

My first memory is that of being kidnapped.

It's not as much as a memory as it is a feeling, the feeling of being carried like a bag on a strange mans back through dark tunnels that smelled of mold and death. I don't remember anything before that.

They brought Adrian when I was five and him seven. He came in with Raven, looking like a wreck, with untamed blonde hair and that faded red sweatshirt with the hole in the sleeve. His shoes left muddy footprints throughout the dwelling. Raven made me clean them up.

The first time we talked I noticed the pink scar that ran from his temple to the corner of his mouth on his right cheek. I'd asked what happened.

"Wouldn't you like to know," he'd sneered. Our conversations after that remained brief and formal.

Eleven years after that Felix decided I should spend some time with Adrian to "get him in line." I didn't know what I could do but I never asked questions. I just did what I was told.

I entered the dark sitting room, where Adrian was sprawled on one of the squishy leather couches reading a thick book. He looked up when I came in and his green eyes flashed in annoyance.

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He looked back down at the book. “Delia,” he said flatly, like he was greeting a stranger on the street.

“Adrian.” I sat down on the couch across from him, smoothing the folds of my black dress. He completely ignored me. I was used to this, but if I didn’t put any effort into the meetings, I would be the one to get punished.

But I didn’t have to achieve anything that day, so I decided to get answers of my own. He’d grown up a lot since the day Raven first brought him in, but he’d always be that wrecked blonde boy to me.

“Adrian, why do you hate me so much?”

His eyes met mine and they devoured me to the depths of my soul. “I don’t hate you. I just don’t like you. There’s a difference.”

The rest of that meeting was spent in agonizing silence.

A week after that, Raven brought him along on a reaping. “Why is he coming with us? He never does his job,” I whispered to Raven as I slipped my black cloak on.

She flicked her yellow eyes at me, but didn’t really see me. I was used to that, too. “Felix arranged it. Don’t ask so many questions.”

Raven was my mentor. She looked like a small child in a reaper costume but could create pain like no other in an instant.

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I turned away and glared at Adrian as the elevator jolted downward. His blonde hair spiked out from underneath his cloak and shadowed his bored expression. “Don’t mess this up,” I warned. This was my third reaping and I was determined to do it right.

He grinned, and his pink scar crinkled along with his skin.

He messed up the reaping by preventing me from harvesting the elderly man’s soul. I was the one punished because I let it happen.

I sat huddled in the corner by the fireplace in the sitting room when Adrian found me. He knelt in front of me, his image blurred by my salty tears.

“I’m not going to hurt you. I’ve had thousands of doses of Felix’s torture.”

Felix was the reaper that kidnapped us. I’d watched him torture Adrian several times. I’d learned to fear him early.

I let Adrian take my arm and he rolled back my sleeve. Three angry gashes glared up from my pale forearm, blood oozing out like boiling water. The whole right side of my body was on fire with the pain, all due to the poisonous knife Felix had used to cut me. It used to hurt worse but I learned to accept it. You can only do so much complaining before getting tortured again.

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Adrian sucked in a breath and shut his eyes. “Come on. Let’s get the poison out.”

He carried me to his bedroom. I didn’t know what his motives were because he had never been this nice. I’d always known him to be cold and heartless.

He laid me down on his navy blue bed, the only piece of furniture in the gigantic room. He disappeared through a door and I stared up at the purple starless sky through the skylight.

I was drifting off when he came back with an unlabeled, red bottle: the antidote to the poison. We always had to cure ourselves or else Felix would let us die.

“Delia, wake up.” He shook me gently then took my arm. He sat on the bed next to me and started to dab the colorless cream on the gashes. It stung and I bit back a whimper. I would not show weakness.

“I thought you didn’t like me,” I inquired after the stinging died down.

He smiled a little and added a red tinged cotton ball to the growing pile. “I lied.”

“Then why do act the way you do?”

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