnic-style tablecloths. I lock the front door. Once I spot a clear path to a hallway up ahead, I turn off the fluorescents.

The hallway holds two doorways. One leads to a bathroom, and the other to a bedroom. On the nightstand, as promised, I find the phone. As soon as I touch it, it turns on, showing me a home screen with three icons: Contacts, Messages, and Phone. The phone itself is silver, lightweight, and doesn't have any ports. As I thumb through the interface, finding it very similar to those of the phones I've had before, I find nothing about a battery, storage, WiFi, data... The wonders of the afterlife, I guess. In my contacts, there is only Wish. His phone number is 1. Just 1.

I laugh. I laugh hard and figure crossing dimensions can't have been easy on my psyche. I just woke up an hour ago, but a part of me wants to go back to sleep. And sleep, and sleep...

Instead, I fish the invitation from "A Friend" out of my pocket. I folded it up to hide it from Wish, so the card stock is a creased mess, but I can still make out the address stamped on the back. I look through the phone for a navigation app but can't find one.

I message Wish. *Thanks for the phone. No maps app?*

Check again, he answers.

When I do, there it is: an icon in the shape of a little folded map. Just like that, huh? Something that probably took a whole team of people back in the land of the living several months to do. The interface is simple, but still. Amazing.

I type in the address to Club Neon. A bright green navigation pin marks the location a six-minute walk away.

My phone tells me it's 11:23 a.m. Not exactly a clubbing hour. But what am going to do—sleep away my afterlife? "A Friend" did say to come as soon as I got free of Wish, and I'm free.

The Messages app takes over my screen, displaying another text from Wish. *Is the app to your satisfaction, Sir?*

My gut twists. But of course, he doesn't mean Sir like that—not in the kinky way. In fact, I've never met anyone less submissive than Wish.

Works well enough, I answer.

You're welcome.

A full-length mirror glints from the far wall. I catch myself in its reflection. I can't meet anyone in this—not in day-old clothes. Wish said he would have clothes for me, but if they're anything like that robe and slippers (which I purposefully left behind)...

At least the closet's a walk-in. I find a string dangling and pull it, which illuminates the little room. There are certainly a lot of clothes in here, and almost all of them are black. I breathe a sigh of relief. Among the darkness gleams a silk button-down, and I pair it with black jeans. I even find a nice fur-lined leather coat.

In the bathroom, I fiddle with my hair, limp with lack of product. I shoot Wish another text. *Can I get some hair mousse or something?*

He doesn't answer right away. When my phone vibrates, I'm in the middle of putting on a pair of lace-up leather shoes.

Going somewhere? he asks.

I should have known asking for a navigation app and mousse would tip him off. *Maybe*, I text back.

Be careful. Stick to clearly marked areas, and if someone offers you a syringe, say no. It's a drug you won't like.

Hmm. *Why won't I like it?*

It'll make your heart hurt, and it'll make you want to fuck anyone, anywhere, no inhibitions.

My insides curdle at the thought of Wish making a drug like that on purpose. Maybe that's the kind of guy he is: lecherous and sex-obsessed. It's a version of things that makes sense with how he's treated me so far, and from what I've heard. I probably shouldn't have caved to his advances so easily, but it's not as if he's damaged me. Sometimes sex can be heartbreakingly

wonderful, but sometimes it's just sweat and skin and awkward moments you have to lock away in the back of your head.

Gross, I text back.

Your mousse is in the bathroom.

The mousse is indeed sitting on the edge of the bathtub. I'm struck with a sense of having my space invaded, and I have to ask. *Can you see me? Look in on me?*

I'm not a voyeur, Lake. And I already know what that beautiful body looks like.

The line doesn't do anything for me. I don't answer. Shaking off the feeling that I shouldn't be rejecting the man who's taking care of my soul, I set out for the club.

Outside of Club Neon, I have another fit of laughter. That sign I saw on the way here—"LIVE NUDE MEN"—beams from the club's exterior. And at the bottom of the sign, square lights flash a rainbow of neon colors in succession. It's a gay club. Has to be.

The inside is bursting with glistening bodies. A guy wearing a furry crop top brushes past me as I try to figure out where any rooms would be, let alone the Crimson one. Colorful lights sweep the whole space in some programmed pattern, and a bass beat thumps in my chest.

Overwhelmed, I approach the bar. It's like forcing my way into a bunch of sardines to get the bartender's attention.

"What can I get for you?" she shouts.

"Where's the Crimson Room?" I shout back.

"Upstairs!" She points to a staircase in the corner.

"Thanks." Getting to the staircase is a pain, but I make it. Where there wasn't a doorman at the club's main entrance, there's one at the top of the stairs, sitting in front of a glass door behind which is only blackness. The man

holds out his hand, and heat rises to my face. What does he need? It's not as if I have an ID.

The man grabs my arm. Reflexively, I pull back, but then I spot a mark on the underside of my wrist. The man lets me go, and the door behind him slides open. The mark is a tattoo: a tiny star.

Did Wish give it to me? Did the mysterious stranger? I try to rub it off, but it doesn't smudge. I think it's real. Anger makes my temples throb, but I'll ignore it until I have someone to yell at.

I walk through the open doorway. I feel rather than hear it close behind me when the skin on the back of my neck prickles. When I turn to look, the door is either gone or expertly camouflaged. It's just a wall, still glass, still black, like a turned-off phone screen.

I give a sickly swallow. I don't know why this is called the Crimson Room when there's no red in here at all. Suddenly, the walls light up with a floor-to-ceiling video, multiplied on each of the four walls. It's a porno. Wait, it's Wish. He's on all fours, screaming as a hugely muscular man pounds into him mercilessly. Everywhere I turn, Wish is getting brutally fucked, and tears glisten on his cheeks. The muscular man slaps him hard on the ass, and Wish shouts, "Harder! Harder!" The muscular man shoves Wish's face into the floor.

My stomach twists. I don't want to get hard from this, because I don't know for sure if Wish is acting. But even as confusion and panic beat through me, my dick swells, making my jeans tighter. Wish looks at the viewer—at me—and I reach out, hypnotized, and smudge the screen with my clammy fingers. I want to taste Wish's tears. I want to lick those reddened cheeks. On all four walls, Wish gives a strangled moan and shoots his load, but the muscular man keeps fucking him, not letting up for a second.

I want to rub my dick against something, but there's nothing in here. Just me and the video, and I'm trapped in here, aren't I? I scream at Wish. Why is he doing this? I need to get out!

I push down my arousal and search the screens for imperfections—something to indicate there's a hidden exit. But I'm not in the real world

anymore. Nothing has to make sense. I notice I'm panting and try to take deeper breaths. Fuck. Fuck!

Why did I come here? I can't trust anything in Wish City!

In the video, Wish begs the muscular man to stop pounding him. "Please. I can't take it anymore! You're tearing me open!"

The muscular man covers Wish's mouth. "Shut the fuck up, pig. I don't care if it hurts. You're nothing but a hole. Got it?"

Wish cries and whines and nods.

I cover my eyes.

"Is it too much?" The voice comes from behind me.

I whip around and— It's Wish! The video's light reflects off his pale skin where his black suit fails to cover it. He has no shirt on underneath the expertly tailored jacket.

He smirks. "I wasn't sure if the crying thing was about humiliation or—"

I shove him against the nearest wall. "What the fuck is wrong with you?" Did *he* leave me that invitation? Is this some fucked-up game?

Wish doesn't fight me. He just laughs. "I'm not him. He doesn't know about me. Relax, Lake."

The Wish in the video is full-on wailing now, and though I'm trying to ignore it, I'm still hard. "Explain yourself," I growl, my temples throbbing anew.

"I'm like his evil twin." Wish leans his head back, baring his throat. "I'll do the things he wouldn't dream of. Give you everything you want."

Mad with arousal and frustration, I shove my thigh between his legs. "Like what?"

"Whatever will get you off." Wish rests his hand on my elbow, his touch so gentle compared to mine. He moans brokenly. "We need you."

I can barely make out his words over the wails in the video, so I lean closer until we're almost kissing.

“He thinks there will be others,” Wish says, “but we’ve already had them. They have no fight in them. You do.” Wish kisses me. Then he’s gone, and I fall against the wall.

The video cuts out. My lips tingle. For a second, the room is pitch black, then suddenly I’m in a dimly lit restaurant with classical music playing faintly in the background. Couples I don’t know populate most of the tables. Up ahead, Wish stands and beckons to me.

I put a hand in front of my hard cock and make my way to Wish’s table. In the middle of the dark wood sits a silver candelabra with rubies dangling from each holder.

“Have a seat,” he says.

I don’t, even if I’d better be able to hide my erection. Are these people even real?

“What is this?” I ask. I might be dressed okay for a nice dinner, but Wish isn’t with his skin on display.

Wish comes around to my side and pulls my chair out. “If you need romance, I can do that. If you need to take things slow...” Wish wraps his arms around me from behind, and I don’t know why I don’t fling him away. Shock, maybe?

“He’s scared.” Wish’s voice is a hiss at my ear. “He’s used to everyone fawning over him—it’s disgusting.” Between the flaps of my coat, Wish traces my shirt buttons. “Why couldn’t he make you come? Do we need to get to know each other first, or did he fail to push your buttons? He’s a selfish lover, but *I’m*—”

I grip Wish’s slender wrist. “Was that video real?”

Wish chuckles. “‘Real’ is subjective.”

“So, it wasn’t.”

“I made it for you.”

“I’m not into rape. Or—or play rape. Whatever it was.”

“But you got hard.” Wish strokes my nape.

“Getting hard is easy. And it’s—it’s involuntary. It doesn’t matter as much as—”

“Coming?”

“No!”

Wish kisses the back of my ear. “Then what? What do you need?”

I need an emotional masochist—someone whose needs balance mine. I need someone who doesn’t want to rough-fuck me after I use my power on them. Someone who gets soft and submissive and overwhelmed with need when I do it. Someone I can take care of after I hurt them. Not Wish.

“Why do you want me so badly?” I ask.

Wish nuzzles my neck. “Because everybody else just loses it for us, and you didn’t. We pulled out all the stops, but they didn’t work on you. You jerked off in front of us like we weren’t good enough to make you come.”

I scoff. Wish didn’t seem that concerned about it to me. “This isn’t even about me. It’s about your ego.”

“But it is about you! You’re so cute.” Wish pulls away and takes his seat at the table across from me. “Please have dinner with me, Lake.” He rests his chin in his palm and bats his lashes. “That’s all I ask.”

I sigh. I haven’t eaten since I got to Wish City, so I might as well. But as I take my seat, I say, “I thought you were going to show me around. That’s what you said in the note.” After all, I need to get something useful out of this nonsense.

Wish smiles. “We can do that afterward. Like a two-part date.”

* * *

Wish

Another Love house has popped up at 25th and Howl.

I close the text from Mercer, my head of security, and drop my skull against the backseat of the Range Rover. It's not technically Mercer's job to scout for Love houses, but he's always on the lookout. And I'm always going to the cesspools in person to close them up.

"Change of course, Char," I tell my driver. "25th and Howl." Dammit.

I know I don't have to go there to get rid of the Love house. I could think it and all the people inside it into dust. But it's punishment, and it's need. The way they touch me...

Will it ever end? I doubt it more and more. Doesn't matter how I direct my power or what I do, the Love houses keep coming back. I feel like I need to make myself a therapist. Maybe they could tell me why this keeps happening. But I'm pretty sure I know. Love represents what the darkest, saddest parts of me yearn for. I want the drug's high: messy feelings, lust, a love that sweeps you up and makes you crazy. It wasn't realistic on Earth, and it isn't realistic here. If I'm going to have anyone, they need to be a partner, an ally. But who knows if that would even solve anything. Or if I could be faithful. I've never tried to only put my dick in one person before.

Char pulls up outside the Love house. The windows glow the tell-tale pink the drug emits. I get hard before I even get out of the car, which is fucking embarrassing. I use my power to make Char fail to notice.

"See you in a bit," I tell her.

Outside the front door of the shabby one-story, I take a deep breath. At the last house, a replica of Seraphim answered the door. Not Seraphim himself because I kept calling him until Fiend answered, and then I had to convince Fiend to put Seraphim on even though they were in the middle of some rope play. Apparently, Seraphim didn't have use of his hands.

I don't want to see that replica again. I have nothing against Seraphim. We'd probably still be lovers if I didn't see something in his eyes the one and only time I fucked him that made me want to grow spikes or a shell or something to protect us both from what might happen. Years ago, but I still remember.

The replica looked at me that way. And he pulled me into the swarm of Love-drugged bodies, and I fucked him into the floor while the bodies pawed at me and whined my name.

I open the door to the Love house. Inside is a great room with no furniture and about twenty bodies rutting and groaning on the carpet.

“Wish!”

Oh, fuck. Lake comes running at me, shirtless with a syringe still stuck in his arm, eyes wild. He grabs at me, kisses my neck. “I can’t stop thinking about you.”

I shove him away and back out of the house then pull the door shut behind me. I have to keep hold on the knob because Lake is yanking it and scratching at the wood.

“Wish, I need you!” comes his muffled voice.

It’s a replica. It’s not Lake. But there’s enough of a chance he could really have stumbled into the Love house that I have to make sure.

Still holding the knob with one hand, I fish my phone out of my pocket and dial Lake’s number.

After four rings, he finally picks up. “Hello?”

“Where are you right now?” I try to listen for any background noise, but there’s nothing.

Lake hesitates. “Club Neon. Why?”

“Just checking on you.”

“Uh, thanks. I guess.”

The scratching and pulling behind the door stops. It’s like I’ve vanquished a poltergeist, but I know if I open the door again, there the replica will be. Or it’ll be something else to torment me. Something else to hurt but get me off, too.

“Wish? Is there anything else?”

“I don’t hear any music. You really at the club?” I’ve heard enough to

know Lake isn't behind the door—his voice would have come through the wood—but is he lying to me?

“I just left with someone,” he says.

So, I'm interrupting a hookup. Great. I hang up without saying anything then realize I probably came off as a passive-aggressive asshole, but fuck it. This is my dimension, and I can do whatever I want. Just like Lake is.

I undo my fly before heading back into the Love house. Sure enough, the replica of Lake is waiting. This time, while he's kissing my neck, I pull the syringe from his arm. He doesn't seem to notice.

“I can't stop thinking about you,” he repeats.

“It's okay. I'm here.”

“Need to be inside you.” It takes a moment for the words to compute. Lake slides his hand down the back of my pants and fingers my hole roughly.

Immediately, I get rock hard, humiliation at being invaded so crudely making me hot everywhere. If Lake is on Love, he won't care if he hurts me—he'll just want to reach oblivion.

He turns me around and manhandles me against the closed door. Then he shoves my pants down the rest of the way, baring my ass and thighs. I could stop this, but I don't. Not even when Lake shoves his cock at my hole and doesn't stop shoving despite resistance. I use my power to add lube to our joining, but it still hurts like a bitch.

Lake puts a hand around my neck. “Don't leave me.”

“Won't,” I manage.

He paws at my chin, mouth, face then claws from beneath my eye down to my jaw, probably leaving red marks on the way. “Cry for me,” he moans.

“I can't.” I hardly ever cry, and this Lake doesn't have the power to make me. I won't give him the power, either, because it's not my place, and if I can't even keep my city clean, can I really be trusted to make specials anyway?

Lake forces his cock in deeper, sending me groaning in pain.

“I want to break you,” he says. “I want to watch you crumble.” Is this what the real Lake wants, too? To kick me off my high horse and see me damaged from the fall?

“Good luck,” I grit out.

“I don’t need luck.”

Lake paws at my arm, and the next thing I know a needle is sliding into my vein, attached to a glowing syringe of pink liquid: Love. Here is another thing I could stop—*should* stop—but don’t.

Lake disconnects the empty syringe and drops it onto the floor, where he crushes it with his oxford. My veins glow like the syringe was, and the butterflies that always accompany the high flutter weakly in my gut. They’ll get stronger. I wait for them to grow with the impending need. Love is supposed to take the user back to the last time they were in love with someone, but I’ve never been in love, so for me, it’s just needing and needing and never getting what I’m after.

People have been in love with me, though, so it’s probably what I deserve.

Lake claws tear lines down my other cheek, and my heart breaks down like a chewed-up piece of meat. The butterflies beat against the flesh of my abdomen, desperate to break free from my skin.

I hit my forehead against the door Lake still has me crushed against and groan in pain.

Lake grabs my achingly hard dick and pounds into me. “That’s right, baby. Need me.” His cock spearing me feels so much better now, but it still isn’t enough. Nothing is enough to fill this deep, dark well in me.

LAKE

I brush off the rush of anger Wish brought on by hanging up on me and slip my phone into my pocket. I wouldn't have answered the call at all if the second Wish walking beside me in the alley hadn't insisted. "He might get suspicious," the second Wish said.

"So. Where are we going?" I ask.

"Plan A's a bust because Wish is there right now, but I have a plan B."

"Don't you mean 'the other Wish'?" I'm not sure I've wrapped my head around the fact that there are two Wishes in Wish City. I should probably let the real one know eventually. At least, I'm pretty sure he's the real one. Or the first one. The one from my past life.

"You can call me something else if it makes it easier for you." Wish points at my wrist and the little star-shaped mark there. "Star, maybe? Like wish upon a star."

"You should get rid of this tattoo, actually," I say. "It's rude to ink a person without their consent."

Wish frowns. "There. Now it's gone."

I inspect my arm, and sure enough, the tattoo has vanished. Good. "I could call you Wish #2."

Wish glares. “That’s really rude.”

“How about Twinkle? Because you’re so much twinkier than the other Wish.”

Wish gasps this time.

I can’t help but push it further. “You’re a sub, too, aren’t you? Want to be under someone’s shoe?”

Wish crosses his arms and glowers at the skyscrapers shining in the afternoon sun. “I told you. I’m whatever you want me to be.”

“Some inexperienced subs tend to say that.”

“Well. We are inexperienced that way. Wish is embarrassed about even being interested, because we do like to be in control, too.”

“That’s obvious.” No way Wish doesn’t get off on being so powerful. He loves that type of attention, or he wouldn’t have taken the leadership role he had in life. He could have hidden his power like I did. Only my parents knew about it. My mother slapped me in the face when she first saw my tears tattoo.

“Wish didn’t do much kinky stuff in the Earth dimension,” says the other Wish. “He had to move around a lot, so he couldn’t really have equipment. But when people he hooked up with wanted to get kinky, he was usually into it. Some of them had toys.” Wish takes a turn into a nice neighborhood. All the houses have manicured lawns and brick-and-siding faces. One has stone lions out front, another angels.

“You don’t need equipment to be kinky,” I say.

“Wish didn’t want to get attached to anyone. Intense sex can lead to feelings, and he doesn’t want those.”

“Ah.” I can’t fault him for that. I couldn’t get attached to any partners, either, or they would have found me out. Maybe they would have reported me to the government or told someone and they’d report me. But aren’t we free here? Can’t we get attached? “I’m into some heavy things. You can’t handle it.”

“I’m not him.”

“Then why do you say ‘we’?”

“Because we started the same, but now we’re different.” Wish beams at me. “May I hold your hand?”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. First a candlelit dinner, now this? “No. Tell me about plan B.”

The hurt is obvious in Wish’s face, but he doesn’t push. “We’re going to a BDSM dungeon.”

“Really?” I imagine Wish must need a point of reference in order to create a dungeon, but this Wish talks as if they’ve never been to one. “What did you base it on?”

“We’ve been to one. One time.”

“Experts, then.”

Wish pouts, an expression I never expected to see on that face. “You don’t have to be a jerk about it.”

We stop outside a house with shuttered windows and no sign of life aside from the several cars parked outside. Wish walks in like he owns the place, which I guess he does. A guy in a harness is manning the door, and he gives us both a stamp on the hand: a red bull. How many marks will litter me by the time this night is over?

Behind the guy in the harness is a little sitting area buzzing with chatter as a group of kinksters socialize. Wish may have only been to one dungeon, but this is about what I would expect at any kink event.

“Come on.” Wish leads me to a door that opens to a set of stairs. Yells and slaps filter up and get louder as we descend into the basement/dungeon. My blood heats. This is run-of-the-mill kink stuff, but it’s been a while since I’ve been to a place like this. My attendance at fetish parties has always been sporadic. The last time I went, I found a novice and showed him the pleasure of a flogger, but he balked when I mentioned tears.

I clench my fists. I’m an outlier, even here.

Wish gets uncomfortably close and whispers into my ear, “It’s okay. May

I touch your arm?”

I nod. It’s not really polite to talk in play rooms when people are scening, and there’s leather and wood and red skin wherever I look.

Wish holds my arm loosely and strokes the underside. I shiver, but it’s not unpleasant.

Wish tugs me over to a leather sofa, and we sit. He presses the outside of his thigh to mine. Across from us, a woman lies on a spanking bench while a man takes a wooden paddle to her ass, the implement thudding harshly into her flesh.

I put my mouth to Wish’s ear. “Did you bring me here to play with you?”

He nods, shifting his ear against my lips.

“What do you want?” I whisper. “And don’t ask what I want.”

“Please. I don’t know.” Wish says it at full volume, but this is a pre-scene negotiation now. This couch is probably for spectators, yet there isn’t anyone in here aside from those playing. And Wish owns the place, so it doesn’t matter.

“Straddle me,” I say.

Wish positions himself on top of me, but he’s tense, trembling. He won’t look at me. It’s cute.

I hold his burning cheek and try not to get too excited. Will he allow me to administer discomfort? Will he let me ruin him and put him back together again? “What’s wrong?”

“If I’m not good enough, we lose our chance with you.”

I find myself smiling. There’s a very slim chance Wish knew of me before I died, so what is this? Love at first sight? Was my lukewarm response to the sex really that devastating for him?

I bring Wish’s face close and look into his terrified eyes. “You like me, huh?”

Wish skims my face with both hands. “Yes. So pretty, small, hard, closed-

up.” His words come fast, breathy. “You tell us not to touch you. You don’t care. You don’t roll over. You’re not impressed. But you think we’re sexy, or you wouldn’t have let us take you into the bedroom. You’re not a follower.”

I toy with one of Wish’s soft earlobes. “But I am.”

“No! You’re different.”

“I’m not different. I watched you online. Read about you. Kept tabs.” I get a good grip on Wish’s hair and press a kiss to his cheek.

He melts like I’ve tongued him, and my whole groin throbs.

“You like your hair pulled?” I ask.

“Like to be kissed,” he murmurs. “Y-You kept tabs?”

I use my hold on Wish’s silky locks to align our mouths and barely touch our lips together. Wish whimpers, and I chuckle.

“How could I not?” I ask. “You wanted to be the leader of all specials. Then I heard about your Heaven, and I wanted to go.” I whisper the next part into his ear. “I killed myself for you.”

Wish squirms and slides his hands under the flaps of my jacket.

I grip his wrists and force them behind his back.

“Please!” he shouts.

In the back of my mind, I remember we’re in a room with other people, but they don’t matter. Wish and I are in an invisible cage. We’re like insects in a jar with brains too small to focus on more than one thing at once.

Wish’s wrists pulse in my grip.

I pant into his hot neck. “What do you want?”

“I want you to use your power on me.”

It takes a moment for the words to compute, but then somewhere beneath my arousal, anger swells. Wish is only saying this because he thinks he knows what I want. And I do want that, but I’m not a puppet. I graze his neck with my teeth. “No.”

“Do it!” Wish struggles in my grip, so I let him go. But he doesn’t pull away. He nuzzles into my neck, the soft flesh of his face tickling me and making me shiver. “Do it, Lake. I want you to. Please.”

“But you don’t.” My voice cracks. I touch him beneath the jacket, finding smooth, burning skin. “You feel rejected because I didn’t lose my mind for you. That’s it.” But I’m losing my mind now, I think.

Wish pulls back enough to cover his eyes. His shoulders shudder as he makes melodramatic sobbing noises, but it’s fake. It’s so fucking fake.

I grip him by the lapels and give him a shake. “Are you sure? You won’t try to rough-fuck me in retaliation?”

Wish gives my cheek a delicate stroke. “If anyone’s fucking anyone, it’ll be you inside me. Just use me, Lake. Use me like a drug—that’s what I want.”

It’s as if Wish is speaking directly to the most hidden part of me, and it feels good. I surrender to him but also to my power. Sorrow. Sorrow, sorrow. Tears, pain, a twist in the chest, the urge to fall to one’s knees. Sorrow for Wish. Tears spilling from those beautiful eyes and snaking down red cheeks.

He freezes, and I wait for him to hit me or growl or otherwise fight back despite all his assurances. Instead, he drops a hand onto my thigh and gasps, sliding his pained gaze up to mine. Tears well and spill, and his brows droop together.

I hold my breath. He seems to hold his, too.

I hit him with another wave of power.

He screams and grips the lapels of my jacket, under which I’m sweating now, and presses his nose to mine. “Hurts, Lake.”

I’m hurting, too—almost. I don’t think I’ve ever been this turned on, and affection explodes in my chest for this creature on top of me. He doesn’t feel like the other Wish felt, but he feels perfect. I’m going to come so hard with him.

I kiss his tear-soaked cheeks. “You’re alright. Time for pleasure now.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Wish murmurs.

I hold his face and meet his eyes. They're blue and still dripping like little oceans, glistening puddles. But they flicker away from me.

“Did I do okay?” Wish whispers.

I swallow against an unbearable punch of arousal. I love when they get like this: all weak and needy and desperate for care.

I kiss Wish's temple as I reach to undo his trousers. “You're doing perfect.”

“Perfect,” Wish echoes.

He isn't wearing underwear, and his cock is hot and hard in my hand. I kiss his neck and breathe in his scent, but behind him, strangers play with cuffs and a whip.

I want him in a bed where no one will disturb us. “Can you take us somewhere private?”

In a second, the people are gone, and Wish and I are in the middle of a huge mattress in a candlelit bedroom.

He meets my gaze shyly. “Better?”

The intimacy is like a heavy cloak draped around us, and I nod and push him back onto the bed. Finally, I get out of my coat and peel the silk shirt from my sweaty skin. The sudden coolness gives me goosebumps.

Wish shoves his pants down and opens his legs. His damp face glistens in the candlelight, flushed and gorgeous.

I run my hands up his naked torso and push off his suit jacket. This Wish's body seems more delicate than the other's; does he think I want him small?

“Was this for me?” I ask. I get off him to remove my shoes and jeans.

Wish's gaze slides dreamily over my body. “Hmm?”

“You. Are you for me or were you here before I came?”

Wish's eyes go empty for a second, but then he smiles. “I was here, but now we're both here, so what does it matter?”

I crawl back on top of him. “I was just curious.” I kiss his temple. “You want me inside you, right?”

“Yes. I’m all ready for you.”

I reach down between his legs and find him open and slick. Most guys would probably be thrilled, but I don’t want a sex toy. “Maybe I want to get you ready myself.”

Wish gives a little gasp, and suddenly his hole is dry and clamping down on my fingers. I can’t help but laugh but also melt a little. “You want to please me so bad, don’t you?”

“You can hurt me. You can do anything you want.”

I know how to administer all kinds of pain, but I’m not feeling it right now. This Wish feels damaged already, and he let me go so far so quickly. It’s up to me to look out for him. “I don’t want to hurt you right now. I want to take care of you. Is that okay?”

Wish looks at me like no one has ever said that to him. “You really want that?”

I trace his bottom lip. “Mhm.”

“Okay.”

“Manifest me a bottle of lube?”

Above Wish’s head, some twenty odd bottles appear. Universe help us.

I choose a pink one with little strawberries on it. “Relax, Wish. I like the pain, but we already did that part. Now, it’s time to feel good.”

“Okay.”

I pop the cap on the lube and sniff it. Strawberries, for sure. I put some on my tongue and am happy to find it doesn’t taste like cough syrup but more like a strawberry milkshake.

“If you don’t like it—”

I silence Wish with a look. He cowers into the blankets like a cat who doesn’t want to be petted, and all the other bottles of lube disappear.

“What did I tell you to do?” I ask.

“Relax, but—”

“What do you need to be cowed, hmm?” My heart thuds in my ears as anger rises beneath my skin. “What will make you submit to my will instead of trying to take control of this? Do you need more pain before I care for you?”

Wish’s cheeks turn even redder. “I’m not— I’m not trying to take control.”

“Yes, you are. You’re worrying about what I want when I’m perfectly happy right here on top of you, and you already know what I want. I want you to relax and let me get you off.”

“But I want to get *you*—”

I backhand him. His head turns with the force, a mark blooms on his cheek, and guilt twists in my stomach. I’m probably confusing him with my words and actions out of sync. But then he looks back at me with his expression slack and pupils blown and makes a noise that’s all need.

I scramble to lube up my fingers. When I spear him, his hole is still delightfully tight, and I stretch it open like I would a real lover, or a lover who isn’t special, anyway.

Wish breathes hard through parted lips and keeps his gaze locked on mine. I fuck him with my gaze and my fingers, drinking him in like expensive scotch. As I get lost in pumping my hand and watching his lashes flutter, I feel weightless.

Wish opens his mouth wider and makes a tiny sound in his throat. This draws me out of my trance, and I slather my dick in strawberry lube.

“Lake,” says Wish.

“Don’t make me bitch-slap you again.”

He moans. “Please, more. I like it, I like it.”

I slap his hip instead. “This isn’t about what you like. I’m in control. Turn over.”

“Yes, Sir.” The honorific washes over me like a thousand lovers’ hands. Wish obeys.

Once he’s on his stomach, I yank him onto his knees and grab my dick. “I’m Sir, now?”

He looks at me over his shoulder. “Is it too cheesy? Would you like something else? I could do Master or Daddy or whatever you—”

I give him a hard swat on the ass, and his front half collapses into the mattress. He isn’t the first boy I’ve had turn to goo from a slap.

“Sir is fine,” I say.

“Yes, Sir. I’m sorry, Sir.”

“It’s cute what a smack does to you.” I smile and pet him where I hit him. He rubs his face into the sheets like he’s embarrassed of his reactions, and my hands tingle with the desire to hit him again. “Should I spank you, Wish?”

He gets on all fours again. “Sir...”

“I need a yes or a no. Should I spank you?”

“Please don’t ask. Please just do it.”

That kind of thing goes against my conscience, but for now, it’s a clear yes, so I hit him. Once again, he collapses but keeps his ass up, and I keep hitting, picking up a rhythm that gets me lost. My palm stings, but I keep going, watching Wish’s ass get redder and redder. I know when to stop, and we aren’t there yet.

“Lake!”

Wish’s shout jolts me into halting, and I collapse on top of him, pushing him down into the mattress with my weight. “What?” I’m breathing so hard I can barely talk.

“I—I was going to come.”

I rut against his seared ass. My cock is like a hungry pet with a screeching yowl—impossible to ignore. “Why didn’t you?”

Wish whimpers instead of answering me.

I guide his face backward into a sloppy kiss. I want to ask more questions, make him answer all of them, get into the hidden parts of his head and wreak havoc and make it better and do it all again, but my brain's given all its blood to my dick, and my balls are aching. I don't get like this very often, but when I do, it means the games are over. I need to come.

I push myself up and bring Wish onto his knees again. Then I give one of his still-red ass cheeks a squeeze before I ready my cock and push it into him. I grip his hips and slam home in one go—so hard our skin makes a slap when we connect. Wish screams, and his hole clamps down on my cock. He's coming and still screaming and I'm helpless as his body forces the cum out of me. I bite down into his shoulder and groan into the flesh as my balls empty.

When it's over, I can't move. My cock stays lodged inside Wish where we lay on top of each other, both of us breathing hard, my heartbeat pulsing in my fingers, toes, everywhere.

Wish reaches back and gropes until he finds my hand. "Lake, let me make us a collar. Please."

"Hmm?" I manage. Did he say collar? Images of long-term couples fill my head. A mistress and her pet I met once, then a cross-dressing sub and his surly master, both long past middle age.

"You can be my Sir, and I can be your boy, and it'll be perfect and for all time because we have eternity now that you're dead. Please, Sir. Say yes. Let me be your submissive." Wish's overzealous words cut through my afterglow and chill me despite how hot I am. I kiss Wish's shoulder where I bit him and probably shouldn't have. "Let's talk about it later, okay? We're too high right now to make any big decisions."

Wish goes quiet but grips my hand tighter like I'm going to run if he lets go. I pet down his flank and kiss him behind the ear and try not to take what a sub says when he's high too seriously.

LAKE

It's impossible to know what time it is because this bedroom Wish transported us to has no windows. I don't know if phones die in Wish City, but I can't check the time there either. My phone is in my coat, which is on the floor somewhere, and Wish is curled up on my chest, blond lashes fanned against his cheeks and breath coming slow and even. I don't want to disturb him, but I have to piss. Plus, the longer I stare at these windowless walls, the surer I get that there isn't a door either. My eyes could be playing tricks, but what if when Wish made this room, he forgot about exits? Where's the bathroom?

"Hey." I touch Wish's shoulder, but he doesn't stir. "Hey, wake up. Wish #2."

His eyes snap open so suddenly I flinch. "You know I don't like that. If anything, I'm #1. I'm better."

I swallow, and my dry throat clicks. "It's a joke."

"Not a funny joke." His elbow digs into my torso as he sits up.

I sit up, too, and rub out the ache. "Can you make me a bathroom?"

"You don't need a bathroom." While he's talking, my urge to piss goes away, but the morning wood stays. The invasion turns my stomach, but frankly, I'm not sure I want to poke the bear right now. He's obviously not a morning person.

Wish switches on the bedside lamp, and I shove at my dick through the sheets where it's making an obvious tent.

“Can't hide from me.” Wish gives me a wicked smile. “Would you like a blowjob, Sir?”

I look for a door, but I was right—there isn't one. Anxiety makes my heart hammer, and I'm not turned on—not at all—but my dick's still hard. He's controlling it. He's inside me doing whatever he wants without permission, which is so not what a sub is supposed to do.

“I don't want a blowjob,” I say firmly.

Wish points to my cock, where a wet spot darkens the sheets. “Then why's it leaking, Sir?”

“Stop. I'm not into this. Stop it, Wish.”

Wish chuckles, and I almost fling myself across the bed and choke him out, but then the sheets dry, and my cock softens.

There's still no door.

“Can we go somewhere else? I'm getting claustrophobic in here.” My ears and face are burning up, and I'm tense everywhere. I think I prefer the other Wish, who does the same type of shit but on a much smaller scale, and he's yet to lock me in a room like this one.

Wish pouts and gives me puppy-dog eyes. “But I don't want to leave yet.”

“I do. I want out.”

“Let's pick a collar first.” Wish holds out his hands and a tangle of leather strips appears in his palms. He pulls the strips out one by one and lays them on the bed.

I make a fist so I don't shove them all to the floor.

Wish holds up a white collar with a heart-shaped silver ring in the center. “What about this one, Sir?”

I snatch the collar out of his hand. “No.”

“Okay, what about—”

“No to all of them.”

Wish stares wide-eyed at me.

“I’m not going to be your Sir, and you’re not going to be my boy. I barely know you. I’m not giving you a collar, especially since you don’t know how to fucking listen!” I do shove the collars to the floor this time, and nothing has ever satisfied me more.

Wish looks at me with knives in his eyes then swats me across the face—not unlike how I slapped him when we fucked.

I see red. I launch myself at him, going for his neck, but instead of his flesh, my hands land and slide against rough pavement. I wince and pull my hands toward my body. No blood, at least, though they smart badly.

Universe, I’m in a nightmare. More specifically, an alley under a street lamp. Up ahead, traffic lights throw their beams into the night as cars whiz past an opening between buildings. Instinctively, I cover my dick. Of course, Wish had to send me here naked without my fucking phone.

Damn it! I should have known better than to make him angry with me. In fact, I shouldn’t have gone to meet him at the club in the first place. I should have told the real Wish about that invitation as soon as I read the postscript telling me not to.

I get to my feet and scowl at the roughness against my bare soles. I hope the Universe doesn’t see fit to punish me for my idiocy by throwing some broken glass or a rusty nail in my path. That is, if the Universe has any bearing on Wish City. Maybe this isn’t Heaven at all, but purgatory, a dimension untouched by the Universe’s laws and shrouded only in the whims of one messed-up guy. Still better than St. Louis but still bullshit.

I amble carefully toward the mouth of the alley, one hand on my dick and the other against my crack. Are there cops here? Maybe they’ll arrest me for indecent exposure and I can call the real Wish to bail me out. At least his phone number—1—is really easy to remember.

At the end of the alley, I rear back. Here, a busy, four-lane freeway stretches. I don’t know the name, and I’m not close to a street sign. I’m not

real thrilled at the idea of walking down to end of the block to investigate, but I guess I don't have much of a choice. This alley might not stay empty of threats, and I can't stay here regardless. I need to get to Wish. He apparently doesn't know there's a second him walking around with the exact same power, and if Wish #2 is as temperamental as he seems, who knows what he's been up to? What else besides BDSM dungeons has he been creating?

I inch out of the alley.

A car honks. Someone shouts—maybe at me, maybe not. But I head to the right down the sidewalk, keeping my eyes on the cement. At least it's not as cold as it was earlier when I was walking to the apartment. If it was, I'd be miserable right now, shivering my way toward hypothermia.

I make it to the end of the block. Sunrise Blvd. and 53rd. Great! I don't remember seeing either of those streets when I was following the route to Club Neon.

“Woohoo!” A woman in the backseat of a car at the corner flashes me her bare breasts. Before I can do anything but gape, the light turns green, and the car speeds away.

I back up into the shadow beneath an unlit store front's awning. I don't know what to do. Should I flag down a stranger, ask to use their phone? Before I died, I could never have done anything so reckless. Strangers couldn't be trusted. They could have a gun and a defensive attitude even if they didn't know you were a special.

Here, I don't know the risks. But maybe that's worse.

“Excuse me.” A dark-skinned man in a leather coat approaches. “You coming off Love?”

Maybe I'm hearing him wrong, because his words sound like gibberish. “Please, do you have a phone I could borrow?”

He squints at me. “I could make a call for you. What's the number?”

“1. Thank you.”

The man hesitates. “You looking for Wish?”

“Yes.” I almost specify *the real one*, but I should wait for Wish to divulge what I know.

“Alright. Give me a second.” The man takes off his jacket and hands it to me, and I use it to cover my waist. Above us, the sky glows with the sunrise. Thank the Universe I didn’t have to walk around in daylight with my dick out.

The man starts the call, but seconds tick by, and he frowns. Is Wish sleeping? I resist the urge to beg the man not to leave me alone if Wish doesn’t answer.

The man takes the phone from his ear. “Okay, come with me.”

“Where are we going?”

“To my car, then to Wish.”

I don’t have any reason to trust this guy other than he hasn’t done anything threatening. Still, I go with him. “How do you know Wish?” I ask.

The man chuckles. “Everyone knows Wish. But I work for him. I’m Mercer.”

* * *

Wish

I wake shivering in a heap of bodies on a hard floor. I ache everywhere. Even though I deserve the pain, I get rid of it with my power. I need to be a leader now and clean up this mess.

Next to me in the dim sunlight streaming through foggy windows, the replica of Lake stirs. “What happened?” Genuine fear clouds his gaze, and his pretty hair is a greasy mess.

I push it out of his face. “Someone must have shot you up before I got here, but everything is okay now.”

He sits up out of the sea of skin and gropes for my arm. I need to put him out of his misery, but I don’t want to say goodbye yet. When I was high, other

men and women tried to get at me, but Lake never let them penetrate me. I only took him. And it was wonderful and awful—mostly awful—but part of me wouldn't mind bringing the real Lake here and letting him ravage me. He wouldn't even have to be high, but then, the Love whores don't like it when you show up and don't take a syringe.

“How do you feel about me now that you're sober?” I ask the Lake replica.

He winces and looks down between his legs. “My dick is raw.”

I use my power to heal it. “All better.” None of the bodies around us stir, and I make sure they won't. It's eerie but peaceful. I don't want to go home.

“I don't know how I feel about you,” says Lake.

I laugh. He doesn't know because I don't know how the real Lake feels.

I use my power to command a different answer.

“As soon as I saw you, I got butterflies, and they don't go away no matter what I do. Even sober.”

I cup Lake's jaw. “That happens to a lot of people.”

“You're just so beautiful and powerful. It hurts.”

“I know, I know.”

Enough. I make Lake disappear, then the bodies, then the house. I dress myself in a comfy blue tracksuit and leave behind a manicured empty lot because I don't have the energy to erect something in the Love house's place. It's not like Wish City needs another bakery anyway, or a nail salon or bookstore or crystal shop or whatever.

I send Char a message. I used to just make my employees appear when I needed them, or make myself appear anywhere I wanted to go, but it proved to be an unnecessary energy expense. Except fifteen minutes go by, and Char is nowhere to be found, and she hasn't answered my message. I'm in the middle of calling her when the SUV finally rolls up.

I get into the backseat.

“Sorry, sir,” Char says. “I won’t be late again.”

“And why were you late?” I squint at Char’s neck where a little star tattoo sits. I’m pretty sure she didn’t have it the last time I saw her.

“Traffic was pretty bad on Sunrise Blvd. I’ll leave earlier next time.”

As we set off, I make myself a pair of sunglasses and lean my head back. I’ve got to do something about these Love houses. Maybe if I meditated, imagined a cage around my subconscious every night before bed or something like that.

I chuckle to myself. What a stupid idea.

“Alright back there?” Char asks.

“Yeah, don’t mind me. I’m just losing my fucking mind.”

Char frowns but doesn’t say anything. When we get stuck in traffic on Sunrise Blvd., I make half the cars disappear, and we get to my house ten minutes later.

I hesitate before I get out of the SUV.

“Hey, that tattoo on your neck. Does it have any special meaning, or is it just for decoration?”

“You didn’t hear?” Char beams at me over her shoulder. “It’s for you. Like ‘wish upon a star.’ A lot of us are getting them.”

A warmth spreads over me that I haven’t felt in a long time. “That’s really sweet, Char.”

Inside the house, I’m heading for the shower when I feel my phone buzz in my tracksuit pants. Looks like Mercer has been trying to reach me since 9 a.m. “Shit.”

Found Lake walking around butt naked on Sunrise. Bringing him by

A second later, Mercer’s signature heavy knock pounds through the house.

I should have assigned Lake a tail. I mean, if I could keep an eye on every bit of Wish City all the time on my own, I would, but I can’t. It’s just too big. Which is why I have my security team watch it for me. If Lake took Love

after I told him not to—and because I didn't give him a tight enough leash—I'm going to freak.

I swing open the front door to find Mercer next to a half-naked Lake. Lake has a jacket around his waist but it's doing nothing to hide his pretty little torso. His dark eyes, fierce but afraid, bear into mine.

"I don't think he took any Love," says Mercer.

"Whatever that means," says Lake and crosses his arms.

I study his eyes, but they're steadfast, not shifting like he's lying or lost like he's been high recently. "It's the pink drug I told you about. Now, get in here. Both of you." I step aside to let them in.

Lake looks me over as he passes. "Why are you wearing sunglasses inside?"

I narrow my eyes. "Just got here. Haven't taken them off yet." I stuff them into my pocket before closing the door. Then I have Lake and Mercer sit down in the dining room.

I take the seat across from Lake. "So why were you naked?" Speaking of, that nakedness is distracting. I put Lake in a shirt.

He growls. "I'm sick and tired of you doing stuff to me without asking!"

Wow. When's the last time anyone has spoken to me like that? I show him my teeth. "You want to be naked?" I strip him of the shirt and the jacket still around his waist.

Anger twists his features into a tiny demon's, and Mercer laughs.

"That was my jacket, actually," says Mercer.

I make it appear in Mercer's lap. "Sorry. And you can send me a report about when and where you found Lake. Seems like he needs to calm down before I talk to him, and I don't want to waste your time."

"Alright." Mercer heads for the door.

"Thanks for bringing him," I call.

Once Lake and I are alone, I raise my brows at him. "You want clothes or

what?”

“Yes,” he grits out.

“What kind?”

“I don’t know.” He gestures toward my chest. “Just put me in what you’re wearing.”

I decide not to make some shit joke about us sharing clothes or me taking mine off. I put him in the same tracksuit but gray. “Good?”

“Fine.” He seems to have calmed from his little outburst as his eyes are back to stormy but scared. If I thought he wouldn’t freak out on me, I’d take away his fear.

“Tell me what happened tonight. Were you really at Club Neon?”

“Yes. I was with you. Another you. And he has—”

“Wait.” I hold up a hand. Has my subconscious finally gone too fucking far? “There’s a replica of *me* at Club Neon?”

Lake nods. “And he has all the same powers, and I don’t think it’s a good thing. He’s temperamental.”

It’s as if the words hit my brain in slow motion. A replica of me? Annoying, but not outside the realm of possibility, I guess. Except replicas are always watered-down versions. They don’t have *powers*.

“What do you mean the same powers?”

“He can create things out of nothing. I wouldn’t agree to collar him and be his fucking Dom, so he sent me to an alley without my clothes or phone or anything. If your guy hadn’t found me, I don’t know what I would have done.”

My temples throb. “Did you say Dom?”

Lake flicks up a cautious gaze. “Yeah. We...yeah. He made some collars and tried to make me pick one. I told him no.”

I rub my temples and take some big, deep breaths. Two of me, he says. And not only is the copy walking around with my powers, he’s also trying to

get people to collar him. My stomach roils; I might actually throw up. Lake saw me as a submissive.

“Were you with him last night when I called you?” I ask.

“Yes.” Lake’s eyes go gooey with concern. “Are you okay?”

“Don’t ask me that.” A blush creeps over my skin, but I turn it off. I hope I was fast enough for Lake not to notice, but he’s watching me so closely. What would he think if I told him about his replica? How I let him tear me open with his cock?

“Wish...”

Lake and I lock eyes, and the throbbing in my temples metastasizes to between my legs. I need to find this other Wish and make him disappear, but I need to know what they did first. I need to know how Lake saw me and what I have to make him forget. Not that I’ll try to mess with his memories—that’s too dangerous, and I’ve never tried it—but I have to smooth this over somehow.

“Did you fuck him?” I ask.

“Yes,” says Lake.

“Did you like it?” It’s not a question I need to ask, but I... I want to know.

Lake’s Adam’s apple rolls in a slow swallow. “Yes, I did. But neither one of you likes to give up control.” No fear squints at me from Lake’s eyes now. “He wanted me to take him, but he wouldn’t give in. I had to hurt him first.”

My arousal is like a flood. I’ve never hung on anyone’s words like this, and I don’t tamp down my cock as it grows in the tracksuit, but only because Lake can’t see it under the table.

Universe, I’m a mess. I’m being a huge mess in front of Lake, and I can’t stop. “I’m not like him,” I whisper.

Lake’s gaze goes smug and skeptical, and I can feel him knowing it’s a lie. It’s taking a lot more energy than it should to keep the blush from my skin. If I could rid of the humiliation wreaking havoc in my gut, I would.

“In BDSM terms, I’m a switch,” I say. “But I lean towards dominant.”

“Okay.”

I feel like he doesn’t believe me.

“Did you make the other you?” he asks. “Did you feel like you needed to do that to get my attention or something?”

“No! I didn’t—I didn’t do it on purpose!” I had to have made my replica, though. Everything in Wish City starts with me, so it had to have been my subconscious. My rebellious, dream-ruining, embarrassing, fucked-up subconscious.

I thought keeping my power in check would be easier. It felt easy when I was making the first square miles of Wish City from Earth. But if I can’t even make the choice not to give my creations powers, what good am I? Anything could happen. *Anything* could go wrong.

My arousal dissipates under the weight of everything I’m responsible for. “I don’t know how to fix it, Lake.” The dangerous words just come out. I may as well say outright I’ve failed to make the specials’ Heaven I promised everyone. I’m nearly as out of control as when Fiend had me in a coma, and that was my fault, too. My power made Fiend, and my subconscious let him free without my knowledge. I managed to get him under control, but that was different. I could take away his emotional pain with my power. I can’t do that with mine.

“Hey.” Lake’s soft voice guides me back to the present. “Can’t you use your power to get rid of him?”

“The other me? Sure.” I bang my forehead on the table and laugh. “He could come back, though. Stuff comes back all the time when I get rid of it. Like Love. I’d really prefer to have every syringe crushed and every Love house decimated, but they always come back.” I hit my fist on the table.

“Do you think the other you is responsible?”

I slowly lift my head and find Lake’s eyes searching mine. It’s not a crazy idea. But that would mean the other me has been here for a long time, since before I got here and Fiend was running things. Months.

I don’t notice I’m breathing too hard until my lips start tingling, and I

groan. I've got a headache now, and I try to search Wish City for my replica, but everything's cloudy. My head's too tired.

"Wish," Lake says in that same soft voice. "We'll figure it out. Everything will be okay. You're not alone." He's trying to be soothing, but he's making fists, and I can hear his breath going fast like mine. "Can I touch you?" he asks.

"You're the one who doesn't like to be touched—not me."

Lake gets up from the table so quickly his chair scrapes the floor. Fear and anticipation twist inside me, and I get to my feet without thinking.

Lake pulls me into a kiss. His mouth ravaging mine is just what my tingling lips need. His tongue is like silk, and his hands feel like armor clutching my back. I could weather anything with his compact body wrapped around me.

He breaks the kiss and pets my mouth. His pupils are huge.

"What has you turned on?" I ask. Because this situation? It's not sexy.

"Comforting you." He takes my head in a fierce hold and stares into my eyes. "The other you has a crush on me. Talked about it like you had one, too. What's the truth?"

An ache forms in my stomach. When will the humiliation end? "That's ridiculous. You and I just met."

Lake smirks and raises a brow.

"Screw you," I mutter.

"Aw," says Lake. "He said you like me 'cause I'm 'pretty and small and hard.'" He puts his lips to my ear, and I shudder violently. "Do you think I'm pretty?" he whispers.

I pulse with need. Lake is so pretty, and he's touching me, but he's not close enough.

"What are we doing?" My voice comes out a pitch higher than normal.

Lake massages the back of my neck. "I'm getting in your head. Testing a

theory.”

“What theory?”

Lake brushes my nose with his. “That the other you is like Id, and you’re Ego. That was the gist I got from him, anyway.”

“Id and Ego?” I think I might have learned those terms in high school psychology, but I don’t remember what they mean. So much has happened since then. Will Lake think I’m a dumbass because I don’t know?

He traces my cheekbone down to my jaw. “He’s the part of you that only cares about sex and pleasure and need.”

I chuckle. “I care about those.”

“Yeah, but he doesn’t give a shit about the consequences.”

Lake’s theory fits with my theory about Love: that it represents what I long for but can’t have. But I’m so tired of psychoanalyzing myself. What does it matter if I can’t fix any of it? “Maybe. Test the theory some more, will you?” Lake seems to have more answers than I do. He’s better at thinking and talking and doing.

“I came inside of him.”

The words dance in my head like rogue pin balls. “What?”

“It was the best orgasm I’ve ever had. Way better than with you.”

I don’t have it in me to stop the rage-fueled flush sizzling over my skin. I shove Lake away, and he stumbles into the table.

He rights himself with an antagonistic grin on his face. “You’re so Ego.”

“Whatever. I was just bored when you got here. That’s the only reason I want you so bad. This is a fling. It’ll pass. More specials will come.”

The light goes out of Lake’s expression.

A heavy knock thuds through the house. Is Mercer back?

I leave Lake looking hurt and head for the door. On my way, I check my phone. Mercer usually messages me before he comes over, but he hasn’t sent

anything. Yet a look through the peephole confirms it's him.

I open the door.

Mercer grabs me, yanking me outside and down the front steps.

"Lake!" I scream.

Lake comes running, but he hesitates on the stoop, watching with wide eyes as Mercer takes me away.

I fight the hold, and I throw my power at Mercer, trying to make him weaken or disappear, but it doesn't work. Then I spot the black star tattoo on his neck, and panic makes me nauseous.

"You didn't get that for me, did you?" I shout.

He looks at me but doesn't say anything. He shoves me into the backseat of his car and doesn't budge despite how hard I kick him.

I look for Lake out the window. He's standing a few feet away, and he nods at me.

And just what the hell is that supposed to mean? Am I supposed to feel reassured? Because I don't!

As Mercer drives us away, I try to transport myself back into the house. Doesn't work. I try to search the city for my replica, for where I might be going, but it's not even foggy anymore; it's just not there. I try something simple: changing the color of my tracksuit, and my whole head smarts with a sharp, cutting pain. My upper lip itches, then blood drips onto my thigh, soaking into the still-blue polyester blend.

My power. It's blocked. It's like Seraphim's was when he got to Wish City, and Fiend had me strapped in that hospital bed and paralyzed with drugs.

I wipe at my bleeding nose and drop my head against the plush backseat. "Are you taking me to my replica?"

Mercer doesn't answer.

"Are you taking me to the wilderness to kill me? Come on, Mercer. Char

at least had the decency to lie!”

“We’re going to Club Neon. Wish would never have you killed. He loves you.”

My eyes well up. “My nosebleed says differently!” Universe, how hard would Lake be right now if he could see me like this? He’d give me that gooey look and tell me everything will be fine, but it won’t. I don’t have special powers of intuition, but still, I can feel it. This is going to be bad.

Wish City is finally reaching its breaking point, and I can’t save it.

LAKE

Standing on Wish's stoop with adrenaline surging in my veins, I feel like the prince from *Sleeping Beauty* about to throw myself into the thorns. Part of me likes it. I'm going to save Wish. If I were bigger—if I thought I could take Mercer—I would have saved him already, but I'm not that kind of prince.

I have to go to Club Neon. Me telling Wish about his doppelgänger and then Mercer going rogue right after can't be a coincidence. So, I have to find the other Wish and get back in his good graces. Maybe I won't be able to convince him to back off, but I can try.

I head out on foot toward Club Neon. Luckily, some sneakers came with my tracksuit. "If you can hear me, Wish, I'm coming to see you. Save me the trouble and teleport me there, will you?" I'm talking to Wish #2 because the real Wish can't do anything. He's all-powerful; if he could have used that power to get away from Mercer, he would have. But Wish #2 either doesn't hear me or doesn't want to.

I break out into a jog. By the time I'm standing outside Club Neon, my legs are burning, and I'm sweating in my tracksuit.

I catch my breath with my hands on my knees and squint up at the club's signage. The "LIVE NUDE MEN" sign looks eerie in the daylight, like a forgotten artifact of an abandoned carnival. Above it, black letters spell out "DUNGEON SUNDAY 24 HOURS." Judging by the paper on the door with

“DUNGEON INSIDE” scribbled in magic marker, today is Sunday.

Is Wish just sex-obsessed? As intellectually stimulating as these last couple days have been, I don’t know if my body can take much more.

I wipe my brow before entering Club Neon.

“Excuse me.” A tall blond drink of water approaches. He’s dressed only in a leather harness with his naked cock dangling between his legs. “Dress code is leather or skin.”

I groan. If only I could have kept Mercer’s leather jacket. Begrudgingly, I strip.

“Shoes, too,” says the doorman.

Once I’ve got everything off, the doorman lets me further into the club. I hold my clothes and shoes in my arms and gingerly step through the dimly lit space. Music plays faintly in the background, but there isn’t anyone here except me and the doorman. No one is manning the bar. The dance floor houses several pieces of BDSM equipment—a few spanking benches, a St. Andrew’s cross, among others—but they stand shadowed and unused.

A sick feeling blooms in my stomach as I head toward the staircase I ascended last time to get to the Crimson Room. As before, someone’s manning the door—this time, a girl with a purple pixie haircut.

She grabs my wrist. “Sorry. VIPs only.”

Fuck. I don’t have the star tattoo anymore. “I need to see Wish.”

“VIPs only,” she repeats.

“Well maybe if you tell him I’m sorry—”

“Look.” The girl stands and gets in my face. Funny, she isn’t wearing leather, but she’s been allowed clothes: jeans and a ripped-up T-shirt. “I know who you are, and Wish doesn’t want to see you. Not either one of him. He hurts himself enough. He doesn’t need some emotional sadist fucking his shit up as well.”

The blunt words sting. How does this girl know so much about me and Wish? She must be his friend.

“I’m trying to stop him from hurting himself,” I say.

“Why? So you can make him cry in good conscience?”

“Well... Yes.”

The girl throws up her hands. “Unbelievable.”

I hug my shoes and bunched-up tracksuit more tightly. “Can you please just tell him I’m sorry about how I reacted to the collars? And that I want to see him? I want to give him what he wants. Needs,” I add.

The girl narrows her eyes. “You have nerve. I’ll give you that.” She gets out her phone and types something on it. A few moments later, she waves me into the Crimson Room. “Don’t fuck up.”

I nod to the girl even though I have no idea what I’m getting into.

* * *

Wish

Mercer shoves me through the back entrance of Club Neon. Last time I was here, it opened to an indoor smoking area behind the dance floor, but now, it’s a room with dark green walls and three staircases.

While the Love houses always look familiar—the dingy walls, foggy windows, and deteriorating furniture—this doesn’t. It gives me the same sickly sensation as the doctors on Earth running tests I didn’t consent to or filling me up with drugs I didn’t know the effects of.

If it’s really a conscious part of me making these decisions, why does he do it? He should know how it makes me feel.

“Come on.” Mercer uses his grip on my upper arm to lead me up the center staircase. Pink light glows at the top, and I fight Mercer’s hold, stumbling backwards.

He catches me. “It’s not Love.”

“I don’t want to go, Mercer. Please just let me go home.”

“You need to do this. Everybody agrees.”

“Who agrees?”

Mercer forces me up a few more steps. “Everyone you’ve made.”

I’m breathing hard, and my head’s getting light again, but I don’t fight Mercer anymore. It’s useless anyway. He pushes me up to the staircase’s landing and through an open doorway.

The pink light lands on me, warm like rays from the sun. It’s coming from fat jewels hanging from the ceiling on cords of varying lengths. At the end of the long room stands...Fiend?

“Wish!” Fiend says warmly and opens his leather-covered arms.

With my all, I push back against Mercer. “I know what this is, and I’m not interested!”

Mercer struggles to hold me, but not as much as I struggle to get free. I tire out, panting.

Fiend approaches, his fancy shoes tapping lightly on the cement floor. “I am only here to talk, my sweet.”

“Isn’t that what you call Seraphim now?”

Fiend frowns. The pink light throws his white, hairless features into sharp contrast, and the mix of fear and arousal I used to feel as he climbed under my bedcovers throbs faintly in my core.

“Yes, Seraphim is my one and only now, and he isn’t too happy about my being here. But our dear Romy tells me you’ve copied yourself, and the copy’s doing all sorts of crazy things—”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!”

Mercer releases my arm to rub my shoulder, and my eyes well up again.

Fiend takes my face in his long-fingered hands. “I know that, darling, and I am so very sorry I couldn’t give you what you needed when you were a boy. But don’t you see? You make the things you are afraid of.”

I shake my head. “No, no.”

“You were afraid they’d take your brain, so you made a brain-eating monster. You were afraid of your sexual desires, so you made me into a thing who’d arouse them in you.”

“No, Fiend. Please stop.”

“Oh, honey.” Fiend presses a kiss to my forehead. “You make Love because you’re afraid of feeling that way, but I know what love is really like now, and it doesn’t have to be so hard. You can have it. It’s safe.”

The tears flow freely down my cheeks now. “It’s not safe. Everything’s hard, even here.”

“No, the pain is over. You left Earth behind. You can let go here. You can have anything you want.”

“You don’t know what I deal with, Fiend! I have to be a leader! I have to make sure the city is running smoothly. I have to take care of everyone. My followers are coming, and things aren’t perfect—”

“Sweetheart.” Fiend wipes my tears away with the back of his hand. “You already made the Heaven you promised your followers. And it is not perfect because no place is perfect, but you don’t have to control everything. The things you make grow apart from you and live on their own.”

“I know that, but my subconscious does stupid things. Dangerous things.”

“Wish!” Fiend gives me a little shake. “Let go, and everything will work out. The odd strange thing might pop up, but if you allow yourself to be happy, there will be no storm inside you to leak out into the dimension. Wish City will live and breathe as it is meant to if you will just stop worrying.”

A strange calm washes over me. I search Fiend’s eyes, soft and sincere. “But how do you know?”

Fiend smiles. “I simply do.”

I wiggle out of Mercer’s hold, and he doesn’t try to keep me this time. I wipe away what moisture remains on my face. “Where is he?”

“Who?” Fiend asks.

“My replica. I hear what you’re saying, and thanks, but he took my power away. He has to give it back. I’ll work on ‘letting go’ later.”

“He’s here,” says Mercer. “Next door.”

I look around and spot doors on either side of the pink room. “That’s where the other staircases lead?”

“Yes.”

“If my replica is on one side, what’s on the other?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that, dear,” says Fiend.

I narrow my eyes.

“It goes to the operating room where you died,” says Mercer.

“Well! We don’t want to go there, now do we?” I laugh, feeling slightly hysterical. If my power was working, I’d erase all traces of my crying fit, but my eyes are probably red and puffy, and I can’t do anything about it. My sanity feels like a block of ice, losing pieces as the sledgehammer of reality comes down on it.

Mercer heads to the right. “This way, Wish.”

As I follow, I look back at Fiend. He gives me a wave, and feeling like the child I used to be, I wave back.

* * *

Lake

The door to the Crimson Room disappears like before, and so does my tracksuit and shoes. Luckily, Wish #2 or whatever spell he’s rigged sees fit to dress me in a full-length leather trench coat with fitted black clothes underneath it and heavy combat boots.

I won’t complain about the clothes this time, even if they’re a little much. I feel like I’m going into war, and the armor is appreciated.

Sniffling reaches my ears. In the center of the Crimson Room, a spotlight switches on, illuminating the sitting figure of Wish #2. His shoulders shake with sobs, and though I've only had the pleasure of seeing a few pretty boys a mess, I'm fairly certain he's not putting on a show for me this time.

Slowly, I approach. Wish must hear my boots, but he doesn't acknowledge me.

"Hey, there," I say.

"What are you even doing here?" The angry words echo off the vast room's walls. With Wish's head up, the collar around his throat is visible. It's the white one with the heart ring in the center.

"You're wearing my collar."

"It's not yours!" The walls light up with a video, this time of gray clouds and lightning. The thunder booms as if coming from the Universe's best surround sound system.

"Are you crying because of me?" I ask over the noise.

"No!" Wish gets to his feet and shoves me in the chest. This version of him seems to have gotten smaller since the last time I saw him, so he doesn't manage to hurt me. "I'm crying because he's going to get rid of me."

"The other you?"

"My *Ego*. Isn't that what you said?"

A shiver runs down my spine. He must have been listening. "That's right. Is he here? Is he okay?"

"Oh, he's fine. Just talking to Fiend. He'll be in here to get rid of me soon enough." Wish #2 wipes at his running nose. He's so cute with his red cheeks and eyes twisted with emotion.

"Did you say Fiend?"

"Yeah. His name used to make sense, but it doesn't anymore. He's nice. He's putting me back together."

Jealousy unfurls in me like a serpent, and I take a step forward. "He's

doing what?”

Wish giggles and fixes me with a devious expression. “You wanted to be the white knight today, didn’t you?”

My face heats, and I cross my arms.

“It’s not your fault you can’t.” Wish comes close and taps the end of my nose. “You haven’t been here long enough, and you didn’t come out of our brain.” He paws at my crossed arms until I let them fall. “Kiss me. Please?”

I’m not in the mood for kissing. The thunder still booming around the room is giving me a headache, and for all I know, this Wish is a distraction keeping me from doing the saving I was planning on. “Where’s the other you? I want to see him.”

“I told you, he’s—”

A door opens up ahead.

“Oh no, he’s here!” Wish #2 scurries to hide behind my back, and a particularly vicious crack of lightning snaps at my eardrums. Rain pours from the ceiling, dousing me and the Wish behind me and the Wish stalking towards us.

“Give me my power back!” yells the real Wish.

Wish #2 shivers against me, and I make fists to resist pulling him into my arms.

The real Wish grips my jaw with slippery fingers. “Are you real?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, then how do you feel about me?”

The question comes out of nowhere, and panic flutters in my stomach. “I... I like you.” Is it what he wants to hear? It’s a simplified version of the truth: *Knowing you has been hell so far, but still, you compel me.*

“How’d you get here?” asks the real Wish, and his hold on my jaw goes gentle and petting.

I don’t think anybody’s ever touched me this way, and it’s making me feel

wobbly on my feet. “I ran.”

“Isn’t he sweet?” The voice comes from behind me. Wish #2 isn’t shaking anymore as he wraps his arms around me.

The real Wish presses himself to my front and kisses me. The rain makes the kiss salty and wet. Lips touch the back of my neck as well, and I shudder like an overwhelmed sub.

Am I about to have a threesome with two Wishes? If I had known this before I died, I would have put that bag over my head a lot sooner.

Wish talks to himself over my shoulder. “Give me my power back.”

“It’s back.” Wish #2 takes my trench coat from my shoulders.

The real Wish licks my neck. “Is this okay?” he whispers.

“Yes,” I say. “Keep taking my clothes off. Don’t just make them disappear.”

One of the Wishes goes for my fly. I can’t keep track of who’s who anymore, and I close my eyes and focus on the rain pelting me and the multiple sets of hands peeling wet fabric from my skin. My groin pounds with my heartbeat, and one of the Wishes rubs against me, cock against cock. I get even more unsteady on my feet.

“Hold on,” one of the Wishes whispers. Then the floor beneath us changes, and the Wishes are coming with me as we fall onto a plastic-covered mattress. The Wish behind me humps my ass, his cock sliding between my cheeks but not penetrating. The Wish in front of me takes my hand and puts it on his neck.

Oh. The collar.

“I lied; it is yours. Are you mad at me for wearing it?” Distress twists Wish #2’s sweet features. “I’m sorry, Sir. I’m so, so sorry.”

“Shh.” I kiss each of his cheeks, and he trembles.

In a flash, the Wishes switch places, and the real Wish looks at me with hard eyes. “Treat me like you treat him.”

I can only assume he means the sweet treatment, so I give him the same kisses on each cheek. But he's stiff, awkward. He pulls away and sits with his back facing me.

The rain comes down harder, stinging my skin.

Wish #2 pats my shoulder. "Hurt him."

Pain is already radiating from the real Wish, as stiff as he is. "I don't know."

"Hit him like you hit me. Use your power on him. We need it."

Like always, the idea of using my power has my heart aflutter. Maybe this time, he'll be into it. Maybe it'll be good.

Universe, I want him like that. Bare. Supplicating. My groin aches.

I press a hard kiss to Wish #2's lips. He's adorable all wet, like a puppy stuck in a thunderstorm. "I thought you two were supposed to be back together by now," I say.

Wish #2 frowns. "You're right. I'm sorry, Sir." Then suddenly, he's gone, but the rain doesn't let up, and the video of the storm keeps going.

I run my hand along the real Wish's spine. He's shivering and covered in goosebumps, but so am I. I think the rain's getting colder.

"Come here." I tug on his arm.

He budes easily, and I get him on his back with his legs around me. He watches me like I've got knives for hands and I'm about to cut him to pieces.

"You want what he asked for?" I scratch lightly down his chilled chest.

He nods.

"You want me to dominate you? Slap you like a bitch?"

He squirms and nods again.

Nerves tighten my shoulders. "You want me to hurt you with my power?"

Wish rubs my forearm. "Show me everything. I want to see. Please, Lake."

With that reassurance, it's as if I can breathe again. I bring my arm up and let it fly, backhanding Wish.

* * *

Wish

Even if we weren't naked with Lake's cock brushing mine every time he moves, this would be sex. It starts slowly with the first slap, but the pain gets worse from there. Or better. It gets better. It builds into a better high than Love could ever give me.

Lake doesn't make me look him in the eyes. He just gives me sensations, and finally, I'm like a sub I saw once on a St. Andrew's Cross, making involuntary noises and debasing himself for his Dom without a care.

Distantly, I care. But then Lake hits me with his power a few times, and I'm a snivelling, tear-soaked, rain-soaked mess underneath him. Like earlier, after I cried with Fiend, a calm washes over me. The difference now is it's heavier, freer. I know Lake likes me like this, so I'm not worried about my puffy eyes and red face.

Lake touches my mouth and looks at me like I'm his dragon's horde. His wet hair hangs in his eyes, plastered to his forehead, and rivulets of rainwater travel into the divots of his muscles and catch in the hair on his abdomen.

"How are you doing?" he asks.

"You look so good wet."

Lake laughs, sending his features folding in the cutest, most genuine way. If I wasn't already blubber, I'd melt.

"Thank you," he says. "Are you comfortable in this position?"

"Yes." Except I'm cold. Remembering how Lake lost it earlier over the shirt, I ask, "Do you mind if I take us somewhere warmer?"

"That would be nice."

I turn the Crimson Room into a huge bathtub like they might have had in Ancient Rome. I put smooth seats in the water beneath us, and we have to tilt to keep our heads above the surface, but Lake stays close. Only his eyes wander, widening prettily as he takes in my creation.

“Your power really is magnificent,” he says.

“You’ve seen how *unmagnificent* it can be.”

Lake smiles softly. “I disagree.”

He followed me before he died, though he never tried to meet me in person. I didn’t know this before, but the memory is sharp and true. “You told my replica you kept tabs on me, right?”

“Yep.” Lake runs his hands up my naked thighs. “I couldn’t tell if it turned him on or off.”

“On.”

Lake smirks, and I’m reminded of greasers from the fifties. He’d look good in an A-shirt, leather jacket, tight jeans. “Tell me about Fiend,” he says.

“Oh, he’s cool. He used to be my boogeyman.”

Lake looks at me like I’ve lost my mind.

I laugh. “When I first got here, he literally took control of Wish City, but he’s nice now. I fixed him.”

“I get it. At least, I’m pretending to get it.” Lake looks down at the clear water. “Are we going to be a thing now? If you’d rather fuck your boogeyman, that’s your prerogative, but—”

“I don’t want to fuck Fiend.” More foreign memories surface, like the very recent one of my replica telling Lake about what Fiend used to be to me. “I fooled around with Fiend when I was first learning about sex. I made him. He was a glorified sex doll for that stuff. Just...don’t worry about what my replica said to you.”

Lake chuckles nervously, and I wrap my legs around him under the water.

“There’s no stopping me worrying about it,” he says. “Do you want a

collar? I'll—"

"No! No. I mean..." I laugh, too, frantic and awkward. "It'd have to be something really fucking subtle."

"What about a necklace?" Lake traces my collarbones. "I could wear one, too. I'm up for... I mean, you can... It doesn't always have to be me in control." Lake's face is on fire, and I'm so hard. "I liked this tonight," he says. "Actually, I liked all of it. Both of you. I'm sorry. I know it couldn't have been easy for you, but it felt so right when we finally got there. When you let go..." He kisses my neck, and I'm one with the hot water and his smooth, searching hands.

"I know," I manage, and my voice breaks when Lake grips my cock with his.

"Did you like it when I bit you?" Lake scrapes his teeth along my throat.

Another memory: an ache in my neck, a sting at my ass, Lake's cum spilling inside me. My balls emptying. Oh, fuck.

"I liked everything," I moan. "Do it."

Lake sinks his teeth into my neck, and the pain is like a drink of water. He strokes us, and I get a good grip of his perfect ass cheek.

"Can I finger you?" I ask.

Lake whines and nods into my neck. He licks my bitten skin then bites it again.

I open him up. I want to make him feel good so badly.

He continues to stroke us and give me that sweet, loving pain. I go away for a while, but at the same time, I'm here in the water in Lake's arms, finger-fucking him and humping his grip.

We come almost at the same time. I've had sex with so many people, but nothing has ever felt easier, safer. I don't have any doubt now that I'll be able to commit to one man.

"That was good, right?" Lake asks.

I kiss him with tongue, slow and sweet. “Yes, I loved it. Did you?”

“Yes.”

We kiss for a long time. Then Lake says he’s hungry, and I make us an incredible spread. Even using my power feels easier now.

Sitting at the edge of the bath, naked and comfortable and whole, I take a bite of a chocolate-covered strawberry then feed one to Lake.

A FREEBIE FOR YOU

The Vampire Heir's First Heat



Eighteen-year-old vampire Lachlan is on the cusp of his first breeding heat. As is custom, he will take a male as his first heat mate to avoid pregnancy, and as the heir of a prominent vampire family, many men vie for his virginity. Lachlan sets his eyes on one man in particular—stunningly attractive and charming Paris, who is eight years Lachlan's senior and far from virginal.

***The Vampire Heir's First Heat* is an erotic short story.**

Word count: 3,500

GET YOUR COPY

ENJOY THIS BOOK?

If you liked this story, please leave a review. It doesn't have to be long (unless you want it to). A few words will do.

ALSO BY LYSSA DERING

Series: Wish City

[How to Love a Monster](#)

[How to Tame a God](#)

Box Sets

[Paranormal Novellas Box Set](#)

Standalones

[Fangs Like Me](#)

[Babyvamp](#)

[Breaking Hell's Rules](#)

[fangjunkie27](#)

[Lovesick](#)

[Belly Up](#)

Writing as Lyss Em

[Escorting the Escort](#)

[Making It Better](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lyssa Dering is the author of *How to Love a Monster*, *Babyvamp*, and several other indie-published titles, as well as *Fangs Like Me*, published with NineStar Press. Since her first foray into *Harry Potter* fanfiction, Lyssa has been drawn to twisted, angst-filled M/M pairings. She has so far written about a brain-eating antihero (*How to Love a Monster*), a high-tech matchmaking program gone wrong (*Lovesick*), and a brooding dhampir letting his savage side loose (*fangjunkie27*), with more fantastical ideas always lurking. Under the pen name **Lyss Em**, she writes M/M contemporary erotic romance.

Lyssa resides in the Midwestern United States with an aggressively affectionate tabby cat. When not writing, she fancies herself a connoisseur of “trash”—devouring the highest quality kinky, enemies-to-lovers, and dubious consent M/M she can get her hands on. Lyssa is nonbinary and has no preferred pronouns—any are fine.

You can find Lyssa primarily on [Twitter](#), where she loves hearing from readers.

Connect with Lyss:

Website: lyss.press

Email: lyss@lyss.press

