Chapter 30

I dreamed of a woman in a white dress with gorgeous red hair while I snored on the couch. She was stunning and I just stared at her in awe as she told me everything would be okay, she would take care of me. I immediately trusted her. I had never seen a woman like her before but when my eyes parted I felt comforted, the the non-existent woman had made everything better. Still, no dream would be enough to make me disregard the aches and pains that came from sleeping on a couch. I groaned as I sat up then took my time stretching, hoping that it would soothe my creaky shoulders and tight neck. It wasn't. å I ambled back to my bedroom and pulled on some jeans and a grey cardigan when I saw the clouds weighing down the sky outside. Oh well, another rainy day would do my plants good, like Hades had said. Still, something about the day made me feel the need to put on a swipe of mascara and attempt to fashion my hair into a cute style. It didn't work to I pulled it into two long braids like I usually did. Very suddenly I wished that I had Tabitha's desire for all things glittery and pretty. Maybe then I could make the woman in the mirror look less bland.

But no amount of makeup or fashion sense would stop me from being timid when I entered the kitchen, knowing I would find Hades there. "Morning," I greeted, my voice coming out in a high squeak. I wished I could be Keiko then and be so indi erent to how handsome my mate was. She ruled the world so comfortably, like she knew others would stare and she didn't care. "Morning," he replied with a cheeky smile.

I felt my own grin tug at my lips but when he li ed a mug to his lips I saw the

bright red marks around his wrist. Not pale, but fresh and angry. They were

from last night. While I had been sleeping soundly on the couch he had been

hoping he didn't notice my lingering gaze. "You know that I can't cook, but I

think it's only fair that I provide breakfast today. Unfortunately, you're going

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wrestling with demons and silver. Guilt and fear made me feel winded for a moment. "So," he began, lowering the mug again. I snapped my eyes to his face,

to have to work for it." "Work for it?" I repeated. He just nodded his head and indicated that I should follow him. We ended up in garage which made me a little pensive. The last time we had been here it was because we had fought. He had banished me temporarily and I had come back even more broken then before I le . But he didn't seem at all

bothered and opened up the garage door.

And there, protesting against the grey sky was a bright blue bicycle. And it was fully equipped with a basket and bell. "Oh dear God," I moaned, "You're going to make me bike to my food? Do you even know how long it has been since I've ridden a bike?"

All of the words tumbled out of my mouth with a hint of anger to cover up my

anxiety and embarrassment. But when he put on a pair of runners I also

that I noticed a second bike leaning against the siding of the garage.

shoved my feet in shoes and followed him outside to the bike. It was then

"That's why I have this," Hades announced, revealing a bright blue helmet

that had been hidden in the basket, bringing my attention back to him. "I'm not wearing that," I denied. "And I'm not getting on that bike." "That's fine. We can go back inside, but I do warn you that the only thing I can cook is scrambled eggs." a "You're kidding."

a bike I fell o and broke my wrist right in front of the country club. My mother had ordered me to get back on my bike because people were starting to stare as I screamed.

I rolled my eyes and stomped over to him, snatching the helmet out of his

hands, but he just peered down at me with triumph clear on his face. And it

was that look that made my tough exterior falter. The last time I had been on

head for the grass and you'll be fine."

day I had to start small, right?"

"I don't even know what that is."

garage.

assured.

with a bull's horns.

first enduro race."

"I really haven't been on a bike in years," I confessed.

"I figured," he mused. His fingers brushed a stray strand of hair o my

forehead, pushing it under the padding. And the touch was enough to make

me lose my breath. "But, if I wanted to get you on a motorcycle with me one

"Baby steps. Today you ride Ethel's bike. Tomorrow you'll be bettered in your

He looked completely natural when he tossed his leg over his mountain bike

butterfly that fluttered in front of me, distracting my focus. It was an ugly

mess and had I not been so stressed out I might've cared about how I looked

"You're doing great. It'll be much easier once we get onto the pavement," he

"I look like an idiot," I grunted, holding the handlebars like I was wrestling

"Oh no, I'm not getting on one of those," I spat, staring at the pair in the

"Nope."

"What if I fall o?" I asked. "Then we will get you training wheels next time," he teased, watching me place the helmet on my head and buckle it under my chin. He must've seen the fear in my eyes because he added, "If you feel like you're going to fall

and waited for me to start pedaling. There was a lot of squealing and swearing at first. I would pedal, then my front tire would hit a rock and I would panic. I cursed the gravel, cursed the potholes, and even swore at a

"Probably for the best," he said, patting my helmet.

to my mate that I was just beginning to bond with.

"No you don't. That helmet totally gives you street cred."

that gave it away was the menu in the window.

"I didn't know there was a cafe out here," I said.

best matcha lemonade."

secluded table.

"I wish," he laughed.

the handlebars for the time being.

hand o the grips. I just gritted my teeth and kept up my slow pace. Hades kept up his slow pace with me, only surging ahead once to open the gate. Then we were on pavement and I was beginning to wonder where on earth we could be going when he lived in the middle of nowhere. We came upon the small village that we drove by to get to his estate though it didn't seem like there could be anything exciting in such a small community. But I pedaled and wobbled on, only mildly skeptical when we stopped outside of a small building that looked more like a house than a business. The only thing

"Oh yeah, even in the smallest populations you need a ca eine fix," Hades

answered, holding my bike steady as I dismounted. "But this place has the

"That sounds gross," I complained while pulling o my helmet. I hung it on

"It looks worse, like swamp water, but the taste is amazing," he vowed.

somewhere between skeptical and jealous. I secretly wished that Hades

his beloved swamp water. She ran her eyes over me, seeming to be

The barista greeted Hades by name and already had a plastic cup filled with

would wrap an arm around me, but it was just the mate bond paired with the

fact that we weren't surrounded by people who hated him. A few days at him

I would've shrieked at him to keep his distance and now I wanted to stake my

I would've given him the finger, but I was too scared to even consider li ing a

"So this is breakfast?" I wondered. "This is the start. A er this we go to the bakery. Ever had a cru in?" "A cru in?"

"A croissant mu in. She puts these fillings in them and I tell you it is the best

thing I've ever eaten," he explained. "I swear I only moved here a er Keiko

But the seriousness of his actual whereabouts dri ed between us, making

me stare down at my drink. I wanted to be open with him, to progress, but

took me here and to the bakery. I wouldn't survive otherwise."

"So is this where you are when Ethel tells me you're out?" I teased.

knowing his true purpose in this world was still hard to swallow.

claim on this man. Once my frozen chia was finished we sat down at a

"So, who is Ethel to you anyway?" I asked, hoping to change the subject. "A dear friend. She was one of the first people outside of my family to understand what I really did. I killed someone close to her, but she knew what they were doing with their kids. She knew about all the times they drove drunk with the kids in the car, the time that their daughter walked in on a junkie overdosing in her own bedroom." "So she's been with you for a long time?"

"Years now. I told her it wasn't safe for her, but she's so grateful and she has

came into my life. Not being able to cook was the least of my problems then.

"What about your parents, your family?" I asked. The words were out of my

Hades didn't seem to mind. "I le as soon as I understood how much danger

I was putting them in. People wanted to get back at me anyway they could

and I knew my family would be their first target. Keiko and Ajax set me up

"Don't you miss them?" I wondered because, despite all my parents'

this keen awareness of when people need her. I lost a lot when this curse

Now, I couldn't be more thankful that she stayed."

and I had Ethel pretty soon a er."

like a person."

him a monster right a er.

~~~Distraction Section~~~

mouth before I could consider if they were too forward.

missteps and mistakes, I still wanted them in my life.

"Sure, of course I do. My dad and I were really close and my mom loved me and my brother so much. Plus, me and my brother were really close in age so we were pretty much inseparable as kids. Now I hardly see him. But this if for the best. People stopped threatening my family and I still get to see them once a year, just before Christmas. Besides, I don't want them to see me like this. They are the only people who still call me Sebastian and still treat me

I averted my eyes, all too aware of how much joy I had given him when I

"Is it time for you to try a cru in yet?" he asked, forcing a big smile.

called him his real name. And how quickly I had taken it away when I called

I nodded my head, silently vowing that I would never call him Hades again.

So this is my favorite chapter that I have written so far. I love quirky dates and men who put thought into how they show a ection beyond holding hands and movies. Question of the Day: What if your favorite kind of dessert? There is a local baker who makes cru ins and she is an hour drive from where I live and you bet that I hustle out there for my flaky, pastry goodness.  $\boldsymbol{\beta}$