

CHAPTER 6: MONSTER OF A MAN

BRIAR'S POV

I'm locked in a delicate trance.

Just the sight of him has the memories of the previous night ooding into my subconscious, making the frilly dress I'm wearing suddenly feel too tight.

My eyes must be playing tricks on me.

He's standing up there, right next to my father on the dais. Right where my husband is meant to be.

And there's just no way in hell.

Hours ago, those same grey eyes burned through my esh without reservation.

He took what he wanted without a care, like he had every right to. And right now, the irony of it all isn't lost on me.

The distance between us closes with every step I take, his gaze locked on mine like a challenge.

But... that's it. That's all there is.

There's no spark of recognition. No lick of familiarity.

He's looking at me like we've never met. Is it the makeup? The gaudy dress? Or is he intentionally putting up a front for the sake of everyone around us?

No. The answer solidies within me the closer I get.

If he's trying to play a part... then he's doing it too well. Well enough to come off almost... angry.

The tips of my shoes hit the front of the rst steps, and I'm suddenly frozen in place, watching him watch me.

His eyes narrow at the edges, like a response to my sudden hesitation.

That same dark glint icks between his irises, just like it did twelve hours ago when I came onto him.

And that's when I know.

He does recognize me.

My father clears his throat then, and it travels as a subtle warning.

Yes, I might be frozen to the spot, but not for the reasons he assumes.

All this time, I thought I'd have my hand given off to the worst kind of grubby pig who couldn't get a woman with his wits no matter how hard he tried.

I'd prepared myself for it.

Tricked myself into believing it wouldn't be the end of the world.

Everything I'd done was solely for the sake of gearing me up for this very moment.

And with everything in me, I knew I would dread it. I knew I'd resent the man who would have stood here today for the rest of my life.

Last night's surge of rebellion seems moot and pointless now. But most of all... embarrassing.

Did he know it was me all along? Had he known I was the girl whose hand he acquired?

He couldn't have paid so much money without knowing fully well what he was getting, could he?

My mind travels back to the night before. His low, "or something," echoes in the walls of my head once again.

Goddess. Am I the stupidest girl to ever walk planet earth?

Or is this just the most inconceivable coincidence to ever occur in the history of my life?

I'm caught off guard as his hand stretches, palm up, as he holds it out for me to take.

My brain has short-circuited in the last few minutes, but my hand slides over his, and I bite back a physical reaction to the electric currents shooting up my arm from just a simple touch.

He guides me up the steps, and as he turns to me, the harsh set of his jaw accentuates a stern expression.

His gaze drops, moving from the hand gripped in his to the one at my side, like he's looking for something.

And that's when the silver ring hidden underneath my bra sings my skin with guilt.

He knows I stole his ring.

Just as his gaze settles back on my face, the ociant commences the wedding and mating ceremony.

It's equal parts torturous and exhilarating.

He holds me hostage with his eyes on mine, and without a single word uttered, he manages to keep me wrapped in his orbit until the nal, "You may now kiss your chosen mate," echoes into the morning air.

He takes the initiative without hesitation, sinking his ngers into the hair at the nape of my neck, angling my head to his taste.

His mouth seals over mine, the familiar warmth of his masculine scent swallowing me whole.

I'm light as a feather, rapidly descending into a suspended state of bliss. Nothing about this is how I'd expected it to play out.

Somehow, the tragic future I'd prepped myself for no longer seems like something I have to be worried about.

The intensity of his kiss proves just how much he remembers me.

It's almost inappropriate how long it takes before he pulls away. And I'm a ustered mess as the nuptials are nalized.

This is going to be good. He's not some deadbeat nearing the end of his lifespan. Not someone old enough to be my father either.

He's a man most women would dream to receive a sliver of attention from. And now, he's all mine.

Just as tied to me as I am to him.

It's almost like the situation couldn't have taken a better turn if the goddess pulled the strings herself.

But as he slips the ring onto my left hand, the loud commotion at the entrance to the gathering proves me very, very wrong.

My head snaps in the direction of the noise as guards ood the clearing.

A bitter-faced Lucas trails after them with a sobbing Tess clinging to him for dear life.

Shit.

A loud bellow echoes from behind me as Dad steps forward in anger.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Lucas barely pays him any mind, the weight of his anger targeted solely at me.

His face colors red in rage as he growls, "How dare you treat my mate in such a manner?" His eyes slant into deathly slits. "What f****g right do you think you have to assault her?"

Tess cries into his arms, the blue tinge on her skin letting me know exactly where it is he found her, and the weight it could possibly have.

A lump forms in my throat, my ngers unconsciously curling into the sleeve of Tavian's suit.

My father takes a confused glance between Lucas and me, wondering what the hell he's talking about.

But Lucas didn't come here to play games.

"Seize her!" he orders.

A dozen guards march up the aisle without a lick of hesitation, obeying their prince's command.

My heart lurches as one of them grips my hand tightly before my father can intercept him.

He forces me down the step with a rough tug, but my balance is lost as the force suddenly disappears, a dull thud landing beside my feet.

One glance down and bile travels up my throat at rapid speed.

A tortured cry rips from the guard's chest as he clutches his bloodied, severed wrist.

The one now separate from the rest of his hand oozes blood onto the white material of my dress on the oor.

A scream builds inside me, but it's suddenly swallowed down at the spatter of blood sprayed all over my dress.

The guard's body drops to the oor with a gurgled cry as he clutches his throat, blood pouring through his ngers like a broken tap.

It was all too fast to even process.

But as the guard falls into a lifeless heap on the oor, a deathly type of stillness overtakes the entire crowd.

Tavian pulls his hand back, retracting his claws with a depraved kind of ease.

He reaches for the handkerchief in his breast pocket, pulling it free and wiping the mess off his ngers.

Calm as ever, maintaining a level of indifference a man who just took another's life shouldn't, all he does is utter two words.

"Who's next?"