

RUSSIAN ROULETTE

Helena Hawthorn Series Vol. 1

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NOTE: This book is written in U.K. English.

Some spelling may be different to U.S.

HELENA HAWTHORN SERIES

Alexander: Memoirs (Prequel/AVIL Series)

Russian Roulette

Demon Gates

Crumbling Control

Desired (Spin-Off Novella)

Monochrome Interview (AVIL Series)

Fated Origins

Cherished (Spin-Off Novella)

Dark Affiliations

Blood Witch

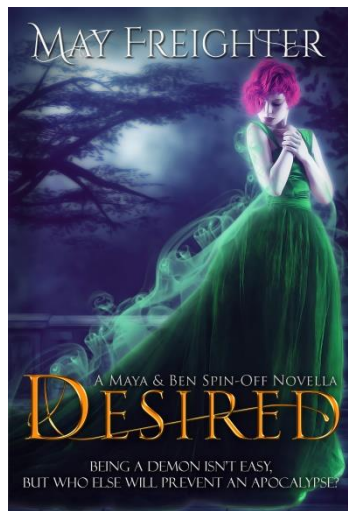
Twisted Truths

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READER INFORMATION

Throughout the story, you will encounter certain terminology that is relevant only to the Helena Hawthorn series. Here's a small glossary.

Childe: A human that had been turned into a vampire.

Sire: A title given to a vampire after he turned a human by sharing his energy with the person and then took their life.

Council: There are seven Councils that control the vampires. They prevent exposure to the world while trying to protect their people from the hunter attacks. A Council consists of 4-5 members, all of which are either respected or feared by the community.

Council's hounds are vampires who voluntarily serve the Council or are hired for their abilities. The number per Council averages between 20-50 vampires, excluding ghouls who maintain the building and do dealings outside during daylight hours.

Fleeting is a term used for inhuman vampire speed. Usually, a vampire can cover a few miles before becoming tired. When they reach their

limit, there is a danger of tearing their leg muscles, which can be both excruciating and slow to heal without ingestion of blood.

Donors: humans who donate to vampires after being affiliated in their circles and have accepted a vampire's protection. They tend to earn a good living and some even gain influential power in the human society through the vampire's connections.

Humans are kept out of the loop by the supernatural. The few who do possess the knowledge of their existence are too scared to reveal the details for fear of death or because no one would believe them.

Ghouls are humans who have ingested vampire blood right before death. The energy exchange never occurred with their sire as it would when creating a *childe*. Young vampires tend to mistake this as a process and bury the body in the ground without waiting, leaving the creature to awaken with an urge to eat the flesh of the dead.

PROLOGUE

A shiver induced by the stone wall ran through Helena. Her heart kicked into the next gear when she noted the restraints around her wrists. She struggled, tugging at the unforgiving shackles time and time again.

“Looks like she’s finally awake,” someone said in a gruff voice.

“Then get on with it,” another replied.

She whipped her head around in search of the voices. The sudden action blurred her vision, causing her to squint. A low-wattage bulb at the end of the room exposed crates and stacked boxes. A bald man sat at a table; his legs crossed at the heel whilst his beefy hands held the local newspaper.

The second man pushed away from the grimy wall, sauntering towards her. His unnerving grin revealed a set of elongated canines.

A breath caught in her throat.

“Aren’t you a tad bit young to be working for Alexander?” he asked.

A deep frown creased her face while her attention darted between her captors. She didn’t work for Alexander nor did she ever want to see him or Lucious again.

The stranger stopped a foot away from her. Dark, greasy hair clung to his scalp in thinning streaks. A few strands separated at the front, curtaining his heavy-lidded eyes. He reached out, grabbing her hair with

a sharp twist and lifted her head to meet his narrowed eyes. "I asked you a question, human."

Her nose wrinkled in disgust. His breath—a mixture of cheap tobacco, beer, and something else—caused her stomach to churn. *Panic will not solve anything*, she thought, yet her heart ignored her rationalisation.

"I don't work for him," she said, surprised her voice came out unshaken.

He waved at her thin shirt and smart trousers. "We saw you leaving his club looking like this."

Helena fought the urge to roll her eyes. If he'd been inside, he would know Alexander's staff didn't wear uniforms. Well, the bouncers did... "This is what anyone would wear to an interview!"

His eyes flared with a light-grey glow, and she instantly regretted her snappy tone. She flinched under his menacing stare which made her think of a glowering two-year-old she used to babysit. The kid always shot daggers her way if she didn't give him any candy.

"...you listening?" He let go of her hair with a sudden shove as he shouted at her.

Helena's head dunked, encouraging the faint ache to blaze into a full-blown headache.

"I think I hit her harder than I thought."

"Rick—" The companion set his newspaper on the table, "—if you can't get anything out of her..."

"I can!"

Helena figured the one who ran the operation was not 'Rick'. His literate friend held an authoritative confidence the man in front of her lacked. She imagined Rick struggling to read a novel by Tolstoy. The image alone made her lips twitch upwards.

"What're you smiling about? Don't you understand what's going on?" Rick snapped.

She glared at him. Arguing wouldn't help, but her mouth lost its filter. "Should I?"

Her left cheek exploded with a burning sting as he backhanded her across the face. Automatically, she moved to rub the pain away and realised with a sickening feeling what situation she was in—chained to a wall with two unknown men in a dingy room.

As a dull ache settled in her arms, she bit her lower lip to suppress her bitter tongue from bringing more trouble.

Rick leant in and peered into her face. His lips hovered next to her ear. "Let's see how much you know."

He grabbed the sides of her head, forcing her to look at him. When their eyes locked, he grinned.

Helena struggled, screaming, "Let go!"

"Calm down, human." His harsh tone switched to a soothing melody.

Right on cue, her body relaxed at his command. His glowing eyes became the centre of her universe. Anything he said would be a binding instruction.

Inside, she screamed, fighting his overpowering control, but nothing happened. *Why couldn't Lucious influence me and this idiot can?*

"Are you paying attention?"

"Yes."

"Will you obey my commands?"

Flat and emotionless, she answered him in an instant. "Yes."

Leaning in to the point their noses almost touched, Rick asked his golden question. "Do you work for Alexander?"

"No."

The grey glow in his eyes intensified, causing her to feel like she was floating. Her wrists throbbed. The metal cut deeper into her skin, and a groan escaped her.

"Do you know Lucious?"

"Yes."

The vampire's fingers dug into her jaw, and she winced. "Where is he? What do you know about him?"

"Russian Roulette. He wanted to meet me to undo the link."

The silent partner sprang from his chair, knocking it over as he rushed to his feet. "What kind of link?"

Words failed her as she fought through her jumbled mix of emotions.

Rick jerked her head backwards and hissed, "Answer his question."

"I'm not sure. It was an accident."

In his frustration, Rick shook her. "I'll suck you dry if you don't give me some proper answers!"

His partner pulled out his phone, typing something on the smooth glass screen. "She doesn't have much information, but she can be useful in other ways."

Rick trailed his fingers along her arms, inching his way closer to her jugular. "Can I play then?"

His influence on her dropped, and Helena glared at the side of his greasy head.

"You can feed but nothing else. We may be able to fetch a decent price for her later."

Shivers ran through her when Rick faced her with a growing grin. There was little she could tell them about the link, so she couldn't use that information as leverage. She didn't know much about Lucious, Alexander, or their plans.

Helena groaned. Her headache transformed into a constant droning. Closing her eyes, her thoughts turned into a prayer for Michael to appear and tell her some good news. News, of any kind, was better than being with these monsters.

The leader glanced at them before his attention returned to his phone. "You have two minutes." He strode out of the room without another word.

With Rick's overseer gone, her smart remarks would lead her to an early grave. She eyed the closing door, willing the second man to return while her heart battered against her ribs.

Rick fished out a folding knife from his jeans' pocket. Light bled back into his irises as he teased the blade open.

Helena squeezed her eyes shut. She wasn't going to be his puppet again.

The cool metal tip touched her cheek. "If you don't open your eyes, I will cut this pretty little face of yours until you do."

She wavered. The stinging in her cheek hadn't gone away, and she wasn't keen on finding out what being chopped to pieces felt like. After all, he threatened with more than a paper cut. Clenching her teeth, she lifted her eyelids. One second of contact was enough to fall under his rule once more.

"Good. Don't move."

Her body refused any further movement, and she berated herself for being so weak.

One by one, the buttons of her blouse popped onto the concrete. With the last one gone; he pulled the material apart. His eyes twinkled as if he was a child, opening his Christmas present. He appraised her chest, and her heavy breathing filled the silence.

No matter how hard she fought his mental hold, she could do nothing. He grazed the knife across her pale skin. Blood rushed to the surface, trickling down her small breasts and staining her plain bra. He slid the dull side of the blade across her chest, entranced by the sweet perfume of her blood.

She was certain it couldn't be her lack of feminine curves that kept his attention.

His mental hold slipped, and she regained control of her limbs. When the knife touched her waist, her hips bucked. In one painful second, the sleek metal sank into her skin. An agonised scream escaped her, bouncing off the walls of the enclosed space.

The boss reappeared, shouting, "I thought I told you to feed and nothing else!"

Rick jerked the blade out. "This bitch is hard to control. Unless I'm looking right at her, she breaks the bloody hold."

"I don't give two shits about that," the man growled. "Leave her be until he comes for her. We must prepare."

Grumbling under his breath, Rick licked her blood off the blade and let out a satisfied groan. With a fleeting glance in her direction, he stashed his knife away and left with his partner.

Her mouth went dry. She studied the gash. Dark red tendrils descended her side. She rested her head against the wall, focusing on the chipped white ceiling to stop nausea from claiming her in its rising waves.

What am I going to do? No one knows where I am, she thought.

A silvery voice came from her right. "That's not true."

Her eyes darted to the side, and she grunted. A headache hit her like a hammer to the face. Her guardian angel stood three feet away with his angular features encased by his long, straight mane of golden hair.

She glared at him. "Where have you been?"

Michael bowed his head in apology. "I should have come sooner, I know. I wanted to find out who they contacted, so I followed—" He paused mid-sentence and rushed to her side. His hand hovered next her injuries. He gritted his teeth. "He hurt you."

"I'm alright, but can you—" She stopped short of asking him to untie her. This whole situation was too comical not to be in a TV drama. He was right there, but he couldn't save her. His ghostly presence forced him to become a mere observer in her realm. He couldn't help her in this predicament even if he wanted to. She knew it, he knew it, and the hurt on his face proved it.

Michael sighed. "He will come."

"And if I don't want to see him?"

"Helena, you know what will happen to you if you don't leave this place."

She arched a brow. "You called him names mere hours ago, what changed?"

"If he can get you out of here, I will adjust my terminology."

Helena snorted. *This day keeps on getting better and better.*

1

THE JOURNAL

Five days ago...

After sealing the final box, Helena stretched, relieving some of the dull pain in her lower back. She wiped the sweat off her forehead and surveyed her old bedroom. It was nothing more than an ocean of pale brown boxes and suitcases.

Double checking her things one last time, she closed her eyes. The sound of her beating heart enveloped her as happy memories merged with the familiar smell of rose scented candles on her windowsill. From downstairs, muffled voices of her mother and Richard floated up. This is where she grew up—a home she would miss.

Her fingers itched with anticipation and a smile tugged at her lips. Sitting on the edge of her bed, she reached under the pillow, retrieving a journal. She rested the two-inch-thick bulk on her lap. It had been on her mind ever since she rummaged through the dusty attic last night. Once she had laid eyes on the leather cover with carved fern leaves, she wanted to know the secrets held inside. Yet, priorities such as packing were paramount. If not done in time, she would be forced to listen to Laura's complaints until her ears bled.

She peeled back the jacket, revealing the first aged, yellow page. A list of names presented itself to her. They appeared handwritten by different people, possibly multiple owners of the journal. One name caught her attention. She skimmed through the strange diagrams and drawings of plants, recognising a few from her grandmother's garden when she was little. Faded, an archaic language filled the worn pages. She didn't even try pretending to comprehend it.

Beautiful curving letters sparked recognition and her hand froze. Her grandmother had been the last owner of this journal. Helena smiled at the bittersweet memory of them spending time together. The old woman read stories to her of witches battling against the dark forces in the world—tales she would never forget.

Her grip tightened. The calm, happy memories decayed as the tragic episodes unfolded in her mind once more. Her mother's version was simply a story of a loving grandmother turning into a crazed woman as she ended her life by setting fire to their home. Yet, those fragments of her childhood remained a knot she couldn't unravel no matter how hard she tried.

Michael's words sprang into her mind, making her jump. *"Sasha is finishing the preparations. You should change."*

"I'm busy," she replied.

"This is your last night here. That thing cannot be more important than spending time with your parents."

She slammed the journal shut. *"Fine!"*

Standing, she cast a fleeting glance to its hiding place under the pillow and walked to her wardrobe. A set of clothes she had prepared for tonight's dinner awaited her on the top shelf. She changed out of her sweat-tinged tracksuit and into a baggy T-shirt with a pair of jeans.

As she opened the door, a delicious aroma greeted her. Her grumbling stomach led her downstairs where she found an excessive amount of food spread out on the round oak table. Her mother went overboard with preparations as per usual. Nonetheless, Helena refrained from pointing it out and took in an appreciative whiff of the roasted chicken.

Her step-father's salt-and-pepper hair bobbed as he battled with a bottle of wine. His two large brows scrunched, creating an impression of a dark unibrow.

"Don't just stand there." Her mother's underlying Russian accent never failed to show when she was anxious. With a huff, she piled plates and cutlery in Helena's hands and rushed back into the kitchen.

Helena set the table mumbling, "Well, hello to you too, Mum."

As Richard settled the bottle on the lacquered surface, his shoulders slumped. The small cork got stuck halfway in the bottle's neck, unwilling to move in either direction.

"We haven't had champagne in a while," Helena said.

"You're right. I think Sasha bought one for the occasion."

When he left the room, her mother reappeared, and two brown eyes zeroed in on Helena. Her fingers raked through her short, platinum hair,

as she commenced the emotional bombardment. "Are you sure about moving out? You can stay with us until you finish studying or—"

Helena crossed her arms. "Mum, we had this discussion last week."

"Yes, we did."

She wanted to kick herself—upsetting her mother was not something she enjoyed. It would be easier for her to travel to and from college if she moved in with her friends. She glanced at the kitchen door. Richard was taking longer than he should have. So, she tapped her foot to try to melt the silence growing between them.

Her mother's transitory act of sadness disappeared, and she squared her shoulders, disapproval remained etched into the frown lines on her face.

"I know you're worried, Mum, but I'll be with Laura and Andrew."

Sasha relaxed her stance and hugged her daughter. "You are my only child. I can't help worrying."

Helena patted her back, unsure of what to say or do next. Thankfully, the heavens answered with a loud pop coming from the kitchen and a faint clinking of glasses.

Richard strolled into the room with a grin, revealing his pearly teeth as he held up an opened bottle of champagne and three champagne flutes.

"I take it you two are doing well?"

"We're fine," her mother replied. She pulled away from Helena, folded her apron over the back of her chair, and took her seat.

Following Sasha's example, Helena sat next to her mother.

Richard poured each of them a drink and joined them at the table. The instant he took a sip from his glass, he cringed.

Helena glanced at her thighs to hide her snort. She loved her stepfather. Even though he was busy as the Head of the Science Department, he remained a family man. He never complained and took care of her and her mother after her real father disappeared from their lives without so much as an explanation.

“Did you finish your registration?” Richard asked.

Helena raised her head. “Yeah, the second I got accepted.”

“I’m concerned by your choice. Becoming a doctor or a lawyer would pay better than a—” Her mother waved her hand in the air, searching for the right word. “I don’t even know what you can call your degree.”

Helena looked away. Her mother’s stony eyes held enough disappointment to drown an army. The silence continued to spread, and Helena clutched the cutlery. The metal warmed in her palms. “If I get bored, I will choose something else.”

“*Bored?*” Sasha’s voice rose.

Finished with the conversation, Helena switched her attention to her food.

Richard cleared his throat. “I heard there’ll be quite a downpour tomorrow. Hope it won’t hinder your move.”

Her mother gave Helena a fleeting glare as if telling her their conversation wasn’t over and faced her husband. “How bad will it be? I have to meet with the girls.”

Helena took the distraction as a reprieve and mouthed a “thank you” to Richard who winked in return.

With dinner out of the way, Helena busied herself stacking the dishes into the dishwasher.

“Can I talk to you for a sec?” Richard’s deep baritone made her jump. She nodded and straightened her back.

“First and foremost, you are always welcome here...” His eyes scanned the kitchen.

Helena looked around with him. When she didn’t notice anything out of the ordinary, she couldn’t help a smile creeping up. “Um, Richard?”

“Right, well, the second thing is that we love you. If there’s anything you need, we will be there to listen.” He faltered and spread his arms out, drawing her into an awkward bear hug. His lean body radiated warmth, and her heart swelled. “Call us if something happens or—”

“I think I got the point,” she mumbled into his shoulder.

He released her and rubbed the back of his neck. “You should rest. It’s an early start for everyone tomorrow.”

“I will.”

Once he left, she sped through putting the remaining dishes away while she analysed Richard’s behaviour. Was he worried about her moving out? He didn’t seem too concerned until now. So, why act like that all of a sudden? She shrugged and pressed the ‘on’ button on the dishwasher.

When she arrived at the top of the staircase, faint whispers from her mother's room caused her to halt. She sneaked across the hallway and pressed her back against the wall.

"...you tell her?" Sasha's agitated voice came first.

"I did. You shouldn't worry so much. She's doing great," Richard replied.

Her mother's voice rose. "What if something triggers her to remember?"

"Hush, Sasha. If she hears any of this, she will want to know more. All we can do is keep an eye on her. Restricting her will drive a wedge between you two, and I doubt that's what you want."

Helena clutched at her chest when the conversation ended. She staggered into her bedroom and dragged her feet until she collapsed on the bed. A sigh escaped her as she faced the ceiling. "What are they hiding from me?"

Michael materialised sitting next to her. He tracked her gaze to the phosphorescent stars that fascinated her in her childhood. "I remember the day your step-father glued them on. He fell off this bed twice."

Helena glanced at his broad back. "What are you implying?"

"Do you recall why he did that?"

"Richard said it was because I used to have nightmares when I was younger. Nightmares I don't remember having..."

"You were a child. Think nothing of it."

Helena sat bolt upright. "Are you serious? They're hiding something from me, something important. I can feel it."

Michael shifted, and their eyes met. She loved looking into the azure depths of his eyes. They were like two handpicked jewels. The longer you marvelled at their beauty, the less you wished to argue with the beholder. And, like real precious gems, they held many secrets.

He withheld a lot of information from her. Something was always missing out of the full picture—a forbidden piece of knowledge his angel bosses coveted. He wouldn't tell her anything regarding them either.

"Memory is a fragile thing, especially at a young age."

She glowered at him. "I have a good memory, Michael."

"Do not look at me with such murderous intent. I have answered your question."

Unable to help herself, she doubted his answer. Her childhood night terrors couldn't be a plausible explanation why her parents were nervous. But the real answer eluded her.

"You'll get wrinkles if you continue to brood over this."

She fell back onto the bed and sighed. "Okay, I'll let it go, for now."

Michael lay next to her without indenting the mattress. His lack of a physical body confused her to this day. "Rest. You have a lot to do tomorrow."

Not bothering to change into her pyjamas, she climbed under the covers and asked, "No matter what I choose, will you always support me?"

"Good night, Helena."

She ran a hairbrush through her hair for the second time that morning, and their eyes met in the mirror. At least, Michael refrained from popping in when she was in the shower or on the loo.

Her eyes narrowed. "What?"

"It's nothing."

"You've been staring at me since I woke up. Tell me what the problem is! Is it the hair?"

The corner of his lips upturned. "You are nervous."

Helena whipped around. "Any normal human being would be. It's a life-changing decision."

"What happened to the calm, collected, and analytical persona you like to portray?"

She folded her arms over her chest. "Anything you want to tell me?"

"If I had to say something, it would be that Andrew is at the front door."

She glared at her guardian angel and rushed downstairs. Tweeting birds filled her ears, and she grunted. The tacky doorbell was her mother's idea.

On the last step, she managed to avoid tripping over her feet by a mere millimetre. Between ragged breaths, she swung the door open and grinned at her soon-to-be roommate. "So, how do you want to do this?"

Andrew's smile faltered. He tapped his chin with his index finger. "Hum, getting indoors should be my primary task." He didn't wait for

her response and stepped inside with a single long stride. "And now we move stuff."

Helena rolled her eyes. "Very funny. I meant is there any *particular* way we get my things over to the new place?"

"Don't worry, Thorn, all will be revealed in time."

She ignored the annoying nickname her friends gave her in school and peered around him. In her driveway, an unfamiliar chalk-white minivan broke the view of the park beyond.

"Is that yours?" she asked.

"Dad lent me one of his company cars for a day. He specifically told me not to crash it, so I hope your things won't weigh down the vehicle."

Helena hid her irritation behind a false smile. She signalled for him to accompany her. "Let's get on with it."

"Let's get on with it, *please*."

Less than amused, she stared at him.

"Spoilsport." He ascended the stairs.

They paused at the bedroom door, and he said, "I bet everything in there is pink and frilly."

"The more you talk, the more rubbish comes out of the big hole you call a mouth."

He clasped his hand over his chest in a dramatic manner. "You wound me dearly, Thorn."

With a shake of her head, Helena pushed past him, opening the door.

Andrew assessed the room, his expression betraying a touch of disappointment.

She smirked. "No pinks and no frills."

"Baggy clothes, purple hair, and a dull bedroom... How are you still a girl?"

"Uh-uh."

Until now, Andrew and Laura had kept the details of their new home a secret. They wanted to surprise her, and that she was. Her eyes widened at the sight of the red-brick apartment block that towered over them. To her, it appeared like a fortress. Perhaps having a castle wasn't a bad thing, especially when they could look out those oversized windows at the cityscape.

"This is the place?" she asked.

Andrew watched her with a hint of amusement. "Do you like it?"

She held back an urge to bounce on the spot, so she schooled her face into slight disinterest. "Until I see the inside, it's hard to judge."

"Don't worry, your highness, we chose it with you in mind."

She shot him a piercing glare, and he stuck out his tongue. In that moment, she questioned her decision to move in with her two best friends.

Andrew opened the glass door for her and ushered her inside. This allowed her to assess the simple white lobby. A chubby guard who

manned the desk near the lift ignored them as they approached. In case something happened, she didn't expect him to be of any help.

"Earth to Thorn." Andrew's face appeared a few inches away from hers. The smell of his fresh aftershave filled her nostrils while his forest-green eyes focused on her. "Do you want to check the place out or not?"

Her cheeks warmed. Desperate to avoid further embarrassment, she marched to the lifts where she mashed the button until the doors slid open, and they entered the metal confinement.

With a light laugh, he pressed the button on the panel, and they moved.

On the fifth floor, moss-green carpet and white-walled interior surrounded them. The morning sun spilt into the corridor in the shades of blue. Upon arrival at their apartment, Andrew swiped a key card above the handle.

Helena set foot in the hallway. Her running shoes squeaked along the polished hardwood flooring. With each step, her eyes widened as she advanced into a spacious living room. Two leather loveseat sofas greeted them with a large LED television on the wall. Photographs of the city landmarks and famous streets littered the walls. She even liked the look of the small ceramic ballerina on top of the coffee table.

"Just how much is the rent for this place?" Helena asked, eyeing the grand interior. It was impossible to get a spacious apartment in Dublin without forking out a tonne of money.

"Laura's dad owns the whole building, and since he loves his daughter dearly...let's say he gave us the place at an affordable rate."

Helena raised a brow, doubting his answer.

With stealthy steps, Laura emerged behind them and slapped Helena on the shoulders. "Glad you made it. Where's your stuff?"

While Helena calmed her pounding heart, Andrew patted Laura on the head, messing with her strawberry-blonde curls.

Laura Quinn wasn't tall at five-foot-four, but what she lacked in height she made up for in personality. An argument with her was like fighting naked and alone against a horde of savages. Helena recalled a time when they debated who would win a local singing contest. Her loss turned into an escapade to bleach and dye her hair purple during a sleepover.

"I thought it would be best to get you in on the action," Andrew said.

Laura pouted. "My arms ache from bringing my stuff here since you" — she poked his chest with her index finger — "didn't bother to help me."

Andrew raised his hands in defence. "Hey, I went to collect Thorn. She doesn't have a car, unlike you. I bet if you wanted help, you'd make the security guard your man-slave."

"Very funny, and he's not my type."

Helena rubbed her eyes. These two had too much energy, and it wasn't even ten in the morning. "I'll need the key card and the car keys."

"Don't worry, Thorn, I'm not going to abandon you and make you carry your *extremely* heavy boxes alone," Andrew said.

Laura crossed her arms. "*Fine*, jeez, I'll help."

"Brilliant. The more the merrier." Helena started for the door, and Laura stepped in her way.

“Forgot to ask you, how’s job hunting going? Do you want any help?”

“I’ll manage.”

“Alright, come to me when you’re stuck. Oh, and I’ll show you upstairs while Andrew goes to get your stuff.” Laura didn’t wait for the reply and half-dragged Helena up the metal staircase.

“Hey, who’s going to lend me a hand?” Andrew shouted after them.

Laura bent over the bannister. “We will join you soon enough. First, I’m going to show Helena her room.”

“Right and this has nothing to do with you being too lazy to help. So, you’re making her slack off, too?”

“We’ll be there in a few,” Laura yelled back. She dragged Helena away, pushing her into a room on the left. “What do you think?”

Helena’s heart almost melted from happiness. Burgundy walls encompassed them in a well-lit bedroom. Pale-blue sheets covered the double bed that sat between two Butternut bedside tables. The furniture wasn’t what she found to be the best feature of the room. From the window, she caught a glimpse of the Irish Sea and let out a soft sigh.

“I knew you’d appreciate it. I had to fight my inner instinct to give this room to you.”

“This scenery is amazing, but why?”

Laura winked. “You can view this as a bribe.”

Helena knew what was coming next. Laura was scheming something, and this was an intricate attempt to butter her up with a pretend grand gesture of selflessness. She waited until her friend drew in a breath.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, Hel, but what do you think of Andrew?”

Helena quirked a brow. She expected something regarding household chores or helping Laura with her college assignments. This was unexpected.

“He’s a friend?”

Laura tapped her foot on the soft black carpet. “I mean as a guy. Do you see him as a member of the opposite sex at least?”

Helena’s brows drew into a slight frown. “What are you getting at?”

“Okay.” Laura rolled her shoulders as if preparing for a fight. “It surprised me when he said this. Like, who would have thought, right? And I, as the best pal to both of you, think this might be a good thing. At first, I had some apprehensions on the subject. Do you know what I’m trying to say?”

Helena’s frown deepened. “Can you speak in concise sentences and a bit slower?”

“Jesus, Hel, you’re fast when it comes to anything other than romance. Basically, Andrew asked me if you liked him.”

“Oh...” She hadn’t considered such an option. Andrew couldn’t be interested in her. Sure, he teased her a lot, and called her by her nickname she fought to ignore every time it reached her ears. The idea of dating him seemed as alien to her as enjoying sports. Was there an upside? She heard enough stories about friends falling out after starting a relationship. This bothered her.

“Alright, I can see you’ve gone into your own little world,” Laura said.

“I don’t know how to answer you. I mean, I—”

“Never thought about it.”

Helena nodded.

“Well, give it a think. There’s still time. As for us, we best go and help him out with your stuff or he will go into a complainathon.”

Helena snorted. “I thought that’s what you do.”

“I will remember that, *Thorn*. Now, let’s do this.”

Around eight, instead of waiting for the Chinese takeaway to arrive, Helena went to her room. The splendid evening view from her window went unnoticed as she switched on the bedside table lamp.

Finally, some peace and quiet, she thought and reached into her suitcase for the journal.

Helena flicked through its pages, fascinated by the detail of the drawings, until she found the familiar handwriting and launched into reading the Russian text. Engrossed in the material, she missed the loud knocking on her door. When it opened, she slammed the journal shut and swept it under her pillow.

“What’s wrong?” she asked Laura.

“The food has arrived. I called and knocked but—” Laura pushed her way into the room and closed the door behind her. “What were you reading?”

Helena thought of a response, something that wouldn't make Laura think she was insane for leafing through strange notebooks. "Just something I found in the attic the other day."

Laura's lips formed into a sly smile. "I bet your mum's romantic escapades are written in it."

Laura was a good friend, but sometimes, her curiosity could lead her to do things that invaded the privacy of others. Helena knew Laura wouldn't be able to read it. That alone wouldn't stop her. With the internet and online software, anything could be translated. So, Helena played along. "It's embarrassing."

"I knew it!" Laura strode over, her hand outstretched towards where the journal lay.

Helena shot up; her hands clamped on Laura's shoulders. "The food will get cold."

"Fine, but you're going to tell me the dirty details later."

"Sure." She pushed her friend out of the room and called out to Michael with her mind.

He replied in an instant. "*Has something happened? You sound upset.*"

"*We're going to have to talk about what's inside that journal, and soon.*"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"Lover of cake, life, and writing."

May Freighter is an internationally bestselling author from Dublin, Ireland. She writes Urban Fantasy, Paranormal Romance, and Sci-Fi mysteries that will keep you entertained, mystified, and hopefully craving more. Her only pets are cacti. They're the only things that survived. It may be too dangerous to entrust her with an animal while she's engrossed in writing.

On sunny, rainy, and overcast days, she spends her time with her fictional friends, putting them through dangerous adventures while wishing them the best of luck. Her hobbies are photography, drawing, and plotting different ways of characters' demise.

You can find her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or her [website](#) for more information!

DEDICATION

To my loved ones.

Thank you for always being there and supporting me in my darkest hours.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank everyone who helped put this book together, especially C. J. Laurence, Jean Wallace, and Anna Santos. You guys are simply the loveliest people I know!

Big thanks to everyone who suffered with the early drafts of this book: M. Belford, K. Manning, E. Hoffman, S. McEvoy, E. McGinnity, L. M. Lawrence, D. Wright, H. Zapolukh, I. Galvez, A. Grey, K. Wynn.

Lastly, massive thanks to everyone on my launch team: Y. Arcangel, L. Adams, M. Greenhill, J. Rubin, A.I. Diaz, L.W. Stuart, R.S. Kovach, M. Appkova, A. Simons, G. Cabezut, F. Loqman, N. Burger, S.G. Benson, K. Oyatedor, E. Hyder, J. Lyons, K.A. Blount, T. Archer, S. Royal, L. Santiago, J. Stark, A. Santos, R.J. Cieplinski, T. Oja, D. Goelz, K. Jacques, I. Galvez, R.C. Kisiel, C. McDonnell, M. Hayes, S. Mason, P. Patel, M. Appkova, M. Sorierro.