



BOOK TWO
CAT & MOUSE
DUET

HUNTING
ADELINE

NYT & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

H.D. CARLTON

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*To my anxiety,
Because you really tried me on this one and I kicked your ass anyway.*

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IMPORTANT NOTE:

As some of you may know, the first book in this duet, Haunting Adeline, was banned due to the warnings. But it is so necessary to have one. These are also available on my website.

This book contains very dark triggering situations, particularly a four letter one that starts with R and ends with E, though NOT between the main characters. Is that creative enough, 'Zon? These scenes can be detailed, so *please* proceed with caution. There is also graphic violence, sexual assault, explicit sexual situations, human trafficking, PTSD, and very particular kinks such as blood play, knife play, degradation, and somnophilia.

This book is **significantly** darker than the first. Please take these warnings seriously.
Your mental health matters.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

If you are expecting a quick reunion, then this book isn't for you.
Don't worry, there's not any less spice.

PLAYLIST

Story of the Year- Miracle
Sophie Simmons- Black Mirror
Klergy- No Rest for the Wicked
gavn!- Crazy
Bad Omens- The Death of Peace of Mind
A.A. Bondy- Skull & Bones
Echos- Saints
Jacqui Siu- Danger
MJ Cole & Freya Ridings- Waking Up
Skillet- Monster
Zero 9:36- Tragedy
Skylar Grey (feat. Eminem)- Kill for You
Aaron Camper- Hypnotizing
Gavin Haley- Sad Season
Glimmer of Blooms- Can't Get You Out of My Head
Ghostly Kisses- Spellbound
Echos- Guest Room
Red- Let It Burn

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PART I

Let me go. Let me go. Let me go.
Pleasepleaseplease PLEASE

PLEASE PLEASE
PLEASE

FUCKING
GET ME
GO

Chapter 1

The Diamond

Smell. The first of my senses to trickle in. I wish it were anything else because I'm instantly overwhelmed by the scent of body odor, spiced cologne, and what can only be described as the stench of evil incarnate.

And then my sixth sense seeps in, whispering notes of warning and urgency.

I'm in danger.

Those notes turn into a song full of screeching and loud noises, filling my body with heart-wrenching panic. Adrenaline spikes, and just barely do I have enough sense to remain as quiet as possible.

Slowly cracking open my crusted eyes, I'm greeted by complete darkness. It takes a second to process that there's a blindfold strapped around my head.

Then, the blissful numbness I awoke in crumbles, and I lose my breath when all-consuming pain filters in, engulfing my body in absolute agony.

God, is this what being alive feels like? It can't be death. I'd be at peace if it were. And I may have fallen for a stalker, but I'll be damned if I didn't land a spot within heaven's gates.

I fucking earned that shit.

Racking my brain, I try to think past the pain and remember what the fuck happened to me. Vaguely, I recall text messages from Daya asking me to come over. The urgency I felt when she wasn't answering my calls. Getting in my car, headlights, and panicking, being jerked forward, and then nothing.

And now I'm here... wherever that is. But not somewhere safe.

Christ, was that even Daya texting me? Did something happen to her too?

That possibility sends another wave of panic crashing through me. Scenarios curtail and evolve until I'm a mass of anxiety and desperation. She could be hurt or in serious trouble.

Fuck—I'm hurt and in serious trouble, and I've no idea how the fuck I'm going to get out of it.

My breathing is escalating further, and my heart is beating so heavily, it physically hurts as it slams against my chest. It takes what little strength I have left to keep silent.

Where the fuck am I?

Where's Zade?

Quiet, dull voices are next, muffled by the noise in my ears but steadily growing louder. I strain my ears, trying to hear over the beat of my heart and the pain swelling in my body like a water balloon.

Somehow the agony has a voice too, and it's fucking loud.

"Z will be looking for her," one man says quietly. "But we'll be fine once we get to Garrison's and chuck the van. We'll get her there quickly."

A particular memory knocks me over the head, flashes of being dragged out of my car and the residual pain of glass and metal biting through my skin. It explains why my back is on fire.

I've been fucking kidnapped—*obviously*. This had to have been the Society's doing. Zade had said they targeted me, and I know he had guards stationed outside of Parsons Manor. They must have used Daya to draw me out, which means there's a high chance she's been taken, too.

Fuck, I'm an idiot.

I didn't even stop to consider it could be a trap when Daya wasn't answering the phone. I was so intent on getting to her in case she was hurt or in trouble that it wasn't even a consideration to call Zade. Not only could it have saved me, but it also could have saved Daya, too.

I squeeze my eyes shut as a sob crawls up my throat. A tear slips through my lashes, and my chest shakes with exertion, trying not to break down. This was my own damn fault.

Zade warned me countless times they were after me, and the first trap they set, I walked right into.

You're such an idiot, Addie. Such a fucking idiot.

"You actually think we'll be able to hide her from him? It's fucking Z, man," another man responds, this one with a slight Hispanic accent.

"We're just giving the Society what they asked for. Which one are you more afraid of? Them or Z?"

Fuck, it *was* the goddamn Society. I knew it, but hearing it confirmed only sends a fresh dose of adrenaline into my system.

I don't know why I got tossed into this shit, but they need to take me out of this fucked-up salad of depravity; I don't belong here. I belong in a salad full of fruits and vegetables. Healthy things that don't run me off the road and enslave me.

The second man mutters, "I'd prefer not to fucking choose."

It sounds like a hand slapping someone's shoulder or back as if to reassure him. "Too bad you don't have a choice, Rio. Doesn't matter. This girl right here is worth millions. I mean, we got a fucking diamond here. Just imagine it, dude—Z's girl, the one and only, up on an auction stage. You know how many enemies he has? People will be frothing at the mouth to

make his girl their little toy. I'll get my cut from Max, and the Society will compensate you, I'm sure. We'll be living fucking lavishly." He lets out a burst of hyena-like laughter. "I can buy my own goddamn private island after the money goes through!"

A shot of anger pumps into me at the man's callous words, speaking of me like I'm a house up for sale.

"Your idea of comfort must be different from mine. We'll have to go into hiding alongside her. At least while Z is still alive," the second man—Rio—responds. His name sounds familiar, and I think I faintly remember someone yelling his name after they ran me off the road.

"Don't worry, man. We'll get a head start with the ritual happening tonight, and I'm sure the Society will take out Z, one way or another. They'll protect us."

A derisive snort is the only response the first man gets.

Jesus Christ, I really am in deep trouble. Tears brim the corners of my eyes, and try as I might, no amount of trash talking keeps them from overflowing like rivers past the blindfold.

I barely manage to wrangle down the sob that's still threatening to spill, clawing its way up to the inside of my teeth.

Deep breaths, Addie. What did Zade teach you?

It takes several moments to collect my thoughts, but eventually, his voice filters in.

Leave evidence.

Gritting my teeth against the pain, I slowly grip strands of my hair and tug until they break free. The sharp pinpricks are inconsequential compared to the rest of my body.

I keep my movements minimal and slow. With the blindfold on, I've no idea if they can see me well. One movement out of the corner of their eye can alert them.

I wiggle my fingers until the strands loosen and fall away.

Just as I'm reaching for more hair, they hit a particular brutal bump in the road, and I can't keep the yelp from slipping free.

The pair hadn't been talking at that moment, but it felt like a crowded room just went deathly silent in a matter of seconds.

"Welcome to the land of the living, sweetheart," one of the men croons. It's the first guy who had referred to me as a diamond.

"Where are you taking me?" I ask, my voice raspy and hoarse.

"To your new home—well, temporary home," he corrects. "Whoever pays the most will provide you with your forever home." He chuckles as if I'm a dog about to be adopted into a loving family.

“Great,” I croak. “Sounds like I’ve hit the jackpot.”

One of them laughs humorlessly, but it sounds like Rio this time. “Hold on tight to that humor, baby girl. You’re going to need it for where you’re going.”

Before I can open my mouth to respond, I feel a prick in my arm, followed by a burning sensation spreading throughout my veins.

I suck in a sharp breath. And it happens to be the last breath I take before darkness descends.



“Her vitals are unstable, and her blood pressure is dropping. We need to get her an IV.”

I stir; the unfamiliar voice distorted beneath the ringing in my ears.

Agony blazes in every inch of my body, but it feels like I’m underwater, fighting to get to the surface yet kicking away from it because I just know the pain will only intensify. I’m encased in a shroud of fire, flames licking at my nerve endings, and the closer I get to consciousness, the brighter the flare.

There’s a tiny prick in my arm, followed by muffled voices coming from different directions.

“Dislocated shoulder, head trauma, lacerations throughout her body.” The man’s voice fades out before cutting back in, a harsh shout that travels up my spine.

“Goddammit, Rio, this isn’t a fucking hospital where I have the equipment I need. She could have internal bleeding right now, for all I know.”

“Come on, man, she was fine just a bit ago,” another answers, a note of concern in his tone. Rio’s companion, I think.

“*Fine?* I have no way of knowing what kind of damage she took. It’s evident she hit her head. She could be hemorrhaging and potentially die in seconds. You gonna find me a CT scanner?” When he’s met with silence, a muttered, “Thought so,” follows.

Darkness licks at the edge of my consciousness, threatening to drag me back under. I moan, and probing fingers pry my eyes open. A bright light flashes in them, but I hardly notice.

“Miss, can you tell me what hurts?”

An older man replaces the light, his face crowding over me. His image is blurry, but I can make out tufts of gray hair, a bushy mustache, and pale blue

eyes.

I part my lips, but my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

Jesus, what did they inject me with? Whatever it was, it's making me disoriented and dizzy.

"I know you're in a lot of pain right now, but I need you to tell me what hurts."

Everything. Everything fucking hurts.

"My... shoulder," I croak out finally. "My head."

"Anywhere else? Your chest or stomach?"

"Back," I gasp, remembering once more being dragged out of my car. My back feels as if it's been shredded with a cheese grater.

"That all?" he presses.

I nod my head, the incessant questions exhausting. A million other places hurt, too, but my energy is depleted, and I'm so very tired.

"I'm going to put you under anesthesia and get you fixed up, okay?"

Clarity surfaces over my surroundings, and the man's facial features sharpen. Along with another man standing behind him, who's shifting on his feet and watching us.

Time to go to sleep, princess.

Dark bottomless eyes and a wicked grin—Rio. He's the one who had dragged me out of the car. Flashes of that conversation elude me, but I know there was more to it. I can't think past the relentless pounding in my skull.

Just as my eyes were beginning to focus, my vision blurs once more, and my eyelids grow heavy. I can't fight the deep pull to just close my eyes.

I don't want to fight it. Not when it'll take me away from the pain.



Addie, baby, I need you to fight for me, okay? I need you to survive until I get to you.

"How badly is she damaged?"

The question stirs me out of the endless pit I've been drifting in, where only an illusion of Zade's voice lives. It's not real—his voice isn't actually there. But it feels so real. So soothing, that I fight to stay where I can hear him.

"How badly do you think? You ran her off the road."

Alongside the angry response is a swell of dull pain pulsing throughout my body. I hear a sigh, and then the older man continues.

"She'll have a few scars along her back from the glass. You're lucky they were fairly clean, so the scarring won't be too terrible."

"That'll decrease her value," a voice mutters, too low to discern who said it.

"Shut the fuck up, you're getting paid regardless. The fuck you care for?"

"Uh, maybe because your dumbass mistake is risking my *life*? Jesus, Rio, I knew she was banged up but not *this* bad."

Whatever Rio was going to say, it's cut off by the unfamiliar voice—the one who must be the doctor.

"She has thirty stitches between the two larger lacerations because she was dragged across sharp metal and glass. You couldn't have expected that not to cause permanent damage," he says, clearly taking Rio's companion's side.

"*Goddammit*, Rio. You do realize that might be coming out of my fucking pocket, right? I asked for your help, not for you to fuck it all up for me."

"How the fuck did you expect me to get her out, huh? Lift the car like I'm fucking Superman and roll it off so I can carry her out like some hero?" Rio spits.

My chest seizes. The roughness of his tone feels like scratching nails on a chalkboard. I've awoken to *that* damn voice too many times now. And each time is a stark reminder that I've been pulled down into a nightmare and haven't found my way out yet.

"If you hadn't hit the car so fucking hard, none of this would be happening, you piece of shit."

"If *you* hadn't been so fucking doped up and screaming in my ear, then you could've been the fucking driver like you were *supposed to be*."

"Gentlemen, let's take a breather. She's awake. Her blood pressure is rising."

My breath stills, but I don't bother pretending. Slowly, I open my eyes to see three men surrounding me, staring at me as if I'm a lab rat in an experiment.

A very fucking horrible experiment.

My eyes clash with a dark pair first. Nearly black and lifeless from the lack of warmth. Tattoos cover his light brown skin, the laurel leaves on either side of his throat snagging my attention first. He's wearing a zipped-up leather jacket, but black ink swirls on his hands and up to each of his fingers, indicating he's most likely covered in them. He has sharp angular features, arched thick brows, along with a scar cutting through the side of his closely

cropped black hair, completing his near-feral appearance. He'd be attractive if he didn't look like he'd rather see me dead.

My gaze moves to the man next to him; he's grungy-looking with scabs on his face from apparent drug use. A mop of greasy hair covered by a backward ball cap, a dirty wife-beater, and pants too big. I recognize him as the other man who kidnapped me.

Finally, I look over to the third man—who I assume to be a doctor. Gray hair, blue eyes, a bushy mustache, and wrinkles disturbing the otherwise smooth expression on his face. His stare is softer, matching the tenor in which he speaks. But something is off about him. A deep, penetrating vibe that I can't quite place.

I look away, a cold tremor settling deep in the marrow of my bones. The dull, throbbing pain is growing sharper but still not nearly as potent compared to when I awoke in that van. Whatever painkillers they pumped into my system must be fading, and I'm not above begging for more.

All of my muscles ache so profoundly that I feel as if a hard shell has molded around my bones. I'm incredibly stiff, and every movement twinges.

Breathing through the aches, I glance around. I'm in a darkened, white room. It's... sterile in here. Not clean like a hospital, which is where I expected to be, but we're not in a dungeon, either.

I'm not sure why I even expected that.

Dirty white walls, concrete flooring, and silver cabinets line nearly every wall in the room. Next to the hospital bed is a large metal table with a bowl and various instruments laid out on a bloody cloth.

Different sorts of machines are placed throughout the room. While I don't recognize most of them, the beeping device next to me monitoring my vitals is familiar, along with the IV that leads directly into my arm.

The doctor grabs a Styrofoam cup from the table next to my bed and hands it to me.

"Drink slowly," he instructs.

Shakily, I grab the cup and sip on it. The cold water feels like dumping ice on a burn. Painfully relieving.

Scratchy, white blankets cover me up to my waist, and when I look down, I notice I'm in nothing but a light blue gown.

Somehow, that's the worst part. They can see the evidence of just how cold it is in here.

Noticing where my eyes are trained, the doctor speaks up. "I do apologize for your clothing. I had to cut them off of you so I could properly treat you and assess the damage you've suffered."

"You can thank Rio for that," the grungy man mutters under his breath. Plenty loud enough for me to pick up on through the near-constant fear steadily swirling in my bloodstream.

"Shut the fuck up, Rick," Rio snaps back, his accent deepening with fury. "Or I will kill you myself, and unlike your precious diamond, no one will miss you."

This... this is a terror unlike anything I've ever felt before. It's nothing like the fear Zade invoked in me, and definitely not a cheap thrill I get from haunted houses and scary movies. This is what it feels like when you're well and truly fucked.

The monitor betrays my body, the beeping increasing until the doctor glances at it with concern.

I scarcely remember the events after they sent my car rolling. However, I do vaguely recall Rio's face hovering over me after he dragged me out of the car, his mouth moving but his words evading me. All except six.

Time to go to sleep, princess.

"Where am I?" I whisper and then cough, clearing some of the phlegm from my throat.

"At the fucking Ritz-Carlton, princess. Where do you think?" Rio snaps, his features still tight with anger.

Rick looks at him with an accusatory expression on his pock-marked face, but otherwise, he keeps his mouth shut, clearly taking Rio's threat seriously.

It's obvious Rio fucked up, and there's a part of me that hopes they kill him for it.

"My name is Dr. Garrison," the gray-haired man introduces, deliberately stepping in front of Rio. Swallowing, I stay silent. If the creep expects me to give him my name as if we're in a fucking interview, then he can shove the IV pole up his ass.

"How are you feeling?" he asks, taking a step closer. I bristle, and before I can tell him precisely what I'm feeling, he powers on, seeming to sense my incoming smart-ass response. "I imagine a headache. Any nausea?"

I tighten my lips. Probably for the best that he diverted the questioning. My mouth is only going to get me killed if I let it run wild.

I'm not going to get away with that like I did with Zade—though I'd still consider 'getting away with it' subjective. Even when he first made himself known and terrified the absolute shit out of me, there was always an odd sense of security in pushing his buttons, as if deep down, I knew Zade would never truly hurt me. Something that only makes sense now that he's managed to worm his way into my life.

The man is incredibly dangerous... to everyone else but me. Even when he had a loaded gun pointed in my direction and used it for more than just a weapon.

But these men? Not only would they hurt me, but they would kill me, too.

"Nausea," I clip, my voice still hoarse. Dr. Garrison begins fiddling with the IV, replacing the empty fluid bag with a new one. I hope it's morphine.

I drain the rest of the water in my cup, yet it does little to acquiesce the perpetual dryness in my throat. No matter how many times I lick my chapped lips, there's never enough moisture.

"You have a pretty nasty concussion. Which means we'll have to monitor you closely. I want to ensure you receive no further damage." He shoots the pair a nasty look, and I get the feeling this is something they already argued over.

My mouth moves on autopilot, opening and readying to tell him not to waste his time—the two other men will ensure that my body endures plenty of more damage.

Sensing my intent, Rio snips, "I dare you." His voice is stern and threatening, drawing my attention to him. "Your pussy will still work regardless, even if you've got brain damage."

My mouth snaps closed, and I avert my gaze back to Dr. Garrison. His lips flatten into a white line, seemingly not impressed with Rio's crude words.

Keep your mouth shut, Addie. We just went over this, dumbass.

"You've experienced extensive trauma, and despite what anyone says—" he gives Rio a nasty look— "we need you in tip-top shape."

They need me in shape so that I will be worth something. But I don't argue, not when it benefits me. Healing means gaining the energy to flee.

Licking my lips, I ask, "What day is it?"

"You really think that's important?" Rick barks. "You don't get to ask questions."

I struggle not to mouth back. My lips tremble with the urge to impart nasty, hateful words to spew past them. But I manage to refrain.

"It's Thursday," Dr. Garrison answers anyway, ignoring the filthy look from the grungy man.

Thursday...

It's been five days already since the car accident.

Zade would be looking for me by now. Most likely out of his mind and on a rampage... Jesus, he's probably going to kill a lot of people. No, he *definitely* is. And when a grin begins to form, I know that man has well and truly corrupted me.