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# NIGHTFALL

DEVIL'S NIGHT 4

**PENELOPE DOUGLAS**

BERKLEY ROMANCE

New York

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# NIGHTFALL

## CHAPTER I

## EMORY

*Present*

It was faint, but I heard it.

*Water.* Like I was behind a waterfall, deep inside a cave.

*What the hell is that?*

I blinked my eyes, stirring from the heaviest sleep I think I've ever had. Jesus, I was tired.

My head rested on the softest pillow, and I moved my arm, brushing my hand over a cool, splendidly plush white comforter.

I patted my face, feeling my glasses missing. I rolled my eyes around me, confusion sinking in as I took in myself burrowed comfortably in the middle of a huge bed, my body taking up about as much room as a single M&M inside its package.

This wasn't my bed.

I looked around the lavish bedroom—white, gold, crystal, and mirrors everywhere, palatial in its opulence like I'd never seen in person—and my breathing turned shallow as instant fear took over.

This wasn't my room. Was I dreaming?

I pushed myself up, my head aching and every muscle tight like I'd been sleeping for a damn week.

I dropped my eyes, spotting my glasses folded and sitting on the bedside table. I grabbed them and slipped them on, taking inventory

of my body first. I laid on top of the bed, still fully clothed in my black skinny pants and a pullover white blouse that I'd dressed in this morning.

If it was still today, anyway.

My shoes were gone, but on instinct I peered over the side of the bed and saw my sneakers sitting there, perfectly positioned on a fancy white rug with gold filigree.

My pores cooled with sweat as I looked around the unfamiliar bedroom, and my brain was wracked with what the hell was going on. Where was I?

I slid off the bed, my legs shaky as I stood up.

I'd been at the firm. Working on the blueprints for the DeWitt Museum. Byron and Elise had ordered takeout for lunch for themselves, I went out instead, and—I pinched the bridge of my nose, my head pounding—and then . . .

Ugh, I don't know. What happened?

Spotting a door ahead of me, I didn't even bother to look around the rest of the room or see where the two other doors led. I grabbed my shoes and stumbled for what I guessed was the way out, and stepped into a hallway, the cool marble floor soothing on my bare feet.

I still went down the list in my head, though.

I didn't drink.

I didn't see anyone unusual.

I didn't get any weird phone calls or packages. I didn't . . .

I tried to swallow a few times, finally generating enough saliva. God, I was thirsty. And—a pang hit my stomach—hungry, too. How long had I been out?

"Hello?" I called quietly but immediately regretted it.

Unless I'd had an aneurysm or developed selective amnesia, then I wasn't here willingly.

But if I'd been taken or imprisoned, wouldn't my door have been locked?

Bile stung my throat, every horror movie I'd ever seen playing various scenarios in my head.

*Please, no cannibals. Please, no cannibals.*

"Hi," a small, hesitant voice said.

I followed the sound, peering across the hallway, over the banister, to the other side of the upstairs where another hall of rooms sat. A figure lurked in a dark corridor, slowly stepping onto the landing.

"Who is that?" I inched forward just a hair, blinking against the sleep still weighing on my eyes.

It was a man, I thought. Button-down shirt, short hair.

"Taylor," he finally said. "Taylor Dinescu."

Dinescu? As in, Dinescu Petroleum Corporation? It couldn't be the same family.

I licked my lips, swallowing again. I really needed to find some water.

"Why am I not locked in my room?" he asked me, coming out of the darkness and stepping into the faint moonlight streaming through the windows.

He cocked his head, his hair disheveled and the tail of his wrinkled Oxford hanging out. "We're not allowed around the women," he said, sounding just as confused as me. "Are you with the doctor? Is he here?"

What the hell was he talking about? *We're not allowed around the women.* Did I hear that right? He sounded out of it, like he was on drugs or had been locked in a cell for the past fifteen years.

"Where am I?" I demanded.

He took a step in my direction, and I took one backward, scrambling to get my shoes on as I hopped on one foot.

He closed his eyes, inhaling as he inched closer. "Jesus," he panted. "It's been a while since I smelled that."

Smelled what?

His eyes opened, and I noticed they were a piercing blue, even more striking under his mahogany hair.

"Who are you? Where am I?" I barked.

I didn't recognize this guy.

He slithered closer, almost animalistic in his movements, with a predatory look on his face now that made the hairs on my arms stand up.

He looked suddenly alert. *Fuck.*

I searched for some kind of weapon around me.

"The locations change," he said, and I backed up a step for every step toward me he took. "But the name stays the same. Blackchurch."

"What is that?" I asked. "Where are we? Am I still in San Francisco?"

He shrugged. "I can't answer that. We could be in Siberia or ten miles from Disneyland," he replied. "We're the last ones to know. All we know is that it's remote."

"We?"

Who else was here? Where were they?

And where the hell was I, for that matter? What was Blackchurch? It sounded vaguely familiar, but I couldn't think right now.

How could he not know where he was? What city or state? Or country, even?

My God. *Country.* I was in America, right? I had to be.

I felt sick.

But water. I'd heard water when I woke, and I perked my ears, hearing the dull, steady pounding of it around us. Were we near a waterfall?

"There's no one here with you?" he asked, as if he couldn't believe that I was really standing here. "You shouldn't be so close to us. They never let the females close to us."

"What females?"

"The nurses, cleaners, staff . . ." he said. "They come once a month to resupply, but we're confined to our rooms until they leave. Did you get left behind?"

I bared my teeth, losing my patience. Enough with the questions.

I had no idea what the hell he was talking about, and my heart was pounding so hard, it hurt. *They never let the females close to us.* My God, why? I retreated toward the staircase, moving backward, so I didn't take my eyes off him and started to descend as he advanced on me.

"I want to use the phone," I told him. "Where is it?"

He just shook his head, and my heart sank.

"No computers, either," he told me.

I stumbled on the step and had to grab the wall to steady myself. When I looked up, he was there, gazing down at me, his lips twitching with a grin.

"No, no . . ." I slid down a few more steps.

"Don't worry," he offered. "I just wanted a little sniff. He'll want the first taste."

*He?* I looked down the stairs, seeing a canister of umbrellas. Nice and pointy. *That'll do.*

"We don't get women here." He got closer and closer. "Ones we can touch anyway."

I backed up farther. If I bolted for a weapon, would he be able to grab me? Would he grab me?

"No women, no communication with the world," he went on. "No drugs, liquor, or smokes, either."

"What is Blackchurch?" I asked.

"A prison."

I looked around, noticing the expensive marble floors, the fixtures and carpets, and the fancy, gold accents and statues.

"Nice prison," I mumbled.

Whatever it was now, it clearly used to be someone's home. A mansion or . . . a castle or something.

"It's off the grid." He sighed. "Where do you think CEOs and senators send their problem children when they need to get rid of them?"

"Senators . . ." I trailed off, something sparking in my memory.

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"Some important people can't have their sons—their heirs—making news by going to jail or rehab or being caught doing their dirty deeds," he explained. "When we become liabilities, we're sent here to cool off. Sometimes for months." He sighed again. "And some of us for years."

Sons. Heirs.

Then it hit me.

*Blackchurch.*

No.

No, he had to be lying. I remembered hearing about this place. But it was just an urban legend that wealthy men threatened their kids with to keep them in line. A secluded residence somewhere where sons were sent as punishment, but given free rein to be at each other's mercy. It was like *Lord of the Flies* but with dinner jackets.

But it didn't exist. Not really. Did it?

"There are more?" I asked. "More of you here?"

A wicked smile spread across his lips, curdling my stomach.

"Oh, several," he crooned. "Grayson will be back with the hunting party tonight."

I stopped dead in my tracks, lightheaded.

No, no, no . . .

*Senators*, he'd said.

*Grayson.*

Shit.

"Grayson?" I muttered, more to myself. "Will Grayson?"

He was here?

But Taylor Dinescu, son of the owner of Dinescu Petroleum Corporation I now gathered, ignored my question. "We have everything we need to survive, but if we want meat, we have to hunt for it," he explained.

That's what Will—and the *others*—were out doing. Getting meat.

And I didn't know if it was the look on my face or something else, but Taylor started laughing. A vile cackling that curled my fists tight.



“Why are you laughing?” I growled.

“Because no one knows you’re here, do they?” he taunted, sounding delighted. “And whoever does meant to leave you anyway. It’ll be a month before another resupply team shows up.”

I closed my eyes for a split second, his meaning clear.

“A whole month,” he mused.

His eyes fell down my body, and I absorbed the full implication of my situation.

I was in the middle of nowhere with who knew how many men who’d been without any source of vice or contact with the outside world for who knew how long; one of whom had a great desire to torture me if he ever got his hands on me again.

And, according to Taylor, I had little hope of any help for the next month.

Someone went to great lengths to bring me here and make sure my arrival went undetected. Was there really no attendant on the property? Security? Surveillance? Anyone with control of the prisoners?

I ground my teeth together, having no idea what the hell I was going to do, but I needed to do it fast.

But then I heard something, and I shot my eyes up to Taylor, barks and howls echoing outside.

“What is that?” I asked.

Wolves? The sounds were getting closer.

He shot his eyes up, looking at the front door behind me and then back in my direction. “The hunting party,” he replied. “They must be back early.”

The hunting party.

Will.

And how many other prisoners who might be just as creepy and threatening as this guy . . .

The howls were outside the house now, and I looked up at Taylor, unable to calm my breathing. What would happen when they came inside and saw me?

But he just smiled down at me. "Please, do run," he said. "We're dying for some fun."

My heart sank. This wasn't happening. *This wasn't happening.*

I backed up as I headed down the stairs, keeping my eyes on him as he stalked me, liquid heat coursing in my veins.

"I want to talk to Will," I demanded.

He might *want* to hurt me, but he wouldn't. Would he?

If I could just talk to him . . .

But Taylor laughed, his blue eyes dancing with delight. "He can't protect you, love." And then the floor creaked upstairs, and Taylor tipped his head back, looking at the ceiling. "Aydin is awake."

*Aydin.* Who?

But I didn't care to stick around and find out. I didn't know if I'd really be in danger with these guys, but I knew I wouldn't be in any if I ran.

Leaping down the staircase, I swung around the banister and bolted toward the back of the house, hearing Taylor howl as I disappeared down a dark corridor, sweat already cooling my forehead.

This wasn't happening. There had to be surveillance. I refused to believe Mommy and Daddy sent their heirs and assets here without some kind of insurance that they'd be safe. What if someone were injured? Or gravely ill?

This was a . . . a joke. A vastly inappropriate and lavish prank. It was almost Devil's Night, and he was dealing me in. Finally.

Blackchurch wasn't real. In high school, Will hadn't even believed this place existed.

I passed rooms, some with one door, others with two, and some with none at all as the hallway splintered off into other hallways, and I didn't know where the hell I was going. I just ran.

The rubber soles of my sneakers squeaked across the marble floors, and a tickle hit my nose at the stale scent of age. Nothing was warm here.

Walls changed from cream to maroon to black, rotting wallpaper

fading in some areas and ceilings a mile high, as well as drapes falling down windows that were eight times my height.

But the light fixtures shone, casting a somber glow in every office, den, parlor, and game room I passed.

Stopping short, I took the second right and dashed down the hall, thankful for the silence, but also unnerved by it. They were outside the door moments ago. They had to be in the house now. Why wasn't I hearing anything?

Dammit.

My muscles burning and my lungs tight, I couldn't hold back the groan as I stumbled into the last room at the end of the hall and ran to the window. I lifted it open, the crisp air rushing in and breezing through the drapes. I shivered, seeing the vast green forest, almost black in the night beyond the window.

Hemlocks. I looked out, scanning the terrain. There were red spruces and white pines, too. The moist scent of moss hit me, and I hesitated. I wasn't in California anymore. These trees were native to land much farther north.

And we weren't in Thunder Bay. We weren't anywhere near Thunder Bay.

Leaving the window open, I backed away, thinking twice. The chill in the air blew through my short-sleeved white blouse, and I had no idea where I was, how far from civilization, or what kind of elements I'd run into unprotected.

I ran back out of the room, pinning myself to the wall and quietly stepping down the corridor, keeping my eyes peeled. *Think, think, think...*

We had to be close to a town. There were paintings on these walls, priceless antiques, massive chandeliers, and a hell of a lot of money that went into furnishing and decorating this place.

It hadn't always been a prison.

No one would spend this kind of money on something a bunch of little frat shits were going to trash. It was someone's home, and they

wouldn't have built it leagues away from town. A home like this is for entertaining. There was a ballroom, for Christ's sake.

I wrung my hands. I couldn't care less who dumped me here. Right now, I just needed to get somewhere safe.

And then I heard it.

A call—a howl—above me. I stopped, my blood freezing. Tipping my head up, I followed the sound as it drifted from my left to my right, my pulse skipping a beat as the floorboards above whined with weight.

Simultaneously. In several places.

They were upstairs, and there was more than one. Taylor saw me run this way. Why would they be upstairs?

And then I remembered what else was upstairs. Aydin.

Taylor spoke of him like he was a threat. Were they going to him first?

An echo of a voice traveled down the hall, and I trained my ears, the window behind me beckoning.

Another cry echoed farther down, possibly from the foyer, and then another howl somewhere around me.

I twisted around, dizzy. What the hell was going on? The nerves under my skin fired, and I forced myself to swallow as bile churned in my stomach.

They were spreading out.

*Wolves.* I paused, remembering the howls outside. It was like wolves. A pack separates to surround its prey and test for weaknesses. They flank the sides and the rear.

Tears hung at the corners of my eyes, and I lifted my chin, pushing them away. *Will.*

How long had he been here? Where were his friends? Did he have me brought here as revenge? What the hell?

I told him not to push me all those years ago. I warned him. This wasn't my fault. He got himself put here.

I dove into a billiards room, grabbed a cricket bat off the wall, and

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crept back out, hugging the walls with my back and darting my eyes all around for any sign of them. Chills spread up my arms, and despite the cold, a light layer of sweat covered my neck. Training my ears, I listened as I took one quiet step after another.

A thud hit the floor above me, and I sucked in a breath, shooting my eyes to the ceiling again as I trailed behind the stairs.

What the hell was going on?

A blue hue, like moonlight streaming through a window, lit the dark marble floor down the hallway, and I followed it, heading to the back of the house.

I inhaled, a sting hitting my nose. Sterile, like bleach. Taylor said the cleaners and staff just left.

My knees shook, and my heart hammered in my chest. I felt like I was already walled in, and I didn't even know it.

"Here!" someone shouted.

I gasped, flattening myself to the wall as I slipped around a corner.

Peering back around it, I spotted shadows moving along the wall as they found my open window.

"She's running!" one of them shouted.

I exhaled, fisting my hands. *Yes*. They thought I crawled out the window.

Their footfalls pounded across the floor, racing back toward the foyer, hopefully, and I clasped my hand over my mouth as they faded away.

*Thank God.*

I didn't wait another moment. I ran and ran, finding the kitchen in the southwest corner of the house. Leaving the lights off, I dashed for the refrigerator and swung it open, racks of fruits and vegetables shifting with the motion.

I looked around, gaping at the size for a moment. It was a walk-in. I thought Taylor said they had to hunt for their meat. There was a shitload of food right here.