



THE VILLAIN
ISN'T SUPPOSED
TO BE KING

DEVIANT KING

ROYAL ELITE BOOK 1

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

RINA KENT

evermore

PENGUIN BOOKS

DEVIANT KING

Rina Kent is a *New York Times*, *USA Today*, international and No. 1 Amazon bestselling author of everything enemies-to-lovers romance.

She's known to write unapologetic anti-heroes and villains because she often fell in love with men no one roots for herself. Her books are sprinkled with a touch of darkness, a pinch of angst and an unhealthy dose of intensity.

She spends her private days in London laughing like an evil mastermind about adding mayhem to her expanding universe. When she's not writing, Rina travels, hikes and spoils cats in pure Cat-Lady fashion.

Copyrighted Material

Also by Rina Kent

Royal Elite series

Cruel King
Deviant King
Steel Princess
Twisted Kingdom
Black Knight
Vicious Prince
Ruthless Empire
Royal Elite Epilogue

Legacy of Gods series

God of Malice
God of Pain
God of Wrath
God of Wrath
God of Ruin
God of Fury
God of War

Villains series

Kiss the Villain
Hunt the Villain
Crave the Villain

Vipers series

Beautiful Venom
Sweet Venom
Tempting Venom

Copyrighted Material

DEVIANT KING

RINA KENT



Copyrighted Material

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com

Penguin Random House UK,
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW
penguin.co.uk



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in the US by Bloom Books 2026
First published in the UK in Penguin Books 2026
001

Copyright © Rina Kent, 2019

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes freedom of expression and supports a vibrant culture. Thank you for purchasing an authorised edition of this book and for respecting intellectual property laws by not reproducing, scanning or distributing any part of it by any means without permission. You are supporting authors and enabling Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for everyone. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. In accordance with Article 4(3) of the DSM Directive 2019/790, Penguin Random House expressly reserves this work from the text and data mining exception.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorised representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-911-74644-7

Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future
for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from
Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.



Copyrighted Material

To all the fighters,
It's easy to lie down, but it takes
courage to step up and fight.

Copyrighted Material

AUTHOR NOTE

Hello reader friend,

If you haven't read my books before, you might not know this, but I write darker stories that can be upsetting and disturbing. My books and main characters are morally gray and don't conform to societal standards.

Deviant King is a dark romance, mature new adult, and contains dubious situations that some readers might find offensive.

To remain true to the characters, the vocabulary, grammar, and spelling of *Deviant King* is written in British English.

This book is part of a trilogy and is not a standalone.

ROYAL ELITE SERIES:

Cruel King

Deviant King

Steel Princess

Twisted Kingdom

Black Knight

Vicious Prince

Ruthless Empire

Royal Elite Epilogue

For more things Rina Kent, visit rinakent.com

PLAYLIST

Grip—Bastille & Seeb	Believe—Normandie
Hypnotised—Coldplay	Lethargy—Bastille
Shiver—Coldplay	Doom Days—Bastille
Power—Bastille	Good Grief—Bastille
Avalanche—Cemetery Sun	Bury Me Low—8 Graves
Destroy Yourself—Dangerkids	RIP—8 Graves
Dangerous Night—Thirty Seconds to Mars	A Rush of Blood to the Head—Coldplay
Fire—The Faim	Warning Sign—Coldplay
Beautiful Drama—The Faim	Swallowed in the Sea—Coldplay
State of Mind—The Faim	Square One—Coldplay
Collide—Normandie	42—Coldplay
Moth—Normandie	

Find the playlist on Spotify.

open.spotify.com/
playlist/3W5gqO1wANC927IuelU0ur

Copyrighted Material

They say it doesn't take long for your life to be flipped upside down.

A moment.

A second.

And it's all over.

I should've known. If I had, I would've done things differently.

Maybe I would've walked the other way.

Maybe my tale wouldn't have ended the way it did.

But the thing about 'maybes'? They're useless.

I wave at my aunt as I stand on the old, Victorian-era pavement. She waves back from the window of her silver Audi with a blinding smile.

Aunt Blair's red hair never lost its fiery, natural colour, hanging in perfect waves to her shoulders. She has high cheekbones and a tall, slender, model-like figure that makes my awkward, sixteen-year-old body look like a potato in comparison.

Copyrighted Material

I strive to be her when I grow up. Not only in the looks

department—although I'll never pull off the red hair—but also the hard work and the personality. She's a partner with her husband in their overflowing business. Their small company, Quinn Engineering, grows tenfold larger each day, and I couldn't be more proud of them.

"Show them what you got, Elsie!" She honks.

"Aunt." My face flames as I search sideways, spying for anyone who might have heard. "Elsa. Just Elsa at school."

"But I like my Elsie." She pouts in an anime-cute way. Her phone rings in a standard, professional melody. Her eyebrows furrow as she checks the call before silencing it. "You'll be okay, hon?"

I nod. "You didn't have to drive me."

"I wouldn't miss my Elsie's first day in this huge effing place for the world." She motions around. "Freaking Royal Elite School! Can you believe it?"

"I wouldn't have been here without you and Uncle."

"Aw, stop it. We might have pulled a few strings, but if you didn't have the grades, you wouldn't be here."

And money. She forgets to mention that it costs a fortune and several organs sold on the black market to get me here amongst the elite.

Still, the weight that's been perching on my chest loosens a little at her contagious enthusiasm. "Teamwork."

"Teamwork!" She opens her car door and whooshes outside to clasp me in a mama bear hug.

I try to ignore the level of weird my future schoolmates must think of me and wrap my arms around Aunt. The smell of cocoa lotion and Nina Ricci's perfume envelops me in a safe cocoon.

When she pulls back, her cobalt-blue eyes shine with unshed tears.

“Aunt...?”

“I’m just so proud of you, hon. Look at you all grown up and so much like...” She trails off and wipes under her eye with the side of her forefinger.

She doesn’t have to say it for me to catch the meaning.

I look so much like my mum. While Aunt took after my ginger-haired grandfather, Mum took after my blond grandmother.

Or that’s what I’m told.

The ache that never died resurfaces like a demon from the dark, murky water.

Time heals everything is a big fat lie.

Eight years later, I still feel the loss to my bones.

It still aches.

It still hurts.

It still brings frightening nightmares.

“Gah, I’m being so sappy on my baby’s first day at school.” Aunt Blair gives me another quick hug. “Don’t forget your meds and *no* junk food. Go get them, hon.”

I wait until she gets into her car and shouts something at a slacking driver in front of her. Aunt has no filter when it comes to her precious time. That’s why I feel guilty when she insisted on driving me.

Once her car speeds into the distance, I resist the urge to call and tell her to come back.

Now, I’m truly on my own.

No matter how old I am, the feeling of being stranded isn’t something anyone forgets.

I stare at the massive building in front of me.

The old architecture springs an eerie, imposing feeling. Ten tall towers adorn the perimeters of the school's main building. Three-storey high, the school sits on a large piece of land surrounded by an enormous garden that's better suited for a palace instead of an educational establishment.

Royal Elite School is basically its name.

Located in the outskirts of London, the school was founded by King Henry IV at the beginning of the 14th century to provide education for scholars that later served in his court. After that, every king used it to cultivate his best subjects.

The school was later owned by aristocratic families and influential figures. They have the harshest and most closed-off entrance rates in the country. To this day, Royal Elite School—or RES—accepts only one per cent of the intelligent and filthy rich elite. Kids here inherit high IQs alongside their parents' massive bank accounts.

Most prime ministers, parliament members, and business tycoons graduated from this school.

The high-privileged education can give me a sure push into Cambridge. Aunt Blair and Uncle Jaxon studied there, and they're my role models in everything.

My dream is theirs. Teamwork.

This is my chance to escape all the rumours in my old school and start anew.

A fresh page.

A new chapter.

A blank book.

I stare down at my uniform that my aunt pressed to perfection and the adorable black ballerina flats—a present

from Uncle Jaxon. The blue skirt is tight at my waist and flares down to a little above my knees where my thigh-high stockings accentuate my tall legs.

My white button-down shirt is tucked into the skirt's high-waist. A dark blue ribbon snakes around my neck like a dainty tie. I also wear the obligatory school jacket on which the school's golden symbol is engraved: a shield, a lion, and a crown.

My white-ish blond hair falls in a fluffy ponytail down my back. I went out of my way by applying a bit of makeup. The mascara enhances my eyelashes and brings out my baby-blue eyes. I even put on Aunt's Nina Ricci perfume.

Today is the day that determines my life for the next three years. Hell, it'll determine my life afterwards if—*when*—I get into Cambridge, so I needed to do everything right.

As I stride through the school's huge, stony arch, I try to mimic the other students' confidence. It's hard when I already feel like an outsider. Students here wear their pristine uniforms as if they're made from gold-soaked cloth. The aura of high, mighty, and a bit snobby drifts from every chatter and measured step.

Ninety per cent of Royal Elite School attended Royal Elite Junior prior to this. They chat amongst each other like old friends reuniting after the summer while I stand out as a loner.

Again.

An itch starts under my skin and spreads along my hands. My breathing deepens and my steps turn forceful as memories filter back in.

Poor thing.

Did you hear what happened to her parents?

Heard she's a charity case by her aunt and uncle.

I shake those voices away and forge through. This time, I'm determined to blend in. No one here knows about my past, and unless they specifically search me, they wouldn't.

Elsa Quinn is a new person.

By the entrance, I spot a student who's avoiding the crowd by sneaking her way along the side pathway leading to the huge double doors. I notice her because I was also contemplating the same path.

While I'd love to fit in, crowds cause that familiar itch to rise under my skin.

The loner's skirt is bigger. She's on the thick side and has the roundest, cutest features I've seen on a girl my age. With her huge rounded eyes, plump lips, and braided long brown hair, she almost looks like a child.

And she's the first presence in this school that doesn't give me the 'untouchable' vibe.

I catch up to her and match her fast-walking pace. "Morning."

Her head snaps my way, but she soon stares at her feet and tightens her grip on the strap of her messenger bag.

"I'm sorry." I offer my most welcoming smile. "I didn't mean to startle you."

Perhaps she's one of the new kids here, too, and feels intimidated.

"You shouldn't be talking to me," she whispers under her breath. Even her voice is cute.

"Why not?" **Copyrighted Material**

She stares at me for the first time with eyes so green,

they nearly sparkle like a tropical sea. “Wow. You have beautiful eyes.”

“Th-thanks.” Her lips curve into a tentative smile as if she shouldn’t be doing the smiling thing. She kicks imaginary rocks as she speaks. “You’re too pretty, you shouldn’t be talking to the school’s outcast.”

“Outcast?” I echo, incredulous. “There’s no such thing as an outcast. If I want to talk to you, I will.”

She troubles her bottom lip and I swear, I’m itching to pinch her adorable cheeks.

“Are you new here, too?” I ask, instead of acting like a creep on the first meeting.

She shakes her head. “I studied in REJ.”

“REJ?”

“Royal Elite Junior.”

“Oh.”

Considering how she wasn’t in a horde of people, I assumed she’s new. Perhaps her friends haven’t arrived yet.

“Do you want me to show you around?” she asks in a tentative, small voice.

Aunt, Uncle, and I came for a tour during the summer, but I won’t refuse a chance to bond with my first potential friend.

“Sure.” I interlink my arm with hers. “What’s your name?”

“Kimberly. You?”

“Elsa—and in my defence, I was born way before the Disney film came out.”

She chirps a little laughter. “Your parents must have psychic powers.” **Copyrighted Material**

“Aunt said Mum named me after a Swedish nurse who

did lots of saving in both world wars and was nicknamed the ‘Angel of Siberia’. You know, Siberia, Elsa, and then *Frozen*, the ice princess? So maybe Mum did have psychic powers. Pretty lame. I know.”

“No. It’s so cool.” Her shyness slowly withers away as we walk together. Now that I have her, I don’t feel as alone or dejected.

My grin widens as Kimberly shows me around elegant, huge classes. The locker rooms. The pool—that I avoided. The principal’s office that she jokes we shall never visit in a Shakespearean-like tone.

My three years in RES will be marvellous. I can almost feel it.

Once we reach the enormous, bright green football pitch, another type of giddiness takes me over. Not only because I’m such a nerd fan of Premier League and a die-hard Arsenal fan like Uncle, but also because of the long track surrounding the pitch.

This school definitely has better equipment than my last and I can continue running as usual. Hopefully, my heart condition won’t start acting up again.

A crowd of RES’s students gathers near the wiring that surrounds the pitch. Eager murmurs and excited gleams float in the air and it tastes like Christmas or a kid’s first visit to the amusement park. Everyone seems to be naturally drawn to this place and they keep multiplying by the second.

“Elites.”

“They’re here.”

“I say it’s a championship year.”

“For sure.”

“Have you seen how that little shit became even more illegal? I’d so do him.”

“Shut it. He doesn’t know you exist.”

While everyone chatters happily, Kimberly stands at the far end of the wiring, near the wall to the exit. Her easy, albeit timid smile withers away and her fair skin whitens some more.

I join her and follow her gaze.

On the pitch, the football team players pass the ball amongst each other with their heads or shoulders. They weren’t playing or even in the team’s jerseys. The school’s uniform for the girls is pretty, but it’s dead gorgeous for the boys, especially if they have fit bodies like these athletes.

They wear pressed dark blue trousers, white shirts, and fitted jackets like ours. The only difference is that the boys have red ties with the school’s symbol.

The crowd’s attention strays to the four boys standing off to the side, half playing with the team and half chatting amongst each other.

It doesn’t take a genius to figure out they’re in a league of their own.

Kimberly’s gaze remains on the tallest boy who’s throwing a ball in the air and laughing like a young film star in the making. He has a classical, golden boy handsomeness. Slicked blond hair, sharp jawline, tanned skin, and a blinding smile, even from this distance.

However, the expression on Kimberly’s face isn’t of admiration or excitement like everyone present. If anything, it’s of...dread?

“Who are they?” I ask, curiosity getting the better of me.

“They’re the elite of the elite.” Her voice trembles,

genuinely, it *trembles*. “If you want to have a peaceful life in RES, you have to be on their good side.”

“That’s ridiculous.” Kids can’t own a school. “Who’s the golden boy?”

“Xander Knight and he’s trouble,” she blurts fast as if her butt is on fire. “I like you, Elsa, and I mean it when I say, *stay away*.”

His put-together type doesn’t interest me, anyway. I throw another look at him for a double-take.

The hairs on the back of my neck stand like needles when I meet the smokiest, most chilling eyes I’ve ever seen.

I hadn’t noticed him earlier because he was half hidden by Xander and his ball. He’s almost the same height as Xander, but with more developed shoulders. His uniform is missing the tie and he looks ruggedly handsome. Inky black hair runs long and slick in the middle, but it’s buzzed on the sides. His nose holds an aristocratic vibe although it appears a bit crooked like it was hurt before. That little imperfection adds more mystery and intrigue to him.

Something in my chest moves. I don’t know what it is, but it just moves.

It’s like a prisoner has been lurking in the corners of my chest and now decided it wanted to be set free.

Even if I want to break eye contact, I can’t.

He stares at me with a slightly tilted head and a silent, manic interest as if he’s meeting an old friend.

Or foe.

“Shit! Shit!” Kimberly grabs me by the jacket and pulls me in the direction of the exit.

“What...?” I’m incredulous, and a bit hazy from breaking eye contact with that boy.

“Just walk, Elsa,” she hisses as her quick footsteps pad along the pavement.

“Why are you taking me away?”

“King,” she mumbles under her breath. “Aiden freak-ing King.”

“And...who’s that?”

“He’s as much of a king as his last name. Heir of King Enterprises and of this damn school. His and the others’ parents own this place and you don’t want shit with them.”

“Okay.”

I don’t want shit with him either. He’s too attractive for that. Though I can’t place whatever got into me when I locked gazes with him.

Boys don’t interest me. I’m too nerdy for that and my studies always came above any boy drama.

That won’t change now.

Especially since my Cambridge dream is within reach.

Then why am I itching for another glimpse at those metallic eyes?

“Oh. Damn!” Kimberly curses again. “They’re coming this way.”

I glance over my shoulder and sure enough, Aiden and Xander stride towards us and the rest of the football team follow like a gang in a mafia film. All laughter disappears and even the bystander’s chatter halts abruptly and a tomb-like silence conquers the air.

The crowd parts for them like the Red Sea did for Moses.

“Run!” Kimberly whisper-yells, her nails digging into my wrist until I’m sure she’ll draw blood.

“Why would I run?”

Due to my struggles with Kimberly, they reach us in no time and block our epic failure run to the exit.

Up close, Aiden's eyelashes are thick and as inky as his hair. A small beauty mole sits at the edge of his deep, smoky eyes.

He stares down at me with a cold, foggy edge that matches the colour of his eyes.

Call it instinct, but something tells me I should be scared of him.

Like that prisoned thing from earlier, something claws at the corners of my chest, screaming at me to run and never look back.

That's ridiculous. I don't know Aiden, why should I run?

"Isn't it Berly?" Xander asks Kimberly in a detached tone before his lips curve into a cruel smirk. "You look even nerdier this year."

Everyone around us bursts into laughter, throwing fat-shaming remarks her way. My cheeks tint in red on Kim's behalf, but it's not due to embarrassment.

My blood boils to smash Xander's golden boy looks to the ground.

I open my mouth to say something, but I'm cut off when Kim lowers her head, lips trembling, and sprints past Xander to the exit.

He follows her with a smirk tilting his lips.

I should've seen what'll happen next coming.

I don't.

A strong hand wraps around my throat and pushes me against the wall. My back hits the brick and pain shoots down my spine and tightens the pit of my stomach.

I always thought myself brave, but nothing, absolutely *nothing* could've prepared me for this sudden, aggressive attack from a complete stranger.

The grey eyes I thought were beautiful seconds ago glare into my soul with murderous intent. The dark shadow on his face terrifies me more than his grip on my throat.

His other hand clutches my jaw, and my lips tremble at the thought that he'll snap my neck.

“Wh-What are you doing?”

He leans forward so his mouth hovers inches away from mine and growls, “I will destroy you.”

Those words seal my fate.

TWO YEARS LATER

Senior year. Last year before Cambridge.
Can I skip the entire thing and somehow still end up in Cambridge?

According to the obligatory grades' system, that's impossible.

The Mini Cooper swerves in the school's car park so hard, the tires screech in protest.

I gasp. "Kim!"

She grins at me as if she didn't almost run us into a pole. "What? Silver almost got the spot and I'm not letting that bitch walk all over me anymore."

My lips pull in a smile. I'm so proud of how far Kim has come during this summer. She went on a camping trip for self-spirituality and came back as this confident, smiley girl.

If only I could let go of my inner chaos as successfully as her.

She stares at her face in the rearview mirror. “How do I look?”

Another thing about Kim’s trip? She lost more than twenty pounds and returned with this model-like body. Even her face has thinned, giving her cheekbones an alluring edge. Although I do miss her chubby cheeks. The mint-green coloured highlights make her appear like a fairy. She wore her skirt short, too short. Like a gust of wind can show her underwear, short.

I release my seatbelt. “You were always pretty, Kim.”

“Only to you, Ellie.” She rolls her eyes. “And my dad, but you guys don’t count.”

“Hey.” I scowl. “Rude.”

She sticks out her tongue, determination sparking in her deep green eyes. “Today, I’ll show all those suckers what I’m made of. I’ll walk with my head held high like you.”

I can’t help the awkward smile breaking free. Kim thinks I’m that courageous, but she doesn’t know the entire truth.

Silver bangs on Kim’s window, her nostrils flaring. “You fat bitch!”

Two of her minions follow after her like she’s their mama duck. They’re all huffing and puffing, but I doubt it has anything to do with the weather.

Silver Queens is every bit the cliché of a mean girl. Blond. Tall. Slender. Her mother is a member of the parliament. Her father is a minister. She also belongs to the school’s best students. A.k.a., the top ten per cent.

She has it all and makes sure everyone in Royal Elite School—or RES—knows it.

Kim lowers her window, grins at Silver, and flips her middle finger. “Fuck you, bitch.”

Silver and her minions’ jaws drop so hard, so fast, they turn speechless.

I’m speechless, too.

My best friend doesn’t curse and she certainly doesn’t flip people off—or bullies, to be more specific.

Kim didn’t only change in appearance. Nuh-uh. The world needs whatever self-confidence training she had.

“Let’s go, Elle.” Kim opens her door, pushing the dumbfounded mean girls back.

I take my backpack and exit, too. I hold my head high as I stare down at Silver.

“What are you looking at, Frozen?” Silver snarls.

Of course.

The beloved nickname at RES.

But it’s not because of the Disney film. No.

Since the first day I walked into RES, I’ve been instantly marked as an outcast.

Kim and I were the butt-end of every fat and nerd joke. While Kim—the old Kim—hid in the garden behind the school until everyone went to class, I walked the hallway with my head held high.

Aunt and Uncle didn’t raise me to be stepped on. I kept to myself, but I never let them touch my dignity.

Apparently, I have an epic resting bitch face. Thus the nickname.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” I keep my expression neutral as I meet Silver’s malicious eyes. “You’re not important enough for me to stare at.”

I interlace my arm with Kim and walk into the school’s

huge doors. The ten towers appear eerie like they belong to a horror film, not a prestigious old architecture.

But then again, that's how I categorised RES since that first day.

My hands turn clammy and my body tightens as if I'm off to battle.

Kim smiles, but it's forced and makes her nose twitch in anxiousness.

"We've got this," I say more to myself than to her.

One more year in this hell.

One more year until Cambridge.

Kim's head bobs up and down, causing her mint-coloured strands to bounce.

"If we die," I joke, "I want to go in full Shakespearean mode. Tragedy."

She laughs, the sound is throaty. "For thy love of thee!"

We break into a fit of laughter as we head down the vast main hallway. The school's golden logo, Crest-Lion-Crown, decorates the entrance hall and the announcement board.

The moment we cross the entrance area and step into the hallways filled with other students, the real nightmare starts.

"Hey, Frozen. Did you freeze any beaches this summer?"

"Where's your fat friend?"

"Is she stuffing her pregnant belly with carbs?"

Kim's grip tightens on my arm. I can't believe they don't even recognise her.

Truth be told, I had to look at her twice after the summer camp to make sure it was her.

“Are you still swallowing cocks, Teacher Slut?”

I bite my lower lip against the rolling wave of anger. That particular rumour makes me want to hit someone.

Two years ago, after the entire class went out, I dropped my pen in biology. When I dropped down on my knees to pick it up, my hair got caught in the table—cliché, I know. Mr Silvester, the biology teacher, helped me out by untangling my hair.

Apparently, one of the dickheads here saw that moment and spread the rumour that I was giving our biology teacher a blowjob before he fucked me in class. Right before the exam—that I had a perfect score on.

Since then, I’ve been labelled a teacher slut.

Whenever I get a perfect score, it means I slept with the teacher.

But of course, no one talks about how Levi King, the oldest of the two kings, slept with a teacher. For real. They were caught in the act by the principal himself.

Nope. He gets a pass. The teacher gets thrown out of the educational system and she had to flee the country, basically.

Oh, and his guardian, the mighty Jonathan King, CEO of King Enterprises, got an official apology from RES.

Levi King got out of it unscathed. In fact, he became more popular, more loved, more admired.

Why? Because his last name is King.

And the Kings hold more power than the actual King of this country.

Levi King was idolised for fucking the teacher.

I’m called a teacher slut for unfounded rumours.

Kim's grip turns deadly even though she's holding on to her courageous mode.

I'm used to this rubbish and name-calling in the hallways. Kim isn't. I want to protect her from all these bastards.

Protect yourself first, Elsa.

Kim and I try to ignore them by talking about my running competition this weekend or the start of the Premier League season.

We release a collected breath when we finally arrive at our class.

At least, the wankers keep their distance when the teachers are around. But the thing about bullies? They work under the surface in front of adults.

RES is a prestigious, posh school, so the students need to keep up a certain image.

The rich are scarier than any normal criminal.

They have all the money and influence to allow them to twist anything around. They're never labelled criminals. No. They're labelled as elites.

Kim stops abruptly two steps into the classroom, and I run into her rigid back.

Her breathing becomes audible.

My own breathing picks up pace, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand on high alert.

Since that entrance day, there's been this baffling level of awareness that won't leave me the hell alone.

Every fibre of my being is honed for the inevitable confrontation.

For that crash and burn.

I suck in several deep breaths and begin the usual chant.
I'm loved. Aunt, Uncle, and Kim love me. I won't break. Not today.

I need to remind myself of those facts to remain strong and not let him get to me.

That's what the devil's reduced me to.

My gaze finally strays ahead, following Kim's field of vision.

Xander Knight. Cole Nash. Ronan Astor. Aiden King.

The four horsemen of RES. They earned the title for their impressive team play on the football team.

I call them the four arseholes.

And they're all here in our class.

No wonder Kim froze. We've barely escaped their wrath without being in the same class.

As in breathing the same air all year long. And not just any year, senior year.

Maybe I need to speak to Aunt and Uncle about my plans for Cambridge.

Cambridge, who?

The four are laughing and jesting. Xander is throwing the ball at Ronan, and the latter catches it with an *oomph*.

Cole, the new captain of the football team after Levi King graduated last year, holds a book in his hand and laughs quietly at the other two.

My gaze strays to the main devil.

The hell ruler.

The black king.

You'd think the summer would somehow erase him from my consciousness and nightmares.

It didn't.

Aiden is the only one sitting. His legs stretch in front of him, crossed at the ankles. His fingers are interlaced across his stomach, making him appear every bit the king his last name suggests.

A ruler on his throne.

A devil in his hell.

Over the summer, I thankfully hadn't seen him. He's bulked up—due to the football camp, no doubt. His uniform's jacket stretches over well-defined shoulders. The dark blue trousers tighten around his muscular thighs and even his legs have become taller. I'm sure the coach would be so proud of his star player wanker.

His dark hair is between being tousled and slicked. Under the dim classroom light, his dark grey eyes appear black. Everything about him is.

Black mind.

Black heart.

Black soul.

I should've listened to Kim that day when she said those little bastards owned the school. Their parents are the biggest shareholders. Everyone in RES, including some teachers, fall to their knees for them.

All of them are sons of ministers or lords.

All except for Aiden.

His father owns those ministers and the rest of the UK's politicians.

Jonathan King leads the most successful conglomerate not only in this country, but also worldwide. If he sponsors a politician, they're sure to win.

If he brings someone down, they're sure to vanish and never return.

That's the only reason I haven't reported the bullying or mentioned it to Aunt and Uncle.

Quinn Engineering is a small fish and their contract with a subsidiary of King Enterprises is the reason they're flourishing. Losing their company would devastate them.

If I stir up any trouble with Aiden, I have no idea what the devil will do. After all, he's the heir to his father's kingdom.

Aunt and Uncle saved me ten years ago, and I'd rather die than hurt them in any way.

Ronan notices us first. He's the typical teenage boy with messy brown hair and eyes. All he cares about is partying and shagging his way through school. Kim and I are probably the only moving things with a skirt he hasn't fucked.

That's probably why he licks his lips suggestively while he looks us up and down. Then he stops abruptly and nudges Xander.

The latter pauses tossing the ball to Cole and freezes. Literally. His easy-going smile falls, the dimples disappear, and his demeanour changes.

Kim's new appearance shocked him.

In his bloody face.

Aiden's eyes are on me. The murderous energy is in the air without me having to look at him.

Xander stares at Kim with contempt. "What have you done, Berly?"

Kim's hand starts shaking. He made her life a living hell like Aiden made mine. The only difference is that her bullying has been going on since the previous school. She doesn't talk about it, but considering that she knew these arseholes her entire life, I'm sure it's been going on for even longer than that.

“Ignore him.” I lean in so only she can hear me. “They get off on a reaction. Don’t show it.”

“You think you’re all pretty now?” He strides forward with a barely tucked-in menace.

Kim shrinks into me, biting her lower lip. Even with her courage resolution, I can’t really blame her.

Xander is an intimidating asshole both because of his stupid football build and his influence as a minister’s son.

Besides, he’s humiliating her in front of a class full of kids who always hated her.

“Once a nobody, always a nobody, *Kimberly*.” He snarls her name.

Her bottom lip trembles, which means she’s about to cry. The asshole always makes her cry.

“Xander, p-please,” she whispers.

He slams his hand on the wall, and Kim flinches. “You don’t say my fucking name.”

“That’s enough.” I level him with a hard glare.

“Stay out of it, Frozen.” He’s speaking to me, but his entire attention is on Kim and her bowed head.

I’m about to pull her into a seat when Silver barges through the door, carrying a coffee cup. Her minions follow after, flipping their hair and making a show of their entrance.

Great.

Silver hits my shoulder and spills her cup of coffee on Kim’s front.

I gasp as Kim’s white shirt, jacket, and even the skirt soak in caramel coffee.

Kim closes her eyes and a tear rolls down her cheek.

The rest of the class snickers.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing, Silver?” I’m about to lunge at her, but Kim digs her nails into my arm, stopping me in my tracks.

“Oops.” Silver holds the empty cup. “Go change, Berly. While you’re at it, lose the whorish skirt. It doesn’t suit your fat hips.”

Her minions chuckle and everyone in the class follows suit.

Everyone except for me and the four horsemen.

My gaze snaps to Aiden. He’s twirling the ball on a finger, but he’s not watching the scene.

He’s watching me.

Despite my resolution to not get stuck in his games, I meet his glare with one of my own.

For a moment, it’s as if only the two of us are in the class.

He’s surrounded by his murderous demons while I seethe for what his minions do.

Since that first time he announced he’d destroy me in front of the entire school, I’ve become RES’s outcast.

He doesn’t even have to do anything. He just sits like a king on his throne and watches what his loyal subjects do.

The bullying and the rumours that I slept with professors for my grades never fazed me because I know who I am.

Who Aunt and Uncle raised me to be.

Every day is a battle in this war Aiden created.

Sometimes, I get weak and hide in the library or cry by myself in the bathroom.

However, I never show weakness in front of him.

Not when I’m almost sure he gets off on it.

He’s usually sitting there, relaxed, watching intently as his minions turn my life into hell.

Only there's nothing relaxed about his expression. I swear if demons could spill from someone's eyes, they'd be crowding his space.

When he plays football or when he's in class, Aiden is every bit the golden boy.

Excellent grades.

Elites' ace striker.

Contagious smile.

But with me?

Aiden King is one dark fucker.

He only gives me murderous glares as if my mere existence offends him. As if I'm the reason for the world's endless wars and famine.

That asshole ruined my fresh start in this school.

My dream.

My new page.

I hate him.

Kim releases me and runs out of the classroom. Xander starts after her with wide strides.

I attempt to follow, but Silver blocks my way with a plastic smile. "She doesn't need a maid, Frozen."

"Get out of my way," I grind out. When she doesn't move, I push her and throw over my shoulder to no one in particular. "Oh, and if you have to bring someone down to feel so good about yourselves, then I feel sorry for you."

I don't wait for a reply as I run down the hallway.

It's a trip to the back garden where Kim usually hides—or finds peace, as she calls it.

After a minute of full-speed running, my heart's palpitations skyrocket into an irregular rhythm.

I stop at the corner of the third tower to catch my

breath. My palm clutches my heart as sweat breaks over my brows.

Breathe in. Blow out.

Inhale. Exhale.

In.

Out.

My nails dig into my chest over RES's logo as I exit the building and head to the back garden.

With every step I take into the cut grass, a weight crushes my chest. My breathing becomes irregular, too.

A sliver of panic lodges deep within. My hands tingle and that familiar urge to scrub them clean takes over my senses.

I can't think past the sensation that my hands are dirty. They need to be scrubbed clean.

The pain in my chest is like tiny needles, tirelessly prickling my heart, even when I walk as slow as possible.

My heart condition can't relapse.

It simply *can't*.

Being able to run again didn't come easily after the surgery. There were intense rehabilitations and a complete change in my lifestyle.

The nightmare can't be back.

I *need* to run.

If I don't purge my energy and stress into running, I'll go crazy.

Kim and Xander's silhouettes appear in the small cabin house on the outskirts of the garden. She's crying and yelling, but I'm not close enough to hear what she's saying.

That and my ears are buzzing so loud, I can barely hear my own breathing.

This is bad.

I blink twice and breathe through my nose then my mouth.

Xander pushes into Kim, imprisoning her against the edge of the cabin. Her back hits the wooden pole and her eyes widen.

It could be because I'm disoriented.

It could be that this is the straw that broke the camel's back.

Or it simply could be that I've finally had enough.

I'm done with these arseholes ruining mine and Kim's life.

I pull out my phone and record a video. Xander grips her by the hips pulling her into him. Although I want to cut off his dick for putting his hand on my best friend, I know that will bring nothing. The video, however, will.

I can see Xander Knight's fall in sight. Either he leaves Kim alone or I'll blackmail him with sexual harassment. RES might be under his father's command, but the press isn't.

They'd be delighted to hear how sick and entitled a minister's son actually is.

I'm in the mood to ruin his future like he's been actively ruining her life.

Once I have enough footage of him manhandling her, I stop the video and smile in triumph. Even my heart problem fades away.

I start towards the cabin to stop Xander.

A shadow blocks my way.

I cease to breathe when I stare up at my nightmare.

Copyrighted Material

Aiden hates me.
He loathes me.

I can imagine him playing my death in the back of his mind.

Why?

I don't know and I never asked.

Because I have a rule: Never try to understand bullies.

They're entitled arseholes who use their power to humiliate others, what's there to understand about them?

But as I stare up at Aiden's punishing eyes, my earlier thoughts shrink behind my trembling, defective heart.

He scares me.

Call it instinct or an intuition, but something terrifying lurks behind that easy-going smile and football star image.

"What did you just do?" His voice is calm and quiet with a slight huskiness.

An outsider would find it welcoming, but I know it's one of his multiple facades.

The voice the devil would use to lure his victims.

I lift up my chin, even though my hand clutching the phone trembles. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He extends his palm in front of me. “Give it.”

I start to bypass him. Aiden sidesteps in front of me. He’s stupid tall. Stupid broad. Stupid everything.

He blocks my vision of Kim and Xander.

But he’s not done.

Aiden advances into my space. He’s so close that I can make out that small beauty mole at the corner of his right eye.

I instinctively step back with every stride he takes forward. My throat dries, and I hate how I shrink in front of his attack.

He’s just too damn tall and has this unreadable mask on his face. The only available image of Aiden is the one he shows to the outside world. Aside from that, he’s... nothing.

A dark secret.

A deep hole.

An endless abyss.

My back hits a tree trunk, and I wince. When I attempt to walk past him, his arm shoots up and slams on the tree by the side of my head.

I’m imprisoned, just like the first damn day I met him.

Since then, Aiden has never gotten this close. He’s the ‘King’ after all. All he has to do is issue a decree and the entire kingdom would bow. People do his dirty work for him—including bullying.

He still smells of body wash and something entirely his. It’s strange how certain things never leave our memories.

He extends his hand again. “Give it, Frozen.”

Frozen.

I'm just that nickname to him. It's another form of bullying and intimidation.

But I've already decided that I'm done with being a victim to Aiden's unjust war. I'm tired of being the one who always breaks eye contact first and hurries in the opposite direction.

We should give back.

Kim's words play in my mind.

If it were the old me, I would've done everything in my might to avoid confrontation with Aiden and stay as far away from his vicinity as possible.

I've always tucked my ghosts between my defective heart and my ribcage, but he needs to learn that the world doesn't revolve around his stupid last name.

I fold my arms over my chest and jut out my chin. "No."

He narrows his left eye. "Who do you think you are, Frozen?"

"Just a human being who deserves to be left in peace."

He cocks his head to the side, watching me with his demon eyes. "Not all human beings are in peace. Why should you be?"

"Are you freaking serious?"

"Give me the phone. I won't repeat myself another time."

"No." I mimic his tone. "I won't repeat myself another time."

He does something unexpected then.

Something I would've never seen coming.

Copyrighted Material

His fingers wrap around my wrist that's clutching the phone.

Something in my stomach twists in a painful, strange kind of way.

Aiden *never* touches me.

The last time was two years ago when he wrapped his hand around my throat.

His touch is still...the same.

Calloused. Rough. Smothering.

He's not cutting off my breathing like the other time, but the air around me crackles and then ceases to exist altogether.

He reaches towards the phone, but I'm out of my stupor before he manages to snatch it.

We struggle for a few seconds. Or more like I struggle to block him. He's like a bull going after the red cloth.

An unstoppable, murderous bull.

Panting, I yank the phone close and hug it to my chest.

Aiden doesn't waver and shoots for it.

Why the hell had I thought the asshole had boundaries?

Trying to block him with one hand, I loosen my ribbon enough to have an opening then tuck the phone in my bra.

I smile in triumph, tipping my chin at him.

Aiden's smoky eyes glint with something unreadable.
"You had to screw up."

"What?"

"You really think that will stop me?"

Aiden dives straight to my shirt and undoes the first button. I'm so shocked that I stare with parted lips without reacting. It's not until he gets to the second button that I push at his chest. **Copyrighted Material**

“Wh-what the hell are you doing?” I shriek.

He pauses, tilting his head to the side with that manic expression. “Are you going to give me the phone?”

“N-no.”

He continues his ministrations with the buttons of my shirt. My throat closes and I feel myself about to start hyperventilating. I push him, but his hold is steel. Impenetrable, hard steel.

“S-stop!!”

There’s a strange rush flowing through my veins and tightening my muscles. I have no idea how to explain it except that Aiden needs to get his freaking hands off me.

I push at his chest again, but he already has the three first buttons opened so the edge of my bra is visible.

My lips part when I realise what else is in full view.

My surgery scar.

For years, I did everything in my power to make sure no one saw it. I never wore low-cut shirts. I bought one-piece swimsuits that hid my chest. I don’t even like showing it to my aunt. Kim probably saw it twice and even then, only by accident.

And now, Aiden is staring at it.

No. He’s not only staring. He’s devouring it with his gaze as if it’s some sort of wonder.

He stops unbuttoning my shirt, but he hasn’t removed his fingers from the fourth button. In fact, he undoes it so the shirt is open to underneath my bra and he has a full view of the diagonal scar at the top of my left breast.

Ugly.

Long.

Faded.

Copyrighted Material

The reason I started hiding it was because of the pitiful looks people gave me. Even Aunt Blair gives me that look sometimes.

However, Aiden's expression is anything but pity.

I didn't expect such emotion to exist in his black soul, but I thought there would at least be a softening of his devilish heart.

I couldn't be more wrong.

His eyes were murderous before, but now he seems like he wishes he had a knife to slice my scar open and rip out my heart.

Twigs crush underneath nearby footsteps.

I shake myself out of my stupor, push him away, and turn around to re-button my shirt. My breathing shortens despite my attempts to regulate it.

Behind me, I can feel his unwanted heat near my back. One step closer and he'd be breathing down my neck—or probably chopping it off.

"Mate." Xander's cool voice sounds from behind me. "You caught yourself an ice princess?"

"Actually, the ice princess is for you. She has something of yours."

Once my shirt is buttoned—with the phone still tucked in my bra—I whirl around. Getting on my tippy toes, I peek around Xander but there's no sign of Kim.

Xander appears victorious like he just did something to be proud of.

If he hurt Kim in any way, I'll ruin his face and pluck out those stupid dimples.

"Something of mine?" Xander's gaze bounces from me to his asshole friend.

“She recorded you.” Aiden doesn’t spare me a glance. “I’m sure she’s thinking of using it against you on social media and the press to ruin yours and your father’s future. That sort of thing.”

I couldn’t keep my jaw from dropping even if I tried to. Aiden figured out my plan to a T.

Am I that obvious?

Xander bursts into laughter like he actually finds all of this funny. A cruel smirk tugs Aiden’s lips as if this is some inside joke.

“All right, Frozen.” Xander faces me, his laughter disappearing. “It’s so cute that you think you can hurt me and all. Now that you’ve had your fun, give me the video.”

Barely concealed fury erupts into hot, scorching flames. It could be because I saw this same asshole harassing Kim or because of how Aiden touched me like he had every right to.

I widen my stance, glaring up at Xander. “You’ve ruined Kim’s life for freaking years for no reason. It’s time someone puts a stop to your spoiled, rich arse. I don’t care if you’re the minister’s son or if you’re bloody royalty. If you don’t stay away from her, you’ll regret it.”

Silence.

Long, thick, fog-like silence.

Xander studies me with a raised eyebrow while Aiden remains poker-faced. If he weren’t so close, I would’ve thought he hadn’t heard me.

The more they remain reactionless, the harder my pulse pounds in my throat. It’s a miracle I’m not fidgeting.

“The phone is in her bra.” Aiden breaks the silence with a levelled tone. “You want me to get it, or will you?”