A HALLOWEEN DARK ROMANCE STORY



SCREAM

little thief

DEADLY SHORTS

SCARLETT CROFT

SCREAM, LITTLE THIEF

DEADLY SHORTS

BOOK THREE

SCARLETT CROFT

ABOUT THE BOOK

“I’ve brought some friends with me tonight. Friends who like to hunt.”

My plan for Halloween eve is easy: sneak into a Halloween party, steal a priceless necklace, and get out unseen.

There’s only one tiny problem: Everthorne Hall isn’t just a regular club for the wealthy but the most infamous, heavily secured, steamy club in the entire country. And Reaper, the ruthless mafia enforcer who’s been stalking me for months, is waiting with a surprise.

Not only do I have to find a way through a hedge maze, but also run from multiple masked men. Because if Reaper or his friends catch me, I’m theirs to play with.

As the saying goes: the more, the merrier. But if I have it my way, it’s: catch me if you can.

Because no way am I letting these dangerous masked men stop me from getting a job done.

Welcome to the Halloween party at Everthorne Hall! Are you brave enough to enter the maze?

This is a steamy why choose Halloween novella set in the Deadly Universe with a HFN. This dark mafia romance can be read as a standalone or as part of the Deadly Shorts series.

For anyone who's ever dreamed about being chased by multiple masked men.

Through a hedge maze.

On Halloween.

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CONTENT NOTE

The contents of this book may be triggering and disturbing to some readers. This is a dark mafia romance with high stakes and high heat. Some of the scenes are completely unrealistic. It is entirely fictional and meant for entertainment purposes only. I do not condone the actions of the characters in this book.

If you are sensitive or easily offended to any of the below subjects please don't read this story.

These are: physical violence, assault, and explicit scenes including dub-con, coercion, primal play, power play, things used as toys, exhibitionism and voyeurism.

CHAPTER ONE

Halloween is the best time of the year for sweets, theft, and murder. On Halloween night, people trust anyone, even total strangers sporting horrifying masks and flashing knives. Because everyone wearing a costume on this special night just wants to have fun, right?

Wrong.

I'm not a serial killer or a hit woman, but if I were, I'd choose Halloween to off as many targets as possible. Since I'm just a thief, I'd rather steal something of value tonight.

Leaving Central London, I soon find myself on the outskirts of the city.

A massive garden surrounds a Victorian mansion, with walls high enough that nobody can climb them. Nobody would dare to even if they could, because the security system here is top-notch. Even Trace, the hacker I work with from time to time, couldn't find a way inside, so I've had to get creative.

Guards are stationed around the perimeter, checking every car driving into the car park. There will be some on the inside too—I'm sure about that—so I must play this game carefully.

The mansion is like a fortress of sins and desires. And tonight, Everthorne Hall has opened its doors to a limited list of select guests to offer them a taste of its membership.

Am I on such an exclusive list? Oh, hell no.

Luckily, I'm not here as myself tonight. I'm here as . . .

"Mrs. Adlington."

One of the two guards in front of the massive gates bows before me as if we're in another century. He's dressed as a footman from hundreds of years ago, with a white wig and all. Only the golden brooch, formed like a rose with blood-red petals, stands out. "Good evening, my lady. Your invitation, please."

I hand him the gold-engraved card I stole from a wealthy couple before they even got the chance to look at it.

"Welcome to Everthorne Hall. Just drive through the gate and down the road. You'll be guided to your designated parking spot." He gives the camera sitting on the wall a slight nod, and the gate opens by itself.

"Thank you."

A couple of minutes later, I park my rental car in the assigned spot and get out. Despite weeks of scouting, I find myself gazing around in awe as if I'm a first-time visitor.

Another guard awaits me, wearing the same costume as the one before.

"Your invitation, please."

"Of course."

"Welcome to Everthorne Hall, Mrs. Adlington." He takes the invitation from me and tucks the card into his jacket pocket. "This is your first time with us?"

I smile politely. "It is. I'm looking forward to tonight."

"Will Mr. Adlington be accompanying you?"

"Oh, no, no, no. My husband had a work emergency, so he told me to go have some fun without him. Maybe he'll swing by later."

"Understood." There's a flicker of heat in his eyes, and his smile widens. "I assume you've read the instructions, but I still must ask. Do you know the safe words, and do you consent to everything that may happen on these premises tonight?"

"I do."

Red is for stopping, yellow for continuing but softer, and green is something along the lines of, *Hell yes, please don't ever stop!*

Though I won't need any of that, because I'm not here to indulge in kinky sex. At least, that's what I tell myself, but my pulse thunders, and my skin has been buzzing with anticipation since the moment I set foot on the grounds.

"Very well." The guard points to the opening of the hedge maze. "Enjoy your stay then, Mrs. Adlington. There are some hidden clues throughout the

maze, if you want to win the golden ticket. And if you need anything, employees are all around the property. You can identify them by the golden rose brooch they're wearing and ask them for anything you wish. Also, for anyone." He winks at me as if he's just too willing to take part in whatever steamy fantasy I come up with tonight.

After all the rumors I've heard about the infamous Everthorne Hall, I know I can take his words quite literally. If I need a drink, I'll get it. If I need a man or a woman or five to fuck me, I'll get them. This club is decadent and dangerous, keen on making every sinful wish come true. Thankfully, only the legal ones. This place is totally legit and squeaky-clean.

Well, if you can say that about a lavish sex party.

Another car parks close by. Doors are shut. The hushed voices of a couple drift toward us, and I can't help but listen in.

"Did you know the founder and owner of this prestigious institute is a woman whose husband died under mysterious circumstances a couple of years ago?" the woman whispers.

I bite back my smile, because I've come across that piece of information during my research as well.

A vampire with centuries of secrets. She asks the one question he won't answer.

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"Really?" the man asks.

"Apparently, nobody knows what really happened to the husband—not even Scotland Yard. Some say he committed suicide, others think his wife a murderer, and there are also theories she hired an assassin to take him out for cheating on her. Can you imagine?"

Oh, I can, because my world is nothing like theirs. I'm living in the shadows, where assassins hide, four Mafia families rule the city, and thieves

steal from the rich.

And even if the rumors about the owner's husband's death are true—good for her. After all, Everthorne Hall has become much more successful since then.

"Mrs. Adlington?" the guard asks warily.

"Yes. Thank you very much." I take the blue bracelet he offers me and attach it to my left wrist. Since it's mostly the people who watch with big, curious eyes that get the blue ones, it's a sign I'm new here. And only a guest for tonight.

Under normal circumstances, Everthorne Hall is only open to exclusive clientele with enough cash to pay for all the benefits of a membership. But tonight is different, because on Halloween, the owner opens the hedge maze up to a handpicked group of people.

Whoever finds their way out of the maze first will be the winner of a golden ticket—a yearlong membership—after being carefully vetted and reviewed, because there's a strict "no criminals" rule at Everthorne, and they give a more rigorous screening than the Met Police. When they're done, they'll know more about you than the government, your spouse, and your own mother combined. That's how they keep this place safe. No Mafia, no gangs, nothing.

Everthorne Hall isn't a place for someone like me. Even though I'll find my way out of the maze and into the building, I'll never be the winner of the golden ticket. But hidden inside Everthorne Hall is something my new client wants, so he called me to steal it for him.

And I will. I have no doubt about it.

You see, some of my colleagues specialize in priceless art, sensitive data, luxurious jewelry, or money from banks or casinos. I don't. I'm a multi-passionate kind of girl. Just tell me what you want and what you're willing to pay me for it, and I'll get it for you. Simple as that. For the right amount of cash, of course.

As I step closer, an eerie music coming from deep within the maze wraps around me like a cold embrace and lures me in. Carved pumpkins with sinister faces and flickering lights mark the entrance. Thick hedges loom on either side, covered in what looks like fake cobwebs, so tall they're impossible to climb. They stretch for over a mile, and there's barely any visibility beyond. Fog crawls low over the ground. Flickering torches light the way into the unknown, casting endless shadows.

Another sound accompanies the music—barely audible at first, but as I step inside, I recognize it instantly.

People moaning in the distance. The rhythmic pounding of flesh against flesh.

The sounds send a thrill through my body. Everything inside me tightens in anticipation.

The couple I heard talking earlier enters the maze next to me. Both give my costume a quick, appreciative glance, then they disappear around the corner.

The black shirt I'm wearing clings to my body like a second skin, and I've pulled up the zipper on the front of it to my breasts, allowing for a daring cleavage. A short skirt, a whip, and thigh-high boots complement my outfit. My brown hair's tied in a bun at the back of my neck, the blue tips hidden so I resemble the true Mrs. Adlington. The finishing touch is the mask with pointy ears covering the upper half of my face.

If I had to dress up for this kinky Halloween party, of course I'd choose Catwoman. Though, the irony of a thief impersonating a thief is probably lost on everyone but me.

My outfit may not reveal much, but it's sexy as hell, and in this place, I don't stick out. The woman I just saw entering the maze was wearing a slutty housemaid's dress with suspenders, while her husband was sporting black leather and a creepy mask that reminded me of *him*.

I swallow hard, ignoring the surge of need and longing in my body.

It's been months since I last had sex with someone. Not only because I'm a busy woman and picky, but also because the memories of that night have burned themselves into my brain.

Whenever I close my eyes, I can picture him perfectly. Both of them. Driving me to new heights I didn't think my body was capable of.

I may not have seen their faces, nor do I know their real names, but no other guy could compare to that. To *him*.

Shaking my head, I step deeper into the maze. Why not have some fun later? But first, I'll find a way through the labyrinth and into the house, past security, to the room containing the treasure I'm really here for.

It's what I do best. I never fail—and I won't start now.

The eerie music remains the same, but the moans grow louder with every step I take.

A prickling feeling on my neck and a surge of adrenaline hit me unexpectedly.

Before I realize what's happening, a thick arm hooks around my waist and pulls me back into the darkness.

CHAPTER TWO

My back hits a hard chest, and long fingers close around my throat in a possessive grip.

A jolt of fear shoots through my body, quickly dissolving into liquid heat in my veins as my body recognizes the attacker before my mind can catch up.

Heart pounding, I lean against him just a little, not letting go of the whip in my hand. “How did you find me?”

“I will always find you.”

Reaper’s voice is as rough and dark as I remember it, and his fingers tighten their grip on my throat just a fraction. Just enough to send another rush of heat through my body, straight to my core.

“No matter where you run, no matter where you hide, I will find you, Riven.”

A shiver snakes its way down my spine at hearing him say my name like that.

The first time we met, he hunted me down, because he’s an enforcer for Los Castillos—the Argentinian Mafia family in London—and I stole something from his boss. I’m pretty sure neither of us anticipated that night would turn into hot and steamy sex. On a church altar.

“How did you get in?” I ask.

His lips brush my ear as he answers. “Same way you did.”

I don’t question how he found out about this new job of mine. He knows all these things about me, but I don’t know shit about him. Not even his face. He tortures and kills people for a living. I should be appalled or at

least afraid, and yet I can't help but feel drawn to him, even though I know how terribly wrong this is. How dangerous. How deadly.

She knows he's a vampire. It's the way he looks at her that keeps her awake.

For a little danger and a lot of longing, search **Lokepub** on Google.

Reaper's fingers find the zipper at the front of my shirt and pull it down inch by inch. I gasp as the chill night air meets my tummy, but I don't stop him. Not even when his fingers slip under the tight material, cup my right breast, and begin to expertly tease my nipple.

"Now, listen to me closely, little thief," he rasps against my neck. "I want you to do what you do best. Run. I'm gonna hunt you down, and when I catch you, you're mine to play with."

My heart bursts out of my chest in heated anticipation, but also with a hint of fear. This is not why I came here tonight . . . yet I'm not sure I have a choice in the matter.

"But beware—I'm not the only one hunting you tonight. Others want a taste of this luscious body too." His grin is dark and menacing, even if I can't see it. I can hear it clearly in his voice. "Since you enjoyed my mate's cock so much last time, I've brought some more friends with me tonight. Friends who like to hunt."

He pinches my nipple, and I can barely suppress my moan. Then he suddenly withdraws his hand from my cleavage and takes a step back.

I almost stumble at the sudden loss of his embrace. When I turn around, I get a first good look at him.

He's dressed in all black and wearing a skull mask that covers his entire face, save for his eyes, just like the first time we met. I'd recognize him anywhere in this outfit, because it's not a costume. It's what he wears for work. For murdering people.

And when he fucks me.

My breath catches in my throat when our eyes finally meet.
“Happy Halloween, little thief.”

CHAPTER THREE

I immediately start running, zipping my shirt and taking a sharp right at the first corner, then veering left. I don't need to hear his footsteps behind me to know he's following me. Prowling. Stalking his prey.

This game he set up should shock and horrify me. I didn't consent to it, and he sure as hell didn't ask my permission for this chase. And yet I did consent to everything that could happen within the maze. I already gave my agreement, and I'm not taking it back.

My heart beats erratically. Blood thunders in my ears. Everywhere I turn, there's a flash of movement—a shadow, a person, a hunter.

In the distance, the dark outline of the mansion rises behind the maze, lit only by moonlight and illuminated windows.

My feet stumble as my eyes zoom in on a couple in one of the windows—on the woman getting fucked from behind while she faces the gardens.

Holy shit.

I hurry along, desperately trying to remember the route I'm taking in case I wind up in a dead end and have to turn back.

The spooky music plays on no matter which way I turn, as if it's coming from everywhere. Only, the moans and whimpers are getting more intense by the second. Laughter turns into screams of pleasure, accompanied by the rustle of fabric and a rhythmic pounding.

"I'm gonna hunt you down, and when I catch you, you're mine to play with."

Reaper's deep voice follows me in my mind even though I can't see him now.

How did I ever think I could just walk through this maze without being affected by what's happening here? The sounds alone are sending my body into overdrive, sharpening my senses, feeding the hunger in me.

My mind is scattered. I need to finish the job, and I need to do it before the end of the night so I can slip out unnoticed. And yet my body's already starting to betray me.

The next turn I make leads to an abrupt halt.

A man is standing at the end of the path, right under an archway. His black clothes melt into the darkness, and if it weren't for the mask covering his face, I wouldn't have seen him.

It's like Reaper's mask, but this one seems more like a balaclava.

He's one of them. One of Reaper's friends.

And he's coming straight at me.

"Fuck."

Pulse pounding, I spin around and run in the opposite direction, back where I came from.

Wind whispers between the hedges like a sinful promise, the cold, damp air clinging to my exposed skin.

Adrenaline rushes through my veins, but I'm not afraid. Not really. I'm exhilarated, even though I can't let them catch me. I never asked for this distraction. But while my mind screams at me to run like hell, I can't ignore the flutter in my stomach or the liquid heat between my legs. And I hate myself for it. But I hate Reaper even more for knowing how to push my buttons and challenge my boundaries.

The sound of a snapping branch around the next corner makes me stop short.

I've barely even caught my breath, let alone decided what to do next, when another man appears in front of me, also wearing a balaclava resembling Reaper's skull mask.

When I turn around, strong arms grab me from behind, pulling me toward a hard body.

It's not *him*. Not Reaper.

"I've brought some more friends with me tonight. Friends who like to hunt."

Heat coils deep in my core, in desperate need of release, even if I fight it. Fight them.

I gulp back air as my second attacker towers over me. My heart explodes inside my chest when his gloved hands cup my waist in a determined grip.

Oh God . . . Am I dreaming? Is this really happening?

Moans erupt nearby. A woman's whimpers. The deep growl of a man pounding into her.

I can't see them, but the sounds they're making are more than enough to harden my nipples. That and the two masked strangers, both closing in on me now—one in front, one behind me.

A billionaire falling hard or an alpha learning to listen?

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Reaper's nowhere to be seen, but I'm sure he isn't far. Not since he's orchestrated all this. He'll want to watch, just like last time.

I bite back a moan when fingers pull down my zipper, inch after inch, over my exposed skin. Then they push the material aside, exposing my bare breasts.

A hot mouth lands on my neck, kissing and sucking, another on my cleavage.

I should try to get free and run away, or at least use the safe word to make them stop. Instead I let my eyes fall shut, cursing myself for enjoying the feel of the stranger's gloved hands, their lips and tongues on my heated skin.

The pounding gets louder and harder. Whoever is fucking just around the corner is close to climaxing, and they don't care if anyone can see or hear them. Maybe they're enjoying it.

Damn . . . Is this what Everthorne Hall is like? Completely letting go with strangers? Feeling so secure and horny you just don't care anymore but get off on other people watching? On acting out your deepest, darkest fantasies? Fantasies you'd normally hide from everyone, including your boyfriend, because they're too dirty and deprived to vocalize?

Wet lips close around my nipple and start to suck. Hands roam over my body, massaging my other breast, grabbing my ass, then shoving my legs apart.

"Oh God . . . "

I watch the masked stranger in front of me get down on his knees, while the other guy holds me captive, kissing my neck and teasing my nipples.

His hands wander over my thigh-high boots and onto my exposed skin, higher and higher, until his fingertips reach my panty line. Then he hooks his fingers under them and pulls them down my legs.

My mouth is suddenly dry. My pulse is thrumming everywhere, a frantic rhythm under my skin.

I don't know these guys. I don't know their names, nor their intentions. All I know is they're friends of Reaper.

None of them utter a word, fully concentrating on prying out as much lust from my body as possible. When our eyes meet, the guy in front of me moves back in, his hands on my knees, his fingers on my inner thighs, and then . . .

"Fuck," I pant as he starts playing with my clit.

His fingers are talented, rubbing me in circles then pushing into my pussy. I'm so wet he slips in easily, while his thumb continues fondling my clit.

My own moans blend in with those from the couple nearby, creating a crescendo of lust, desperate need, and startling bliss.

This was not what I planned when I drove to Everthorne Hall, but . . . fuck it. I'm not thinking anymore about who might hear me or see me like this. I don't care. I need the release, and I need it now.

The whip I've been holding onto the whole time drops to the floor next to us.

The man behind me nips at my neck and cups my breasts with both hands. His hard cock presses against my lower back, while the other guy fingers me frantically, licking his lips like he wants a taste.

Oh, fuck, that's so hot.

I'm almost there, but something's missing . . . Or rather, *someone*.

When I lift my head, Reaper's right there, standing a few feet away, his gaze locked on us with fierce intensity.

The second our eyes meet, my climax hits out of nowhere, as if my strung-tight body were just waiting for him to be there. Waiting for his

approval.

My head falls back and I moan loudly, riding the wave until I can't take it anymore.

The second their grips loosen on me, I ram my elbow into my captor's ribs, shove the guy in front out of the way, and bolt, picking up my whip on the way and holding onto the fabric of my costume covering my breasts.

What on earth just happened? Did I really let them make me come like that? Was Reaper's presence, his eyes watching me, really enough to get me off?

Fuck. I can't think anymore.

When I take a quick look back, Reaper's eyes are ablaze with fire.

"So you want to play?" I murmur. "Fine. Let's play."

Then I run like hell.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rounding the next corner, I almost stumble into a foursome.

My feet come to a sudden halt. I just stand there. Staring. Blinking. Unable to move, because part of me is so intrigued.

The naked woman on her hands and knees stops giving one of the guys a blow job in the middle of the hedge maze and looks up at me. Another man fucks her from behind, and a third lies underneath her, licking her clit.

She doesn't seem at all bothered by my intrusion, but she winks at me with a twinkle in her eye then takes the cock in front of her back into her mouth. All of them moan in unison, and the man behind her ruts into her harder now he's also realized they have an audience.

My core tightens. Heat licks at my skin, leaving goose bumps in its wake.

The sound of approaching footsteps is the only thing that rips me out of my sudden trance. And reminds me *who* is chasing me.

Heart racing, I skirt around them, not daring to take another peek, and follow the way down to the next intersection. I need to find a way out of this maze and fulfill my mission, but all I can think about is Reaper.

His words. The way he looked at me when I came. All the things he'll do to me when he catches me. Things I can't even imagine right now.

I tighten my grip on the handle of my whip while searching frantically for a clue. I could really use an exit sign right about now, but there's nothing helpful in sight.

Damn it. I need to make a decision right now.

Left or right?

I turn left and start running again. Then I take another turn, this time not even glancing at the couple fucking out in the open, just moving on. At the next intersection, I force myself to slow down.

My heart's beating erratically, my lungs burning in my chest, but there are no footsteps behind me. Not anymore. Not . . .

Fuck. There they are again.

I don't dare to turn around.

Just as I'm about to take the next left turn, I pause. There's something different in this hedge. Something darker.

I take a step toward it. My fingers roam over the branches, finding something solid underneath. Simple stone, or a hidden door?

The footsteps behind me grow louder.

I don't have time to overthink it. I push at the stone until it gives in—and stumble into a secret chamber in the middle of the maze.

There's a huge hot tub in the center of an open-air, secluded alcove, with gurgling water and steam evaporating into the night sky. Four torches, one in each corner, light the place in addition to the moonlight. There are also two patio heaters, and a cream-colored chaise longue big enough to do all kinds of stuff on it.

The door snaps shut behind me, hiding me from the men.

I'm still breathing hard. The other people sound farther away now. Even the music's muted. I take a quick look around to make sure no one's in here, but it's empty. Seems like I'm the first one to discover this hidden place. And the entrance is also the only exit.

I turn around, listening closely, but there's no sound other than the burbling water in the hot tub. No footsteps. No voices. No one pushing at the hidden door to find a way inside.

I'm safe. For now, at least.

This is exactly what I wanted, and why I came to Everthorne Hall in the first place . . . right? To do a job and not let myself get distracted before I'm done. And yet I can't bring myself to feel relief. Instead I force the simmering disappointment away.

"Don't be ridiculous, Riven," I murmur.

Time to be a professional. If a secret alcove like this exists, it must contain some clue as to the exit, right? What's the point otherwise? And the guard in the parking lot informed me about hidden clues . . .

Pushing all thoughts about Reaper and what just happened to the back of my mind, I search the place systematically. I check every wall, nook, and corner, finding nothing of use, then I finally turn to the hot tub.

The water's clear, the heat a welcome change.

As I look closely, I notice a faint shimmer at the bottom of the tub.

"I knew it!"

Putting my whip aside, I roll up my sleeve and stick my hand in the water, holding onto the edge so I won't fall in. But as much as I stretch, I can't reach the damn thing.

Bloody hell. I have to get in.

I take one last look to confirm I'm still alone, then I get undressed, set my costume, boots, and whip within reach, and slip into the hot tub wearing nothing but my mask.

My moan is almost as loud as the other people fucking within the maze. The water's like a warm embrace, pulling me deeper until all my muscles relax under the bubbling, massaging streams.

This feels heavenly . . .

When I reach for the shimmering clue at the bottom this time, my fingers snatch it without difficulty.

Turns out it's a transparent cube, as big as my hand and made of glass. Water droplets run down each side. I hold it above me until the flickering torchlight reflects in the glass, unveiling notches that kind of look like . . .

"Holy crap," I murmur, suddenly sitting upright. "It's a map. A map of the maze."

And if I'm reading it correctly, I'm exactly at the center right now. With this cube, it'll be a breeze finding the exit and getting the job done. I may even win the golden ticket for the yearlong membership if I want it.

But do I want it?

All the thoughts, memories, and feelings about Reaper I pushed away come back with brute force.

I carefully place the cube next to me on the edge of the hot tub, then I lean back, allowing my mind to wander. Just this once. And only for a couple of minutes.

It's kind of weird lying here in a tub, watching the moon and the stars above me, surrounded by music, moans, and a rhythmic pounding in the distance . . . but I get the appeal of Everthorne Hall. My skin hums and my

core tightens at the mere thought of what just happened. What I did. No—what I *let* happen.

I bite my lip. New heat coils deep in my core when I think about Reaper watching us. Getting off on it. Jealous. Obsessive. Desperate to punish me for it, just like he did last time.

My head falls back, and I close my eyes, letting myself relax a little. Letting my fingers roam over my body, teasing and caressing my skin, pretending it's someone else touching me.

Suddenly, a hand clamps over my mouth, and I'm pulled out of the water.

My eyes snap open, but my scream is dampened by the fingers covering my mouth.

"Gotcha!"

CHAPTER FIVE

Fear explodes in my chest. Instinctively, I grab the cube and throw it in the direction of the door. Everything in me is ready to fight-or-flight, but the panic stops the second I hear the familiar voice.

Reaper holds my naked, wet body close to his chest, not letting me go even when I realize it's him.

How did he get in here? How did I not hear him?

My heart beats like crazy, doubling down as I notice another masked man entering the pool, naked, closing in on me. With Reaper holding me captive like this, I'm sitting on the edge, my legs still dangling in the water.

The masked man's eyes roam over my naked body and fixate on the place between my thighs.

Oh, he won't. He wouldn't dare.

Oh, but he does. Rough hands grab my knees and spread them apart.

On pure instinct, I struggle, I fight them, relishing in the rush of heat and the danger sizzling through my veins.

Both their grips tighten. Reaper loops his arm around me, forcing me to keep still, while the other man gets down on his knees in front of me, removing his balaclava just enough to bury his face between my legs.

I whimper as his tongue glides in one long stroke from my pussy to my clit.

Unable to move, still stuck, I can only receive what they choose to give me, and not being able to talk with Reaper's hand still on my mouth really messes with my head.

Blood rushes in my ears. All my senses are heightened.

Moaning, I lean against Reaper, letting him hold me upright while his friend licks and sucks me like he's starved and I'm the best meal he's ever had.

It's not Ghost, though, because I'd remember those hands, mouth, and cock. The man in front of me is a complete stranger. A complete stranger who's licking me expertly, pushing me closer and closer to the edge, while Reaper holds me still, watching his friend eat me out.

The masked man places my leg over his shoulder so he can go in even deeper and pushes his tongue into my pussy, licking up my wetness.

"I want to hear you scream tonight, little thief." Reaper's hot breath makes my neck tingle. "I want everyone to hear you come screaming."

He lowers his fingers just a fraction to let me answer, though I doubt he'll like what I have to say.

"What if I don't want that?" I pant.

Reaper's laugh is deep and cruel, his arm around me like an iron grip. "Then you're lying to me, and to yourself."

It's so hard to concentrate with his friend still playing with my clit and my pussy. But I've never backed down from a challenge, and I won't start tonight.

"Am I, now?"

A vampire with centuries of secrets. She asks the one question he won't answer.

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He nods at the stranger eating me out, who thrusts a finger inside me.

Electricity zings through my body, the feeling making me moan out loud, but I'm not as distracted as they think I am.

I spread my legs wider while simultaneously pushing back against Reaper's chest to gain momentum, then I kick at the stranger's elbow,

shoving his hand to the side and pushing him off-balance. Using their surprise, I twist and turn until I'm out of Reaper's embrace—and I run.

Water splashes. Heat and adrenaline pump through my veins. I don't waste time grabbing my clothes, but I do pick up my whip. The only thing I can use in my defense.

When I turn around, Reaper's already coming for me.

I don't think. I just act.

I lunge my whip at him, using it as a weapon for the first time.

His reflexes are astounding. Instead of ducking, he catches the other end in his hand without even flinching. Then he starts pulling me toward him.

Even though I should let go of the handle, I don't. Because deep down, I don't want to run away from this. From him. I want *every* filthy thing he's promised me. Whatever that says about my mental state, I couldn't care less. This is what I need. Him. In whichever way he sees fit. Because in the end, I always get way more than I could ever imagine.

When I'm standing right in front of him, Reaper turns me around and pulls my arms behind my back. I don't fight him this time—not even when he opens his belt and ties my wrists with it.

"Get to the chaise longue. On your knees, back turned to me."

For a second, my gaze wanders to the other guy who licked my pussy only a couple of seconds ago. He's standing next to the hot tub, water droplets running down his chiseled torso.

I swallow hard.

My limbs are trembling, but I position myself on the cushion, legs spread, heart pounding. My skin's still wet from the hot tub, and goose bumps erupt on my arms and my legs, but I'm not cold. How could I be, under Reaper's fiery gaze?

Well, the patio heaters might also be helping.

I can't see what's happening behind me, but I can feel their stares on me, their eyes wandering over my body, over every curve, just like their hands will.

But it's Reaper who steps up behind me. Even if I can't see him, his powerful presence is familiar. Just like the tickling of excitement, because I don't know what's about to happen or what he's going to do to me.

His fingers grab my ass first, massaging my cheeks.

Then he rasps in my ear, "Seems like someone *wants* to be punished tonight."

CHAPTER SIX

"I don't—"

A scream cuts me off. It's my own scream, and it turns into a moan of pleasure when Reaper slaps my ass a second time.

Fuck, I love the sizzling sensation. I'd never let another man do what he just did, but with him, it's different. I crave every second of it.

One of his hands caresses my burning flesh, while the other sneaks between my legs.

"You're so wet," Reaper murmurs, his fingers playing with my clit until I whimper. Even if I could, I wouldn't stop him, because he knows exactly how to touch me. He knows the perfect amount of pressure, the precise circling of his fingertips, and just the right speed.

Without skipping a beat, he pushes two fingers inside me, and I almost come on the spot.

"You're in desperate need of a cock, aren't you, little thief?"

"Yes!" I gasp, riding his fingers.

Even though I love them inside me and on my clit, I need more. Something bigger. Harder. Deeper.

Without warning, he withdraws his fingers and pushes something long into my opening, inch by inch. I gasp as realization hits.

Did he just . . . ? Did he really . . . ?

Never slowing down, he pushes the handle of my own whip inside me, using the rest of it to rub my clit. My eyes roll back in my head, and I moan shamelessly, not caring anymore who might hear me or see me like this.

“You have no idea how fucking hot you are right now, little thief,” Reaper groans into my ear, “taking the whip like that. I’m so fucking pleased with your costume choice tonight.”

The frosty night air tingles on my skin, but all I feel is heat. All I hear are the sounds coming from the surrounding maze, the eerie music, the rhythmic pounding, the moans getting louder, and the whimpers of the other people.

Liquid heat races through my system, sizzling and burning hot.

“Oh my God . . .”

“I’ve told you once before,” Reaper growls, pushing the handle deeper into me. “There’s no God here. Only the Devil himself.”

My fingers twitch like they want to grab the whip, but they can’t. My wrists are still tied up behind my back, leaving me bound and helpless, at the mercy of the Mafia enforcer haunting me for data files I once stole. I never gave them back, and he never turned me in or tried to kill me. But he could if he wanted to. He could snap my neck in an instant, and I wouldn’t even see it coming.

Suddenly, I’m not so sure anymore he won’t harm me. With intent or involuntarily.

“Reaper . . .” Slight panic surges in my chest, but I don’t stop him. I probably couldn’t even if I tried. Only, the fear tightening my muscles is bigger than my arousal.

He catches my chin between his thumb and his forefinger. His eyes are as dark and deadly as I remember, but now there’s a hint of something else in them. Something softer.

“You trust me?”

I laugh hoarsely. “No way.”

Which is a weird thing to say, considering I’m kneeling in a secret chamber in the middle of a hedge maze belonging to the most exclusive sex club in all of the United Kingdom. My hands are tied, my legs are spread, and he just pushed the handle of my whip into my pussy.

Oh, and don’t forget the other people gathering around to watch us. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice more masked men entering the alcove, all friends of Reaper, just waiting for his approval to do to me whatever they want.

How the hell did I end up here?

Reaper hesitates, and for a moment, I think he's about to finally take off his mask to reassure me. But he doesn't. Of course he wouldn't. He never has in all the time I've known him.

They agreed to fake a relationship. Nobody agreed to get jealous.

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Instead he leans down until we're at eye level, and I could almost kiss him if it weren't for that damn mask.

"Do it now," he whispers. "You'll love it. I promise. Trust me."

I don't know how much a promise from a ruthless Mafia enforcer is worth nowadays, but I nod anyway. "Okay."

He watches me intently. "Give me a color."

"Green," I say without hesitation, remembering the safe words.

"Such a good little thief." He pushes his thumb into my mouth, and I immediately suck on it. "Now take what I give you. Take what you deserve."

With that, he pulls his thumb out of my mouth. His other hand moves to the handle, and he pushes it all the way inside—then starts fucking me with it.

"Oh damn!"

Everything in me concentrates on the feeling between my legs, on the ever-growing need and lust and despair, and my embarrassingly wet pussy already clamping around the handle.

A hoarse whimper escapes my throat.

"That's it," Reaper rasps, quickening his pace.

His fingers are suddenly on my clit, blurring over it with each thrust.

I hate that he's right—that all of this is turning me on, and I can't take it any longer.

"Be a good little slut and come for me. Come for everyone watching."

He pinches my clit, and the climax rips through my body. I come so hard I almost lose consciousness. Reaper slings his arms around me and

keeps me upright, never stopping fucking me with the handle, until the last tremors have left my body.

I turn my head, panting, incredulous, searching for his gaze.

His eyes are piercing and full of heat when he grabs my face. “You have no idea how hot that was.”

The need in his voice is almost palpable, and I can’t help but smile at his praise.

More men have now found their way into the secret room, making the total five. Five men, all of them wearing black clothes, identical masks covering their faces, like something straight out of a horror movie. They’re surrounding us, watching every move, listening to every sound I make, moaning with their dicks in their hands.

Two of them come with a deep grunt, their eyes fixed on the handle in my pussy. Three are still hard, staring at us, waiting for what will happen. Waiting their turn.

My gaze snaps back to Reaper, and I moisten my lips. “What’s next?”

“Next,” he says and carefully pulls out the handle, his hands gripping my hips firmly to turn me around so I can lean on the backrest, “I’m going to fuck you in front of everybody. But before that . . .”

He takes a big step back, letting the other guys come closer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My heart in my throat, I look around, watching three men closing in on me. Their cocks are out on display, hard and glistening with pre-cum from watching Reaper fuck me with the handle of the whip.

"You're not allowed to come until I say so, little thief." Reaper's voice is a dare and a warning alike.

Before I can grasp what's happening, two men have sat next to me, one on each side, while the third kneels in front of me. Rough fingers travel over my sensitive skin, and hot mouths place kisses on my neck and my inner thighs, sending waves of bliss through my body.

I let them do to me whatever they want, let them use me however they see fit, trusting Reaper knows me well enough by now to give me everything I need, even if it's not him touching and tasting me.

Lips close over both my nipples and start sucking, licking, nibbling.

I throw my head back and moan, fighting against the belt still tying my hands behind my back.

How am I supposed to stay calm in a situation like this? How am I supposed to hold it together when I'm about to shatter into a million pieces?

Breathe, Riven. Just breathe.

Hands spread my legs wide enough for everyone to see all of me. Warm breath grazes my clit, followed by gloved fingertips. Lips suck on just the right spot on the side of my neck.

I can't take it anymore. Everything in me tightens, trembling on the edge of surrender.

“Don’t.” Reaper’s harsh voice cuts through me like a knife. “Do not come. Not yet.”

I snap open my eyes and suck in a breath, biting my lip hard. Sweat glistens on my skin. My body’s strung so tight I’m trembling. It takes an enormous amount of self-control to push the lingering climax down, but that doesn’t stop me from pleading with my eyes. Pleading for Reaper to allow me to come.

My gaze never once leaves his face, and he’s all I see while three of his friends pleasure me in the most deliciously torturous of ways, while the other two stand next to us watching.

Suddenly, Reaper stalks toward us, and I can’t help but notice how everyone gives way without him having to utter a word. Standing right in front of me now, he grabs my knees, spreading my thighs even wider.

“You didn’t come,” he says.

I shake my head and bite into my lip again, my heart pounding like crazy. Anticipation and longing burn in my veins.

“Good girl.” Reaper holds my gaze, ignoring the others standing around us. Then he unzips his pants and takes his dick out. It’s as big as I remember it, with pre-cum glistening on the tip.

Wetting my lips, I look back up into his eyes as he moves closer. He rubs his cock between my legs, wets it with my arousal, then positions himself at my entrance.

Not once does he break eye contact.

I’m a shivering, sweating mess, teetering on the edge, while he’s in full control. Of himself. Of the situation. Of my body.

He enters me with a hard thrust that sends me spiraling. I cry out as a new orgasm tears through me, wreaking havoc. Then I burst into pieces right in front of him—in front of all of them—not able to hold back a second longer.

Reaper ruts into me while I’m half sitting, half lying on my back, tits bouncing, legs spread wide, hands tied behind me, while everyone watches him fucking me.

Just as he promised.

And I let him. I want him to coax all the pleasure from my body, because he’s the only one who can. The only one I’d do such sinful, forbidden things with, even if I won’t say it out loud.

But then he stops all of a sudden and pulls out. I whimper at the loss, but he doesn't grant me the slightest time to think about it. Instead he grabs my upper arms and pulls me to my feet, turning me around swiftly. One second, my hands are tied by his belt. The next, I'm free again, and kind of disappointed about it.

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What the hell is wrong with me?

"You know what to do." Reaper takes a step back, pointing to the nearest wall.

I shiver from the tension and the thrill of it all, but I don't hesitate. This time, I don't try to run or fight him. I do exactly what he expects me to do.

Without looking back, I position myself in front of the hedge, my legs spread like the good girl I am, fingers gripping the branches for support.

Not knowing what's happening behind me only magnifies the suspense.

None of the men utter a word. But one of them approaches me.

Hands roam over my naked skin, over my back, to my bottom. Hands that don't belong to Reaper. And yet I don't move when the stranger stands between the wall and me. His fingers are back on my body, his lips kissing, licking, and sucking my nipples until I moan.

Then Reaper comes up behind me again, his hard cock rubbing between my ass cheeks.

The stranger gets down on his knees in front of me, his masked face now eye level with my pussy. But he doesn't continue.

"You want him to lick you?" Reaper asks.

Lost for words, I can only nod.

"Tell him," he orders. "Tell him exactly what you want him to do, baby."

My cheeks blush fiercely, but I'm too far gone now to care anymore. "I . . . I want you to lick my pussy until I scream."

The man shows me a devastatingly handsome grin, then he grabs my hips and buries his face between my thighs.

The first touch of his tongue on my clit sends white-hot lightning through my core. I throw my head back and moan, leaning on Reaper, who's keeping me upright when my legs want to give in.

"Feeling good?" he asks while the other man licks my pussy.

I nod, panting.

The man in front of me spreads my legs. His lips close in on my clit and suck it like I'm the best damn thing he's ever had in his life.

I'm so close to coming again, just from him pleasuring me, and Reaper, and a bunch of strangers watching.

"Hands on the wall," Reaper reminds me.

I didn't even realize I'd moved them toward the stranger's head, wanting to press him closer, but I clutch the branches again, bracing myself for what's about to happen.

Heat blooms in my ass when Reaper's palm collides with my skin. I bite my tongue, not wanting to show him how desperately I need this—how desperately I need *him*. But when he slaps my ass a second time, a needy moan leaves my lips, loud enough for everyone to hear.

Oh God, is this really happening?

CHAPTER EIGHT

Not giving me a moment's rest, Reaper's palm collides with my ass again and again, until I cry out. Then he slams into me, fucking me hard, while the stranger licks my now overly sensitive clit until I'm on the edge again. He only gets up so another man can take his place.

This is straight out of the dirtiest dream I've ever had. Even dirtier because I've never dreamed about having sex with so many men at once.

"You want a cock in your mouth too?" Reaper suddenly asks, his fingers enveloping my throat. "A cock to suck on while I pound into you?"

My stomach does a little flip-flop, but I nod. This man knows me too well already. "Yes, please . . . "

One of the guys steps forward—big, hard cock in his hand.

In one swift motion, Reaper turns us around so I'm facing the new guy, while the other one resumes his position between my legs, his tongue already back on my clit. Reaper takes my hand and wraps my fingers around the other man's cock.

We both moan in unison as I start pumping his dick, while Reaper continues rutting into me. Harder this time, as if part of him is punishing me for touching another man or letting them touch me.

This is so incredibly dirty and totally outside my comfort zone, but I can't make myself stop. I can't make myself not crave every dark, depraved fantasy Reaper's bringing to life. It's like I'm addicted to him and everything he does to me.

When I entered the maze, this wasn't what I had in mind. I don't even know what I expected, but it definitely wasn't this. Sex, not with one or two

but *three* men at the same time. With others watching, wanting to join, hoping for a chance, waiting their turn. But it's Reaper's choice whether to share me with them or keep me to himself.

I moan as he pushes me down toward the third guy, his hand between my shoulder blades, dick still buried deep in my pussy.

"Open those pretty lips for him, little thief."

My tongue glides over the long shaft, then I press my mouth to his tip, wrapping my lips around him. Abruptly, Reaper thrusts into me hard, pushing me forward so the other man's cock is buried to the hilt in my throat.

I gag and moan as they all start to truly fuck me.

It's the hottest thing I've ever experienced, giving up all control and being at their mercy. Not having to think anymore, but letting them decide what they want to do with my body, knowing I'll get everything I want and need out of it.

Before I met Reaper, I couldn't have imagined seeing myself this way. And I still can't imagine letting loose like this with anyone but him. The deadly man I've never seen the face of. The man who seems to know so much, if not everything, about me—and pushes me to do things I've never even dared to think about.

My moans mix with the men's groans of pleasure and the wet sounds of our bodies colliding. Hands hold me down, and I feel the stranger's cock getting bigger each time he hits the back of my throat.

He's close. He's so close, and I just need . . .

Reaper twists my wrists behind my back, sending a zing of electricity through my body. Now I'm truly at their mercy. At *his* mercy—because he's the one in control, just like he was during our very first encounter in the abandoned church.

Only, now, I trust him enough to give me everything I need, and to know my body better than I know it myself.

"Take that cock." Reaper grabs my hair and pulls my head back until my moans and whimpers drown out every other sound. "I want everyone to hear you scream when you come on my cock, and mine alone. Scream for me." He pumps into me faster, pushing my body to places I've never felt before. "Scream, little thief."

The alpha wants his mate back. She wants a better apology.

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And I do. I scream as the final climax detonates within me, sending shockwaves of pure bliss from my core through my whole body.

One after the other, the men come, groaning and grunting while watching us.

Reaper pistons into me like he's lost all control, hitting all the right places deep inside me. His palm collides with my ass again and again, until I moan and sob, still riding out my own orgasm.

"Fuck!" He digs his fingers into my hips when his own climax takes over, and he fills me with his cum.

I gasp for air. My knees shake and give way. Reaper loops his arm around me, stopping me from falling to the ground. He holds me close to his chest.

I'm a panting, shivering, blissed-out mess. My mind can barely catch up with what happened. What we just did in front of—and with—the other guys . . .

Holy crap.

I'm still trying to catch my breath when Reaper straightens behind me.

"Leave us."

It's an order, and everyone follows it.

As I watch the men go, I don't feel the least bit of disappointment. Not with Reaper still with me, holding me like I'm precious to him, his cock still inside me, fingers caressing my sweaty skin.

The hot tub seems more alluring than ever right now, but just as I open my mouth to suggest getting in, Reaper takes a step back, releasing me from his embrace.

A shiver races down my spine, my body already missing him.

"Come with me." He pulls me into a corner and extinguishes the torchlight so the shadows swallow us both.

It's so dark I can't see a thing. I can only feel Reaper towering over me.

Then I hear the rustle of clothing, and . . .

Wait. Hang on a second. Is he taking off his mask?

"Reaper . . .?"

Suddenly, my muscles tense and my heart races for completely different reasons than before.

He doesn't say a word, just takes my face into his hands.

Then he crushes his mouth to mine.

CHAPTER NINE

At first, I'm too stunned to respond. Then my body reacts before my mind can catch up. My heart explodes in my chest as I wrap my arms around his neck and start kissing him back.

Reaper and I may have had sex a couple of times now, even including other people in our games like we did tonight, but this is the first time he's taken off his mask and kissed me.

This is our first actual kiss.

He pulls me closer, one hand on my hip, the other roaming up my back, until he plunges his fingers in my hair, holding me close. My moan escapes into his mouth as he bites my lip, then again when our tongues first touch. Little by little, the fervent kiss turns into something else. Something deeper. Crushing lips and longing moans, where dreams and reality bleed into one, until I don't know where I end and he begins. Until there's nothing else but this kiss and the man devouring me.

When he finally lifts his head, we're both breathing hard.

I still can't see his face, because he's towering over me in the dark corner, the only light coming from the room behind him. But I'm pretty sure the intensity of our kiss surprised him just as much as me. And yet neither of us seems able to find the words to describe what just happened or what it meant.

If it even meant anything.

But it has to mean something. Right?

"Riven . . ."

Swallowing the lump in my throat, I blurt out, "I need to clean up."

He hesitates for a heartbeat or two, not moving an inch.

"I'll get you your stuff. Wait here." His voice seems gruff and deeper than usual. The sound sends a shiver through my body, making my chest pang with a yearning I've never felt before.

"Okay," I say, for once thankful for the darkness, because without it, he'd see the lie in my eyes.

As I watch him retreat, the mask back on his face, a plan quickly forms in my head. Because as much fun as this has been, I've come here on a mission. And if there's one thing I'm good at, it's sneaking in and out unseen.

Right now, I'm standing near the hidden door leading to this place. Next to it lies the cube with the map inside it, on the floor, just waiting for me to pick it up.

Reaper's still preoccupied with searching for my clothes, his back turned to me.

I ponder for a second, then I push through my conflicting emotions and head for the door. Still butt-naked, but I don't care, as many of the visitors tonight already are.

Quickly, I pick up the cube and push the door open, sneaking out before Reaper realizes what I'm doing.

As I pass another couple fucking out in the open, I pick up some of their clothes and put them on when I'm out of sight.

Then I run.

With a little help from the cube, it's almost too easy to find my way out of the maze.

There's nobody waiting on the other side though. Only a red carpet leading into the main building for the winner of tonight's party.

I don't follow the path but find a back door inside, probably a delivery entrance, which serves me perfectly. When I enter the illustrious Everthorne Hall, I keep my head down and try to be as invisible as possible, hiding the blue bracelet that marks me as a guest for only one night. Instead I move as if I belong in this place. As if I'm a regular.

My pulse roars. Adrenaline pumps through my veins. The familiar tickle of danger is back. The shit I live for.

He expected her to come back. She came back for her things.

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Nobody notices me. Everybody's too preoccupied with the maze and the regulars.

When I almost run into a guard, I make a sharp left and pretend to enter a room, only to retreat once the guard has passed. Thanks to my research, I know exactly what kind of fantasy my victim plays out on a regular basis. Tonight's no different.

I head down the hallway and take a last quick look around before entering the barely lit room.

Thick air. The moans of women and a man. Wet pounding, and the sound of a headboard knocking against the wall again and again. There's virtually no light, so I have to search for a bit, sifting through all kinds of clothes on the floor, until I find what I came here for. The one thing I was tasked to steal tonight: a blood-red necklace with lots of rubies and diamonds in it.

I shove it into my pocket and sneak out of the room. The people inside are too busy with themselves to even acknowledge another presence.

A small smile creeps onto my lips as I silently close the door behind me.

I don't feel bad about stealing, and to be fair, it's not like I'm the first one to steal this necklace. The previous owner stole it himself and gifted it to a woman who's clearly not his wife, and who cheats on him too, so I'm only taking back what doesn't belong here.

Fireworks light up the night sky when I leave the main building. Seems like someone finally found the exit of the maze and won the golden membership card.

I'm not sad it wasn't me, though tonight was incredible. Sinful. Shocking. It showed me parts of myself I never knew. The memories of it are enough to make me blush, so I try not to think of them. At least not until I'm home alone.

When I reach the parking lot, the footman from before smiles at me.

“Leaving so soon?” He sounds disappointed. But if he remembers me from before and realizes I’m wearing a different outfit now, he doesn’t comment on it.

“Yes. I’ve had quite the adventure tonight.”

And that’s not even a lie.

“Did you enjoy your stay at Everthorne Hall?”

Out of the corner of my eye, I catch a flicker of movement.

Reaper’s standing there, all tall, dark, and dangerously handsome, with his skull mask covering his entire face once again. He watches me intently from the shadows, probably pissed off I sneaked out like that, but I don’t regret it.

In fact, I don’t regret a single thing that happened here tonight.

So I give the footman a huge grin when I answer. “Yes. I’ve enjoyed it a lot.”

And my contractor will be very pleased with my work. Because despite all the distractions, I found what I was looking for and got it for him without being caught.

And I got plenty for myself tonight too, didn’t I?

“Great.” The guard beams at me. “I suppose we’ll see you next Halloween then?”

I look back at Reaper one last time and give him a little wave.

Then I wink at the guard. “You can count on it.”

The end . . . for now.

*Check out this **exclusive sneak peek from Masked, Little Thief**, Book 4 in the Deadly Shorts Series!*

MASKED, LITTLE THIEF

CHAPTER 1

Stealing from an earl at a New Year's Eve masquerade ball is a first, even for me. Normally, I break into vast mansions or office buildings and get the things I need in the middle of the night. Unseen. Untraceable. Unstoppable.

Two months ago, I dressed up for Halloween and went into a maze at Everthorne Hall, London's most infamous and prestigious sex club, to steal a priceless necklace.

But a masquerade ball at a castle, thrown by the Earl of Harcourt for the wealthiest aristocrats in the United Kingdom? This is new. And a thrilling challenge for a change, since the past couple of weeks have been terribly boring and I've spent most of my time alone at home with my cat.

God, I just hope neither the king nor the queen nor someone else from the Royal Family is in attendance tonight. I'll never get past their security—and I want this job done, because I have a reputation to uphold. I never fail. I've never been caught or convicted. And I plan to continue my streak.

My fingers tingle in anticipation as I smooth out a wrinkle in my sleeveless royal-blue gown and walk through the ballroom as if I belong here. As if I'm one of them.

As I move through the crowd, I can't help but notice the twinkling lights coming from the enormous chandeliers. I bet just one of those would cost more than my liver on the current black market.

Rich, beautiful people in splendid gowns fill the packed dance floor, while an eight-piece ensemble performs classical music. If it weren't for the modern clothes, their hairstyles, and the phones in their hands, I'd feel as if I'd wandered straight into an episode of *Bridgerton*.

Luckily, everyone's wearing a mask tonight, varying from full-face coverage for anonymity to masks that look more like pretty accessories. Which means I don't have to pretend to know who these people are. Instead I blend right in.

I finish my round right where it began, next to the entrance door, with a fresh drink in hand.

What appeared to be aimless wandering, taking everything in, was really surveillance. There's a member of the security team stationed in each corner of the ballroom, two at each door.

As I take a sip of my champagne, I turn away from one of the cameras. They're hidden well, unless you know what you're looking for.

The camera now solely captures the perfect fit of my ball gown and my voluminous sweep-train skirt. I chose a simple but gorgeous dress for tonight, and I had to pay a fortune just to rent it. The gown has a sweetheart neckline with a satin bodice, and a royal-blue mask goes with it, hiding almost my entire face. It would be a perfect match for the blue tips at the ends of my brown hair, though I've concealed them with an elegant high bun tonight. Otherwise the color would be too peculiar, standing out among the clean-cut guests.

As I take another look around the ballroom, the tiny hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

Something's wrong.

Someone's watching me.

Instead of looking around, I place my drink on a nearby table and blend into the crowd. The babble of voices and the sweet sound of music follow me as I walk through the ballroom.

So does the tingling sensation on my neck.

A sense of relief washes over me when my eyes meet another woman's gaze. For a second, I feared a security guard might have discovered I'd snuck in.

Or someone else watching me.

I shake off that thought and zero in on the woman observing me from afar.

She has icy blonde hair pulled back on one side of her head and striking grey eyes that look like a storm waiting to happen. Even with a mask covering her face, I can tell she's the kind of beautiful that borders on dangerous. And yet her taupe-colored dress seems to dim her shine, not accentuate it.

I wonder why she chose this dress for tonight. Maybe for whichever mediocre man she's here with. Too bad. She's gorgeous, and she shouldn't make herself small for anyone. Especially not some guy.

Speaking of guys . . .

My eyes sweep the room once again and finally land on Lord Harcourt. He's our host for the evening and owner of Harcourt Castle, located three hours north of London.

He's also the man I'll rob before the clock strikes midnight.

Unfortunately, this mission is a little more complicated than I'm used to. Forging an invitation to the party and getting in as one of the prestigious guests was the easy part. According to my hacker friend, Trace, Lord Harcourt keeps his most precious belongings in a safe in his office. A safe I'll need not a code for, but a fingerprint. And not just one fingerprint, of course, because that would be way too easy. Oh no, this guy is far too paranoid, so I'll need a set of three different fingerprints from the man.

However the hell I'll get them. I'm still trying to figure that part out.

"Looking for something?" a deep voice asks behind me. "Or should I say, *someone*?"

A shiver crawls down my spine, and my heart skips a beat, then it thuds painfully fast behind my ribs.

I turn around—and suck in a breath.

Somehow, I expected him to be wearing what he always does: a simple black shirt, black jeans, boots, and his typical skull mask covering his entire face.

I wasn't prepared for *this*.

To continue reading click here.

ACKOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this story and for supporting a new indie author. I hope you enjoyed this spicy novella just as much as I enjoyed writing it.

If you want to support an indie author, tell your friends, rave about it on social media, and leave a review. It would mean the world to me!

Thank you to my editor Bryony for loving this story and for your amazing attention to detail. Thank you, Abagail, for your gorgeous graphics and for helping me spread the word about the Deadly Shorts Series.

And to my wonderful readers: Get comfy, grab a drink and some chocolate. It's about to get dark, steamy, and twisted!

There's a lot more to come, so I'm just gonna leave you with this: **Welcome to the Deadly Universe! You might want to check your morals at the door.** 🖤

If you loved *Scream, Little Thief*, get ready for the next adventure! Reaper will be back in *Masked Little Thief*—a spicy New Year's Eve novella including Reaper, Riven … and Ghost!

Join my mailing list to get all the news, exclusive reveals, early excerpts, and special content!

xoxo

Scarlett

ALSO BY SCARLETT CROFT

Deadly Shorts (novellas)

Riven & Reaper

Run, Little Thief

Hide, Little Thief

Scream, Little Thief

Masked Little Thief

…and more coming soon!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Scarlett Croft writes spicy dark mafia romance packed with high-stakes action, twisted obsession, and unapologetically lethal love stories. Her books feature morally grey anti-heroes, women just as dangerous as the men who desire them, mafia empires, assassins, sizzling chemistry, and fierce enemies-to-lovers tension.

When she’s not writing and emotionally wrecking her readers (you’re welcome!), she's surviving on strong coffee and good books, rewatching her favorite comfort movies, planning her next trip, or plotting her next deadly romance.

Join her mailing list for news, exclusive reveals, excerpts, and special content. You can also connect with her here:



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