

N. von Wolf

*Some masks hide faces.
Others cage monsters.*

Safe **WORD**

OBSIDIAN DUET - BOOK ONE

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(EXCERPT)

N. von Wolf

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TRIGGER WARNINGS

Emotional and sexual manipulation,
Coercion and power imbalance,
Psychological and physical abuse,
Gaslighting and manipulative
conditioning,
Stalking, surveillance, and tracking
(GPS, hidden cameras),
Voyeurism and non-consensual
recording,
Dubious consent and blurred
consent boundaries,
Sexual activity under duress or
mistaken identity,
Threats of sexual violence and
attempted rape,
Kidnapping, abduction, and physical
restraint (chains, bondage),
Impact play (belts, slapping, kicking,
corporal punishment),
BDSM themes (submission,
domination, denial, aftercare),
Humiliation and degradation
dynamics,
Drugging and chemical
incapacitation (chloroform, drink
spiking),
Alcohol use and impaired consent,
Physical assault and graphic injury
depiction,
Gun violence and firearms
discharge,
Blood, wounds, and medical realism
(first aid, injury care),
Illegal underground fighting,
Arson and property destruction,
Criminal activity and police
involvement,
Obsessive behaviour and
possessiveness,
Jealousy and rivalry between
brothers,
Depictions of psychosis and
delusional thinking,
Trauma bonding and complex post-
abuse reactions,
PTSD, flashbacks, panic attacks, and
dissociation,
Self-blame and victim-blaming

dialogue,
Familial trauma and paternity
revelations,
Hospice and end-of-life scenes,
Profanity and explicit adult
language,
Religious imagery and corrupted
prayer motifs,
Sexualised violence and power
reversal,
Workplace power dynamics and
emotional coercion,
Public sexual context (Obsidian club
scenes),
Emotional whiplash and recovery
after violence,
Death and implied murder,
Moral ambiguity and unreliable
narration,
Dark eroticism intertwined with
trauma,
Mental manipulation under the guise
of love,
Themes of salvation through
suffering,
Depiction of Stockholm-syndrome-
like attachment,
Explicit sexual content (oral,
penetrative, BDSM acts),
Aftercare following physical or
emotional distress,
Scenes of despair, guilt, and suicidal
ideation (mild, implied),
Isolation, captivity, and confinement
settings,
Sensory overload (sirens, flashing
lights, confined spaces),
Loss of bodily autonomy,
Mutilation imagery (minor,
metaphorical or implied),
Corruption of innocence and purity
symbolism,
Moral conflict between desire and
violence,
Depictions of trauma recovery and
conditional forgiveness,
Manipulative tenderness following
abuse,

Cycle of violence and emotional dependency,
Emotional regression and fear responses to affection,
Control exerted through pain and pleasure,
Self-destructive behaviour and denial of safety,
Sexual awakening through trauma-linked intimacy,
Haunting and intrusive memories,
Violent confrontation between family members,
Forced proximity and captivity-based intimacy,
Burning buildings and suffocation imagery,
Post-traumatic intimacy and identity confusion,
Murderous ideation and violent retribution,
Moral inversion of good and evil,
Exploration of love as possession and control,
Depictions of grief, mourning, and survivor's guilt,
Moral desensitisation to violence,
Psychological voyeurism and obsession,
False salvation and corrupted protection,
Invasive internal monologues reflecting trauma distortion,
References to Catholic ritual and blasphemous prayer inversion,
Emotional punishment as affection,
Repressed memory resurfacing through violence,
Echoes of childhood trauma in adult relationships,
Hypervigilance and fear conditioning,
Moral decay through sexual control,
Unreliable perception of consent and desire,
Crisis of morality in love and redemption,
Distorted empathy and trauma bonding,
Intimate violence framed as devotion,

Cycle of redemption and relapse into abuse,
Emotional collapse and fractured identity,
Survival guilt and emotional detachment,
Power asserted through religious symbolism,
Psychosexual obsession and corrupted faith,
Emotional coercion disguised as protection,
Fear-induced compliance,
Post-traumatic dissociation during intimacy,
Survivor guilt and emotional reconditioning,
Death of abuser and aftermath trauma,
Rescue scenes involving lethal violence,
Realistic first-aid and field medical response,
Familial manipulation and loyalty conflict,
Abuse recovery intertwined with desire,
Moral exhaustion and forgiveness under duress,
Corrupted romance and divine imagery,
Dark reconciliation through shared trauma,
Relapse into violent intimacy,
Final emotional inversion (love redefined through pain).



*Good girls get rewards.
And bad girls...
Get exactly what they asked for.*

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Chapter One

Cain



*M*y eyesight had always been sharp, even in my forties – no glasses, no squinting in dim lighting. Wearing these scleral black contacts, however, was a unique form of torture. Whichever sadist invented them must have thought blinking was optional. The online tutorials made it look simple, but these contacts were bigger, meaner, and required more dexterity than my clumsy sausage-fingers could manage.

I balanced the glossy black disc on my fingertip, glaring at it under the harsh fluorescent light. It sat there as if it knew exactly how badly this was going to go. With a frustrated sigh, I dragged my focus back to the mirror.

The gaudy LEDs framing it lit up the topaz in my eyes – distinctive and, unfortunately, unforgettable. My mother's, down to the last fleck of amber. They had always drawn too much attention. To some, fascination. To my father, a reminder. She had left us, but her gaze

still stared back at him through me. He tried to beat the resemblance out of my face. Didn't work. Not then. Not ever.

I clenched my jaw and shoved the memory aside. This wasn't the time for reflection. Tonight wasn't about the past – it was about becoming someone else.

With a measured breath, I wrestled the second contact lens into place, blinking until the discomfort dulled into something tolerable.

My focus shifted to the skeletal mask lying on the counter – a grotesque masterpiece of craftsmanship. It had cost me more than I wanted to admit, but it was worth every cent. The hand-carved wood was light as a whisper, and the paint didn't irritate my skin – even when I had no time to shave. It even carried a faint scent of cherries. It was subtle and oddly comforting, as though mocking the monstrosity it portrayed. This mask wasn't just a prop – it had become a part of me.

I stepped back, studying the man in the mirror. He looked unhinged, a figure ripped from someone's darkest nightmare. I could hardly recognise myself.

Black jeans clung low to my hips, my chest were left bare – broad, disciplined, and inked like a warning label. The tattoos did a decent job of distracting from the older scars beneath, though nothing short of amnesia could do the same for my mind. The skeletal aspect of the mask was convenient – framing my face with theatrical menace, its hollow sockets offering just enough room to see – and pretend – I was still human. The cursed contacts erased the last trace of *me* – blacking out any hint of soul, while the smudged kajal around my eyes stitched the whole monstrous illusion together like a final, careless flourish.

Makeup de Frankenstein. *Très chic.*

A villain. That was what I looked like – the kind parents warned their kids about.

A dry laugh escaped me, bitter and hollow. Who found this appealing? And why was I so drawn to embodying it?

Yet, as I adjusted the mask, a grim satisfaction coiled in my chest. Excitement began to bubble. This was what I was – a villain.

The mask was a pullover design, sliding over my head almost like a balaclava, concealing every strand of my black hair beneath it. It fitted snugly, tight enough to make me feel like I was suffocating for a moment before the sensation passed. Once it was on, there was no way anyone would recognise Cain D'Angelo – the American-Italian philanthropist, the celebrated author, the face that graced magazine covers. In a place like this, anonymity wasn't just a perk – it was an

absolute necessity.

I glared at the black tiles and flickering neon choking the doorway, wondering if this was what passed for luxury in the underworld economy. I still wasn't entirely sure what these venues were even called. They weren't brothels – touching the women was not allowed for the most part unless agreements were signed. They weren't strip clubs, either; no dancers, no poles, no garish signs screaming indulgence. They weren't dating hubs, with awkward exchanges over cocktails or apps pinging aloud. Someone once referred to them as *fantasy lounges*, and I suppose the term fit. Here, people indulged their deepest, darkest fantasies, safely shrouded behind disguises and strict rules.

Ossidiana – or *Obsidian* in English – was more than just a venue; it was a sanctuary for the taboo, a velvet-lined liminal space where the rules of society didn't apply. Tucked away between unmarked buildings in a quiet Roman district, it thrived on whispers and exclusivity. Membership wasn't something you applied for; it was earned, vetted by an unspoken hierarchy that judged you not by wealth, but by the darkness you carried and the discretion you kept.

I owed my discovery of this place to Vinnie – Vincenzo Marino, my manager, my friend, and occasional voice of reason. He knew everything about everything – and what he didn't, he had ways of finding out.

He had dragged me here after one too many nights spent staring into empty bottles.

'*You need this,*' he'd growled, '*to stop being such a goddamn nuisance.*'

But Vinnie didn't understand. This wasn't about sex – not for me. It was about control, about exploring the darker corners of myself in a place where those shadows weren't just tolerated – they were welcomed.

Inside, *Obsidian* was a study in contrasts – silken drapes, gilded mirrors, chandeliers scattering fractured light. The air clung with amber and smoke, intoxicating and unforgettable. Voices murmured low, their secrecy a shared illusion.

However, even here – where masks replaced faces and shame had no place – order ruled. *Obsidian's* laws were sacred. No unmasking without consent. No photos. No touch without a signed agreement. Safe words were lifelines, enforced by silent, suited attendants who moved like spectres. Break the rules, and you weren't *just* banned – you vanished. No second chances.

Yet, even with such order, there was always an undercurrent of danger. The anonymity offered was intoxicating, but it also meant you

never truly knew who was behind the mask. A politician. A doctor. A criminal. They all walked these halls, drawn to the darkness.

Just like I was.

Traditional dating wasn't an option for me – not for the kind of things I needed.

I had... *needs*, yes, that was what I'd call them. I didn't have to fuck a woman to get off. I needed to hear her, see her react to things I did to her.

And those needs couldn't be whispered about, let alone indulged in the daylight. Needs that, if discovered, could even have me locked away.

Or worse.

Obsidian had been the perfect solution to my particular state of mind. The women I'd seen so far were stunning, curated to fucking perfection. And they were real, not some fucking actresses. They were just like me. They needed things to be done to them, and to do things to others.

The online portal was very private, and only if our profiles matched would we see each other's. And through that portal we scheduled meetings.

But even in this haven, I had yet to find a woman willing – or perhaps brave enough – to venture into the depths of my kind of fantasy. I eased them into it at first, but as I pushed ahead, they'd all eventually balked, no matter how well they initially did.

Before entering tonight, I'd signed the waiver, as always. A standard agreement outlining the boundaries, the rules, the risks. Nothing too physical, nothing illegal, everything consensual – and there were those beautiful safe words. A far cry from what I truly craved, but close enough to keep the worst of the darkness at bay.

As I adjusted the mask for the last time and stared at the mirrored door leading into the lounge, I let out a slow breath.

Maybe tonight would be different. Maybe tonight, someone would see the monster lurking beneath the surface and decide not to run. Or maybe they would just run, like the rest. And I would go home too early – again. Crack open another bottle and watch my life go by.

Either way, Cain D'Angelo would remain a ghost in this place, a phantom that no one could ever truly touch.

I turned on my heel and stepped into the small, private lounge. My boots echoed against the dark-grey relief tiles, each step reverberating like the toll of a guillotine bell. A grim herald of my own undoing. And wasn't that the truth of it.

I wasn't stupid. I knew – the more I indulged, the deeper I sank,

the quicker I plummeted into the black mire of my own desires.

A bitter smile crossed my lips as I pushed the thought aside. No room for self-loathing here. Not tonight.

My eyes landed on the black duffel bag resting in the low-lit corner, the contents as ominous as the setting. I'd packed it methodically, as always, and its contents mostly consisted of weapons. Real ones. The sharp, cold steel and the loaded weight whispered of power and control. Some of them I bought purely for effect. Others, well...

Getting these inside wasn't simple. The bag had to clear inspection – every item declared in advance and logged before entering the lounge, their serial numbers etched into the records. *Obsidian* didn't allow weapons on any of the floors. *Officially*. But this *was* a fantasy lounge. And some fantasies? They had a sharp edge – tucked neatly in a zippered lining, for those who could afford to bend the rules.

With a sharp exhale, I moved to the large, round bed dominating the room. It was absurdly decadent – dark silken sheets, devoid of pillows. The beams above it were adorned with chains and leather shackles. With a push of a button, they could descend; the chains could extend and retract.

That wouldn't come into use today.

My gaze found the metal chair with straps in front of the bed.

That was how I started them.

I sank into the bed, my back against the headboard. The tension in my shoulders eased just enough to make me feel human again. For a moment.

How the fuck was I here again?

The thought struck like a hammer, but I didn't flinch. I'd asked myself the same question every time, yet the answer never came. I couldn't believe there were so many women into these kinds of kinks, let alone willing to share them. What was it that drove them? A trauma from their past twisting their minds? Or was it something else, something darker, more primal?

My lips curved into a bitter smirk, but before my mind could stray too far into that forbidden corner, I shut my eyes tight. The sting of the contacts hit me like a slap, harsh and biting, yet grounding. It wasn't pain exactly, but it was real – a reminder that I wasn't completely dead inside. Not yet.

The poison of the night was a woman with the username *Scarlett* – thirty-three, according to her profile. Her picture was a masterpiece of mystery and seduction. A Venetian mask adorned the upper half of her face, elaborate and laced with beads and metallic accents.

Something sharp dangled from it, catching the light like jagged claws poised to pierce her skin. It wasn't just a mask – it was a weapon in its own right.

Her photo was a side view. Her delicate jawline curved into an ear studded with dangling earrings. I had counted at least eight on that ear, each one sharper and more intricate than the last. Her lips gleamed blood red – an invitation and a warning. The lighting in the photo was dim and intimate, a stage carefully set to lure and disarm.

Which it had.

I was completely fucking disarmed.

Her dark hair was drawn tightly into a low bun, framing an olive complexion that hinted at Mediterranean roots. Italian, perhaps? That was my guess. Her profile listed several languages – a fact that intrigued me more than it should have. There was nothing sexier than a woman with brains.

She was educated – that much was obvious.

The *kinks* field on her profile had been starkly empty except for one solitary, tantalising word: *'exploring'*.

My dick twitched at the thought. To imagine a woman like her wanting to *explore* something like this – with me... Her surrender – *if* she surrendered – would be my undoing.

But I forced out a heavy breath, my fingers tightening against my thighs. No illusions, no expectations. This wasn't the place for fantasies beyond the ones we paid for.

'Don't get your hopes up,' I muttered under my breath, my voice rasping against the low hum of the room. Hope was a poison far more dangerous than anything in my duffel bag.

I checked my phone. Three minutes left. Three minutes that stretched like a lifetime as I sat there, staring at the closed door of the adjoining bathroom. It mocked me in its silence, taunted me with the promise that it might swing open at any moment. Yet, it stayed firmly shut, testing the limits of my patience.

It had always been one of my finer qualities – *patience*. I had perfected it over the years, honed it like a blade. Its prime purpose had been to orchestrate the meticulous elimination of shadows of the past – a masterpiece I took no small amount of pride in crafting, though it concluded with far less fanfare than I had imagined.

But here, in this dimly lit room with my blood running hotter by the second, my patience was challenged.

And that fucking door...

It called to me, daring to give in – to rise and rip it open, to catch her before she was ready. The thought was intoxicating, almost

impossible to resist. But I stayed put, my fists flexing and tightening as I imagined what she would look like when she stepped through.

Leather? Lace? Both?

Neither?

My body reacted before my mind could catch up. A pulse of heat shot through me, my dick stirring to life as though it could sense her presence on the other side.

I let out a sharp breath, trying to steady myself, but the images wouldn't stop.

They'd all been beautiful so far, the women who'd seen me here. Each in their own way, each a different kind of temptation. But beauty wasn't enough – not for me. When things started to get real, when the spark of fear ignited in their eyes... That thrill, sharp and maddening, was a high like no other. And yet, it was always the same: the fear grew too raw, too overwhelming, and they would bolt for the exit before things could reach their natural conclusion.

I hated it. And I loved it.

The sound of the doorknob turning snapped me from my spiralling thoughts. My breath stuck in my throat like a vice. The click of the latch felt deafening in the stillness, a single note of anticipation that thrummed through me like a devil's symphony.

I swallowed hard, my pulse a roaring drumbeat in my ears.

Please, I sent a prayer to the devil, let her be as fucked up as I am.

Paula



'What am I doing?' I murmured to myself, staring at the keycard slot as if it might answer.

The card trembled in my grip, caught between my fingers like a confession I hadn't meant to speak aloud. I clenched it until the edge bit into my palm, a petty punishment for walking this far. For wanting this.

The red light above the slot blinked – once, twice. Mocking. Contemptuous.

But also... welcoming. Like a mouth curled into a secret smile, waiting to swallow me whole.

I could still turn back.

Blame the weather, the time, the heat clinging to my skin like guilt. I could call a cab and return to the world without ever knowing what was behind that door.

But I had seen what happened in that world, too. The men who smiled openly still lied. Still took.

Glancing at the mirror, the woman staring back looked like she had stepped out of a magazine – painted lips, lined eyes, brown contacts. And a Venetian mask.

A stranger in drag, almost.

I exhaled, long and low.

The mask...

That was it, wasn't it? It wasn't just the itch of curiosity that dragged me here like a loose thread I couldn't stop pulling.

It was the mask. The illusion. The armour that hid what trembled underneath: anxiety, shame, the stitched-up remnants left behind by the man who was meant to protect me.

But that was ancient history. One I'd left behind in the States.

The keycard had stolen the warmth of my palm. It felt weightless. Damning.

I didn't know if I'd come here to take control or to hand it away.

I only knew the door hadn't opened yet, and that I hadn't told my feet to leave.

But I needed to break the monotonous streak – the nightmares, the daily routine that was beginning to turn me into stone.

Despite myself, I moved before the decision fully formed – the card sliding in with a finality my heart hadn't agreed to yet.

The light smiled green.

My heart thundered as I stepped into the room. The low thrum of ambient music blended with the sound of my quickened breath. The space was dark, decadent, a velvet-clad secret that seemed to welcome and judge me all at once. The red carpet stretched like blood beneath my feet, its richness muted by the shadowy purple walls. There were no paintings, no ornaments – only mystery. Here, identity didn't matter, judgment didn't exist. Only desire. Only fantasy.

For a moment, I wondered how my cousin had known about this place. It didn't exist on maps, there were no websites, save for the secure connection portal you couldn't even reach unless they allowed you to.

My gaze flicked to the chair first – a wicked tangle of cold metal and supple leather straps, promising restraint and surrender. A shiver prickled my spine, my body betraying a thrill I wasn't ready to admit.

And then I saw him.

He sat on the bed, commanding, his broad shoulders spanning the dark headboard as if the shadows had carved out a place just for him. His legs sprawled with careless confidence, an unspoken claim on the space.

The ghostly mask covering his face should have terrified me, should have sent me running. Instead, what it sent was a jolt of heat through me – sharp and undeniable.

He was massive, a symphony of sinew and muscle adorned with scars and tattoos that testified to his darkness. The black contacts beneath the mask glinted faintly in the low light, hiding his gaze. But I felt it. It raked over me – not just the dress, but the skin beneath it, peeling back every layer of pretence until all that remained was something raw and aching.

I wasn't Paula now – I reminded myself. I was Scarlett – a woman carved from fire and hunger, chasing the one thing that might burn down her demons before they devoured her whole.

The faint gleam of sweat on his skin caught the light, accentuating the defined planes of his muscles. My eyes followed the faint trail of dark hair that led from his chest down to the low-slung waistband of his black jeans.

Heat crept up my neck. And though women today were conditioned to look away – to guard their virtue, however performative – I let Scarlett look. I let her drink him in, lips parting, tongue slipping through the seam like a secret.

I let her *hunger* for the devil stretched out on that mattress.

My focus skimmed the tattoos on his forearms – random, yet deliberate – a language of symbols and words I didn't understand but desperately wanted to read. There was something raw about him, something untamed that both thrilled and terrified me – as if he could crush me and nurture me with the same touch.

My body moved before my thoughts could, carrying me forward until I stood just shy of the chair – too close to pretend indifference, too far to touch.

'Scarlett,' he murmured, his voice like a slow drag of smoke curling around me, dark and intoxicating. It wasn't a greeting – it was a claim. A command.

The 'R', though – not Italian.

American.

What were the odds?

'Ghost,' I whispered back, the word catching on my breath as if it might snare me if spoken louder. Speaking to this faceless enigma felt

dangerous, yet oddly safe. Safer than seeing a man with a face, a history... something real enough to haunt me.

We were nobodies here. Just desire and urges stripped bare.

For a moment, silence settled between us, thick and electric. Though I couldn't see his eyes, I felt the weight of his gaze, the way it lingered on my body as if he could see beneath the fabric of my black mini dress, beneath my skin, to the fractures inside me.

The slow, measured rise and fall of his chest was almost serene, but I could sense the storm brewing beneath it – a reflection of my own.

We just looked – for a long time. As if the quiet between us was saying more than either of us dared speak.

'Is this your first time?' He broke the spell, his deep whisper vibrating through the space and straight into me. Like a tether, grounding me in this moment when I was already so close to unravelling.

'Yes,' I whispered, the sound barely audible over the pounding of my heart.

I'd read the instructions, memorised them. But they didn't prepare me for this – the raw intensity of being here, of being seen without truly being seen. There was something about the anonymity of this, of him. It stripped away the fear that usually came with being vulnerable. No name. No history. No face. Just sensation. Just need.

And it all reminded me why I was here – to reclaim my past. My body, my desires – take them back from the man who had weaponized them against me.

With Ghost, it felt possible. He wasn't a threat; he was temptation in its purest form. A chance to seize what had been stolen.

The thought steadied me, even as the hunger in his voice made me weak.

I wasn't here for him. I was here for me – the mantra echoed in the back of my head.

'Then we go slow,' he murmured, his tone a velvet caress. 'You set the pace. You speak, I listen. Nothing happens that you don't want.'

He shifted. Measured, silent. A ripple beneath still water.

He extended a hand, fingers curling just enough to suggest intention. There was no rush – just command, clear and poised. My breath hitched as I stepped closer, my knees trembling slightly, though whether it was from fear or something far more dangerous, I couldn't tell.

'My role is to guide and push only as far as you allow,' he said,

voice steady. ‘Yours... is to feel, respond and speak.’

He let the moment linger as the words settled. For some reason it calmed me. This stranger. This *ghost*... calmed me.

Fear still lived in me. But I was sick of it – of that twist in my stomach, of flinching at shadows. So I took the risk, and gripped the thread of trust with both hands.



Chapter Two

Paula



‘*S*it,’ he ordered, a whisper that bled into a growl. The single word ignited a spark that danced through my nerves. My body obeyed, sinking into the cool leather of the chair as if it had been waiting for me all along. It felt both firm and yielding beneath me, a sensation that mirrored the conflict in my veins.

The moment I was down, Ghost was there, a six-foot-five wall of heat and restraint. His fingers hovered over my wrist, brushing against my skin as though seeking permission. The pause was careful, a silent question hanging in the air. When I didn’t pull away, his grip tightened, firm but never bruising, a demand that felt more like a request.

My body answered him before my mind could catch up. This wasn’t force – it was surrender, willingly given.

He reached for one of the straps, the leather supple in his hands as he wound it around my wrist and pulled it tight. My heart jolted once, my skin prickling with awareness. The way he worked was mesmerising – slow, methodical, as if savouring every second.

‘You’ve done this before,’ I whispered, my voice trembling despite the attempt at levity.

‘Many times,’ he admitted, his tone dark.

He paused, his eyes holding mine. ‘I don’t want *just* your body.’ His voice dipped lower. ‘I want the moment you stop fighting yourself. The breath you hold before you beg. The stillness when you realise there’s nowhere left to run—’ Then he stepped closer, his mask hovering just beside my ear. ‘—only into me.’

My throat struggled to make way for the air.

‘I want your surrender...’

‘Why?’ I croaked.

‘Because you *want* to give it.’

Looming over me, inhaling my scent without even touching me, he waited until I said something more. But words wouldn’t form.

‘Now,’ he murmured curiously, ‘pick something from the bag.’

The answer surged before I could stop it as my eyes landed on the gleaming silver in the duffel. A flash of memory hit me – my ex, his blade against my thigh. Not in play, but in punishment.

‘Knife,’ I whispered, eyeing the sheathed Bowie tilted just enough to warn.

His head angled, reading more than I said. But he simply nodded once, slowly. ‘Good choice,’ he said. No weight of judgment in the notes.

I shuddered slightly when he bent to reach it, the instinctive flicker of fear mingling with something deeper, something primal that I couldn’t yet name. My heart pounded in my ears, the sound drowning out everything else in the room.

Wiping the knife clean with a sterile cloth in a way that had me staring, he made it seem as if the ritual mattered to him as much as the edge.

He stepped around me, securing my other wrist with the same measured attention, his knuckles brushing against my skin just enough to make my breath catch. I watched the tattoos along his forearms ripple as his muscles flexed – anchors, helms, compasses, all manner of nautical ink shifting with every movement.

When he bent lower, his hands moved to the straps near my ankles. He raised his head, now level with my knees, and the proximity made heat bloom low inside me. His fingers lingered for a brief moment, as if testing my reaction, before looping the leather around my ankles and pulling. The restraint was snug but not painful – a silent reminder of the control I was handing him.

‘I want you to feel what is about to happen,’ he said, his voice

barely above a whisper. ‘Every touch, every pull. I want you to remember that it’s your choice.’

I nodded. Words were too heavy for my tongue.

When he reached for the strap across my thigh, a breath stuck between my teeth. His hands skimmed along my legs, firm but careful, as if measuring me. He wound each strap just above my knees, and as he pulled tight, they did more than secure me – they opened me to him.

The leather forced my legs apart with a slow stretch that left me utterly exposed, and it made my cheeks flush and my heart race. I felt the cool air creep along my skin, a contrast to the heat building between us. My tight black dress rode up my hips until it exposed more than it should have.

Ghost straightened, his black gaze – a heavy, invisible weight – dragging over me like a caress. He stood close. The intimacy of this was maddening, each small movement igniting a fire beneath my skin.

‘Safe word—’ he murmured, his voice dipping into a dangerous purr that sent a shiver sliding down my spine, ‘—red to stop. Green to go.’

I offered a quiet nod, as the faint, masculine scent of leather and something darker – something wholly him – clouded my thoughts. He leaned closer, his shadow swallowing me, his heat brushing against my skin like a forbidden promise.

‘Say it,’ he drawled, the vibrations of his voice forcing my eyes closed and my thighs to spread further apart.

‘Red to stop,’ I whispered, my voice trembling, ‘green to go.’

‘If your voice fails you, you tap twice.’

My eyes widened for a heartbeat – thinking about all the reasons why words wouldn’t be able to come out. And it was just the plunge I needed.

I tipped my head in agreement again, watching his gaze fall to my knees – trying to press together, but the leather mocked the effort.

His approval hummed low in his chest, a sound that quivered through the air between us. He pulled away just enough to let me breathe again, though the space he left behind felt achingly empty.

My gaze dipped to his waist – to the telltale strain of fabric against the zipper. Heat rushed up my neck, and before I could stop it, my tongue slipped out to wet my lips – as if already craving the taste of him.

What was wrong with me? I wasn’t into one-night stands. Not really. But something about this damned anonymity, his voice... his body... just—

The motion didn't go unnoticed.

Something silver flashed in my vision, and in the next moment, cool steel pressed against the underside of my chin. My breath caught in my throat as he tilted my head up with the flat edge of the large, serrated knife. Menacing. Brutal. Yet the way he wielded it was almost tender, a paradox of control and care that had me shuddering.

'Hungry, little angel?'

The side of the blade pressed into my soft skin, tilting my chin further up, and forcing my gaze to lock with his shadowed mask.

'Eyes on me at all times,' he rumbled.

I exhaled the breath I've been holding.

He leaned in, his voice dropping to a dangerous whisper. 'Tell me, angel—' he slanted his head, the mask casting shadows that seemed to move with him, '—are you scared?'

My breath stuttered, my lips parting as the heat of his words wrapped around me.

'Yes,' I admitted, the word trembling between us, as raw as the desire coiling in my stomach. Though it wasn't the entire truth. I was scared of the knife. But not of him.

Why?

He froze. The knife lingered under my chin, its flat edge still pressed to my skin. For a moment, the air thickened, and I reminded myself: *red. Say it and it stops.* The thought pulsed like a heartbeat, a small light in the thick dark.

Adrenaline surged through as the silence drew out. He waited. And in that unbearable pause, it hit me—

He might stop. Walk away – because I couldn't handle it.

No!

Don't stop. Don't retreat. If he pulled away now, I would shatter. I wasn't done.

I wasn't done!

His movements were slow, measured, giving me every chance to retreat. Each inhale rattled in alarm, but the way he held the blade – controlled, almost reverent – kept my fear alive, but at bay.

'Safe word?' he reminded, his notes vibrating in the air. He must have seen something on my face to have asked that. The question hung between us, a tether back to safety that he offered without hesitation.

'Green,' I whispered, surprising myself with the strength in my voice. 'More.'

He angled the blade away from my throat, ensuring my eyes remained locked on him.

My heart skipped a beat as my eyes caught my reflection in the gilded mirror behind him. The light softened my features, casting me in a haze that felt almost surreal. The woman staring back wasn't the broken woman I remembered. She wasn't the one who flinched at every shadow or wilted under a man's touch.

No, this woman...

Could she really be me?

I blinked once, then again. Her eyes gleamed, but my fingers trembled against the armrest. The woman in the mirror looked powerful, her cheeks flushed with desire. But *I* still looked like a mirage to myself.

My body... it was working against me. Or maybe it wasn't. Maybe it was memory. A reminder of who I used to be – before I offered up that version to Ghost.

I turned my attention back to him. The knife was tracing a path down my collarbone and past the curve of my breast before dipping lower. His hand pressed lightly against the inside of my knee. Then the steel replaced it, sliding up the softer flesh of my thigh with unhurried precision. The contrast between the biting chill of the blade and the heat pooling in my core made my skin pebble.

It climbed higher, teasing, grazing against the delicate fabric covering my most sensitive spot.

The pressure was fleeting yet devastating, and I couldn't stop the soft whimper that escaped my lips. The sound echoed between us, raw and unguarded, and his head snapped up sharply, the weight of it pinning me in place.

Then his shoulders tensed, his fingers flexing as if to ground himself. He moved the blade again, this time slower.

I felt it – the moment he ran the flat of the blade along my folds, cold metal tracing wet heat.

A gasp slipped from my lips, my hips twitching as shame and arousal collided in the space between breaths.

He stilled. Just for a moment, tilting his head to the side. That black, unreadable mask, those endless eyes caught the next tremble he drew out of me like a confession.

When he retreated, the steel glistened faintly, catching the soft light. My cheeks burned as I realized why.

With unhurried confidence, he lifted the mask just enough to reveal the lower half of his face. My lips parted as I watched, transfixed. He brought the blade to his mouth, his tongue darting out to lick the dampness. It traced the blade's edge, tasting me. Like an offering.

My thoughts reeled from the intoxicating mix of fear and power. I wanted to see more – to watch his tongue move against the blade, to see his expression as he teased me. But the mask obscured most of his face.

Rising slowly, his movements were too fluid for a man his size, a predator circling his prey. His footsteps were heavy on the naked tiles, the faint rustling of his jeans the only sound as he disappeared behind me.

The anticipation tugged at the fraying edges of my composure, and when the blunt side of the blade pressed against my neck again, fear bloomed across my skin. It wasn't the touch of the knife that startled me – it was the flood of memories it brought with it. Dark, suffocating memories that clawed at my mind, threatening to pull me under.

I squeezed my eyes shut, my heartbeat erratic as I fought against the rising tide of panic. But before it could consume me, the blade shifted. The flat side of the steel nudged under my chin, tilting my head upwards.

'Eyes on me,' he said, his voice firm and calm, unlike the voice that came with the memories. And it cut through the chaos in my mind just like that.

I blinked, my gaze snapping up to meet the hollow black of his. The world around us narrowed, and I latched onto the sound of his voice as if it were the only solid thing in the dark.

'Calm your breathing,' he instructed, his tone softer but no less commanding. 'Use the safe word.'

I hesitated for only a breath, the warmth of his touch coaxing me to submission.

He waited.

'Green,' I exhaled.

Calming myself was easier said than done. Each inhale came shallow, but the weight of his presence was steady, anchoring me in a way I hadn't felt in years.

Slowly, I pulled air back into my lungs, matching the rhythm of his own. He waited, patient but unyielding, until my pulse began to slow, my panic dissolving under the sheer certainty of his control.

'Good girl,' he murmured, the approval soothing.

The knife began its journey again, tracing a path down the column of my neck. Each inch it passed sent contradictory signals through my body – pleasure and panic, heat and ice. I flinched, just once, when it passed my collarbone.

Not because he hurt me – a flash struck me again. Another room, another hand... another knife, but without rules.

But this wasn't that room. This was *me* choosing this blade. *Me*, watching him wield it in pleasure – not punishment.

The weapon dipped lower. This time, I met it without a tremor, following its arc with a held breath.

The faint rip of the dress at my chest broke the silence, each thread conceding to the blade. I felt his gaze following the blade's path, its weight as tangible as any touch. He wasn't just stripping away fabric – he was peeling back every layer of me, leaving nothing hidden under the merciless gaze of the chandelier.

And just like that, the forbidden memories that had haunted me evaporated, replaced by the heat of his breath and the chill of the weapon. He had managed what years of therapy couldn't – a single moment of freedom, of release, where ghosts of my past held no power.

The lace clung to my waist in tatters, sheer and useless now – like the last defence of a fortress already conquered. His gaze travelled over me, slow and methodical, as if he were memorising every inch he had claimed.

I shifted, my throat labouring to catch air.

'Is something wrong?' I murmured when he lingered too long, suddenly too aware of my body.

His gaze lifted, and when it met mine, it was as if he were surfacing from someplace dark and indulgent.

'No,' he said, low and precise. 'There's nothing wrong.' A pause. 'You need to learn something.' He crouched, his mask level with my breasts, barely hidden behind the blue lace. 'This... what I am doing... what I am not *yet* doing... is restraint.'

His knife ran down the slope of my breast without touching. His breath ghosted over my collarbone even through the fabric of his mask.

'I don't want to rush this,' he whispered, more to himself. 'You have no idea what it takes not to mark you... Not to bend you over and erase any doubt you ever had about yourself.'

My mouth slid open slowly, the ache throbbing low between my thighs.

Fuck, I cursed inwardly. He was killing me.

'Mark me... how?' I whispered.

His gaze dropped to my breasts and stayed there. Raising the sharp tip of the knife, he lifted his head to look at me with a silent question.

'Green,' I murmured, stifling a plea that almost slipped alongside the word.

The blade made contact to the right, its tip circling the lace over

my nipple.

‘Here... Teeth. Just a little,’ he rumbled, inclining his head sideways as if to get a better view. ‘Then tongue, to soothe what I’ve taken.’

I wanted this. The pain. The pleasure. All of it.

‘I’d mark you where only I’d know to look. And every time you moved, you’d feel me there.’

Sending a shiver through my body, the blade descended further, slicing through the centre of my dress with a soft, decisive sound. The knife paused as it reached the lace below.

He stilled, his body rigid as he stared over me. The quiet thickened, his gaze lingering longer than expected, longer than I could endure. My cheeks burned, and I fought the urge to look away, but the tension in the room kept me locked to him. I could see the muscles in his neck working, a subtle betrayal of the battle he waged within himself.

The sight sent a surge of satisfaction through me. *Could I truly affect him so much?*

The contract we’d signed suddenly felt like a cruel boundary, a line neither of us could cross. Yet the unspoken promise in his every movement, the way his hand flexed on the hilt of the knife, left me yearning for more.

I wanted him to break me further, to take every fractured piece of me and shatter them until there was no trace of the person I used to be. My chest heaved, my breaths quickening again as I watched him wrestle with his own restraint.

‘I won’t touch you,’ he murmured, more to himself.

‘Do it,’ the whisper came, breathless – too eager.

‘It isn’t allowed.’

‘I won’t tell.’

The knife paused. For a moment, I wondered if I had crossed some invisible line.

No...

He rose, his frame dominating the space between us as he brought the weapon to my chin. The knife hovered near my lips, the smooth edge brushing lightly against them – a touch that promised but did not threaten. I forgot how to breathe. Time folded in on itself, leaving only him and me.

‘Good girls get rewards,’ he rumbled, tilting his head, the shadow of the mask obscuring his look but not the intent behind it. ‘And bad girls...’ His voice dipped lower, a tantalising pause, ‘get exactly what they ask for.’

I swallowed.

I didn't know which he saw me as, and the uncertainty burned through me like fire. But I knew what I wanted, what I needed, even if it defied reason. It was unnatural to want someone this much, this quickly, but it was the naked truth of it.

'Then give me what I need,' I said, my voice trembling but my gaze steady enough to hold his. My words lingered – a challenge and an invitation all at once.

His breaths grew louder, heavier, echoing through the mask as he seemed to teeter on the edge of control.

The knife slid into my mouth, its cold steel sharp against the warmth of my tongue. I opened instinctively, careful not to let the blade nick me. I didn't recoil. I welcomed it – because I had asked for it.

Because he waited.

For a moment, I forgot to breathe.

The knife's side pressed down, urging me to open my mouth further. The stretch left me feeling utterly exposed. I knew he wouldn't hurt me – somehow, I knew – but the danger increased every sensation, every second of this wicked ritual.

'I want those lips around me, little angel. But you are not ready to take me yet,' he rumbled, leaning closer.

His soapy scent was overwhelming. He was so close I could feel the heat radiating off him, and it made me ache to pull the barrier away, to see him, to feel him.

'I want to load that mouth,' he continued, the words reverberating through me, raw and unfiltered. 'I want to hear you choking on it.'

A moan trembled at the back of my throat, shameless. The sound seemed to break something in him. He jolted upright, towering over me now, his body tense as he fought himself.

For a moment it felt as though the world had stopped, leaving only us in this suspended moment of need.

With a ragged breath, he stepped back.

The distance felt unbearable, a loss so acute it left me fragmented.

'You did good, little angel,' he murmured, his voice gravelly.

Reaching for the straps that bound me to the chair, he loosened the leather. Their absence hit me hard, as though the weight of freedom were heavier than the bindings themselves.

'No,' I protested, my voice sharper than I intended. 'We still have half an hour.'

His movements paused, his eyes snapped up from his crouched position and met mine. Though the mask concealed his face, I could still feel the intensity of his gaze. He rose, stepped back with care as

though the distance was the only thing keeping him in control.

‘It’s enough for our first time,’ he said, his tone even and gentle. The knife in his hand spun once, then slid into the sheath before he tossed it into the open duffel bag. The soft thud of leather against fabric marked the end.

‘Did I do something wrong?’ I asked, rising from the chair and closing the space between us. My steps were hesitant at first, but when he didn’t move, didn’t push me away, I dared to come closer. Close enough that I could feel the heat emanating from him, smell the faint mix of leather and musk clinging to his skin.

‘No,’ he forced out.

I reached for him absently, my hand brushing towards his chest, aching to feel the solid weight of him beneath my palm. But before I could make contact, his hand shot out, gripping my wrist tightly.

The pressure wasn’t painful, but it was uncompromising – desire and restraint in one.

‘No touching,’ he ground out, his tone harsher – a reminder of the rules we had both agreed upon. But there was something else in it, something deeper than the confines of the contract we had signed. It wasn’t just a rule – it was a shield, a wall he had built for himself long before tonight.

I studied him, my chest tightening at the tension in his body, the way his fist clenched. It wasn’t the tremor of weakness but of a battle fought and barely won.

Was he as broken as I was? As maimed. As torn? Was that why we found each other on this jagged ground?

‘Two days from now,’ he murmured, pausing.

His thumb brushed over the delicate ink of the sparrow tattoo on my left wrist – a contradiction: gentle, almost reverent, despite the tempest hidden behind his mask. ‘Same time.’

I nodded, unable to form words under the warmth of his touch, his presence, his everything. The way his thumb lingered on my skin felt intimate, as if he wasn’t just touching me – he was memorising me.

And then he released me, his hand falling away, leaving a breath of cool air behind.

‘Walk away from me,’ he said. ‘I want to watch you.’

Self-awareness crashed over me, but my body responded to his command regardless.

With flushed cheeks, I took a tentative step back, his gaze – unseen yet unmistakable – anchoring me in place. The air felt thick, heavy, as if the smallest motion could snap the thread holding us both together.

Slowly, I turned, my pulse thrumming in my ears. Every step I took was measured, as though I were performing for him, even though I couldn't bring myself to fully understand why. My hips swayed with each step, my heels clicking softly when they reached the tiles, his gaze searing into me from behind.

When I reached the door of the bathroom, I paused, one hand resting on the handle. The urge to look back was overwhelming, and I couldn't resist.

The glance over my shoulder was a mistake.

A jolt shot through me.

He stood where I'd left him, his shoulders tense, his chest heaving with restrained need. But it was his hand that captured my attention – palming the dark fabric of his jeans, the motion slow, as if he were cataloguing the angles of my body with quiet hunger as I retreated.

My fingers tightened around the handle, my knees threatening to buckle at the sight. There was something so raw it made me ache for him, made me want to go back – to touch him, to give him everything he wanted.

'Go,' he rumbled with a desperation that mirrored my own. And then he dragged his zipper down.

The sound broke through the haze clouding my mind, startling me.

I turned quickly, slipping out, and closing the door behind me with trembling hands. My heart pounded as I leaned against the flat wood, the memory of his gaze and his touch still etched into my skin. My breaths came shallow and uneven, my body alive with a need I hadn't felt in years.

A shiver slashed down my spine, heat blooming in its wake, my skin prickling as if his stare had teeth. My own sank into my lip as I closed my eyes, trying to smother the smile tugging at my mouth.

I've completely lost my mind.

After a quick change of clothes, I entered a small, soundproof booth lit only by the glow of the touchscreen. Several questions were listed to make sure the contract hadn't been breached. Then the last question blinked back at me:

'Would you like to see Ghost again?'

I hesitated. My finger hovered. My heart nearly bursting out of me.

He could hurt me. Those scars on his body were not from a gentle past.

But...

He made sure I was in control the entire time.

If he tore me open, something told me he could put me back

together just as well.

I tapped 'Yes'.

And my heart misfired from that leap – from taking that risk.

Not because he thrilled me – and he did – but because he saw the line, traced it, but never crossed it.

Because he wasn't just a man.

He was my reckoning, and I wanted to face him again.

THIS DUET

Book One: Safe Word

Cain D'Angelo hides his darkness behind fame – but in Obsidian, he becomes Ghost, a man who dominates, controls, and never breaks. Paula DeLuca enters as Scarlett, seeking healing – but what she finds is a reckoning.

As submission becomes power, their identities begin to unravel... and survival means giving in to the very thing that could destroy them.

Book Two: Bleeding Ink

Two years later, Paula is a mother, an author... and a woman haunted by what Obsidian awakened.

But Cain was never gone – just waiting in the dark, rewriting their story.

Some sins stain. Some lovers scar. And some obsessions never die – they only bleed deeper.

OTHER BOOKS BY AUTHOR

ANCIENT LEGACY

(Paranormal | Urban | Historical | Romance | Dark | Gothic)

Bloodlines run deep. Desire runs deeper.

*This dark, myth-soaked MFM vampire saga weaves lust, legacy, and betrayal
across centuries.*

In a world ruled by ancient power, love isn't sacred—it's survival.

Book One: From Valhalla

As an *Oscurelle*, Elise was meant to serve the Ragnulfs—ancient Viking kings turned vampire nobility. Erik commands her body, and Magnus tempts her soul.

Desire becomes danger.

To survive the cruel politics of the world, Elise must choose: stay their pawn... or rise as something far more dangerous than a queen.

Book Two: From Ashes

The Cotta estate demands obedience.

Sent to serve five vampire heirs under their monstrous father's rule, Maria must soothe, submit – and survive.

But the brothers are possessive, the rituals cruel, and desire... feral.

In this house of secrets and scars, love isn't salvation.

It's a weapon. And Maria is the fuse.

Book Three: From Death

Lirina Ardiaei commands kings, bends fate, and walks with war at her heels. But when Death himself rises—ancient, merciless, and bound to her by blood—power means nothing.

Sariel doesn't ask. He claims.

And this time, the Queen of the Night must face the one force she cannot control: him.

Book Four: From Hel

The world burns, and Elise stands at the centre – bound to Erik's fire, drawn to Magnus's shadow, and now haunted by Thorstein, the blood-soaked prophet returned from death.

Three brothers. One war.

As fate fractures, so does she.

And in the ashes of empires, Elise must choose: become one with the flames... or be devoured.

Book Five: From Steel

Sigrid Ragnulf is power incarnate – shieldmaiden, politician, queen. But when secrets surface and allies turn, even she can't outrun the past.

One man stands beside her. The only one she can't afford to want.

In a world of masks and knives, truth cuts deepest.

And love may finish the job.

SOVEREIGN SERIES (novellas)

(Dark | Post-apocalyptic | Psychological | Thriller | Romance)

Pleasure is a weapon. Obedience... negotiable.

Hazel was forced into the Sovereign's system – a designed engineer trapped in a post-apocalyptic cage. Until an augmented enforcer begins to crack, obsession ignites, and what started as submission becomes rebellion.

Gritty. Relentless. Addicting. Sovereign isn't just a trilogy – it's a psychological, post-apocalyptic captive romance where love is the ultimate system error that could bring everything crashing down.

Book One: The Chain Loop

He dragged me from the sand like wreckage – silent, lethal, all heat and metal. Now I'm chained in his bunker, caught in a game where breath and obedience blur. His touch is control. His silence, a threat. And the worst part? I'm starting to want him to break me.

Book Two: The Tether Protocol

He let me run. Watched me vanish into the dark. But I should've known better. Jase doesn't lose things. He hunts them. Tracks them. Chains them quietly. And when he finds me again, there's no bunker, no warning – just his gaze on my skin like a brand. And this time, he's not letting go.

Book Three: The Blackout

I ran from him once. Thought distance would save me.
But he broke himself to keep me safe.
Now I'm the one bringing *him* back – piece by shattered piece.
The Sovereign will try to rewrite us. Erase us.
But I remember. And I'll burn this world to make him remember too.

THE AUTHOR

N. von Wolf writes dark, emotionally intense romances where desire collides with danger and power always has a price. Her stories blend myth, dystopia, and slow-burn obsession, featuring morally grey characters, lush prose, and worlds built to unravel both reader and heroine. Influenced by Eastern European folklore, Scandinavian myth, and Celtic mysticism, and the complexities of today's world, her work explores the line between surrender and survival – often with teeth.

When not writing, she works as a Technical Engineer Team Lead and balances life as a mother and wife. Expect bloodstained love stories, broken heroes, and heroines who refuse to stay soft.

You can reach out to her via social media or her official website:

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I hope you enjoyed this excerpt from the first book of Obsidian Duet: **Safe Word!**

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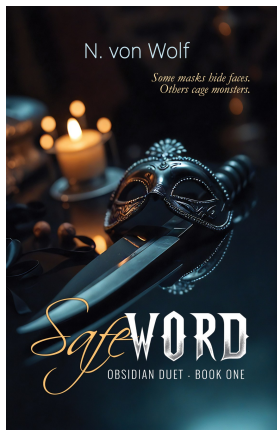
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