

[50% Sample]

Suicide Doll

A Miserable Love Story

By Claudia D. Christian

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*We played so well together, my darling. Surely
you can forgive me for my follies? After all,
I've made you into my own image, Lisette.
Will you forgive me? Please say yes, my
darling. I don't think I can keep running
after you much longer.*

---Narcissus

I remember everything you've ever done to me. I remember
how you dirtied me and used me. I remember every
single lifetime you've taken from me. I remember it all
and I will make you pay for it. Then and only then will
I consider ending this enslavement.

---Lisette, Sophie, Chessie

Prologue

"LISETTE"

December 13, 1753
London, England

The tiny room reeked of alcohol and misery. The stench didn't come from the dwelling's owner, but rather from *him*. Spoiled, intoxicated, arrogant—just like the rest of his aristocratic brethren. The woman with her trademark reptilian gaze stared at the seated man with unconcealed disgust. He had invaded her peace, forced his way into her haven, and demanded the obscene. She would take great pleasure in denying him.

"I want her back." The words, while drunkenly slurred, held the resonance of a creature bent upon implacable satisfaction.

"You cannot."

"Liar!" Lilac eyes instantly deepened to violet. The color betrayed his mounting rage. Long, elegant fingers slid across the table's scarred surface. An obscene amount of gold glimmered in the shadow of his perfect hand. "You can sell her soul to me, Broker. It's what you do."

Her tiny slit of a mouth widened. "But not for you, Viscount Hawthorne."

"Do not call me by that mortal name!" He slammed his fist down, scattering coins in its wake. "You know me, Broker. You know my real name and you know what I can do if you don't aid me!"

"Yes, I do." The slow smile creased the living leather of the old woman's face. "I also know what your guardians can do if you break covenant with me. Your threats will do no harm here, Narcissus." She spit inches away from the young lordling's leather clad feet. "You're not even a god—just an abomination between a ridiculous human and stupider nymph. You're lucky you weren't drowned at birth."

Narcissus took the insult of his origins without remark. "I don't care for your game, Broker. Lisette is mine. Nephilim wouldn't have given her to me if that wasn't true."

“She was yours. No longer.”

His control splintered beneath the Broker’s vicious pronouncement. Tears filled his eyes and spilled down cheeks the color of bleached parchment. “You don’t understand. I must have her back. She belongs to me. I need her.”

Contempt flicked across the Broker’s face. “You truly are your father’s son. Cold to all who would love you and in love with only yourself. No wonder you carry his name.”

“Do not speak of that man, witch! I am not the same!” Narcissus’ yell mated petulance and despair, mimicking the circumstances of his secret birth. “Once again, I’m not here to discuss my paternity. I want Lisette back and I will not leave until you give her to me.”

Narcissus gestured to the fortune littering the blackened wood. His voice dropped into dulcet notes of nobility, ones at extreme odds with his trembling hand.

“You must be playing a hard bargain with me, Broker. Fair enough. I’ll play along with you. Do you require more gold? Forgive my ignorance...I’ve no experience with this type of transaction. I’ll pay whatever you want. Cost means nothing to me.”

Her dark eyes narrowed with impatience. “And once again, I cannot sell *this* soul to you. You are free to buy any other but *this* one.”

Narcissus swept the coins to the floor. Not satisfied, he then flipped the table over. Standing over the Broker, he bared his teeth, showing elongated fangs. “Why?”

She suffered no fear and smirked at his misfortune. “Even a god cannot buy an unwilling soul and this soul is most definitely unwilling.”

“Unwilling? No.” His exquisite face rippled in disbelief. “Lisette loved me. She would never deny me anything. You’re lying.”

“I don’t have to lie, you idiot!” Her contempt sliced through his useless denials. Seeing Narcissus about to blabber more of the same, she swore in frustration. “You need nothing of this broken girl, you wicked man! Isn’t it enough that little Lisette allowed you to whore her body out for your despicable show of vanity?”

He choked back a sob. “She did it because she loved me. I forced her to do nothing that wasn’t her choice.”

“You abused that innocent child’s love! You perverted her and made her just as immoral as any streetwalker!”

“Don’t judge me by your morals, Broker. Lisette was no streetwalker. She was perfection.”

“And don’t think I believe one word that falls from your mouth, Narcissus. Lisette was simply a toy for you. You purchased her, mastered her, and then discarded her when she no longer provided any sport!”

“Not true! I never discarded her!” He shook his head in violent denial. Inky hair slipped free from the haphazard queue holding it in place. His gaze grew unfocused as he whispered, “I never thought she would actually...”

“Never thought what? Did you or did you not say to this little lamb, ‘You would die without me, Lisette? Very well. Prove it to me, my pet.’ Did you tell her that?”

“Yes!” Narcissus dropped his head in complete desolation, unable to bear the words or the awful crime they inspired.

His pitiful cries did nothing to move the other’s judgment. “She hung herself for you, Viscount Hawthorne. She swung in your attic for *three* days before you even noticed she was gone.” The Broker shook her head in disgust. “The rats had a lovely feast on her flesh...as in life so in death.”

Narcissus wailed with shameless abandon. When he lifted his head several minutes later, the Broker noted how terribly beautiful he was, even in the midst of this selfish sorrow. “Poor Lisette. She never could see past that dangerous face of yours.” The old woman stood up in dismissal. “But she’s safe now. Safe from disgusting men like you.”

Narcissus swayed towards the much smaller human with hands held open in supplication. “You’re wrong about me. I loved her. I still do.”

“Pity for you then.”

“Damn you! Have you no heart?” he screamed.

“Yes. One much bigger than yours.” The Broker walked to the door. She faced the ethereal creature without fear or regret. “Leave my room and never darken my steps again. You have lost your right for love, Narcissus. May you spend the rest of eternity paying for your selfishness.”

“You aren’t the only Broker.” Anger once more painted his character with capriciousness. “If you won’t sell her, I’ll find someone who will.”

The strangled threat invoked another spiteful smile. “We all stand united, Narcissus. No one will sell her soul to you. No one.”

Violet eyes burned with unholy defiance. “She will be mine again.”

“Lisette died hating you. She hated you for what you made her become. She hated you, finally understanding just how filthy you both were.” The Broker watched as the truth crumpled him. “Now get out.”

Narcissus shuffled across the room, leaving the gold and all his hopes behind. A little serving maid suddenly appeared by the door. She handed him his cloak and waited patiently as he donned it with beaten motions. The Broker narrowed her gaze and left the room without further comment.

“It’s not all true.”

The tiny whisper brought Narcissus to an ignoble halt. “What did you say?”

“It’s not all true. Lisette is not completely lost to you.”

His reddened eyes blazed with renewed fire. “Tell me.” He gestured to the abandoned gold. “Take it all. I don’t care.”

The adolescent girl shook her pale head. “I don’t need your money, Viscount.”

“Then what do you want?”

She looked up and smiled. “I want what she had.”

Narcissus stiffened. His full mouth tightened into a rigid line. “And afterwards?”

“There is no afterwards. I’ll tell you what you need to know now, but only if you give me your word.”

Narcissus gently cupped her chin. He inspected the girl’s face with an appraising eye. “You’re very young. Have you started bleeding yet?”

She nodded.

His finger brushed against her pink mouth with languorous strokes. “Have you had a man yet?”

“No.”

“Have you had a woman yet?”

She didn’t blush. “Yes.”

Narcissus leaned forward, allowing his question to feather her delicate ear. “One or many?”

“One.”

Derision curled his lip. "The Broker?"

"Yes."

"Why am I not surprised?" Narcissus pulled back, but kept his hand encircled about her throat. "How do I know your information has any value, little girl?"

"Because you'll kill me if I lie."

He tipped her head back and held her unflinching stare for many moments. Finally, he nodded once. "All right then. I'll give you what you seek..."

"Mary."

Narcissus made a moue of disapproval. "No, too bland. Too biblical." His eyes roved down her under-developed figure before settling back onto her face. He knew what to tell her—what she wanted to be. "You're cold with all this beautiful silvery hair. You're distant to all who would touch you...love you. You're unmoved by the mortal dilemmas of all creatures. You watch and you're constant, but you're never owned. You're like the moon, Diana."

"Yes." Power sprung to life in her cerulean orbs. "Yes!"

"Say it."

She understood him perfectly. "My name is Diana."

"Good." Narcissus released her. He eyed the closed door the Broker had just exited. "You've just switched masters, Diana. I hope you find it everything you've ever dreamed of, my girl. However, I won't be crossed. Betray me and I will send you to a living hell."

The newly-dubbed Diana curtsayed with the grace of any noblewoman. "You have my loyalty and my discretion, Viscount."

"Let us leave then." Narcissus ushered her through the open door and out into the night. Diana kept a respectful pace behind his. Her light steps suddenly reminded him of his darling Lisette. Narcissus came to an abrupt halt. Diana's stance echoed his. He hated it. "You are not my servant. Take your place next to me."

"As you wish, Viscount."

He couldn't bring himself to look down at his unexpected companion. However, what needed to be said could not be displaced by his maudlin emotions. Narcissus fixed his gaze straight ahead. "Never follow behind me again. I will not stand for it. Do you hear me?"

Intuition bade Diana to simply answer, "Yes, my lord."

He nodded in turn and murmured, "Very good." Soon they reached his awaiting carriage where a footman stood ready to assist them both.

Narcissus stopped her from entering at the last moment. His curiosity coerced him to ask, "How did you end up here?"

Diana jerked her chin to the beautifully lettered sign above the door. "Candy. She got me with candy."

"When was that?"

"Seven years ago."

"Why you?"

"Why not?" she countered neatly. "I was a little girl with no family and no real friends. Serving Mistress Green was better than starving."

The cold night whipped his hair about. Narcissus tied it back again. He felt exhausted and invigorated all at once. "Have you ever tried to leave?"

"No."

"Then why now?"

"Because it's my destiny."

"Destiny." Narcissus brushed his hand across his cheeks and felt the sticky residue of tears. "I understood destiny far later than I should have, Diana. What would you know about it at your tender age?"

The girl shrugged. "She taught me much."

"She did, did she?" Narcissus refused to acknowledge the Broker by name. "Speaking of the witch, will she try to get you back?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I told you, Viscount. This is my destiny. None can stop it. Not even Mistress Green. She knew it as soon as she saw you tonight. Why else do you think she hated you so much? First Lisette and then me."

"Lisette." The name rolled off his tongue with deceiving lightness. "Why did she care so much about my Lisette?"

"She was female. You're not. That is reason enough." Diana turned away from her former life. She entered the carriage and waited for Narcissus to take his seat across

from her. Once the door snapped shut, she whispered, "This is also your destiny, Viscount."

Melancholy marked Narcissus with a heavy hand. "I will train and educate you, Diana. I will pave the way for your triumph over London. But you are not my destiny and you never will be."

A pitying and superior smile tweaked her pink lips. "You misunderstand me, Viscount. You're in no danger from my love. I seriously doubt it's an emotion I'm capable of."

"What you say reeks of challenge and pity. I care for neither." Narcissus rested his head against the plush cushions and stared morosely at the dark ceiling. His customary petulance would have inspired Lisette to rush to him and seek to banish it with winsome kisses and unsophisticated smiles.

There's no more Lisette. She's dead. Stolen from me by her own hand.

Life was not fair. He had only been in this world for a few short years and now it was over.

"It's true that you cannot buy Lisette's soul. It is also true that she left this world filled with hatred for you." The shadows couldn't hide the agony her words created. "But Lisette's vengeance will be a boon for you."

"Vengeance?" Narcissus croaked in a voice thick with unshed tears.

"Of course, Viscount. Lisette will seek vengeance against you. This you can be very sure of. As much as she loved you, she ended up despising you that much more."

"You say it so cheerfully. Why should this give me joy?"

"Because you've left a mark on her soul. A Hate Mark."

Narcissus frowned mightily. "I've never heard of this."

"I wouldn't expect you to have. Hate Marks don't appear often, and are rarely spoken of. It's the way of things, Viscount. Your fate is your own. She will seek you out. It may take several lifetimes, but eventually Lisette will come to you."

Narcissus stared down at his feet, mulling over what his newest protégé was saying. "I can win her back."

"Yes. This too may take several times but eventually you will succeed. You may never own her again...but she will be yours."

Narcissus looked up. His eyes glowed with unnatural splendor. "You're wrong. I will own her again. No matter what it takes, I will own her." His vicious countenance melted into a customary, charming mask. "You have fulfilled your part of the bargain, Diana. Now I will fulfill mine. Come sit next to me, my pet."

Diana settled next to Narcissus. She felt his fingertips trail down her cheek.

"You're a virgin."

"Yes."

Narcissus kissed her temple. "You do understand my doubts?"

"Have me examined. You'll see I speak the truth."

He laughed low and deep within his chest. "I'll examine you tonight, my dear."

Diana's chest tightened in anticipation for her future. Many years ago little Mary had heard her mistress swear that the only power women had was what they held between their legs. Little Mary carried those words and the ambitions they fostered. She proved them with Mistress Green, careful to keep herself intact.

Diana was now poised to make them reality.

Turning to her benefactor, she dared direct him. "Examine only. I won't be wasted in your bed, Viscount." Diana expected anger. Instead, he surprised her with subtle amusement.

"Wasted now? I don't think I've ever been so insulted. Indulge me, my dear. Why would a night in my bed be a waste?"

Eyes hard as glass, voice as soft as a dream, Diana declared, "I don't want to just be an expensive whore, Viscount. I want to be the greatest one who ever lived. I want to be greater than even Lisette."

Deep within that brutal reminder of what his lost love was, what he ultimately made her, Narcissus lost his smile.

He never truly regained it again until two hundred and fifty years later.

Chapter One

"SHE COMES WITH A SMILE..."

April 17, 2003

Charlotte, North Carolina

"Now give it up for the lovely, luscious, and oh-so-pleasing, Chessie."

Raucous applause erupted when the female vision appeared onstage. Hair black as sin, eyes as sweet as heaven, and a body made for love, Chessie was Plum's most popular exotic dancer.

Fetish from the delicious silver hat on her head, to the corset with matching, saucy garters, down to the sequined shoes on her tiny feet, Chessie owned Plum and every debauched soul in it.

Limpid blue eyes scanned the crowd. They searched for one face among the male supplicants. Chessie stood still, head tilted at a rakish angle. A low, seductive beat filled the air, promising dangerous, dark things. Finally, the scarlet mouth painted the same shade as her costume lifted in enigmatic triumph.

There you are it seemed to whisper.

Her rounded hips began their hypnotic sway in time to the musician's breathy growls. Chessie lifted her gloved hand to reveal a crimson riding crop. Several men yelled their pleasure. She smiled coyly in acknowledgment and elegantly danced her way to the center stage.

A lilac gaze devoured her every movement, worshiping her with the fervor of an insane acolyte. Narcissus stared with concealed hunger as Chessie stirred the crowd to a violent pitch. He watched her tease her way out of her clothes until she was clad in only a hat and thong.

You're so lovely, Lisette. I love you more than ever before.

Narcissus had lost none of his obsession for this decadent darling during the passing centuries. His hunger for her had stretched into famine, pulling at his insides until Narcissus' every function was dictated solely by memories of Lisette.

Now you're new but so very wicked. And you're still such a pretty, pretty thing.

He shifted in his seat. The low whine of scuffed vinyl was lost in the cacophony of yells surrounding him. Narcissus struggled to rein in his compulsion for the elegant nymph twirling onstage.

The room bled at the seams, melding the present sights of artificial light and smoke with the gilded walls of a century long dead.

Dark tresses pulled at his limbs, tangling and knotting as he pushed deep within Lisette.

"Open your legs wider, love," Narcissus panted, greedy for more sensation.

Always obedient and eager to please, Lisette complied. She stretched her limbs to the point of burning discomfort.

"Oh...yes...more...I love you so much!"

He gifted her with a bite. His fangs, evidence to his unnatural origins, pierced Lisette's shoulder. Never one to deny his capriciousness, Narcissus dug deeper. Her blood burst into his mouth, sweet with love and misery. Lisette's cries faded into a guttural moan of ecstasy...

The song screamed into his ears and then died into an agonized whisper, much like the one his little doll had given long ago. Shaken from the past, Narcissus tasted the ashes of his once perfect life. He blinked rapidly, shaken, disoriented, and more than a bit maddened over his own culpability.

Why didn't I love her more than I did?

As if she knew the sin he contemplated, Chessie's sultry gaze met his. She pouted her lips into an adorable rosebud before blowing a kiss of farewell. The set was over, but her affect on the rambunctious crowd was anything but. Narcissus watched in varying degrees of broken amusement as the surrounding males continued to shout and thump their tables in a gross display of excitement.

Narcissus noted the blending of classes that compromised Plum's clientele. Poor, barely washed bodies occupied the same space as those clothed in exclusive apparel. These men would never acknowledge one another in the barren world outside Plum's doors, but in this den of illusion and withheld pleasure they were united in Chessie's undeniable dominion over them.

"Sir?"

The gruff whisper tickled his delight, knowing what was to come. Narcissus acknowledged the bouncer with a nod. Raucous beats colored the air, announcing the arrival of another girl on stage. Narcissus didn't bother to spare her his notice. Instead, he got up and followed the red-shirted male into the recesses of the club. The hallway beckoned and he faithfully walked the path, much like he'd done for the last three months. More than anywhere, he saw her in this hallway and Narcissus never wanted to look away.

Its smudged indigo paint was Lisette's eyes. The carpet worn like the path he had trudged over the centuries. The littered posters were the thousands of memories between them. Narcissus knew every bit, old and new. Every piece of trash, every piece of dust, every faded flyer, every glossy advertisement—he knew them all. Narcissus studied them, recognizing the changes and relishing the sameness. This hallway was the road to salvation for Narcissus and he worshipped it as such.

The bouncer stopped in front of the last door. "Chessie's asked for you to hang out here until she's ready for you."

Narcissus allowed a smile to trace his lips. "Sure, Mark."

"All right. See ya." He walked away quickly, as if to distance himself from the perverse dynamic between the stripper and her admirer. Not that it would do any good for he had already been a witness to their entire corrupt courtship.

That's all right, my servant. Run away from what you don't understand and pray you never do.

Mark had observed Chessie leave Narcissus outside her door only to ignore him when she finally emerged to go home. He had seen her keep Narcissus at her dainty feet, like a dog, when he poked his head in to pass along a change in the night's schedules. Mark had also watched Chessie, at her request and sweetened by monetary compensation, use a crop thoroughly across Narcissus' bare bottom.

How far I've fallen in my obsession for you, Lisette. I allow you to do what I've never allowed any other, but still you deny me what is rightfully mine.

All Chessie's trials were woefully reminiscent of what he had done to Lisette in vicious play. Over two centuries without his love had forced a certain amount of retrospect. As perverse as Narcissus was for Lisette, he couldn't help but feel guilt for all he had done to his darling.

Narcissus had not been kind. He had been spoiled, petty, and sadistic in his revels to the very end. It was no wonder Lisette died hating him.

Diana was right. You can't help it. You're drawn to me even though there is the other thing between us...

Hate Mark.

The two words inspired his chest to tighten in pain. Lisette had not only killed herself, but had essentially indentured her soul to wreak vengeance upon him.

And all because of an arrogant, hasty, spiteful remark...

"I don't want to do this anymore."

The weary whisper easily stopped him from leaving the room.

"What do you mean?"

"This." She waved once, arm falling limply against her side. "I tire of these dirty games, Narcissus."

He narrowed his gaze, taking in her lax form, half-dressed as it was. "We have an understanding, Lisette." The warning had little effect on the human girl.

"No. You have an understanding. I just loved you too much to ever say no." She coughed once. "I was too stupid to know it was wrong."

"Are you trying to deny the pleasure we've had?"

A sick smile corrupted her rosebud mouth. "There are types of pleasure that please the body but sicken the heart."

Narcissus' rage darkened his eyes until only a sliver of violet showed. It took great effort to keep his voice gentle. "You are obviously overtired tonight. I will excuse you from the festivities but do not think to avoid them for long."

"Festivities?" Lisette's scorn brought her festering wound to the surface. "Whoring out my body for you as you watch is not a festivity. Watching you fuck every

new lady is not a festivity. Letting you beat me for the pleasure of your vanity is not a festivity, you disgusting bastard!”

Narcissus drew back in shock. Lisette had never raised her voice to him. Ever. She stood before him; cheeks flushed scarlet and eyes glittering with tears.

“What did you call me?”

“I called you a disgusting bastard!”

His hand shot out, striking her face in a hard slap. She fell against the wall with a shrill scream. “How dare you call me that, Lisette? You know who and what my parents were! In comparison, you’re nothing but a worthless piece of human shit! Nephilim plucked you out of nowhere to be my companion and what a wonderful job they’ve done! Defiant, disrespectful, and ungrateful as you are!”

Lisette leaned against the wall, sobbing inconsolably.

“Quit sniveling!” Narcissus grabbed her arm and shook her. “I’ve given you everything, Lisette! You alone live in my home. You alone share my bed. You alone possess my attention.”

She gasped and shook her head.

“N-Not true!” Lisette swallowed several times. “You replace me every time you lay with someone else!”

He cursed in frustration. “I will not have this conversation with a mad woman. Stay in your room tonight and think over the idiocy plaguing your mind before you speak to me again.”

“Narcissus! Please, please listen to me!” she begged with hoarse entreaty. She rested her head against his chest and whispered, “I don’t want us to be like this. I don’t want to be with anyone else again. I don’t want you to be with anyone else. I just want it to be us.”

He flung her arm away. “And be like what? Shall we marry in church, godly and pious on the surface like every good Christian waiting in our drawing room? Shall we attend Mass, pretending to pray to ease our lusty souls, shamed to enjoy the passion of a marriage bed? Are we to pledge ourselves to one another, turning vile and bitter as the years drag on because we refuse to admit the lack of spontaneity? Is this the life you would have us live?”

“It doesn’t have to be that way! Only you would turn as such! I love you and I deserve to have all of you!”

“No! I refuse to exist like that!” Narcissus stared at her with loathing, disgust for her desertion all too evident. “Nephilim gave you to me, Lisette. You belong to me but if my life and beliefs are too repulsive for you then I will request another.”

“NO!” Lisette rushed him, slamming her tiny fists against his chest. “How can you be so cruel? Does nothing I say matter to you? Living like this is killing me, Narcissus!”

“Then all the better for you to leave. I’m sure Nephilim will provide you a tidy little sum to find yourself boring respectability. Perhaps when you lay beneath your fumbling bridegroom you can hide a bit of chicken blood to mark the sheets. I wish you joy, darling.”

Lisette’s tear-streaked face paled; his white embroidered vest held more color. “You would give me up and feel no regret?”

“Yes,” he answered shortly without a shred of remorse.

She swallowed a sob. Her doll’s face held eyes that looked far too old. “I can’t believe this. All this time I thought you loved me.”

Narcissus didn’t utter a word to refute her statement.

“Nephilim brought me to you because they said I was meant to be yours. They told me I would become a part of you and you a part of me. They said we were tied together. I always thought that meant love but it doesn’t.”

“I grow weary of this discussion. A gathering awaits. Finish your tantrum, Lisette.”

She blinked once, sending a lone tear to trickle down her cheek. “You raised me to be your whore. Nothing else.”

Narcissus turned on his heel. He was halfway out the door when she garbled, “Please don’t do this. Send them away and come back to me. Please don’t have these past seven years be all a lie.”

“Have a maid pack your things, Lisette. I’m going to have you removed from the place that’s made you so very unhappy.”

“I will die without you, Narcissus.”

The quiet pledge caused him to look over his shoulder. Her swollen eyes, flaming cheek, and broken demeanor pleased him greatly. He saw it as exactly what she deserved. Narcissus flashed a wicked grin.

“You would die without me, Lisette? Very well. Prove it to me, my pet.”

Narcissus placed his right hand onto the wall. He was careful to ensure his palm lined up exactly where it always did. Paper crinkled beneath his touch, fingers splayed right across the illustrated heart of his beloved.

I wish I could've done everything so differently.

He had left Lisette alone for three days, assuming she would abandon her madness without his presence inspiring defiance. He had sulked, finding not even carnal pleasures could chase away his ennui. Narcissus had ranted and raged, destroying several rooms with precise madness. He had been incensed that his perfect playmate wasn't so perfect after all. Narcissus had spent those days alternating his time between denouncing Lisette as a traitor and finding himself inclined to forgive her.

Not once in all those days and nights away from their room did he ever imagine she would slip out and go into the attic.

Even when he saw fit to summon Lisette did he ever believe she was beyond him and had been the very night he left her.

Never did he ever imagine she would have hung herself in the attic where she had lost her innocence to him.

His fingers curled. They scrabbled for warmth, wishing the woman beneath their touch was actually real. If he shifted his gaze he would see a replica staring at him from across the hall. Chessie's posters were splayed all over Plum in gaudy tribute. Her smoky gaze challenged with innocent debauchery. An emerald top hat perched upon glossy black curls mirrored her corset, garters, and saucy heels.

She was wearing green when I last saw her.

Narcissus blinked back the tears stinging his eyes. There was nothing he wouldn't do to erase the sins he had committed against Lisette. Paying tribute in a strip club was just one way to help ease the wounds he had inflicted upon his most precious girl.

I will see you love me again, Lisette. I just have to be patient.

The door opened. A heady mixture of sweat, powder, and candy drifted forth. “You’re here.”

Narcissus waited, frozen in stasis to her ruthless will. Chessie abused and mocked him more often than not. She made sport of his devotion, using his emotions as a weapon.

The obsolete demigod knew he deserved far worse.

“You can come in,” she murmured while directing him with a wave of her fantastically colored lollipop. “No, not like that,” she chided with a perfect smile.

Narcissus held her blithe stare for just a moment. Without a murmur of dissent, he dropped to his hands and knees.

“Oh, you’re such a good boy. Hurry now before Mark sees you. You know how uncomfortable it makes him to watch us play.”

He passed through the door, quick and obedient to Chessie’s whim. A slow burn of shame and desire painted his cheeks scarlet. Narcissus had never debased himself like this before finding this wicked girl. But Lisette had. Nightly.

It had seemed like such fun then...

“Come now, Lisette. You can crawl better than that, darling.”

“But I keep getting caught on my skirts.”

Petulance warred with amusement. Narcissus bent forward, beckoning her with a small slice of cheese. “You want this, don’t you?”

Lisette’s mouth lifted in a mischievous smile. “Only if I get more than that itty, bitty slice.”

Narcissus approached her. “More?” he teased while lifting the square high in the air. She arched her back, hands at sides, mouth opened just slightly. “More what, darling?”

Lisette nudged the cheese with her lips, looking at him for permission.

Permission he denied gleefully.

“No, my pet. Not yet. Not until you answer my question at the very least.”

Lisette sunk back onto the ground. Her palms lay against the polished hardwood, nails clicking to show her agitation. “I want the cheese.”

“And I want an answer.”

She batted away at an errant curl. "My knees hurt."

"Your whinging won't change my mind, Lisette." Narcissus bent until he was nearly on eye-level with her. "You were being quite the minx just now. Was it all just for a piece of cheese?" He nuzzled her lips, rubbing it back and forth with maddening strokes. "Or something more?"

Her breathing quickened. Lisette aided in his playful seduction by shaking her head.

"No?"

Before Narcissus could draw the cheese away, Lisette snapped it out of his hand with one bite. Melodic peals of laughter colored the air as Lisette stared at her lover's expression of chagrin.

"You cheated!"

She abandoned all decorum. Rolling on the floor, she held her stomach and screamed in laughter.

"Lisette!" Narcissus yelled while stomping his foot. This only inspired her to chortle louder. "Stop it! It's not funny!"

"Yes...it...is!"

"You cheated! You broke the rules! You were only supposed to eat it when I said you could!"

Lisette gasped for air. She was entirely too amused to feel repentant.

Narcissus' expression mimicked that of a child still in leading strings. He plopped down on the floor in a fit of bad humor. "You don't care at all, do you?"

His genuine disgruntlement killed her merriment. Lisette lay there for a moment. She collected herself into some semblance of calm before rolling over. Lisette resumed her previous position. Once on all fours she crawled over to him, bunched skirts and petticoats damaged by their play, and nuzzled his cheek with hers.

Narcissus remained silent, stubborn in his temper.

"Come, my love," she cajoled. "You can't be so petty as to deny me a bit of pleasure."

"At my expense," he pointed out sullenly.

"But you promised to give me pleasure in all forms. Is laughter not expected?"

Narcissus yanked his head away. "You cheated."

“That I did.” She kissed the exposed skin between neck and chin.

“Why?”

Her clever tongue crept out and licked his pale flesh. “Because I wanted more.”

“More what?” His exasperation cut in direct odds to growing arousal.

She laughed again. Only instead of high and girlish, her joy was husky with a woman’s coy promise. “More than just cheese and games that we played together as children.”

“Oh? So you don’t like my games anymore?”

Lisette scooted forward until she sat between his knees. “Narcissus, I will play whatever you want, whenever you want.”

“Is that a promise?”

“Yes.” She cupped his cheek and kissed his brow.

“Do you swear it?” He leaned into her hand and laid his on hers. “Do you?”

“Yes.”

“Do you promise to always be with me?”

“Always.”

“No matter what?”

“No matter what.”

Narcissus wrapped his arms around her small waist. “I love you, Lisette. I’m so glad you were picked for me. I’d hate to spend the rest of forever alone without someone like you.”

“I’ll always be with you,” she swore while playing with the ends of his hair. “I love you, Narcissus. I was born to love you.”

Chessie closed the door with a firm hand. The lollipop dangling from her fingertips got shoved into his mouth with little thought to gentleness. She strode past her kneeling suitor without giving him another look.

Narcissus watched the young girl go through the rituals that came part and parcel with her occupation. She had already changed out of her corset before fetching him. The black cotton robe dragged along the linoleum floor. He could see the dirt and lint clinging to the bottom. He didn’t need to see her feet to know the soles were darkened as

well. Narcissus remembered a time when the sight of filth would've sent him into an apoplexy.

Now he would lick the grime off her skin if she only asked.

Chessie glanced at him with a vixen's awareness. "Henry?"

He looked at her flushed face and nodded his head in recognition to the false moniker. She rarely used his 'name' but when she did it grated his nerves unmercifully.

"Tell me again why you're here." She plopped down on a fuzzy pink chair that had seen fluffier times. "Why do you keep coming here to do this with me?"

Narcissus sat back on his heels. He pulled the sticky sweet out of his mouth. "Because I adore you."

Her eyes hardened. Her mouth lifted in a caustic smirk. "You adore me, do you? But why? Out of all the girls in the whole wide world, why do you adore *me*?"

Her eyes were glacial, those of a hungry predator. She reminded him of snake, circling and slithering, ready to strike at any exposed weakness.

"Come on, doggy. You adore me right? So what's taking you so long to answer?"

How could Narcissus answer her? What could he say that she would believe? Could he tell her truth? Could he truly give voice to the obsession and guilt which had become the very air he breathed? Could he give her everything that he couldn't before?

She leaned forward with a conspiratorial wink. "Or is it that you have other strippers and hookers stashed away? After all, you are the type. Rich, good looking, and completely without morals. Isn't that right, H-e-n-ry?"

Chessie rolled the name with a deliberate drawl. "H-e-n-ry?" The first three letters drawn out, the last two uttered as a pair. All in mockery.

It was a lie. His name. His adoration.

I don't adore you. I fucking love you. I love you enough to accept your dislike of me. Dislike, I'm sure, that you have no idea as to why. Dislike I will definitely change into love. I just need to be patient.

"You're the only woman in my life, Chessie, if you can call it that."

"I can call it that. I can call it a lot more." She patted her lap in command. Chessie waited until Narcissus crawled forward and laid his head beneath her hand. She took the lollipop from his hand and tossed it to the floor. She trenched her fingers deep within his dark hair. "I'm not a woman. I'm an underage stripper and you're a pervert."

Narcissus' eyes slit in sleepy contentment. He loved the sensation of her lithe nails against his scalp.

“No denial on that one, silly doggy?”

He kissed her thigh, tasting the cloth hiding her skin from him.

Chessie trilled a malicious laugh. “I want to play a game with you.”

Narcissus exhaled softly. “What would you like to play?”

“I want you to see me exactly as I am.”

He raised his head. He met her sapphire stare and wondered why she would grant him this wish. Narcissus knew her brilliant eye color owed its loveliness to plastic film. Just as he knew her long, curled locks owed their existence to artifice. He had never seen her without either, even when she left for home or had allowed him to accompany her on the occasional date.

Chessie cupped his cheek and smiled. “This game is one long coming. I hope you know I have no intention of you winning it.”

“I've never won against you.”

“Haven't you?” she hissed. The rage trembled beneath her upturned mouth. Chessie moved to another chair. The harsh illumination of high wattage bulbs threw her reflection into blinding clarity. “Bring that chair over here, H-e-n-ry.”

Narcissus obeyed as he always did. He couldn't deny the knot of apprehension and exhilaration forming in his gut. Chessie's ever-present expression of innocent malice had disappeared with her contained explosion. Her painted face mimicked the doll she kept on her table.

His gaze touched the cheap china representation of a woman with empty blue eyes, pasty skin, and an inferior green velvet dress. His focus skittered away, guilty in acknowledgement of the parallels between it and Lisette.

I would throw it away if I could.

It was the first gift Narcissus had given her. Although he had purchased many since, this was the only one she kept on display. Narcissus never felt comfortable with its presence. He was sure Chessie was fully aware of his sentiments and kept the doll as punishment.

Her malice about this bothers me more than anything. I can't figure out the purpose of this weapon. She isn't ashamed of stripping. If anything she's brazen with

pride, so she's not comparing herself to the doll...at least it wouldn't make sense if she did.

They had been strolling about a local flea market when Chessie had spotted it. Narcissus remembered her face when she approached the cheap toy. Avarice and longing gouged her eyes until all she could desire was the miserable doll. Narcissus had been most reluctant to purchase it. Chessie had been most adamant for him to do so.

He had capitulated, unwilling to outwardly mar the first outing he had with her outside of Plum. Chessie had toted the doll with a fervor matching any toddler. He had been hard-pressed to ignore the stares trailing them, but ignore them he did for her joy.

Never mind how Chessie had abruptly parted ways with him outside the dilapidated building, refusing his offer to take her home. Never mind how he had waited in the parking lot, watching her for over forty minutes until the bus came. Never mind how she had ignored him for three weeks afterwards.

In that moment she had been pure delight.

“H-e-n-ry, let's start.”

Yet, he still hated the doll.

“What would you like me to do?”

Her blank stare met his in the mirror. “I want you to hold this and watch.” Chessie plucked the doll from her corner and placed it in his hands.

Narcissus resisted the urge to smash the doll against the floor. Not by blink or whisper did she betray her knowledge of his desire but somehow he knew she knew. Narcissus settled the false lady in his lap. He kept his hand around the tiny waist and placed the other palm up against his thigh.

One hand could keep her safe. Two were bound for destruction.

Chessie freed several cotton balls from their glass enclosure. She slathered them with creamy liquid. Keeping her reflected gaze locked on his, Chessie cleaned her face with long deliberate strokes.

Narcissus watched with rapture. His hand tightened once before relaxing completely. He felt the doll slide down and only barely kept it from tumbling off his lap. He watched as the object of his affection became less like the thing in his hand and more like a living, breathing version.

Chessie's pallor lost its powdered perfection and revealed pale, living flesh. He watched as a few blemishes gave tribute to her youthful age. His fingers itched to trace them, to see if they would give under his questing touch, to prove Chessie was indeed a human girl with human flaws.

Even now, Narcissus couldn't bring himself to remember Lisette as anything less than an immortal's perfect match. Lisette hadn't had pimples, stray hairs, or wrinkles.

Chessie did.

He expected to be put out over her blatant humanity. He wasn't. Rather, Narcissus fell under enchantment. He wanted to see more. He wanted to know what was behind the colored lenses and false hair. He needed to see how different Chessie was from Lisette.

Chessie continued cleansing until all the makeup was removed from her face. The blank canvas yielded nothing to deter Narcissus from his fascination or his impatience to see more.

She palmed a small case before opening it with easy motions. A squirt of liquid times two before she reached up and opened her left eye with thumb and forefinger. Narcissus sat spellbound. He leaned forward and let out a breath of anticipation.

Chessie plucked the film and deposited it into the case before repeating her motions with the other eye. She blinked several times, the lashes fluttering in jerky movements before settling.

"They're brown," she pointed out unnecessarily. "Not blue, not violet like yours, not hazel, but just plain brown."

"They're beautiful." He didn't mean to whisper the compliment. His eyes jerked away, fearful he had inadvertently broken the rules of their play.

Chessie didn't reprimand him or even say something scathing to his detriment. Instead, she reached up and removed several pins. They clattered against the serviceable linoleum table. Soon she peeled off the wig carefully.

"Blond." He could see the gossamer hair peeking beneath the edges of the cap she wore to play her illusion.

"Not quite," she denied as she removed the last piece. Several strands stuck to her forehead. Sweat had darkened the hair but couldn't hide the sheer brilliance. Narcissus cocked his head to the side, seeking to find the roots to betray her true color.

“Is it real?”

Chessie smiled in response and shrugged a shoulder. “Maybe.”

He frowned in disappointment. A surge of anger thundered across his countenance and his hand tightened around the doll in response. Chessie smiled again, obviously pleased with his reaction.

She turned and faced him. “This is what I really look like, Henry,” she said without drawing the name. “This is what I’ll always really look like.”

“I don’t mind,” he rushed to assure her, completely misreading her move. “I think you’re still beautiful.”

“No, I’m not. I’m pretty but I’ll never be beautiful again.”

“What do you mean?”

Chessie smiled. This time the movement of lips, mouth, and teeth unnerved him as did the sudden lack of life in her eyes. He jerked back when she leaned closer. Laughter tainted the space between them.

“What’s wrong? I thought you adored me.”

“I do—”

Her warm lips touched his, daring Narcissus to pull away. She pecked him once, twice before she ripped the doll from his hand.

“I told you to hold onto this,” she whispered in reproach. “But you let it go so easily. Just like you let me go.”

“What? No, what did you say?”

“You heard me, H-e-n-ry.” Chessie stood up and stared down at him. She caressed his cheek with the top of the doll’s head. “Why did you grow a beard?”

“I did it to look different,” he answered with a slow, steady tone.

“Different. No, not different. You did it to hide, to look older.”

Narcissus froze, dangling between falling to her logic and disbelief of the insinuation.

She doesn’t know who I really am. She can’t. I’m completely misreading this, her. I have to be otherwise...

“I don’t like your beard.” Her hand stopped. The doll’s head lay against his cheek as emphasis. “You’re so much prettier without it.”

Narcissus swallowed once. “I can shave it if you like.”

“And then what? I’d see what you’d look like because I obviously can’t know your face without it? I can’t know what you really look like because you’ve had this beard since you came into Plum three months ago?” Her breathing remained even, peaceful against the harsh staccato of her voice. “I finally showed you my real face tonight because I’ve always known yours.”

Narcissus leaned a fraction of an inch away. “You’ve known mine.” He laughed, masterfully hiding the nervousness beneath. “All right, Chessie. You win tonight. I can’t keep up. Now that I’ve lost what do you want me to do for you, my darling?”

“Don’t put me off with your bullshit.”

He flinched. It was on the tip of his tongue to remind her that ladies never cursed. Instead he apologized. “I’m sorry. What do you want me to say or do?”

Chessie’s eyes watered. Tears spilled down her cheeks. “I want something from you that you’re incapable of giving me.”

“No, no. I’ll give you anything, Chessie. Just tell me and it’s yours.” He risked putting his hand on her hip. “Don’t cry, my darling.”

She flinched. Her voice warbled. “I’ve known you forever. I remembered you when I was little. I was afraid of my dreams because of you. I remember how you hurt me, left me alone in your attic. I remember it all.”

Narcissus shot straight up. The chair toppled backwards. “What are you saying?! Speak clearly, girl!”

A twisted smile slashed her waxen face even while the tears still kept rolling. “Ah, yes. That’s the boy I remember. Not this puking version of sweetness and acceptance. I wondered how long it would take to make you honest. Obviously, I went about it the wrong way. I really thought fucking your ass would be the way to make you talk. Guess I was wrong.”

He clenched his fists in fury. “I did it for you.”

“But you enjoyed it too.”

“Yes, I did.” Narcissus would not allow himself to become embroiled in proving his sexuality. “I enjoyed it because it was you.”

“And I enjoyed it because for once you would know how helpless it is to allow someone you adore to fuck you like you meant nothing.” She placed all her scorn on the word ‘adore.’

“Is this part of your game, Chessie? Are we still playing because I don’t know the rules. Tell me and I’ll play as long as you want.”

“No more games. No more.” Chessie petted her doll with gentle fingers. “Do you want me to stop crying?”

“Yes!”

“You never could stand to see me cry. Not because you wanted to make it better, but because it took you away from your precious lovers. Everyone else was more important than me and my tantrums.”

The tiny room became a cage, pressing and closing in on him like the memories and insinuations Chessie called forth. Her words chanted a language too rotted with regret and blame for him to process. He rubbed his temples with anxious fingers. Thumping beats invaded, blatant cues to remember he was in a strip club filled with human patrons and their painted dancers.

It was normal. Filthy but normal.

And so is she.

Narcissus hoped she hadn’t partaken in anything illicit, but in many ways he prayed she did. “Chessie, honey, have you had too much to drink tonight? Did you take anything? Do you want to lie down?”

“You idiot. I haven’t snorted, smoked, and shot up anything since that first night I saw you. The sight of your face scared me straight. Don’t you even want to know why?”

“Chessie, stop.”

She pressed her advantage, sensing his fear fueled by obstinacy. “I had proof you were real. It was my moment to shout, ‘Yes! I’m not crazy and he is fucking real!’”

Chessie let out a shaky sigh. She wiped her cheeks and nose.

Narcissus fixated on the shiny mucus trailed across her face like a comet. “Keep talking to me, Chessie. I’m all ears and I want to win.”

Manic joy flickered in her watery gaze. “Win? I’ll tell you about winning. Do you know I graduated from high school two years early because I knew I had to be ready for you? I filed for emancipation from my parents because I wanted there to be nothing standing in my way when I finally came across you. I became a stripper because I knew how dirty you were. I counted on it. But I couldn’t take the risk that you’d overlook me so I became an exceptional stripper. No bump and grind for me. Oh no! I became

everything you dreamed of—black hair, blue eyes and all. I did it because I knew you wouldn't be drawn in by just plain me.”

Narcissus looked down. He studied her perfect pedicure and noted it was no longer perfect. She had a chip on the second smallest toe of her right foot. His head jerked up. Chessie released his hair in disgust.

“You will not take this from me! You will listen to every word I have to say, do you understand? Don't take your eyes away from again. Never, ever again!”

“I understand, Chessie. I'm sorry.” The apology wasn't empty. Narcissus meant every word.

“Damn you! I would've prostituted myself if I had to! Do you understand what that means for me? Everything in my life was fucked up because of you! I have parents who love me, who are going to just die when they find out what I've been doing, because of you! I was a straight-A student who could've gone to any university, not U of T and A. I gave it up because of you!”

Narcissus reached for her, encouraged when Chessie didn't shake off his touch. “Why did you do it? Why?”

“Because I hate you.”

He collapsed without moving a muscle.

Don't say that to me. Never that.

“The sight of you sickens me. I hate knowing you're out there, watching me as I take off my clothes for the whole fucking city of Charlotte!”

He shook his head. “You don't have to do this anymore. I'll take care of you. You want to go to school? I'll pay for it. I'll pay for everything. You never have to come back here again.”

Chessie quivered. “Do you really mean that?”

“Yes!”

She leaned into him. “You've surprised me. I didn't expect you to change the script.” She kissed his neck without passion. “But it's much too late for that. A lifetime too late.”

Narcissus stumbled back when she pushed him violently. “FYI—I don't need you to take me out of Plum. I can walk away anytime I want. In fact, tonight was my last show. It was my best ever, don't you think?”

“Do they know?”

She graced him with a look that spoke all too eloquently, ‘Is that all you can ask?’

“I mean, um—just—”

“No, but they will. I don’t regret anything. I would’ve done it all over again because I did it right. I wasn’t stupid enough to believe you ever loved me. Adore. Yes, adore is the best emotion you could ever give me, Narcissus.”

The world bled away with his name. He stared into her face, precious and foreign. Her brown eyes, simple brown eyes that looked like dirt, sparkled with triumph.

Narcissus swallowed back his nausea. His hands trembled. He couldn’t believe what he had heard and he wanted nothing more than to hear her say, “H-e-n-ry.”

“Narcissus, I know what you really are and I’m not just a piece of human shit.”

Hate Mark. Diana never said she’d remember; only that she’d be consumed with hatred for me. She said she’d come for me—not that she’d remember. I didn’t plan for her to remember. I didn’t expect it. I didn’t FUCKING expect it!

Rage mottled his face, turning it into an unholy caricature of a man. The glamour began to fall piece by piece. His height grew, hair lengthened, and the dark whiskers receded. Lit from within, his violet gaze deepened to amethyst.

“How do you know, Chessie? Tell me now!”

Grief marked her in a dizzying array of misery and sick joy, both fighting to dominate her. She traced his face bravely, knowing he could rip her hand off with very little effort.

“You’re just as beautiful as always. My God! I knew but until this moment I never thought I’d actually see you like this again. I’m glad.” The tiny whisper quaked with madness.

“How did you know about me? What exactly do you know?”

“I already told you, Narcissus. You still don’t listen do you?” Her broken heart peeked out from behind the disgust and anger. She clasped the forgotten doll against her chest. “I remember everything and always had from the very beginning. My family thought I was crazy. They were so very scared, Narcissus, that their little girl was sick in the head. I talked about our house, about Nephilim, about going through the door and meeting you in a place where time stood still. I told them about Narcissus and Echo. I

told them how you hated to lose any games. I told them about what you made me do to others. When my hair turned white they knew they'd been robbed of a daughter.”

Narcissus' body trembled like a man torn apart by fevers. Shame buried him alive. “I didn't know how much it hurt you, Lisette. I'd do it so differently if I could. I swear I would.”

“My name isn't Lisette. It's not even Chessie. It's Sophie and I hope to never see you like this again.”

Before Narcissus could lunge away, Sophie slammed the doll against his shoulder. She closed her fist around a broken chunk of pottery. She dropped her head.

“Goodbye.”

“No!”

It was too late.

Sophie dug the jagged piece into her neck and yanked her fist to the right.

“No!” he screamed again, maddened by what she had done. “No, Sophie! You can't do this again! Not again!” Great gasping sobs wracked his body. He screamed in anguish even as he tried to keep the blood from draining. His hands pressed against her neck, desperate to piece her flesh together. “I'm sorry! I'm sorry, Sophie! I love you, do you hear me? I love you! Sophie, don't leave me. Please. Not again.”

Her deathly pallor matched his, just as her tears did. Blood, hot and thick, gushed out. Sophie bled out her life and did it with a broken smile.

“I...win...”

Chapter Two

“...AND LEAVES HIM WITH A RUINED HEART”

He walked down the long corridor. No one saw him. No one remembered him. Mark, the unwilling manservant, had no recollection of a well-dressed client named Henry.

I am nothing. A nobody. You can't see me because I don't exist.

Narcissus flexed his fingers. Blood clung to his skin, sticky and rubbery, a pliable extension of Chessie. No. Not Chessie.

Never Chessie. Never Lisette.

He reached the end. Narcissus sagged against the wall. Eyes wet, face empty of all expression, he gripped the remnants of her broken doll.

I never wanted it to end like this. I never wanted it to end.

Narcissus eyed the stage. He imagined Chessie twirling about the stage, face gay with manufactured delight. He saw her in sequins and top hat. He waited for the heady sense of possession to overtake him.

Narcissus remained empty as the husk in his hand.

Chessie had died tonight, never ever to return to this fantasyland of lovely girls who lived for the pleasure of their dirtied audience.

He shuffled forward, ephemeral as a ghost, miserable as an echo. The audience still remained, ignorant to the fact that their Chessie had gone out the back on a stretcher. If he had cared to study the Plum Pretties he would've seen pale faces and stretched smiles. He would've seen the grief in several, avarice and opportunity in others.

Narcissus usually reveled in the profane.

Not this night.

This night he left Plum a broken man. He had given Chessie everything he thought she wanted, just like he did with Lisette. He had given everything and nothing.

His colossal arrogance had believed playing sexually perverse games with Chessie had been exactly what she wanted.

Because it was still what I wanted. And here I thought I was a different man...a better man.

Never once did he think that another had existed beneath Chessie's pleasing exterior.

Yes, Narcissus had debased himself for Chessie.

He had done every wicked thing that had come into her wicked mind. He had fucked her. She had fucked him. He had worshipped her, seeing another chance with Lisette.

Narcissus paused in his journey. Music still blared obnoxiously. He looked about, seeing the people there but not wanting to acknowledge how they still had the right to live. His eyes smoldered in agony, irises dilated to unnatural degrees.

Wife beaters, child molesters, thieves, cheaters all had a seat front and center. Not just at Plum.

Why? Why can they make mistakes and still have the right for salvation? What makes them better than the gods? What makes them better than me? Than her?

Narcissus swayed in the smoke-laden air. He stared at the oblivious faces with contempt and maddened envy. These humans had everything. The world spun just for them. Even God himself sent a piece of his immortal fire to accompany each one of the ignorant sods during their journey.

Narcissus stared them all down, eyes mean and unforgiving. Wraiths looked back at him, pity and love shining brightly in their angelic countenances before turning their attention back to their human charges.

Where the hell was Chessie's guardian angel? Oh, that's right. She didn't get one. She didn't get one because she made the mistake of spiting Heaven by ending it on her terms. Suicide. The one sin that won't be forgiven easily. Where's the justice in that?

Everyone but Narcissus and Lisette were favored with a box of never-ending chances.

Hurt someone? Just ask for forgiveness. Kill them? Ask. Do it over and over again? Simple. Ask for forgiveness.

So why doesn't it work for creatures like us?

He snarled and swiped at a table. The couple sitting there jumped up in surprise, unable to see the bloodied man standing at their elbow. Narcissus wished to make the world disappear. The humans' constant, consuming, droning stench couldn't overcome her blood. He lifted his hand. The ruined toy stared back at him with no face.

Narcissus knew he was looking at karmic poetry all rolled up in an artistic package of irony.

I can't do this. I just can't.

He wanted to fall down and never get back up again. He wanted to be tread on, ground into the dirt, and left to rot. He wanted the impossible.

Narcissus brought his face forward. The jagged shards cut into his skin. He heard the flurry of activity, ethereal and otherwise, surrounding him. Pottery dug into his flesh, biting down with the force of very real pain.

The aptly-named angels approached Narcissus. They spoke wordlessly, pleading for him to rise past his despair. He gave them a ruined smile while pressing the doll deeper. They were wasting their time. Just like he was. It didn't matter how much he pushed. He could rip his face off and it wouldn't give him what he wished.

"Narcissus."

He paused in his manic destruction. Slowly pulling the doll away, he appeared much like a shy child coming from behind a favored toy. Blood smeared across his white skin, belying the wounds that had healed as soon as their obstruction had been removed.

His eyes lighted upon a true angel.

Rippling across the floor, she passed through patrons and employees alike. They gave no notice of the secret play happening around them. Sentient creatures slipped away, leaving him to her tender mercies.

"You died."

"Died? Yes."

"Why are you here?"

"Here? Because."

Narcissus heaved. Cries mingled with his thin laughter, making him all the more mad.

"Why can I see you now and never then?"

“You know the answer, Narcissus.”

He looked away from her dark eyes. He did know. He was constantly looking backward. Narcissus never looked for Sophie.

“Not Chessie. Not Lisette. Sophie.”

She smiled. Tilting her head, the young wraith reached for his hand. She ignored his startle and pressed against flesh.

“I can feel you.”

“Odd, isn’t it?”

Narcissus relished their contact. His hand burned from the icy pressure of her dead touch. “You came to me for a reason.”

“Of course, silly doggy.”

“Do you forgive me? Is that what this means? Please...” He continued to ramble, praying to a God that didn’t service him, in the hopes of gaining the salvation he wanted more than anything else.

Sophie shook her head, platinum strands brushing emphatically against her chin. “No.”

He closed his eyes. The music which had faded into nothingness rushed back to deafening intent. Narcissus swayed forward, nearly crumpling to the ground. Sophie’s grip on his wrist kept him up. She then led him to the front of the club. Any who could see them would liken it to a girl carrying an oversized doll.

Narcissus kept docile. He pressed through living flesh, passing through their hearts and souls without peeking. He didn’t care about who they were. He cared solely for the agony ripping him to shreds.

Sophie deposited him outside. He collapsed on the sidewalk. Huddled against the side of the maroon building, Narcissus could smell the acrid odors of urine, smoke, and nicotine mixing in with the coppery scent of Chessie’s blood.

Narcissus shook his head.

AUTHOR NOTE

Thank you for taking the time to download and read this 50% sample from **Suicide Doll**! I really appreciate you giving an unknown, indie author a chance. I truly hope you enjoyed this dark, twisted romance and are ready to find out what happens next.

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