

****Chained****

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By : **GleoLion**

Katie Hollow's life is going into overload. Friends that abandoned her are pushing back into her life, the ex love of her life shows up after disappearing for five years, and her best friend is in a coma from a severe attack. To top it all of, someone is targeting her and friends, picking them off one by one. She will do whatever it costs to keep them safe and stop the mysterious killer in his tracks. Cole Williams never had a chance to know his son and he would do anything for that chance. Years of tracking, killing and false identities brings him to a small peaceful town, the perfect place for someone hiding from their past. Now posing as a doctor, he watches his son from a distance. The only thing that can stop Cole from claiming him is an annoying group of friends and a lover. But for Cole, those can be very easily removed.



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****Chained** : Chapter 1**

It's funny how people can change within seconds to avoid a life threatening situation. This was a fact Katie had just realized, staring into the frightened eyes of her whimpering boyfriend. Make that ex-boyfriend.

"Look Katie, I'm really sorry for hitting you. It was an accident! I swear it'll never happen again. I love you babe." he pleaded, all the while glancing down at the object in her tight grip.

An evil smile played on Katie's lips as she twirled the extra-large butcher's knife in her hand. She watched him through the full length mirror that leaned against her living room wall. Just seconds ago he had been tall and menacing, pushing her against the kitchen counter and smacking her across the face. But all that changed once she grabbed her weapon, lying innocently on the counter top, and chased her attacker to the front door.

"Katie, put down the knife. Let's just talk about this..."

"Get the hell out of my house." She didn't raise her voice, but it was full of strength. "If you think I'm one of those girls who'll let you beat them around, hoping that you'll change, then you've got another thing coming. Now get out of my house and know that if I ever see you again, I will kill you." She glared at him ferociously, her green eyes reflecting burning flames of hate.

"Now Kat..."

Whoosh.

Twang.

The knife wiggled in its place, stuck in the front door. Without saying another word, he rushed out, slamming the door behind him.

"Holy crap Katie!" The shocked face of a young woman peeped out from behind the couch. She was small and mousy, with dirty blonde hair that was clenched in her fists and big gray eyes filled with disbelief. "I can't believe you just did that!"

Katie grinned widely at her best friend. "Claudie, get the ice cream."

Moments later, Katie and Claudie were huddled together on their red, plushy couch, each holding a spoon and a carton of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

"I still can't believe he hit you." Claudie commented, licking her spoon clean.

"Me either." replied Katie. She started playing with the ends of her dark brown curls. "It's a shame. I had such high hopes for him."

"Is that all you have to say?" Claudie laughed at her insensitivity. "I almost thought you were gonna kill him when you threw that knife. Good thing he saw it coming or we'd be doing a body dump right now."

"Yeah, I wish. What a jerk! What did I ever see in him?" she shook her head at the thought. "No, it doesn't matter anymore. I'm done with these stupid games."

"What games?"

"Boys, men, this! Love and lust and freaking relationships."

Claudie turned to her friend and shrieked "What! How could you say that? How could *you* say that? You know, you used to believe in love once. Don't tell me you never think about it."

Katie was caught off guard by her words. It was true, she did believe in love once, but it was a topic rarely spoken of. It had been five years since the boyfriend she had loved with all her heart had ditched. Without a word, he was gone and she hadn't heard from him since.

As Katie faced her, ready to argue, she was interrupted by a guest bursting through the door. It was her brother, Shadow, who stood before them.

"Ok, I'm here! What's wrong?" he panted, trying to catch his breath. His worried gaze swept the apartment.

Katie examined her twin curiously. He shared the same dulled green eyes and curly hair that stuck out everywhere. Although they shared a link, he couldn't have known she was in trouble. Not that quickly anyway. She rolled her eyes at Claudie in realization.

"You called him?" she groaned.

"Well, yeah." Claudie looked down sheepishly. "I was afraid, Katie! I didn't know what else to do."

Katie sighed. *When are they gonna realize that I can take care of myself*, she thought. Shadow was glaring at her now, making her uneasy. "What, what are you looking at?" she snapped.

"Who did this?" His voice rumbled out like low thunder. Katie looked away towards the mirror. It was clear to him what had happened thanks to the red, swollen welt on her cheek and the small cut only a ring could make.

"Don't worry about it now. Katie took care of it." Claudie giggled and Katie frowned at her roommate who could be so childish at times.

Shadow didn't take his eyes off her face. She could feel his anger rising up, sharing in his upheaval of emotions. It can be a useful skill, sharing in your twin's emotion, but at the moment Katie found it extremely annoying that his waves of anger were building inside of her too. She gave Shadow a warning look which he recognized and took a deep breath, unclenching his fists.

"That explains the knife in the door." he simply said. More giggles from Claudie.

Katie could see him deciding whether or not to handle it. She had no doubt that he could. He was 7 inches taller than her 5'6" and his muscular arms were ready to burst from his tight hoodie. Shadow was more than capable of beating the said guy into the pile of scum that he was and without much effort. Making his mind up, he leaned down, kissed Katie on the forehead and turned to leave.

"Don't do anything stupid" she called after him.

He turned back and smiled. "Nothing you wouldn't do." and with that he left.

"Oh my god Katie! Your brother is sooo hot." Claudie shouted, pretending to melt into the couch. "I hope you will be present at our future wedding and godmother to all of our five children."

Katie couldn't help but smile. No matter what, Claudie could always get her to smile.

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"OK first, that's disgusting and so totally in your dreams and second, I'm going to bed." she said, recapping her ice cream and setting it on the table in front of her. "I've had a rather long and painful day."

Claudie looked up with a goofy grin. "Okee dokee artichokee. I've gotta go to the hospital anyways." She rolled off the couch and went to toss their comfort food back in the freezer.

"Does that mean I'm discharged nurse?" Katie yelled to the kitchen.

"Yep. Just get some rest and I'll look at it tomorrow." Claudie called back.

Katie yawned as she stretched her tired arms up to the ceiling. Drowsy, she stumbled to her room and plopped down onto her bed. Without bothering to change clothes, she submerged herself under the warmth of her covers.

"Katie." she heard Claudie whisper at the doorway. "It's been five years. You have to think about it sometime."

Chapter 2

The Real Nightmare is Waking Up

As soon as it started, she knew she was having the dream again. The dream of five years ago. The dream that was a warning of trouble to come. It was set in a semi dark room, the only light coming from the lavender scented candles scattered on shelves and windowsills. There was little furniture: a bookshelf filled with random knick knacks and a few good books, a round wooden table, and a small tree that grew inside a large green pot. All these items were pushed against the walls and the floor was littered with a dozen big plushy pillows arranged in a circle. A half-eaten birthday cake played as the centerpiece for this arrangement.

Katie found herself cross legged on one of the pillows and she took in the eight people sitting before her. To her right was Claudie, long blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail and gray eyes gleaming with joy. Next to her was a goofy looking boy of twenty. His wavy black hair was pulled into a short ponytail with a few strands framing his funny face. Funny. He had a certain look that Katie could only describe as funny. His chin and nose were pointed, his lips were thin, and his ears were like elephants, sticking straight out to the sides. Luckily, he had dimples and gorgeous eyes to counter his facial imbalances.

His pale blue eyes were currently glued to the body of the boyish Puerto Rican girl beside him. She playfully pulled his face up to meet her similar bluish gray eyes.

"Izaak, what do you think you're looking...Oh!" she was interrupted as a large chunk of strawberry icing landed on top of her chocolate brown hair. Gasping, she grabbed it and threw it back at the obvious culprit, Shadow, who was holding a fork covered in sticky pink goodness.

"Ow Kodi! You got me in the eye!" he yelped. Kodi reached over, playfully swiping some icing from his face, and licked it off her finger.

"At least you taste yummy now." she replied, batting her eyelashes.

Katie chuckled to herself. *Only in my dreams*, she thought. But when she met her brother's cold gaze, she wasn't so convinced. Staring into his eyes, a shockwave of thoughts and emotions ran through her. Sure, she had experienced the feeling before, but that was in real life, not in a silly dream. For a moment, she was convinced that he was actually there, like they were both sitting in that room. A shiver crept up her spine and Katie pulled her eyes away from his. "This is a little too weird." she whispered.

Avoiding her brother's piercing stare, Katie looked down to her lap and became aware of the head resting on it. Without looking at the face, she knew exactly who it belonged to. Smiling faintly, she rested her hand in his jet black hair and began curling it with her fingertips. It was him. The one she loved years ago. The one who left without a word. Derrick. His name found its way to her lips and she let it out in a whisper.

"Derrick..."

He stirred at the sound of someone calling. Twisting his body around, he gazed up and flashed her one of the rare smiles she loved so much. Katie was immediately lost in golden yellow eyes. They twinkled up at her like two bright stars peeking through the black curtain of night hair.

"Katie." he whispered dreamily. It was his only reply as his starry eyes steady locked on her. They continued on that way for what seemed like hours until Derrick broke the silence. "Wake me up when it gets exciting, okay Kit-Kat?" Katie managed a small nod and he rolled back on his side, hiding his face from view. *How*

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long has it been since someone called me that? Stupid candy bar..., she thought to herself and forced her eyes to look somewhere other than down.

With her thoughts on chocolate, she found herself lost in the dark brown skin of the girl on her left. It was the most beautiful color and Katie envied her for it, comparing her own caramel color. If there was one person Katie was jealous of, it was Lina Jacobs. Even though they were like sisters, Katie couldn't help but envy her curvy body, beautiful features, and bubbly personality. Lina was now leaning towards an older boy while strumming a golden harp. She was laughing melodically and glowed with an unnatural white light. *An angel, who'd have guessed?* Katie thought bitterly. *So the man next to her is...*

"Daddy!" she heard herself saying. "I'm bored." *What?? Janak is not my father!*

Janak rolled his eyes at her. He was the oldest of the group, rugged and tall. His olive skin seemed to glow in the light and his hair was short and rainbow colored, which was strange and out of place. He definitely was not old enough to be her father.

"Jinxie!" he yelled. "Party's over, we're tired, what do you want?" On his left was a medium built Asian girl with dark red hair. Jinxie was a great friend, but in this land of dreams she was scary and intimidating.

"Why, we must perform the ritual." she spoke in a monotone voice, showing no expression in her face.

"Baa!!" Kodi responded in an agreeing tone.

"It's time. Time to chain our souls together forever. Never leave each other!" she cackled crazily. Katie started feeling nervous. This was usually the part in her dreams where everything goes wrong and she has no control of her minds journey.

"We must kill her! She knows the secret, she knows too much." shrieked Claudie pointing a threatening finger in Katie's face. Katie could only watch as her friends went insane. Kodi continued making random animal sounds, Izaak laughed uncontrollably, Liina kept strumming her harp, and Janak beat his broad chest with fists like Tarzan.

"You guys. Please no..." she pleaded. It fell upon deaf ears as they became even more hysterical and crawled towards her on all fours. Their faces were dark and twisted, barely recognizable. She knew exactly what would happen next, her dream swiftly becoming a nightmare.

"We must sacrifice to stay alive, sacrifice to stay alive, sacrifice..." Jinxie dully repeated over and over. Soon enough the knife came. How she hated it, glowing green in the increasing dark, slowly moving towards her.

She was knocked onto her back by the almost-forgotten Derrick. He was pressed on top of her, holding the knife close. She could feel the chill of the metal as it gently brushed her cheek. Then came the part she hated most. Derrick's face started changing, morphing into a dark grin, shadowy face, and reddish eyes boring into her own. She tried desperately to push him away and was startled to see her arms pale and small. She clearly saw her reflection in his gleaming eyes and gasped to see that she wasn't Katie anymore. She was Claudie. And Derrick plunged the green thing into her heart.

Katie's eyes shot open. She was too afraid to move under her thick covers and panted heavily. The air was hot and sticky, but she refused to stretch an inch until she had completely assured herself that it was just a dream. Slowly relaxing, Katie pushed all traces of her nightmare to the back of her mind. *What the hell is wrong with you?* She asked herself silently. The strange quiet enveloped her as she waited for a reply and jumped at the sound of her cell ringing. Shakily she grabbed it, hoping for a comforting voice.

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"H-Hello?" she whispered.

"Katie! Where are you?"

Katie let out a sigh of relief. It was just her brother. "I'm home. Is everything alright?"

"No! Claudie's in the hospital. I'm coming to get you, so be ready."

"I know she's at the hospital. She works there." she replied, confused at the urgency of his tone.

He let out an exasperated cry. "No, Katie! She was attacked. She's there as a victim! Look, I'm almost there. I'll explain in the car, ok?"

"Ok, bye." she spoke softly and as she closed her phone, the last images from her dream rushed forth. Katie shuddered at the image of herself as Claudie as she was about to die. *Really, what the hell is wrong with you?* She asked herself once more and rushed out of the apartment.

Chapter 3

Funny How Things Work Out

Cole looked out into the dark hallway before him. An entire hospital floor shut down, could he be any luckier? He sighed as he had to make his way through, depending on his memory and not his sight. He managed to navigate the blackness while avoiding sharp corners and misplaced hospital equipment. It only took a couple of minutes, a quick left and he found what he was looking for. The light at the end of the dark. Cole picked up the pace and prepared himself for what he was about to do. *Reed Jackson. 25. Fresh out of the police academy. Family in Wyoming. Single. No wife. No kids.* He repeated these simple facts over and over in his mind while tapping his fingers on the tool belt of needles slung on his waist. He stopped in the doorway and gazed at the bandaged sleeping victim.

"Mr. Jackson!" he bellowed out, causing Reed to jump. "It's time to join the world of the living! Now I've got some questions for you and I need truthful answers."

"Who are you?! Where am I?" Reed huffed angrily. He eyed Cole warily, assessing the threat factor. Cole was roughly 6'3" and although he was big, he didn't look very muscular. Taking this in and seeing the doctor's uniform, Reed was able to relax a little.

"I'm Dr. Williams and you are in Berkley's Memorial Hospital. As I was saying, I have some questions..."

"Why is it dark out there? And what happened to me?" Reed interrupted. He figured his questions were more important since he was the one with the IV in his arm.

Cole felt his frustration build, but refused to let it control his actions. Instead he smiled and replied. "I said I was going to ask *you* some questions, not the other way around. How about I tell you what happened to you tonight and in return, you have to answer all my questions. Deal?"

He grimaced on the inside, hating how fake his voice sounded. He watched as Reed opened his mouth to reply, but instead shut it and nodded his head. Cole took a deep breath and continued in his "friendly doctor" voice.

"Tonight you were at a bar investigating the Stone case. While there, you were mistaken for a man named John Steele, who owed a lot of money to some dangerous guys. They took you outside and beat you up pretty bad. One of the guys had a knife on him and after stabbing you in the back five times, he proceeded to carve the words 'My Bitch' into your chest." Cole suppressed a laugh when he saw Reed's panicked face peering under the bandages on his chest.

"They left you to die, but someone at the bar saw what happened and you were rushed here shortly after. The hospital has been extremely busy lately and we had trouble finding you a room, so I suggested that you be kept here by yourself. This area was shut down due to an outbreak of syphilis that was spread to all patients and staff on this floor." Cole had to hold his laughter again at Reed's increasing discomfort. "That's why there's no one else here. Just you and me."

Enough playing, let's get down to business. Cole took a step closer and set his features to be hard and menacing. He could do it without thinking, it had become second nature. He looked Reed straight in the eyes, determined not to blink or waver. "Now you are going to tell me everything you know about the Stone case." his voice was deadly calm, void of any previous warmth. The cold monotone sound echoed into the empty hallway behind them.

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Reed was a small, helpless animal caught in the hypnotizing glare of a snake's dark blue eyes. He didn't bother trying to mask the fear filling up his body and as he started rambling, he couldn't control what words slipped out of his mouth.

"Ms. Stone was murdered about five years ago, she was the last in a chain of similar deaths all thought to be done by the same person. They didn't find any evidence, but they could tell that she was the intended target and I thought I'd make a name for myself at the station if I could get some kind of closure on this. I did some digging around and finally got a tip. Tonight at the bar I wasn't mistaken for John Steele, I was there meeting with him. He used to watch her well he watched Ms. Stone and he was across the street the day she was killed."

Watch her?! Cole thought angrily. *How dare he watch my Sylvia!* "It happened at her house. She had just arrived when a man came in after her. It looked like they were together, so Steele didn't think anything was wrong. The curtains were all drawn and it was pretty quiet. No one noticed anything was wrong until the son came home." *Oh no.* "The boy went in and came out with his shirt soaked in blood." *No, Derrick.* "He was screaming for help, saying his mother was bleeding all over the floor." *I'm so sorry Derrick. You shouldn't have seen that.* "With the lack of evidence, he was the main suspect, but he took off before they could accuse him of anything."

The emotions of that day came into remembrance and Cole shut his eyes to hide the pain creeping into his expression. At this moment he wanted nothing more than to hold his dear Sylvia in his arms, to see her gaze lovingly at him again. With great willpower he pushed these thoughts out of sight so he could focus on his current task.

"With the son gone, the police had no one to blame. They tried interviewing his friends, but no one knew where he went, not even his girlfriend. In fact, they were all trying to head out of here. Those murders did a lot of damage to the people here and nobody ever talks about it. That's what the chief said anyway. But I got word that the Stone boy is coming back to town after all this time. Should be here any day now. And when he does..."

Cole put up a hand to silence him. He gave Reed a satisfied smirk and put some distance between them. Inwardly, he was punching the air with joy. After all his hard work, all the searching, waiting, fighting, hiding, killing; he was finally rewarded. Derrick was coming straight to him. And when he arrived, there would be nothing stopping him from taking back his boy.

"We're gonna have a welcoming party for that boy. The town needs someone to blame and I'll be the one to give that closure. I'll be the town hero." He heard Reed mutter under his breath. He obviously had said it to himself, but Cole understood every word. And he didn't like it one bit.

Instinctively Cole reached for his tool belt and pulled out a syringe filled with a clear liquid. Reed sat up quickly at the sight of it. It became very clear that Cole wasn't the average doctor.

"I was kind of hoping I wouldn't have to do this, but I can't let you mess with my son."

He saw the wild panic written all over Reed's body as he sprinted to his bedside. Reed attempted to make a run for it, but Cole pinned him down on the bed in one swift movement.

"No, stop! I don't understand, what the hell are you doing?!" he shouted, swinging wildly to get free.

Cole released an animalistic growl and leaned in till Reed's face was inches away. "Derrick Stone is my son and there's no way I'm losing him to the police. Sorry kid, I'm gonna have to kill you."

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Reed froze under his constricting grasp. He shook his head in disbelief. "No, no, no! You can't do that!" He shouted with newfound confidence. "Everyone will know it was you, you're the only one who's been here. They'll know if you kill me. But if you let me go now, I can forget this ever happened. I won't go after your son. No one needs to know anything."

Cole was shocked for a moment. He couldn't believe this man would say such a thing. How could he be so naive? "You stupid boy! I can't let you live, you know too much." He released one hand from Reed's body and pulled the IV pole closer. He switched the syringe to his free hand and smirked at Reed. "Tonight you are going to have a seizure in which you over exert yourself and die of blood loss. No murder, just natural causes due to your attack."

He reached up and injected the clear liquid into the IV. Before Reed could pull the IV out of his arm, Cole pounced onto him again, holding his arms on each side of his body. "You want to play the part of the hero. Eventually, you would have told someone what you know and pretty soon you would have discovered you're killer. Sorry, but I'm not planning on going to jail anytime soon."

Reed gave one last attempt at escape by kicking his legs, but he didn't have the energy to fight Cole off. "I could care less about you, I just want the Stone murderer!" he screeched, looking over Cole's shoulder.

Cole's smirk turned to a scowl. "Are you really that simple headed? I just told you that I'm the Stone murderer and you have no idea what I'm talking about! I think I'm doing the world a favor by getting rid of you!"

Reed was still looking past Cole when the effects of the chemicals kicked in. His eyes rolled to the back of his head and his body started bucking wildly. Cole let go of his arms. This was possibly the cleanest kill he'd ever had. With his work done, Cole turned to leave, but was met with two gray eyes staring at him in shock.

"Dammit!" he screamed and the eyes shook with fear. They started backing into the darkness and Cole chased them. They moved fast, but Cole was faster and grabbed the person, pushing them on the ground. He grabbed a bright green syringe and proceeded to stab it straight into the person's chest. They struggled momentarily until falling limp in his arms.

He noticed the body was a woman's so he picked it up easily and brought it towards the light. He was taken aback by the glazed grey eyes that lay half open. He quickly moved his hand over her face to close them. Gently he brushed her dirty blonde hair away to reveal her face. Cole frowned down at her. She was one of the nurses at the hospital, one of his favorites in fact. Such a small mousy thing she was.

Cole sighed deeply. This was not going as planned. If he killed her, all the evidence would point to him. But who knows how long she had been standing there, how much she overheard. He double checked the empty syringe in his hand, making sure he hadn't killed her. He recognized the leftover glowing green drops inside as paralyzer and calmed down a bit.

Cole needed a new plan and fast. The smartest thing to do was keep her in a coma until it was safe to get rid of her. He looked over at Reed's body, calming from its seizure, and a perfect back story came to mind. Well, not a perfect one, but it would have to do for now.

He set the girl down on the floor and grabbed the closest surgical knife he could find. Cole rushed to Reed's bed, making sure to stand on the side so no blood would get on him. He gingerly tilted Reed's head back and cut his throat in one quick stroke. *Oh no Mr. Jackson. Looks like those guys that beat you up came to finish the job*, he thought while watching the gurgling fountain of red pour down from Reed's neck. He brought the knife to his cheek and cut a line from under his right ear to the bridge of his nose. *They got me too, of course.* He threw the knife out of the window behind him. *And this poor girl.* He walked over to the nurses limp body.

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He crouched over it, staring at her regrettably. *She walked in on them and they beat her to a pulp.* He leaned down and murmured an apology into her ear, as this was the last thing he wanted to do. Kneeling so that she was held firmly between his knees. Cole grabbed her arm tightly enough to make sure there was a bruise. He mumbled another apology as he raised his fist above her head.

Cole watched with a tinge of guilt as the girl erupted in tears. He stood behind the glass as she broke down in front of her friend's hospital bed. He still remembered the pained look in her green eyes when he told her that her friend was in a coma. He felt the guilt, knowing that he was the one to beat the nurse. Claudie was her name. Cole shook his head in regret. She had been one of his favorite nurses at the hospital. If only someone he didn't like could have walked in on his terrible deed, then maybe he wouldn't feel so bad.

So far, no one had suspected Cole, or his story. It had been fairly easy to convince everyone that he had arrived while the thugs were leaving. He had gotten away with it as usual, but it was still extra work that should have been avoided. If only it had went as planned, but sometimes things don't work out the way you want.

Cole decided it wasn't worth mulling over so he turned to leave. But as he walked by a group of young adults, something caught his eye. He watched them burst into Claudie's room, becoming intrigued when the green eyed girl started yelling something at them. He watched her walk up to a funny looking boy and slap him. Cole laughed quietly as he studied the boy's features.

Then it hit him. Cole rushed to the window and made note of everyone's faces. Yes, these people had to be related to the ones he killed five years ago. He recognized them all except for the green eyed girl and one that looked like her brother. He was sure of it now, recognizing the funny boy as Sylvia's nephew. Cole felt a new joy reawaken in him. This was Derrick's cousin and these were his friends. These were the people Derrick would come to.

Cole grinned widely at this new thought. These friends would lead Derrick straight to him. He would be able to be the father he never was. And once Cole got his son back, he would remove these attachments from the picture, so no one could take him back. He would finally have what he so desperately wanted, all thanks to the upset Claudie had caused for him. It was truly funny how things could work out.

Chapter 4

Safe Havens Hold No Comfort

The beating of her heart kept in time with the pounding of her feet as they sped over the wet concrete. She didn't notice when the rain started and she really didn't care. All that mattered was getting away from that room and those people. Nearing her destination she took a sharp turn, slipping, but never stopping. Her running became more scrambled and desperate. *I just need to be somewhere safe, somewhere loved. Where my problems don't matter.* She finally found the building and mercilessly yanked open the door to her escape.

"Katie!" A greeting of a dozen voices rang out engulfing her with the warm air and intoxicating smell of baked bread and alcohol Katie had grown to love. With a sigh of relief, she shed off all her bad feelings and stepped forward in a skin of glowing happiness.

This was her safe haven, it had been for years. Big Bear Bar had been a second home with its cool wooden floor, the cedar tables scattered around the front, the familiar oak bar sheltering her in a cave of bottles. Right underneath the everlasting stock of booze was the next best thing, freshly baked bread. Big Bear, the owner, and his wife couldn't afford buying two shops for their separate businesses so they decided to combine their talents and what a wonderful combo it was. Katie stood up on the small wooden stage sticking out of the side of the wall. Almost everything inside was made of some type of wood or another, making it feel like she was inside of a giant tree. There were no bad memories here. This was her safe place.

Katie and Shadow had been orphans from the start. It was true that they were temporarily raised by their father and mother to age five, but it was a dark childhood and perhaps it was their abandonment that saved their lives in the end. The popular saying "It takes a village" had become a favorite of Katie's because in truth it had been the combined effort of all the people in that sleepy little town that raised the twins. Being juggled from one household to another had given the twins an iron skin needed to face the world and the wits to survive. They grew up wonderfully, never feeling abandoned but loved.

Big Bear and his wife were perhaps the most charitable of all the many 'parents' and definitely the most accepted. It was to those two that the twins told everything: fears, hopes, dreams, failures, and even their true names. Big Bear loved them dearly and his wife had even been kind enough to go through the trouble of legally changing their names from Karlton and Katathrine Travine to the Shadow and Katie Hollow everyone knew them by. Memories swarmed around in circles, growing and fading until an echo of a smile was visible on Katie's face. It had been a long time ago, but Katie thanked her luck every day for the love and family she had fallen into.

Feeling refreshed, Katie hopped over the bar and ran to the back room. "B.B!" she chirped out. Big Bear turned at her call. Despite his bad ass title, Big Bear was a scrawny, short man. He was bald and had one of those faces that crinkled in an adorable way every time he smiled. Katie rushed over and enveloped him in a hug.

"Hey, Katie. Didn't expect to see you here tonight."

"Yeah, well I needed something to do, so if you don't mind..."

"No, not at all. Go right ahead."

"Thanks B.B."

Katie peeled off her sweater and made her way to the bar. A good night of bartending was all she needed to clear her mind. So what if she ran away? They all did, now it was her turn. Katie hummed to herself and got lost in the music. She danced around in her own world, not even hearing the bells announcing a customer.

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She didn't find the quick loss of noise suspicious, didn't think the stomping boots were unusual, and didn't mind the extreme squeaking of the barstool. No, she didn't care at all, until an all too familiar voice rolled over her ears like a rough lullaby. *And this, Katie thought, makes today the worst day ever.*

Chapter 5

Infamous words

"Give me a beer, please."

Derrick....Is that? No, of course it is! Wha....Ok calm down Katie! Keep it cool! Don't turn around just yet. Yeah. Let him wait to see your face. Just, just respond with something cool, something sly. What did he say to me again?.....Give me.....what?! Seriously? Give me a beer?! That's what he says to me!

Katie took a quick glance over her shoulder. Sure enough, there sat the infamous Derrick Stone, arms crossed on the bar, head hanging down. Katie's fingers skipped back and forth on the bottles in front of her.

Why am I so nervous? This is nothing. Ugh, I can't believe him! Why would he come here? I don't want to see him, I want nothing to do with him! 'Give me a beer please.' Really? Where's the imagination? Where's the respect? It wasn't even a question. Who the hell says please at a bar anyway? Why not start with an apology? 'Hey Katie, I'm really sorry for screwing you over. Here's a million bucks!' Oh my god! Why am I getting so worked up? He has no control over me. He has no control over me. He has no control. No control. No control. No control!!!

Katie grabbed the closest beer bottle, swerved around, and slammed it in front of Derrick. She saw him jump lightly and turned away before he could see her face.

"Ummm, are you okay?" His words were slow and careful as if he suspected her of some emotional imbalance.

Katie knew she had startled him and he obviously had no idea who she was. *Am I okay?* Her heart was beating obnoxiously loud, she was out of breath, and had to lean against the shelf for support. Behind her was the sound of a stool squeaking back, which meant he was probably standing now. Katie cleared her throat and squeaked an "I'm fine." Trying to look as casual as possible, she half-walked, half-ran to the back room.

Free from judgmental eyes, Katie lost no time in pacing around the back room, voicing her every mad thought. Tonight was turning out to be too much for her sanity to handle. If she wasn't safe here, she wouldn't be safe anywhere. Mid-pace Katie forced herself to stop and take a few deep breaths. She was stronger than this. All she had to do was plan out her steps. First, she needed to be calm. Second, she needed to face her problems (aka people) head on, one by one. Third, gain superpowers so she could heal Claudie. Then finally, she would jump and play in an overly green grass field with lollipops and rainbows.

"Sounds good to me." she huffed.

Katie managed to find the sweater she had ditched earlier and pulled it back on. She messed with her hair a bit and deciding she was presentable enough, entered the bar from a side door. Luckily, everyone had given her their greeting for the night, so she was able to maneuver anonymously. She sulked up to the bar and sat two stools down from her target.

Now, how would she go about revealing herself? Soft and subtle or loud and out there? The air around her felt colder than it should. Was that a hint to go cold and cruel? Claudie used to say that cold air meant dead spirits. That doesn't make any sense, Katie would say. Of course it does, she would argue. Dead people don't have body heat so normal people get cold when they're around.

****Chained****

"Does that mean you're around Claudie?" Katie found herself saying.
'*Well I'm not dead silly.*' would probably be her response.
"What if I don't know what to do without you?" she asked.
'*You're strong Katie, you don't need me.*' She could picture Claudie sitting next to her.
"Why can't you be okay? What happened to you?"
'*I wish I could tell you.*'
"Then why don't you?"
'*It's safer this way. I don't want you to get hurt.*'
"Look around Claudie. Somehow I'm going to get hurt."
'*Listen, you just need to...*'
"Hey, are you talking to me?"

Katie snapped out of her daydream and turned away from the sound of Derrick's voice. "No, sorry." He was filling up the space next to her, his presence overwhelming her senses. Every breath she took smelled of him, the hairs of his arm were tickling her own, his breathing was rough and calloused in her ears.

"Oh, are you on one of those Bluetooth things? Sorry." He had apologized, but refused to move away. "I don't mean to be nosy and an eavesdropper, but did you say you knew Claudie? Claudie Thrush?"

Katie mentally slapped herself for daydreaming out loud. *Please keep inner conversations on mute.* Well, there was no point denying it. Katie turned a little more towards him to get a better view of his face while keeping hers hidden.

"Do you know her?"
"She's my," Katie opted to a higher pitched, "yeah I know her."
Not too much info there.
"Do you know where I can find her?"
"Of course that would be the obvious next question. That was also one she didn't want to answer."
"Who wants to know?"
"What?"
Good one Katie. Great stalling technique.
"I can't just give out her information to anyone. That would be very irresponsible."
He was laughing! Good sign, things are going okay.
"I'm a friend of hers."
"What kind of friend?"
"What?"
"There are your work friends, your good friends, and then your mafia friends who try to hunt you down and kill you."
"Yeah, I'm definitely a good one."
Now that was a lie.
"Oh really? Then why don't you know where she is?"
Aha I got him!
"What's with the 20 questions?! I'm not asking you any. For all I know, you could be the mafia friend."
"Come on Tom-Tom. That's such a lame thing to say!"
"Then the credits all yours Kit-Kat! You came up with it."

The laughter lasted for a split second before she realized what had just been said. *No, did I just? Shit!* Before she could make a move to run away, his hands were around her waist, turning her to face him full on. It was exactly what she had been avoiding, making direct eye contact. His yellow eyes plunged into her, reading her every thought. No, she wouldn't let him! With one strong pull she managed to break from his grip. The two were standing, all eyes in the bar glued to their little interaction. Katie was frozen to the spot. She wanted to

****Chained****

run away again, but couldn't find the strength to move and it seemed that neither could he.

"Katie." It came out as a breath, sending shivers through her body. It was enough to power her to step backward and him to step forward. Big Bear popped into the scene before any other movements could be made, demanding everyone's attention except that of Katie and Derrick.

"Katie, are you alright?" he demanded, eyeing Derrick warily. Katie managed a small nod, never taking her eyes from Derrick. "Derrick, I think you should leave, but do come back later will you?" Derrick offered the same response as Katie. The bar filled with uncomfortable silence again.

"Well one of you start talking already!" a random voice called out. It worked and the two snapped from their daze.

Katie ran towards Derrick, but stopped short of touching him. He looked startled that she hadn't gone in the opposite direction. *But running hasn't worked yet, so I might as well try something else.*

"Katie, I'm sorry. I didn't know you were gonna be here, I swear..."

"Derrick, just stop for a second. We can talk and everything, but right now we need to go to the hospital."

"What's at the hospital?" Katie could feel tears threatening to choke her up. "Katie, what's wrong?"

"Claudie's in a coma."

Chapter 6

The Green-Eyed Monster

The minutes were draining away and too soon, the hour was up. He hadn't come. Derrick hadn't come. Cole dragged his feet through the empty corridor one last time. All of Claudie's guests had been filed out with the promise of visitation tomorrow. He glanced at Reed Jackson's old room. It was now empty, white bed sheets and sparkling floor. Not a single memory lingered of its horrors. *These people sure do clean up quick*, he thought and moved on to Claudie's room.

All alone and in the strange light, Cole was startled by her appearance. She laid there like a cracked porcelain doll, giving off an eerie glow as translucent as her skin. Where she wasn't pale, she was grayish-green in the spots he had gripped and hit her. As morbid as her body was, it was the face that gave Cole chills. He was sure it was meant to look peaceful, but instead it echoed a deep pain. Her face was littered with bruises, lips cracked with dried blood. It was as if a shadow had come over her, preventing you from seeing where her cheeks ended and the skin of her eyes began. She was the perfect corpse bride; all black and blue and dressed in white.

Cole's sigh seemed to be the only life filling the room. Grumbling, he pushed away the six chairs gathered around the bed. His hand found the familiarity of his tool belt, tapping over his rainbow assortment of syringes. They paused over a bright blue formula, snatched it up and stuck it into Claudie's IV. *That should last her for the night*, he decided. He was all ready to leave and give it a night's rest when a soft whimper floated from Claudie's mouth. Cole frowned and turned to stare at his patient. His ears must have been playing with his mind. He leant down and placed his ear right next to Claudie's face. Stiller than stone, just like he thought. Finally he would be able to go home, get some rest...

A shuffle of feet interrupted his thoughts. *Great. Another distraction.* Cole turned to face whatever would keep him longer and froze. A boy, wrapped up in black, was staring intently at Claudie. He was panting slightly, but stood prominently at the door. The intensity of his yellow eyes seemed to try to raise Claudie from her sleep. Cole remained unmoving, caught in a trance from a ghost in his past. His son was standing in his reach. Unbelievable! After all this time, his dream was coming true. *Quick, snap out of it! Say something!* Countless times this scenario played in his head, but now that it was real, Cole was surprisingly nervous. He cleared his throat, but the yellow eyes never looked his way.

"Hello." he ventured. The eyes flicked to him and back to Claudie. *At least a reaction.* "My name is Cole, and you must be..."

"Derrick!"

The girl with green eyes stormed into the room. She took the same stance as Derrick radiating grief and anger. They both stood without speaking for a few seconds.

"Claudie...she..."

"We have to go." snapped the girl. The yellow eyes fixed on the side of her head, a look she refused to meet.

Cole watched the whole scene in disbelief. Her! He was looking at her and not him! It took all of Cole's self-restraint to hold him from charging her right there.

"Let's go then." Derrick whispered. He went to grab her hand, but she shrunk away and instead turned to Cole.

****Chained****

"Keep her safe for me?" she asked.

Cole's anger nearly growled through his throat as he gave a small nod. She smiled at him and exited with Derrick close behind. Cole was left standing alone, anger brightening his skin. *What just happened?! I had him. He was mine for the taking and then she ruined everything! What the hell was she smiling at! I should chase her down and strangle the life out of her. We'll see if she's smiling then.*

Cole realized he had been holding his breath and released it along with his clenched fists. He glanced down at his pale palms to see the indentations his fingernails had engraved. He chuckled to himself. He would definitely kill that one there. He would make sure she suffered.

His feet finally led him to leave the hospital. Cole shivered in the chill wind and picked up a drift of laughter down the street. He glimpsed Derrick's head disappearing into the back of a silver car. *So, they're still in the area. At least this will be a good opportunity to see where my son lives.* Cole pulled up the hood of his jacket and climbed into his car, prepared to follow his son to the ends of the earth.

Chapter 7

Running Away Only Works Once

"Katie!"

"Kay-tee!"

"Kit-Kat!"

"Katie Hollow!"

"Katie!"

"Katie!"

"What? What?! What!"

"Get in the car."

"Get in right now!"

"Please Katie."

"Don't make me pick you up!"

"Come on."

"Get your ass in the car right now!"

Katie picked up her pace and tried to remain oblivious to the silver Camry rolling behind her. Only ten more blocks, then she'd be home free. Or as free as she could be with a carload of crazy people following her. The horn burst out from behind.

"Stop doing that! And stop following me, you're holding up traffic."

But as they all knew, the street was deserted of cars. People though were in heavy supply and they all stared at a sight they hadn't seen in over five years.

"Katie, after what happened I'm not letting you walk home, not by yourself." her brother's voice called.

"Hey Katie, nice parade!" a bystander shouted. She coolly lifted her middle finger towards him. "I see your friends rolled back into town."

"Shut up Mac!" she called back.

Janak's laugh cut through the air. "Mac Jones? Is that really you?"

The tone of his voice changed right away. "Janak! I didn't know that was you. Hey man, we should hang out sometime. I'm free whenever. You wanna go grab a beer? Right now?"

"Maybe some other time Mac."

"Alright, that's alright. You know where to find me. Just give me a call. I'm always available. Anything you need, I got it man. Don't be a stranger."

Katie glanced behind to see Mac jogging beside the car. Janak waved his hand, dismissing him, and Mac scuttled back to his friends.

****Chained****

"No one likes a groupie Mac!" Katie taunted.

"No one likes a runaway Katie!" Kodi snapped from behind.

"This brings back some memories." Izaak chimed in. There were a few seconds of silence before the car horn sounded again.

"I said stop that!" Katie screamed. She whirled around and stopped, glaring as the car came to a halt. Six faces pressed against glass and out of windows watched her with eager humor. *Wait...six? Shadow, Izaak, Kodi, Liina, Jinxie, Derrick...where is?*

Katie suppressed a squeal as her vision swung backwards and Janak hoisted her onto his shoulder. A burst of clapping and cheers erupted from the car and the growing crowd of pedestrians as Janak hauled over his catch. Katie hung limp in defeat, knowing any struggle would be in vain.

"Scoot over, here she comes!"

Katie squeezed her eyes shut as she was shoved into the small car containing seven other people. She hardly felt it lurch forward since she was too busy rolling in a sea of elbows, knees, and faces. After much squirming, she managed to rest across a few laps, face smooshed against someone's chest. She opened her eyes to see Derrick's hesitant smile. It faltered as soon as Katie's poisonous glare activated and he shifted to stare intently out the window. Katie urged herself to move away, but instead she was reminded just how tired she was. Every limb grew numb, every voice blurred together. Ignoring Derrick's startled expression; she made herself comfortable on his chest and succumbed to sleep.

Chapter 8

The Definition of Loss

A vibrating buzz sounded from within muddled clumps of sheets and blankets. A hand emerged from the multicolored sea and felt its way through, searching for the source. Digging deep into the side of the bed, it found the target and hastily silenced it, falling limp at the completion of its mission. The peace lasted for about five seconds and the gentle hum sounded again, causing a quick reaction from the hand and silence again. By the third time, Katie Hollow figured she might as well wake up and face the day. Her other hand was first to emerge, then her head, and last she stretched out her legs until one came in contact with something mushy and wet. Peeking through a curtain of matted curls, Katie spied her brother curled in a tight ball, freely slobbering on her toes.

"Shadow!" she grumbled, but he was too knocked out to hear. Katie wiped the top of her foot on the sheets as she rolled off of the bed, down to the floor. She pushed herself onto four legs, and then evolved to a staggering, stumbling two.

As much as she had claimed to be, Katie Hollow was not and never had been a morning person. It was this important fact that had been overlooked in the plan of her friends who believed their best bet for attack was early in the morning while Katie pushed around in pajama pants and a sports bra, mumbling incoherent ideas that were hardly cheerful and bordering on insanity. And so at ten in the morning, the day after her best friend had been put in a coma, Katie stumbled over one warm body after another without considering that they might belong to estranged friends who were waiting to literally pounce back into her life. She made it to the counter, shimmied into a stool, and face planted. A few seconds of silence were relinquished before a deep throated chuckle floated its way to her ears. Alarmed with the thought of being trapped in a nightmare, Katie spun around in her chair twice before finding the source on the floor leading to her bedroom.

Janak's amused smile was a quick reminder of all that had happened in the past 24 hours. Katie groaned and spinning back to the counter, hid her head under her arms. *If you can't see it, it won't hurt you.* There was a gentle tug on one of her curls.

"Can't you just leave me alone?" she moaned.

"Look at me Katie."

She burrowed her head deeper into the counter. There was a slightly stronger tug. "Janak!"

"Yes babycakes?"

Katie snapped her head up. "Don't call me that!" she bit back, narrowing her eyes. Janak chuckled.

"Thought that would get your attention. Now let me look at how much you grew up." With a pull from Janak's hand, Katie stood and gave a pathetic spin.

"Tada!" she mocked with false excitement. Janak just laughed and for the first time, she noticed how much he had grown up. For someone already so tall, he had gotten taller. His dark hair had grown out in waves and the adolescent goatee was gone. His face was still the same, though the sharp jawline was filled in, probably due to his famous appetite.

"Still pretty damn good looking, if I say so myself." His grin matched the warmth of his brown eyes.

****Chained****

"Same to you, if I have to say anything at all."

His eyes twinkled at her with that old spark and for one second Katie felt she was living in the past, until a shrill scream snapped her back to reality. She had been standing in front of Janak and in the next comprehensible moment she was between a wheezing body and a flurry of chocolate skin and black curls. Katie managed to find a free hand to rub her ringing ears as she tried to focus on the shrill voices.

"â you so much you have no ideaâ !.but I didn'tâ !.Katie!"
"..what theâ !off meâ !.Lina!"

Katie felt a strong arm snatch her away from the madness and found she was standing once again in Janak's protective grip.

"Lina, please get a hold of yourself and get off of Izaak." He spoke in a calm monotone.

The flurry halted and despite herself, Katie couldn't stop the spread of her smile at the sight of Lina Holmes. She was sitting right there smiling her bright whites as if there wasn't a care in the world, dimples fully indented, brown eyes blossoming with radiance. She shot up revealing an upset Izaak curled in fetal position. Her full trembling arms reached out to Katie, grabbing one shoulder and then the next.

"I know you hate me Katie, you hate me so much, but I justâ !I miss you!"

Katie was sucked into Lina's backbreaking embrace, arms awkwardly pinned to the sides. She felt a warm drop on her back and another and she sighed as Lina erupted into loud sobs over her shoulder.

"Come on Lina, not like this. You promised not to cry." Izaak stood, holding his gut. Katie gave him a plea of help with her eyes to which he smiled and detached the sniffing Lina and led her to the couch.

"I'm just really sorry. I'm so, so sorry Katie." She huffed, wiping the tears on the back of her wrists.

"Lina really, stop being such a baby okay?" Katie snapped her head to the living room. A familiar Puerto Rican girl sauntered in taking a place next to Izaak, her signature smirk meeting Katie's fearful gaze. "What's wrong with you?" she elbowed Izaak's ribs, never breaking Katie's stare.

"I got trampled." He winced.

Katie felt trapped. They had been waiting in her house, in her own home, preparing for her and now there was nowhere to run. She broke her intense stare with Kodi, who rocked Peter Pan's haircut better than the prepubescent boy himself.

"Where's Jinxie?" she murmured.

"Oh yeah, she had to take Derriâ !.ummâ !uhâ !she had to do something." Izaak faltered.

She could hardly hide her grimace. Did they really think she was that fragile? That she couldn't handle hearing his name? Katie stepped forward, shaking Janak's hands off her shoulders. She could hear Shadow calling her name before stumbling into the group. A look up was needed to see him glance around the room before meeting her eyes and she made sure he felt exactly how she was feeling. He shivered slightly, but returned with his own wave of determination.

"So," he started, turning his head to Izaak and Kodi, "How has everybody been?"

****Chained****

They all mumbled a general consensus that they were doing fine and the evasiveness of it all was the drop to bring Katie over her limit. They had gone out of their way to come back, trap her where she had to talk to them, and here they were skirting around the main issue.

"Doing great, I see. All been keeping in touch? Living the good life out there?" she smirked at them, hoping they felt the disgust in her eyes.

"Cut the crap, okay. We didn't come here to get attacked." Kodi spoke firmly.

"Then why the hell are you here? I didn't get the invite for a reunion"

"It wasn't planned, it just sorta happened." Izaak cut in.

Katie turned to Shadow. "Did you know they were coming?"

Shadow looked guiltily away. "Only Janak," he explained, "and the only reason I didn't say anything was cause he wanted it to be a surprise."

"I found out about Izaak and Kodi after I got here." Janak offered his excuse.

"We ran into Lina by mistake..." Izaak explained, looking to her.

"I didn't know about him though. None of us did." Lina smiled instinctively to ease the situation.

"So, what? You didn't think I could handle it? Everything had to be a big secret for Katie! Katie's not a big girl who can deal with her abandonment issues."

"Don't you even start with that!" burst Kodi, tired of holding her tongue. "We had our reasons for leaving, all of us."

Katie turned to attack. "Really Kodi? Was it so bad that you couldn't handle it? Did it really hurt so much that you had to run away while the rest of us stayed and dealt with it?"

"Katie...stop!" Shadow tried to interject, but the flames had been lit and there was no dousing them now. Kodi and Katie faced off, with whips of flame and thorns in hand, each word a lash at the others heart. It was a bloodbath that all else where simply witnesses to.

"Oh I'd expect you not to understand. Who did you lose, may I ask? Which of your family members was brutally murdered by some psychopath? Who did you have to cry over and bury into the ground? Who did you realize would never look at you again, who was it that you could never see smile?!"

"Are you kidding me?!"

"No, shut up and listen you little brat! You have no one."

"What?"

"You have no family." Kodi had pulled out her ultimate attack to which Katie had no defense.

"I do."

"No."

"I have him..." she interjected weakly, attempting to point to her one life line, her brother, but Kodi's gaze faltered her finger before it even got halfway.

"You're an orphan! How the hell could you understand? You, you had nothing to begin with, how could you possibly understand what it feels like to lose everything?!"

The room was frozen in an echo of sounds. Katie felt out for Shadow, but he had left before a word could reach his ears. Kodi stood huffing and puffing before stomping out the door, followed by a drained Izaak. Flustered, Lina stared down at her hands and became no more than a pillow on the couch, leaving Janak where he started, stiff as stone.

"You...." Janak looked up at her fumbled words. "You were it. I looked at you and thought, this is what a sister feels like. I looked at them and thought this is what a father feels like, or a mother, or a cousin or an aunt. You were my family. And I lost you. I lost the only family I ever had one burning day in June five years ago."

Janak took one step and another until Katie's nose brushed up against his chest. Trance like, she stared straight ahead.

"Because you left me. You left me." Not wanting to hear anymore, Janak wrapped a big arm around her, bringing her tight against him. She collapsed on his chest, broken down and tired, completely dry of tears. And Janak could do nothing, but hold her, hoping she could feel how much love that was held just for her.

"You left me."

****Chained****

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