

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall

Chapter 1

Aleera POV

If there was one thing I was good at, it was running. Six years I had been running from them, ever since my magic fully manifested. Running from my mates, from the world, and a future I never agreed to or wanted. But I was also running out of choices as I turned up yet another alleyway as I tried to lose the monsters hunting me.

Their heavy footfalls on the ground behind me were getting closer, and I knew they would force me to make a choice. My magic was getting low, my reserves depleting. I tried not to use it because I came closer to running out every time I did.

Once a Fae runs out of magic, we are essentially human. Being human is dangerous in this world. Predators would pick you off in a heartbeat. I could hear the snarling beasts as they chased me down, getting closer

with each step while I was getting weaker.

I knew there was only one way out of this. One way I would get to live another day was by setting off a flare off of my magic to them. All I had to do was alert them of my location and pray they would come and didn't ignore it like I had ignored their calls for years.

Growls tore out behind me, and I heard one knock something over as it gave chase, feel its aura as it tried to gain on me, yet adrenaline kept my feet moving despite wanting nothing more than to pass out, yet I fought the urge to give in and accept my fate. I glanced down at my hands, my magic fizzling in my fingertips as I sought another way to lose them. Yet there was no other option.

I had avoided setting it off my mark for six years. But with my magic running this low, I had no other choice. Either alert them to where I am or be killed by what is chasing me. One thing I knew was they wouldn't kill

me; they would come for me. But would I be any better off if they did?

They would be furious. I knew my mate's magic was still strong despite me not being there. Fae's power is shared with their other mates. That's how we remain strongest, and I was the link to all of them. I was the power keeper, yet somehow they found a way without me. I could feel their power, constantly searching for me, trying to draw me nearer and promising me safety, but I knew I wasn't safe with them either. They just wanted to use me to get stronger.

Growing more tired, as I ran up these darkened streets, the light coming from the full moon lit my way; and that was the worst time to be in a werewolf city surrounded by savage beasts that loved nothing but the chase and to kill for sport.

I pushed harder and ran past some garbage bins, twisted my wrist, letting my magic flow from my

fingertips, and blasted one and made it explode, hoping to slow them down as I ran on the wet ground, puddles splashed my legs, and my clothes were drenched making it more challenging to run.

Fae were the most powerful creatures in the world. As long as we had magic and our mate, it turns out I have four, and not one of them was a good option. Unfortunately, the longer I have gone without them, my magic has become weaker.

I sure as hell didn't want to belong to those Savage men. My mates are the ones responsible for my parents' deaths. They tore my house apart and tore my heart from my chest the day Darius killed them. Then they crushed it further by leaving nothing left of them to bury.

Only to be forced into a bond I never wanted, but I was out of options, and I just had to pray they would have mercy on me when they found me because from what I know of them, mercy wasn't a part of their vocabulary.

I turned up yet another darkened street. I heard the howls in the distance as more joined the chase. Shifters could smell a Fae easily; they could smell the power in my veins even as weak as mine is right now. I knew I should never have tried to get into the city at night. But I was desperate and hadn't eaten in four days. Most of the water sources outside the city were polluted.

Sure, I could have conjured up water, but it wasn't worth the energy it would burn with me using magic. One stupid decision has just cost me another year's supply of my power, all burned up trying to escape these growling monsters.

A year was all I had left to find a human community to hide in and maybe live without fear of them finding me. Instead, here I am being hunted by werewolves and god knows what else through a city I was unfamiliar with. This was not part of my plans or how I saw my day turning out.

Just when I thought my luck couldn't get any worse, the street turned out to be a dead-end and made me spin around as I looked around for another escape. There was no getaway. I didn't find any. That is when I realized they had herded me here, and now I was cornered and about to be torn apart all because I stepped into the wrong city.

How was I supposed to know it was a shifter city? It's not like they had a huge ass neon sign at the city limits saying 'shifters only.' However, it did explain the stench of wet dogs, I thought to myself. Now was so not the time for my sarcastic inner monologue.

A growl shoved me into reality again. Nine werewolves were closing in around me. Oh oops, make that ten; I didn't see the one on the roof drooling down its chest, wanting to munch on me like a damn chew toy. I was about to become chum dog food because I still couldn't bring myself to let off a flare of my magic to them.

I didn't spend this much time running, only to beg them for help. The wolves closed in, my heart pumped in my chest, and I knew I didn't have enough magic left to kill all of them.

I weighed up my options, both unappealing, and neither option had any sense of hope for me. I would be doomed either way.

My eyes moved to the marking on my wrist, their marking that said my soul belonged to them. I just have to alert them, and they would know my exact location, but what if they didn't come? What if they let me

die? They would have to know I must be desperate to be calling on them. They didn't need me; they have kept their magic strong without me. Maybe they might think, well fuck her, let her die.

Hesitation ran through me, and I prayed to the fates to not stuff me over again and hoped this wouldn't be the worst decision I ever made. Yet nothing felt right about the decision I was about to make. It wasn't just them killing my parents. I had additional reasons, reasons they could never know about me.

I swallowed down my fear and rubbed my fingertips over the infinity symbol of their four names. Each of us has the same markings. All of us are born with them on our wrists, yet they only appear when our powers manifest. Not only did I run from them, but they also waited until I was eighteen before they called on me, which I thought was odd.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 2

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Chapter 2

Once a Fae manifests, most people hunt their mates down and wait for them to come into their magic. But they left me and let me finish school. It wasn't until I turned eighteen and the marking appeared along with my fully-fledged magic that I learned who my mates were. When their names appeared, I ran.

I say fully-fledged because I had a secret. I already had magic long before I should. Growing up, I knew I was different, knew something was wrong with me with the way my parents kept me hidden, kept me from the world. If only I truly understood what it meant, I wouldn't have complained so much. My mother's voice rang clear through my head every time I felt the urge to use my magic.

"Don't let them see, don't let anyone find out what you are" Her words usually pulled me back, and instinct told me not to show what I was. I had learned early to mask it. The entire world contained Dark Fae. A plague killed all the white Fae leaving only Dark. I was the last of my species, a unique blend of Fae that no longer existed.

My mother was a white Fae. She should have died, but my father was Dark Fae, and when the Plague hit, her entire bloodline died out except her. Dad said it was because she was pregnant with me, and I'm the last Harmony Fae in existence. I am the Light and the Dark, the last of my kind. I was the ultimate weapon when fully powered, a weapon Darius Wraith could not get his hands on.

Hiding what I am was near impossible after my grandma died, and they chucked me into boarding school—forced into the world by Fae authorities. I thought for sure they would have figured out what I was. Now I need to hide it from the Fae population and my mates if they don't let me die here tonight.

The wolves circled me, tried to get behind me to jump me, and I kept turning while trying to watch them all at once. Tonight would be it; this would be the night I died. Their silver eyes sized me up, and teeth snapped in my direction. They were waiting for me to attack, yet I had barely any magic to use in my defense. Certainly not enough power left to save me.

The wolf on the roof jumped down and landed behind me. The wolf's big heavy paws landed on the dumpster with a thud. Please, Fates, don't let me die! I want to live, not die a virgin and hungry. Aren't I supposed to get a last meal? If your gonna kill me, at least feed me first. Seriously, if fate wanted to fuck me, at least do it gently and ease in, and would kill them to add some damn lube.

My fingers twitch toward my mark. I was going to call on them, which feels like a low-frequency buzz over every inch of your body, making you want to go to your mates. I have ignored that buzzing feeling for six years, and now it feels more like an itch. One I just can't reach to scratch.

A growl behind me made me jump, and I swear I watched my entire life flash before my eyes in that split second as they closed in.

Lifting my hand, I placed it over the markings and sent a spark of my magic into it. Leaving enough so as not to drain me completely. My wrist burned, searing with pain like it caught alight, making me scream and clench my teeth. The sheer agony in my voice makes the wolves back off, wondering what has got into me.

The mate symbol glowed red and throbbed painfully. I knew it only hurt like this because I waited so long to answer their call for me.

The world around me spun violently, and I fell to the ground. My palms bit into the road along with my knees. My power had become too low, a few more minutes and it would fade out, and I would be as useless as a human and killed by these beasts, that's if I didn't pass out from the pain of my searing mark burning into my soul and calling for them.

Just as the wolves closed in again, teeth bared and snarling. I felt the air around me ripple, and the turbulent noise made me cover my ears. I recognized the whooshing sound instantly. They came for me, and for a few tense seconds, I believed they wouldn't.

Four sets of feet hit the surrounding ground before the colored light of their magic was all I could see. It swallowed my vision, just their closeness made my reserves shudder slightly, and I had to stamp down the urge to pull on it before they realized.

Their power gave me a taste of their magic, kept what was left of mine strong, and made me crave their power. Flames missed me by millimeters, the heat so hot, I cried out when it burned the flesh on my arms when it rushed past me.

When the howls and whimpers stopped, everything fell silent. Deathly silent. My heart was pounding in my ears. Their domineering auras surrounded me threateningly as they took up each side of me. Their auras made me want to cringe and flinch away.

Can I take it back? I choose death; I choose fucking death fates. Nothing good would come of me calling on them. By the feel of the angry ripple of energy surrounding me, they were livid, and these men were not ones you wanted to anger. No, you never wanted to be on the receiving end of their anger or their magic.

Too terrified to look up, I remained frozen until boots stopped next to me. I clenched my hands into fists to prevent them from trembling. They stepped closer, and I found myself caged in by their legs and sitting at their feet.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 3

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Chapter 3

They could kill me, and I felt like they genuinely wanted to crush me like a bug beneath their shoes. I have never felt so small in all my life.

“Six years, Aleera, six fucking years, and you have the guts to ask for our help. We should have let them

fucking kill you. Have you even got magic left because I can't feel it?" One of them screamed at me.

I have feared no one more than my mates. I knew who they were and what they had done. Now I was second-guessing my decision to call on them.

One of them grasped my hair, my head ripped back, forcing me to stare at the eyes of the one I feared most. Darius Wraith. His name is constantly in the media; nobody in the world feared anyone more than they did Darius Wraith.

And to think he is one of my mates, not that the three others have stellar reputations. No, they were just as dark and twisted as he was. I never understood how I could be fated to be theirs; they were pure dark magic while mine was not like theirs, mine was, well I wasn't exactly sure, but it is both, yet I felt the urge more to my pure white magic more, it made no sense why the fates punished me this way.

They could not get their hands on my magic. It would be dangerous in the wrong hands, and their hands would be the worst. They didn't need more power, especially Darius. He is a Demonic-Fae, and they're the strongest of the Fae. He, too, like myself, was the last of his species.

Demon and Fae, and here I am, the last of my kind, and mates with the last of his. What were the odds, two dying species fated to each other as if we should create a more incredible monster?

"Fucking answer me, Aleera, say something," He bellows as I clutch at his hand, trying to free his tight grip. He yanks my head back harder by my hair, and I cry out, my hair ripping painfully from my scalp.

“Please, just let me go,” I beg him, now wishing I chose death. I was an idiot for even calling on them. A fate with them would be worse. Darius laughs at my pleading, but he lets go, shoving me back to the ground. His presence was suffocating me already.

“Never. You belong to us, Aleera. We gave you time, and we could have come for you when you were thirteen, but we didn’t, and still, you ran from us. We are your fucking mates,” He yelled. His hands glow with his anger, and I watch as he fists them. Ready myself for the blow.

“Bloody monsters,” I whisper before I can stop myself, stupid no brain to mouth filter. I instantly regret the words I never intended to speak out loud.

“What did you say?” I shake my head, not wanting to repeat myself, knowing that would be a mistake when someone suddenly nudges me from behind. His foot connected with my thigh hard, and I could feel my thigh bruising.

“Darius asked you a question. Answer him,” someone says behind me, his voice velvety smooth, but the coldness of it sent chills down my spine.

My hair was yanked again, my head jerked back painfully at an odd angle, and I saw the man behind me. His dark hair falls into his green snake eyes when he glares at me. If he weren't so homicidal looking, I would say he was hot, but the look of rage on his face made me want to cringe away from him. So he must be Tobias Kade, I could tell by the fangs protruding from his mouth and, from what I know of him, he is Vampiric-Fae, a fucking bloodsucker. Nice to meet you too fuckface.

“Answer him now Aleera, I want to go home, or we will leave you here to rot,” He says, with a cruel smile, and by the look in his eyes, he heard what I said. I say it, and chances are they may leave me here to fend for myself.

Tears roll down my cheeks, and I hate that I cry when I’m angry. I also cry when happy and sad too. I just suck when it comes to emotion. Emotion to me is like squirting onion juice in your eye. I guess that’s me, an onion girl, has a nice ring.

“I said bloody monsters,” I spit at him through gritted teeth; his smile chilled me to the bone when I felt fingers wrap around my throat, and Tobias suddenly lets go of my hair. Darius glares at me, his fingers cutting off my oxygen, and I clutch his hand. His grip tightens.

“You have no idea the sort of monsters we can be. You would have been better off letting them mutts rip you to pieces because we will never forgive you for what you did. You will wish you never called upon us. I will make you wish for death,” he snarls before letting go. I suck in much-needed air, choking on my stolen breath. My throat feels damaged as I try to breathe through my mangled windpipe.

“Grab her, and let’s get out of here,” Darius says before hands grabbed and tossed me someone’s hard shoulder.

The air around me heats and warps, rippling like a stone tossed in a lake, and I am pulled through a portal they created. The motion and whooshing noise made my stomach turn before being thrown against the concrete floor.

My head bounces painfully off the ground when he throws me off his shoulder. I hit it so hard darkness swallowed my vision for a few seconds, and I clutched my head in my hands and gritted my teeth through the pain that just exploded in my skull before hearing creaking and the slam of metal on metal.

Opening my eyes, I look around to see I am in a cell. Tobias locks me in with a key. He didn't even glance in my direction before turning on his heel and walking away.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 4

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Chapter 4

Darius Wraith POV

I stared out the window overlooking the castle grounds. This place was older than dirt and passed down through the generations, though we had renovated the castle to our taste. My father was old-fashioned, and I would not miss the gaudy drapes and the ugly furnishings he had throughout this place. We had made it more functional for our needs and that of the army we were building here.

Tobias would handle Aleera until I could get over my shock and anger at her calling on us after all this time. All this fucking time, and then she suddenly wants us to save her. Not a fucking call, not a letter, nothing.

Nothing for six bloody years. To say I was angry was an understatement. I wanted to hurt the girl, strangle the life out of her. She needed to feel the agony she caused us. She would regret running from me from us.

Kalen and Lycus didn't say a word, yet I could feel their eyes on me, watching me and waiting for the explosion that would come, yet despite hating her, every goddamn thing about her, I have never felt so relieved at the same time. She would pay for betraying us, for nearly destroying us. Hearing the door open, I look over at it to see Tobias walk in. His anger was as hot as mine.

He hated her just as much and, with good reason, what she took from him, what it had cost him, pained me still. She took so much from us, more than she could ever or would ever realize, but she would pay; Aleera would pay for what she had done.

We would have loved her, we already did, we would have looked after her, but she threw it in our faces.

“Well?” I ask him as he drops into the armchair next to the fireplace, his shirt all creased, and he looked unkempt for the first time in ages.

“Hopefully, she freezes to death,” He mutters, glaring at the flames licking at the wood as he tosses more kindling in. I hated that look on his face, the look he had when he re-lived that night. That night would forever haunt him. I look away, unable to handle seeing his torment.

“Where is she?” Kalen dare asks, and I look at him; his blue eyes instantly drop to the floor as if embarrassed he asked, no he is embarrassed because he still cared for her, and he should be after the damage she caused. Lycus watched him with a worried expression, and I knew why he was concerned.

Kalen’s obsession with her almost killed him last time when she never answered our call, and by the time we got to her school, she was gone. We thought she needed time to get her head around the idea of us, but after a few hours, we realized we misjudged her.

“She is in the cells,” Tobias answers him with a sigh before rubbing a hand down his face like he was tired, and he was. The anniversary is coming up, and this time of the year, he never slept much, and I would have to exhaust him or put him under when he went too long without sleep. Tobias would become unstable and driven by his instincts. We had lost a few men to his grief. Having her here was going to make him worse.

I watch Kalen as his head snaps up before he realizes I am watching him. His face shuts down, instantly recognizing his mistake. He was our weakness, and we couldn't drop our guard around her. I nod to Lycus, and he pats Kalen on the shoulder and nods toward the door. Kalen reluctantly gets up and follows him. I will have to pull him in line later. We won't lose him to her again. She has taken enough from us, and I won't allow her to do it again. She either falls in line, or she will rot in that cell for the rest of her life.

"We should have let them kill her," Tobias mutters. He reached for the bottle that sat on the coffee table between the armchairs that circled the fireplace. Moving toward him, I watch as he twists the cap off the bottle before bringing it to his lips, swallowing down the amber liquid. My hands fall on his shoulders, and Tobias flinches, only relaxing when I squeeze gently. He knows I would never hurt him. We were friends long before we became mates. I trusted this man with my life, and he trusted me with his.

“She will pay for what she has done,” I tell him, and he drops his head back to look up at me standing behind him.

“I want her to hurt, and I want her to bleed like we have all done for her.”

“Then make her,” I tell him.

Tobias turns his stare back at the fire burning for a second, his green eyes reflecting oddly from the flickering light of the flames. His expression darkens as his mask slips back in place. The same icy demeanor that made people run just at the sight of him. He could be cruel, he was nearly as sadistic as me, and he knew it.

“Aleera will wish for death long before we grant it to her.” He chuckles softly, shaking his head before tipping the bottle to his lips, and I take it from him, making him growl at me. His drinking had become worse, making me worry he was developing a drinking problem. My jaw clenches at the angry look on his face as he glares up at me.

“You want revenge fine, but do it sober,” I tell him.

“And after?” He asks, and I stand upright. My lips press in a line as I stare at the flames, my mood plummeting further. Sometimes I hated the mate bond, hated it with a passion. It was the worst feeling, craving someone but hating them simultaneously.

She nearly ruined all of us; Aleera nearly killed Kalen. We almost lost him because of her selfishness. We just need to remember everything she took from us.

“Then we kill her. We don’t need her”.

“Are you sure that is a wise decision? We need her. I fucking hate her and wish nothing but death on her, but she is our power keeper. She would strengthen us, complete us.”

“We have survived this long without her, and I don’t want her touching my magic. She doesn’t deserve to after what she has done,” He nods in agreement bending forward and leaning his elbows on his knees. The tension in his body was evident as his back muscles tensed under his shirt, his arms flexing and straining against the fabric.

“She has no magic. I couldn’t feel it. Could you?” Tobias asks me while looking over his shoulder at me.

“She must have burned herself out. I couldn’t sense it either, but she has manifested; otherwise, she wouldn’t have been able to call on us,”

“What was she doing there in the first place? That was bloody stupid of her. Not even we would take on a Lycan City on a full moon.”

“Well, maybe you wouldn’t,” I tell him, and his lips tug at the corners.

“Yeah, but you are crazy enough to,” he says, and he was right. I feared nothing, and I didn’t have to. Nobody in the world feared anything more than my name.

“Would be an enjoyable challenge,” I tell him, and he looks over at me and smirks.

“I think Lycus should deal with her for a few days. I don’t want Kalen near her. Not until he has control of his emotions. Probably best I steer clear of her, too. I may just kill her,” Kalen says, snatching the bottle back, and I have to agree. These would be testing times, with her under our roof and tested she would be.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 5

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Chapter 5

Aleera POV

For three days, I have sat in this cell. Noone came except one man. He brought me a bottle of water and some bread, but that was it. Every morning, like clockwork. They hated me, but I didn’t care; the feeling was mutual. Yet despite my hatred for the men that killed my family, I didn’t think they would do this to me. Yes, I ran, but I had a good reason for not being with them. Did they honestly think I would go running into the arms of my parent’s murderers?

I should have chosen the werewolves. At least I wouldn’t suffer this misery. Stupid Aleera. I was fucking stupid for calling on them.

Hearing the steel door groan as it opens, I look over to see the man of the morning. He walked over, his back ramrod straight. He bends down, placing a metal plate on the ground that holds three slices of bread.

“Are you trying to anger them?” He asks, speaking for the first time in three days. It speaks! I thought dryly. I was beginning to wonder if he were mute and was waiting for him to bust out some miming, it would have been nice to have some entertainment. I ignore him, and he growls. He growled like some savage, making my head turn to glare at him.

If he weren't one of my mate's minions, I would appreciate the conversation, but since he was also helping hold me prisoner. I couldn't care less about his words. He has brown hair to his shoulders and even darker pitch-black eyes. His scent told me he was a Were-Fae; he had Lycan blood running through his system. That and the black eyes were a dead giveaway.

They looked nearly as eerie as Darius, but nothing made my blood run colder than Darius's demonic eyes. I blink at him before turning back to the wall that has captured my attention, and I continue to count the

bricks on the wall; it has become some kind of game, that and counting the smears of blood.

“You are asking for trouble. Just be happy they let you live. Not eating will anger them, and if you don’t eat or drink soon, I will be forced to tell Darius,” he says. The man didn’t look that old, maybe in his late twenties around my mates’ ages. His tone clearly showed that he thought I was some naive girl who ran into trouble and was brought here on a whim.

“Answer me, goddammit, if I have to go up there and tell them, they will probably order me to kill you, so please eat. I don’t want to be responsible for your death. I have enough blood on my hands,” He mutters the last part more to himself, staring at his clean hands like he could see the blood that stained them.

“Death, now that sounds appealing. Bring on the grim reaper,” I tell him.

"I am being serious, they....they will hurt you. Do you have any idea who they are, what Darius is capable of?" He asks.

"What's your name?" I ask him.

"How can she still not know?" I thought I heard him mutter.

“After three days now, you choose to speak to me. Were you told not to talk to me?” I ask, and he looks away, so he has been told not to converse with the enemy. I chuckle to myself.

“What’s so funny?” He asks before chucking a water bottle to me. The bottle rolled across the ground, and I was almost tempted to drink it. I licked my cracked, dry lips, my tongue so dry it felt like sandpaper. My throat is raw, but if they intended to keep me here forever, I would rather starve to death and put myself out of my misery. I was doing well so far, nearly seven days total without food, three days without water.

It shouldn’t be too much longer if I could hold out a little longer, thirst will kill me quicker than starvation, and I guessed that if it were hot down here, dehydration would have killed me by now, but it turns out it is like an igloo down here, so it was taking a little longer than I predicted. Lucky me, I thought bitterly.

“Nothing. You worry about telling Darius. I find it funny, is all,” I tell him.

“Why would that be funny? They will kill you. No, they will force me to do it, and that’s worse.”

“Why is that worse?”

“Because I don’t want to, that is why; you may have a death wish, but I don’t like killing people; I have seen enough people die, and I am not someone that enjoys killing,” I snorted before coughing on my laugh.

“You hate killing people, but you are a were-fae. They love hunting and slaughtering. I was nearly dog food before they brought me here,” I chuckle.

“I am not a monster and I sure as hell didn’t ask to be down here with you, so please drink at least, so I don’t have to tell them, I would rather you down here and away from everyone than up there with-” he doesn’t finish what he was going to say; instead he was looking toward the door.

“How about you tell them I am eating and drinking like a good evil minion, and they will be none the wiser,” I tell him, rolling my eyes.

“I can’t do that when they ask every day about you, so if you die and they find you, they will blame me for not telling them.”

“Instead of asking you, they could check for themselves, so run back to your master,” I tell him, shooing him away with my hand, the movement taking way too much energy than it should.

“You have no idea; I warned you,” He says, rushing out. I sighed, reaching for the drink bottle and tossing it through the bars so I wouldn’t be tempted to drink it.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 6

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Chapter 6

Hours passed. I spent most of the day sleeping on the cold concrete floor. I was too lethargic to move. My ass went numb hours ago, my legs were asleep, and they had pins and needles, yet moving them felt like too much effort. My teeth chattered as my temperature plummeted, and the day turned into night. The

coldness of night seeped into my bones, making them ache worse. I was asleep when I heard the steel door open.

“And you are back. Is it morning already?” I murmured. Hearing the cell door open, I instantly knew something was wrong as he never once ever came into the cell. My eyes flew open to see Darius standing in front of me.

“Oh, shit!” I curse under my breath.

“Oh shit is right, why aren't you eating?”

“Not hungry,” I tell him, and my traitorous stomach growls at the mention of food. His eyes flickered, and he glared down at me. He walked over to me, and I had to fight the urge to shrivel into a ball.

Darius growls before reaching down and grabbing my hair. He jerks my head back painfully, but I can't even fight to loosen his grip. My entire body felt like a dead weight. He sneers at me, looking me over.

“Fucking disgusting,” He says, letting me go and shoving me against the brick wall. My back hits the wall so hard it knocks the air from my lungs in one short wheeze.

“Just let me go. You don’t even want me, so why keep me?” I ask, trying to catch my breath.

“You’re weak, eat, or I will force-feed you,” He says, kicking the plate towards me. It resembled toast, only white with no color, but it was as stiff as toast. I turn my face away, looking back at the brick wall.

“I am going to give you three seconds, or I will make you eat,” He says coldly.

“1....2....3” I glared at him—a big mistake when his foot came down my shin. I screamed. The sound echoed off the walls and made my ears ring as the bone broke at the force.

Pain radiated up my leg, and I blinked back tears while staring at his foot on my leg, his foot crushing it still as I panted. He counts slowly again, and I could only gasp and stare at him in horror at what he had done.

His face is expressionless, like hurting me meant nothing to him. I suppose it did mean nothing, or he wouldn't be doing it.

"1...2...3" He twists his foot, earning another scream from me, yet I was too weak to stop him, and my magic was all but gone; I highly doubt he would give me any to renew mine.

“Stop, stop, stop, Darius” My scream agonized, and I tried to clutch my aching leg, only for him to stomp on my hand. I hear the sickening crack of my three middle fingers. Bile rises in my throat before I throw up the emptiness of my stomach. Acid burned my throat while I gasped for air as bile spilled from my lips onto the ground beside me.

He removes his foot off my hand, and I clutch it to my chest when the door opens behind him. My entire body trembles and Darius steps away from me, looking toward whoever entered. The pressure on my leg leaves, but it is bent inward in the middle. Just moving causes me pain, and my blood coated the floor beneath it. The bone jutted out of my skin, and I fought the urge to throw up again at the gruesome sight of it.

I could only stare at my leg in horror at what he had done. The pain receded, and I knew I was in shock. I welcomed the shock, anything to replace the pain, but I knew it would wear off any minute, and it does.

“What’s going on?” asks Tobias, making me look toward him, but I couldn’t see him, with Darius blocking my view.

“She wouldn’t eat; I was making her,” Darius says simply like he does this sort of thing every day, and it was merely some annoying chore to him.

“Just leave her be. Hopefully, she dies. We don’t need her,” Tobias says coldly, and it was like a dagger in my chest. Tobias steps to the side and glances at me with an expressionless face. His eyes darted to my leg and the blood pooled below it. I watched his adam’s apple bob as he swallows, and his eyes went to mine fleetingly before he turned his attention back to Darius.

Darius grunts but adds nothing else before closing my cell door and leaving me as he follows Tobias. The moment the steel door shut. I fell apart; uncontrollable sobs wracked my body, causing more pain as the floodgates opened. I could no longer contain it.

My hand shook as I tried to use the one that wasn't broken to pull my pant leg up, the fabric catching on the juttied-out bone. Pain steals my breath away, and I slump back, trying to breathe through it as my leg throbs. Tears trekked down my cheeks. He broke it; he broke my leg and hand and just left me here.

"Why?" I whisper to no one. Was my life always going to be a battle, some disaster? Did the fates think I was indestructible? Because if they did, they are wrong. Gosh, how they are wrong.

Pairing me to these monsters was just cruel. I knew I would never survive them, and I had been asking why ever since their mark appeared on my wrist. The wrist attached to the hand Darius just broke. I should have chosen death.

I couldn't fathom how they could hate me so much. I hated them for a good reason, yet I would never inflict this on someone, never hurt them like Darius just did. I stared down at my leg, hoping it would go numb like the rest of me, no such luck. Haven't they taken enough from me? What do they want? They clearly hate me, so why keep me trapped here?

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 7

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Chapter 7

I didn't know what time it was when the door opened again, but I cringed when it did. Fear coursed through me, making my eyes dart to it. Worried, Darius has returned to inflict more injury on me. My leg needed to be set back into place, and I needed a doctor. Without my mates, I have no way of fixing it myself with one hand, and I doubt I could, anyway. My pain threshold wasn't the best.

Relief floods me when I realize it isn't him. It was my usual morning visitor. He walks in, and I watch him as he tosses the water bottle through the bars. It falls at my feet and bumps my foot. I didn't even feel it, and I wasn't sure if that was a good thing because I wasn't in pain or a bad thing.

"Aleera, please just-" He stops, his eyes going to the odd angle of my leg and my blood that has frozen on the floor beneath it. His eyes moved to mine before going to the hand still held to my chest. I knew how gross it looked; my fingers were swollen and black, and they still hurt; however, my leg was numb, and I prayed it didn't mean something terrible.

“Darius did that?” he questions, and I just look away from him. He appeared shocked. Why he thought better of him was beyond me? All the rumors of his cruelty turned out to be accurate, and to think, I tried to convince myself over the years that maybe it wouldn’t be so bad..

Perhaps I could get past him killing my parents. Thankfully, I never gave in to the hopelessness that comes from living out there and surviving. If I had, I would have been here over four days, and if this is four days brings me, just what am I truly in store for, and could I survive it.

The door swings open and bangs on the bars, and I look over at the man. He curses but hesitates for a second before walking over to me with his eyes trained on me like he thought I would do something. He glanced at the door behind him, and I watched as he kneeled beside me. He rolled my pant leg up. His eyes dart to me like he was expecting me to cry out at the movement of my leg, but I feel nothing when I see his hands move towards my leg where the bone poked out of my skin.

“What are you doing?” I ask him.

“I can’t leave you like this,” He says; he almost looked guilty like he did this to me.

“Why do you care?” I mutter, looking away from him.

“Because you don’t just belong to him,” He says, and my head whips back to look at him.

“You still haven’t figured it out, have you? Do you know who I am?” He asks before I feel his hands grab my leg. My skin buzzes and vibrates, and I gasp.

“Lycus!” I whisper, and he nods once but doesn’t take his eyes off my leg when I hear it crack as he forces it back in place, and I scream. I wanted the numbness back. So much for being numb.

His hand instantly clamped down over my mouth while his head turned to look at the door, which I noticed was wide open. He looks back at me when no one comes down before removing his hand, I try to catch my breath.

"Quiet, they are in the mess hall," he says while examining my leg.

"Mess hall?" Lycus nods but doesn't explain. He returns his hands to my leg, and I flinch as his hand comes in contact as he feels my leg, searching for something. I have no idea, but it bloody hurt as he prodded before reaching for my hand that tucked against my chest. He turned my wrist, examining it, but no bones were jutting out.

I watch as his eyes turn silver and his canines slip out before he bites into his wrist before offering it to me. I just stared at him. When a thought hits me, I could siphon his magic and knock him out before he even notices; this was my chance to escape.

"Hurry, it will heal you, Were-fae!" He says, pointing at himself like he thought I couldn't tell what he was. I was glad I had no magic right now because, with my pain, I knew I wouldn't be able to keep it contained to shield him from what I was. I needed them to believe I was a dark Fae like the rest of the world.

"I know what you are," I tell him.

"Are you sure because you didn't recognize me or feel I was your mate?" he says.

"I felt it when you touched me," I muttered.

"Yes, but you have no magic left, or I would sense it, we all would nevertheless I still would have thought you would have had some inkling about who I am to you" he sounded almost upset I didn't recognize him or maybe I imagined it.

"Well, sorry if I'm a bit power drained right now, and it is not like I see your face splashed all over papers and the media," I tell him.

"Having no power is your fault, don't expect me to feel sorry for you because I don't," He says, his eyes darkening back to their pitch-black color.

“Kalen and I don’t like leaving the castle,” He finally states, but my brain is still stuck on the word castle. Did he mean like an actual castle from fairy tales? Did they still exist? Was I in a dungeon of sorts? That explained the weird-ass shackles on the walls. I thought maybe they were some twisted Halloween decoration, or perhaps they were into BDSM, but now I was looking at them differently. I wondered briefly how many people hung up by them.

“Aleera, hurry before I heal,” he says before groaning, and I turn my gaze to his wrist that closes up before my eyes. His eyes turn silver again, his canines sinking into his wrist. He tears the flesh away, which made me pull a face when he doesn’t even flinch, oh how I wish I had his pain threshold.

Right! Back to escaping, blood to heal, then siphon and run like my ass is on fire. I could do this. I hope it won’t hurt him, though. I know I shouldn’t care, but I didn’t want to hurt him. The pull to his power and him now I recognized him was growing stronger-stupid mate bond. And couldn’t the fates have made them as ugly as their shitty personalities? Seriously they get to be sick depraved assholes and get godlike looks. How is that fair?

Grabbing his wrist with my good hand, he flinched, and I had a strange feeling he was fighting the urge to pull away from me. Like my touch repulsed him when I realized he wasn’t healing me because he wanted to, but because he felt guilty. Anger courses through me, and he looks away as I press my lips to his wrist, letting his blood flow into my mouth. I could feel his magic in his blood as it coated my throat and tongue, making them tingle as I healed.

Healing quickly, I wiggled my fingers as they healed before grabbing him with both hands and pulling, no that was the wrong word for it. It’s like turning on a vacuum, and I felt his magic slip into me. The more I take, the higher chance he would notice.

I wiggle my toes, and I let his wrist go. He wipes his wrist, cleaning my saliva off with his shirt, but I don’t waste any time. While he cleaned his wrist, I lifted my foot and kicked him straight in his pretty face. I hope I didn’t damage it. The shock would have been my only element of surprise, and I jumped up as he fell backward. Not expecting it and he clutches his nose, which sprays out blood.

But I didn’t have time to feel bad when I blasted him with the magic I just stole from him, which wasn’t much but enough to shove him backward until he smacked into the metal bars, which knocked him out.

His face falls slack, and his shoulders slouch. I hesitated, feeling guilty I hurt him, but that wore off quickly as I looked to the open door and my escape route.

Running, I take the steps two at a time. Once I made it through the door and I reached the top. I find another door and push it open slightly, peeking out. Blinking, I am taken aback by the fact the place was indeed something out of fairy tales. It was a castle by the high ceiling and enormous chandeliers, the massive staircases, and was that a ballroom?

Oh, no, that is the mess hall, but it must have been a ballroom by its sheer size. It has a very modern look for a castle, one of them has good tastes.

Pushing the door open, I could see a vast corridor across from me, but that meant running across to hide at the base of the

stairs, which meant running past the double doors wide open to the mess hall. Men seated at the long tables made me wonder if I would go unnoticed-only one way to find out. So I ran like crazy.

The screeching of chairs alerted me that I did not go unnoticed, and the fierce growl that echoed off the walls out to me. Still, I tried racing toward the double arched doors at the end of the long corridor.

This place is a maze, corridors leading everywhere, but I had no time to explore while I raced toward the doors, praying they led outside to freedom.

My blood runs cold when Darius suddenly materializes out of thin air, and my feet screeched on the floor. He appears in front of the doors I intended to run out of-forced to stop and back up a step. Turning, I run in the direction I just came from when I see Tobias behind me. A menacing look on his face before I see his hand whip toward my face a second too late.

It took another second to register as darkness swallowed my vision. Tobias punched me. He knocked me out, I thought. Though I shouldn't be surprised, he is exactly like Darius. Darkness engulfed me, and I begged the fates not to let me wake back up this time.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 8

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Chapter 8

Darius POV

Tobias's fist connected with her jaw. It happened so quickly I barely caught the movement until she started to fall. Tobias hesitated to catch her like he would let her hit the marble floors, but he moved at the last second, catching her limp body.

Lycus storms out of the dungeons, looking extremely pissed off, and his shirt is coated in blood. Kalen was at his side in an instant, fussing over him. Lycus's shirt is saturated in blood, his nose bleeding, and Tobias turns, noticing my gaze is directed over his shoulder. Lycus smacks Kalen's fussing hands away as he storms over to us.

"Fucking bitch stole some of my power and hit me with it," He growls, rubbing the back of his head with his hand.

Kalen's eyes look to Aleera in Tobias's arms, his expression looking conflicted before reaching his arms out for her.

"No, we have talked about this. You are to stay away from her," Tobias tells him. Kalen looked at me, and I could see the pleading in his eyes. He wanted to hold her, feel her close.

"She is unconscious; she can't hurt him," I tell Tobias, giving in to Kalen.

Tobias growls but shoves her toward him and lets Kalen take her limp body in his arms. Lycus growls, not wanting Aleera near him. None of us did, and I worried this might start up the obsession again. I am pretty sure letting him take her will be just the beginning and a mistake on my part.

Kalen was already attached to her. He has attached to her already, and he hasn't even spoken to her yet. She looked small in his arms, hugged close to his chest. How could he still want her after it nearly cost his life? He almost chucked it away for her, and yet he was so tender with her. I hated it, and Tobias' deadly glare said he did, too.

"Put her back in the cells," I tell him when he turns around with her in his arms. He freezes, turning back to

face me.

“Darius, please,” His voice a soft murmur before he looks down at her in his arms. Lycus walks over to him, stopping in front of him.

“Put her back in the cells, Kalen,” Lycus’ voice is a menacing growl. He was pissed off, but I wanted to know why he went into her cell.

“No! She isn’t going back down there,” Kalen snaps, and Lycus

eyes go to his, his lips turning to a frown.

“She attacked me. She just tried to run. Put her back in the cells, or I will,” Lycus threatens him. Lycus is never like this with Kalen. He has never challenged our mate, but Kalen was the weakest of us, and the fact he would go against us showed his obsession was already returning.

We all knew he loved Aleera. He spent years talking to her.

Without her knowing who he was to her, her running affected him most. Now she is here. I am worried about his mental state. Stepping closer, I was about to back Lycus up when Tobias spoke beside me.

“Put her in her own room in our quarters. Kalen, if she runs again. I will kill her,” Tobias warns him, and Lycus’ presses his lips together, and his jaw clenches.

“She won’t,” Kalen answers before rushing off with her before Tobias changes his mind. We all struggled with saying no to Kalen. We are terrified of losing him again.

“What are you doing? We all agreed he was to be away from her. I don’t want her near him,” Lycus growls, his eyes

flickering to a silver, burning brightly as the beast that resides in him tries to take over. The savage side likes to terrorize its prey. Right now, I knew Aleera was his prey. Good, she deserves no mercy.

Lycus was usually calm. Aleera attacking him seemed to set him straight. He hated violence unless it was protecting one of us. He spent most of his childhood and teenage years fighting for Kalen in the orphanage they grew up in together. Aleera was a threat to Kalen, one he wanted to ruin.

“You said she used your magic against you?” I ask him, and he looks away guiltily before making sure Kalen is out of earshot.

“Did you have to break her fucking leg and hand? I couldn’t leave like that.”

“Well, you should have, so don’t blame us because Kalen is with her,” Tobias scolds, but his eyes dart to me. We aren’t usually violent people towards women, but I had a particular spot reserved for Aleera. I had no qualms hurting her like she did all of us.

“You healed her,” I scoff before shaking my head.

“She was in pain. You said we make her suffer. You never said about literally breaking her bones.”

“She was suffering. I see no difference,” I answer.

“Don’t let Kalen see you hurt her like that,” He says, turning and folding his arms across his broad chest to glare at Tobias about to rant at him.

“He would have sat down there with her, don’t look at me like that. You know I hate him with her just as much as you do, but I won’t have our mate withering away in a cell with her or sneaking down to see her. It is better this way. We can monitor both of them,” Tobias says before Lycus could shout at him about letting Kalen take her to our quarters. Lycus snarls, clearly not happy, but says nothing else on the matter.

“This may be a better idea anyway,”

"Why is that?" Tobias asks.

"Because tomorrow she can start classes. Let's see how she fares when she goes up against an entire castle of pure demons" Tobias chuckles at my words, knowing exactly what I'm thinking.

"But she has no magic," Lycus says, and Tobias chuckles, dropping his hand on his shoulder. "Exactly, we don't have to make her suffer; they will do it for us," Tobias says before stalking off toward the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Lycus asks him.

"To get Kalen away from her before he does something stupid, like confessing his undying love for her," Tobias tosses over his shoulder.

"So, what are you going to tell the men about her?"

"No, we will tell them nothing, only that she is our prisoner. Let them think what they want about her. I will just tell them she is an enemy we want to be kept close," I tell Lycus.

"Good, I don't want them following her orders just because of what she is to us," Lycus states while watching Tobias walk up the stairs to our mates.

"No, I have a better idea. Whoever breaks Aleera first wins the ballad for a ranking officer," I tell him, and he smirks.

"Well, that will be enough motivation for them, but she is not to be in any of Kalen's classes," Lycus says, and I nod my head in agreement.

"I know you're worried about him-" He raises his hand, silencing me.

"Don't. You didn't find him. You didn't have to cut his body down from the rafters. Worried is not the word I would use to describe how I feel about Aleera being near him," Lycus growls before turning on his heel and walking away from me.

My jaw clenched at his words. I wasn't there, but luckily we got back in time. Luckily, Tobias could revive him and heal his broken neck. A few seconds later, he would no longer be with us. We would have never let him die, but resurrection could be tricky. It taints the soul, and not in a good way. She won't destroy us this time. No, she will break, and when she does, she will understand the torment she has caused us.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 9

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Chapter 9

Aleera POV

My head throbbed, and the back of my eyes ached but not nearly as much as my jaw does. I groaned, forcing my eyes open when I realized I wasn't on the hard concrete floor of the dungeon. No, I felt warmer and comfortable. I blink, trying to clear the blurriness of my vision to find a man sitting next to me, and I am in a bedroom on a bed.

The man stared like he was looking through me as I jerked upright and pulled away from him. He had blonde hair that looked like he had just run his fingers through it only moments before. His blue eyes were the lightest shade I had ever seen, almost so pale they were almost white. If it weren't for my enhanced eyesight, I would have assumed they were until he blinked. The color returned to them. I wondered where his mind went as the color returned, and his eyes were now a startling cerulean blue.

"Drink, please," he says, reaching beside me for the tall glass of water. He hands it to me, and I clutch it in shaky hands." Please," He repeated, and for some unknown reason, I didn't like the idea of upsetting him, so I quickly obeyed, bringing the glass to my lips. The icy liquid pours into my mouth, which is so dry I gulp it down before nearly choking on it.

"Slow. Not so fast," he murmurs, gripping the glass. My fingers tingle where his bumped mine. He slowly tips the cup up, allowing me to drink what is left in it.

He goes to open his mouth to say something else when the door opens suddenly, and he turns his head to look at who entered, and so do I. Tobias leans on the doorframe. I quickly look away from him, back to the man sitting beside me, and I know who he is.

"You are Kalen?" I whisper, and his face turns back to me. He studied me for a second before shifting closer

to me, his hand outstretched, and I wondered if he was going to hit me, but he didn't seem like he was going to. I didn't have time to find out when Tobias spoke from the doorway.

"Kalen, Darius wants to speak with you," Tobias says while pushing off the doorframe. Kalen drops his hand and sighs.

"Why?" He asks, turning to look back at Tobias. His voice was deep yet not cruel sounding and didn't make me want to cringe at the sound of it like Darius and Tobias's voice makes me.

"You know why now don't make him wait. You know he hates waiting," Tobias tells him, his voice different, softer as he spoke to Kalen. Kalen's shoulders drop as he gets up off the bed. I didn't want him to leave. He is the only one that didn't appear to want to kill me. Yet as he moved around the edge of the bed and towards the door, I noticed Tobias would not follow him.

"Close the door," Tobias says, and my heart rate picks up at his words, and I glance toward Kalen, who nods before giving me a sad smile and shutting the door behind him as he leaves. Tobias steps slowly around the edge of the bed, and I move to the other side, getting ready to run if needed.

He chuckles like he finds my fear of him amusing. He stopped next to the dresser that sat along the wall.

"I would remain where you are Aleera, don't tempt me because it will only end in pain for you," Tobias says, the softer kind voice he used with Kalen gone, replaced with a harsh cold one, that held a warning. I hesitate to place my foot on the grey carpet. He turns his head to the side, and I bring my leg back onto the bed before tucking both to my chest.

"Good, you can listen," He says as the door opens again. My other three mates walk in. Darius is the most imposing out of them. The second was Tobias, but they were all intimidating. Darius and Tobias commanded your attention effortlessly just by their presence alone, and if looks could kill, Lycus would have turned me to ash.

He had changed his shirt to a white one. Darius had black slacks and a white button-up shirt; the sleeves rolled to his elbows. Not only was he menacing, but he also looked the part, with the way the shirt hugged his body like it was tailored to him. The fabric did nothing to hide the bulk of muscle beneath

it.

Kalen had on jeans and a black shirt. He was leaner than the others, yet still muscular from what I could tell by his arms and the ridges of his abs pressing against his shirt. Lycus, however, was all muscle with having Werewolf genes mixed with his Fae ones. Typical shifter genes.

Lycus' eyes had again changed, making me wonder if they changed with his temperament though he looked pissed off, yet his eyes color was now amber. Maybe it was the light down in the dungeon. I know werewolf shifters had deep silver eyes in a semi-shifted or shifted state, so it must have been a trick of the light, which means this must be the natural color of his eyes.

Darius folds his arms across his chest, glaring down at me, and I drop my gaze, unable to handle the intensity of it; it burns into me with a hatred that makes my stomach twist.

"Nothing to say, Aleera," Darius asks, and what could I say. What excuse would he accept that is good enough because murdering my parents and burning my family home down wasn't a good enough reason to run from them? If I told them the other reason, they would probably pin me down and use me to destroy the world as their personal power source.

Movement catches my eye, and Darius suddenly appears next to me before gripping my face. His fingers dig into my cheeks as he forces me to meet his demonic eyes. Darkness was all I saw in them. He is evil incarnate.

"I asked you a question," He says, his voice deadly calm when he shoves my face away. I rub my cheek where his nails dug in a little too hard, breaking the skin.

"You will remain in this room between classes if you leave this castle without permission. You will find yourself back in the cells, understood?" Darius asks.

"Don't try to run Aleera, our room is right next door, and I will have guards stationed on the stairs. They have permission to use force if necessary," Tobias says, and Lycus walks over to a door I hadn't noticed before.

He opens it, and I see it is a bathroom. Another door on the other end, which I am guessing, leads into the room next door.

When his words suddenly register, did they all share the same room? I stare at them but say nothing when Darius leans down, making me tilt backward as his hands drop on the bed on either side of my hips.

My eyes go to the faint outline on his neck, three marks overlapping each other. I blink in shock, wondering if I imagined it. No, it couldn't be. I am their keeper, and mates don't mark each other; usually, they only mark their keeper. I am the link between them, yet why did he have all three of their marks on his neck, making me want to know if they all shared

each other's marks.

"Is that understood, Aleera?" Darius asks, and I tear my eyes away from his neck to look at his face. I quickly nod.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 10

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Chapter 10

Darius watches my face for a second, and I swallow as his eyes run down my body and to my lap, making me shift uncomfortably. He growls; the noise makes goosebumps cover me as he towers over me.

"Lycus, go get her some clothes. Kalen, go grab her a shirt until Lycus comes back so she can shower," Darius says before pushing off the bed away from me. Lycus nods to him before walking out, and so does Kalen, leaving me with Darius and Tobias.

"You attend every class. Someone will pick you up from your room of a morning to take you down to the mess hall, which is where all meals are for those that live here."

"Where am I?" I ask before I can stop myself. Darius didn't like being talked over as he took a deep breath, and I watched his hand's fist at his sides before looking down.

"Meals are in the mess hall. I will have some books sent in here; under no circumstances are you to tell anyone here you are our mate. If you do, you will wish you were in the cells, am I clear."

“Crystal,” I tell him.

“Also,” Tobias says, stepping closer to the bed and moving to stand beside Darius.

“You steer clear of Kalen, stay out of our way and if you can behave and do as you’re told, you will have a bit more freedom.

“Why can’t I go near Kalen?” I asked, confused. He appeared to be the only one that didn’t outright condemn me.

“Don’t question us. Just do as we ask. It isn’t up for discussion,” Tobias says just as Kalen walks back into the room. He has a folded shirt in his hands, and he places it on the end of the bed with a towel.

“Now go shower; you’re filthy. Tobias will bring you something to eat when you are out of the shower,” Darius says before turning on his heel and walking out. He stops at the door, looking expectantly at Kalen, who turns around when Tobias touches his shoulder, nodding toward the door. Kalen leaves. He looked like he wanted to say something but kept it to himself. They both go, and Tobias remains looking down at me.

“Count yourself lucky we haven’t killed you yet Aleera, be careful not to give us reason too. Kalen may not want you dead, but the rest of us do; just remember that,” He says before walking out and closing the door behind him. I hear the lock click in place, so I don’t even bother checking it as I get up and walk into the bathroom.

A shower sounds excellent. I hadn’t had a hot shower in god knows how long, usually washing in lakes or streams. It wasn’t the same. You never really felt clean with only cold water, and I was lucky to find soap when I could. I suppose that’s what happens when you leave the Fae community and are forced to live in the wilderness, amongst monsters never catching a whole night’s sleep with jerking awake at every noise.

Walking into the bathroom, I stopped in front of the mirror above the basin, making my brows furrow when I noticed it had five sinks. A shower took up an entire wall behind me, and there was a colossal bath that could easily fit five people in it comfortably that sat in the middle of the room. A toilet was in the far corner, and I wondered if they specifically made this room for the five of us before I ran.

Guilt gnaws at me as I place the shirt and towel on the basin before looking at myself in the mirror. I looked different from what I remembered. My face had changed; it was slimmer. I didn't look like the same eighteen-year-old girl when I left the boarding school. Now I look older, drained of life. I was skinnier, my hair dull and lifeless. It was so much longer now. It used to sit on my shoulders now; it is halfway down my back, having grown out.

The door opens leading to the other room, and Kalen wanders in.

"There is shampoo and soap in the niches, spare toothbrush," He walks over before bending down and opening the cupboards under the sink basin and reaching into it.

He pulls a hairbrush out and a toothbrush before handing them to me.

"Thank you," I tell him, observing the man. He nods, and I hear talking in the room he just walked in here from.

"You all share a room?" Kalen looks at the door before he nods while looking back over at me.

"Strange, huh?" I shrug, unsure what other mates did when they had multiple. I stared at his neck, finding the same markings on his neck as I saw on Darius's. Kalen places his hand over it, pulling my attention back to him.

"I should go. They won't be pleased if they catch me talking to

you,"

I chew my lip as I watch him slip out of the bathroom. Turning back to the mirror, I peel off my hoodie and shirt before dumping them in the basket.

The clothes were stained and holey, but I wasn't sure where my bag was, and I believed I had left it behind in the city, vaguely remembering it slipping off my shoulder when I called on them. I unbuttoned my jeans and stepped out of them before unclipping my bra. I placed it on the sink basin, knowing I only had one.

Turning around, I hurry to the shower and turn it on, my hand placed under the water as I wait for the temperature to heat before stepping in. It was like heaven, and I sighed, bracing my hands on the tiled wall—the dirt, grimé, and blood washing down the drain as I press my face under the spray.

Opening my eyes, I reach for the soap in the niche before slathering it on my skin. I didn't want to get out but knew I had no choice; the effort it took to remain standing was becoming intolerable. Hunger made me feel weak and shaky; I needed to eat soon. The steam made me dizzy, and my hands hadn't stopped shaking since I woke. Shutting off the shower, I jump when I hear a knock on the door before the handle twists.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 11

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Chapter 11

Panic has me rushing over to my towel and snatching it off the sink basin. The door opens while I am trying to wrap it around myself, only just managing to cover myself when Tobias walks in. He sneered at me before his eyes ran the length of me while I stood clutching the towel awkwardly. My fingers are clutching the towel tightly, and I watch as his face twists in disgust like he couldn't bear to look at me. Shame washes over me. How could I be so stupid as not to check the door is locked. I would have saved myself this sort of humiliation. I didn't think I was horrid to look at, nothing that warranted the look of disgust he gave me.

If I repulsed him with just a towel on, I would hate to see the look on his face if he got a good look at the burns on my back. That was something I consciously made sure was covered, my back permanently mutilated because of Darius. Gym class was the worst at school; I hated it, the girls would stare in pity, they never said anything but a look could tell a thousand words, express more sometimes than words could. And to think my mate did that to me when he killed my parents, he branded me permanently.

"Hurry up, I haven't got all night," He snarls before slamming the door as he walks out and back into the room they placed me in.

The bang of the door makes me jump before I scramble to dry myself and put on the T-shirt Kalen gave me to wear. It fell to my thighs, but I still had another issue. I had no panties, and I couldn't put the ones I was wearing back on. A little nasty to wear them again after having them on for days while in the dungeon.

Tugging the shirt down as far as it would go, I suck in a breath, trying to calm myself as I open the door to see Tobias sitting by the fire.

He points at a bowl of something that smells delicious. "Eat," his voice is cold as he turns his attention back to the fireplace. Frankly, anything would smell delicious at this point. Seven days without eating would make the grossest food smell and look appealing.

"Now, Aleera, or would you prefer I bring Darius in here to force you to eat?" he asks, turning around from where he sat in the chair by the small fireplace. Shaking my head, I force my feet to move, slowly walking past him toward the tray on the bedside table. Nausea swirled in my stomach at the smell. Maybe I should have eaten the bread. I thought as I watched my hands tremble as they clutched the bowl before placing it on my lap.

The spoon rattles against the porcelain as I grab it trying to scoop the soup on the spoon. Most of it spills back into the bowl as I bring the spoon to my lips, seven days without eating, and the smell of hot food shows how weak I had let myself become. I couldn't even remember the last time I ate hot food, mostly living off fruit and veggies I could scrounge up in the forests. The Lycan city had been the first time in months that I stepped into a city.

And I wouldn't have even left, but the cold and snow had frozen my water source, and most of the vegetation was frozen or dead. At that point, I had no idea how much further the human communities were, and I was too weak to continue walking, so I dared to go to the city in search of water and food, only that was a mistake because look at where I ended up in the clutches of men that didn't want me.

Movement makes me flinch as Tobias moves toward me, his aura rushing out like a protective barrier, except it wasn't for protection, no he wanted me to know he could hurt me, inflict pain on me if he wanted as he stopped in front. I swallow nervously before I strain my neck to look up at his angry face.

"I warned you, and you fucking still refuse" He spits at me before turning on his heel and walking toward the bedroom door, and disappearing into the hall, the door clicks shut behind him, and I wondered what he meant; I was doing what he asked. Turning back to my chicken soup, I place the spoon down before glancing over my shoulder, slightly embarrassed before I drink the soup straight from the bowl, having managed to get none in my mouth with the spoon from the

trembling of my hands.

They still shook as I brought the bowl to my lips and the warm liquid spilled into my mouth. A moan escapes me at the first mouthful, and some run down my chin, and I nearly choke as I hungrily gulp it down when I hear the door handle rattle. I pull the bowl away from my lips and hastily grab the spoon from the bedside table, so they don't think I am some pig with no table manners, but it would have gone cold long before any made it to my mouth.

My belly felt warm from the chicken soup, and I tried to scoop some onto the spoon when a shriek left me when Darius appeared next to me, his hand reaching toward me, and I scramble back, nearly spilling the bowl onto my lap. Tobias grabs it before it ruins the bed and splashes over my legs just as Darius grips my hair. I clutch his hands, tears burning my eyes as I try to figure out what I did wrong. I did what they asked.

"You were fucking warned," Darius snarls before pulling a piece of flexible hose from his pocket and a funnel. "Hold her down," Darius says, shoving me back, and my eyes go wide as I see him connect the funnel to the hose. What was he doing? What did I do?

Tobias grips Darius's forearm. "Wait, she has eaten half of it" I blink at them, and Darius looks over at Tobias, and I scramble back on the bed. My heartbeat pulses in my ears as fear wraps around me and how I wish I never wasted my magic. Wishing I had tried to take on the Lycans instead of calling on them.

Darius takes the bowl from him and holds it out to me. "Fucking eat, or I will force-feed you."

My hands trembled as I reached for the bowl, my eyes going to the hose and funnel as I took the bowl and sat back against the headboard. Tobias throws the spoon in my lap when I realize the shirt had ridden up, but neither pays attention as I quickly tug it back down, covering myself when Kalen appears. His eyes are wide as he rushes into the room, and Lycus grips his arm as he goes to step toward the bed.

"Now, Aleera," Darius's angry voice sends a jolt up my spine. I fought the urge to scratch myself, my body becoming itchy. It was a nervous thing. I hated it; whenever I felt fear, my skin itched, I couldn't explain it, but Darius and Tobias made my skin crawl just being near their intimidating auras.

My hands shake, and this time not just from hunger as I try to scoop the soup on the spoon. Their eyes watching me make me more nervous. Please just leave; I need them gone. Their presence made me feel sick as I sensed Darius glaring down at me.

The soup spills from the spoon before I get it to my lips, and a whimper escapes me when I see Darius's hands clench into fists.

Darius leans toward me, and I cringe away from him, pulling my legs to my chest and turning away from him. Shrinking in on myself as my body tensed, wondering what he would do. "Aleera!" His eyes Demonic eyes bored into me, and I could see my reflection in his black, menacing eyes. The frightened look on my face made me feel pathetic; I should not be subjected to this.

Scanned with CamScanner

"And still, you deliberately disobey me" I shake my head and glance at the funnel clutched in his hands as he steps closer. His hand wraps around my ankle his fingers dig into my skin painfully. I knew being Demonic-Fae, his temperature was hotter than mine, but his skin was searing hot against my cold skin, making me wonder if it was intentional that he was trying to burn deliberately.

"You will learn to obey" He spits at me before nodding to Tobias, and I watch, horrified as Tobias moves toward me, his hands reaching toward me.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 12

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Chapter 12 "

No, no, no," I shriek while kicking my legs. Darius pins them to the bed before crawling on it and straddling my waist. My eyes frantically search the room before my eyes fall on Kalen. Lycus looked away beside him like he couldn't handle watching as Darius and Tobias pinned me to the bed.

"I was trying. I was trying, Darius," I scream as Darius takes the bowl from my hands, and Tobias shoves my shoulders down flat on the bed. Tears streamed down my cheeks as I thrashed. I was doing what they wanted.

"Darius, what are you doing?" Kalen says, sounding outraged, his eyes going to me, and I look at him frantically, wanting him to stop them as he rushed over to the bed.

"She did it to herself; we warned her. Lycus, get Kalen out of here," Darius snaps. Lycus grabs Kalen's arm. Kalen shoves him off and steps closer to Darius.

“She was eating for fuck sake,” Kalen tells him, grabbing his arm as Darius moved higher, straddling my chest.

“No, she was deliberately spilling it.” Darius snarls.

“No, I wasn’t... I wasn’t, please,” I begged. Tobias pins my hands in one of his before pinching my nose, so I have to breathe through my mouth.

“She is starving, Darius. For fuck sake, you try holding a spoon steady when you haven’t eaten in days; I told Tobias to put it in a cup for her,” Kalen snaps at him before glaring at Tobias, who growls at him.

“You dare go against us. You just saw her tip it back in the bowl” Darius turns to glare over his shoulder at him, but Kalen doesn’t flinch away from his gaze. Lycus touches his shoulder, and Kalen shrugs him off. I don’t know what look he had on his face, but it was enough that Lycus took a step back from.

“You haven’t gone hungry; you have no idea how hard it is to eat when you have gone days without food. I will feed her. Just let her go and move. She wasn’t spilling it; her hands are shaking,” Kalen tells Darius, who scoffs. Embarrassment hits me, making a hiccuped sob escape me. This was so humiliating.

“Please, Darius,” Kalen pleads, touching his arm and making Darius glance at him over his shoulder. Darius glares at him before his features soften like he couldn’t bear to see Kalen upset before he sighs and looks down at me beneath him. Tobias lets go of my nose and wrists. Darius nods before climbing off me, and I scramble upright, tugging the shirt down and bringing my knees to my chest. It horrified me that he was about to force a tube down my throat, not a care in the world that he would be hurting me.

Kalen holds his hand out for the bowl, and Darius hands it to him with a growl. Kalen sits on the bed beside me and reaches for me, trying to pry my arms away from my legs. My eyes flick to Darius, who sighs, pinning me with his glare when I feel fingers gently grip my chin and turned my face toward Kalen sitting beside me.

Kalen nods, holding the bowl up and pressing it to my lips. My hands grab it as he tips it up, and my hands shake violently as I grip his hand on the bowl so I don’t choke as he pours the soup in my mouth. ?

"That's it," He says as I drink straight from the bowl. Soup runs down my chin and spills onto his shirt.

"Slow, you will choke," Kalen tells me, pulling the bowl away for a second and letting me catch my breath.

"When did you eat last?" He asks as I reach for the bowl. He brings it back to my lips, and I drink the remainder of it, my stomach feeling heavy and full for once when he pulls it away when I have drained it.

Kalen holds his hand out, and I notice Lycus has my towel in his hands; he passes it to Kalen, who hands it to me. I used it to wipe my face and his shirt, where I spilled some of the soup on it.

"You didn't answer," Kalen says, and I look at him, my brows pinching as I try to remember if he asked me something.

"Better?" He asks, and I nod my head, giving the towel back to him.

"When did you eat last?" Kalen asks.

"Seven days ago," I tell him.

Scanned with CamScanner

"Bullshit, you have only been here three days," Darius snaps, taking a step toward me, and I cringe.

"That's why you were in the shifter city," Kalen states, and I nod.

"Yeah, everything froze over, all the vegetation and the stream, majority of the water sources polluted, I didn't realize it was a shifter city. I was hoping it was a human one. I was desperate, mainly for water. I could have lasted longer; I have lasted longer but not without water," I admit.

“You expect us to believe you were living in the forests and homeless all this time, bullshit! Aleera. Who did you run off with, we saw the surveillance footage, and you left with someone? Who is he?” Darius snarls and Kalen glares at him. Did he seriously think I ran off with some man, that I would run away for someone else? Clayton only helped me get out. That was it; we were not friends, merely acquaintances.

“I don’t care what you believe, Darius. I know the truth, and that is all that matters. Whether or not you, believe me, is up to you, or you could ask Tobias he should be able to tell if I am lying or not, I have no magic left to mask myself,” I tell him. Darius looked over at Tobias, who was observing me like a complicated math equation.

He moves around the bed stopping behind Kalen before reaching his hand toward my face, and I pull away when he suddenly pinches my chin between his fingers.

“Repeat it,” He says, his eyes boring into mine.

“I hadn’t eaten before now in seven days, drank anything in nearly just as long. I ran because Darius killed my parents,” I answered him, and he let my face go. He sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose and exhaling.

D

“Well?” asks Darius.

“I was wrong; she is telling the truth.”

“So you called me in here for no reason?” Darius snarls at him.

“How was I supposed to know? I thought she was refusing to do what she was told.”

“By fucking asking, did you bother to ask her?”

“You deal with her then; I didn’t even want to be near her,” Tobias says before storming out of the room.

I look down at my hands, my throat restricting at his words. The mate bond made his words sting, even though the feeling of hatred was mutual. Their outright blatant rejection was like a slap in the face, making me remember they don't want me. I was here out of necessity and for them to ruin. I don't want to be here either, but forcing me to stay was cruel.

"Can I sleep now?" I ask, wanting them gone. Kalen's hand drops onto mine as I pick at my nails before gently squeezing. "Kalen!" Darius' angry voice makes me look at Darius, who was glaring at Kalen's hand gripping mine, and Kalen sighs, removing his hand before dropping his head.

"Go with Lycus," Darius growls at him, and Kalen stands, taking my empty bowl and the tray. Lycus follows him to the door before stopping. "There is a bag with clothes in it in the wardrobe for you," Lycus tells me before turning and walking out, leaving Darius alone with me.

"Just because Kalen stood up for you, don't think you can turn him against us, so stay away from him. If I catch you seeking him out, you will beg for me to kill you. Understood?" I nod, pulling the blankets back up.

"I asked you a question."

"Yes, Darius, I understand," I answered as I tucked my legs underneath the blanket, my stomach sinking. Why wasn't I allowed near the only person that didn't seem hell-bent on trying to kill me? He is the only one that was sort of nice, and I couldn't go near him. Darius walks out before flicking the light off, leaving only the light from the fire in the fireplace. The door handle jiggles, and I know he locked me in when I hear the lock click in place.

One thing I knew for sure was, I needed to find a way to get out of here. Get away from Darius, because I could tell this was only the beginning of the cruelty I was about to endure at their hands.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 13

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Chapter 13

Restless, I tossed and turned all night, not really getting proper sleep. The tugging sensation of knowing they were so close was pulling me to seek out my mates, the bond urging me to seek them out, knowing they could replenish my powers. It must have been the early morning hours when I heard the twist of the shared bathroom door.

My mind instantly became alert as I looked in its direction. I let out a breath when I realized it was Kalen and not one of the others. He stops when he notices me sitting upright in the bed before hesitating.

“Did I wake you?” he whispers, and I shake my head. He looks over his shoulder toward his room before quietly shutting the door. For some reason, his presence didn’t scare me, I found his aura comforting, and I wanted to keep him safe and close to me for some reason. Kalen walks over to the bed, sitting down on it, and I move over, so he has more room, and he lays on his side facing me.

“Sorry, it is the bond,” Kalen says.

“You might get me in trouble, though,” I tell him, thinking of Darius’s threat.

“I can go?” he says, and he rolls about to get out of the bed. When I grip his arm, he stops. He didn’t want to go, and honestly, I didn’t want him to leave. It had been years since I actually met someone I wanted to be around.

Kalen was the first normal interaction I had had since leaving school. Being the strange girl who stuck to herself in school didn’t win me any friends, and for years the only friend I had was a stranger I spoke to online. It was the only way to vent my frustrations, and I regretted leaving my tablet behind. I wonder if I could get access to a computer here? I knew it wouldn’t be anytime soon if they did agree, and I doubt they would let me use it to speak to my friend over the internet, whoever they might be.

Kalen lays back down, and I observe him the best I can in the darkness, yet curiosity is eating at me.

“You’re not like them. You don’t seem to hate me,”

“Because I don’t, I figured you ran for some reason,”

“And if I just ran?” I ask him. He shrugs. “I can’t say I blame you. Darius scared the crap out of Kalen and me when he found us,” He paused like he was locked in his memories, his aura turned depressive, and I held my tongue, thinking it might be best not to ask what upset him.

“So, I still couldn’t hate you for running even if you had no reason,” he says simply before wriggling closer to me.

His hand reaches toward my face slowly, and he hesitates once again before I grab his hand, his magic coming to life beneath mine, yet I don't take it. I couldn't bring myself to break his trust. If I was going to be stuck here, I needed a friend to survive my mates, so why not keep the only decent one close.

Kalen lets out a breath when I place his hand on my cheek. His thumb brushes beneath my eye softly, and I close my eyes. Sleep finally taking me.

When I woke up, I found the spot where Kalen was empty, looking around the room. A prickle up my spine alerted me to someone in the room before his voice did. "Looking for someone?" Darius asks, and I shake my head, scooting up the bed.

I yawn. Darius watches me or rather glares at me. "Get up; you have five minutes to get dressed; put these on," He says, chucking some clothes at me.

He then storms out, and I look to the window to see the sun is barely up. I groaned, wondering where he wanted to take me. I slipped the jeans on which fit perfectly and a white blouse. How did Lycus know my size? I shake the thought away before realizing I have no shoes. I look around the room for some when the door opens...

"Time is up," Darius calls, pushing the door wider. I glance down at my feet. Only socks on, and I quickly glanced around once again but found no shoes. Darius, however, didn't care as he suddenly walked off. Was I meant to follow him even if I had no shoes on?

"Now, Aleera," Darius snaps, and I rush out after him. His long strides had me jogging to keep up. My feet were cold even with the thick bed socks on. Darius walked down a flight of stairs, and I was becoming lost with all the twists and turns. I could hear the murmuring of men behind the doors, and I raced to keep up with Darius before we went down yet another set of stairs to a floor I recognized from when I tried to escape.

Darius walks to the mess hall, where I saw all the men gathered the other day. It had a few tables full when we walked in. All of them looked up, and I froze. More men file in behind me, bumping into me, and Darius grips my arm, his nails digging into my tender flesh. He drags me over to a table and dumps me in a chair.

Glancing around, I noticed something quickly, they were all demons. These men weren't Fae. The other thing I noticed was there was no woman in this room. Looking up at Darius, he was smirking cruelly at me.

"Welcome to hell, Aleera, don't think my men are your friends or will be your friend. No one likes a traitor," Darius leans down. His stubble brushed my cheek, and I hold my breath at his closeness.

"And all of them think you are and don't go looking for any woman. You will find none. You are the only one," Darius says before standing upright. Darius turns to leave.

"Wait," I reach out, grabbing his hand, and he growls at me, and I jerk my hand away and take a step back at the frightening look he gives me.

"You can't... Are you leaving me here?" I ask, petrified of them, demons fed on fear and any emotion, really, and I knew I would be a nice treat to these men. An emotional buffet.

"Why, are you scared, Aleera?" I look around, their demonic eyes watching me, and I gulp before looking up at Darius. He chuckles, the sound mocking.

"I wanted to kill you, but now seeing the look on your face, I know this was the better option," Darius says, and he looks around at all the men. He smiled; I didn't like the look he wore on his face. It was off, severely off.

"Zac, come here," Darius calls out and waves a man over.

"Keep Aleera company and take her to your first lesson,"

"Be my pleasure, my King," the man taunts, his smile growing bigger as he stared down at me.

"Just don't kill her; I want to watch her suffer; I don't want you to incinerate her before she has," Darius tells him before walking out of the mess hall. He leaves, and I remain frozen before turning to face this Zac person who grabs my arm, hauling me over to a table with three other men.

Chapter 14 “

Darius can be a dick; he will settle down,” Zac said. I stare at him, confused. He almost seemed normal, nice even as he slid a tray of food over to me. Zac sits across from me, grabbing another before digging into his food.

The man beside him is a huge burly-looking man with a short beard and dark hair, and he taps my tray. “Eat; if your training with us, you will need it,” he says, and I looked down at the tray to find it has scrambled eggs on it.

“I’m Satish, that’s Zac as you know, and that one is Deacon,” The other man waves; he had blonde hair, a boyish face, clearly the youngest at the table, I think. It was impossible to tell the actual age of full-blooded Demons; they could be hundreds of years old or precisely the age they appear.

“And that one at the end is, Lyle,” The man nods, but his lips are pulled back in a snarl. Note to self stay away from the unfriendly one. I go back to my food, scooping up some egg on my fork.

“So Darius and the others don’t eat down here with you?” I asked. Zac snorts and shakes his head.

“No, this place belongs to Darius; he owns and runs it,”

“So he brought it then,” Zac shakes his head before leaning back in his seat, “You don’t know much about them,”

“About Darius and the others? No, only what I managed to hear on the radio or see on the news of their killing sprees,”

“Darius grew up here, and this was his home. Darius turned it into a dark arts training facility; they are all teachers in a way, who better to teach dark magic than the demon king himself,” Zac answered

“So you all like it here?” I ask, glancing around at the table, wondering if I could get an idea of where here was.

“Well, we all volunteered, so yeah. We may be demons, but we want to catch the ones responsible for releasing that plague, and taking over the world also sounds promising,” Zac answers, and I nearly choke on my food.

“Wait, Darius is building an army?”

“Why else would we be here?” Satish says with a shrug. Suddenly an alarm blares loudly, and everyone jumps to their feet.

The silent instruction has me scrambling to my feet after them, and I follow Zac, dumping my half-eaten breakfast on the bench where everyone else did as they filed out.

Zac grabs my hand, pulling me after him, and a few people trod on my feet by accident. I hiss when I feel my toenail bend back. Zac stops looking back at me, and I look down at my sock, blood staining the toes. Sighing, I rip the sock off quickly, knowing the tugging will make it annoying. I pressed my lips together for a second to stop from swearing. My toenail was half ripped off. I could live with that. I quickly removed my other sock since everyone appeared to be going towards the main entry doors.

“Man, you must have really pissed him off for him not to give you shoes,” Zac says, tugging me toward the door leading out. Excitement bubbles in me; this could be my chance to escape. That thought instantly died down when I stepped outside and saw vast fields with different obstacle courses, and then nothing but dense forest making me stop.

“Hurry up, Tobias doesn’t like tardiness. The first lesson is with him,” Zac explains, and I nod, trying to keep up.

“What does he teach?” I ask, trying to hide my disappointment at not seeing a road leading in here.

“Hand-to-hand combat, and the tracks,” Zac says, and I stop completely.

“What like fighting combat?” Zac looks at me like I have grown two heads before he laughs.

“Well, that is why it is called hand to hand,” he holds up his fists.

“Don’t worry, I’ll go easy on you,” Zac says, and I let a breath of relief before letting him pull me along after him.

“So, how many men and women are here?”

“Six hundred men,” I waited for him to tell me Darius was joking about there being no women, but when he added nothing else, my stomach dropped a little.

“Wait, there is really no other woman here?”

“Nope, you are the only one, lucky you aye,” He says, tugging me to an empty place on the field, men start getting into different stances, and I look around nervously. A few were stretching, and some just chatting amongst themselves.

“Well, I thought you were going to be a complete asshole since Darius asked you to show me around, but I am glad to see he is wrong about you,” I tell Zac as he leads me over to his friends.

“He ain’t wrong about Zac; he is the cruelest of us all,” Satish says, clapping a hand on my shoulder. I look over my shoulder at him, and he takes a stance behind me when I see Deacon move to my side, and Lyle comes up to the other side of me.

The four men were boxing me in. Looking over at Zac, he has a smirk on his face. “What?” I ask, my voice trembling, suddenly feeling uncomfortable with the way they were all staring at me.

“Darius told her to her face that we would make her miserable, and yet she thought we could be friends,” Zac laughs, and my stomach drops.

What the heck just happened. But they were nice a few seconds ago. Satish sniffs the air deeply, and I spin to find him directly behind me, too close, and I take a step back only to be shoved.

I landed in the mud, losing my footing and headbutting the ground hard enough that black dots danced in front of my vision before I hauled myself up onto my hands and knees only to be kicked in the stomach. The air leaves my lungs in a long wheeze. I could hear them laughing and braced myself for another blow when a whistle sounded. They all stop and Zac kneels next to me while I gasp for air.

“We told you our names, not because we want to be your friend Aleera, but so you know who to whine to Darius about,” he sneers before shoving my face away. The whistle blows again, and boots stop in front of my face, and I look up with my blurry vision.

“Get up. Why are you on the ground?” Tobias spits at me. I look over at Zac, who smirks.

“Tripped,” I tell him, and Tobias reaches down, seizing my arm and yanking me to my feet. I try to wipe some of the mud off using my hands but only manage to smear it worse.

“Fucking disgusting,” Tobias growls before stalking off, and I grit my teeth, fighting back the urge to cry. I couldn’t let these monsters see me weak; I had to learn to block them out. At least until I escaped.

“Twenty laps, then the obstacle course, no one-on-one today, . you have your prep exams,” Tobias calls out to the men.

I gulp when I see the men start running toward a field, I make my way over, trying not to slip on the mud, and the tiny sharp rocks dig into my feet. I make it halfway to the field before stopping. The mud is too slippery, making me wonder why this side was all mud and slippery.

What could you possibly do while sliding around? I clutch my knees, trying to catch my breath and also fighting the urge to throw up the little breakfast I got to eat. The backs of my legs were burning from having to unstuck my feet and legs from mud. This was ridiculous; the mud was now up to my knees.

“What do you think you are doing?” I look up and see Tobias stalking towards me, and I flinch when I see

his hand reach toward me. Losing my footing on the slick surface, I fall backward, slipping in the mud and landing on my bottom.

“Get your ass over there with the other men,”

“I have no shoes,”

“You need something; you fucking earn it. Clearly, Darius doesn’t think you earned them yet, now get up,”

“Well, can I at least have mine back?” I asked. Tobias reaches forward, gripping my arm, his nails sinking into my soft skin, and I could feel the entire outline of his hand. His grip was that tight; I knew it would have bruised.

“You don’t speak to me unless spoken to, understood? You weren’t supposed to be in any of my classes, but here you are, s o shut up and quit whining” I nod before he shoves me forward, and I only just manage to stay upright as I clamber to the field. A sigh escapes me when I find my feet on solid ground.

However, my relief was short-lived when I noticed the track running a circle around the obstacle course was all gravel.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 15

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Chapter 15

“Move it, Aleera, twenty laps now,” Tobias roared behind me.

Despite not wanting to run, my feet start moving, the rocks digging into my feet painfully. It didn’t take long before the men overlapped me. Around a hundred or so barging and shoving past me. What the heck was their problem? I didn’t even know them, and they took no care when they came too close.

“Aleera!” I hear Zac’s voice behind me before looking over my shoulder in time to see him running straight at me. I tried to step out of his way when he dropped his shoulder and barrelled straight into me, diverting slightly off track to deliberately hit me.

My body was tossed across the gravel, and I felt like I was being skinned alive. My face burned as I skidded across the loose gravel, my hands I used to try and brace myself grazed, and I felt battered and bruised all over.

“Up Aleera, you have only done three laps,” Tobias calls from the center where the obstacle courses were. I haul my body up to my hands and knees. Trying not to cry out at my pain and discomfort.

It was agonizing, I kept going, and by the time I finished the laps, the men had completed theirs plus the obstacle course. The rest of the class moved on to their next lesson while Zac had been told to make sure I finished the course.

His sneers and name-calling were starting to get to me. I was starving, and the sun was cooking me alive. I wondered how long I had been out here when the blare of the alarm sounded signally; it was lunch.

Someone brought Zac out some food while I tried to navigate the climbing wall. My arms could not take my weight much longer and shook as I tried to haul myself up when I felt something smack me in the center of the back. I was about five meters up when pain rippled up my spine, and I lost my grip, plummeting to the ground below.

A shriek left my lips as I grasped the air frantically, hitting the ground with a thud before darkness swallowed me.

It was the sound of angry voices that pulled me back to my surroundings, a furious growl has me blinking, and I found the sun was no longer directly above me, the sky in orange and pink hues as I tried to remember what happened.

“If she ran again, I swear I will fucking kill her,” Darius’s angry voice boomed. I groan, rolling on my side, my head pounding to its own beat, and every muscle ached. My back was killing me and my skin felt sunburnt

“You know she wouldn’t be able to find her way through the . forest to the road. She wouldn’t even know what direction to go in,” I hear Lycus’s voice answer, Darius.

“Wait, I can smell her scent,” Lycus growls, and I pull myself up to my hands and glance around to see them coming up over the small hill from the castle.

“Found her,” Tobias calls out. Pointing at me. My vision was blurry, and I squinted about to get to my feet when suddenly Darius gripped my hair, yanking my head back. He moved with speed that made the air rush around me. One second he was over on the crest of the small hill; the next second, he was beside me.

“You think you can skip classes, Aleera?” He snarls as I clutch his hands and cry out. My hair ripped painfully from my scalp, and I would need to find some scissors. The taunts and bullying I could deal with. The hair-pulling was a low act and very demeaning. I suddenly cursed being a girl.

“Let go. You’re hurting me,” I choke out, and he laughs before shoving me forward back in the dirt.

I rubbed the back of my neck and noticed Kalen was nowhere to be seen, which at least gave me comfort, knowing the only person who had been decent to me since being here wasn’t hunting me down to inflict more injury when my brain backtracked. He was one of them. He could be looking for me elsewhere.

“Get up; you have power placement with me. If I ever have to come searching for you again because you have missed class-“.

“Ah, finally you found her,” Kalen says, cutting Darius off as he jogged over to us and a look of relief crossed his features as he let out a breath.

“Had me worried for a second, I thought you left us again,” Kalen says before his smile falters when he looks at me. Kalen turns and looks at Darius before he shoves him. “Why is she bleeding? What the fuck did you do?” Kalen snaps out in an angry growl.

Darius rips Kalen toward him by the front of his shirt. “I haven’t done anything but take that tone with me again, and I will make you watch her punishment,” Darius growls at him.

Lycus grips Darius’s arm, and Darius looks at him. “We have enough going on. We don’t need to be fighting each other, especially over her,” Lycus says before glaring down at me. I remained quiet, not wanting to draw any more attention to myself. Kalen, however, doesn’t.

“Punishment for what?” Kalen demanded.

“She skipped my class and Lycus’s,”

“Come on, give her a break. It’s her first day,” Kalen says, reaching down to offer me his hand. I reached for it, and Darius slapped my hand away.

“She can get up herself. She survived for six years holed up, God knows where, or with whom, she can get herself up,” Darius snaps at him. Kalen frowns and appears to be thinking. He went to speak before closing his mouth. A dark expression crosses his features before he turns on his heel and walks off.

My stomach sinks, wondering why the sudden change in his attitude. Surely, he didn’t believe what Darius had said, but then again, I didn’t really know any of them well enough to judge their behavior.

Though a kick to my leg pulls my gaze away from a retreating Kalen. I hiss at the sudden pain radiating up my leg.

“Get up and get to your next class.” Darius spits at me. The look of pure hatred on his face makes me cringe away. My eyeballs pulsed in my head, along with the pounding headache and all I wanted to do was find somewhere to lay down and rest for a bit.

Climbing to my feet, I staggered. The ground felt like it was moving, and my vision blurred worse. Touching the back of my head, I wince, quickly pulling my fingers away to find blood stained them.

“I said get to the next class,” I flinched at his closeness and forced myself to move.

“What time is it?” I ask as I try not to limp. Each footfall caused pain as the rocks stabbed and sliced my tender feet open more.

“Lunch just finished,” Lycus answers, and I nod. My stomach growls hungrily at the mention of food. I couldn’t believe I had been out here for hours. Zac just left me there. That thought, stung a little at the knowledge that not a single person here cared if I suddenly dropped dead.

“Where are your shoes?” I don’t bother answering Lycus, and Darius growls behind me when I stop glancing back at him.

“I don’t know where I am going,” I admit. Let alone what class I had next.

“The mess hall, now get moving,” Darius snarls. Lycus moves toward me and grips my arm, and Tobias and Darius both growl at him.

“For fucks sake, Darius, look at her feet. She can barely fucking walk,”

“Well, if she didn’t skip classes, I may have given her shoes,” he retorts.

“I didn’t skip. I fell off because of that jerk-” I argue but stop not seeing the point in debating my tardiness with him.

“Because of who?” Tobias demands, and I glance at him to see Darius glare at him. Tobias quickly looks away and adds nothing else when my feet suddenly go from under me. I shriek, not expecting it, and Lycus grabs me, scooping me up in his arms.

“Lycus!” Darius roars, and I feel the energy rush out of him, which makes me suddenly want to run. Terror filled me, and I wanted Lycus just to put me down before Darius did something. Lycus just holds me tighter and starts walking when I smack into Darius’ chest while in Lycus’s arms. Lycus stops staring at him.

“She can walk,” Darius tells him, but Lycus holds his gaze unafraid of him while I push closer to Lycus. The movement is not missed by Darius, who glares at me.

“She is done for the day,” Lycus says, his voice even as he barges past him, walking around a furious Darius.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 16

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Chapter 16

Everything ached, there wasn't a single part of me that didn't hurt, and I had never felt so relieved to be locked back in my room; I would take this prison cell over not having to face those men again. Lycus had placed me on my feet just inside the room before shutting the door. He locked it. I heard the door click and heard him storm off up the hall.

He didn't say a word to me, yet I could tell after we got back to the castle-like he was second-guessing getting me out of classes. Every time my skin touched his, he would tense like he couldn't even bear the thought any part of me was near him. His jaw was tense as he climbed the stairs before placing me in the room and leaving. I kind of hoped I could see Kalen. I couldn't understand the strange vibes I got from him. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

Like I needed to protect him, but from what? Like he was fragile somehow, I noticed they were super protective of him, but I wouldn't hurt him. I had no magic to even if I wanted to. It fizzled out, and until they either gave me some, which is unlikely, or I managed to sneakily obtain some, I was utterly defenseless, and that thought scared me.

Moving toward the bathroom, pain rippled up my legs, it

caused pain through the bottoms of my feet, but I needed to clean them. I winced when I placed my foot on the cold tiles, my foot sliding as my blood stained the tiles, making it slippery.

I made my way over to the bathtub and sat on the edge, planning to rinse them under the tap and assess the damage when the door suddenly opened. I look up to see Kalen step in with an angry-looking Lycus. Lycus quickly glanced out the door into his room before shutting it and locking it. Lycus moved to the door leading into my room, and I jumped up in a panic when he closed and locked it also. They were locking me i

"Woah, woah, calm down. I won't hurt you, neither will Lycus, see," Kalen says, pulling bandages from his pockets and alcohol wipes and showing them to me.

"Just hurry, Kalen, if Darius comes in and finds you with her. He will lose it," Lycus tells him.

"Since when doesn't he, Lye. He gets angry if I am out of damn sight for more than five minutes or If I don't text him every five bloody minutes," Kalen mumbles. Lycus sighs but perches himself upon the sink basin while I glanced between the two of them.

“He won’t do anything, Aleera, sit. We want to help,” Kalen told me.

“Speak for yourself. The only reason I even brought her up here is for you, not because I want anything to do with her, don’t speak for me, Kalen,” Lycus snaps, and Kalen rolls his eyes and sighs. I glanced briefly at Lycus but sat on the edge of the bathtub again. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

Kalen sets to work cleaning and bandaging my feet. My eyes burned with tears at the stinging sensation as he washed them with the alcohol wipes.

“Can’t you just heal her?” Kalen asks, glancing over his shoulder at Lycus.

“Not after last time,” He says, glaring at me before looking down at Kalen. Kalen mutters under his breath and starts wrapping my feet with the bandages.

“Kalen, just hurry up,” Lycus snaps at him; his hearing would be a lot better than mine being Were-fae. I wondered what he heard Kalen mutter.

“No, it’s fucking bullshit. Darius shouldn’t be the only one allowed to have a say about her,” Kalen argued.

“Kalen enough, or he will do more than just take your magic,” Lycus scolded him. I was a little shocked he would take Kalen’s magic. Is that why they didn’t want me near him?

“He only did it because he knew I would heal her when pulls shit like this,” Kalen snapped back.

“You shouldn’t have pissed him off, now hurry so I can get you out of here before he realizes,”

“Just go if you are worried about being caught,”

"I'm not worried about me, idiot. I am worried for you, and I will not be leaving you alone with the likes of her," I said nothing the entire time. Just observed. I peeked at the markings on Kalen's neck, and before I could stop myself, my hand reached out to touch them. Lycus's hand was wrapped around my wrist in a bone-crushing grip before I could, his reflexes crazy fast.

His grip hurt, and I pulled my hand away, feeling stupid for wanting to touch him; their marks called to me. I knew it was the bond, making me act strange, yet didn't they feel any pull toward me at all? I just wanted to touch him, reassure him that I would be fine and not to worry. It was odd that I would even think to do that when I didn't know him.

"Don't touch him," Lycus snarled at me, and I swallowed and tugged my hand away and placed it back in my lap. Lycus growls, and I avert my gaze back to what Kalen was doing.

"Ignore him. You can touch me," Kalen said before glaring up at Lycus. My fingers twitched to touch the markings, to give him magic. I couldn't explain it because I had none to give him. I clasp my hands together to refrain myself.

"Can I ask a question?" I asked, finally speaking for the first time. Kalen's head whipped up instantly, and he smiled. "Always," My breath hitched in my throat at his breathtaking smile. Lycus, however, growled but said nothing. Instead, watching Kalen as he finished my other foot.

"Why did you mark each other. I thought mates only marked their keeper?" I asked.

"Well, you ruined that, didn't you?" Lycus snarled. Kalen pressed his lips in a line before running a hand through his hair.

"So we didn't lose our magic, and yes, it is taboo for male mates to mark each other, frowned upon. But it was the only way if we wanted to keep our magic," Kalen explained. I nod. Looking at Lycus, he stood with his arms folded over his broad chest.

"I had already marked Lycus before I found out about you, or them, though," Kalen tells me, and Lycus growled at him. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

"Enough," Lycus snaps at him, but Kalen ignores him.

"Lycus and I were already together before we found out we were mates," Kalen tells me.

"So you were boyfriends?" Kalen nods, and my eyes dart to Lycus.

"Yep, we grew up in the same orphanage,"

"That's it, time to go," Lycus snarled at him, gripping his arm before hauling Kalen up.

"Stop, Lye," Kalen said, trying to shake off his grip.

"No, she doesn't deserve to know anything about us. If she wanted to know about us, she shouldn't have run like a damn coward," Lycus tells him, shoving him toward his bedroom door.

"I will see you later, Aleera," Kalen says, smiling sadly before looking at his mate. I nod, watching Lycus all but drag Kalen from the room.

"I ran because Darius killed my parents. Did you expect me to come running into your arms and pretend he didn't? I saw him burn my house with them in it to the damn ground," I snapped angrily, and Lycus stopped.

"If that is why you left, then you are a bigger idiot than I thought. Darius didn't kill your parents, Aleera," Lycus growls at me before taking a step forward. He stops, and his eyes flicker in his anger.

"You would know that if you bothered to fucking ask, instead of nearly killing us all." Lycus spat at me.

"I saw him, I know what I saw,"

"Then what you saw was wrong. Darius and Tobias didn't murder your parents, Aleera,"

"What are you talking about? Tobias wasn't even there," I argued.

“Who do you think dragged you out? So, if that is why you ran, then you deserve everything they do to you,”

“Lycus!” Kalen murmured behind him, and Lycus growled before turning on his heel and shoving Kalen out of the bathroom. He then slammed the door so hard it made me jump.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 17

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Chapter 17

Darius POV

Lycus was in a terrible mood when I came up to the room. Pushing the door open, Lycus was yelling at Kalen, which was rare; he tried to never raise his voice around Kalen. We all knew how fragile he was. We had all had to pull him back from the brink at some point, yet walking in, I had no doubt that Aleera was the reason.

“What’s going on?” I asked, opening the door and shrugging off my Jacket. I tossed it over the back of the chair by the fire. Turning around, they were both glaring at each other, yet neither answered.

“This has something to do with Aleera?”.

“Who else, she needs to go,” Lycus snaps at me, finally turning away from Kalen.

“What is this about? What did she do?” If she has disturbed the peace, she will be back in the cells.

“She did nothing; Lycus is the problem,” Kalen says before storming toward the door to leave.

“Where are you going?” I asked him.

“Out,”

“Kalen!” I growled at him, and he stopped with his hand on the door handle.

“No, Darius. We are mates. You don’t get to control all of us,”

“If it is to do with your safety, I do. You leave this room before I know what is going on. I will have her placed back in the cells, now sit your ass down,” I growl at him. Kalen’s knuckles turn white on the door handle, where he gripped it before he slammed the door. I raised an eyebrow at his anger.

I watch as he goes and lays on our custom-made bed. Finding a bed that fits four men was impossible, so we made one. Lycus watches him and moves to the couch by the fireplace. Despite his anger, Kalen’s behavior was as expected, and I could feel a hum of satisfaction come through the bond when Kalen lays down, snatching Lycus pillow to use.

I wasn’t even sure he noticed he did it, but it’s always the same when Kalen was in a mood. He would just lay in bed and sulk or stare off blankly when he is depressed, clinging to our pillows like they were a safety net. I watched, amused as he reassembled our pillows so he could steal our scents from them.

Tobias walks in and pauses at the tension in the room. I turn to him, and he nods, letting me know he dropped Aleera’s dinner off to her. He glances at Kalen, and I shrug, and he rolls his eyes before climbing on the bed and sitting next to him. Kalen rolled instantly, placing his head in Tobias’s lap. Tobias leans back against the headboard and brushes his fingers through Kalen’s hair and, I could feel Tobias magic oozing out and calming him.

The tension leaves the room, and guilt flashes through the bond. Both Tobias and I look at Lycus, knowing it is coming from him. Kalen was our weak spot in more ways than one, and we hated upsetting him. His mind was fragile. One minute he was fine and overly excited and bouncing around. The next, he refused to get out of bed, would harm himself, or try and kill himself. I lost track over the last six years of the number of times he wanted to end it, the number of times he actually did, and we had to pull back from death, each time we brought him back, each time he was more mentally unstable. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

It is not natural to die and come back so many times. The last time was the worst. We actually thought we lost him for good. 12 minutes he was dead for. For 12 minutes, he hung from the rafters unmoving. I had

all the cameras pulled down that week. When I checked the footage, it sickened me. I couldn't unsee it. Kalen on that damn tablet wondering why she never opened his message, staring at the screen when he tossed it aside. He spent weeks begging her to come back or let him know she was ok.

I didn't see the rope around his neck until he jumped off the staircase.

It was the last class of the day. He planned it perfectly. He knew no one was in the castle watching. He knew we wouldn't get back in time. Luckily, Lycus went back feeling sick. Kalen was dead before he walked into the castle, and Lycus found him hanging from the second floor. He cut him down and performed CPR until Tobias got back. We all felt his bond sever, yet Tobias didn't stop. He kept feeding his blood to Kalen, and by some miracle, his heart started up, and Tobias's blood healed his broken neck. Since then, for the most part, Kalen was fine until he wasn't.

We finally got him to a good place recently, and then she called on us. Kalen had never been happier until we had to remind him she could leave again, not to get his hopes up.

Lycus crawls on the bed beside him before tucking his arm over him.

I shouldn't have taken his magic, it always made him worse, and I couldn't believe I was stupid enough to take it from him, blinded by my anger With Aleera.

I moved toward the bed and sighed. "Come here," I tell him, but he doesn't budge, just stares off blankly.

"You wanted to heal her?" I asked him and Kalen nodded.

"Are you angry at Lycus because he wouldn't,"

"He also yelled at her," Kalen mumbles.

"She did the wrong thing," I tell him.

"She didn't understand,"

“Because she didn’t ask, she didn’t want us, Kalen,” I tell him. Kalen shakes his head.

“If you let me speak to her, I can prove it. We can get her back,

“Kalen says, looking up at me. It was too dangerous, and I knew he wouldn’t get the answers he was hoping for. Tobias tried to muffle his anger and block Kalen from feeling it.

She destroyed all of us, one woman, and she near killed all of us. She destroyed what we could have been. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

“I can’t let you do that. You know why, Kalen,” I tell him.

“If I heal her?” I ask him before gritting my teeth. I hated the idea of doing such a thing but to bring his mood up, I would. I couldn’t risk him seeking her out.

“Can I sleep in there with her, or maybe she could come in here? I will sleep on the floor with her.” Tobias growled at his words, and I didn’t miss the flicker of anger in Lycus’s eyes.

“No, I am still angry I caught you in there last night,” Tobias scolds him. I chewed my lip. Kalen could be child-like, could be crazed, insane. So many different sides of him, and he had too many triggers.

“She must be lonely,” Kalen mumbles, looking at me like I would back him up, and usually I would but not when it comes to his safety.

“I will heal her, but you will remain in here with us,” I tell him.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 18

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Chapter 18

Aleera POV

I was sitting huddled under the blankets trying to get warm. The room was freezing since someone had opened a window, and the bloody thing was jammed open. I had asked Tobias if he could shut it. He even watched me struggle with the damn thing as I tried to pull it closed, giving up when it hurt too much to stand. So I had gone and climbed in bed, wrapping the blankets around me like a cocoon.

—

He said not one word and had placed my food in the room and left. I was starving, and I was pretty sure I inhaled my food without tasting it. I was that hungry from barely eating all day and starting to feel shaky.

Darius walked in, and I was too cold to be scared. Freezing as the frosty night air seeped into the room and my aching bones. Darius walked over, gripping the handle on the window and yanking it shut. I watched his every movement carefully while wondering what he wanted now. Was he here because he didn't get to punish me earlier for skipping classes? I didn't doubt it. He hated me. They all hated me, and I didn't believe me running was an acceptable excuse, as if they wouldn't have done the same.

Yet despite me hating him too, I also couldn't deny the bond. The bond made me crave them. My entire body told me I needed them even if I didn't want them, and I hated myself for it. Yet also longed for interaction after so much solitude, longed for touch and to feel some semblance of normality. I wanted rest without having to look over my damn shoulder. I wanted for once to feel wanted. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

I haven't had any of that since nana died. I missed my nana terribly, missed when she was alive, and I had somewhere to call home before I was tossed into the care of the Fae Authorities and institutionalized at boarding school with nothing left but memories of what I once had and lost.

Darius's entire body was tense as he moved toward me. I was too cold to care what he did to me at this point. I watch as flames spurt from his fingertips and form a sphere in his hand. Darius then tosses it at the small fireplace; the wood instantly caught alight. The flames erupt up the chimney before dying down and crackling loudly.

Darius's hands were fisted at his sides as he approached the bed. Now I couldn't blame the cold for all my shaking as his

intimidating frame stood over me. It made it more obvious how easy it would be for him to hurt me or end

me. His lips turned up as he snarled down at me.

He reached for the blanket and yanked it off. My body jerked forward, and I nearly toppled off the bed headfirst. He growled, gripping my shoulder and tossing me backward on the bed. My eyes widened as he reached toward me again. His hand grabbed my ankle as he yanked me toward him, a shriek left my lips, and I kicked my legs out, trying to free myself as he trapped my ankles on the bed.

My knee came up as I tried to break free, he snarled, and it connected with his mouth. Darius's nails sunk into my skin when his aura rushed out, halting my breath as I began to choke on it. Like invisible hands gripped my throat, and I clawed at it. His aura is so much stronger than anything I had ever felt. I couldn't place where I felt something similar. Tears welled in my eyes as my hands pawed at my neck; he ripped the bandages covering my feet off.

His hand clasped over the bottom of my foot when he dropped his aura, leaving me gasping for breath. My heart was pounding painfully against my ribs as I sucked in much needed air. He lifted my foot, examining it before growling and cursing under his breath. He dropped my foot, I scrambled away from him on the bed, and my back smacked the headboard with a thud in my haste.

"You really like causing issues," he sneered, wiping his bleeding lip. His tongue darts out. It ran across the split where my knee connected with his face, and my eyes widened as he rubbed his fingers together. His eyes dart to mine, and the anger behind them made my throat thicken like something had lodged in it. I swallowed in horror as he moved towards me, awaiting the blow I was sure would come when he stopped in front of me. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

His lip still bleeding, and his blood dribbled down his chin again, and he wiped it again.

"Kalen wants me to heal you," he spat venomously, it was evident he didn't want to when his eyes darted to my feet briefly, and he sighed before they flicked to me, his lips tugged in the corners briefly.

"Kiss me," I blink at him.

"Wh..a..t?" I spluttered at his words, confused.

"You need my blood to heal, so kiss me," I shake my head, horrified at what he asked. He couldn't be serious.

"So you would rather walk around with your feet like that?" My eyes dart to my throbbing feet that seemed to now have their own pulse. My blood-stained the cream-colored sheets from my thrashing.

"Maybe you could get one of the others," I didn't want to get that close to him, just being in his presence was bad enough, let alone close enough to touch him. Darius growls at my words.

"Then forget it," he says, turning on his heel to leave the room. My feet ached, the swelling making my skin shiny, and I would have to walk around on them. But why did I have to kiss him for him to heal me?

"Wait," I blurted out.

He was my mate, so it wouldn't be that bad. Although I didn't want to waste my first kiss on this monster, but my feet ached,

and surely it wouldn't be that unpleasant, right? The bond zapped to life as my thudding heart pumped faster at what I agreed to do. Darius stopped and looked over at me. He smiled before walking back toward the bed. He stopped looking at me. I stared at him. Why was he making it more awkward?

"Haven't got all day Aleera," Darius said in tauntingly. My eyes dart to his full lips as his tongue darts out. He smiled, and I hated how my heart skipped a beat at the sight. I hated that he could hear it too.

"Aleera," He says, annoyed; my face heats, and I hesitantly knelt on the bed. Darius just stood there waiting. Couldn't he bend down or something. He sighed and raised an eyebrow at me. Moving off the bed, I stood before him. I hissed as pain rippled across the bottoms of my feet that felt spongy to walk on. The bond zinging in my blood urged me to go to my mate, wanting me to touch him even though he hurt me.

Yet he was still too tall, so I looked up at him. I chewed my lip feeling very uncomfortable despite the bond urging me closer. Stupid bond. Placing my hand on his shoulders, I stood on my tippy toes, and Darius gripped the back of my neck, and I sighed, relieved that he wouldn't make me humiliate myself more as he tilted his face toward mine. I feel his breath fan my lips, and his fingers tangle in my hair. His nose brushed

mine softly, my heart hammered harder as his scent overwhelmed me, and I leaned closer when he started laughing.

My head was yanked back painfully by my hair. My hair tugged so hard I cried out, clutching his hands as I tried to lessen the pain.

“I wouldn’t kiss you if you were the last person on this earth. You don’t deserve love, only pain.” .

Hurt rippled through my chest as the bond went berserk at his rejection, and my stomach sank at his words. I didn’t want to do it in the first place, yet his words stung more than they should; like he just reached into my chest and crushed my heart in his hand.

“But it was entertaining watching you struggle with the bond that you ignored for 6 years,” he snarled at me. He bites his wrist before jamming it over my mouth. His blood flooded into my mouth, and I choked when I couldn’t swallow fast enough.

Sputtering, he shoves me away and laughs before turning away and heading to the door.

“All meals from now on are in the mess hall. The less we have to see you, the better,” he spits at me. Leaving me upset due to the stupid bond. I wiped my mouth on the back of my hand, and he slammed the door, locking it and leaving me gasping for air, clutching my chest as pain rippled through me. The moment he was gone, hot tears flooded my eyes and spilled

over, running down my cheeks. I hated him.

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Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 19

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Chapter 19

Someone placed an alarm in my room when I left. I thought a fire alarm was going off because it scared the crap out of me when it started blaring loudly. It took me a few seconds to realize the noise was coming from beside my head on the bedside table. Looking at the screen, it read, ‘breakfast, get up.

No doubt it was Darius's doing. I couldn't even shut the damn thing off had to wait for it to shut itself off. My ears were ringing as I pushed open the bathroom door to pee. I also wanted to have a quick shower to wake up, as it was only 6 30 AM.

The moment the door opened, I realized that someone was in the bathroom by the steam. I froze when Tobias looked over at me before turning back to the mirror while he continued to shave.

"Sorry," I tell him backing out of the room.

"What?" he asked as I went to close the door. I shake my head.

"Aleera," I paused. My eyes ran the length of him. He only had a towel draped low on his waist, and I could tell he had just gotten out of the shower.

"I will be out in a minute, but if you want to shower, I would remain if I were you. The moment I step out, someone else will come in," Tobias says, not bothering to look over at me. I nod, stepping into the room and standing by the wall furthest from him.

"Did Darius give you some shoes?" I shake my head, and he nods, tilting his head to shave under his chin. I glanced at him before doing a double-take. His entire back was covered in thick burns, making me think of what Lycus said. I opened my mouth to ask but quickly closed it. However, the movement of my lips was not missed by Tobias. He glared at me through the mirror when the door opened up, and Kalen walked in.

I couldn't help the smile that split onto my face when I saw him walk in. He didn't notice me at first and instead kissed Tobias's shoulder before plucking the razor from his fingers and going to sit between the sinks next to Tobias. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

"You're up," Kalen says, excitedly moving toward me. Tobias growls, and Kalen sighed before moving back toward Tobias. He sits between the two sinks before grabbing Tobias by the towel and moving him between his legs. Tobias places his hands on Kalen's thighs. It was strange seeing Tobias be pulled around by Kalen and letting Kalen pull him around. Kalen turned Tobias chin up.

"Darius give you some shoes?" Kalen asked me as he started shaving Tobias's face. Tobias growls so I don't answer, and Kalen grips Tobias's chin and turns his face toward his." Darius said he would get her some," Kalen tells him.

Tobias's eyes soften, and I look away like I am intruding on some moment between them. I was beginning to realize that they all treated Kalen like he was made of glass; they were gentle with him. Even Darius was protective of him.

"I'll speak with him," Tobias tells him, and Kalen smiles before turning his face back up and continuing to shave him.

"What classes have you got?" Tobias's eyes went to mine in the mirror, but I had no idea what classes or where they were.

"She has a theory with me," Tobias answers. Kalen nods like we just had an everyday conversation.

"Why not with Lycus?"

"Lycus refused the classes with her," Tobias answered, and I swallowed.

"I will shower later," I tell them about to leave the room. I felt somewhat awkward when Tobias hisses as Kalen jumped off the sink basin.

"Oh shit, sorry," Kalen says.

"Aleera, the tissues," Kalen said just as I was walking out. I stopped looking to where he was pointing at the windowsill above the toilet in the niche. I grabbed the box and walked over to him, and Kalen had sliced Tobias's chin. He repeatedly apologized to him, and I plucked a tissue out, handing it to him. I place the box on the basin beside him and turn around.

"Don't leave; I don't know when Darius will let me see you again," Kalen whines gripping my wrist. They have all warned me away from Kalen, and my eyes went to Tobias's in the mirror, and he rolled his eyes. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

"You can stay,"

“See, Tobias isn’t so bad, just a big blood-sucking teddy bear,” Kalen laughed. Odd way to describe someone, I thought to myself. I remained where I was, but I could tell by how tense Tobias was that he didn’t want me anywhere near him and was only tolerating me because of Kalen being here. I swallowed, wanting to leave but also not wanting to upset Kalen.

I found my eyes trailing over Tobias again. My brows furrowed at the thick burns, which had me wondering if they were from the fire, but if they were, why didn’t they heal? His power would have manifested by then. They were 18 at the time of the fire, and he could have healed himself, or Darius could have healed him. Kalen happily talked away; he seemed extraordinarily bubbly and upbeat this morning.

“Did you take your medication?” Kalen’s eyes darken, and he cuts off mid-sentence and glares at Tobias.

“Have you?” Tobias asked him. Kalen didn’t answer, and Tobias sighed.

“I hate taking them,”

“Go take them, Aleera needs to get ready, or she will miss breakfast,” Tobias tells him. Kalen went to argue when Tobias leaned forward and kissed him.

“You can see her later,” Tobias says, tapping Kalen’s legs.

“I can’t once Darius gets back,”

“I will take you to see her, but only if you take your medication,” Tobias tells him, and Kalen’s brows furrow, but he nods before hopping off the sink basin. Kalen moved toward me, and I expected Tobias to stop him, but he didn’t as Kalen suddenly grabbed me, crushing me against his warm chest. He buried his face in my neck, and I sighed, hugging him back before he let go and walked back to his room.

“You like Kalen,” Tobias stated as I went to leave the bathroom. Was I supposed to answer that? I found it hard not to like Kalen. I think anyone would find it hard to not like Kalen.

“Kalen, he can be erratic,” Tobias says.

“You mean fragile; I have noticed how you all are with him. What sort of medication is he on?” Tobias nods and chews his lip.

“You being here will either be good for him or destroy him,” I noticed he ignored my question about his medication.

“I won’t hurt him; I couldn’t even if I wanted to,” I tell Tobias.

“Do you want to?” Tobias growls, taking a step toward me. I shake my head, taking a step back.

“No, I didn’t mean it like that. I have no magic that can hurt him, but I wouldn’t even if I did,” Tobias watches me for a second.

“You wouldn’t hurt him,” he mutters and nods before looking back at the mirror again.

“But would you leave again?” Was that a trick question? As if I would stay if given the opportunity to leave. Who would want this for life? I don’t answer, knowing he could tell if I lied anyway.

“You can shower, and don’t be late for class,” he says, walking out. I quickly raced over and locked the door.

I had the quickest shower in history before chucking on some jeans and shirt that I found sitting on the end of my bed. Yet no shoes. I curse as I rip the brush through my hair, hoping I don’t have to do anything outdoors today. When I was done, I made my way downstairs to the mess hall; walking in, the chatter stopped instantly. All eyes turned to me, and I

line, but they refused to serve me, instead making me help myself.

Filling my plate, I looked for an empty spot. The only table was next to the toilet at the back. I walked over and sat down with a sigh, eating my food and trying to ignore their gazes watching me. I was on edge, and the room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Thankfully though, the bell rang, and I waited for

everyone to leave before following out after them. I was hoping to follow them to class, but they all went off in different directions, which had me wandering aimlessly, trying to figure out where to go, when I ran into Lycus in one of the halls. This place was a maze.

“Why aren’t you in class?” He snapped at me.

“I don’t know where to go?”

“Did you bother to ask?” Now, why would I after Zac’s warm greeting? I shook my head, and he growled. Lycus walks over to me and grabs my arm.

“You’re lucky Darius isn’t back yet. He would fucking lose it if he found out you ditched again,”

“I wasn’t ditching. I don’t know where to go,” I snapped at him, ripping my arm from his grip. Lycus growls, watching me for a second.

“Fine, find your class yourself,” he says, walking off.

“Can’t you show me?” I ask him, but he ignores me and keeps walking. I had no idea which part of the castle or what floor I was on, but all doors were shut when the siren went off. Men flooded the halls barging past, and few called me a traitor, making me scrunch my face up in confusion. I tried to ask a few if they knew what class I had next when I saw Zac at the end of one of the corridors. I quickly turned to race down the next flight of steps.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 20

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Chapter 20

“Aleera!” He called, and my blood ran cold. I raced down the steps, quickly disappearing amongst the other demons.

Getting to the bottom of the steps, someone shoved me, and I hit the ground. I looked to see who it was, but too many men to pinpoint which one, and I cried out when another stomped on my fingers.

"There she is," I heard Zac's voice just before a fireball rushed toward me. I shrieked, just managing to move, and it evaporated as it hit the ground where I was.

"Let's see how pretty she is without all that hair," Zac's voice says, making me look up the steps. Zac smiled, and his eyes glistened evilly as he played with another fireball bouncing it in his hand. I took off running down the corridor. I didn't stop running until I ended up in a hall on my own. I had no idea if he was still intending to burn my hair off when I stopped to try and catch my breath.

"I think she went this way," I heard Deacon's voice. I cursed and started trying doors, finding most of them to be rooms set up with bunks, and I figured it wouldn't be a good idea to hide in one of their rooms. I could hear the screech of their shoes as they ran toward me before I burst through another door and quickly shut it.

Looking around, I find it is a classroom. I could hear them opening and closing doors in the corridor and looked around for somewhere to hide before spotting a jar of pens and noticing some scissors. I grab them before darting underneath the desk.

If I get out of this, the hair is going. I was chopping it off. My heart stopped when I heard the door open. I clutched the scissors in my hand as I heard footsteps walk toward the desk. The chair is dragged out, and my eyes meet with Tobias's. He went to no doubt curse me out when Zac's voice reached my ears, and I jumped, bumping my head on the top of the desk.

Tobias growled and sat down just as the door burst open. I froze; I even held my breath.

"What?" Tobias snapped, pushing his chair in and caging me in with his legs.

"Shit, sorry, Sir," I hear the door creak like Zac was about to leave before it stopped.

"Have you seen the traitor bitch?" My heart skipped a beat at Zac's words.

"No, now get out of my fucking classroom." (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

"Sorry, sir," Zac says before I hear the door shut. I let out a breath, but Tobias doesn't move. Glancing at

the scissors, I quickly pocket them before tapping his leg. Still, he doesn't move.

"Tobias?"

"You never answered me this morning," he says, pushing the chair out a little to look at me but not enough for me to get out.

"You would know if I lied, so I didn't think it was worth answering," he growls.

"Um, can I get out?"

"You missed my class,"

"I couldn't find it,"

"You know Darius won't be happy when he finds out," he pushes his chair back further, and I scramble out before being trapped between him and his desk.

"Unless," Tobias said. I swallowed, and my thoughts went to Darius last night and his cruelty playing with the bond. All night I was Restless from the pain of being rejected and humiliated for falling for it.

"Unless what?"

"I won't tell him, but I want something in return,"

"I am not doing anything sexual with you," I snap at him, trying to push past his leg blocking my way. Tobias stands towering over me. His eyes flicker and turn blood red, and he pins me against the desk by placing his hands on either side of me, and I lean away from him.

Tobias growled, and I watched as his fangs slipped out. "What if I want something else, like your blood?" he asked, and my heart rate quickened.

"You want to feed on me?" he nods, sniffing me before grabbing me and burying his face in my neck.

"You smell fucking divine," he growls, I felt his tongue run over the pulse in my neck, and I tried to shove him off and failed miserably when he let me go; he grabs my wrist, bringing it to his nose.

"You smell sweet like Lycus," he whispered. I felt his magic rush over me as he paralyzed me. My body became frozen as my thoughts ran rampant, and my heart thudded painfully.

"Lycus knows," I blurted out, petrified of him feeding on me. Would it hurt? What if he killed me? Vampires weren't the best with control.

"I will take care of Lycus, so what will it be, Aleera. I tell Darius, or you let me feed on you, I promise to be gentle," he said, running his teeth against the inside of my wrist. My eyes widened before thinking of what Darius would do if he found out, but what was stopping Tobias from still telling him. But then again, what was preventing him from feeding on me if he really wanted to anyway.

"Tick tock Aleera, Darius will be back soon; your next class is with him, so pick, or you will be late,"

"And you won't tell him?"

"I won't tell him, besides he would be pissed off if he knew I fed off you, so it will be our little secret," My heart thudded so hard I could hear it, but I found myself nodding anyway, more frightened of what Darius would do if he found out. Apparently, my nodding must have been enough consent because I hissed in the next second as his fangs sank into my wrist, breaking my delicate skin. Initially, it hurt before my wrist and hand tingled; warmth spread through me, making me realize he was using his magic so it wouldn't hurt. He didn't feed off me long.

Tobias then pulled his fangs from my wrist when the siren sounded, signaling next class. I glance at the clock behind him to find it wasn't a clock, but some strange moon wheel, with different, phases of the moon.

Tobias wipes his mouth with his thumb before sucking my blood off it. His eyes glistened, and I watched as he pricked his thumb with one of his fangs before running it over the two puncture marks on my wrist. They closed instantly, and he brought my wrist to his mouth. I thought he was going to bite me again when he ran his tongue over it, licking up the blood that spilled down my wrist. His eyes flicker before going to mine, and he smirks.

“You taste sweeter than Lycus, though,”

“Is that a bad thing?” I asked. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

“Not for me it isn’t, but for you, it may be,” he chuckles darkly.

“Let’s just say I have a sweet tooth,” I take a step back when his eyes glow redder, and he laughs before flicking his wrist, and a portal opens up beside him.

“Get to class,” He says, shoving me through it.

I gasp, feeling his magic swallow me along with the portal before I find myself spat outside on the fields. I landed on my hands and knees. I look around the vast area to get to my feet and see all the men walking in my direction and Darius. He stops cocking his head to the side.

“You decided to show up and on time. Thought you would have run when you found out your next class was with me,” He laughed as he stopped in front of me. The men moved out onto the field, and I was thankful it was all grass. However, that was short-lived when I realized they were using their elements, and this was a magic class.

Fuck! I curse, knowing I have no magic. All Fae have an element, and I knew I was about to come out of here battered brutally because I wasn’t dealing with Fae but demons, who only had one element and the most lethal, fucking fire. Whereas I was an elemental harmony Fae which is not only rare but extinct, holding not only one but all elements, plus some other odd gifts I couldn’t explain or have dabbled much in but being an elemental harmony Fae was no good to me now with no magic.

“Partner up,” Darius called out. I looked around at all the men, and one smiled at me. The man was a giant, tall with dreadlocks to his waist and mocha-colored skin, his demonic eyes ran the length of me, and I took a step back as he stalked toward me.

"I will take the traitor," The man said. Traitor, why does everyone keep calling me that? Darius nods to him, and I look at Darius. He doesn't surely expect me to fight without magic? I will get destroyed in seconds.

"Let's see how pretty you are without your hair," The man sneered. What is it with everyone trying to ruin my hair?

"Her hair is off-limits; burn her hair off, and I will take fucking your head," Darius tells him, which shocked me.

"But she is a traitor,"

"I don't care; her hair is off-limits," Darius says. Maybe he likes long hair because I know he doesn't like me. Well, he would be in for a rude shock when I cut it off later tonight with the scissors I stole.

I spent most of the class dodging his fireballs, which I was glad was all he used. He could have turned me into a raging inferno but seemed more amused with just tossing them at me. Although, I noticed Darius stayed close for some reason.

My clothes were singed, my arm was burnt, and one hand took a nasty blow. I was exhausted, having spent all my time dodging while the men laughed and watched. Some even sat on the grass just watching my torment as I tried to avoid the flames. Dodging another, my lungs were burning as I ducked,

Scanned with CamScanner

falling to my knees when suddenly flames erupted around me, boxing me in with fiery walls. I jumped to my feet, looking for an escape as they drew nearer, panic gnawing at me. I hated fire, hated it, and nothing scared me more.

"That's enough," I heard Darius growl.

"Don't worry, I will only burn her a little," The man taunted as the flames grew closer. My heart rate skyrocketed as the flames grew closer and closer. I coughed on the smoke and could feel the heat blistering

my skin.

“I said enough,” Darius growled before the flames were blasted with water. I looked through the smoke to see Darius turn and attack the man I was partnered with, drenching him too. Wait, how can he use a water element? I saw him use fire last night?

“My word is law, defy me again, and you will find yourself in the dungeons,” He snarled as I choked on the smoke from the extinguished flames.

Images flickered in my vision, the smoke ridiculously thick, and my eyes burned from the smoke. I remembered this feeling, the choking as each breath burned my lungs; I tried to suck in a breath, my vision tunneling as I was brought back to the night my parents were killed. I stumbled, cursing under my breath, realizing I was having a panic attack.

Air suddenly blasted me as I became dizzy. The smoke was pushed away, and I blinked my brain trying to register where the air magic came from before all I saw was black and heard the snickering laughter of the men surrounding me as I fainted and collapsed on the ground.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 21

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Chapter 21

Darius POV

Aleera was lithe on her feet; I will give her that. She could move when needed making me wonder how much time on the run she actually spent running. She moved quicker without magic than some of my men here who had been in training for years. It was like she anticipated where the next attack would come from, like she could sense it, and I found myself absorbed as I watched her.

Even some of the men had stopped to watch. Most laughed, but most of them were floored with how she moved and she remained almost in the same spot, never stepping out of the barrier. This class was a defense class. You had to block your opponent, yet she had no magic to block with, but she watched. I figured out pretty quickly she studying the flick of his fingers; the way he stood. And it was almost as if she knew what he would do before he did it just by his stance.

Mikhail was one of our best; he never missed a target, and at first, I thought he was holding back, but the longer it went on, I could see his frustration. He really was trying to hurt her; he just couldn't touch her.

I knew I should have stepped in; a pit formed in my stomach when he decided to partner up with her. I initially was going to be partnered with her when he stepped forward, eyes locked on his target, but I was ready to step in if needed. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

I wouldn't have hurt her knowing it would upset Kalen and Lycus, scared her, yes but hurt her probably not with how this stupid bond was growing stronger with each day. Ignoring the pull was becoming harder until I remembered what she inflicted. Which infuriated me even more feeling the pull to her, feeling my mates pull to her. But she deserved it, god did she deserve pain for what she has caused us, but when I noticed her becoming tired, I knew I needed to stop it.

The bond called me to protect her, going absolutely haywire when I saw her get boxed in. Just like that night we found her in her burning room. The entire place was a raging inferno; she had tried to escape but was passed out on her bedroom floor. The moment we stepped into her room, we knew something was amiss. We tried to get back out, but a barrier had been placed on her door and window. Tobias and I only just got her out in time before the roof caved in. Tobias had used his body to shield her and sustained severe burns while I broke the damn barrier spell placed on it.

It took nearly all our power that night to heal her and put the cloaking spell on her and her grandmother so she would be protected. Little did we know it also cloaked us from her once she came of age.

I always felt bad I couldn't heal Tobias. His back was destroyed and he refused to let Lycus and Kalen heal him, knowing our reserves were almost completely depleted. We were literally running off borrowed time.

Two and a half years Tobias and I went without power before we figured out another way to power share. All of us agreed Aleera was not an option. She was too young, and her powers hadn't manifested, and none of us were comfortable with knowing what that meant for her to power share and transfer our power amongst all of us, and it would have been plain disgusting. We were monsters but, not those sort of monsters.

They tried to kill her. We never should have left that day. We simply wanted to tell her parents she was our mate and that we would wait for her to come of age. We never thought they would try to kill her. But as the flames got nearer, I could see her panicked state as she gasped and I knew that was where her mind took her. I could almost feel her panicked state even without marking her. I heard her heart racing, so I

extinguished the flames just as she collapsed on the ground. Mikhail was warned, so I felt nothing towards him when I drove my hand through his chest and melted his heart. A few men gasped around me as his lifeless body fell on the ground at my feet. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

“When I say enough, you fucking stop,” I tell them, letting fire engulf my hand and burn off the residue of blood. Shaking the flames away, I looked down at my mate on the grass. I couldn’t help the snarl that slipped on my face as I scooped her up.

I didn’t want to touch her, but I wouldn’t leave her here unconscious with these men. They could truly be monsters, but none got away with defying me. Yet as I picked up her limp body, damn, she smelt good, felt good in my arms. I shake the thought away and open a portal to her room before stepping through it. Get a grip, idiot, I reminded myself.

Placing her on her bed, she stirred, blinking up at me dazedly, stuck wherever her mind had taken her. I needed to get out of this room, away from her when she rolled on the bed, and I saw something in her back pocket, just an outline and something steel poking out the top. Walking back to the bed, I fished it out to find it was a pair of scissors. My brows furrowed, wondering why she had them. Was she going to try and kill us in our sleep?

Let her try. It wouldn’t end well for her. I placed them on the bedside table next to the bed when she mumbled. “You’re an Elemental,” looking over at her, she was still passed out. Shaking my head, I walked out. She was bound to find out anyway what’s it matter if she knew earlier. I may be the last of my kind in more ways than one, but it is not strictly like I kept that small fact secret from the world. It’s partially why everyone feared me. It was one thing being an elemental, but a dark Fae elemental and demonic-fae was unheard of.

I wondered what Aleera’s perks or gifts would be. I knew she was dark-fae from her schooling paperwork, although it never stated any gifts, she wouldn’t be the first not to have any, but I still wondered briefly before shaking that thought away, who cares we would never know anyhow. But each of us had certain gifts that were our own.

Walking through the shared bathroom, I open the door only to bump into Kalen. He clearly wasn't expecting to find me in her room. He glances past me before tilting his face toward mine. His hands connected with my chest, and his magic fizzled out as he tried to use it. If he had done that to Lycus, he probably would have shoved him through the wall. Yet his dark magic was no match for mine dying out as it touched me, and I felt my magic get a jolt as it absorbed it.

"What did you do to her," he demanded, trying to shove past me.

I grip his arm, shoving him through to our room before locking the door. I glanced at him. His aura was all over the place, his anger being the strongest to come through, but I could see the madness lurking through it. Lycus warned me this morning he was too upbeat and energetic. What comes with the high is a massive low.

"Where is your medication?"

"What did you do to Aleera," he snapped, trying to get past me to the door.

"Where are your meds, Kalen? You promised Tobias you would take them,"

I could feel our mates getting nearer as his emotions became more turbulent. They could sense his aggravation. I tried to reach for him, and I cursed, giving his magic back as I watched a portal open up. Grabbing him and pinning him when I saw it led to Aleera's room just as Lycus all but smashed the door in to help subdue him, only it was too late as I tackled him, another portal opening up and swallowed him just as he punched me. His fist connected with the side of my face knocking me off him. I hit the ground where Kalen should have been.

"Where did he go, where did it lead," Lycus panicked. Jumping to my feet, I raced to Aleera's room and burst through the door. Aleera was sitting up on the bed. She looked over at me.

Kalen, however, was not in the room. "Is he in there?" Lycus said, smacking into my back.

Aleera looked at us, confused. "What's-"

"Stay in your room." I snapped at her before slamming the

door.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 22

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Chapter 22 Aleera POV

I woke up dazed and confused and back in my room, and I couldn't remember how I got here. The last thing I remember was being out in the training fields, and I remembered Darius using his magic. I rubbed my temples, looking around the small space when the door bursts open. Darius's eyes fell on me, and at first, I thought he would scold me, but the panicked look on his face told me he wasn't in my room to deliver some punishment.

"Is he in there?" Lycus said, bumping into the back of Darius.

"What's-" I wanted to ask what happened, but Darius cut me off with a glare

"Stay in your room." he snapped at me before slamming the door so hard I was surprised it didn't break.

Something niggled at my insides, dread filling me, and I wasn't sure if it was my own feeling or the intuition of the bond that had been growing stronger daily. Without realizing it, I ran my fingers over my infinity marking with their names.

Kalen flooded to the forefront of my mind before my room suddenly disappeared. Just evaporated around me. My stomach tried to rise into my throat when I felt pulled into new surroundings. I had no idea what I had done, but I was suddenly inside Kalen's head.

I couldn't hear his thoughts but could see out his eyes, see what he saw. I appeared to be in some attic. Dust-covered boxes were scattered everywhere. His hands started banging on his head as he yanked his hair, nails scraping down his face. I could feel his flesh tearing, and I wondered what was wrong with him, why he was acting this way. I wanted to understand, and I cursed that I couldn't hear what he was thinking. What good was it to be in someone's head if all you got was seeing what they saw and feeling what they felt.

His emotions were all over the place as I tried to understand them when I was pushed out. I gasped, feeling

breathless. How did I do that? I had no magic. Maybe it was a trick of the mate bond or possibly my harmony side of my magic. All I knew was I somehow thought of him, and I was suddenly in him.

I looked down at the infinity symbol, confused. One thing I did know was I got the same nagging feeling of panic I saw on Darius and Lycus's face, that he shouldn't be alone. That he was a danger to himself. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

Moving toward the door, I was shocked to find it unlocked. Darius must not have checked the main entrance or forgotten with his worry. I peeked out into the hall and saw no one. Darius said to remain in my room, yet I found my feet moving on their own as I wandered aimlessly around. Coming to the stairs, I stopped when I heard Tobias's frantic voice and Lycus and Darius were arguing over where Kalen would go.

"He is not in the usual places," Lycus worried.

"Can either of you feel him?" Tobias asked. I glimpsed over the banister, I was on the third floor, and they were on the ground floor.

"What happened? What did you do this time to set him off, Darius," Tobias said, gripping Darius's shirt.

"What do you think he did? He probably did something to Aleera. You know how he gets when it has anything to with her," Lycus snapped.

"Fighting with me is not helping to find him; I did nothing. I only asked if he took his medication because I could tell he hadn't,"

"Shit!" Tobias curses.

"What is it?" Darius demanded, and I looked over to see Tobias clutch his head.

"I told him if he took them, I would let him see her tonight,"

“You what?”

“She won’t hurt him, Darius, I think she even likes him,”

“If she liked him, she wouldn’t have run the first chance she got,” Lycus scoffs.

“I don’t know, but she is different around him,”

“How so? I swear if she has done something, I will fucking end her,” Darius snarled.

“No, not that. Like she can sense the shadows on him. I can’t explain it, but she is different when it comes to him,” Tobias argued back.

“Maybe?”

“No!” Both Lycus and Darius bellowed at the same time. I turned away, having heard enough. I wasn’t sure what was going on with Kalen but I needed to find him, the bond pulling me toward him and urging me to get to him. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

I had no idea where I was going, but I seemed to have wandered into an almost empty part of the castle. This side was cold and the draft told me it had been closed for a long time. Dust clung to the walls and the sparse furnishings. Pushing the door further open, I slip inside.

The cold draft washed over me and sent a chill up my spine from my toes. This place looked untouched, and I wondered how long I had wandered for before coming to this blocked-off part of the castle. It was eerily silent over here and gave me the creeps. Walking down the large hall, I looked at the high ceilings, the chandeliers covered in cobwebs. This place looked like it was out of some medieval movie. Like I stepped back in time to a different world. I ran my fingertips over the hallstand before brushing the dust off.

Even without having magic, I could tell this place was abandoned and forgotten for a reason. Something terrible happened within this part of the castle. Moving further down the hall, I stopped in front of a massive portrait of a man. He had a startling resemblance to Darius before my eyes fell on the teenage boy

at his side. Reaching up, I swiped the dust off his face and it was indeed Darius. The man had his hand on his shoulder, and Darius appeared to be about thirteen or fourteen. Both dressed in a suit, and he shared his father's features, the same cold eyes, and expressionless face.

Giving it one last look, I let the bond pull me to another corridor lined with doors, yet I never got the urge to enter any of them as I passed them, instead my feet took me to the end to a large door with silver knobs.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 23

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Chapter 23

I twisted it, having to push my weight against it as I shoved it open. I coughed and choked on the dust, and the draft here was so much colder. Ice cold and made me shiver. Stone steps led up. Climbing them, I stopped halfway up the spiraling stone steps to a stained glass window.

I peered out and saw the back of the castle lands but that wasn't all I noticed. It was road. I was high enough to see over the forest and I could just make out with my heightened vision a road snaked between the forest as a car drove along the narrow-looking path.

That could be my escape, yet I wondered how it led into the castle grounds or if it did. Ascending further up the steps, I find I am in a round room. The pointed ceiling told me I had found my way to one of the castle towers. By the time I got to the top. I was covered in cobwebs and dust.

The wooden floorboards creaked as I stepped inside. Boxes covered nearly all of the floor when I noticed a figure that looked out of place amongst the boxes. Kalen laid on the floor, his cheek pressed against the floorboards. He was murmuring to himself in a language I hadn't heard before, or maybe it didn't exist because his words held no sense to me.

"Kalen?" I murmured but he didn't move, and the feeling I got from him was cold and numb, shadowed with darkness.

I called out his name a couple of times before giving up and laying on the ground beside him; I laid on my side facing him. His eyes were closed and his lips moved as he spoke to himself in a barely audible whisper. I reached out and brushed his cheek gently with my hand. His eyes flew open, going to mine. I don't think he had heard me calling his name or felt my presence. He seemed to be in some trance-like state before I touched him or maybe he still was, I was unsure.

He grabbed my hand on his cheek, kissing my palm, and he looked so vulnerable, desperate as he clutched my hand. My hand cracked in his tight grip, but I just gritted my teeth through it instead of jerking it away.

"You're here, are you really here?" he whispers, kissing my wrist and hugging my arm and hand to his chest.

"You feel real. I can even smell your scent," He whispers.

"I'm real, Kalen," I tell him, but he mumbles to himself incoherently. His behavior scared me. He almost seemed insane.

"Why are you up here? It is freezing," I tell him.

"I don't think it's cold, is it cold?" he asked. I wasn't sure if he was talking to himself or me. His eyes stared at me, but it was like he was looking through me. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

"I don't want to go with them," he mumbles.

"Go with who?" I ask him, and he wiggles closer.

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"They want me back; I shouldn't be here. They want me back with them,"

"Who wants you back, Darius?"

"No, they won't let me near you. They took you from me," his words made no sense because I was right in front of him.

“Now, I can’t see you,”

“Why can’t you see me? I am right here, Kalen,” I tell him.

“But I won’t be able to see you. They will make me take the pills. I don’t want to the pills. I don’t want Darius to take it away. He always takes you from me, I need you, I need you,” He mutters. I moved closer, pressing my forehead against his.

“I love you, Aleera. I have always loved you,” he mutters, wiggling closer to me, so his body was against mine. My heart twisted painfully in my chest? Was he like this because of me? Did my leaving send him insane? Surely a keeper didn’t have this much power and influence over their mate.

“Kalen, we should head back to Darius,” I tell him. I didn’t know what to do. And I didn’t want to say the wrong thing, I wasn’t sure if he was violent in this state, but I knew I didn’t want to find out. Kalen shakes his head.

“We can stay a little longer; I don’t want you to disappear again, just a while longer,” I chewed my lip, knowing I needed to call them somehow, but I had no magic when my eyes darted to Kalen. I could feel his dark magic oozing off him, it had utterly enveloped him, and it was so thick and strong, almost glowing off him, and I was surprised I hadn’t noticed when I came in.

Darius would kill me, but I didn’t know what else to do. We couldn’t stay up here, but siphoning even just enough magic to alert them to my whereabouts meant they would know I touched his power. I swallowed, deciding I would take the wrath of Darius. I was their keeper. This was what I was supposed to be for, transferring power from one to the other and it was almost too easy as I touched my fingers to his hand that still clutched hand tightly. My fingers were purple as the circulation was cut off.

I barely touched him, but I gasped as his dark magic flowed through me, making me giggle as it tickled my sense when I felt it trying to change to light. I couldn’t allow that, so I quickly touched my mark, sending the power through my infinity symbol. It glowed silver but didn’t burn like it did the first time. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

Just tingled when I felt a weird sensation, almost like an intuition run up my arm from my mark, letting me know they felt it, and I was glad I didn’t try to revel in the feel of Kalen’s magic, they would have noticed my power change, and they may have figured out what I was. Despite sending the magic into my mark, it

lingered in my veins writhing through me, and I felt it give my magic a little kick, urging it to life and my senses tingled with ecstasy before it died out, knowing Darius wouldn't let me keep it.

Tasting Darkness By Jessicahall Chapter 24

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Chapter 24

My mind flicked to Kalen in this vulnerable state. I could take his power and escape, but I couldn't do it for some reason. It would be so easy, but I felt like I would condemn him if I did. The floor creaked as I heard three sets of feet step into the room. I could smell the buzz of electricity as a portal opened up. I glanced over my shoulder to see Darius, Tobias, and Lycus step into the room.

"You were supposed to stay in your room," Darius told me, and I nodded.

"How did you find him?" he demanded like I was the one that brought him here.

"I don't know; I just found myself here. I don't even know where I am, only that I was in some abandoned part of the castle,"

"What, you just stumbled across him?" Darius snapped and Lycus walked around Kalen and kneeled on the other side of him. He grips his shoulder.

"Kalen, can you hear me," Lycus whispers.

"I won't let you take her from me again. Why is it bad? I just want to see her," Kalen mumbled, and Lycus's eyes went to me. I could feel them all looking at me.

"I am right here, Kalen," I tell him.

"But not for long, they always take you away, always take you away," my brows furrowed in confusion. Lycus pried his hand from mine.

"She is right there, Kalen," Lycus whispers, kissing his cheek. Kalen just stared through me like he wasn't

really seeing me when Lycus placed Kalen's hand on the side of my face.

"See, can't you feel her?"

"She is right in front of you," Lycus tells him.

"Why can't I feel her," Kalen mutters, his eyes scanning my face. His words confused me.

"She has no magic, that is why, but she is right there,"

"You lie, you always lie, then take her from me," Lycus looks behind me at Darius, and I hear movement before I watch Tobias kneel beside him. Kalen growled before he could even touch him. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

"Leave him. He may hurt her if you try," Lycus tells Tobias. His hand fell to his side and I figured he was going to try to compel him.

"Your point being?" Darius growled.

"He would never fucking forgive himself, Darius. Stop being a dick," Lycus snarled, his canines slipping out in his anger.

"Well, what do you suggest then, Lycus? He hasn't had one of these for months. You know it is the only way," Darius snaps at him. Lycus eyes went to me fleetingly, and Darius growled at him.

"Darius, she won't hurt him, will you Aleera," My brows furrow in confusion at Tobias's words.

"What?" I asked when Lycus suddenly gripped my arm, and I felt his magic rush into me with a significant force when without thinking, I felt myself latch onto it and drain him. It made me almost choke before he let go stumbling backward, his eyes wide. Tobias grabs him, and the atmosphere suddenly ripples with Darius's rage at what I had done. I remained still, unmoving. Lycus looked at his hand when I felt Darius grab my arm in his grip, and I knew he was about to take it off me when Kalen made a strangled noise. My eyes darted to his as he blinked at me like it was the first time seeing me.

His lips part and I know he could sense Lycus magic running through me, yet I remained still. Not moving, knowing if I did, Darius may just kill me for what I accidentally did, but the moment Lycus tried to force me to take, his magic bond latched on to him like a starving person getting its first-ever meal and absorbed it completely.

I know that wasn't Lycus intention. He would have only . wanted me to take enough that Kalen could feel me beside him, feel my nonexistent aura that was extinguished with my power.

"You're glowing," Kalen murmured, and I chuckled, yet his following words made me stop.

"You have color in your aura," I swallowed, wondering what gifts he had that he could see it. I focused on the power running through me, fighting the urge to let the bond change it, trying my best to ignore it as it tried to seep in deeper and mingle. I felt like I was back in school fighting to keep my secret kept.

Fighting myself so no one would notice, I forgot how much strain it was from stopping the light from mixing with the dark and morphing it into something else entirely. I couldn't control my aura for those who could see it, but only one other person I had come across had the gift to see someone's essence within it.

Yet the other person died when we were attacked. I didn't even know his name, but he saved me and sacrificed himself to do it, but I still remembered the look on his face. "Well, don't you burn brighter than the sun, the first time I have seen a rainbow aura. I knew there would be something special about you," he had said, then he smiled before the bloodhounds came for us.

I tried to save him, but he shoved me through a portal when we couldn't run anymore.

"They will come for you," He screamed when the portal sucked me in. When I tried to portal back, I couldn't like he blocked me from returning to help him.

"Why did you do that?" Kalen asked, pulling me from the memory.

“Do what?” I asked him without thinking. (This Novel Daily Latest Chapters provide it www.InfoBagh.Com)

“Change it to dark. Can you make the color come back?” I ignored his question but could feel everyone’s eyes watching us when Kalen reached his hand, brushing the air around me, his fingertips touching my aura. I could feel him through it, I couldn’t see my own, but I could feel him touching it; it was an odd sensation.

“What are you?” he asked suddenly.

“I’m like you,” I told him, and I noticed Tobias tilt his head to the side observing me and I swallowed, wondering if he could tell I lied but I hoped I had cloaked it enough. Kalen went to say something, but I cut him off. I needed him to be quiet. It would raise suspicion if he kept talking of my aura or whatever he sensed. He wasn’t of sound mind right now, so I could play it off by letting them think it was his ramblings.

“We should get you back to your room, Kalen,” I told him.

“They will take it away,”

“Take what away, I am right here?”

“He means his power,”

“We won’t have a choice, now. Not until he is stable enough to have it back,” Lycus explained.

“I don’t understand,” I admit.

“Of course, you don’t. How could you when you weren’t here,”

“Darius, not now,” Lycus warns him. Darius’s grip on my arm was tight still when a thought flicked through me, and I realized why Kalen’s aura was so cold and dark.

He had died. It wasn't darkness but shadows of death. I suddenly remembered doing classes on it in school. The more someone was brought back, the more fragile they became mentally. It is also why the keeper of mates is important. They can cleanse the shadows or share it with their mates until it dissolves.

"I.. could..um.." I stopped knowing they would disagree, I already had Lycus power running through me, and I knew that made them nervous, more so since they weren't sure exactly what my gifts were.

Darius growled as I moved and gripped Lycus's shirt while he tried speaking to Kalen. Everyone froze at my actions. Darius's hand was suddenly wrapped around my throat in warning. Not tight, but like he was seeing what I was going to do.

Lycus's eyes were on mine, and Tobias was on his feet with speed unlike any other. My hands shook as I let his shirt go before touching his face. I gave it back; I couldn't believe I just willingly handed his magic back to him like I was giving him a piece of paper. He gasped as it rushed out of me, my hand glowing with the darkness of his magic before it fizzled out of me, leaving a hollowness inside me.

They all looked at me dumbfounded. Kalen tilted his face up, and I could feel his confusion at the sudden deadly tension in the room. I knew I only had a second before Darius ripped me away from all of them. I wouldn't have time to take it without him willingly giving it to me via touch. I knew that. So I acted quickly.

My lips crashed against Kalen's hard, so hard I hurt myself, but the moment they did, the bond flared to life, devouring the shadows tainting his magic completely. So cold, and I took it way too fast. Darius ripped me away and tossed me on the ground within seconds of touching him. I choked, gagging on the taste of it as I crawled to my hands and knees. My back ached, yet the pain running through me from his magic hurt way more. Smoky and twisted, I had never felt anything colder before in my life.

A scream left my lips, and I didn't know how Kalen coped with it as I gasped for air, feeling like I was dying, and the air in my lungs turned ice cold. I tried to suck in a breath, but I couldn't like my lungs to work; I didn't know how to function anymore. My vision tunneled as the room darkened around me. Everything numbing with the coldness of it.

"Wait, he still has his magic. She didn't take it, Darius," Lycus screamed. I passed out just as he grabbed my hair. My body fell limply on the hardwood floor. I needed air. I couldn't breathe; I needed to breathe. These were my last thoughts as I succumbed to the darkness.

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