



Jackie Mae

A
Lifetime
to Wait

No where to run ...

THE DARKEST SERIES

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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To,
My husband, always my knight

And a special thanks to,

Larry and Rebecca for being the best

And to,

**Richard, whose love and support
has meant so much**

A Note from Jackie Mae:

Welcome. Come along with me to a place where the Ones walk amongst us. Where ordinary people, like you and I, have hidden strengths. When all else fails, the meek shall not be mild, but bold and daring.

THE ONES (The Darkest Series) is the first book. A LIFETIME TO WAIT (The Darkest Series) is the next installment in the series.

I hope all my readers will enjoy the ride.

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Chapter 1

He came out of nowhere, tackling her to the ground like a battering ram, milliseconds before she felt the heat from the beam of light. It had just missed them. Thankfully, he had rolled them to the right. Jerking her up by her shirt, he pulled her along to the edge of the forest. Wedged between him and a large Sycamore tree, she barely had time to look at his face, when the tree was hit with such force a large portion of its top half exploded and came raining down. He took her hand and ran through the forest.

Sprinting farther into the interior, he abruptly turned sharply to his left and ran at break-neck speed for the riverbank. Her heart was pounding; she was finding it difficult to understand the events unfolding before her. Running over tree roots and rocks, the man was unknowing or uncaring that she would falter any second now and they would both go tumbling over the rocky trail. She knew she couldn't keep up this pace. As if somehow knowing what

she was thinking, he stopped for a moment. Out of breath, she leaned over putting both hands on her knees for support. She began contemplating what exactly was going on, when he pulled her forward slowly. She was rudely awakened from her thoughts when the ice cold water hit her senses.

“Here Brooke, take this, hurry.”

He handed her a reed. She grabbed the reed and took a life-saving deep breath a mere moment before he shoved her face underwater. He squeezed in close to her and none-too-gently pushed her up against the embankment. The cold was slowly seeping into her pores and making her brain foggy.

She wasn't sure if she was still holding up the reed when he took her hand. She could hear voices calling her name, over and over again. She started to stir when the man beside her held her tightly, shook her just enough to help her focus. She couldn't see anything, but the voices were near. She felt the coiled tension in him.

Minutes or maybe hours went by before he hauled her up and out of the murky water. She lay motionless in the grass, welcoming the sun's rays pouring over her body. She began to shake uncontrollably. He leaned over her, murmured in her ear that she would be alright, that he would take care

of her. She sure hoped he was one of the good guys, because she was fading into unconsciousness fast.

She awoke to the smell of herbs and spices all around her. She smelled some other heavenly aroma coming from down the hall. Perhaps her host had cooked a meal. She sat up and slowly looked around. As she looked around, she saw she was in a man's room. It had masculine hues with little pops of color. She suddenly shivered from a breeze upon her shoulders. It was then she looked down, realizing she had on a man's shirt and little else. *Where am I? What's going on here?* The implications were overwhelming. Lying back down for a moment she inhaled her pillow. It smelled manly. She liked it.

"Brooke, if you're hungry, food is on the table," called a man's voice from down the hall.

She did not respond. Truth be told, she was terrified in that moment.

He added, "If you prefer to shower first, your clothes are laid out in the bathroom."

She quickly walked to the bathroom and saw her clothes were clean and fresh towels were draped over a chair. The bathroom itself looked big enough to be the size of some apartments in New York City. The frameless glass door led to a four person sized tiled shower enclosure with eight body jets. Even the toilet

was unbelievable. It had a panel on the side of it with multiple selections available. *How many features did a toilet need to have?* she wondered. She locked the door and took a luxurious shower. Using all the body jets, she let the water wash over her. The tension slowly washed away, easing her many aches and pains, and she thoroughly enjoyed herself. She took her time dressing and blow drying her hair. She found a mini hairbrush on the counter and helped herself.

She was afraid to open the door. Who was this man? What was the intent? Who had undressed her? How had she arrived here? And where was here? So many questions, enough stalling. Besides, she needed to eat, as she was beginning to feel light-headed.

She opened the door. In the doorway stood a man that was formidable looking and really, really strong. She had serious thoughts about closing the door and locking it again.

Then, he smiled at her. Her knees threatened to give out. That look could make women swoon. He was leaning against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest. He had short, cropped, baby-fine blond hair, with dark blue eyes. His dark tan told her he mainly stayed outdoors.

“Aren’t you hungry, Brooke?” He reminded her of a mythical, Greek god.

“Yes, I am, but I want some answers first.”

“Come and sit down. With food in your belly, your mind will focus better.”

She couldn't argue with that. She followed him to the kitchen. A long set of windows banked the far wall and highlighted the massive mountains in the foreground. What she saw out the windows was breathtaking. Mountains, some taller than she could see to the tops, others smaller in size, but all of them full of trees, green and lush, was a sight to see. And, she was sure, full of life.

The kitchen itself was impressive with all the latest appliances and gleaming granite countertops. It had a huge island with stools on one side, the six burner gas cooktop on the opposite side. Before her, a feast was laid out. She hopped onto one of the stools and helped herself to a strawberry. Just before she put it in her mouth she challenged, “Aren't you going to join me?”

He laughed. “No. I was so hungry and you were peacefully sleeping, so I helped myself earlier. It's not poison, Brooke. If that had been my intention, you would already be dead.”

She shrugged. She had already figured that out for herself and had decided it was safe to eat. She ate her fill and then put her napkin down in her

lap smoothing it around in circles. She didn't quite know how to ask it.

"Is there anyone else here?"

"No."

"Who actually took my clothes off? And... washed them?"

"I did Brooke."

She looked up into his eyes. There was heat there.

"Oh," is all she could come up with. She cleared her throat and stood up. She cleaned her plate off. Not knowing what to do next, she returned to the stool.

He said nothing else. His eyes followed her, burned into her skin.

"Um, I suppose I should say thank you. Thank you."

"You're so very welcome, Brooke." He had said the words slow, with heated emphasis.

"How do you know my name? And what is your name by the way? And, where, exactly are we?"

"Slow down Brooke, I will gladly answer all your questions." He looked amused.

She took a deep breath. "Alright then, how do you know my name?"

"I was searching for you. I am a protector."

"Protector of what pray tell?"

“The men who were chasing you, you needed protecting from them didn’t you?”

“Well... yes. I guess I did. How did you know I needed protection?”

“I told you already, I am a protector.”

This was getting her nowhere fast. He had ruffled her temper. “Listen up, Protector, I want some answers without the runaround, and I want them now.”

She had a bad habit of talking before she could fully think about the ramifications. It had plagued her most of her life. She immediately knew she had made a tactical error demanding answers from this man before her. He could break her neck in less than five seconds. Perhaps she should go back to her original brilliant plan. Hide in the bathroom.

He sat motionless and looked at her. “Don’t make the mistake of underestimating my sweetness, Brooke. It would bode well not to forget.”

She gulped in some air. She slowly got up and backtracked toward the bedroom door. She was getting scared. Hell, she didn’t even know his name. For all she knew, he was with the other men, the bad men, all along.

“Brooke, take it easy. I would never hurt you. But I do have my limits and retaliating is my specialty. It

would be my pleasure to show you.”

He smiled again, dammit. She must have a mild concussion, because she actually had thoughts about what that might imply. She needed to get out of here. She backtracked some more.

He got up. He darted across the room faster than she imagined possible. She was caught in his arms. He forced her to look up into his eyes. His beautiful blue eyes penetrated her carefully built defenses.

“Brooke, listen to me. There’s a lot to explain and we have little time before we must leave. I need you to follow my directives for your own safety. All will become clear along the way.”

She felt hysterical. She laughed a shaky laugh. He didn’t look like he was accustomed to anyone laughing at him.

“Must I prove to you I am in charge here.”

She laughed. She didn’t mean to, she really didn’t. She just couldn’t help herself. She must be dreaming. Yes, she told herself. She would wake up any minute now laughing at the ridiculousness of it all.

Then his mouth came crashing down on hers and he took all that she was. He demanded she open her mouth. He pushed his way in, drank like a thirsty man. When she finally softened beneath him, he reluctantly released his hold on her. He gazed into

her eyes, and she couldn't have looked away if her life had depended on it.

"Brooke we need to leave soon. Can you please trust me? We will talk further tonight. I promise to make things clear."

He hadn't released her fully. She was still in his embrace.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Dragone."

"Okay, Dragone."

"Okay what?"

"Okay, I will wait until this evening to get all my questions answered. All, Dragone." He released her and she hastily retreated to the bedroom.

He had given her privacy these last 30 minutes. She had a lot on her plate. He would try to make her understand.

"My pack is ready Brooke. It's getting late, are you ready to go?"

There was no response. He moved with speed throughout the house. She was gone. The little minx had tricked him. He was furious. She would pay this time.