

The Unmaking

The Rayne Whitmore Series
Book I

Alanna J. Faison

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The Unmaking

Chapter One

“Great, don’t tell me that it’s time already for your weird vampire show fixation. What is it this time?” My favorite/ only sister is standing in front of the television, dyed auburn hair cut short with a bang to the left side, nearly covering her eye. The latest brand name jeans are hugging her too-quickly-for-my-liking developing body. She asks, abruptly ending my silent Buffy time that is a monthly ritual of mine. I hadn’t heard her enter the den area connected to my bedroom as I was occupied watching my favorite episodes.

I roll my eyes at her, pretending to be irritated as I pause the episode just as Spike is getting ready to sing his musical number to Buffy. “Do not go there. These shows are sacred and Buffy is a classic.” She smacks her lips in irritation and I give her a smirk.

I look into her almond shaped hazel eyes and then at her cherry glossed full lips that match mine as if we are twins and not six years apart. My sister is very much the type to do her own thing. She has plenty of friends, every type of social networking account imaginable, and access to a private driver that would take her to any of the approved places my parents had given. So, for her to come bother me means that something just has to be going on in her young teen world that needs the advice of her big sister.

We get along extremely well, but we have a mutual understanding that given our age difference, our lives will probably go in different directions. I’m proud of the fact that my sister is independent and does not want to live up under my shadow. Still, if she needs me, I will gladly make time for her no matter what. I’ll do anything for Jasmine. I scoot over on the couch to make room for her and her drama. She looks at me with those gorgeous hazel eyes that we both inherited from our mother and inhales as if she’s going to blow out a 60 candle birthday cake. Twenty minutes later, I know all about Justin Bridges and his quest to have sex with my thirteen year old, hottest eighth grader in the city, apparently, sister. Then, I’m definitely the one to take a deep breath. Then another.



After about two minutes of silence, soulful deliberation, and thoughts of murder-by-hire, I decide, “How about we go for a ride, get some ice cream, and talk about this away from where mom and dad might hear?” *‘I am not going to be the one trying to keep my father, the government security and arms dealer, from unloading a grenade launcher from an unmarked vehicle and pointing it at a fourteen year old boy,’* I think to myself.

“Sounds good to me, but you have to promise not to tell your girlfriend about this. She’ll just encourage you to get one of dad’s men to beat him up. Please Rayne, I know that was your first idea,” Jasmine begs me, her bottom lip poking out. I try to look shocked at her request, but we both know that tomorrow I was going to be waiting outside the school with a couple of my dad’s men to pay this Justin a visit. I was only going to scare him a little, geeze. She’s right, Selene would encourage it too. In the six months that we’ve been together, she’s become extremely protective of Jasmine. That is just one thing I love about her, along with her wonderful taste in pumps.

I put my arm around Jasmine and realize that she has relaxed tremendously after telling me her dilemma. These are the kind of things that sisters do for one another. Besides, if mom knew about this, she’d probably find a way to blame it on me being a lesbian, saying something like,

"Your sister is seeing the deviant lifestyle you are living and is trying to have sex in order to compensate for all the ideas you are putting into her mind." Yep, that sounds about right. Boy, do I love my mom. Yay.

Jasmine waits for me outside my door as I grab my favorite half jacket, all black with rhinestones on the back and silver accents, and fish my keys out of the drawer. I take a quick glance in the mirror to make sure my make-up is still decent. Once I approve, I tuck one side of my long jet black hair behind my ear and head out. Two divas on an ice cream date. As we hop inside my white Aston Martin, I patiently wait until Jasmine is all buckled in before starting the car. Safety first.

"Where do you wanna go, Ms. Lady?" I ask, slowly turning up the volume on my music, then quickly changing the song when "Freek'n You" by Jodeci starts to play. Great, just great; a sex song is not what we need right now. Jasmine, bless her heart pretends not to hear.

I leisurely pull out of our drive and through the high security gates as Jasmine contemplates, then, finally decides on Bingham's lake. I smile and nod. Good choice Jazzy. Bingham's lake is where daddy would take us on boat rides and for fishing whenever we were feeling sad. It has been a long time since it was just the two of us out here alone. There's a nice view of the water through the trees at this spot where I got my first kiss. I was about the same age as her when I kissed the girl I liked. I'll take her there to talk things through.

Thinking back on that time, smiling, I know that I've come a long way. I had loved the way her long blonde hair was always in her face. I was always willing to touch it and put it up in a ponytail for her. That day, I pulled her through the trees to the perfect spot and told her in a whisper, even though no one else was around, that I liked her as more than a friend. I had planned my confession for weeks. How forward I was, and before she could even respond, I had closed the gap between us and kissed her on the lips.

When I opened my eyes and pulled back, she was staring at me blinking, so unsure, yet so, happy that I had done that. I saw it in her eyes, but she still ran away. We never spoke again, but she also never told anyone. Neither had I, as her movie star friends at the time would have probably disowned her. I still remember the sadness I felt waiting for her to return any of my calls.

Do I know movie stars? About a handful, because with money comes exclusive perks, but none that I've ever really bragged about or taken complete advantage of, to my mother's discontent. I have other plans and they don't involve simply being successful just because of who I know. I have faith that I'm capable of more than that.

Sometime in between my trip down memory lane and parking, Jazzy had put on a pair of designer sunglasses and rebrushed her hair back into place. Stealing a quick glance at her, I picture all the boys in her school falling over her, adoring her naturally athletic build, small waist, and beautiful smile, much prettier than mine, as she was blessed with naturally straight teeth and I had needed invisalign. When she gets to high school next year, daddy will have to buy her a taser to keep in her purse.

Daddy is a tall, about 6'2", caramel skinned man with a big grin, short, curly hair, and full lips; mom is white with those astonishing hazel eyes, long brunette hair, athletic shape, and beautiful dimples. Somehow, Jasmine got the very best of both of them. She's on track to be on the World's Most Beautiful People list before she even makes it out of her teens and I'm not exaggerating. My little sister is as friendly as she is beautiful, and that, these days is truly rare.

She and I look a lot alike, but where she has dimples, I have none. Her lips are less full than mine and as I said before, her smile, better. I have more of my father's nose and hers is slightly narrower. Her face is rounder due to her still losing those childlike features and her skin tone is closer to my dad's. She prefers to wear her hair short and always with some reddish tint to it while I love my long, natural wavy hair. Both of us are beautiful and we know it in our own way.

Jasmine is still growing into her confidence and I had already found mine when I was her age. Where she hesitates, I never would have. Where she smiles and tells people she's fine, I tell them point by point why I am not.

We both get out and I push the remote to lock the car and set the alarm. Then, I start down the trail to the spot by the trees with Jasmine trailing behind, clearly thinking. The trees arch over us as if hiding us from the rest of the world. The scent of pine cones and tree flowers fill my nose. There's hardly any wind and the sun is slightly hidden by the clouds as if trying to play peek-a-boo with a baby. The warmth of the day feels good against my face, and I take a deep breath to enjoy the air near the water as I wait for Jasmine to collect her tangle of thoughts.

Kicking up rocks as we go, she finally finds her courage and asks, "Rayne, did you have sex when you were my age?" Instead of looking back at her I decide to continue walking as I acknowledge the question so that I won't embarrass her.

"Well," I start, close my mouth choosing my next words carefully, then, say honestly, "No. I knew that even though sometimes my body really, really wanted to; I knew that my heart wasn't ready."

"When?" she whispers without saying the rest.

"I was sixteen, a couple months before I was seventeen and trust me Jazzy, I was scared to death at first because I was still kind of unsure if I was truly ready." By this time, we reach my favorite spot and take a seat beneath the trees to gaze upon the shimmering water. Geese quacking and fish jumping become our soundtrack for this drama. "I guess maybe, I wasn't then, huh, but I don't regret it. It was special to me and I thought I was in love," I admit.

I didn't really think about my first time too much. After I did it, by the time I had had my seventeenth birthday, that love I thought I felt had been erased partly because after my first time, all she wanted to do was have sex with me. No conversations, no dates, just sex. The other part of me simply cared more about my activities I was involved in such as swimming, track, and of course dancing.

"But what if I want to now?"

Silence. Even the animals seem to quiet down waiting on my response.

"Rayne, what if I'm ready? Maybe not in love, but just ready, to know how it feels?" she asks, searching for the words.

I have to sit here and think, let the words sink in.

"Baby girl, then all I can say is you're going to do what you want in the end regardless of what I say here now." I reach my arm out and pull her closer to me. "But for someone at your age, it's not going to feel the way it will when you're older. It can't. There's too much

inexperience there and if you're lucky, you'll get a whole two minutes out of it. Do you really want to waste your first time on two minutes?" There's really no point in going with the *save your body for the right one, love will conquer all speech*. She's too smart for that. I have to be logical. "Besides, there are other ways to deal with that need and if not, just don't put yourself in those situations."

Jasmine picks her head up off of my chest and look at me sideways. Lips turned to the side, she barks out a laugh. "You can't be serious. Touch myself like an internet perv?"

I giggle at the comparison. "It's nothing like that and nothing wrong with it either. Many people do it and hell, I do it sometimes."

She stays quiet for a second then answers, "Maybe I'll try it, but what if I still want to do it with Justin? What if I can't trust myself?"

"You are going to still want to do it, but it'll help those urges. You're human, you're hormonal," I shrug. "The thing is to recognize situations that may put you at a greater risk to make a mistake and then to not make those decisions to be in those situations."

We continue to talk for another hour or so about her life as well as mine. By the time I buy us ice cream, I really feel good about myself. I have to make more dates to spend time with her because if I don't, someone will take advantage of her beauty and hormonal teenage lust.

Chapter Two

By 9:00p.m., I'm changing into my swimsuit getting ready for my nightly swim workout before my daddy comes home to practice a bit of martial arts with me. I had never really learned them growing up and that was something that he regretted not teaching me. I had always felt I was too girly for martial arts and wanted to dance instead. At the time, we compromised by me getting into the water. Now, he wonders why he even compromised with a four year old in the first place. My dad, he could hold his own among businessmen and even the president, but up against me, there had never been any contest.

My routine is to do three miles at the very least, and depending on my stress level, I sometimes do more. I always make sure one of the staff is on-site just in case something happens. That was a promise I made to my mom, knowing full well if I didn't keep it, she'd drain the pool in a heartbeat. No, my mom and I do not see eye to eye on a lot of things, but I never doubt her love for me or her need for my safety. We just live in two separate worlds and in hers, appearances are everything.

I can care less what people think about me. It has never kept me from having friends and even when I came out at school my sophomore year; no one ever treated me differently, at

least, not that I can remember. Hell, I think I made more friends when I came out. I certainly had more date offers from girls and even guys. I do know that not everyone is as lucky in that regard as I am, so I don't take it for granted either.

I think one of the biggest fears my mother has is that I'm going to start dressing and acting differently, which has not been the case. All she clings to is her gay stereotypes. I'm a femme who loves my femmes and I don't see that changing. Mom has always said that she wants what's best for me, but by her actions, she only wants what's best for her and her image. I'm nineteen years old and I want to mold that image for myself, not through her eyes. Until she understands that, we can't be close anymore. Besides, I'm getting ready to travel abroad for three months before I come back and go to school. I'm sure the gap between us will be even wider if our issues don't get resolved soon.

I dip my toe in the water like I'd seen in movies. It is my ritual. Then, I dive in. The water is room temperature and it feels amazing. Daddy had this room built just for me with the ceiling painted with all my favorite constellations. I love to lie on my back and simply look at my faux stars. I'm not a brat, though. We all have our own special spaces in the house. Jasmine has her own art studio and we both share a love for dance so we have space for that too. We have a big house; understatement of the year, maybe. I float there a few more minutes, thankful for the blessings we were given and vowing to have my dad build me a house similar to this one, customized for all my needs. Spoiled, not a brat.

The work has been put in and it's time for me to exit the pool. Muscles pleasantly sore, I nod to my staff, David. He turns off the wave machine and points to where he has a towel and bottle of water waiting for me. After I wrap the towel around myself, down the water and start to head to my shower, I stop and turn before David shut the lights off. David has been on staff for about two years now and I only remember having about a handful of conversations with him. He's average looking, average build, and about four years older than me. I wondered how he got so lucky to land a job here.

"David," I say.

He stops what he's doing immediately and turns. "Yes, Ms. Whitmore?"

Ew. I hate that. "Rayne. It's just Rayne."

He looks around, unsure. Clearly this is someone who does not like to break the rules and I'm sure it was my mom who instilled the cost of breaking the rules into him. "Um, yes, Rayne?" It comes out awkward and fearful.

I smile at him. He's looking as if I am some newly discovered species. It's pretty amusing. "Do you like to swim?"

He looks longingly at the pool and sighs. "I love swimming. I used to live in Virginia Beach and went swimming all the time before my parents, divorced," he bites off the last word with a bitterness that I can't understand. I leave it alone because it's not my place to comment on memories that are clearly supposed to be suppressed.

Instead, I say, "That is a shame to hear, and I'm deeply sorry. If it will make you feel better, I give my permission for you to swim here once a week, but only after I'm done with my laps, okay."

I don't wait for an answer, as I turn and walk away while adding, "I will let my mom know that you have my permission, so don't worry, she won't bite your head off."

"Um, thank you Ms-er... Rayne. I appreciate it," he stammers behind me.

"No problem David," I call back, waving.

Then, it hits me. Maybe we should have an employee day where they get to enjoy some of the luxuries of our home since they work day in and day out but never get to be on the other side. Even though I'm sure some of them probably sneak every once in a while and help themselves to a massage chair or the home theater room. I'll run it by daddy later.

After the shower, I check my phone to see that I have a new text message from the beautiful Selene Marquez. All I can do is smile when I see the pic she sent me of a pillow with the caption: *It's getting a little lonely over here.*

I text her back, *As soon as I can baby.*



I met Selene about a year ago when I was club hopping with a few of my friends. That is one perk of having lots of money; no one cares if you are underage as long as George and his friends are around.

It didn't take long at all for me to see her. I looked, then looked again. Then, at her ass. Hey, I liked what I saw. Her hair was dark, a shadow that swung all around her, straight and beautiful. She had a stunning skin tone, I could tell from where I sat. I thought she'd probably loved to be outdoors. Her body, Lord, all I thought about was how she had to walk around naked frequently. With a body like hers, it'd be a crime not to. She moved as if, as if she was music itself. It was mesmerizing. I watched her for a while until she finally noticed me.

Then, I smiled, made eye contact, and walked away. Now she knew I was there and that was all I needed. By the end of the night, I found her sitting alone by the bar. She looked out of place there, still and peaceful, around all the noise and movement. I walked up to her and asked, "What's your favorite song?"

She looked up at me standing next to her and locked eyes with mine. I could smell her perfume as I leaned in close to hear. She smelled wonderful, earthy, like cinnamon and vanilla. "Why?" She asked, not too interested, but curious just the same. I looked into her eyes and discovered that they were forest green and all I wanted to do was keep gazing.

"Because I'd like to dance with you to a song that has meaning, so that neither one of us forget this dance." Damn, I wanted to be close to her. I had never felt that way about someone I just met. No, it wasn't love, but a deep intrigue. It was a pull, gravity.

She liked that and decided to play along, this time, really looking at me. I could tell in her eyes she saw something she liked. Instead, she said, "You can't dance with me, but I'll tell you my favorite canción." That's when I caught the slight hum of an accent. It sounded deep, ingrained into her core, one of those accents that would never completely go away no matter how much practice she put in. I loved it and needed to hear more from this enchanting woman.

"Why?" I asked, now curious.

She stood up straighter, her leg now touching mine and said, "Because, as beautiful as you are, I can tell that you are too young to be in here. If I dance with you now, it would just encourage you to come back, and I can't promote bad behavior."

I looked at her, now amused. "I bet that the real reason you don't want to dance with me is that you know that if you do, you'll want to be as bad as possible."

She laughed at that and I knew it was the truth.

I continued, "I am younger than you, I'm sure, but, one dance, or even one conversation with me will change your mind. I promise that I have much to offer. You can't be more than five years older than me anyway and do you really want to miss out on something that could be... special?"

She leaned back and contemplated that for a few minutes then told me, "Tell the dj to put on something slow. You're gonna have to work at getting to know anything about me and I'll be the judge of that by how you dance."

That night, we danced to four songs in a row, sweating, with me fighting the urge to touch her, feel her skin against mine. I didn't want it to end and I refused to leave the club without knowing her phone number. After the way we moved together, it wasn't hard to get it because she wanted to see me again too. A week later, my driver was picking her up in my Aston Martin, to her surprise, and dropping her off at my favorite restaurant.

We continued to spend time together, her slow to trust, me doing what I could to earn it. Months later, we finally made it official in more ways than one. It was the best night of my life; the way she touched me as if she had the power to pull a climax from me just by brushing her fingertips against my skin. There was electricity there, it had to be. I felt the shocks spread through my body as I gave her more than I even knew I had. That night, I learned more about making love than I'm sure even the most practiced experts knew.

To this day, the memory of it still makes my body quiver. Selene was so absolutely thorough and sure of herself that even the confidence that I normally give off in waves was waning. I had trembled under her and all I wanted to do was make her feel half of what I felt.

Thinking back on those wonderful memories, all I want to do now is hurry and rush to see her. I'm going to make this workout with my dad as quick as possible. I throw on some grey sweats, a black tank top, my grey and white Nikes, and trek downstairs to find my dad. As I'm walking past the main hallway to reach the basement stairs, my daddy's best friend and business partner Damien, is standing at the end of the hallway, all black designer business suit on, hair in a fresh brush cut, clearly waiting for me. I look at the medium height dark skinned man and wave. There's obviously some kind of change in plans for tonight if Damien is here. I stop a few feet in front of him and cross my arms.

"What's up D?" I ask, head tilted to the side. Although Damien is my daddy's best friend, he's more of a big brother to me than an uncle and has always been one of the first people I would talk to if I needed to clean up any mess I made. He is absolutely reliable and whatever he does with my father and the business makes him a valuable asset.

"I need you to take a ride with me. Get your jacket, Jason's waiting for you." He may sound cool and collected, but I can still see through his relaxed demeanor and tell that he's not too happy with my father right now. But, I know enough not to ask him about it until we are on our way.

“Um, ok. Just, give me a sec,” I tell him as I head back upstairs to my room to grab a light jacket and ponder where we could possibly be going.

D holds the door for me as I slide in his silver Camaro. The leather seats are cool against my back, the recently detailed interior sparkles, and his car freshener reminds me of strawberries. I buckle up and he does the same before speeding off into the night. I reach for my phone, slightly disappointed at the prospect of not seeing Selene until even later tonight. I sigh heavily.

Sumn’s up wit my dad. I’ll let u kno asap when I’m comin thru, I text.

Ok. I guess I’ll jus take a long shower then. Alone, she responds.

I sigh even louder this time. *Ass.*

Lol. I kno. I can’t help it, I’ve learned frm the best.

I shake my head, put my phone back in my jacket pocket, and turn my attention to Damien who is weaving through traffic, clearly even more irritated than before. Road rage, I assume. From the landmarks around us, it seems safe to say that we’re headed to my daddy’s company, but the manufacturing warehouses in the business district, not the corporate office downtown.

“D, what’s the deal?” I ask him.

We turn a corner and then Damien answers carefully, “Since you’re going to start being a part of the business, there are some things you need to see first.”

“Okay,” I say knowing that there is obviously something more to the story than that or he wouldn’t be having this scowl on his face. “So, what’s wrong with that?”

“I just don’t think this is the right way to go about it. He should talk to you about these things first, not just throw it on you.” Boy... that was telling. Damien grips the steering wheel tighter as if he could crush it into a thousand pieces.

“You guys deal with weaponry. I know that it can’t be all rainbows and sunshine,” I say, slightly offended at his insinuation that I can’t handle it or am oblivious to what is going on.

“No,” he nearly snaps. “No, Rayne. Your father should have been telling you these things a long time ago, and now he just wants to throw you into it. I don’t think it’s right.”

“I think you’re exaggerating D,” I say as I turn back to look at the road, the buildings are nothing but blurs as we zip by.

“Dammit Rayne, you just don’t get it. You’ll see.” We both sit silently for the rest of the drive, irritated at each other for different reasons. Five minutes later, we pull up to a security gate. The guard comes up to the car, points his flashlight inside and then waits for Damien to roll down the window.

Damien flashes his id and then the guard hands him some kind of computer speaker type thing. Damien speaks his deep, dominant voice into it. “Damien Carson. Charlie Zero Gamma X-ray X-ray Beta.”

There's a pause, then a masculine voice comes through the speaker, "Voice recognition confirmed. Damien Carson. Password confirmed. Welcome back sir." Damien hands the device back to the guard who walks back into the security office. We wait patiently for the gates to open and then close behind us, one by one, three in all. I have never been here and I'm already intrigued at the heavy security around the lot.

Chapter Three

We pull up to the farthest building out of the five that are inside the gated area and Damien stops the car. Each building is a different size and none of them have windows in front. All of them have garages as well as doors except for the one we stop at. It's all white as far as I can tell from the lighting and seems to be the smallest of all the buildings. "Wait here for a second Rayne," he tells me as he walks up to the door, knocks and then says a few words to someone behind the door. Less than a minute later, he's waving me to come to him.

I get out of the car, surprised by the chill in the air as well as the silence. There are other cars around, but very few, and I wonder if there's more parking on the other side of the building. My steps are quick as a wave of fear quickly washes over me, then, goes away. What is that about? When I reach Damien, he puts his hand on the middle of my back, opens the door, and guides me inside.

It may be the smallest of the buildings, but the inside is huge, and astonishingly clean. As our footsteps echo against the gray tiled floor, I take in the expensive looking equipment and picture this place as if it were during the day. I visualize people with white coats standing over the machines and monitors, nodding their heads and collecting their data. But, there is none of that now. Now, there is simply enormous emptiness from the very top where the railings and walkways hang and steps, but after that, only darkness. The smell inside here is that of ammonia as if something dangerous had spilled and needed gallons upon gallons of cleaner to wipe it up. It becomes more overpowering to the point that my head begins to feel dizzy.

I'm grateful when we reach an elevator. Damien removes his hand from my back and then presses up on some kind of scanning device. Next, he swipes his badge and the doors open. When we step on the elevator, I realize that there are only two buttons. It's strange for there to only be two floors to go to, seeing that this place is incredibly huge. It must be a special clearance one.

Even after the card swipe and the hand scan, Damien presses another button and the same voice as before speaks, startling me, "Prepare for eye scan." Damien steps up to the panel with the buttons on it and remains still, unblinking. "Confirmed. Damien Carson." After another second, the voice says, "There is another occupant with you, identity has not been confirmed. Shall I override, Mr. Carson?"

I look at Damien and ask, "So, what am I supposed to do?" At this point, I'm afraid I'm going to have to go through an x-ray body scan.

"State your full name and then say confirm identity," he tells me calmly.

I sigh. All of this is becoming a little too unnecessary for my liking. What is there to hide down here? I'll play along for a little while longer though. "Rayne Danielle Whitmore. Confirm identity." I tried to sound as authoritative as D had sounded.

"Rayne Danielle Whitmore. Identity confirmed. Prepare for eye scan." Surprised, I hesitantly stand where Damien had stood and hold my eyes open, not knowing if there'll be a lazer pointed in my eye that could blind me if I wasn't who they thought I was.

Thankfully, the voice says, "Analysis complete. Rayne Danielle Whitmore, daughter of Jason Anthony Whitmore. Identity has been confirmed. It is good to finally see you Ms. Whitmore."

I take a deep breath as the elevator finally begins to move with a slight jolt and a humming sound.

"So," I say, extremely curious. "What does it do if you are not who you say you are?"

"Well, it accesses your perceived threat level, and from there it either gasses you to sleep while it calls security, or it," he pauses, but I already know the answer. "Can kill you."

I don't ask any more questions. I think I'm starting to understand why Damien had wanted my daddy to talk to me about these things first. Whatever is down here clearly needs to be protected and now all I can think about is how many people may have died trying to get to the lower level.

When the doors open, I finally see my dad standing in front of the doors waiting patiently for our arrival. At first glance, other than the fact that he has on dress slacks with just a wife beater, nothing seems out of place. Then, as I glance again before his chiseled arms embrace me, I can tell something is off. Even though this had been his idea to bring me down here, he obviously is having second thoughts about it. Hmmm.

"Hey, sunshine," he says warmly. I had always thought it was amusing that he called me that, since he was the one who named me Rayne.

"Hey, daddy," I reply with a smile.

He and Damien exchange brief looks and I can almost hear the argument they surely had before now.

I try to break the awkward silence. "The technology is beastly dad. I need to put one of your security locks on my phone in case someone tries to steal all the naughty pics on it."

That does the trick as Damien bites back a laugh and my dad attempts to completely ignore what was just said by shaking his head and pretending to clean out his ears with his finger tips. Dad then starts to walk away, his demeanor all business. Damien motions for me to follow. I walk closely behind them ogling all the cases of weapon after weapon that are hanging on each side of the wall as we go down a corridor. Interesting. I'd never seen so many different types of knives, swords, spears, bows, or even guns. My dad has to have every single hand wielded weapon known to man down here. This would have been a ninja's wet dream.

"As you know, we contract with the government to make weapons of all sorts, but that's not all. Sometimes I sell weapons to collectors or even overseas to small rebel groups if the price is right. We have the most brilliant minds at work here and those minds are just as valuable as the weapons we make. They, above all must be protected Rayne," my dad tells me, his mood becoming much more sour by the way his body language shifts as we get closer to a room.

He stops just short of the door, reaches for the handle then stops, before turning to me frowning. "There are consequences for those who threaten the safety of my family, my friends, and my valued scientists." As he says the last part, he looks me in the eyes, a cold ruthlessness behind them that I've never seen before from him.

"Show me," I tell him, needing to understand what it is that has changed my father in this way.

Damien steps in front of us and opens the door. Agonizing moans hit my ears, coming from across the room. I step inside. A white man is strapped to a chair, arms behind him, head bowed, and shirt ripped open in the front to reveal deep bruises and blood. Without seeing his face I know that it is in the same condition. On the floor is a bloody towel lying next to my father's suit jacket. He cleaned himself up before I got here. My father had done this to this man. Why did he need me to see this?

I try not to turn and run away as I study the room to see brass knuckles, spread on a table, a hammer, and other items that I care not to name. My stomach starts to hurt and my knees begin to tremble. As if he can feel my fear, the man lifts his swollen face slowly, looks up at me, and smiles through bloodied gums and missing teeth. One eye is completely swollen shut and the other eye reveals something dark and sinister inside it. It is almost as if he's enjoying the pain that he's been put through in a twisted sort of way. How can a man who has been beaten like this still look as if he's the one in charge? At this point, I am more afraid of him than all the weapons in the room. Instinctually, I take a step back and the battered man looks amused by my reaction.

I can hold my gaze no longer and stand closer to Damien as I tuck my hair behind my ears nervously. My heart is pounding and goose bumps form on my flesh. "What's wrong with that man?" I ask quietly.

Completely understanding my meaning, my father answers loudly, "This man is a sociopath. He kidnapped two of my best researchers and tortured them to get our secrets. All I'm doing is returning the favor."

The man laughs. It sounds like tires screeching.

"Where are they now?" I ask, afraid of the answer.

"Dead," the man hisses, sounding nothing like a human being. "I mailed them back when I was done."

I use my hand to cover the sound of disbelief. I imagine my father opening a package to find broken body parts, decomposed, staring back at him. How could this be business? How could my daddy, no, how could anyone play this game?

Damien puts a hand around my waist to balance me, and I cannot meet his eyes. He says nothing and so, my father continues.

"A perspective associate had been fishing around our sites for some time now. Ever since we began to expand certain types of weaponry that has proven very successful in some of our field tests, we'd begun to start peaking the interest of this client. So, he started to send his errand boy here over to my offices trying to broker a deal to sell some of my secrets. However, that man deals in the black market. We refused and he didn't like the answer." My daddy picks up random things off the table inspecting each one until he finds that he likes the tire iron the best. "We make weapons to kill things and we make security technology to protect secrets, but I would never sell those things to people like you. In the hands of your kind, the world would fall."

His kind? Before I can ask what that means, there's a blitz of speed and then a crack that fills the room. The man howls in misery as his leg twists in ways that it should never go. I have seen enough. My stomach has seen enough and I know what the outcome of this game is. Dad said he would return the favor and I know that only death awaits this man.

How do I feel about that? To know that my father who's always taught me to be moral and upstanding is a murderer. I don't know. I had looked at that man for only a couple minutes, but I can tell that inside of him is something twisted and evil. Still, does that mean that what my father is doing is justice? How many times has my father given out this type of justice? Am I expected to do the same?

My dad had once told me that reputation was as much of a weapon as anything else and now I understand what he meant. He has appearances to uphold just as my mom had told me many times before. I wonder if she knows, if she truly knows the man that she had fallen in love with so many years ago. How does my dad transform from this to the kind and gentle man that he is at home? If this is the price that must be paid to keep our family and assets safe, I'm not so sure that I want it anymore.

My head hurts, and all I want to do now is be with Selene. I need to be around something good and warm. I need something right, to hold on to. Selene is right, she is kind, and I need her. This is something I will never let Jasmine see. I promise myself. Never will she have to see the violence and torture. Inside those doors, more muffled screams are being drawn out. I slide down the wall crying silently for the loss of the scientists and for the loss of my ignorance.

Five minutes later, Damien stalks down the hallway to sit next to me on the floor, his hands on his head. We sit there silently for about five minutes before I finally ask, "Is he dead?"

"No," he responds, surprising me. "Your father isn't done with him yet."

"Wow. How thorough he is," I spit. "How many have you killed?"

"None. Jason doesn't want both of us to go down that road. He says that watching and actually having to physically carry it out are two different things."

I almost laugh at that. My daddy, the virtuous one, always taking one for the team.

"Rayne—"

I cut him off.

"Don't Damien. I'm not ready to talk about anything else right now. I don't want to know anything else. I'm on overload and I just want to see Selene," I practically beg, feeling the full weight of exhaustion that stress can put on you.

"Ok. I won't argue with you, but there is more that you need to know sooner than later now."

Those are the last words spoken between us as he drops me off at Selene's. I am deflated. I had told her that I was coming and that I was staying the night about twenty minutes before I arrived, then I had texted mom to let her know where I was too. I figure by this time, she'd start to worry a bit.

When we pull up at her house, my body is numb and my thoughts are a tangled mess. I had always prided myself on doing the right thing and maybe I had only seen the world the way I wanted to see it up until now. Maybe my dad is doing the right thing, even if it seemed wrong to me. My dad is not an evil man and clearly, he has an empire to protect. How else are you supposed to protect an empire? Damn. What wouldn't my dad do if pushed?

Right when the car stops, I hop out before Damien can say anything and Selene flicks on the porch light. She had been waiting for me. I have to practically fight with my legs to not run the rest of the distance to the door. She opens it as soon as I hit the first of four steps; and once I see her face, a wave of relief floods me.

I'm safe now, I tell myself. We stand in the doorway and hug as I listen for the sound of Damien's car driving off. Then, after a soft, much needed kiss, Selene pulls me inside.