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## Chapter 1

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"ALICE! ALICE! HALT, PLEASE."

Alice Andrews let out a loud sigh as she forced her sneaker-covered feet to stop when in reality she wanted to run in the opposite direction, even though the twenty-two-year-old was not exactly known for her athletic ability.

Even *if* she had been some hot shot athlete on a scholarship, she doubted her short legs could outrun him. The *him* Alice was currently talking about and the persistent thorn in her side was Kyvan. No last name, just Kyvan.

In the few short conversations she'd had with him, he had mentioned he was a foreign exchange student who had somehow landed his hot ass in her tiny private liberal arts college in remote Vermont.

They had meet two weeks ago in passing, when he had accidentally bumped into her when she had been nose deep into her planner trying to figure out how many more weeks until her college graduation. Since then, he hadn't left her alone even though Alice considered herself a pretty forgettable person who enjoyed her alone time.

Despite her cold shoulder, Kyvan was a pretty persistent

man from France or Germany or perhaps even Demark. He had never given her a straight answer when she inquired about it. All Alice knew was he had a thick accent, was stupid hot, and used old-fashioned words like "halt" and "versed." Once, Alice had even caught him poring through an old English dictionary from the 1970s.

Still, she couldn't simply dismiss him. For starters, the puppy dog eagerness he had for her had resulted in the jealousy of her roommates which had never happened before, and the larger reason being she didn't want to graduate college a virgin. Kyvan's golden retriever energy was a hell of a lot more welcoming than a surly TA or a stupid frat boy.

"You walk fast," Kyvan mentioned once he reached her in what seemed like three easy steps. "It is an excellent skill to have when potential danger arises."

Alice forced a smile on her face. Kyvan might be handsome, standing at an impressive six foot eight, with dark curly hair that reached his bulky shoulders, striking green eyes, and a chiseled six pack, but it didn't change the fact he was so goddamn weird. Maybe he had grown up in a weird cult before he packed his bags and headed to stalk her in Vermont.

Sure, he showered her with compliments and carried her belongings when they had class in the same building, but it didn't change the fact that the majority of their conversations these past two weeks had gone a little like this: "Would you say you are a relatively healthy young woman?" and "How are the birth rates in your family?" And, of course, she couldn't forget the best one, "Your wide hips are perfect for childbearing, has anyone told you?"

Not to mention, he always seemed to be watching her or close enough to ward off any other potential males who tried to chit chat with her. Being six foot eight and built like a Greek god, made it really hard to blend into the background.

Alice chuckled awkwardly. "Well, thankfully, there is no danger here." She moved her arms to motion to the large forest which surrounded the tiny college. "See, perfectly safe."

One of the reasons she had moved to Vermont for college after her single mom had passed away from cancer two weeks after her high school graduation was because she had wanted to get away from the city, the crowds, and the unnecessary noises. While others might have freaked out being so far away from "civilized society", Alice thrived in the peaceful nature.

"There is always danger, my little Alice." Kyvan's eyes flickered strangely, and for a second, they seemed to change from their deep green color. "You shouldn't dismiss it so easily, especially when it could be closer than you think."

"I'm not little." Alice waved away his warning. It was true she was five foot seven, taller than most other girls, but next to Kyvan, she might as well be an elf. She tugged on her long, black hair which she had neatly braided earlier. "Can I help you with anything, Kyvan?"

The serious expression left his face, to be replaced by a large grin. "Yes, I was hoping we could partake in each other's company tonight. I will bring sweets."

Alice snorted. He was making her seem like a dog who could be lured away with promises of cake and cookies. "Thank you, but I have a date tonight."

Daria Miller, her roommate, had set her up on a blind date with her cousin, Kevin, and the three of them were going to a party tonight hosted by Daria's boyfriend. She wasn't particularly excited about going, but Daria said she couldn't spend the rest of her senior year studying in her dorm room.

Kyvan's mood darkened as he narrowed his eyes at her. He suddenly leaned forward, gripping her wrist. It didn't

hurt, but it was firm enough she wouldn't be able to shake him off. "A date? With another potential mate?"

"A mate? I'm not a bird. Ow, that hurts, Kyvan, let me go," Alice hissed. Kyvan loosened his iron grip but didn't let go. There was still a frown on his handsome face and she would be lying if she said it didn't make him look more handsome. "I'm single. I'm allowed to date, which I'm doing right now."

Kyvan pouted, still holding on to her as if she were a life preserver. "Alice, don't go. I'll be your mate, not another male. I'll take you on a date tonight and give you all the sweets you want."

"Thank you, but I have plans." She used the opportunity to slip her wrist out of his mean grip. He looked like he was about to place her over his shoulder and carry her like a caveman from a bad TV movie, but then his features relaxed.

"I see. I'll see you later, little Alice." He no longer looked angry. More like serene. Like he could see into the future and he was the winner while she played the part of the loser. She didn't know which was worse.

Alice chuckled as she jogged to the Communications building for her first class of her day. "I doubt it, Kyvan."

Later in the evening, close to midnight, Alice was drinking a lukewarm beer in Daria's boyfriend's home pretending to be interested in the conversation with her date of the evening, Kevin.

Her jaw was starting to hurt from fake smiling, but she didn't know how to politely tell Kevin the conversation bored her. He had been talking about his latest fishing trip for the past thirty minutes, and Alice was about to cry from boredom. She should have stayed home tonight,

Alice tugged on her short black dress and looked over Kevin's shoulder, hoping to catch Daria's attention to let her know she wanted to leave, but Daria was too busy

making out with her boyfriend to even look in Alice's direction.

She let out an annoyed huff.

Kevin stopped talking about the best way to remove the eyeballs from a fish's carcass. "Are you okay?"

Alice forced a wobbly smile on her face. "Yes, I just need to go to the bathroom."

"Cool. I'll wait here for you. I have this great story about the time my dad and I went fishing in Montana. You'll laugh your ass off."

"Can't wait!"

Alice waited until Kevin was distracted to sneak out of the house, instead of heading to the restroom. The house was surrounded by drunk college kids, so it was easy to escape unnoticed.

Her heels clicked on the pavement as she walked a few houses down to call for an Uber. The last thing she wanted was to wait outside Daria's boyfriend's house and get caught by Kevin, trying to escape.

Once she had confirmed her ride, Alice waited impatiently for the car to show up as she shivered in her too-short dress. She was on her phone texting Daria a lame excuse indicating she wasn't feeling well when she was suddenly surrounded by bright white light.

At first, she thought it was her ride, but then the lights got bigger. Much too big to belong to a regular car. Alice let out a loud scream. The bright light was coming straight at her, blinding her.

Then, darkness.

Followed by silence.

The brunette wasn't sure how much time had passed when her blue eyes opened. Her head felt heavy, like she was underwater, her body half asleep, as if her muscles had stopped working.

Alice tried to sit up but found she couldn't. Her entire body was strapped to a cold, metal table, the kind used in morgues. She opened her mouth to scream, but only a whimper came out. It was as if her vocal chords had stopped functioning.

A breeze passed through her, causing her thighs to tighten and her pink nipples to pucker like tight little nubs in response. A wave of horror passed through her. She was naked.

Who had taken her clothes? Was it the same person who had taken her from the party? What were they going to do to her? Steal her organs? Cut her eyeballs out? She should have never listened to Daria and gone to the stupid party.

"Relax," a calm voice said as large gray hands palmed her cheeks as if trying to comfort her. "You're very nervous. Your heart rate is elevated, it's not good for your body."

Alice raised her face. At least the voice sounded kind. She immediately regretted the thought when she saw the scene in front of her. Three men were staring at her as if she were a rabbit at the petting zoo. Though she was using the term "men" loosely.

They were extremely tall, with deep gray skin and thick, pulsing veins surrounding their muscled bodies. Their hair was of different shades, but the majority of them wore it long. The one who had tried to calm her down seemed to be the oldest of the three, with snowy white hair. Their front teeth were sharp and pointy like a snake's, but the worst part was their eyes. They were the color of blood. Large and red, like they belonged to the devil himself.

They were monsters.

Some sort of devilish creatures.

She didn't know if they were worse than humans.

Frightened tears started pouring down her face as her

entire body trembled with fear. Her pink lips swelled by how hard she was biting them.

"Put her back to sleep, Orval," the creature with red hair ordered with disgust. "These human females are so sensitive. They're like children who cry at the smallest thing. How they have survived for centuries is still a wonder. I told the king we should have chosen another species, but he seemed to be soft on this one."

"It is because they bring better results," Orval mentioned as he pulled out a large needle. "Without human females, we would have died out a long time ago. It is best if you remember that. Do not criticize our king, for he knows what is best. Sleep, little one."

Alice felt a sharp prick on her thigh and then a burning sensation, as if her whole body had caught on fire. She wanted to scream, to plead for mercy. But almost as suddenly as the pain had come, it had also disappeared.

Once again, she was surrounded by darkness. This time, she welcomed it.

Anything was better than the creatures who had stood over her.