

# CHAPTER THIRTY

from  
Dance of Devils and Daylight  
by Indiana Rose

*As told by Nyar*

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“Shall we bath now?” Hetty whined, her blue eyes skipping between Nyar and Freya. She let her arms hang heavy at her sides, dropping her bottom lip.

Nyar felt her gaze snag on the fullness of it, but only for a heartbeat. *Gah. Stupid woman.* She shifted her attention to Freya to keep herself from looking at Hetty’s mouth again.

“I feel like I’m going to need to soak for a week,” Hetty continued.

*You smell like you need to soak for a week,* Nyar almost retorted, but she held her tongue.

Though she enjoyed teasing Hetty and watching her react, the only thing she really wanted right now was a moment of peace and quiet. She couldn’t wait to sink into the steaming thermal pools of Lyvienna’s bathhouse, close her eyes, and pretend she was far, far away from this cold, bleak place. And if she fucked Hetty off any more than she already had, she suspected her time in the pools would be anything *but* peaceful or quiet.

Hetty began trudging towards the chiseled cave that led to the bathhouse’s underground pools, and for once, Nyar was inclined to follow. Already her mind was swirling with memories of the radiant water, the silky steam, and the muscle-melting heat that the pools promised.

She paused when she realized Freya wasn’t following them. There was no way she was going into the pools with Hetty alone. The woman was insufferable at the best of times, and that was with Freya standing as a buffer between them. Without Freya, Nyar might accidentally slip a dagger across

Hetty's throat.

Freya shifted her weight from toe to toe, as if torn between following them, and following something else.

Nyar quirked an eyebrow. "Are you coming?"

Freya unshouldered her satchel and tossed it to Nyar. "I need to use the lavatory," she said. "I'll catch up in a few minutes."

The anxious dart of her eyes down the street said otherwise.

Nyar had slain enough men to know what a lie looked like. In the face of death, they often promised everything and anything they could just to buy themselves another day – promises they could never make good on.

But this lie – Freya's lie – was different. It was not a promise, nor did she look as if she stood to gain anything from it.

Curiosity pushed Nyar's thoughts of the pools aside. She rolled her eyes and muttered, "as long as you don't ask me how to use a fucking bedpan this time," trudging away but listening for the moment Freya began to move.

A heartbeat later, she heard the soft crunch of Freya's boots and paused. She turned back to the street where they'd both stood only moments before. Fog was rolling in, made thicker by the steam that poured from the bathhouse, and Freya was nowhere to be seen.

*Sneaky.* Nyar had all but forgotten about the sweet warmth of the bath now. She loved a game of cat and mouse.

"Where did Freya go?" Hetty asked, her fingers curled around the shoulder straps of her bag.

Nyar shrugged. "To the lavatory. I think I might visit, too."

She held out Freya's satchel. "Can you take this inside for her?"

Hetty took the bag, tucking it beneath her wing. "So, I'm to bathe by myself?" She sounded almost...disappointed.

Nyar's gaze flashed up, and she found herself searching the blue, sparkling depths of Hetty's eyes. Something tightened in her gut.

*Damn this woman.*

She had an infuriating way of making Nyar feel hot and cold at the same time. Like she wanted to take Hetty to a bedroom and discover everything she had learned in that brothel she'd been enslaved to, while also making her want to draw her blades and cut the redhead down, just for the sake of not having to worry about feeling anything at all.

The latter would be much easier. Cleaner. Simpler.

But would Nyar be any better off if Hetty were dead? Somehow, she didn't think so...

She clenched her jaw, forcing herself to look indifferent to the redhead's emotions. "I'll be back in a few minutes." Then, just to see how Hetty would react, she said, "Try not to have too much fun by yourself."

Hetty's lips parted, then snapped shut. Heat flushed the pale skin of her cheeks.

Nyar smirked as she turned away, lifting her keffiyeh from her neck onto the crown of her head. She shouldn't enjoy teasing Hetty this much – shouldn't enjoy it at all. But ever since that first night on the ship, when the pair of them had been forced to share a room, Nyar had found herself curious

about the woman.

The problem with curiosities was, they often got assassins killed.

The street was dark and thick with fog by the time Nyar found the end of it. She paused and let her eyes drift closed, calling upon her other senses to help her determine where Freya had gone. She drew a deep breath. The crisp air made her nostrils sting, the natural aroma of salt and damp stone slowly becoming overpowered by the tang of smoldering coals and some sort of fish stew. Somewhere in the distance, water lapped the stony shore, and a bird cawed above the tall cliffs. Voices – a man and woman – chatted, their conversation growing muffled by the expanding distance between them and Nyar.

She opened her eyes again, her feet carrying her somewhere before she even knew where she was going.

Lyvienna was not a big place, but it was damp and cold and full of shadow, and there were plenty of places to hide if one wanted to.

She found Freya squatted behind a cluster of barrels at the edge of a side street lined with stone cottages. Her frame was so dark Nyar had almost wandered right past her – almost.

But the assassin was too practiced at finding people who did not want to be found, and Freya's dagger seemed to catch all the moonlight.

Nyar was about to snatch from behind when she caught the shift of air farther up the street, followed by the ever so slight scuff of boots on the ground. She drew back, away from

Freya, and into the shadows of the house behind the barrels.

Nyar peered into the dark, watching as a dark figure strode down the street, footsteps carefully quiet. She recognized Hex's tall frame a moment before he passed through a shaft of light peeking from between the curtains of a cottage window.

Nyar scowled.

Where was he off to?

But something in her gut tensed, her mood souring. She knew *exactly* where he was going.

Freya was frowning, too, watching Hex walk past as though she hadn't been waiting there in those barrels, ready to ambush him. When he reached the end of the street and turned for the path that would lead him to Lola's cliff-top cottage, she stood, skirting around the barrels, and chasing after him. She was not stealthy, though she tried to be. Her clothes were rough, the fabrics brushing against one another with a *swish*, and her boots scuffed the ground every few steps. Her only saving grace was the distance she maintained between herself and Hex, and the way she crouched in the shadows whenever she paused to let Hex move ahead.

But *bleeding sands*, was Hex really that oblivious? Or...another thought occurred to her. One that seemed as ridiculous as it did probable.

He knew Freya was following him, and he simply not care.

What did that mean for Nyar? Was she supposed to just let Freya sneak around town, listening in on all his private conversations? She was sure that Freya would not be prepared

for what she discovered if she followed Hex to the clifftop.

Hex was a prince. The first-born son of King Odin of Pyredam. An illegitimate fucking heir. And Nyar did not want to have to spend her night standing guard at Hex's door, should Freya try to assassinate him in his sleep.

Smothering her sigh, she slipped out of the shadows, closing in on Freya while she crouched in another pool of darkness.

Were Nyar's eyes growing wary, or did the dark seem thicker around Freya? Like the shadows were swarming her, clinging to her skin...

Nyar grabbed Freya's shoulder and spun her around, driving her back with a forearm pressed against her chest. She had the woman pinned against the wall of the nearest house before she even had time to gasp.

A slight breeze stirred the air.

Nyar snarled. "What do you think you're doing?"

Freya blinked, her body relaxing slightly beneath Nyar's hold.

*Well, that's insulting.*

"Shouldn't you be taking a bath?" she snapped, crinkling her nose as though Nyar smelled any worse than she did. "You stink."

"As do you," Nyar growled, jerking her hold on Freya's cloak then shoving her firmly back against the wall. "Now why don't you tell me what it is you're doing sneaking about in the shadows?"

Freya didn't so much as flinch. Her nerve had improved, even if her stealth hadn't. "I could ask you the same thing."



Nyar dug her elbow into Freya's breastbone, finding satisfaction when she winced. "Don't make me ask again."

"What do you think I'm doing? I'm following Hex."

*Obviously.* "Did your mother never teach you not to stick your nose where it doesn't belong?"

"My mother was murdered when I was nine, remember?" Freya snapped, her eyes sparking with fire. "And besides, I'm sure there have been dozens of times someone told you not to stick your knife where it doesn't belong, and you didn't listen."

Many. Too many. But so long as she wasn't the one getting stabbed, Nyar could live with her actions. "Why are you following Hex?" she demanded.

Freya frowned. "Because he's hiding something, and I want to know what."

"If it was your business to know, he would have told you already," Nyar hissed. Freya was right – Hex was hiding something from her. But he wasn't doing it to hurt her.

"My business is to steal secrets," Freya said, challenging Nyar's glare with her own. "That is why the Legion recruited me. If he is hiding something, I will find out what it is."

Fucking thieves. Though assassinating people was often dirty work, there was something almost pure about it. The taking of a life seemed so much simpler than ruining one. To take a life was final, but to ruin a life required forethought and planning, the evaluation of the structure of one's life and the consequences should that structure collapse. It was a madman's work.

Simply killing was so much easier.

“And who will you report your findings to?” Nyar asked.

“Hetty, most likely. She loves a dirty little secret just as much as I do.”

*A whore who loved gossip? Shocking.*

But something in Freya’s tone told Nyar she wasn’t lying. Perhaps she would only share what she discovered with Hetty. It wasn’t as though Freya had an abundance of connections at her disposal that she could use to deliver information the right people for the right price. And clearly Hex had no qualms with her following him. Perhaps he wanted her to learn his secrets like this. Perhaps for him, it was the easiest way.

Nyar stepped back, needing her hands free to think. The cold always made her brain sluggish.

“You don’t even know what you toy with,” she finally said, and she hated the way her voice sounded strained, like she wasn’t callous enough to simply say it outright. She paced the ground, wondering how to tell Freya what she needed to hear without telling her too much. “What he guards, he guards for good reason. Whatever you discover, you must share the duty of protecting.”

Freya looked dumbfounded, the breath she released curling in the frigid air. “You mean, you’re not going to stop me?”

Nyar’s teeth ground. “No.”

“Why not?”

“Because,” Nyar said, pausing to stand directly before her. “There may come a day when knowing the truth protects him more than it hurts him. When that day comes, you better make

the right choice.” She held her gaze. “If you don’t, I will kill you myself.”

Though it pained her to say it, she meant every word.

Freya stared back, unblinking in the dark.

Before Nyar could say anything that would threaten whatever friendship they’d built, she turned and marched back to the bathhouse.

Hex was a grown man. If he was so dumb as to let Freya eavesdrop on him, then that was his choice, his consequences. It wouldn’t be Nyar’s secrets that Freya would steal.

The mist thinned to reveal a scatter of frost that had begun to glisten its way across the ground like a spider’s web. *Bleeding sands*, she was nearly quivering beneath her leathers. Her fingers were curled into tight fists as she slipped into the cave of the bathhouse and descended the shallow stone steps. The air was instantly warmer. Steam curled up the steps, and a faint blue light illuminated the stone walls, reminding Nyar of the sacred waters in the Temple of Sands, her home.

Or, what used to be her home.

Water tinkled as it trickled over rocks, the lulling sound growing clearer as Nyar rounded a corner and stepped into a wide cavern.

Two pools of turquoise water, one large, one small, glistened beneath a veil of shifting steam. In the center of the largest pool, a woman floated lazily on her back.

Nyar’s feet stopped moving. She drew a silent breath.

Hetty’s eyes were closed, a mindless smile on her lips as she drifted through the water. Her red hair drifted around her

head in a bronze halo, and her fingers softly combed the water, sending ripples across the surface of the pool.

But it was the woman's body that had Nyar's pulse skittering, heat flushing her neck as she struggled with deciding whether to make her presence known.

Hetty was naked.

Completely naked.

Her skin was smooth and pale, marred by the odd dark freckle that made Nyar want to explore her body, just to see where others may be hiding. Water pooled in the pale dip of Hetty's navel, glistening on her stomach and on the sides of breasts, which were full and firm, nipples peaked as steam caressed them.

Heat flushed Nyar's body, and her mouth suddenly felt dry, like she'd spent too long in the desert without water.

She purposefully scuffed the toe of her boot across the ground, moving again, as if she had never paused.

There was a splash as Hetty righted herself, coming to stand in the pool.

"Oh," she said, the flush of her cheeks at odds with the icy blue of her wide eyes. "It's you." Her arms wrapped tight around her chest, hiding those beautiful breasts from view as if she had anything to be self-conscious of.

Nyar held her gaze as she unwound the keffiyeh from her head. "You sound disappointed. Were you expecting someone else?"

Hetty's flush deepened and she sunk into the water.

*Don't hide*, Nyar wanted to say.

Wanted, but never would.

“No,” Hetty answered, sounding sheepish. “I just...I’d forgotten that anyone else was coming at all.”

Nyar’s fingers paused on the buckles of her bandolier. “I can leave if you’d prefer. If it would make you more...comfortable.”

Almost immediately, she kicked herself. Why had she offered to leave? This was the only chance she had for a hot bath, the only chance she would likely have for weeks, maybe even months. She wasn’t prepared to sacrifice it for the sake of this woman’s humility...was she?

Hetty’s eyes widened further, and she shook her head, unwinding one arm from her chest to gesture to the water. “Er, no. Please. Be my guest.”

Nyar loosed the buckles of her bandolier, lying it on the ground, before her fingers moved to untie her leather bodice.

Hetty bobbed in the water, shamelessly watching Nyar pull the bodice over her head, followed by the fine black wool shirt she wore beneath. Unlike Hetty, Nyar didn’t plan on getting entirely naked. She still wore a dark singlet, and beneath her pants she had a pair of tight underwear commonly worn among people who understood how excess fabric often equaled excess noise.

She kicked off her boots, placing them next to her bandolier. When her fingers moved to the belt of her pants, pushing them down to her ankles, she glanced up, only to find Hetty still staring.

She quirked an eyebrow. *Enjoying the show?*

Hetty flushed and turned her back, far too late to give Nyar the privacy she needed, but to give some semblance of privacy, nonetheless.

For the second time since entering the bathhouse, Nyar found herself paralyzed.

The blue glow of the water illuminated Hetty's back, where a dozen silver lines crisscrossed her skin.

Lashings.

Those were lashing marks.

Someone had *whipped* her.

Anger surged through Nyar before she had time to control it, curling her fingers into fists and making her teeth gnash. She felt her lip twitch as she fought the urge to snarl. The hilts of her knives glistened, whispering wicked, murderous things in her mind. Warmth enveloped her legs, and she looked down to realize she had stepped into the pool, unconsciously crossing the space between them.

Hetty half-turned, eyes closed, the wet tendrils of her hair skimming the tops of her shoulders.

“Can I turn around now?” she asked, sounding bored.

But Nyar was already there, standing at her back, staring at the raised lines across her skin. Her fingers reached out, as if she might trace the scars.

*Sands*, if she ever found out who did this – who it was that could inflict such ugly hurt on such beautiful skin – she would fucking slaughter them. Slowly, savagely, until their screams filled her ears, and their blood filled her vision.

And she would do it without an ounce of remorse.

“Who did this to you?” she whispered.

Hetty jolted, spinning to face Nyar so fast she sent water splashing into Nyar’s chest.

“*Sweet seas!*” she cried, her icy gaze sweeping over Nyar. “What are you—? Don’t sneak up on me like that!”

Nyar didn’t move an inch. “Who did that?” she asked again. “Who whipped you?”

Hetty’s arms snaked tighter around her torso, and she averted her gaze. “No one.”

“Somehow I doubt you’re masochistic enough to do that kind of damage yourself.”

Hetty’s eyes flared back to Nyar’s. “What? Of course not.”

Nyar leaned in, searching for the truth. Her voice was low, dangerous, as she demanded, “Then tell me who did it.”

Hetty stepped until her back hit the rocks at the edge of the pool. Her chest heaved, nostrils flaring. “Why do you care?”

The question took Nyar by surprise. She blinked.

Why *did* she care? What did it matter if Hetty had scars? So did Nyar. So did Freya. So did everyone Nyar knew. They all had their burdens, the pasts that they could not escape.

So why did Hetty’s scars make Nyar so...so...

As she struggled for an answer, Hetty’s eyes turned cold.

She glared at Nyar with temerity. “Is it because you wished you’d done it yourself?” she asked, her jaw clenching between questions. “Are *you* sadistic enough that you like to see others in pain? Is that why you hurt people?”

Anger crackled through Nyar like lightening. But it wasn’t the same anger she’d felt moments ago, the kind that made

her want to destroy things. This anger was laced with shock.

How could Hetty ask such a thing? How could Hetty think that Nyar would ever hurt her like that?

Sure, sometimes Nyar thought things would be easier if the redhead was dead, but that was only because she was a threat to the once-impenetrable wall of Nyar's defenses. She would never purposefully hurt the woman, especially not in such a cowardice way as *lashings*.

She was still struggling for an answer when Hetty pushed off the wall, the venomous fire in her eyes forcing Nyar to step back.

“Did you know I defended you when we got on this ship?” Hetty demanded. “Freya tried to warn me that you were a danger, and I defended you. I didn't even *know* you and I defended you, because I *believed* there was good inside you. Because I believed you were simply misunderstood, and you were capable of kindness and gentleness and mercy.”

Her tone grew sharper, stronger, with every word, forcing Nyar back – forcing her to retreat – until it was *she* who hit the wall, the stone grating against her spine through the thin singlet she wore.

“And then I watched as you cut off a man's hand in the hold,” Hetty continued with a bitter laugh. “And you smiled. *You smiled*. Like that act of revenge was the only thing that could bring you joy.” She shook her head, a bitter smile on her face. “And I realized how terribly wrong I had been. Because someone who finds joy in *that* has no good in them. You are incapable of love, of passion, beyond that which was bred into



your vicious, blackened heart.”

Nyar flinched.

*Flinched.*

She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt this...wounded. Hetty was wrong. Mostly. Nyar wasn't *incapable* of love. She just couldn't fathom it. Not after the things she had experienced, the way she'd had to slaughter love, just to keep it from killing her.

She fought the urge to shrink away. To run from the pools. To shelter in the dark on a cold cliff where no one could reach her, where no one could find her.

Instead, she clung to her anger, needing it to ground her, to keep her from shrinking.

She glared back at Hetty. “You think you have everything figured out, don't you?” she snarled, letting her eyes drag scathingly up and down the woman. “What? Did you think you were going to change me? Is that why you're so fucked off? Did you think you'd be the one I melted for? That I'd become good and obedient and soft, just so you didn't have to see all my sharp edges? Well, you're not that special. And there was only one thing you were right about.”

“Oh?” Hetty bit back, her own eyes sparking. “Which part? When I said you were a sadist or when I said you were incapable of love?”

*Fuck this.*

Nyar made to step around Hetty, but the redhead snatched her wrist. Nyar's skin flared beneath her touch, and with it, her temper.

She was wrong. She *would* be better off if this woman was dead.

She grabbed Hetty's throat, spinning them so fast the world blurred. And then she had Hetty pinned against the wall, her fingers curled around her throat, pressing into the soft flesh beneath her jaw.

Hetty's hands reached up, her fingers prying at Nyar's, but the assassin held firm.

"You were right when you said you don't know me," Nyar snarled. "You have no idea who I am or what I am capable of."

They were so close, their stomachs brushed against one another beneath the water. Every ragged breath threatened to close the distance between their chests, where Hetty's full breasts now hung, exposed, on the surface of the water.

Her voice was a rasp, her words strangled by the hold Nyar had on her neck. "Then show me."

Nyar's grip slackened, the fight draining out of her as if Hetty had put an axe through the wall where Nyar's anger pooled. She stared at the redhead, searching her face.

*What?*

There was no fear in Hetty's eyes as she whispered, "Show me."

Nyar's gaze dipped to Hetty's mouth, as if she had to witness those words being spoken for herself. Her full, rosy lips were slightly parted, drawing in heavy breaths.

Nyar wondered what it would feel like to brush her own mouth against those lips, to feel those lips move against her

skin...

She was barely squeezing anymore. Her fingers were slack against Hetty's throat, but Hetty's fingers still clutched her wrist. If she wanted to, Hetty could pull Nyar's hand away with ease.

But she didn't.

Nyar's heart thundered. Beneath her thumb she could feel Hetty's pulse pounding just as hard, though her face remained cool and calm.

"Show me what else you can be," Hetty said, firmer this time. Demanding.

Nyar swallowed.

What was she saying? What did she wa—?

Hetty's fingers finally tugged Nyar's wrist, pulling her hand away from her throat and submerging it below the water.

Nyar could barely breathe as she watched Hetty guide her hand down – down – over the plane of her stomach, to the apex of her thighs.

Nyar's fingers brushed the supple skin there, and Hetty gasped, her eyes flaring with heat.

"Prove me wrong," she breathed. "Show me you can be gentle."

*Bleeding sands.*

Was it too much to believe that this woman – this stunningly fierce and beautiful woman who wielded her words like fire – *wanted* Nyar?

Suddenly the heat of the pools was too much. Nyar's skin burned, her pulse throbbing in time with a new ache that

flared between her own legs.

*I can show you*, she thought weakly, suddenly filled with the need to prove this woman wrong. *I can be good. I can be gentle.*

She hooked her fingers, taking back control of her hand as she eased them in between Hetty's thighs, using her thumb to sweep the sensitive spot there.

Hetty gasped, arching her back.

Nyar's other hand slid down her side to the swell of Hetty's ass, cupping the back of her thigh and lifting her leg so that it rested on Nyar's hip. Her other hand worked in delicate thrusts, her thumb continuing to stroke the sensitive spot above Hetty's entrance.

Hetty moaned, her hips grinding against Nyar's, against her hand.

*Bleeding fucking sands.*

Nyar wanted nothing more than to see her come undone. Wanted to see Hetty's body find its release, wanted to feel her thighs clamp on her hand as she coaxed her to the edge and pushed her over.

Her fingers moved faster, but not too fast. She had to be gentle. *Needed* to be gentle.

Hetty's hands lifted from the water to curl around the back of Nyar's neck. She pulled, and Nyar let her bring their lips together.

Nyar's tongue swept through her mouth, and when she retreated, Hetty's teeth grazed her lips.

*Sands* she tasted good. Like berries and spice.

Hetty's fingers wound through her hair, tugging it free from

the knot she'd twisted it into. She felt her dark curls fall down her back, into the water, felt Hetty's fingers tangle with the strands, tugging as Nyar drove her closer and closer to the edge.

Hetty broke their kiss to tip her head back, gasping for breath.

Nyar dipped her head, planting kisses on the throat she had gripped only minutes ago. Never again would she place her hands there, not unless Hetty wanted her to.

Hetty moaned. Her thighs widened, her hips rocking, forcing Nyar deeper.

Nyar's control was about to fucking snap.

It was her turn to demand something.

"Show *me*," she said, her dark gaze flicking between where her fingers were buried, and Hetty's face.

Sweat beaded at Hetty's temples and her eyes were closed, her mouth popped open as she panted, fast and sharp.

"Show me what it looks like when you come undone," Nyar said.

Her fingers hooked inside Hetty, pressing into the sensitive wall of muscle there as her thumb circled in on an even more sensitive spot.

Hetty gasped, her arms flinging back to grip the stone as her back arched and her hips pressed hard against Nyar.

Nyar felt the tremble in Hetty's muscles a moment before they burst, spasming around her fingers as the redhead cried out.

*Gentle*, Nyar reminded herself. Her hand slowed, but didn't

stop entirely, drawing out the wave of pleasure seizing Hetty until the woman's entire body shuddered, and she went limp against the stone.

Nyar drew back her hand, placing it beneath Hetty's thigh to hold the other woman so she half-floated in the water, half rested on Nyar's hips.

"Was that gentle enough for you?" she asked.

Hetty looked at her through half-lidded eyes, a smile spreading across her swollen lips. "I knew I was wrong about you."

"Which part?" Nyar challenged, twisting Hetty's earlier words while her thumbs brushed lazy circles on Hetty's thighs. "When you said I was a sadist or when you said I was incapable of love?"

"You haven't proved me wrong on either of those accounts yet," Hetty murmured, and her blue eyes glittered in a way that made something like hope flutter in Nyar's chest. "But you will."