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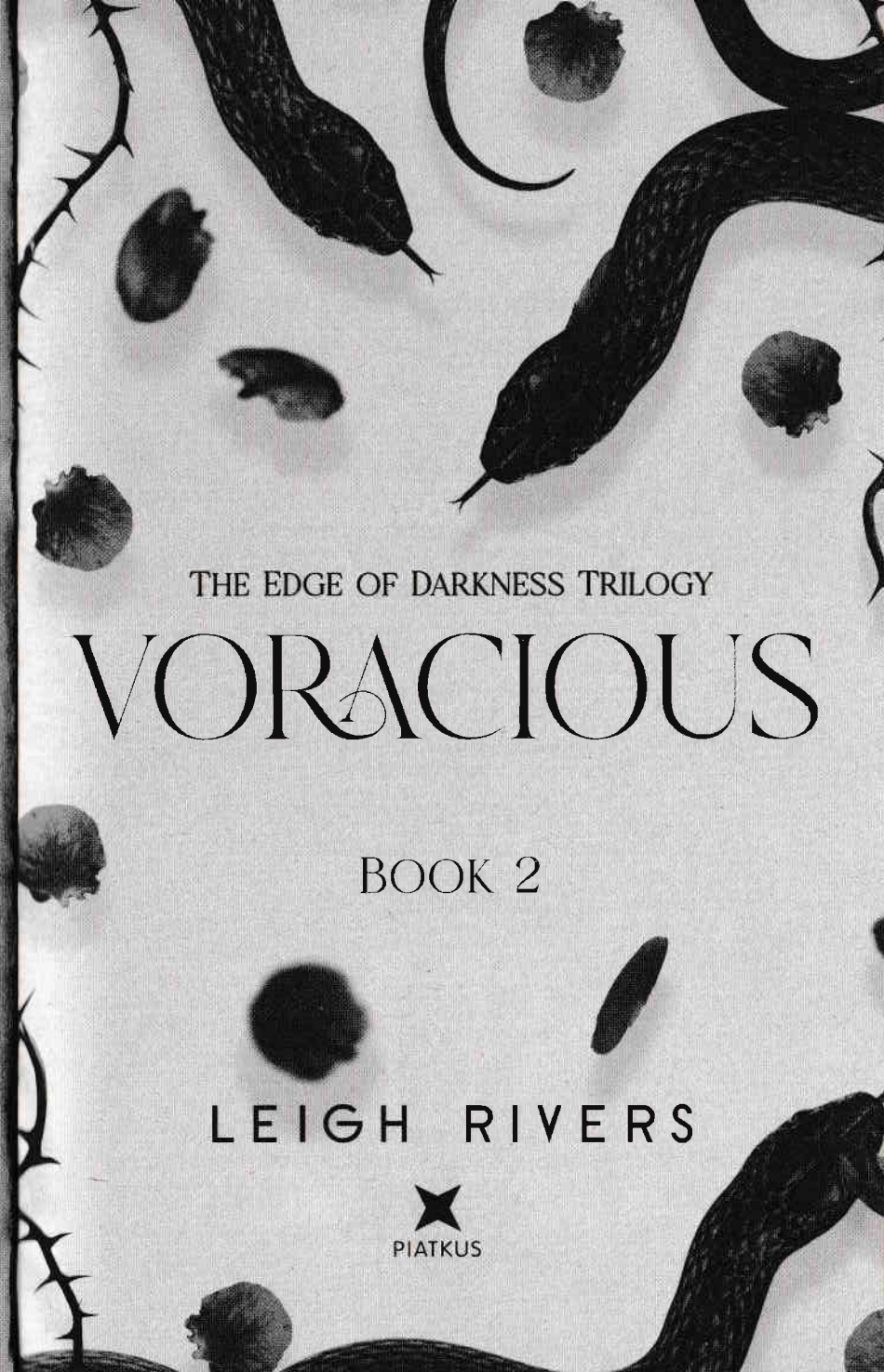
BY LEIGH RIVERS

Edge of Darkness trilogy
Insatiable
Voracious
Restitution

Psychotic Obsession

Web of Silence duet
Little Stranger
Little Liar



THE EDGE OF DARKNESS TRILOGY

VORACIOUS

BOOK 2

LEIGH RIVERS

PIATKUS

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1

STACEY

"Do you need anything, Miss Rhodes?"

I stare out the window, watching the wing of the private jet cut through the air, tears soaking my cheeks, some already dried on my skin. I sniff, using my sleeve to wipe my nose. It's been all but three hours since we took off, and I can't calm my somehow beating heart as it races in my crippled chest.

The last few hours run through my head – from the moment Kade rushed me onto the motorbike, to being chased through the streets while gunshots fired, to finding out he's being blackmailed, to that last kiss – and I can't breathe.

Barry stands beside the small table, hands folded in front of him.

"I'm okay." Lie. I'm not. I'm anything *but* okay.

I'd begged them to turn around and help him, but Barry said

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they have orders they can't go against. Kade made sure that no matter what happened at the hangar, they'd get me into the air. I was to be protected at all costs.

I'm far too terrified for Kade's safety to think about my own. Or what waits for me at home. I'll deal with Chris later. My mind is on fire with traumatising thoughts of what could be happening to Kade right now.

He could've come with me. He could've taken my hand and left this behind. We would've worked out how to get him out of this – together. His parents would've protected him.

It's over. It's been over for two years.

He's wrong. If it was over, then what the hell has this entire trip been? The sex. The kiss. The need to hold me. We aren't done.

Kade told me not to speak to his father about what's going on, but I have no idea how else to help him. What will telling Tobias actually do? Would it just cause him to spiral? Luciella said he's been doing really well with his health and behaviour.

Telling him might jeopardise that.

But what else can I do?

Does it make me selfish that I'd risk destroying Kade's dad's life to save his? Do I speak to Aria? Luciella?

I'm lost.

"We need to do something," I whisper, looking up at Barry.

"The police can't help, so don't bother calling them. No one can interfere."

"There must be someone who can help him?"

"No."

It's a solid answer that I refuse to believe.

"Will they hurt him?"

Barry averts his gaze, shifting on his feet. "He'll be fine."

"Someone hit him on the head. You saw it too."

"Miss Rhodes..."

"Stacey," I reply. "Please call me Stacey."

"It's nothing he can't handle, Stacey," Barry replies. "You should sleep."

They thought I was asleep in the car – like I'd actually be able to pass out under those circumstances. I heard every word they said –

I'm too innocent; I'd be in danger if we spent time together – and Kade saying I should have stayed out of his life, but I was always there.

An hour later, my thoughts are still wild. Barry hands me a glass of water, which shakes in my grasp. He sighs and drops into the seat in front of me. He looks tired, as if he hasn't slept in days. He does a lot for Kade – cleans up his messes and deals with him when he's drugged up or drunk out of his mind.

I'm starting to think Kade is forced to take drugs too, because he hated them when we were teenagers.

I manage to gulp down three mouthfuls of the water then place the glass on the table between us. "I have a question. Do you work for them? Or Kade?"

He clears his throat, straightening his already flat tie. "Mr Mitchell is my boss. He pays my salary and bonuses. But I'm very aware of the Sawyers and his position with them."

"Who's the wife?" I ask, leaning my elbows on the table. "Her name and everything else you have on her."

"There's no reason for you to know. You can't do anything. No one can. Do what Mr Mitchell said – move on."

A tear slides down my cheek. "How can you just sit back and watch these people control him?"

"Do you care about your family, Miss Rhodes?"

My teeth grind together. "Partially."

"Then understand that if you keep digging, your family will suffer the consequences. Stop while you're ahead. That is my only piece of advice."

"Will you go back for him once I'm home?"

"No. I'm to monitor you for the foreseeable."

"Can you please go back for him?"

He wipes his face, exasperated. "We land in four hours," he replies, changing the subject, and my heart sinks. He really isn't going to do anything? "Once we land, contact your brother to pick you up. I'll follow behind. Don't tell him about any of this or pay any attention to me or my colleagues. We're ghosts to you."

My stomach plummets. What if they see Chris?

Regardless of the twisted feeling in my gut, I nod. "Okay."

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He gets to his feet and buttons his suit jacket. "To put your mind at ease, if the order comes in, then yes, I'll go back for him once I know you're safe. But I doubt we'll hear from Mr Mitchell for a while. He's blocked all comms to his phone and deactivated the system. He's untraceable. The last time that happened, he was gone for three months."

My lip trembles. "Kade wasn't always like this. I... I'm so worried about him. They could be hurting him right now. I feel useless."

The lights dim, and he refills my water.

"Mr Mitchell has been in a lot of situations where his life has been at risk. Trust me when I say this is minor. He's too valuable to be killed. Many have tried and failed. He's good at what he does because of what he's gone through." He gives me a tight smile and gestures to the cockpit. "I'll be right through there if you need anything. Get some rest. Miss— Stacey."

I'm not sure how much time passes; the music playing from the speakers is all I have to focus on. "When the party's over" by Billie Eilish is on, and my heart sinks with every lyric. Memories rush through me. Me inverted on the hoop; Kade kissing me upside down while this song plays. He often used to interrupt my routine to kiss or touch me. Other times he'd sit to the side and watch me, as if he was watching me dance for the first time.

I knew that version of Kade was in love with me. I could see it in his eyes.

I'm not sure I'll ever see that side of him again.

I go to use the bathroom. My eyes are swollen from crying, my headache teetering on the edge of a full-blown migraine. I stop outside the cockpit door, hearing Barry's voice.

"A girl?" he asks in a happy tone. "What else did the midwife say? Yeah. That's awesome. I'm so sorry I couldn't be there, baby. I'll be home in a few weeks. Work is a bit hectic." Then there's a long silence. His partner must be talking.

"Honestly, she's not what he described. I think they need their heads knocked together and to actually talk it out. Yeah. I miss you too. I'll be home before our wedding anniversary, I promise. I love you too."

I move away and stop eavesdropping on Barry and his wife. It's

good to hear people still have joyful moments, even when it feels like the world is swallowing me whole. I remember how excited me and Kade were when we found out we were having a girl. We'd impatiently waited until the sixteen-week mark and paid for our own ultrasound instead of waiting the extra four weeks.

It stayed a secret until I figured out a plan to escape Chris without risking Kade's life. I used the excuse of not wanting Luciella to know yet. I took it easy with dancing and told my friends I'd torn my rotator cuff, so I couldn't do rigorous exercises; that I couldn't drink on nights out because I was on certain meds, and they bought into the lie.

So many lies.

I had the faintest swelling at the bottom of my abdomen that I blamed on bloating when around Lu and Ty, but despite how small I was, the midwife said everything was perfect. We started planning even more. Where we'd move to, the house we'd build, how many children. Listing names.

Kade was mortified with half the names I suggested. *I am not fucking calling my daughter Vixen.* And then: *Georgina? Really? She's not ninety.* My favourite was: *You're trying to fucking annoy me now, Freckles. That's a dog's name.*

Disaster struck barely a week later, and it was the beginning of the end.

Right now, I'm so confused about everything. Kade said it was over, yet he kissed me. I can still feel his lips on mine as I run my fingers over my mouth. I wish I'd let him kiss me before. I wish we'd done it the entire trip.

Do I still love him? Yes, without a doubt. Am I *in* love with him? I have no idea.

Feelings suck sometimes. They're my best friends, but they're also my worst enemies.

I manage to fall asleep, and when we land in Glasgow, Barry waits outside the airport bathroom while I try to remain calm and call Tobias on the number Aria gave me, but he doesn't pick up. I send a message to let him know I landed back in Scotland.

Kyle tells me he's parked at arrivals, and I've to move my ass.

I exit the bathroom. "Can I tell my brother? About what

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happened?"

Barry stares at me in horror. "Absolutely not. Did you not hear what I said on the flight? Consequences, Miss Rhodes."

"Stacey."

"Unless you want your brother dead, keep your mouth shut and get on with your life. I won't interact with you. I'm just here to make sure the Sawyers aren't hunting for you."

They'd never find me. Chris is a cyber-freak. I don't think the police could even hack into my phone or the Fields' manor security system. After begging him last year, he removed the tracker and stopped reading my messages, but only because I agreed to stop locking my room door. I did, but only for a little while before paranoia kicked back in.

I sacrificed one form of privacy for another.

Barry leaves my side and goes to his black SUV, which is waiting a few cars behind the white Range Rover Kyle bought a few months ago. My brother grins at me and puts my bags into the trunk, and I climb into the passenger side, my nerves shattering when I see Chris glaring at me from the back seat.

2

KADE

FLASHBACK

Whoever decided it would be a fucking fantastic idea to go camping as a family needs to die. Preferably before the tents are pitched and I'm lying in mine bored as fuck.

We were supposed to celebrate my brother Jason's birthday with a party in the manor, and as much as I hate parties, I would've been able to drag Stacey into a spare room or closet and devour her face until we couldn't breathe.

I despise any sort of social gathering. But this? Spending the weekend close to Stacey but not being able to kiss or touch or even speak to her? Way worse. It's torture.

I have to maintain this facade that she does my head in because apparently it'll look suspicious if I randomly stop calling her names and

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making her life hell.

Last night, when everyone went back to their tents while Ewan and Base got into a heated debate about the blueprints of the Eiffel Tower, we texted for hours before she fell asleep. The last message was me asking if she was still awake, and I've had nothing from her all day.

All. Fucking. Day. It's brutal. Being so close but not being able to do anything. I'm sharing a tent with Jason, Dez and Base. Ewan and Mum are in their own tent, and Luciella, Stacey and Tylar are in the other a few spaces away.

I can hear my sister giggling, and it irritates the fuck out of me. How is it fair that she gets to have Stacey to herself?

It's been an entire month since we left London, since I woke up with the smell of her vanilla-scented hair in my face, her body on top of mine, her soft breaths hitting my neck. It felt different, maybe because we'd just had sex for the first time. I felt the butterflies intensifying, especially when she woke up and smiled at me.

I'm not afraid to admit that I stayed in that position for fucking hours, stroking her dark hair, tracing the ink on her shoulder blades, wondering how long it would last before she got fed up with me.

We've been going slow when it comes to sex, or any other acts for that matter. I don't mind at all. We aren't in any rush. But the five times we have fucked, it's been careful, safe and always ends with me holding her until we both fall asleep. I usually wake to her gone.

We're still learning from each other. I think, along with her as a person and how beautiful she is, I'm also drawn to how understanding she is. None of this is easy for me. Emotions I've never been in touch with are surfacing whenever I'm around her. She's patient with me, and I think that alone makes me comfortable around her.

Call me insecure, but I second-guess everything. It's impossible for a person to be as happy as I am and not have the other shoe drop like fucking thunder. She doesn't even want me to meet her family yet, for fuck's sake.

We aren't in a relationship. Nothing has really been established. We haven't spoken about how we feel, except for the odd time she tells me she likes me, and I need to hold back on telling her I think I might be falling in love with her.

Might be.

I'm not sure if the need to see her, speak to her or even fucking smell her is an obsessive trait, one that may turn into a dangerous need for control or make me manipulative. I can't wake up without her on my mind, and when I go to sleep, all I can think about is her.

When I'm not with her, I check my phone every five minutes, intentionally going to the kitchen when I know Luciella is there to see if Stacey is with her. I'm always on her social media, her tagged pictures and checking if she's following anyone new.

My heart literally sinks when she takes forever to respond to me. But it also explodes in ecstasy when she smiles at me, when she cuddles into my side and tells me she doesn't want to go back to my sister's room.

I haven't heard any noises from the other tent in a while. Would it be psychotic of me to sneak in, kidnap Stacey and drag her to the woods to kiss the living daylights out of her?

Debatable.

I sit up in my sleeping bag and grab my phone.

Me: Still awake?

Three dots appear, and I internally sigh with relief and lie back, holding my phone up to my face while I wait for her reply. I pull the strings of my hoodie, tightening the hood around my face.

Freckles: Yep. I can hear Ewan snoring from away over here! I would've suffocated him with a pillow by now if I was your mother. Wait. Is that Ewan or Aria?

Could be either of them. In all fairness, Stacey snores as well. I won't say that to her though. She's in denial about her singing voice – imagine I commented on her snoring too? I'd be the one suffocated with a pillow.

Me: It sucks being so close to you and not being able to do anything. How is it possible to miss you, yet you're right here?

Was that too forward? Fuck it, the message has already sent. Dad told me to be honest, so I'm being fucking honest.

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Freckles: I miss you too.

I smile and type a reply.

Me: I have a question...

Freckles: You may ask.

How the hell do I ask about exclusivity without asking her to be my girlfriend? I reckon the latter will scare her, considering how secretive she wants us to be, so I won't mention us being in an actual relationship.

Me: I know we spoke about this when I was in America, but do you want to see other people?

She types. Deletes. Goes offline. Comes back online and types. Offline. Online. Types and deletes.

Freckles: Ummmm...

Fuck me, my heart is rattling in my chest. What if things have changed since London and she's been seeing other people, and I've completely read this wrong?

My left eye twitches, an unsettling, violent feeling sinking into me at the thought of someone else kissing her. Seeing her smile. Hearing her giggle. Watching her dance and falling asleep with her in their arms.

I'll find out who and I'll hurt them. Threaten them.

Wait, no, fuck. No.

Freckles: Have I misjudged this? Without sounding needy, I only want you. But if you're wanting to see other people, then please tell me. I'm not into sharing.

Is the heavy weight lifting from my chest what relief feels like?

Me: I only want you too. Come here and I'll prove it.

Freckles: Do you forget the part where you're sharing a tent with your brother and friends?

Me: They're drunk and asleep. Come keep me company.

I shut my screen off when she goes offline, and I check to make sure they're definitely asleep. It's three in the morning – I doubt anyone will be awake. Base has his arm over his eyes, mouth open with deep, sleepy breaths, mumbling in Russian. Dez is face down and keeps twitching in whatever dream he's in. Jason is motionless, a sure sign he's in a deep sleep.

I throw one of Base's protein bars at them, and none threaten to kill me.

Definitely asleep.

The zipper of the tent slowly moves up, and her head appears. Her hair is mostly pulled back with a clip. Her face, from what I can see in the moonlight, is make-up free, but there's a slight sheen on her lips where she's put on lip balm before coming here.

In a hoodie and baggy sweats to keep her warm in this frigid weather, she climbs into the tent, zips it back up at the speed of a snail then crawls over to me as quietly as she can.

It's kind of pathetic how my heart skips a beat over her willingly wanting to spend time with me. The excitement I feel that she's sneaking away from her friends, sneaking around mine and sliding in beside me in my sleeping bag is unmatched by any thrill I've ever had.

That's just it with Stacey. She could be singing a musical horrendously off-key with food all over her face, and I'd still see her as my own fucking angel.

"Hi," she breathes as I turn on my side to face her, mirroring her position. "This is risky."

I look over her shoulder at my friends then look down at her, pulling

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my sleeping bag up to hide her from them. I half-smile and tuck a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "Risky is fun."

"They won't wake up and tell Luciella I'm here?" Her voice is so quiet, so sweet and soft.

"Not if they want to live, no. It's just Base and his big mouth though. He's a fucking gossip."

We whisper as low as possible, talking about anything and everything – what she's been up to this week, the classes she's been teaching, the sketches I sent her one night when I was bored. After she saw them, she asked if I'd design her a tattoo.

Stacey is already a work of art. The idea of having my drawings on her skin makes mine tingle. I'm no pro, but my therapist has started encouraging me to doodle often, since it helps when I'm overwhelmed or need to express myself in a way I struggle with.

She wraps her arms around my neck, hiking her leg up to rest on top of my hip. "I can't fall asleep here," she tells me. "But I want to cuddle for a bit."

I tighten my hold on her waist, bringing her knee up higher to my ribs. "Then cuddle me, Freckles. It's been brutal not being able to do this with you."

"I love how romantic you are," she says. "I know you keep saying you're not, but you really are. You're just as needy as me."

I squeeze her ass. "I'm not romantic." Needy? Yeah, I'm fucking needy when it comes to her.

She hums quietly. "Is that why you researched all the side effects to my pill and restocked your minifridge with things to make me feel better? Or when you bought me a hot-water bottle the morning after our first time, because I was sore?"

"The side effects are a little intense. I was being nice." I raise my shoulder. "I need to take care of you somehow after how well you take it."

She slaps my arm, and we both silently chuckle.

Most of the time, we just do this whenever we're together. Cuddle and talk.

Stacey being a cuddler has been unexpected. Without a doubt, this is one of my favourite things about her – whenever we sleep, she always has to touch me.

Her head is always on my chest, and whenever I wake and we're

tangled as one, I can't seem to move. I don't want to move. It's moments like those – this – when I try to figure out if my dad ever felt this way about my mum, and at what point it all turned sour. At what point did he decide it wasn't enough and start using manipulation and coercion to keep her for as long as he did?

He still does. In a way. Her life, twenty years later, still revolves around my dad like fragile glass. She loves him – a part of her can never not love him. They remain in this toxic bubble, where she lights up around him, and he conceals every vicious urge to keep her happy.

I know that takes a lot for him, and sometimes, when Mum needs space from dealing with his bad days, my dad ends up in solitary confinement for being an enraged psycho.

One thing I will say, and fuck if my parents ever found out, but I never want them back together. They're truly toxic. Plain and simple. She's married, and I honestly think I'd go with Ewan if they split up.

Personally, I think Ewan deserves better. He should find someone who can love him the way he loves her.

I'm the worst son ever for thinking that.

Stacey brings me out of my head fuck by cupping my cheek. "Hey. What's wrong?"

I shake my head. She doesn't need to know where my thoughts go sometimes. "Nothing. I really do miss you."

Base is definitely asleep. Because he'd be snorting and trying not to laugh if he heard me.

She grins and gives me a chaste kiss. I go in for more, but she presses her middle finger to my lips. "I'm right here."

Yeah, she is, but I can't kiss her or hold her or fucking even look at her ass without chancing us being caught. Her shitty rule of keeping this all hush-hush is starting to piss me off. I'm trying to be patient, but fuck me.

I'm not patient.

And I'm also starting to despise my sister.

"You know what I mean," I say against her finger.

She moves her hand and slides it between us, gripping the waistband of my grey sweats. "We're going home tomorrow. I'll see you after my hoop class. I'm teaching until nine."

I sigh deeply and lower my forehead to hers. "Not enough."

Stacey shakes slightly in a silent laugh. "What are you going to do