

Once the paperwork was filled and signed, Kali had been escorted into a side room where she waited for what felt like an eternity. It was strange. She had been filled with such anxiety and fear, and yet once she'd signed away her rights, her very freedom, it was almost like a weight had been lifted from her shoulders. That wasn't to say she still wasn't scared; of course she was. Terrified, even. Who knew what awaited her next? But the weight of *responsibility* was gone.

Whatever happened now, there was *nothing* she could do about it. Her fate – and the fate of her daughter now rested in the hands of bureaucrats, and the family who purchased her at auction.

It couldn't be worse than the hell they'd already been living, right? That was the hope she held onto when a man dressed in a sharp suit entered the room, his graying hair cut high and tight, his face chiseled from stone. When his eyes fell upon her, there was nothing. He looked at her as if she were an object; not even good enough for his disdain or anger, just... blank.

Kali wasn't sure if this was better or worse. At least with anger, you knew where you stood with them.

He held a clipboard in hand and inspected her as if she were cattle.

"Ms. Kali Belladonna?" he questioned, raising a pen to paper.

Mrs. – but she didn't bother correcting him. What was the point? Ghira was gone and she'd just become prospective property. It was easier to ignore.

"Yes," she replied evenly.

“And a Ms. Blake Belladonna,” those cold, blank eyes darted to Blake. “Correct?”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” he wrote something down and then produced two collars. Kali felt her insides freeze. “Put these on.”

The indignity – but did she even have a right to dignity any more? He handed over the collars and Kali saw they weren’t ordinary. While the main strap was crafted from leather, the sort of thing you’d use for a dog, a thin metallic wire was woven along the inside with a small metal box on the back housing a tube of powdered lightning Dust.

A shock collar.

The threat was clear. If you tried to back out and run, you were in for a world of pain. There was no escape. She had made her bed, and now she had to lie in it.

Hands shaking, Kali looped it around her neck and secured it in place, threading the end through the buckle. Blake’s was smaller, designed for children – and wasn’t that a sickening thought? Kali slowly looped it around Blake’s small neck, locking it in place, disgusted. The jostling had awoken her, amber eyes blinking up at her blearily with complete trust.

It almost made her cry.

“In a moment, you and several others will be escorted to a nearby facility where you will await the next auction,” the man said blandly, emotionless. “All of your needs will be taken care of for however long it takes in accordance with the contract you’ve signed. Do you have any questions?”

Kali shook her head.

“Very well,” and then he was gone, leaving them alone.

Ten minutes later, a woman appeared. Like the man, she was dressed in a sharp suit but with a pencil skirt instead of pants. Unlike the man, she wore a wide smile. It immediately put Kali on edge.

“Hello deary,” she greeted happily and Kali was struck dumb by the contrast between the two workers. She clapped her hands together, bending at the waist as she said, “Up, up – it’s time to go~! Aren’t you just super excited?”

It took Kali a few seconds to respond, rising from the chair she was sitting in and following obediently. The women hummed merrily as she guided them down the hall, stopping at several rooms along the way. Many more faunus joined them, all of them wearing the shock collars that had been provided. Just as Kali was, they were off put by the cheerful nature of what was essentially their jailer.

“Come, come – just this way. We’re almost there.”

They were led outside through the back of the building where two vans were waiting, the drivers putting out their cigarettes as they approached. They hurriedly opened the backs of each vehicle and Kali saw two benches bolted to the floor on either side.

“In you go,” the woman ushered them with the same disturbing cheer. “I hope you all have a safe trip~!”

Kali huddled near the front, cradling Blake as the doors were slammed shut. Thankfully she didn't cry, and soon they were being ferried across the city.

No one spoke. Kali recognized a few of them but many more were unknown to her. In their van, they were all women. The oldest couldn't have been over forty while the youngest – if you didn't include Blake – can't have been a day over fifteen, a pretty girl with long blonde hair and horns curling out both sides of her head. It was this girl that Kali couldn't take her eyes off, imagining her daughter at this age and having to make such a horrible, life changing, degrading decision.

Of course, it would never come to that because Kali had made the decision for her. Blake would grow up as property without ever knowing a life of freedom and choice. Every meaningful decision would be made for her.

The facility they arrived at was large and cold, made from featureless concrete and glass. A large wall surrounded it, the top ringed with razor wire and the entrance gated by a pair of heavy, massive wrought iron gates. They were unloaded and then shown inside where it was much of the same; there was no personality on display, the wooden floors handsome but the walls a dull, lifeless gray. The workers were dressed in boring cream jumpsuits, and they were guided into a large sleeping area.

It reminded Kali of the barracks the faunus army had constructed at various locations to house their troops. There was no privacy, rows upon rows of bunk beds stretching to the end of the room. At the end of each bed were trunks that she would later discover were filled with plain, nondescript clothing. Faunus loitered around, those that had been brought here earlier, watching with defeated expressions.

Waiting for them was a harsh looking woman with deep lines around her mouth and eyes, and a fearsome scowl.

"Welcome," she said, though her voice didn't sound very welcoming at all. "You will only be here for a short time but I expect you all to be on your best behavior. I will not tolerate any troublemaking, do I make myself clear?"

No one spoke.

"Beds have been assigned," she continued, angry eyes roaming across all of them. "Meals happen at eight in the morning, noon, and six at night. Do not miss them for you will not receive any food outside of these times. There is an outdoor area you may use during the day. Curfew is at nine. Any questions?"

There were none.

"Dismissed," she barked.

It was like they were at boot camp.

Kali wandered outside. The area was large with a chain link fence surrounding them topped with more razor wire, a well maintained lawn stretching a hundred yards, give or take. She searched for a familiar face; maybe Olive was still here? But no, while many of them she had seen in passing, there wasn't anyone she knew personally. No Olive, no Cherry. They'd been moved on.

They were with their new owners.

The days passed by slowly. Without anything to do but think, Kali often found herself trapped inside her own mind. It wasn't a healthy place to be. Her thoughts often drifted to her husband but what was once a comforting retreat soon became a place of torment. What would he think of

what she'd done? Would he understand her plight? Or would he be furious with her, disgusted? Would he still see the woman he loved if he looked at her now – or would he see the woman that signed their daughter's life away? Kali would never know; and she didn't want to know.

In her lowest moments, she was glad he wasn't around to see this. When she thought this, it only made her feel worse.

The meals were basic but nutritious; filling. Hunger didn't exist for them any longer, and she could see the physical health of those around her improving. Gaunt faces slowly filled out, color returning to their skin. Kali felt the changes in herself. Blake was taken care of, as well. She had access to limitless baby formula, and any soft solids she could ever require.

But while their physical state improved, their mental state was something else. More faunus were brought in every day until every bed was taken, the once large facility seeming so much smaller. Surrounded by so much despair, Kali could see the strain it was placing on all of them. While many tried to remain stoic, unfazed, not everyone was able to hide the slipping of their declining mental health.

There had been a few attempts at escape. A pair of younger girls and a man in his mid twenties. They'd tried to scale the fence but got caught in the razor wire, their flesh cut to ribbons. The shock collars weren't even required. Kali hadn't been the one to find them but she'd seen the aftermath. Blood everywhere, soaking into the grass.

One of the girls had perished, cutting through one of the arteries in her leg. The other two survived with the wounds of their foolish attempt but they were never seen again, removed from the general population. Kali didn't know what happened to them.

She'd rather not know.

She hadn't expected to remain in this facility for so long. Days became weeks, and then weeks became a month. Blake was growing fast. She was babbling often, attempting to speak, and seemed to understand Kali more and more. She was also crawling, and Kali often took her outside to crawl in the sun – when they got some. The harsh grip of winter had broken but it wasn't uncommon for snow to fall occasionally, and some days were still too bitter to go outside.

Kali hadn't made any friends because what was the point? But she had learned a little bit about some of the others, including the blonde girl with the horns. Her name was Honey, and she had been alone since the end of the war. She was fourteen at the time, now fifteen – and Kali tried to imagine herself in a similar situation at that age, and often wondered how she'd survive.

She'd been shy at first but as the days trickled by, she opened up. What Kali learned made her want to cry, and rage, and scream.

Honey had nothing, and so she turned to the only profession possible. Prostitution.

It hadn't taken her long to find those that found her age... encouraging. It killed a piece of her inside each time, but if she wanted to survive, what else could she do? The only reason she hadn't signed up for the voluntary servitude earlier was because of a friend. A friend that refused to bow down and surrender. Honey didn't want to leave her alone because all they had was each other.

A friend that was no longer around.

Halfway through their second month, things finally changed.

They were all gathered together in front of the harsh woman that ran the place. None of them knew her name, and she was only ever referred to as Madam.

She had news for them.

“The auction will be taking place tomorrow,” she announced, those angry eyes observing their reactions. A ripple of unease spread through the crowd, their moment had finally come. “You will be provided with new clothing and transported to the auction house where your future will be determined. Those that aren’t purchased on the first day will return here, and for the next five days, will return to the auction house for a new set of prospective buyers.”

And if none purchased you? She didn’t say.

She didn’t need to.

They were awoken early and prepared. Kali showered and then bathed Blake, and they were presented with brand new clothes. Unlike the featureless, bland uniforms they’d been wearing, these were regular clothes; nice, even. Kali was given a floral dress, something she could imagine herself wearing in the summer. Included were a pair of heels and a pearl necklace, though she suspected the pearls were fake. Blake was given a matching dress suitable for a baby and a small cap, and Kali couldn’t deny that she looked like the cutest little thing she’d ever seen.

Kali was able to fight down her nerves all morning but once they were loaded into vans, she couldn’t hide it any longer. Her knee bounced up and down, her hands shaking as she rocked Blake back and forth. Blake could feel the nervous energy in the air and was unsettled, babbling, on the verge of crying.

Humming under her breath, she managed to calm her down.



Now wasn't the time for a screaming baby.

The building they were driven to was old. It was built in the typical wooden design that most of the older buildings in Mistral followed with wide, stone foundations and sloping, tiled roofs. The doors and walls within were made from wood and paper, sliding open silently as they were shown inside. There had to be at least a hundred of them and they were divided into groups of twenty.

Kali was in the second group.

She could hear more and more people gathering, and from the snippets of conversation she could make out, they were human. Here for the auction, here to purchase the lives of faunus, chatting away without a care; happy, joyous.

As if they were simply coming to the pet store to buy a new cat or dog.

It wasn't long until she heard the sounds of bidding begin and realized that the first group had already been ushered out in front of the potential buyers. The woman seated next to her began muttering under her breath, a string of names that held no meaning to Kali but meant the world to her.

Lost loved ones?

It felt like it took an eternity for the first round of the auction to conclude and when a woman dressed in a pretty kimono entered, her black hair pulled atop her head in a tight bun, Kali knew that it was time.

“Follow me,” the woman said coolly, turning on her heel and marching away. They hesitated before slowly rising, following her down the hall. The chatter from the gathered humans grew louder and now she could hear them with her human ears, not just her cat ones.

“That group was high quality,” she overheard, the voice sounding a little older, that of a man.

“That bird woman fetched a high price,” a woman tittered.

“Ah, some people just have all the luck,” a younger voice bemoaned. “What I would give for a pretty thing like that.”

“Luck has nothing to do with it. He just has the bigger wallet,” someone replied.

“Ain’t that the truth.”

They were shown onto a raised stage, a long room stretching out in front of them. Kali squinted, briefly blinded by the bright light before she saw the sea of people seated in rows. At a quick estimate, she thought there had to be well over a hundred people in attendance, closer to two hundred. Many of them were dressed to showcase their clear wealth, while others were much more casual.

She suddenly felt naked as hundreds of eyes judged and found her wanting.

Blake squirmed in her arms but remained silent, for which she was grateful. Kali followed the woman until she stopped, turning to face them.

"Sit," she said, and they all obeyed without question.

"Lot 2," a man announced, his voice loud, charismatic. He was slender, tall with short black hair, a handsome face and dressed smartly in a three piece suit. He commanded the audience's attention effortlessly. "Biddings for this group will begin at thirty thousand across the board."

There were rumblings of discontent from some of the humans but most of them were unphased by the price suggested. Kali had been third in line but they started from the other end, from last to first. She wasn't sure what she'd rather. Terror filled her heart but getting it over and done with was preferable to watching her fellow faunus sold off.

"Ms. Misty Bara," the man called first.

She was a bird faunus that drew instant attention, the feathers threaded through her black hair and along the nape of her neck colorful, vibrant; a type of tropical bird like a tucan. She was incredibly attractive with high cheeks, a slender nose and bright blue eyes. Her skin was pale, snow white, and beautiful. The bids came thick and fast, and Kali watched as thirty quickly became fifty, sixty, seventy before she was purchased for seventy eight thousand lien.

Just like that, Misty belonged to a man with ill intent in his eyes. Kali saw the barely concealed horror as Misty was led off stage, the man following after to fill in the paperwork and make everything official. Another man that had been bidding against the first looked disgruntled, annoyed.

As if he'd been out haggled at the fish market and lost out on the fattest cod.

Kali felt as if she were in a dream as the auction continued, slowly making their way down to her. No one else fetched as high a price as Misty but some came close. A dog faunus went for sixty nine thousand, while a cow faunus fetched seventy exactly. Paradoxically, things felt like they took an age and were over in the blink of an eye, for suddenly it was her turn.

Kali swallowed thickly.

“Ms. Kali Belladonna,” her name was announced, and she stood upon shaky legs. “And it appears that she is not alone. A package deal – or not? Ms. Blake Belladonna.”

A murmur swept through the crowd when they saw Blake clasped to her chest, an eagerness almost. The atmosphere changed at once. Had they not seen Blake this entire time? Or had they been so focused on the others before her that they hadn’t even noticed.

Well, they noticed now.

“As with the others, the bidding begins at thirty thousand – *each*.”

Her blood turned to ice.

They couldn’t separate them. They wouldn’t.

“Fifty for the mother,” a man shouted, and then it was bedlam.

“Sixty for both!”

“Sixty each!”

“Seventy for the mother, fifty for the child!”

Men, women – they shouted their bids, appearing feral, savage. Kali felt her heart thunder in her chest, the fear of being ripped apart from Blake crippling her, lungs struggling to breathe. All she could hear was the roar of the crowd, a confusing cacophony of sound.

And then, “Ninety for the mother,” a man boomed, cutting through the din. “Ninety for the child.”

There was a hush.

A hundred and eighty total.

Kali saw the expression he wore. It was hungry. Alien. Dread pooled in her stomach. Instinctively, she knew – this man was dangerous. She had signed away their lives and for what? For this... beast. His eyes burned into her, a promise of torment.

“I have a hundred and eighty for the pair going once,” the announcer called. “Going twice!”

Her throat closed, almost choking her.

“A hundred for the mother,” a woman’s voice cracked like a whip. “A hundred and twenty for the child.”

It was like the air was sucked out of the room.

Kali's eyes found the bidder.

She was a beautiful woman, she thought. Clear, healthy skin and long, blonde hair curled into ringlets, her eyes as blue as the summer sky. Her features were sharp but not harsh, soft, feminine, her lips pretty, pink and lush. Beneath her left eye sat a small black beauty spot atop the swell of her high cheeks, and her dress was form fitting, hugging her body tight around her trim waist and the curve of her womanly hips, and impressive bust.

The small tiara atop her head made her look like a Queen.

The man that had bid before her looked ready to counter offer before seeing who it was, his mouth shutting as he wilted under her blue eyed stare. Even the announcer was struck dumb and took several long seconds to recover.

"Two hundred and twenty thousand," he called, dazed at the figure. "Going once!"

No one spoke.

"Going twice!"

Silence.

"Sold!" he clapped.

It was over. She was sold.

And her price? A hundred thousand lien. Blake? A hundred and twenty.

"Mrs. Arc," the announcer bowed. "Please, through here."

Mrs. Arc.

This was the name of the woman that now owned her and her daughter.

Kali was shown into a side room. There were a few people within, seated at a table, piles of paper sorted into stacks. She moved without thought, almost floating, her mind still struggling to comprehend what just happened.

Mrs. Arc shortly joined them.

The woman approached and Kali shrunk back on instinct. Those gorgeous eyes inspected her critically before darting down to Blake, sharpening. It reminded Kali that she had paid *more* for her daughter.

"Yes," she said, meeting Kali's eyes. "You will do nicely. I'm glad I decided to come today."

She then turned away and approached the people at the table. Kali watched as forms were signed, and a cheque was written out for the promised amount. Their collars were removed and replaced with new ones; black leather etched with twin crescent moons colored gold.

Their fate was sealed.

This woman, Mrs. Arc – she was clearly wealthy. Kali also had the feeling that her name carried weight with how that other man had backed down so quickly, shrinking under her stern gaze. A nice car was waiting for them outside, the latest BWM. Kali was shown into the backseat by the driver, a broad shouldered man with narrow eyes and she sank into the leather seats, suddenly exhausted. The day's events had taken their toll, the stress and worry, sapping her of whatever strength remained to her.

Mrs. Arc slipped in the other side, hands neatly settled on her lap as the driver got behind the wheel and pulled out onto the street.

“My name is Amethyst Arc,” the blonde woman said.

Amethyst. It was a pretty name for a pretty woman.

“Have you heard of the Arcs, Kali?”

She shook her head slightly, lowering her eyes. “No,” she hesitated. “Ma’am.”

Was that how she should address her new owner? Kali felt heat rush up the back of her neck, stinging. It was her life now to be subservient in all matters, right?



Pink lips twitched. "I didn't think so. In certain circles, this name carries weight – but with each day, it slips further from the minds of most. Are you from Mistral, Kali? Or do you come from elsewhere?"

"I – from the southern coast," Kali could see the glittering waters in her mind, the yellow sand, the wooden buildings of her village. She wondered if those buildings still stood. "I grew up in a village there."

"I see," Amethyst said. "So you aren't from Menagerie?"

Ghira had been from Menagerie. She pushed that thought from her mind. "No, ma'am."

"And this little one?"

Kali swallowed. "She was born... in the west."

Amethyst hummed. "During the war?"

Kali felt a bolt of fear. "I – yes, at the end of the war."

Had this woman lost a loved one during the conflict? It was entirely possible. If so, did that mean Kali and Blake were destined for a cruel end? Was it so inconceivable that someone may purchase faunus for the purposes of revenge? She recalled that inhumane expression on the face of the man that Amethyst had beaten out.

Was she just better at hiding her rage and disgust? At hiding her intentions?

Some of the fear must have shown on her face. Amethyst smiled. "Do not be alarmed. I am simply curious about my new maid, nothing more, I assure you."

Maid.

"I am not from Mistral," Amethyst revealed. "I am only here to visit family. I have a cousin that lives here and I have not seen her since before the war began. I attended the auction on a whim, in need of a maid – and I'm glad I did. You're perfect, Kali. I couldn't just have any woman around my children."

Some of the fear faded away. "Ma'am?"

"You've a child of your own," Amethyst nodded at Blake. "So you've some experience with children, newly attained as it is – and you're beautiful, exotic. Perfect. You will fulfill the role nicely."

Children. She was to look after children. Human children.

"Though I warn you, you may have your work cut out for you," Amethyst laughed lightly. "My husband is quite insatiable. I have seven daughters and a son, and it has been difficult managing them myself."

Seven... and one... Kali felt her mind blank. Eight children?

Eight.

Kali recalled the difficulty of Blake's birth, the pain and discomfort, and the ache that persisted for days afterwards. This woman had given birth eight times and yet her figure was unmatched, Kali's eyes slipping down over her exquisite physique.

Sometimes Kali felt older than she was but she was still in her twenties. Amethyst Arc couldn't have been much older than she was, though it was difficult to tell. Based on looks, they could be the same age, maybe even be younger than her – but it was the way she carried herself, that mature bearing that made Kali think she was closer to thirty.

Eight children.

"Have you ever been to Sanus before?"

Kali shook her head.

"We live in the north. My husband's family has farmed that land for generations. Have you ever dealt with farm animals before?"

One of the women down the street when she'd grown up had a house cow for milk, milk she sold at the market every Saturday morning. A few times, Kali had helped milk her. Another family had chickens, and she had helped their son collect the eggs on a few occasions.

"A little," she confessed. "Not much, ma'am."

“Excellent,” Amethyst nodded. “My plans for you are this; you are to help me raise my children, and you will raise Blake to serve my family when she is older. Apart from my children, you will keep my home spotless and attend to our laundry, and help with the livestock when required,” suddenly, her expression became sharp. “I trust that you will not attempt to whore yourself to my husband at any point.”

For a moment, Kali wasn't sure she heard her correctly. It was so sudden and out of nowhere, and the word almost felt alien on Amethyst's lips. Unease settled within, Kali eyeing her owner warily.

“I wouldn't,” she stuttered.

Amethyst nodded. “Good. He is a very handsome man, you see. Women tend to lose themselves around him – and since you are, well, instincts can be strong, yes?”

The implication was clear. You are an animal. Do not let your instincts override common sense.

The contrast between her polite, even warm tone of voice and her implications, her outright accusations – the whiplash left Kali feeling out of sorts. She had been lulled into a false sense of security, taken in by her gentle voice and beautiful face.

The fact remained this; she was their property. Blake was their property.

That was all that really mattered.