

CHAPTER 13: UNHINGED CRAZY WOMAN

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BRIAR'S POV

I pull as hard as I can on her ugly blonde hair and raise the knife high enough, aiming for a nger—any one will do.

The best part about dull blades is that it takes more than one swipe to really cut into anything, meaning I get to have a bit of fun. Turns out, I only get squeamish around blood when it's not my own.

We're interrupted by another scream coming from the doorway, making me realize that her friend is back, and with the company she went to bring along.

"Annalise!" she screams like a banshee, sprinting toward us and pulling her away from me, clutching her shivering friend like a newborn babe. "What did she do to you!"

Oh, I haven't even started to do anything yet.

Annalise sobs like a child, weeping and rubbing at her eyes, her devious nature turning soft and gentle almost instantly before her mouth opens.

"She hit me with a bottle. She wanted to hurt me... all because I offered to help her."

"What?" I stare back at the delusional b***h in pure disbelief, like I didn't just hear her.

Help me? Had I just imagined the past ve minutes?

No, the page is still on the oor, detached from the book. It really happened. She's lying to protect herself.

Only, her friend eats it right up, facing me with rage before she lunges at me, grabbing at my own hair now.

"How dare you touch Annalise? You wicked thing. She only wanted to help!"

I scream in pain, wincing from the unhealed trauma, before grabbing at hers too and yanking harder, hard enough to pull out bits of her hair.

We enter a full-on brawl, and I have no plans of backing out—not with the pent-up frustration in my blood, not after the constant streams of disrespect I've had to face from people beneath me.

The crowd around us continues to grow slowly, and soon the chanting begins.

"Fight! Fight! Fight!"

Both of us topple over, and I emerge on top, throwing blows at her right in the face, doing her good indirectly. My consistent blows give her no time to recover and hit back.

I unleash my rage on her face, striking over and over again, still insistent on getting that nger from her friend once I'm done with her.

The chanting fuels my rage... until it ceases in an instant.

"What is the meaning of this!" A voice echoes into the hallway, and all the servants go quiet instantly, all of them pulling back and shutting up like they weren't part of it seconds earlier.

The crowd around gives way, and the head maid springs forward with an icy glare, cold enough to freeze me solid.

And it does once she sees me on top of her maid, beating her. She adjusts the spectacles on her eyes, glaring daggers at me.

"Separate them!" she shouts an order, and male servants pull me away from the girl in an almost robotic fashion, against my will, and help her up.

I break free from their hold, insisting on standing on my two feet before facing her glare again, something solely pointed at me.

As if all of this is my fault.

"What happened here... Annalise?"

Just like that, the little snake springs forward, sobbing softly while still holding onto my book.

She runs into the old woman's arms, whose countenance softens while she consoles her with a single pat.

"I don't know why she suddenly attacked us, Auntie Hail..." she cries out, putting on a show for everyone and infuriating me once more.

I suddenly regret not cutting her nger off rst before her friend got back instead of reveling in her terror.

"That's a lie, Hail. That little rat knows exactly what she did," I defend myself.

"It's Madam to you," her anger toward me is reinforced by this Annalise girl.

"What is going on here?" The voice, cold and commanding, cuts through the bustling crowd, and the room instantly falls silent, the air growing chilly.

I sense him before I see him—the light tingle on my skin, the cold shiver down my spine.

The crowd parts, almost fearfully, and Tavian strides forward, his presence lling the room with an unmissable stench of dread.

"Alpha, I apologize for cutting my report short and having to leave right in the middle of it." She bows to him a full 90 degrees.

It seems they were together right before she got here.

Well, shit... just when I was free of him for a day.

Tavian's gaze cuts through me, cold and hard, brimming with a darkness that makes my skin crawl. There's something else lurking there, something even more sinister.

"What happened here?" he asks.

"Well, of course, I was cleaning like you told me to and—"

"Not you." He cuts off, shutting me up, right before Madam Hail responds.

"Well, to my knowledge, she attacked two maids unprovoked while doing the task you assigned to her."

"And has she nished said tasks?" he asks, obviously knowing I haven't by the looks of it.

He just wants her to say it, to prove some kind of sick point.

"No, she hasn't," she responds again, eyes now watching me just as Tavian's are.

Now everyone is staring at me, the dozens of eyes gathered in the room once praising my victory now watch me, judge me, as though I'm some unruly, uncivilized thing.

An unhinged crazy woman.

I falter backward, tasting bile rising in the back of my throat, ghting the urge to vomit right in front of them, wanting to hide myself from eyes that taunt me just like last night.

"Briar..." Tavian nally speaks. He shakes his head like a disappointed father would. "I'm glad to see you haven't changed. Still the same bloodthirsty creature you were years ago."

"No... Tavian, I swear there's more to this story... I didn't."

"Kneel."

"Wh-what?"

He draws closer to me.

"When you speak to me, you will kneel." His voice is soft, almost gentle, yet the dark threat laced within it sends shivers down my spine.

My entire body goes rigid with warning blaring in my head. My instincts scream at me to obey... or else.

My legs give way beneath me, and I fall to my knees, trembling like a sh out of water, unable to utter another word.

"Hail."

"Yes, Alpha." She steps forward.

"List her offenses."

"Failing to complete a task within the given time-frame. Assaulting her colleagues without reason, partaking in violent acts under the Alpha's roof, causing a nuisance and disrupting the normal ow of activities, creating a scene that is unbetting of the staff serving the Alpha, and presenting a sight that is displeasing to the Alpha."

"And what is the routine penalty for all these?"

"Extensive whipping before an expulsion from the pack."

He muses for a moment, stroking his jaw as if lost in thought. When his eyes lock onto mine again, the glint in them is terrifying.

A small, chilling smile plays on his lips as he draws closer. I shiver and try to pull back, but he grabs my chin, forcing me to meet his piercing silver gaze.

"Don't worry, my dear, I'm not so cruel as to kick you out of my pack. I want you here, to stay with me forever." He strokes my hair brie, then lets me go, allowing me to breathe again.

"Let the aggrieved step forward."

The brown-haired girl, Leslie, steps forward, her face partially swollen, holding what looks like a horse whip.

Suddenly, the two who had pulled me away from the ght grab me again. Realization of what's going to happen next hits me too late.

I struggle in their hands, trying to free myself, but it's pointless. They hold me in place, giving Leslie the chance to draw close to me.

"Strike her."

She raises the whip high in a swift motion, and the leather strikes against the esh of my back, ripping my skin with the rst blow.

I scream, clenching my sts and squeezing my eyes shut to withstand the blow, to hold back the tears that still ow.

"Oh, that was hard," he commends in a dull tone. "Again."

She cracks the whip once more, on the same spot, eliciting more pain. I ght again, struggling to break free, but it's pointless. I can't.

"Again."

"Tavian... please." I beg, tears falling down my face.

It wasn't my fault. I didn't do anything wrong. I'm innocent!

"Again." He repeats, unfeeling, unmoved.

The whipping continues until I don't feel anything anymore, until I have no more energy to ght the pain and my back is a bleeding mess.

He leaves rst, walking away as calmly as he had come without looking back or showing an ounce of pity.

Before she leaves, Madam Hail reminds me to nish up my work, to be done and clean up my own blood before the sun rises or else I'll face another punishment worse than being whipped.

I'm left alone once more in the empty halls as darkness falls, alone to start from the very beginning.

I recall a single moment during the banquet, when he had revealed his identity, when I remembered that his brother had killed himself. When I felt pity for him for losing his brother.

And now I feel no such pity... instead, I think he deserved it.