

the darkest space



A FANGFLASH EDITION

ilta



the darkest space

ilta

fangflash edition

ilta.doll.systems/dark/the-darkest-space/ · 2026



rain gathers beneath my claws until the slate can hold no more, then spills in silver threads toward the gutter six storeys below, carrying soot, chimney ash, and the day's last warmth into a city that has begun closing itself room by room. doors seal around yellow light. tramlines hum after their final weight has passed. footsteps enter the square in loose currents and leave through streets too narrow for moonlight, each body briefly distinct through breath, cadence, pulse, then released.

i have been crouched between two chimneys long enough for cold to settle across my shoulders and for hunger to lose every impatient edge. horns folded into shadow. tail wrapped once around a drainpipe. jaw loose. mouth open just enough to taste wet stone, coal smoke, wool, skin. nobody looks up.

i let a laughing pair pass beneath me, then a courier, then three women walking arm in arm, every refusal making the quiet behind my teeth heavier, sweeter, until one set of heels separates from the thinning crowd and turns alone into the passage where the lamps end.

she walks without hurry, one hand closed around the throat of her coat while rain stipples the bare wrist beneath it, and the calmness of her pace lets me feel each small alteration in the distance between us: the roof sloping under my weight, her pulse passing behind brick, my tail easing free of the pipe as though the city itself has begun drawing a breath.

she does not glance back when the square disappears. she does not see the silhouette uncurl above her or the black claws leave four wet points on the slate. another doorway receives her shadow and gives it back thinner; another corner takes the sound of her heels and returns only their fading rhythm.

i follow from above, moving when the rain moves, crossing gutters and chimney gaps while her warmth threads the cold beneath me, and

by the time she pauses at the mouth of a courtyard to listen, hunger has gathered my whole body around the hollow of her throat. her head turns slightly. one pale cheek enters the last diluted light. i become still enough to hear the blood asking beneath her skin.

she waits in the courtyard while the rain spends itself against shuttered windows, listening so intently that her pulse becomes the loudest movement left in the city, and i let the silence lengthen until uncertainty starts inventing shapes for her. one hand leaves her coat and reaches into the dark beside her, fingertips searching for brick, doorway, anything solid enough to tell her where the world ends.

i cross the roof without sound. she looks up too late and sees only water falling through the place where i had been. relief touches her mouth before the gutter behind her gives one small metallic complaint beneath my weight. her shoulders rise. breath catches. blood quickens so suddenly i taste the change from above.

i could take her before she turns, but hunger wants recognition first—the clean instant when a living face understands what has chosen it—so i lower myself from the roof edge until my horns enter the courtyard light, then my eyes, then the wet point of one tooth. her gaze finds mine. fear opens. i smile.

“run.”

she runs, and the first violent change in her cadence goes through me like a hand drawn down the spine: heels striking too hard, breath spent before the passage has even narrowed, one shoulder clipping brick because terror has made the body larger than the space it must cross.

i drop behind her. impact travels from boots to thighs to belly. hunting pares the city down to her pulse beating inside my mouth and soaked cloth dragging across my cunt with every stride. she chooses left, vaults a rain barrel, wrenches open a gate; each useless decision makes me wetter around the certainty that i will put my mouth on her anyway.

my jaw hangs loose. saliva threads briefly between two lower teeth when i grin. she sees it and misses half a step. i could close the final metres now; instead i match her speed, near enough that my claws scrape the

wall beside her shadow, letting her feel exactly how much of the chase exists because i want it to continue.

she throws herself through the covered market and darkness blooms around rows of empty stalls, canvas roofs snapping above us while her hands overturn baskets, stools, a rack of copper pans—small desperate obstacles that make bright noises and ask nothing of my stride.

i clear them one by one, never looking down, watching only the white flash of her wrist and the pulse working at the side of her neck. every landing jars through my thighs, wet cloth grinding over my clit. my laugh reaches her; color rises above her collar when she hears the breath inside it.

at the butcher's stall she finds a knife left beneath the block, turns too quickly, and holds it before her with both hands. the blade shakes. she does not.

fear has found a spine inside her. my cunt answers. i slow enough to let her see my gaze travel from the knife to her face, then down to the throat she has chosen to defend. blood from a nick on her palm slips along the handle. its scent reaches me. my tail becomes still.

“good,” i say, and step into reach.

she cuts before i finish the step, faster than frightened hands should be, the knife rising from beneath my ribs in a bright economical line that turns my body just enough for steel to open the shirt and the skin below it. pain enters cold, then burns. my blood follows a heartbeat later, slipping warm over my side and under my waistband. my cunt clenches around nothing so sharply that my breath leaves as a laugh.

surprise crosses her face. she watches my thighs lock and my mouth open instead of using the space her knife bought. when my smile widens, every tooth shows.

then i catch her wrist and drive it down against the butcher's block. wood takes her knuckles. metal rings loose. her other hand claws my face, her knee rises between mine, and for three delicious seconds the whole hunt contracts into pressure—her body fighting for a seam, mine closing each one as it appears, my blood slick beneath her fingers.

then her knee finds the cut she made. white pain folds me just far enough. she tears free, snatches the knife from the floor, and runs with my blood across her hand.

i touch the wound, lift two red claws to my tongue, and taste myself inside the chase.

“again,” i call after her.

she leaves the market through a curtain of rain and carries my scent with her, blood drying tacky across the hand wrapped around the knife, a red mistake brighter to me than any lantern. i follow at a walk. each stride opens the cut beneath my ribs. blood slips under my waistband, warm against rain.

ahead, she abandons speed for silence. heels vanish. breath disappears behind the glass arcade of an abandoned conservatory, where dead vines knot the ironwork and shattered panes let rain fall through in separate shining columns. i step inside without hiding the sound. gravel answers my boot. leaves whisper where no wind reaches.

somewhere among the black planters she presses herself still and learns what i learned on the roof: waiting does not quiet a pulse once fear has claimed it. i taste my own blood on her before i find her outline, salt and heat carried back to me by every breath she tries to swallow.

“you marked yourself with me,” i say into the wet green darkness, and hear the knife shift in her hand.

the knife flies toward my voice and passes through the space beside my cheek, close enough for its cold wake to touch me before the blade strikes an iron post and falls ringing among the planters. she moves with it, choosing attack over concealment now, one hand closing around a shard of fallen glass as she drives through the curtain of dead vines. i meet her halfway. our bodies strike hard enough to shake rain from every leaf above us.

the shard opens my palm; my claws close around her shoulder; momentum carries us into a stone planting bed where old soil gives beneath her spine and the smell of roots rises dark around us. for one breath i have her there, thigh between hers, wounded hand pinning the wrist that cut me, mouth hovering so near her throat that every frantic beat touches

my lips without skin between. the ache low in my body becomes almost painful. she feels it in the pressure of me and goes rigid when my breath breaks against her neck.

i want to bite. i want the first mouthful so sharply that saliva reaches her skin before my teeth do.

then her free hand finds the cut beneath my ribs and pushes two fingers inside. pain tears my head back. she rolls from under me, but not before my claws open her shoulder and bring her blood into the rain.

her blood stays beneath my claws after she slips between the planters, darker than mine and hot enough that steam seems to lift where rain touches it. i draw one finger slowly through my mouth. copper opens first, then salt, then the bitter electric taste of fear carried straight from her pulse. my hips press once into the empty air beneath me; a low sound escapes before i choose whether she should hear it. she does.

somewhere ahead, her next breath catches. the glasshouse gives it back from pane to broken pane while i lick the second claw clean. “you taste frightened,” i tell the darkness.

her footsteps break into motion again, climbing now—the narrow iron stair that spirals toward the maintenance walk beneath the roof. i follow with blood still bright on my tongue, one hand trailing the rail, taking each step slowly enough that she can hear exactly how little her violence hurried me. above, glass shatters. cold air pours down.

by the time i reach the final turn she is crossing the spine of the conservatory under open rain, one bleeding hand pressed to the panes for balance, the whole black city falling away on either side of her.

the roof bends beneath her carefully placed feet, each old pane holding the night in a trembling black reflection until her weight turns it white at the edges, and she looks back only once before understanding that speed has become another weapon the glass can use against her. i step onto the iron spine. rain flattens my hair against my throat and carries blood from the cut at my ribs down one bare leg; beneath the panes, dead branches reach upward like hands waiting to receive whichever body falls first.

she watches me come without the caution she has been forced to learn, claws curling around the ridge, tail moving behind me with slow deliberate balance. her gaze stays on the body she has bloodied. wet cloth drags raw over my clit with each careful step. my gaze lowers to the pulse beneath her jaw. hers follows, catches on the way my clothes cling between my thighs, and jerks back to my face.

the pane complains beneath her retreat. before she breaks it, her gaze returns of its own accord and travels once from the blood on my bare leg to my wet mouth. fear still owns her scent, but not alone now. i bare blood-bright teeth. she sees that i noticed.

then her expression hardens, one heel lifts, and glass breaks between us.

fracture races outward in a white web, faster than rain can fill it, and the roof gives way between one heartbeat and the next.

she expects me to recoil.

i jump toward her.

iron leaves my boots; glass opens beneath us; for an instant we meet above the falling panes with the whole conservatory waiting below, my hand closing in the front of her coat, her bloody palm striking my mouth, our bodies turning together through a storm of reflected city light.

shards write cold lines across my back and thighs. one catches deep along her calf. the smell of fresh blood reaches me in the air, and hunger bends my fall around it. i pull her leg against my mouth before gravity can separate us. my teeth cross wool, find skin, close just long enough for heat to flood my tongue. her scream enters me with the blood.

my cunt contracts so violently around the mouthful that my jaw tightens on instinct, but a dead branch rises out of darkness and tears her from my grip. we strike the flooded planting beds apart—she among black earth and broken orchids, i on my back in rainwater deep enough to close over my ears—while glass continues falling around us in bright diminishing pieces.

beneath the water, stunned and smiling, i swallow the first mouthful of her.

sound returns through the water as a distant frantic pounding, and for one delicious second i mistake her pulse for my own before lifting my head into the rain. she has dragged herself upright against a stone bed.

blood runs from the bite at her calf into the black soil, each drop disappearing at once, but the shape of my mouth remains open and red above it. her gaze fixes on the blood shining across my teeth. mine lowers to the way she protects the wounded leg, the involuntary tremor passing through the thigh each time she tries to put weight on it.

soaked fabric presses my swollen clit with every beat.

i rise slowly enough for her to watch water pour from my clothes and blood thread from the glass-cuts down my skin. my tongue crosses my lower teeth. her taste is still there. another throat would be wrong now. i need hers—the pulse, the fear, the stubborn human body carrying both away from me.

“that,” i tell her, voice roughened around the mouthful, “is what running does to me.”

fear hollows her breath. she seizes a broken orchid pot and throws it at my face, then limps through the boiler-room door while ceramic bursts against one horn. i follow, laughing.

heat closes around me beyond the door, mineral and breathless, copper pipes sweating down brick walls while the dead boiler ticks as if some buried fire still dreams inside it. her blood marks the floor in uneven commas. i follow them past the coal bins and understand one step too late why the trail ends beneath an open valve.

steam strikes my face. white fills the room.

she comes through it with a shovel held in both hands and drives the iron edge across my horns hard enough to turn the world sideways. one knee meets brick. pain rings through my skull and pours straight down my spine. the wet ache below narrows to my clit; my thighs clench around empty air. she sees it. her gaze drops to the contraction and returns.

the second swing comes across the same horn-root, no longer only escape but experiment: can she force that sound from me again? iron lands. she can.

i catch the shaft before a third, but the wounded leg buckles beneath her and changes the angle; metal grazes my cheek while she tears the shovel free. her fear sharpens into precision.

“stay down,” she gasps. blood has soaked her stocking to the ankle. both hands shake around the handle. still she stands between me and the narrow service tunnel, trying to make the order become true. i lift my head, ceramic dust and rainwater slipping from my hair, and let her see how the blow has widened my smile.

“make me.”

she runs before i finish rising.

the tunnel accepts her upright for six strides before the ceiling lowers and forces both of us onto hands and knees, brick closing around breath, shoulders, horns, every sound she makes. she crawls badly on the wounded leg. i crawl beautifully. claws find the mortar seams she misses; tail presses against the wall behind me and turns each movement into a slow deliberate thrust forward. there is no room now for the chase to pretend it is distance. her heat fills the passage. her blood slicks the bricks beneath my palms.

when she looks back, my face occupies all the darkness she has left. breath breaks each time wet cloth drags over my clit. brick makes one long hand of the tunnel, pressing both bodies into the same rhythm.

ahead, she reaches an iron grate and throws her weight against it. rust holds. she claws for a latch that exists on the other side, then turns until her spine meets the bars and draws one blood-wet knee toward her chest. nowhere else remains.

i keep coming slowly, letting my shoulders brush both walls, letting my breath reach her before my claws do.

her boot strikes my mouth when i enter reach, splitting the lower lip against a tooth and filling the space between us with the smell of fresh blood—mine again, offered by her again. i catch her ankle before she can recoil. she twists, drives the other heel against my shoulder, scrapes both hands along brick for anything that might become leverage, but the tunnel gives every movement back to me.

my tail loops the wounded leg. one pull takes her hips from the grate; another brings her under my body. iron rings behind her head. i crawl over her slowly, knees finding the narrow spaces beside hers, one bleeding palm closing both wrists against the bars while the other traces the torn shoulder my claws opened beneath the roof.

she bucks and the pressure between us changes, her hip grinding once between my thighs. my cunt closes hard around nothing; my body answers with one shallow thrust before i can hide it. her eyes widen. i let her see it. rainwater and blood move together down my chin.

“your name,” i say. she turns her face from my teeth and answers with one word, hoarse but whole.

“no.”

my jaw receives it like another pulse. my claws close more firmly around her wrists.

“good,” i whisper.

my whisper warms the breath between our mouths. she struggles again, but differently now—less force, more rhythm, hips turning beneath me until mine follow. one shallow grind, then another. i lower my face to the wound at her shoulder. blood has gathered in the hollow above her collarbone; my tongue takes it slowly, and her shudder travels through every place our bodies touch.

she uses that instant. something thin slides from beneath one cuff: a length of wire hidden against the wrist i thought i had made useless. each measured turn of her body has been walking its hooked end toward the latch behind her head. metal catches. the grate gives one quiet click. i hear it too late, attention drunk on blood and pressure.

she throws her full weight backward. iron opens beneath us and the floor disappears; both bodies spill through into a drainage channel where black water strikes my ribs and tears her from under me. she lands badly on the bitten leg, cries out, keeps moving. by the time my claws find stone she is already limping down the channel, one hand against the wall, the broken grate swinging between us.

my laughter follows her. she looks back once. satisfaction warms her face when she sees me smiling in the water; then hatred closes over it and she runs.

i do not follow the splash of her steps. water already carries enough to find her—blood from calf and shoulder, panic-sweat, the lingering trace of my mouth—but not what i need. she is still moving ahead of me, and the channel beneath her runs toward the old pumping court with only one grate large enough for a body to pass.

i climb instead. brick gives my claws a vertical path into a maintenance shaft where rusted rungs rise through warm darkness. every pull opens the cut at my ribs. her measured struggle still moves between my legs. she escaped by teaching my hunger where to stare. i learn. distance aches with her exact shape.

by the time she reaches the pumping court, dragging the bitten leg through knee-deep water, i am stretched along the stone arch above its outlet with my tail hanging loose behind the masonry. she forces the final grate, crawls into rain, and lies there for three breaths with her forehead against the ground, believing exhaustion has purchased solitude. i watch the pulse in her exposed neck settle from terror toward hope.

then the spade of my tail descends through the rain and touches the center of her back with exquisite gentleness. every muscle beneath it becomes still.

“again,” i say above her.

gentleness becomes pressure one measured degree at a time, the smooth length of my tail settling along her spine until the breath leaves her and the stone receives her weight. i drop from the arch behind it. boots strike on either side of her bitten leg. before she can turn, my knee finds the small of her back and my claws close in rain-dark hair, lifting just enough to bare the line from jaw to shoulder. her pulse answers immediately, wild against the skin my mouth has not touched yet. saliva floods my jaw; beneath soaked cloth my cunt pulls tight in the same frantic rhythm, and i have to breathe before speaking.

“please,” she says into the flooded stones, the word almost lost beneath rain and the machinery’s distant drip.

my tail tightens. her hips press helplessly against the ground; the answering movement of my body behind hers makes the plea fracture on its second breath. i lower my face until wet hair sticks to both our cheeks.

“your name.”

she closes her eyes. for one moment i think she will give it to me. then her mouth hardens.

“go to hell.”

laughter enters the hollow beneath her ear, warm enough to raise every fine hair along her throat.

“after you,” i whisper.

i turn her beneath me, one hand at her shoulder and the other still tangled in her hair, until her back meets stone and the rain can fall directly into her face. my tail keeps the wounded leg extended; my knee closes the space beside the other; both wrists disappear inside one clawed grip above her head. there is no leverage left, only the pulse offering itself beneath skin and the slow involuntary movement of her body testing mine for weakness.

i let her test. each failed shift drags her thigh across the soaked seam between mine. each breath she spends against my weight pulls another involuntary grind from my hips until even darkness cannot hide what she is doing to me. her gaze drops. soaked cloth has made every line of me legible. when she looks back up, horror has acquired certainty.

“you’re enjoying this.”

“yes.” the answer loosens my jaw. i shift my grip, take one of her hands in mine, and press two blood-wet fingers against the pulse in her throat, letting her feel how violently it beats beneath the pressure i control.

“aren’t you?” she spits into my mouth. blood from a bitten lip warms the rain between us. i close my eyes and lick it from my teeth.

“not yet,” i say.

each beat lifts her skin against the points and returns through my jaw as pressure, small and living and unbearably close, until my whole body begins answering a rhythm she cannot feel inside me: thighs tightening

around her, belly drawing taut, breath shortening against the throat i have chosen. saliva gathers where tooth meets skin. one drop slips into the hollow beside her pulse and trembles there. i want to close so badly that holding the jaw open becomes its own exquisite strain, every muscle loaded with the murder waiting inside it.

“your name,” i ask again, the words shaped around her warmth.

silence. another beat. another contraction low in my body.

then, barely louder than rain: “mara.”

mara enters through my teeth. i say her name back and feel her flinch at hearing herself inside the mouth that means to kill her.

“mara.”

need closes around the name: alive beneath me, dead in my mouth, meat between my teeth. the sound draws one slow, empty contraction from inside me. her eyes close.

“will you let me go?” i press one point hard enough to dimple the pulse beneath it.

“no.”

her head snaps upward before the answer finishes, forehead striking the base of my horn, and white pain opens the jaw she has just escaped.

she turns the opening into violence before sight returns, shoulder driving beneath mine, both hands catching my wounded side as she rolls us through the runoff and comes above me with one knee against my sternum. rain makes a blade of her hair across my face. hatred has burned the fear out of her expression; what remains is close, female, furious, beautiful. she presses harder. the pulse in her injured calf jumps against my ribs. my hips lift to meet her weight. disgust curls her mouth.

“you want me.”

her face is near enough for our blood to mingle when i smile.

“dead.”

need stays in my open mouth after the word ends. she slaps me with it still between us. my split lip opens again. i catch the striking hand in my teeth and close until her palm breaks, holding her gaze while blood spreads hot across my tongue.

hatred returns to her face sharpened by pain. she tries to tear free. i bite deeper.

mara does not pull away a second time. she drives the wounded hand farther into my mouth, sacrificing flesh for reach, two fingers hooking behind a lower tooth while her thumb presses hard beneath my tongue. pain flares through the jaw. surprise makes me laugh around her blood. she uses the sound as leverage, drops her weight, and tears sideways until the tooth shifts in its root and my mouth opens. her hand comes free ragged.

before i can close again she catches my hair, bends to the exposed curve beneath one horn, and bites me with blunt human teeth hard enough to break skin. the grip has already broken when she keeps her teeth there, holding just long enough to feel my pulse answer before she spits my blood across my cheek. her breath touches my ear, her knee grinds my sternum, her blood fills my mouth and mine shines across hers—the whole body one argument at kissing distance. my cunt knots empty beneath her.

“fuck you,” she says into the bite.

i turn my face until my lips brush the blood at the corner of hers.

“fight better.”

rage gives her one beautiful instant of carelessness. my tail loops her waist, contracts, and throws her from above me. she strikes the flooded stone on her back. i follow before breath returns, one knee pinning the bitten hand, claws closing around her throat.

her pulse leaps against my palm before the claws apply force, and i hold it there—five bright points surrounding the rhythm, my thumb beneath her jaw, a life contained inside one hand. mara reaches for my horn. my tail catches the wrist, but she keeps straining, face close, hatred bright even as blood loss pales her mouth. every failure drives her pulse harder into my palm.

“do it,” she says through my grip.

i lower my face until one shifted tooth grazes her lip.

“you don’t choose when.”

disgust flashes. “coward.”

my claws tighten by one degree. her pulse stumbles, recovers, and contracts through me.

“there you are.” she bares bloodied teeth.

“still here.” needing her dead breaks my next breath.

she hears it and goes perfectly limp. resistance vanishes; weight remains.

“you need me to fight.” her pulse is frantic, her voice almost calm.

“i like you fighting.”

“not the same. you need me to keep giving you something to push against.”

she opens the wounded hand and lets stillness deny me friction while hatred stays awake in her eyes. heat spreads instead of breaking. i press closer. “you think stillness isn’t prey?”

my thumb moves once over the rhythm in her throat; it leaps against me. composure cracks. her gaze drops to my shaking thighs, the blood and rain darkening my clothes. “look at you. all this because someone ran.”

“because you ran. because you cut me. because you kept getting away.”

“you could have killed me in the courtyard. you kept following because you needed me to keep refusing you.”

“i wanted every no.”

“you need me.”

“alive for another minute.”

“fighting.”

“optional.”

“wanting you back?”

my laughter moves through both chests. “irrelevant.”

teeth pass beside her ear. “your pulse is enough.”

my cunt tightens around the part i did not answer. her body remains still. her breath breaks.

mara turns and bites the thumb beneath her jaw until bone takes the pressure. i push deeper instead of withdrawing and let my blood reach

her tongue. she tries to spit me out; my hand denies the distance and holds her around the taste until a shudder runs through my thighs.

“you taste vile.”

red marks her teeth when i let the thumb slide free.

“you keep taking bites.”

she spits blood between our mouths and laughs, raw enough to resemble mine. stillness breaks.

she wrenches one wrist against my tail, drags the other from beneath my knee, drives one heel into my thigh, and rises until our foreheads meet. hatred burns at the distance where another pair of women might kiss. i hold her there, pulse jumping inside my palm, and turn my mouth slowly toward her throat.

my lips touch the pulse first, a brief wet contact over the rhythm i have carried through every street. mara jerks her head aside. my grip brings it back. teeth settle around the line my thumb has been guarding, points finding their places one by one while her hatred enters breathless and close against my cheek.

“monster.”

it trembles through the skin between my jaws. “mara,” i answer, and close.

resistance holds for one exquisite instant. then flesh parts. blood arrives with enough force to fill my mouth before i can swallow, hot and salt-bright and unmistakably hers. her whole body convulses beneath me. mine answers just as violently.

her pulse drives from jaw through sternum into belly and thighs, gathering every wound, every frightened glance, every counterbite. stillness cannot protect her now. she fights again—wrists twisting, heel scraping stone, throat working inside my bite—and each movement makes blood come faster. i tighten my tail, lower my weight, and drink around the teeth while the rhythm beneath them begins to change.

the first weakening beat almost takes me with it. it strikes my clit like a hooked claw and pulls every muscle closed around mara’s body—jaw harder, thighs crushing down, breath breaking uselessly through a

mouth full of blood. another pulse follows, smaller, and the ending opens inside me with such unbearable promise that instinct reaches to finish everything at once. i refuse it. teeth withdraw before stillness can arrive.

blood spills from the punctures in two bright streams; mara drags in a ruined breath and turns beneath me. i press my wounded thumb against one side of the bite, enough pressure to slow the loss without quieting the pulse, and feel its frantic return directly through my own blood.

“not yet.”

my voice shakes around the orgasm i have stopped one pulse short of. she tries to crawl. my tail lets her gain the length of one body before curling around her ankle again. rain dilutes the red trail she leaves across the stones.

i stay where i am for three breaths, licking her blood from every tooth while the living rhythm struggles back toward strength.

mara rolls onto one hip and clamps her good hand across the bite, staring at me through rain with an expression too furious for the grey beginning at its edges. “you’re sick.” blood thickens the words. i rise with one palm pressed to my own cut.

“yes.”

“you felt me dying and let me go because once wasn’t enough. you wanted to put me back under your teeth and feel it happen again.”

“yes.”

hatred strips the last fear from her face. “i hate you.”

my tail loosens from her ankle, not enough to free it, only enough to let her feel the choice remain mine. “stay alive long enough to mean it.”

she bares teeth red with my thumb’s blood and reaches behind her without looking, fingers finding the length of chain coiled beside the old pump housing. the first swing comes low. iron wraps my calf and jerks both feet from under me. stone strikes my shoulder.

mara hauls herself upright on the chain, half choking on the effort, and limps toward the outer gate while my laughter follows her through the rain. even opened, she turns whatever i give her into another way to fight. i have never wanted her death more.

she reaches the gate, braces one boot against iron, and uses the chain's return before i can rise. links hiss over stone. the loop catches my collar and closes. one violent pull takes the slack from my throat, turning the band warm beneath another woman's force. rage flashes from collar to cunt so cleanly that the whole body becomes motion. i do not fight backward. i run into the chain. surprise steals her leverage; distance vanishes; my shoulder drives her against the gate while links fall between us.

"not yours."

my voice leaves against her mouth, blood-warm and shaking. mara's good hand knots in the collar anyway, using it to hold me close as she brings the chain across my wounded side. pain folds through heat.

"nothing about you is mine."

"exactly."

my tail climbs her wrist and tightens until the hand opens. claws take her throat where the chain took mine. i lift. her boots scrape iron. blood spills fresh around the bite beneath my palm, pulse beating frantic and furious into every finger while my body presses her against the gate hard enough to make the bars ring. she smiles down at me despite the pressure.

"someone's is."

your hand stays warm inside the collar. pride strikes low.

"yes," i tell her, and throw her through the gate.

mara lands beyond it among weeds pushing through an abandoned freight yard, rolls once across wet gravel, and comes to rest against a rusted rail with the chain tangled around one leg. for several breaths neither of us moves. rain ticks on empty wagons. blood darkens the stones beneath her throat. i step through the gate. the collar settles against my throat. mara's pull is gone. your hand remains. my jaw loosens. she watches.

"does she know?" her voice barely carries. i do not ask whom she means.

"everything."

“not the story you tell afterward. does she know what your face looks like while you’re doing it?”

“yes.”

“what it does to you when i bleed?” my thighs still tremble around the denied orgasm. my jaw is wet. every wound beats with the pulse she is failing to hold.

“yes.” her hatred stutters into disbelief.

“and she loves you?” i walk closer until my boot rests on the chain between her legs.

“unconditionally.” mara searches my blood-wet face for shame. there is none. i draw the chain slowly toward me.

“she’ll be proud when i bring your taste home.”

“then bring her this.”

mara closes both hands around the chain and comes toward me with the force of my own pull, wounded leg folding beneath her only after momentum has done its work. something rusted flashes in one fist—a rail spike lifted from the gravel while i watched her face. she drives it beneath my collarbone. iron crosses skin and muscle. impact throws my head back; shock strikes down my spine and lands in the cunt she has kept swollen through half the city. mara holds the spike there, face inches from mine, hatred restored by the sight of pain.

“tell her i made you bleed.”

i look down at her hand around the iron, then at her face.

“she likes me bloody.”

my claws close over hers and push the spike deeper by one deliberate fraction. mara’s eyes widen. my hips jerk toward the iron and the next breath breaks into a sound neither of us can mistake.

“so do i.”

she could let go. instead her hand twists the iron in answer. pain opens me wider. a slow, astonished smile finds her through the blood loss.

i wrench the spike free before she can take another turn, blood following hot beneath the collar, and swing the chain around her waist. links tighten. one turn of my body lifts her from the gravel and hurls

her through the open door of a freight wagon. wood cracks around the shape she leaves.

darkness receives her with the collapse of empty crates, and the chain between us goes slack for one heartbeat before snapping taut hard enough to drag me against the wagon. i climb through the broken door following iron, blood running warm beneath my shirt, every breath rubbing the new wound from inside.

mara waits beside the handbrake. she loops the chain once around its wheel and throws her weight backward. links close across my ribs. the bite at her throat opens wider with the effort, but satisfaction flashes when my body strikes the floor at her feet.

she kneels over me, one hand twisting the chain, the other pressing directly into the puncture beneath my collarbone. my cunt contracts hard enough to jerk my hips from the boards and drive her thumb deeper into the wound.

“you keep making that sound when i hurt you.” i bare my teeth beneath her.

“then hurt me better.” for the first time, hatred smiles through her whole mouth.

“i’m learning.”

her thumb enters the wound as she rises, taking one more broken breath from me before both hands close on the brake wheel. metal gives with a shriek. outside, couplings slam one after another; the wagon lurches, begins to roll down the rain-slick track, and throws her full length across me. for an instant we are mouth to mouth without kissing, breath and blood exchanged across nothing, while the wheels gather speed beneath our bodies.

mara recovers first. she feeds the loose chain beneath my collar and pulls both ends until iron bites the back of my neck, trapping the chosen band against my throat beneath pressure that belongs to neither of us. my breath narrows. pleasure does not. she braces one knee beside my hip and hauls harder, watching my face for panic, finding hunger instead.

the wagon strikes a switch; both bodies slide across the boards; her mouth strikes my split lip in the collision. she could recoil. teeth close

instead, brief and deliberate. she tears the lip wider. pain pulls a sound from me; her eyes brighten at what the sound reveals before she spits the blood between us and lifts her face.

“every time i hurt you, you push closer. you don’t know whether you’re hunting me or begging me to do it again.”

links tighten on the final word. darkness sparks at the edge of sight. i curl my tail around the axle of her wounded leg and drag until balance tears loose.

“both have teeth.”

she falls sideways. i turn with her, use the wagon’s next violent sway to roll above, and drive her against the wall hard enough for timber to bow. chain still connects throat to hands.

her pull hurts me; my weight opens the bite in her neck; every turn of the wheels translates our hatred into pressure and drives the pulse in my clit higher, no longer a distant ache but the beginning of an orgasm close enough to make each breath uncertain. beyond the broken door, rails curve toward the river bridge and the city begins to fall away below.

wind tears through the wagon as the first bridge span takes our weight, carrying river-cold into blood heat. mara looks once through the broken door, measures the black water between iron ribs, and changes the argument. she plants both boots against my thighs, loops the chain around one forearm, and throws herself backward into open air. links rip across my collar. my body follows before claws can choose wood, chest striking the threshold while her weight hangs beyond it and the river turns far below.

“if i go,” she gasps, suspended from my throat, “you come with me.”

pressure makes the world pulse at the edges. arousal makes the threat feel like an invitation written in gravity. i crawl farther out. her eyes widen as my face approaches hers above the rushing dark.

“you go,” i tell her.

“i finish.”

my tail finds the door rail behind me and closes. one contraction lifts both bodies. mara swings against the wagon, catches the roof edge with

her good hand, and uses my upward force to climb over me. we roll onto rain-slick boards under the open sky, chain tangling wrists, collar, waist, legs until neither of us can move without moving the other. the bridge drums beneath us. every shared impact drives a link against the soaked seam between my legs; hatred becomes intimate enough to rub against.

the wagon sways and rolls mara above me, her wounded thigh trapped between mine, chain drawing us tight enough that breath becomes shared pressure without becoming tenderness. she uses the position instantly, forearm across my jaw, bitten hand twisting the links at my collar while her knee searches for the cut beneath my ribs. pain throws my spine away; both arms drag her closer. the movement saws rough chain over my swollen clit through the cloth, each link translating struggle into a broken sound against her wrist.

she hears it through the wheels. her eyes sharpen. "you're close."

i turn my mouth into the forearm pinning it and let one tooth break skin.

"so are you." death reaches her before the meaning finishes.

she slams my head against the roof. horns ring on timber. i bite deeper. blood follows.

my claws find her back beneath the torn coat and enter while the bridge flashes between iron shadows around us, each puncture pulling her body hard against mine. she tries to rise; chain denies it. i roll. the sky turns. her spine strikes the boards beneath me, and my blood-wet mouth finds the wounded throat again.

this time mara does not turn away. her fingers close around one horn and hold my face above the wound, forcing our eyes to meet while the pulse beneath my lips stumbles through the damage i left in it.

"look at me."

i obey. i want the hatred intact when i take the life behind it. gold-brown eyes, rain caught in lashes, mouth pale except where our blood has made it red.

"watch," i answer.

my teeth enter the old punctures and widen them. her grip convulses at the horn-root. blood surges around my tongue, warmer than rain,

fuller than before, each beat pushing against the mouth that will end it. the wet ache between my thighs climbs with terrifying ease. my cunt tightens once around nothing when her next pulse fills my mouth; chain draws taut as my thighs lock around hers. claws remain buried in her back. she feels every change and does not look away, even when breath becomes a wet sound beneath my jaw.

hatred holds. pride holds. her fingers close harder around my horn. i hold her beneath me and keep drinking. every swallow relieves nothing. each one makes the last beat more necessary.

the pulse loses its clean cadence and my cunt takes the broken rhythm into itself, contracting whenever blood strikes my tongue, holding through the widening silences, every muscle drawn tight for the next beat to prove she is still beneath me. mara sees the wait. she sees what each return does—the tremor through my thighs, the breath i cannot keep quiet, the jaw closing fractionally deeper as the ending approaches. her mouth curves.

“you’re going to come.”

barely voice. perfectly accurate. her fingers tighten at the horn. i swallow blood and give her the truth without releasing the wound.

“yes.”

satisfaction opens across her face, bitter and intimate; she wears my yes like another wound she gave me. then the wagon strikes the center of the bridge. iron thunder passes through boards, chain, bodies, teeth. her pulse jumps once against my tongue, bright enough to push the contraction to the edge of orgasm; when it falls away again the silence beneath my jaw feels wide enough to contain both of us.

the next beat arrives late and enormous. blood strikes my tongue; my cunt closes hard enough to pull jaw, thighs, and claws with it; mara moves inside that one helpless instant. two blood-slick fingers drive beneath my eye. sight turns white. my jaw opens before the pulse can become the last one, and she rolls away with the chain dragging across my throat. the wound leaves my mouth in a hot red arc.

mara crawls toward the roof edge on one good hand and one ruined knee while the almost-climax shakes through me unfinished. frustration

becomes laughter. she looks back once, sees what interruption has made of my face, and throws herself from the moving wagon. chain uncoils after her. the final loop catches beneath my arm and tears me over the edge hard enough for one horn to strike timber. mara reaches the maintenance platform; i swing below it over black water until my tail closes around a crossbeam.

“still close?” she calls down, voice breaking at the wound.

i climb the blood-dark chain hand over hand.

“closer.”

her heel grinds across my fingers when i reach the platform. claws hold. she heaves on the chain, drags me upward instead of throwing me down, and rolls me onto the grating beneath her with one hand at my horn and one knee in the wound below my collar.

“say thank you.”

i catch the back of her neck and pull until our foreheads touch.

“after.”

a freight engine strikes the span. bolts shear. the platform falls into the river while my tail arrests both bodies against the tower, mara full length against me, her hand knotted in my collar and her teeth splitting the edge of my mouth.

“you like me close.”

“i like you bleeding.”

“then stop running.”

“make me.”

i climb with her tangled around me, pin her to the next crossbrace, and lower my mouth. chain flashes between the bite and her throat. she forces the doubled links against my fangs with both shaking hands. blood reaches my tongue around the iron.

“all this hunger. all this blood. you dragged me across half the city, and you’re still waiting for me to fight hard enough to make you come.”

“yes.”

“you want this.”

“yes.” her eyes hold mine.

“you need me.”

“yes.”

her smile opens.

mara tears one wrist from my claw, folds my thumb into my palm until the joint leaves its place, catches my horn at the root, and turns my face hard against the tower. chain slips from between my teeth.

“then choke on me.”

i smile through the torque. “gladly.”

teeth enter the ruined throat. blood fills the mouth the chain abandoned; she pulls; i swallow; the orgasm she interrupted seizes low and unfinished as her life narrows into the hot, irregular current crossing my tongue.

her grip slides once, catches again, and tears my head back until teeth leave flesh with a wet sound. blood pours between us. mara holds me there by the horn while her other hand presses uselessly against the opened throat, eyes fixed on mine with a ferocity death has not reached yet.

“say my name.” breath frays around each word.

“mara.” the name tastes of her.

“again.”

“mara.” satisfaction touches the corner of her bloodless mouth.

“when you come, you’ll remember i made you wait.” the cruelty lands exactly where she aims it. the orgasm she has delayed tightens around the whole hunt—the streets she chose, the wounds she gave me, every escape that turned wanting into need—and my laugh trembles against her face.

“no.” i close my working hand around the wrist at my horn.

“you’ll remember you were mine.” claws force her grip open. my head lowers.

her name remains behind my teeth when they enter her again, and every weakening beat returns through it changed: *mara*. blood. *mara*. pressure. *mara*. she shudders beneath me. my cunt draws tight, empty and

aching; jaw holds; claws lock; the distance between her last pulse and my orgasm becomes one breath wide.

mara spends that breath trying to wrench my horn sideways. strength fails halfway through the movement, returns as spite, fails again. her eyes stay open. her lips shape blood before sound.

“i hate you.”

her voice travels through the throat inside my mouth and trembles directly against my teeth.

“good.”

one beat strikes my tongue. another arrives broken, too quick and too small. i hold her harder against the tower, claws locked, tail burning around iron, every part of me gathered around the place where her life keeps attempting to continue.

the last pulse comes without warning. it swells once beneath my jaw. i close. flesh tears. the rhythm collapses into my mouth. orgasm takes me at the exact instant her pulse stops. my jaw locks in the ruined throat; belly seizes; my cunt clenches wet and empty; thighs crush her hips against the tower.

the bridge vanishes. no river. no rain. no city. blood, stillness, release.

i hold her corpse through every aftershock, teeth buried, claws fixed, tail burning around iron. i do not fall. i do not look away. her fingers loosen from my horn only after her eyes have stopped finding mine.

her body grows heavier when it no longer helps me hold it. chain creaks between us. the crossbrace cuts into my knee. a train passes overhead and shakes rain from every beam, but the pulse does not return. i keep my mouth at the wound until certainty becomes physical: no pressure against the tongue, no breath along my cheek, no small refusal hidden in the chest pinned to mine.

finished.

i lift my face. blood runs from chin to collar and slips beneath it warm. laughter opens low behind my sternum, catches on the ache in my ribs, opens again.

i killed her. i wanted every step that brought us here. i needed this ending from the moment her blood entered me. i love the blood-bright woman holding the consequence.

mine. hot. beautiful. mara's face rests against the tower, eyes still open to the rain she cannot feel.

i promised her one word. i bring my forehead to hers and let the horns bear their own weight.

"thank you."

my tail begins to tremble. orgasm has left my muscles full and unreliable; the torn place beneath my collarbone spills whenever mara's weight shifts. i did not kill her to lose us both now. i pass the chain twice around her waist, once beneath her arms, and lock it through the cross-brace. only then do i loosen my tail from the beam. pain flashes so bright that both legs kick against empty air. the chain holds.

i hang beside the corpse, breathe until the tower stops turning, and set the dislocated thumb against a rivet. one pull. one blunt click. the joint returns with nausea and relief braided together.

claws find the next seam above. i climb, hauling mara after me one length of chain at a time, her boots striking iron below, her blood marking every place the bridge makes me work for what i have taken.

an inspection hatch waits beneath the rail bed. rust has sealed it against gentler hands. i drive one horn beneath the lip and lift until the hinge tears loose, then drag mara into a signal room barely wide enough for both bodies. dead gauges cover one wall. levers stand at angles no train obeys anymore. rain enters through a cracked window and taps the wooden floor around us. i lay her beneath it.

gold-brown eyes hold the ceiling. her coat hangs in strips; bruises darken every place my hands closed. cuts from conservatory glass cross her palms. my bite has opened her throat into an answer no pressure can reverse.

she cut me, bit me, chained my collar, drove iron beneath it, dislocated my thumb, and kept hating me until her mouth could not move. laughter shakes once through my ribs.

"you were magnificent."

hunger returns quietly beneath the high. her pulse is gone; my need remains. i kneel beside mara, put one hand against her shoulder, and bite where neck becomes muscle. no counterblow comes. no pulse changes the taste. flesh parts beneath a jaw that has already learned every resistance in this body; i tear free a mouthful, chew, swallow.

warmth reaches my belly. the next bite goes deeper. blood has begun cooling near the skin but remains hot within her, and opening her releases it across my hands. i eat without hurry. shoulder, breast, the dense meat along one rib. teeth scrape bone; my tongue finds the softer seam and follows.

the first mouthful carries the last aftershock of orgasm. the second answers hunger. the third answers need: her inside me, no distance left to close.

mara is dead beneath my hands. i eat her. her name remains present through every swallow.

my jaw tells me when to stop: a deep pleasant ache at the hinges, saliva slowing, the next bite no longer brighter than the warmth already gathered inside. i listen. enough of mara remains to show exactly who died here. i do not hide the face or close the eyes. rain beads in her lashes.

i tear an unbloodied strip from the lining of her coat, bind the wound beneath my collarbone, then wrap my ribs and palm. the chain lies in a wet coil beside her, marked by both our blood. i leave it looped around the hand that held me from her throat. i take no trophy.

the marks she made are coming home on my body; the force she spent is warm in my belly; her taste remains behind every fang. dawn has begun diluting the window.

i sit beside the corpse until the shaking stops, one bloody hand resting open on my thigh, pleased enough to need no witness and wanting you with the same whole mouth.

stairs descend inside the bridge tower. i take them slowly. each step wakes another injury and settles another part of the hunt into memory: calf bruised by chain, side opened by her knife, shoulder pierced by the spike, cheek cut, thumb swollen, horn-root throbbing where she used it

to turn my head. rain washes the loose blood from my arms but cannot reach beneath the collar or between my teeth. i leave those places hers.

workers are beginning to move along the far quay when i cross beneath the bridge. nobody comes close. bells make hours out of the morning. bakery smoke enters the wet air. hunger notices it and rests. i walk home with no speech prepared.

mara. i hunted her. she fought. i needed her. i killed her. i fed. i loved it. every sentence fits inside the body that made it.

you open the door before my claws touch the wood. warmth closes around me. your gaze finds blood first, then the torn shirt, the bandage darkening beneath my collar, the angle at which i protect one side. it reaches my face last and stays there. no flinch. no clerk.

“ilta.”

my name in your mouth brings my tail around your ankle before either of us looks down.

“i’m here.”

“i see you.”

your hand rises and waits one breath where i can meet it or refuse it. i step forward. your palm closes around the root of my horn.

my knees find the floor. not collapse. choice. the weight of your hand travels horn to skull to spine, and the collar warms beneath blood that has dried almost black. you crouch with me, thumb moving once over the place mara held while she died.

“her name?”

“mara.”

“did she fight?”

laughter catches in the answer. “all the way.”

i tell you about the knife, the flooded tunnel, her hand on my collar, the rail spike, the wagon running loose toward the bridge. i tell you what she saw in me and what i admitted. i do not clean the need before putting it into your hands.

“she knew i was close. she made me admit i needed her.”

your grip tightens at the horn-root. your mouth curves slowly.

“good doll.”

praise crosses collar, spine, belly, cunt, then settles into fed warmth. my eyes close. the whole bloodied animal rises into it. nothing hides.

your hands become practical without becoming less yours. scissors open the shirt. hot water reddens around the cloth. you set three stitches beneath my ribs, five below the collarbone, and make me drink between them. pain is quieter here. i lean into it, head against your thigh, while you hear every turn mara forced into the hunt.

when i reach the bridge and her command—*say thank you*—you laugh softly above me.

“did you?”

“after.”

“good.”

your fingers clean the split beside my mouth but leave one dark streak across the chin until last. you look at it for a long moment, gather it with your thumb, and keep touching me. i turn my face and press one blood-warm kiss into the center of your palm.

morning is fully inside the windows by the time bandages hold and the story has nowhere unfinished to pull. i lie with my head in your lap, jaw pleasantly used, belly heavy, cunt softly pulsing, hands open. somewhere above the river a corpse cools beneath dead signal levers. here your nails move slowly through my hair and pause whenever they reach the tender horn-root.

by noon there may be sirens on the bridge and boots on the tower stairs. none have reached this room yet.

i am happy. the hunt is mine. the stopping is mine. mara’s hatred stays bright in memory. it cannot move her hands now. your hand stays warm against my head.

toast burns while neither of us is paying attention. i smell it first and start laughing hard enough to wake every stitched place. you swear, run for the kitchen, return with two blackened slices and the expression of a woman daring breakfast to complain. i take mine.

one small piece of mara remains caught behind a lower fang; my tongue works it loose, tastes rain and iron once more, and swallows. then i bite the toast. bitter crust breaks. butter runs warm across my tongue.

you sit beside me with your bare foot against mine beneath the table. i ask for the salt. you pass it.

outside, another set of bells begins another ordinary hour. i look up, show you one wet point of tooth, and smile.

fangflash.