

Four or Dead by G O A Chapter 26 - 30

Chapter 26

Emma...Present...

“Asher...” I said with a whisper. “W-what are you doing?”

“Your so...beautiful.” He said suddenly as he reached his hand up to cup the side of my face.

My eyes went wide at his words and my body tightened instantly from his touch. His

touch was so gentle and his words so soft I was almost sure I had imagined it.

“I have been trying so hard to keep away. Why can’t I stay away from you?” I had a

feeling he didn’t expect me to answer that, but his words hit me hard.

I lowered my eyes and tried to step back from him feeling a little hurt. What was so

wrong with me that he didn’t even want to be near me?

“I-I’m sorry,” I replied, my voice small.

He lifted my chin so that our eyes could meet again. “Why are you sorry?” He looked

confused by reply.

“I have caused you guys so much trouble.” The guilt started to hit me with a vengeance.

I had been with them for weeks now with no real need for their protection. I should have

been trying to

find somewhere else to go. With those thoughts in my mind, I tried to step away from

him and leave but his other hand dropped to my waist and pulled me closer to him.

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“Emma. You don’t understand. We want you...I think we always have. We felt it the moment we saw you. There was a light in you that called out to the darkness in us. We didn’t know what to do, so we tried to push you away. We hurt you because we were afraid. We...I wanted to be close to you so badly but I couldn’t.” His voice began to trail off as did his eyes.

“Why?” I asked before he could close himself off to me.

This was the most he had ever expressed to me and I didn’t want him to lock his feelings away again. His eyes snapped to mine again.

“There is so much you don’t know...things we’ve had to do...people we’ve hurt. There is a reason we are called The Dark Angels. We don’t protect, we don’t save anyone...we destroy them. I don’t want to destroy you. You’re too pure, too good.” He doesn’t let me go though, instead, he held me tighter like he was afraid he would lose me forever if he let me go.

I wasn’t sure what to say or do. I knew his words should scare me but they didn’t. In fact what he described made sense to me even though it shouldn’t. Even though they had hurt me, I still felt like I was exactly where I was meant to be when they were near me. It scared me because I knew I shouldn’t feel that way toward them but somehow I just couldn’t run from them. Maybe it was the way their eyes followed me. Or maybe it was

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the look in their eyes when my eyes would find theirs like they were yearning for me.

I didn't understand it but I felt it. Maybe that's why they hurt me because I was being

pulled toward them but they were trying to scare me away.

Asher's body started to shake against mine like he was using every bit of his strength to

control himself. I shouldn't push him, I knew that but I didn't want him to hold back

anymore. I wasn't afraid of him and I didn't want him to keep hurting. So I reached for

him cupping the side of his face with my hand.

"Asher...it's ok. It's ok. Please just let go. You don't have to hold back because of me.

I'm not scared of you." I said it as confident as I could but my heart was pounding in

anticipation.

Asher was intense in every sense of the word so when our eyes met again the look in

his eyes caused a shudder to travel through me. His resolve was cracking and barely

hanging on.

"Emma..." my name sounded strained and his hand clenched my waist tighter to the

point I was sure it

would bruise but I didn't pull away.

He needed me and I was willing to travel into his darkness if I needed to.

Everyone

deserved light in their

life, even him.

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“It’s ok,” I said again and it finally broke through to him shattering his control once and for all. His lips came crashing down on mine like a flurry of desperation and fear. I gasped at the sudden attack and the intensity of it but I melted into him the longer it went on. He and Jayden kissed like it was the last breath they would ever breathe and it felt so much like they were trying to steal that last breath from me. Asher’s hold on me began to lessen but he didn’t let me go. His other hand had lowered to the back of my neck and he was keeping me locked against his kiss. I didn’t mind because kissing him felt like I was floating and there was no way I would ever want to come down. When our lips finally broke apart we were both, for the lack of a better word, breathless. His head lowered to mine and we stood there as time stopped just for us to be in that moment. Asher was intense in every way including this. His kiss held every emotion he kept bottled up and he had just poured every bit into me. I planned to lock those dark emotions away and never let them touch him again. If I was his light then I was going to chase away as much darkness as I could. “So about that tattoo design...” I said once I caught my breath. He let out such a pure laugh that I couldn’t help but smile. “Yeah let’s talk about that”

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tattoo.”

We pulled apart just a bit so he could place a last kiss on my forehead. He let out a sigh before stepping away and leading me to his desk. He dropped into his desk chair and I stood off to the side waiting. I watched him reach for a well-used sketchbook and pencil, and excitement rushed over me. Once the book was open though he didn't start to draw, he turned his attention to me instead. Before I could ask what was wrong he pulled me into his lap and wrapped his arms around me. I let out a little squeak of surprise but laughed it off once I was comfortably in his arms. He nuzzled his face into my neck for a quick moment before turning his attention back to the sketchbook. I laid myself back further into his chest and watched as he started sketching the design that would be just for me. The design looked more and more intriguing as he added more and more details. “Is that a birdcage?” I asked as the design began to take a more specific shape. He had drawn something that looked like a sun and was adding a small cage but he didn't stop there. Once the intricate design of the cage was finished, he added soft flowers to specific corners of the cage. “You have been locked away your whole life. Hidden and hurt. I want to set you free...little bird.” Those last words instantly made me go still. Little bird...it's what my mom called me when I was little. She would write little poems

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for me and I never forgot them. Whenever i felt scared or sad I would write them down

from memory and read them over and over. They were promises to me.

Promises that

she and I would always find a way to each other even in death.

“What’s wrong?” Asher’s voice pulled me back from my memories and pushed by the

tears that were building in the corners of my eyes.

“Nothing it’s just...my mom used to call me that,” I admitted to him.

“Really? It was the name I always thought of when I thought of you.” With that, he

added the last piece to the design.

A bird taking flight through the opened door of the cage. He held the sketch up and I let

out a soft laugh of disbelief.

“Asher...it’s beautiful.” I sat up and turned to him.

Without hesitating I let my lips meet his and he immediately wrapped tightened his arms

around me. I let my thanks melt through our touch and when I pulled away there was a

soft smile on his face. 2

“Thank you,” I say softly. “I love it.”

He places a quick kiss on my lips but there was something more on his face, something

he wanted to say but was too scared to. I didn’t push, he would tell me when he was

ready. In the meantime, I scrambled out of his hold to stand on my own two feet again

and reached out a hand to him.

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“Come on! Let’s do it now! I want to get my tattoo before I chicken out!” He quirked a brow at me but stood and grabbed the sketch before taking my hand. I led him out of the office and the others watched us leave but didn’t ask us where we were going or try to stop us. I was glad because this was something for just Asher and me. Our moment.

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Four or Dead by G O A

Chapter 27

Asher...Present...

I knew something was wrong the moment I got the text from Leo. He was always vague and short with his texts but this message had an air of urgency that had me worried.

LEO: Get home NOW we got trouble.

We always had trouble, but with Emma in the mix now trouble meant she could be in

danger. She was sitting in the chair still and the guy who had tattooed all of us was

adding the finishing touches to the design I made for her. She had barely made a sound

the whole time earning a good amount of respect from both of us. She looked small and

fragile but her years of enduring endless pain made this seem like a butterfly kiss. I was

a little annoyed that another guy had his hands on her but I tried my best to push those

thoughts down. I liked the guy and I really didn't want to knock him out while he had a

needle near

my girl.

She must have noticed my unease because she looked at me with a furrowed brow as

he stood and told her

the tattoo was finished.

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“Leo needs us back at the garage,” I told her as we quickly paid and headed toward the exit.

2

She nodded and kept in step with me matching my serious expression. She had a way

of doing that I noticed. When any of us were in a certain temperament she seemed to

know it and would either match our emotions or try to help pull us out of them when they

got too dark. It was a little uncanny but useful right now. She recognized the seriousness of the situation based on my mood and I was surprised by how easily she

fell into a more confident posture.

As we drove I stole glances at the piece of art on her shoulder. It was covered by a

clear bandage now. It made her look even stronger and fearless but the elegant design I

had purposely created to match her made captured her gentleness. She was our light

but with the ink, she was a little bit devil now too and I hated how much I loved it. (15)

As much as I wanted to preserve her innocence she was in our orbit now and that

meant the tougher she was the safer she would be. I hadn't considered that she should

learn any kind of fighting or weapon training but it wasn't the worst idea. She could

refuse to train with weapons of course, but she needed to at least learn to fight. I didn't

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want her to be beaten or caught vulnerable ever again. If we couldn't be there to save

her I wanted her to put up one hell of a fight all on her own.

Our girl was stronger than she knew and it was time we showed her exactly what she

was capable of if given the chance. My thoughts were interrupted when my phone rang.

"What?" I growled out.

"Where the hell are you?" Leo spit out on the other end.

"I'm on my way back chill," I replied rolling my eyes.

"Your dad is here and he is pissed." Leo's voice had lowered a little and that was as bad

a sign as any.

He wasn't afraid of my dad but there were times when he knew to show him a little

respect. Especially when my dad was on the warpath which I assumed was the case

now.

"What happened?" I didn't want to wait to find out.

I wanted to know exactly what I was walking into.

"Andrea's dad has denied the deal once again claiming he has enough backing now

that no deal with your dad would be appealing," Leo explained.

Dammit. That slithering worm was a thorn in my side that I really wanted to tear out and

burn right about now and done with it.

When we finally arrive at the garage I reached over to Emma and locked my eyes on

her.

"Stay next to me and stay quiet, okay?" That is all I tell her before we climbed out of the

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car.

She moved to stand beside me and before I thought better of it I threaded our hands

together. I walked into the garage with my head held high. To my surprise though

Emma didn't seem the least bit afraid. She stood tall by my side with her head held high

and I couldn't help the smile that lifted the corner of my mouth. Damn this girl was

driving me crazy. We had no idea just how amazing she was because she was constantly surprising us. She was morphing into someone new just being around us.

"Son!..." My father said with a fake proud smile before his attention fell on Emma. "Well

well, who is this. pretty lady?"

I hold back a snarl as his eyes travel down my girl's body. My father had changed a lot

after my mother left. He had been a respectable man and good father for most of my life

but he had spiraled out of control the last few years. The way he was looking at Emma

only reminded me that the father I once knew was gone now.

"This is Emma, and she is our girl," I replied honestly and with an underline warning.

1

Emma smiled at him and bowed her head in greeting. "It's nice to meet you."

She said

sweetly. 4

My father looked at each of us and smirked. "All of you sharing one girl...interesting."

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How exactly does that work? Does she jump from bed to bed or do you all gang up on

her? That last one has some pretty fun ideas going through my head.”

I feel disgusted hearing those words coming out of my father’s mouth. I barely recognize

him anymore.

“That’s none of your business,” I growled out in reply with my other hand clenched by

my side.

My father laughed a little and I looked at him in confusion. “Or maybe she doesn’t put

out at all and you all just grovel at her feet. Pathetic.”

Emma stiffened beside me and I so badly wanted to turn around and get her out of

there, but I needed to know what the hell my dad wanted from us. I was about to say as

much when Emma stepped away from me and walked past me to stand right in front of

my dad. His eyes locked on her and he seemed a little surprised that she wasn’t afraid

of him.

“Mr. Ramano I am glad to meet you but the boys and I have plans for the afternoon.

Can you please tell us what we can do for you?” Emma asked offering him her sweet

innocent-looking smile.

I glanced at the other guys who wore the same expression as me. Pure shock.

Emma

was the sweetest angel that we had ever seen but standing against my father she looked like a wolf in sheep’s clothing. 1

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My father snorted a laugh. “You have some fire in you sweetheart. I respect that.”

Something passed across Emma’s face that surprises me more than anything. Anger.

She didn’t look sweet at all as she stepped closer to my father. The rest of us took a

step toward them ready to help her if my father turned aggressive.

“I am no one’s sweetheart. Now, what do you want?” She spits out with controlled rage.

My father didn’t show his true emotions often but for a second his eyes furrow in anger

at her disrespect. He scoffed again and stood walking around Emma basically brushing

her off. My eyes dropped to her’s and the fear she had been pushing down. She had put

on a hell of a show but she was terrified the whole time. She was smart though, my

father would have eaten her up and spit her out if he saw how scared she was.

“Thomas Millar has been more trouble than he’s worth and now he thinks his business

with me is over. I want you guys to show him how wrong he is.” My dad said turning to

me with a smirk. “Your welcome to bring your little plaything with you so she can see

everything you boys get up to. Maybe even get her hands a little dirty herself.”)

“We’ll handle it.” That is all I said in reply not even acknowledging his suggestion of

including Emma.

That seemed to satisfy him because he well knew we never rejected any of his

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requests. We were just buying our time until we had the money we needed to get out of

this town and away from him.

“Good.” He turned then and snapped his finger at the two men standing guard a few

feet away.

The three of them filed out and we all let out a collective breath. We never wanted

Emma anywhere near

this part of our world and she had just gone face to face with the head of our whole

organization. Logan rushed toward her and swept her into his arms. 2

“Damn baby you were amazing but I was freaking out.” He admitted with a sigh of

relief.

She let out a laugh that sounded more close to the relieved sigh Logan let out.

“What came over you standing up to Devaro like that?” Jayden asked, his voice hard. 3

Emma looked to him as Logan lowered her to her feet again. There was that expression

again and it still

shocked me because we had never seen Emma get angry.

“I was thinking that he would see me as a weakness. He would see me as a way to hurt

you guys if I acted helplessly.” She all but yelled at him.

“What then? Do you plan to fake your way through every encounter with anyone from

his crew? You can’t defend yourself Emma not even close.” Jayden growled out stepping up to her so they were only a few inches apart.

“Then teach me! If you don’t want me to be helpless then teach me to fight back.” She

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wasn't backing down and the rest of us were too curious about this whole thing that we

didn't step in.

Jayden let out a sigh of defeat as he looked to be taking in her words. "You're right. If

you are with us, you need to learn what it means to be an angel."

Emma was breathing hard as the adrenaline started to slow. "Good I'm glad we agree.

Look I know I am not even close to being on your level but I don't want to be a victim

anymore. I don't want to cower and be afraid all the time. I want to be more than that. So

please."

Jayden nodded to her in agreement. "Good. Let's start now."

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Four or Dead by G O A

Chapter 28

Two Years ago...Emma...

Jayden was sitting at an empty table in the library waiting for me. He hadn't seen me yet

so I could run if I wanted to but he would find me and I wasn't going to risk that. Out of

all of the Angels, he scared me the most. He was cold and never showed his true emotions. I was also intrigued by him because of his lack of emotion. While Asher was

stoic and broody, Jayden is unmoved and unreadable.

"H-hi," I said as I stepped up to the table.

He didn't bother looking at me he simply says, "Sit."

I did as he asks as quickly as possible leaving one seat between us.

"Where is the paper?" He asked me, his eyes fixed on his phone.

I ruffled through my backpack and pulled out the slightly thick packet of paper and slid it

over to him. He let out a sigh like I had already made a mistake.

"Why is it this thick?" He asked.

"I-I included references for all the information I found in case you wanted to see how

accurate everything

is," I explained.

I wanted to be as thorough as possible but he seems to not appreciate the extra paper.

He grabs the packet with slam of his hand and I flinch. The motion catches his eye and

he smirks just a tiny bit.

"You're a jumpy thing aren't you." He says his voice just a little amused.

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He was letting things slip through his cold facade and it had my insides twisting with nerves. Just like when a kidnapper doesn't bother hiding his face because he plans to kill you anyway. The slips of emotion, coming from Jayden had me wanting to run in the opposite direction so badly. I had no idea that those moments were showing me how much he wanted me to see the real him, and run away forever. I watched him skim through the packet and I am well aware that he had barely read it. When he quickly closed it he stood and walked to the nearest trash can and dumped it inside. 2 My mouth dropped open and my eyes followed him as he returned to his seat. "Nothing about that meets the standards our project should be at. I gave you time to do this right and you still can't manage that. Just how stupid are you? This isn't an elementary school book report. Do it again. You have one more week before I kick you out of our group and I take over. You will get an incomplete and that will be the least of your worries." He threatened and I nodded and lowered my eyes from him just like I always did. I always tried to never look anyone in the eyes if I could help it. The eyes are the window to the soul and I was sure if anyone really looked they would see the darkness where my soul should be. That innocent part of me died a long time ago and my body

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was just a shell that wouldn't die nearly fast enough. I knew that I could end this myself

but I had been too scared to try just yet, and not because death scared me. It was because I didn't want to accidentally survive and be locked away without a chance to try

again. When I do it, I would be sure it was final. I had been thinking of all my options

because one day I would know that it was time and I would revel in my freedom. 2

One day enough would be enough and I wouldn't care the mess I'd leave behind. In

fact, I would hope that my father would have to wash away the blood I left behind. It

would be symbolic actually, having my blood on his hands.

"Emma don't waste my time again. I don't take kindly to people wasting my time."

Jayden had reached across the table and grabbed my face and squeezed. "Do you hear me?"

I had been so trapped in my thoughts of death that I had gone numb to the world, falling

into an almost trance. His booming voice though snapped me back. For the first time

that day, my eyes met his and there was a flash in his expression that looked almost

like concern but it was so fast a blink whipped it away.

His hold on my face was painful and I knew it would bruise but what was a few more

bruises anyway. Why did I even care anymore? Pain is pain it didn't matter where on

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my body I felt it. My dad would see the bruises and have a fit but he would just add to them in his rage. (3)

I did something unexpected as I was trapped in Jayden's hold. I laughed. Not a happy laugh, but a laugh of someone who had accepted their fate. I would die by his hand and I welcomed it, better him than my father or even my own hand. He would be sure it was done right, and no one would ever know who did it. Instead, Jayden dropped his hand and stepped away from me. He could see it, I was giving up. He watched me for a second and I stood and walked right out of there, not looking back. Maybe it was time after all; I was done. Why was I waiting? A dramatic exit wasn't really my style anyway. I didn't bother staying for the rest of my classes.

I walked right out and grabbed my bike and headed to that park. The one where I met Leo. It was pretty much run down by then and no one ever went there. I dropped my bike and climbed into the little place we hid from the rain and I held a small blade tight in my hands. The sharp thing was what I used to punish myself. At one time I thought if I hurt myself I would become numb to pain altogether. It hadn't worked yet but I was persistent.

Another helpless laugh escaped me as tears fell from my eyes. I held the blade to my

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wrists and sliced as deep as I could before doing the same to the other side. My hands had been shaking but it was done. I rested my head back and waited to drift away. It wouldn't take long and I would finally be free. My eyes fluttered shut and I waited for that bright light everyone said I would see when my time was up. I wasn't sure how long it took but it didn't take long because I started to feel cold. Really cold but also peaceful. Then suddenly I felt a warmth around me and I frowned. My eyes slipped open and I whined because someone was holding me and was warming me up much against my wishes. "Come on. Don't die on me!" I heard the man say and I focused my eyes just a bit. I didn't recognize the guy but he looked really worried. His face lowered to look at me and the warmest blue eyes met mine, golden hair brushing the tips of his eyelashes. "Just hang on ok? Fight just a little longer." He said softly to me. He was a stranger. He didn't go to my school I was sure of it, I would have remembered his beautiful eyes. I was too weak to try and figure out if I knew him and the sound of his soft warm voice was lulling me into the darkness. If his voice was the last thing I would hear then I was ok with that. Soon the warmth increased and I opened my heavy eyes to see we were in a car with the heat blasting I guessed.

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“Take us to the hospital.” The man holding me said.

“Yes sir! Will she make it there?” The man driving asked.

“I think so.” The man holding me said brushing hair away from my face. “Come on beautiful stay awake.”

I felt like I was floating between wanting to just sleep and wanting to know who this guy

was. Why did he save me? Why was he helping me? I was no one special. No one

cared about me and no one would miss me so why would this stranger care?

“We are five minutes away.”

I let my eyes close completely and I took in the warmth around me. It had been so long

since anyone held me in such a gentle way.

I must have finally passed out because I couldn't remember anything else until I open

my eyes and saw white and grey all around me. I turned my head a little and I realized

then where I was.

“Hey! You're awake.” Someone said coming in through the door to the room.

My eyes fell on him and I froze. Who was he?

“Yes...I guess so...” I replied hesitantly.

He smiled at me and walked toward the bed and my breath hitched a little when he

reached out and took my hand. His eyes were deep blue and his golden blonde hair was a

little long and messy in the best way.

1

“You scared me there but I'm glad to see you're ok.” He said brushing his thumb over

the top of my hand.

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“I-I’m sorry do we know each other?” I asked as politely as possible. He smiled and shook his head. “I found you at the park and brought you here.” My eyes widened as the events of my attempted death came flashing through my mind.

It was then that I notice the bandages wrapped around my wrists. Then another scarier thought came to mind.

“What time is it? How long was I out?” I asked him in a panic.

His smile fell and he looked at me with concern.

“You were out overnight. Why?” He asked confused by sudden panic.

My heart started to race. “I have to go! I have to get out of here.” I said trying to climb out of the bed.

My feet hit the ground and my legs gave out under me.

“Hey, it’s ok.” The guy said immediately catching me and helping me take a seat back on the bed.

“No, you don’t understand...if he finds out...” I started to say before a knock came at my door.

The door cracked open and in walked my dad. He smiled at me but I saw the anger in his eyes and with the tightness of his jaw. He was furious and when his eyes fell on the guy helping me he quirked his head to the side.

“Who might you be?” He asked the guy holding me up.

“Just a friend. I was the one who found Emma.” How did he know my name?

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My father looked him over and smiled wider. “A true hero! Thank you for helping her but you can go now that I’m here.”

I didn’t want to be alone with him and the guy sensed it and promptly said, “No I’m staying.”
Idiot.

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Four or Dead by G O A

Chapter 29

Leo...Present...

“Again!” Emma growled out in frustration to Jayden as she pulled herself off the mat.

“Come on baby you need a break,” Logan called out to her but she just waved him off.

“No, I need to do this.” She said instead.

Emma had been sparring with Jayden for over an hour and it was clear she was exhausted but she wouldn't stop. We tried to get her to just sit for a few minutes but she

refused. She was strong for sure and picked up the moves Jayden showed her a lot

quicker than most. They had moved past self-defense moves to full- on sparring in

hand-to-hand fighting. She was a natural but she was losing energy and we all could

see it.

She didn't want to be seen as the weak link in our group, but the boys and I had been

training since we were young. This was new for her and she needed to build muscle

and endurance to spare correctly for long periods.

1

“Enough Emma. You need a break.” Jayden finally said when he pinned Emma to mat

yet again.

She squirmed beneath him trying to escape his hold but she was too tired and too

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angry. Anger was never a good emotion to go into a fight with. When you attack in

anger you tire out quickly giving your opponent an advantage.

“Emma you don’t have anything to prove to us or anyone. This is simply to protect

yourself if you need to.” Jayden reminded her.

She stopped fighting him and I could see a silent conversation passing between them.

Jayden was a hard. guy to understand but Emma was not just anyone. She seemed to

understand us better than anyone ever has. She offered each of us exactly what we

need which shouldn’t make sense but she was special that way.

There weren’t many girls who would be able to handle the emotional baggage of just

one of us, but she

was able to handle us all with ease.

I glanced to Logan and he nodded. Emma and Jayden needed some time alone so we

stood and left the workout room.

“She is a lot better than I thought she would be,” Logan admitted proudly when we

walked into the kitchen.

“She is. It was always in her, she was just too afraid to use it.” I said in agreement.

“I hate that she needs to learn this stuff. I want to be able to protect her always but I

guess that’s not

exactly realistic.” Logan said dropping onto one of the dining room chairs.

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“Honestly I’m worried about her dad. We don’t know enough about him or what connections he has. We can’t anticipate his next move and that has me nervous.” I added with a sigh. “Yeah, it’s never good when you don’t know someone well enough to anticipate their next mood.” Logan groaned and dropped his head back. “Can’t we just kill him?”

2

That made me laugh but I understood where he was coming from. That seemed like the easiest solution. but not knowing what connections he had meant we wouldn’t know what kind of problems his death could cause.

“I wish we could but we need to be smart. We don’t want suspicion to fall on Emma.” I reminded him.

He let out a dramatic sigh in reply but nodded in agreement. “This is a mess.” Jayden...

I was impressed by how hard Emma had pushed herself. I had a lot more respect for our girl seeing her get back up no matter what I threw at her. “You did well,” I said but I wasn’t in any hurry to get up. We were still on the mat and Emma was beneath me. Even after going through intense training she still looked as beautiful as ever.

“It’s still not good enough.” She said letting out a frustrated groan. “You have the fight in you. You just need to learn to channel it in the right way.”

Her eyes opened then and locked onto mine. We laid there for a few silent moments before she brought her hand up to my hair and

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started running her fingers through it. It was such an intimate gesture that I hadn't felt in so long and on instinct I wanted to pull away. Emma wasn't just anyone though so I let her do what she wanted. I lowered myself with crossed arms and rested myself on her hips. She let out a cute laugh and continued to run her fingers in my head making my cold heart melt.

"Thank you, Jayden." Her smile had a way of making my heart flutter in such a clique way that made me so mad. 4

My heart was not supposed to be melted so easily for a girl. Emma was just too good

for me, but I needed her. She was like an addiction, with just a small taste of her I

couldn't help but keep wanting more. I had been fighting my attraction to her for years

now and here she was giving herself over to me and not asking anything in return. At

least nothing we wouldn't give her for free. We would protect her from heaven and hell

and not because she asked but because nothing was taking her from us now.

I sat up after a few minutes and pulled her into my lap, needing her to be wrapped

around me. Holding her was like breathing and I had been suffocating for way too long.

she straddled my lap and looked down at me with the softest smile. 1)

"You're beautiful did you know that?" My body went still at her words and she let out a

soft laugh. "You really are."

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No one had ever called me beautiful before. Most guys would find such a compliment degrading, but coming from my girl I knew it was the highest of compliments. My mother said I was handsome like my father but no one had called me beautiful before. Now that I'm older and I wear a cold no emotional expression almost all the time it was hard to imagine that anyone found my looks particularly appealing. They were probably too afraid to get a good look at me anyway. Emma placed her hands on either side of my face and lowered her head to mine. "I know you don't like people to see what is going on inside you, but please don't shut yourself off from me. There is nothing about you that I don't want to know and there is nothing you can tell me that will make me run." From the look in her eyes, I knew she meant every word but she had no idea just how dark I was. If I told her everything I had done I knew for a fact she would never be able to look at me again. "I know you think that, but that's because there is so much you still don't know," I replied hoping that we could move on from this subject. Instead, she rested her forehead against mine and sighed. "I know that all of you work for Devaro and the work you do involves shakedowns, hits, and more." She said straight out and I can't deny how surprised I was.

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“How do you know all that?” I needed to know who had shared all this with our girl who didn’t need to know all the crap we did.

“Rumors mostly but with Devaro’s visit and other things I have overheard and seen I put everything together. Jayden it I didn’t know what you guys were capable of I wouldn’t have asked for your help.” She had a point and we hadn’t even considered that she knew more than we thought. I was thinking it over as she moved slightly and lifted my head up to look at her again.

“I don’t care about that Jay, I care about you. I care about the others and I know that you guys will never hurt me again. At least I hope not.” That last bit was meant as a joke I knew but it hit hard that she still wasn’t sure if she was safe with us.

“We will never hurt you Emma I swear. We....I....” It was too soon to say it I knew that but she needed to know that there was a good reason why I would never hurt her again. “I’m in love with you.”

Her body stiffened in my arms and her eyes went wide.

“W-what?” She asked with a shaky voice and I immediately regretted saying it, but there was no taking it back.

“I mean that...” I had no words, my brain failed me as panic set in.

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I had told a girl I loved her only once before and that didn't turn out well either. My eyes had fallen away from Emma's and I got lost in my thoughts trying to push down all my feelings like I always did. Then her soft hands brushed along the back of my neck soothingly making me feel like putty in her hold. "You really love me?" My heart pounded in my chest. I didn't know how I knew I loved her. It was a bunch of little things that I just loved about her since I saw her freshman year. The way her hair looked sunkissed every first day of school, the way her eyes looked like deep galaxies with a million stars in them. I loved how big her eyes were and how innocent they made her look. I loved the sweet sound of her voice and how just the sound of it calmed me. I loved the softness of her hands whenever she touched me, and how she smelled like cherry blossoms. I loved how she looked at me like she could see the darkness in me and wasn't afraid of it. Sure she had been afraid of me for a long time because she never tried to see me. She was too busy trying to hide that she didn't dare look me in the eye if she could help it. I just loved her for seeing me and wanting me even after everything I had done. Her heart was pure and big and more than a guy like me deserved. So to answer her I said, "Yes. I love you." Her smile made my heart burst and when she leaned down to kiss me, I kissed her back

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as hard as I could.

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Four or Dead by G O A

Chapter 30

Emma...Present...

I decided to sleep with Jayden that night because there was no way I could be away

from him after what he told me. It meant so much to me to hear him say those words.

Coming from him it was a big deal and I wanted to cuddle him so badly after.

He may

not be a cuddly kind of guy but he made me swoon and I was going to be all over him

from now on. Logan would probably complain that I am showing Jayden some special

attention for the next few days but I can't help it.

Hearing someone say they love me had my heart doing some crazy things.

Jayden

didn't seem to mind the idea of me sleeping with him and he even curled closer to me

like it was so natural for me to be there.

"You're going to get all clingy now aren't you?" I asked him teasingly.

"I may but if you tell me to leave you alone I will," He said with a promise.

I turned to look up at him and smiled. "I would never tell you to leave me alone.

I know

this is new to you though so don't push to please me. I understand if there are things

you aren't comfortable with."

He took a moment to consider my word as I went back to resting my head on his chest.

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“Truthfully it is a little strange to cuddle in general or be affectionate at all. I always felt too cold-hearted to even enjoy those things anymore. But with you...it feels right.”

My lips turned up into a huge smile at his sweet words and I held him tighter.

“You are actually really good at this. Maybe better than Logan.”

5

He huffed out an amused laugh. “I find that hard to believe. He has that whole perfect boyfriend thing going on.”

I let my hands trail along his broad chest absentmindedly. “He isn’t perfect, no one is,”

Jayden grumbled in disagreement but I ignored it. “He gets crazy jealous but not in a

bad way. I just reassure him and he turns back into his cute cuddly self again.”

He let his hands run down my side and stay fixed on my hip. “I can’t promise I will be

anything like that but I will try my best to make you happy.” 3

I hated that he didn’t think he was enough for me and I was determined to make sure he

knew he was. I

looked up at him again and his face turned to me as well. My hand left his chest and

brushed along his jaw. “I don’t want you to be anything but you. I love everything about

you, darkness and all. I love you.” 2

He tensed under my touch for just a moment before he lowered his head and closed the

space between us

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and met my lips with his. This kiss was soft and slow as he poured all his gratitude and hope into me. It was so intimate and gentle that it could have easily progressed to more but he moved away before that could happen. I knew the boys wanted me to have time to be ready to take those next steps and it made me love them more.

We stayed wrapped in each other for a few more extra minutes and I must have drifted

off because a loud banging woke me and had me shooting up in the bed. My eyes

scanned the room on instinct but when I turned I found Jayden sleeping peacefully

beside me. The panic I felt began to subside until another bang rang out.

“What is that?” Jayden asked, his voice deep and gravely from sleep.

“I don’t know. I think someone is banging on the door.” He pulled back the covers and I followed.

Jayden quickly made his way to his bedroom door and out as more banging rang out

through the first floor. When he finally reached the door everything happened so fast. I

don’t even know how it happened but the sound of a gun had my ears ringing. I watched

as Jayden fell to the ground, blood spraying all over. I screamed and tried to get to him

but something had a hold on me.

My body was pulled away and toward the door as I struggled to reach Jayden.

My ears

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were still ringing as I was roughly dragged out of the house and I caught a glimpse of Jayden trying to stand and reach for me. He was hurt though and it was making him stumble as he slipped on the blood coating the floor. I was pushed toward a car running and wait nearby and shoved into the driver's seat. I scrambled to get out until I felt the cold touch of metal against my head. I looked up and was met with the burning eyes of my father.

"Get in or I shoot you right here, right now." He said in a calm voice that had chills running across my skin.

I nodded with a shaky breath and climbed in properly. He slammed the door shut and I heard shouting coming from behind the car. In the rearview mirror, I could see Logan running toward the car. My father held his gun out and shot at Logan and another scream escaped my lips. My father kept shooting until he jumped into the passenger seat and turned his gun to me.

"Drive now!" He shouted.

I didn't argue. I needed to get him away from my guys.

"Where do I go? I ask just above a trembling whisper.

"Head toward the highway." He growled out with his gun still pointing at me.

"You are going to regret what you've done to me! You will pay for this I swear!" He shouted at me as I drove, shaking the gun around dramatically.

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I could smell the alcohol on him and I knew that he could easily kill me if I said or moved in any wrong way.

“Dad please...” I knew begging wouldn’t save me but I had to try.

“Shut

up

and take a left!” He yelled at me pushing the gun into my temple yet again.

He barked out directions and I followed them to the letter and soon we were driving

down the nearest highway. My mind was panicking but the longer I drove Jayden’s

voice begin to flicker in my mind.

“Protecting yourself is not just about fighting until your opponent is too hurt to fight back.

It’s about being smart. If someone has a hold on you, you don’t thrash around and tire

yourself out. You hit key points to loosen their hold on you enough to getaway.

So when

someone is threatening you, calm your mind and look for a way out.” Jayden’s words

echoed in my mind like he was sitting right beside me.

He was right. I was panicking because of the gun aimed at my head, but I realized that

my dad couldn’t kill me. If he did he would have nothing to bargain with. He was trying

to scare me enough that I wouldn’t fight back. With this in mind, I knew I needed to find

a way to get out of this car.

My eyes scanned the area around us but there wasn’t much but trees and more trees.

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There weren't many options with us being on a highway going 70 miles per hour. Then I realized that as much as I wanted to fight, I could end everything by simply swerving off the road. I could kill us both and it would be done. There would be no one hunting me and no one who would be able to possess me. I would be free. These few weeks had given me hope, but I needed to sacrifice myself to save the people I cared about. 3 My father would never stop coming for me, and he would happily hurt or kill anyone in his way. I glanced at my father for a second and really took in what state he was in. One of his eyes was swollen. from a clear beating and he seemed panicked and on edge. The arm he was using to hold the gun on me was less ridged now, and I knew that was the exact opening I needed. I slowed my breathing and screamed yanking on the steering wheel hard enough to send us flying off the road. The car jumped from the force knocking the gun from my father's hand as the car slammed headfirst into the grass before bouncing back. He cursed and I pressed harder on the gas as we moved closer and closer to the trees. "Don't be stupid Emma! You'll kill us!" My father screamed trying to grab for the wheel.

2

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He was too late and the impact from hitting the tree slammed darkness all around me.

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