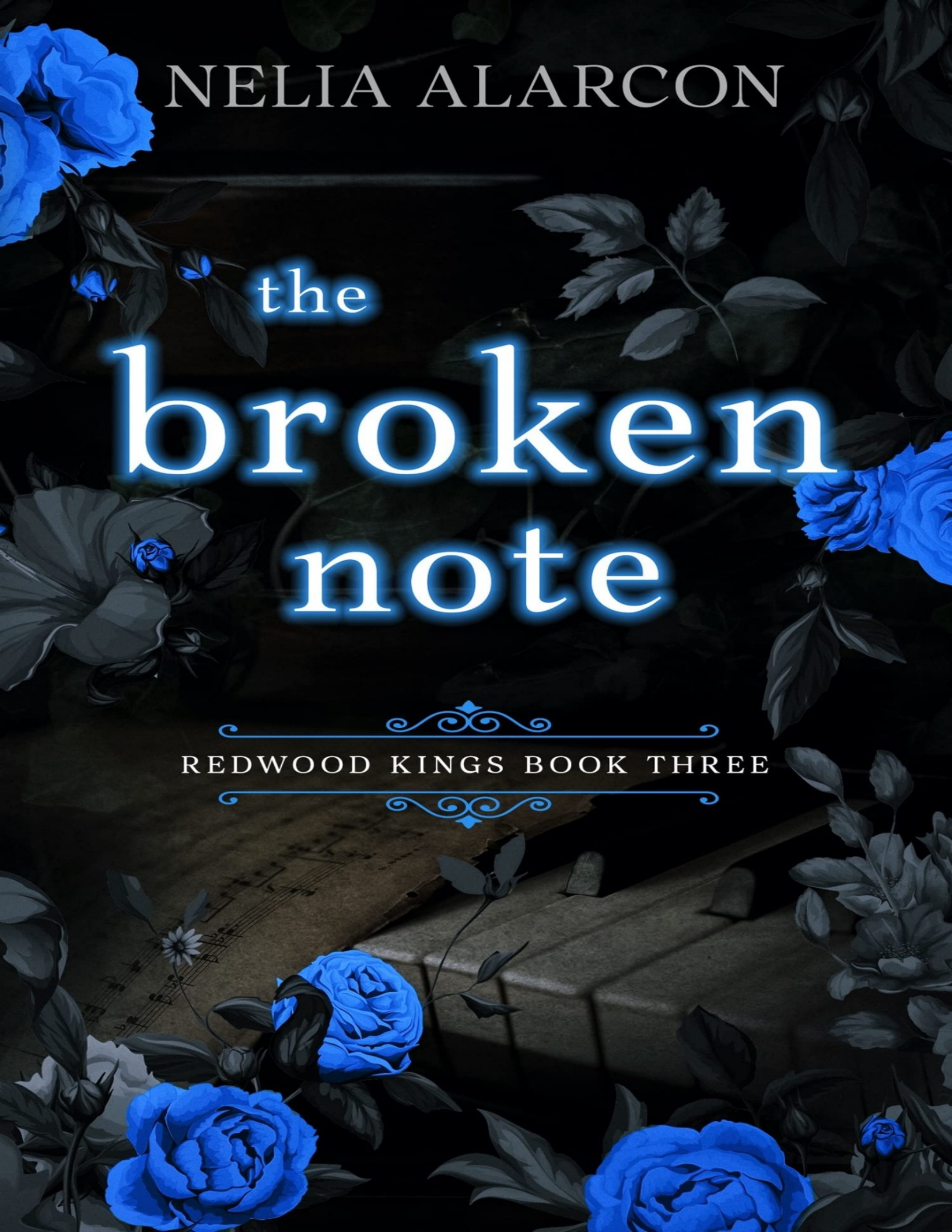




NELIA ALARCON

the
broken
note

REDWOOD KINGS BOOK THREE

THE BROKEN NOTE

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A Word From The Author

Also by Nelia Alarcon

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WRITTEN BY NELIA ALARCON

THE REDWOOD KINGS Series

The Darkest Note

The Ruthless Note

The Broken Note

The Plutonian Warrior's Series

The Alien Warrior's Mate

The Alien Warrior's Woman

The Alien Warrior's Heart

The Alien Warrior's Vow

Mates Of The Plutonians

Made For The Alien Warrior

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This cruel king won't stop until he makes a queen of me.

Dutch Cross is rich, powerful, and possessive.

I gave him too much of me and now it's too late to run.

Yet it's what I do.

Far, far from the villain of the story.

But the thing about villains is...

They always drag you back to the dark.

And when a secret that should have stayed buried rises from the grave, I have no choice but to join hands with the enemy.

Lust.

Desire.

Deception.

The very boy who destroyed me is now my only salvation.

There are more beasts at Redwood than I can count.

But I didn't fight my way into this elite world just to leave with nothing.

I've been broken into something stronger and I have Redwood's cruel prince in the palm of my hand.

They think I'm weak and powerless? Fine.

I'll bend all the monsters to my will and show Redwood what a queen looks like.

CHAPTER ONE

CADENCE

“Mom.”

The name slips past my lips with a hint of fear and a swell of nausea. My fingers tighten on the door jamb—the one Hunter helped me switch a couple weekends ago.

The fixed lock. The barred exit. The change that lured mom out of the shadows.

If I’d known, I probably wouldn’t have made the effort.

“Daughter.” Mom tilts her head.

The living room falls into a deeper quiet as she stares at me. Brown eyes. Brown hair. Lips a dark red—the color of dried blood. Like the scabs I used to pick at obsessively when I was a child.

My skin starts itching.

I hear the rising notes.

D# major.

The saddest key in music.

The perfect background for mom’s haunting.

My mother rises from the couch. Always with that regal manner, even though we’re dirt poor and destitute.

She used to be beautiful. A pageant queen, mom always boasted. *I won the Miss Teen Pageant.*

One of her many stories.

Addicts are allergic to the truth.

What she won was the genetic lottery. But like all lottery winners who foolishly splurge their winnings and end up worse than before, mom's beauty is desperate. Like a fraying rope, tying together what little appeal her face and painfully thin body have left to give.

Under the weight of her bad decisions, the cracks always show. Makeup and a nice smile can't hide it.

"What are you doing here?" I snap. Despite my heated tone, my nail scratches against the glossy paint of the doorknob. The heel of my pumps slap the floor as my knee bounces uncontrollably.

"I found this under your bed." Mom whips up two fingers. Perched between them is a golden condom.

My heart slaps hard against my ribs.

A flood of images rush my mind.

Dutch with amber eyes burning as he growled, *'Take off your clothes and spread your legs.'*

Dutch cradling my face and kissing me. *'You're doing great, Cadey. Just relax, baby. You feel so good'.*

Dutch pushing into me and filling me with an explosion of pain and pleasure. So much I thought I'd burst.

My muscles coil and I subconsciously brush my hand against my school skirt, right over the deepest bruise on my hip. The strength of his hands when he'd gripped me left marks all over my body. Marks that soaked right through to my soul.

Mom arches an eyebrow. "I see." A slow, smug grin spreads across her face. "Good for you, Cadey. I thought you'd be a square all your life. You make me proud."

It's instant the way her words crush the memories. Twist and turn them into something crude. Ugly. Despicable.

Everything beautiful falls to ruin in her tainted hands. I shouldn't have expected this to be different. Yet all I want to do is shower until my skin bleeds.

"Was it your first time?"

My eyes lift to hers.

Can't she see? Can't she tell that I'm uncomfortable? That I'm angry? That I'm bleeding inside?

Or does she see and not care?

I've always wondered.

Is she that oblivious or is she that evil?

Mom's brown eyes light up with excitement. She used to look at me like that when payday rolled around and she had her dealer on standby.

"Oh, I can tell it was painful. Poor thing. It's always horrible the first time. Especially if he doesn't know how to please a woman. Next time will be better. Once you know what you like—"

"I told you not to come back here," I hiss.

Mom's spiel dies a violent death.

She goes still and a flash of something cruel passes through her eyes. In a blink, it's gone and she's back to her smiley self.

"Why wouldn't I come here? This is my house."

"*Your* house?" I scoff. "Rick and I are the ones paying rent and keeping the lights on. What have you done, mom?"

"Cadey—"

I cut her off with a sharp gesture. "I let you stay the weekend because Viola wasn't home. It's Monday. School will be over soon. I don't want her to see you."

"Oh, loosen up, Cadey." Mom tsks. "I let you yell at me all you wanted this weekend. Are you still not over it?"

"*Over it?*" My eyes bulge.

I shouldn't let her needle me. I should brush her off and let it go. But she's an expert at digging under the skin. She pushes at the cuts hidden deep

inside. It's instinctual to react. To bawl out. To clamor for justice when someone presses on an open wound.

"What exactly is it that I'm supposed to get over, mom?" I hiss. "The fact that you faked your own death? The fact that you roped me into your ridiculous 'suicide'? Had me lie to the police and burn some poor woman's corpse?"

"That corpse was a verified Jane Doe." Mom sticks a pointer at me. "And why don't you yell a little louder for the entire apartment building to hear?"

I take a threatening step toward her and she inches back.

"I don't care why you had to die and I don't give a damn about the reasons you're alive again either, but for my sister's sake you need to stay dead. At least until I can find a way to explain this to Viola."

"Explain what?" A sweet voice pours behind me and sends a cold shiver down my spine.

No.

Viola can't be here.

Not while mom is in the living room like a freaking ghost come to life.

Panicked thoughts bombard my head.

I reach desperately for a solution.

But it's no use.

Mom makes her move first. When she breezes past me to reveal herself, I smell death. I smell disaster.

I smell the end of everything I hold dear.

"Mom." I croak. And then I react.

Desperately.

Without thought.

I wrap my arms around her and try to jerk her back, away from the doorway, away from Viola.

It's too late.

Vi's sharp gasp and the clatter of her cell phone on the ground are what I hear first. Slowly, almost painfully, my eyes move to my little sister's face. Pale skin. Dark hair. Pretty. Like mom.

Except her makeup isn't a tool to hide how tough life has been. My sister's makeup enhances her round cheeks and pretty lips. Her sweet, innocent eyes.

Eyes that are darkening with horror and pain as she stares at our mother.

"What... who is this? Why does she look like mom?"

"Vi—"

"It's me, baby." Mom coos. "I'm back."

"Back? But..." Vi's face turns as white as a sheet. "You were dead. You..." Her gaze shifts to me. "Did you know?"

My mouth opens, but no sound comes out.

Viola's eyes narrow.

Something shatters in my heart when I see her look of betrayal.

I take a step forward, but she whips around and takes off at a breakneck speed, sprinting down the hallway and dragging my heart with her.

* * *

Jinx: Dirty Secrets Don't Stay Buried

Redwood Prep has been known to cough up earth-shattering scandals, but I might have just stumbled on the biggest of them all.

You know what they say. Don't dig up the body in the backyard, or its ghost just might pay you a visit.

Until the next post, keep your enemies close and your secrets even closer.

- Jinx

CHAPTER TWO

CADENCE

I call Dutch.

Not because I want to.

In fact, he's the absolute last person I wish to talk to right now.

Especially after... that night.

But I don't have a choice.

My sister is missing.

"Have you seen Viola?" I cry, trying to keep my voice steady and failing.

Night has fallen. The shadows are thick around my neighborhood. Dark clouds choke out the stars so all I can see when I lift my head is a heavy smog.

"Vi? No." He sounds surprised.

"If you see her, call me right away," I beg. I'm frantic. Desperate. It escapes in my voice, but I don't even care.

My sister is missing.

Four hours ago, Viola thought mom was dead. Now, mom is walking, talking and turning our lives upside down like she used to.

I don't know what an impulsive teenager reeling with shock, anger, and frustration might do.

Scream?

Rage?

Throw a tantrum?

Fine.

She can do all that.

With me.

At me.

I don't care.

I just don't want her to get hurt.

My sister is the most important person in the world to me. If I lose her, no—I won't think like that.

If even the smallest hair on her head is harmed, it'll be my fault.

"Please," I add. My fingers tremble and the cell phone almost slips out of my hand. "Please. If she calls you, tell me."

"Brahms, where are you?" Dutch's voice is velvet-steel.

My heart pounds.

My head is swimming.

There's a relentless and pulsing fear blossoming in my stomach. Every part of me is aching with anxiety.

Viola, where are you?

"Cadence!" Dutch calls my name more forcefully.

I snap back to myself.

"I'm..." I inhale a shaky breath. "I'm in front of the convenience store in my neighborhood."

"Stay there."

My eyebrows tighten and I straighten instantly. "I'm not staying here. I need to find my sister."

"Damn it, Cadey. I want to help."

"I don't need your help."

"And I don't give a damn. I'm coming to get you. Don't fight me on this." I hear a door creak open and shut. A moment later, Dutch's low murmur is met with another voice.

One of his brothers?

My phone buzzes with a text.

I hang up and eagerly check it.

It's not Viola.

Breeze: No sign of her at the mall.

Cadence: Would she have gone back to your house?

Breeze: I just texted my mom. Vi's not there.

I grit my teeth and squeeze my eyes shut, struggling to keep myself together. The world is tilting at the edges, crackling like paper held to the flame.

Disintegrating.

Bit by bit.

Vi, please be okay.

My options are dwindling. Vi isn't at the mall—possibly her most favorite place in the world. Or the park. Or the library. If she isn't with any of her friends, with Breeze or with her new buddies The Kings then...

I don't know.

I've hit a brick wall.

Tears of frustration press against my eyes.

My feet hurt. I've been walking for hours, wondering if maybe Vi is hiding out right in our neighborhood.

She dropped her cell phone in the doorway earlier and she doesn't have a lot of money. At least, not enough to go too far.

But being close to home brings its own problems.

Now that night is falling, those who like to play in the dark will be creeping out of their holes. Gunshots. Casualties. There's no need to be humane when the sun goes down and your sins are hidden in the black.

If Vi runs into some thugs looking for trouble—

My stomach feels sick.

I ignore my aching feet and jog forward, heading away from the light of the convenience store and turning down a dark alley.

Please be okay, Vi. Please, please, please.

I slip out of the alley's mouth and notice a group of guys hanging out at the corner of the street. Cigarette smoke blows from their lips and they laugh loudly.

Alarm bells clang in my head. I eye the group warily. I can tell, just from a look, that they're dangerous. Hardened eyes. Hardened smiles. Criminals with no sensibilities.

Fear trips through my veins.

I turn the other way, knowing better than to cross their path.

Vi, where are you? Please tell me you didn't encounter someone like them.

The streetlamp overhead flickers as I quicken my pace.

Footsteps thump behind me.

Damn it.

My body coils.

Fight or flight instincts rear to attention.

I dig my fingers into my skirt and increase my speed.

Answering footsteps quicken right behind me.

My heart flogs my ribs and I bite down on my bottom lip to quiet my rising panic. Self-preservation roars inside me.

What can I use as a weapon?

I swallow hard as I pat my skirt down.

Nothing.

All I brought when I tearfully fled the apartment was my cell phone.

I cast my eyes to the ground, looking for a brick or a rock that I can grab and wield, but there's nothing. Not even a beer bottle that I can smash into their heads.

A tall shadow spills in front of me, indicating that my stalker is getting closer.

My shoulders wind up to my ears.

I can't get dragged away.

Not when I still haven't found Viola.

The shadow extends. My pursuer is about to grab me.