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HIDEAWAY

DEVIL'S NIGHT 2

PENELOPE DOUGLAS

BERKLEY ROMANCE

New York

CHAPTER I

KAI

Rain was like night. You could be different in the dark and under the clouds.

I'm not sure what it was. Maybe the lack of sunlight and how our other senses heightened or the subtle shroud hiding things from our sight, but only certain times were acceptable to do certain things. Shrug off your jacket and roll up your sleeves. Pour a drink and lean back. Laugh with your friends and scream at the basketball game on TV.

Follow a girl you've been eye-fucking for an hour into the pub bathroom and have your friends nod in approval when you come back out.

Try doing that during the day with the intern at the office.

Not that I'd want the freedom to indulge in anything at any time anyway. Things were more special when they were rare.

But every morning, when the sun rose, the coils in my stomach wound tighter in anticipation.

Nightfall was coming again.

Letting my mask dangle from my hand at my side, I stood at the top of the second-floor landing and watched Rika sitting in her car. She kept her head down, her face visible by the glow of her cell

phone, despite the downpour of rain hitting her windshield as she typed.

I shook my head, my jaw flexing. *She doesn't listen.*

I watched as my best friend's fiancée finished up, the light from her phone disappearing, and then she opened the car door, stepped out, and broke into a jog, dashing through the pounding rain. I darted my eyes, taking inventory of her. *Head and eyes cast downward. Keys wrapped in her closed fist. Arms shielding her head from the rain and hindering her line of sight.*

Completely unaware of her surroundings. The perfect victim.

Grabbing the harness at the back of my mask, I stretched it out and slid the silver skull down over my head, the inside hugging every curve of my face for a tight fit. The world around me shrank to a tunnel, and all I could see was what was right in front of me.

Heat spread down my neck, seeping deep into my chest, and I drew in a long, cool breath, feeling my heart pounding, getting hungry.

All of a sudden, the rain, like a waterfall in the alley outside, filled the dojo, and the heavy metal door downstairs slammed shut.

"Hello?" she called out.

My heart dipped into my stomach, and I closed my eyes, savoring the feel. The sound of her voice echoed through the empty building, but I stayed planted on the dark landing, waiting for her to find me.

"Kai?" I heard her shout through the large space.

I reached back and pulled the hood of my black sweatshirt up, covering my head, and turned to look down over the railing.

"Hello?" she asked again, more urgent. "Kai, are you here?"

I saw her blond hair first. It's what you always noticed about Rika first. In her black penthouse, in this black dojo, in the black alley outside, in dark rooms and on black streets . . . she always stood out.

I rested my hands on the rusted steel railing, keeping my feet planted on the grates, and watched her step slowly into the main room below, flipping up the switches on the wall. But nothing happened. The lights didn't go on.

She jerked her head left and right, looking suddenly alert, and then darted out her hand, flipping them off and then on again.

Nothing.

Her chest moved up and down quicker, her awareness peaking as she clutched the strap of her bag tighter.

I fought not to smile and cocked my head, watching her. I should show myself. I should play fair, let her know I was here and that she was safe.

But the longer I waited, and the longer I stayed quiet and hidden, the more nervous she appeared. And as she walked farther into the room below, I couldn't help but want to feel this moment. She was confused. Scared. Timid. She didn't know I was here. Right above her. She didn't know that my eyes were on her right now. She didn't know that I could run at her, get her in a hold, and have her on the floor before she even knew what had happened.

I didn't want to scare her, but I did. Power and control were addictive. And I didn't want to like it, because it made me sick.

It made me Damon.

I started breathing harder and tightened my fists around the railing, growing scared myself. This wasn't normal.

"I know you're here," she said, looking around with her eyebrows pinched together.

But the stubborn set to her eyes was forced, and I lifted the corner of my mouth in a smile behind my mask.

Her long gray T-shirt fell off her shoulder, and rain glistened across her chest and neck. The downpour pummeled Meridian City outside, and at this time of night—and in this neighborhood—the streets were empty. No one would hear her. Probably no one even saw her enter the building.

And by the way she began backing slowly out of the dark room, it looked like she was just beginning to realize that.

I took a step.

The grate flooring creaked, and she snapped her head left, following the sound.

Her eyes locked on me. Keeping my gaze on her, I walked toward the stairs.

“Kai?” she asked.

Why isn't he answering me? she probably wondered. Why is he wearing his mask? Why are the lights out? Because of the storm? What's going on?

But I said nothing as I walked slowly toward her, her pretty, small form getting more defined the closer I got. Wet strands of hair I didn't notice before stuck to her chest, and the diamond studs Michael gave her last Christmas sparkled on her ears. The points of her breasts poked through her shirt.

Her blue eyes looked at me warily. “I know that's you.”

I smirked behind my mask, her rigid body belying her confident words. *Do you?*

I circled her slowly, caging her in, while she remained stubbornly still. *Are you so sure it's me? I might not be Kai, right? I could've just taken his mask. Or bought one just like it.*

Stopping behind her, I tried to keep my breathing calm despite the way my heart was pounding. I could feel her. The energy between my chest and her back.

She should've turned around. She should've been preparing herself for danger like I taught her. Did she think this was a game?

“Knock it off,” she barked, turning her head just enough so I could see her lips move. “This isn't funny.”

No, it wasn't funny. Michael was gone—out of town for the night—and Will was probably out getting drunk somewhere. It was just us.

And with the way my goddamn stomach was flipping right

now, it wasn't funny or good or right how much I needed to constantly push myself over the edge to feel in control anymore. It wasn't good how much I didn't want to stop.

I grabbed her, wrapping my arms around her and burying my nose under her ear. Her perfume made my eyelids heavy, and I heard her gasp as I tightened my hold, keeping her body against mine. “It's just us, Little Monster,” I growled. “Just how I want it to be, and we have all night.”

“Kai!” she shouted, tugging against my arms.

“Who's Kai?”

She twisted, fighting my hold and struggling. “I know you by now. Your height, your form, your smell . . .”

“Do you?” I asked. “You know how I feel, huh?”

I buried my masked face in her neck and tightened my arms around her. Possessive. Threatening. I breathed out in a whisper, “I miss you as a little high school girl, Rika.” I moaned, acting like I loved the feel of her squirming against me. “You didn't give any lip.”

She stopped, every part of her body freezing except her breathing. Her chest caved and then began to shake under my arms.

I'd gotten to her.

Someone close to us said those words once, someone who scared her, and now she was doubting whether or not I just might not be him. *Damon had disappeared last year, and he could be anywhere, right, Rika?*

“I've waited a long time for this,” I said, hearing the thunder crack outside. “Get this shit off.” I yanked down her shirt, exposing her in her tank top, and she let out a scream. “I wanna fuckin' see you.”

She gasped, pulling away and throwing her arms at me. She immediately stepped back—the first countermove I showed her when someone grabs her from behind—but I pushed off my back foot, knowing what she was going to do.

Come on, Rika!

And then, all of a sudden, she dropped, the full weight of her body slipping through my arms straight to the floor.

I nearly laughed. She was thinking quickly. *Good.*

But I kept up my assault. She scrambled to her hands and knees, getting ready to scurry away, and I lunged out, grabbing her by the ankle.

"Where do you think you're going?" I taunted.

She flipped over and kicked my mask, and I reared back, laughing. "Oh, God, you're going to be fun. I can't fucking wait."

A whimper escaped her as she crawled backward and pushed herself to her feet again. She twisted around, fear etched across her face, and broke into a run toward the locker rooms. Probably going to the exit at the rear of the building.

I raced after her, grabbing hold of her shirt, my whole body on fire.

Fuck. I felt a trickle of sweat glide down the back of my neck.

It's just a game. I won't hurt her. It was like tag or hide-and-seek as a kid. We knew nothing bad would happen when we got caught and we'd bring no harm when we chased, but the irrational fear excited us anyway. That was what I liked. That's all it was. This wasn't real.

Twisting her around, I wrapped one arm around her and lifted her knee up with my other hand, picking her up off the ground. She threw up the other knee, but I twisted my hips before her jab landed between my legs. Flipping her back, I threw both of us to the ground, coming down on top of her.

"No!" she cried. Her body thrashed under me, and I forced myself between her legs, bringing her wrists up over her head and pinning them there.

She fought against my hold, but the steel in her arms began to shake, and her strength started to weaken.

I stilled and stared down. Damon and I both had dark hair and

eyes, although his were almost black. She wouldn't be able to tell the difference under the shroud of darkness around us. But she could feel me. Handling her, forcing her, threatening her . . . just like him.

I slowly dropped my head to her breast, hovering an inch above her skin, and she'd stopped fighting. Her chest heaved so hard it sounded like she was having an asthma attack.

Looking up at her, seeing her body mold easily to mine and her hands bound helplessly above her, I saw her tear up. She knew this was it. No one to stop me, no one to hear her scream, a madman in a mask who could hurt her, kill her, and take all night doing it.

Her face suddenly cracked, and she broke, crying out as her fight was swallowed in the horror of what was happening to her.

Goddammit. I yanked back my hood and threw off my mask, furious. "You're a fucking baby!" I bellowed, slamming my hand down on the floor at the side of her head. "Get me off you!" I got in her face. "Now! Come on!"

She growled, her face turning red, and she launched up and wrapped her arm over the back of my neck. Squeezing me into a headlock, she reached her other hand under her arm and dug her finger and thumb into my eyes.

It wasn't much, but it got me to loosen my hold long enough for her to slam me in the side of the face, and when I reared back, she scrambled upright and grabbed her bag, swinging it at my head.

"Ugh!" I grunted, yanking it out of her hands.

But quickly, she scurried to her feet and ran to the wall, grabbing one of the kendo swords and assuming her stance, bamboo *shinai* raised and ready.

I sat back on my heels and pulled my hand away from my face, checking for blood. Nothing. I let out a sigh and raised my eyes to her, my body growing cold as the fear left her eyes and was replaced with anger.

The adrenaline still coursed through my limbs, and I took a deep breath, all of a sudden my body ten times heavier as I pulled myself to my feet.

"I don't like being ambushed like that!" she gritted out. "This is supposed to be a safe space."

I blinked, fixing her with a scolding look. "Nowhere is safe."

I walked toward the stairs, pulling off my sweatshirt as I climbed. "You're not alert." I picked up the water bottle I'd left by the window earlier. "I watch you. Your face was in your phone out on the street. And you could barely budge me. You waste too much time panicking."

I gulped down the water, so thirsty from more than just the exertion. Too much thinking and worrying and plotting. I'd needed this.

I missed all those nights, years ago, when I had a release. When I had friends to get lost with.

Her footsteps fell on the stairs, and I stared out the window, the bright lights of Meridian City on the other side of the river glowing bright, a sharp contrast to the darkness of this side.

"I've absorbed everything you've taught me," she said. "I trusted you, and I wasn't taking it seriously. In the moment, if it ever happens again, I'll handle it."

"You should've handled it this time. What if it wasn't me? What would've happened to you?"

I glanced down at her, seeing her pained eyes staring off out the window, and regret curled its way through my stomach. I hated seeing that look. Rika had been through enough, and I'd just shaken her again.

"I think you liked that," she replied quietly, still staring out the window. "I think you enjoyed that."

My heart skipped a beat, and I turned away from her, following her gaze out the window.

"If I did, I wouldn't have stopped."

She looked up at me, and I heard a car passing by below, its tires sloshing through the rain.

"You know, I watch you, too," she told me. "You're quiet, no one gets to see where you eat or sleep . . ."

I twisted the cap to the water bottle, the plastic container crackling in my fist. I knew what she was talking about. I knew I was distant.

But I had to keep everything inside or risk the wrong things slipping out. It was better this way.

And it was worse lately. Everything was fucked. She and Michael were so consumed with each other, and Will was sober only a few hours a day anymore. I'd been on my own more than ever.

"You're like a machine." She drew in a long breath. "Not like Damon. You're unreadable." She paused. "Except just now. Except when you're wearing your mask. You liked it, didn't you? It's the only time I see you feel anything."

I turned my head, softening my eyes. "You're not with me all the time," I joked.

I held her eyes for a moment, both of us knowing exactly what I was talking about. She didn't see me with women, and a slight blush crossed her cheeks. She gave me a half smile, abandoning her line of questioning.

I cleared my throat, moving on. "You need to work on your counterattacks," I told her. "And your speed. If you stop, you give the attacker a chance to get a good hold on you."

"I knew I was safe with you."

"You aren't," I replied sternly. "Always assume danger. If anyone other than Michael grabs you, they get what they deserve anyway."

She crossed her arms over her chest, and I could feel her aggravation. I understood it. She didn't want to live her life always on guard. But she was barely taking basic safety precautions, and there was no limit to how sorry she was going to be taking the wrong chances. Michael wasn't always around.

But when he was, at least he was with her. It had been weeks since I'd really talked to him.

"How is he?" I asked her.

She rolled her eyes, and I could tell the mood was shifting to something lighter. "He wants to fly off to Rio or somewhere to get married."

"I thought you both decided to wait until after you were done with college."

She nodded, sighing. "Yeah, I thought so, too."

I narrowed my eyes on her. So, what was going on then?

Michael and Rika's parents expected a wedding in Thunder Bay, and as far as I knew, the couple was fine with that. In fact, Michael had been very adamant about making a big deal out of it. He wanted to see her in a dress, walking down the aisle toward him. He grew up thinking she would marry his brother, after all. He intended to show everyone she was his.

And then it hit me.

Damon.

"He's afraid a fanfare wedding will entice Damon to return," I guessed.

Rika nodded again solemnly, still staring out the window. "He thinks if we get married nothing bad will happen to me. The sooner, the better."

"He's right," I told her. "A wedding—hundreds of people and Will and me at his side—Damon's ego couldn't take it. He wouldn't stay away."

"No one's seen or heard from him in a year."

I flexed my jaw, anticipation curling its way through my gut. "Yeah, that's what scares me."

A year ago, Damon wanted Rika to suffer unimaginably. We all did, actually, but Damon went a little further, and when we didn't stick by him, we all became his enemies. He attacked us, hurt her, and helped Michael's brother, Trevor, try to kill her. Michael was

smart to assume that Damon's anger probably hadn't dissipated. If we knew where he was, that would be one thing, but the detectives we hired to find him and keep tabs on his whereabouts hadn't been able to locate him.

Which explained why Michael wanted to take measures to keep Rika out of the limelight, where such a grand wedding in our affluent, seaside hometown would put her.

"You don't care about a large wedding," I reminded her. "You just want Michael. Why not go off and just do it like he wants?"

She was silent for a few moments and then spoke quietly, her eyes in a far-off place. "No." She shook her head. "Just behind St. Killian's, where the forest ends and the cliffs give way to the sea. Under the midnight sky . . ." She nodded, a beautiful, wistful smile touching her lips. "That's where I'll marry Michael."

I studied her, wondering about that far-off, dreamy look in her eyes. As if she'd always known she would marry Michael Crist and had been seeing it in her head all her life.

"What is that building?" Rika asked, jerking her chin, gesturing out the window.

I followed her gaze, but I didn't have to look to know which building she spoke of. I'd chosen this location for our dojo for a reason.

Gazing out of the glass, I stared at the building on the other side of the street, about thirty stories higher than ours, the gray stone darkened by the rain and the broken streetlights.

"The Pope," I answered. "It was quite a hotel back in its day. Still is, actually."

The Pope had been abandoned for several years and had been built when there was talk of a football stadium being constructed over here as a way to bring more tourism to Meridian City. And a way to revitalize Whitehall, the run-down urban district in which we now stood.

Unfortunately, the stadium never happened, and The Pope went under after struggling to stay in business.