



Heart of Obsidian: A Psy-Changeling Novel (Psy/Changeling Series Book 12)

By Nalini Singh

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Step into New York Times bestseller Nalini Singh's explosive and shockingly passionate Psy-Changeling world...

A dangerous, volatile rebel, hands stained bloodred.

A woman whose very existence has been erased.

A love story so dark, it may shatter the world itself.

A deadly price that must be paid.

The day of reckoning is here.

From "the alpha author of paranormal romance" (Booklist) comes the most highly anticipated novel of her career--one that blurs the line between madness and genius, between subjugation and liberation, between the living and the dead.

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- Sales Rank: #47045 in eBooks
- Published on: 2013-06-04
- Released on: 2013-06-04
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

"A must-read for all of my fans."--Christine Feehan, #1 New York Times bestselling author

"Scorching hot."--Dear Author

"I don't think there is a single paranormal series as well planned, well written, and downright fantabulous as Ms. Singh's Psy-Changeling series."--All About Romance

"Paranormal romance at its best."--Publishers Weekly

"A fast-moving, heart-pounding, sexy-as-hell thrill ride."--Joyfully Reviewed

"Nalini Singh is a master storyteller when it comes to emotions and relationships."
--Dark Faerie Tales

"Sheer genius."--The Romance Reviews

About the Author

New York Times and USA Today bestselling author Nalini Singh lives and works in beautiful New Zealand, and is passionate about writing. She also loves chatting to readers. You can find her on Twitter (@nalinisingh) and Facebook (facebook.com/authornalinisingh), and via her website: nalinisingh.com

Nalini's Newsletter: Goes out monthly and includes exclusives for subscribers, including free short stories, sneak peeks, deleted scenes and more. To join, just copy and paste this into your address bar and fill in your name and email address: mad.ly/signups/59681/join

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Chapter 1

Kaleb Krychek, cardinal telekinetic and a man no one wanted to meet alone on a dark night, had been searching for his quarry for seven years, three weeks, and two days. Even while he slept, his mind had continued to hunt through the sprawling psychic network that was the heartbeat and the cage of the Psy race. Not for a day, not for a second, had he forgotten his search, forgotten what they'd taken from him.

Everyone involved would pay. He'd make certain of it.

Right now, however, he had different priorities, his search complete, his target huddled in a corner of a small, windowless room in his isolated home on the outskirts of Moscow. Crouching down in front of her, he held out a glass of water. "Drink."

Her response was to crush herself impossibly further into the corner and tighten her arms around the knees she hugged to her chest. She'd spent the hour since he'd retrieved her from her prison rocking to and fro in

brittle silence. Her hair was a tangled rats' nest around her face, her upper arms bearing both fresh scratches and marks of older gouges.

She was still a bare five feet, two inches . . . or so he judged. She'd been in a huddled position pre-teleport, had only curled further into her shell in the past sixty minutes. Her eyes—a blue so deep they were midnight—refused to meet his, skittering away if he entered her line of sight.

Now she ducked her head, the matted waist-length strands that should've been a rich black interwoven with unexpected strands of red-gold, dull and greasy around her down-bent face. That face was all bone under pallid skin of palest brown, the nails on her hands gnawed to the quick yet embedded with dried blood that said she'd used the stubs to viciously scratch either her own skin or another's, perhaps both.

At last, he understood why the NetMind and DarkMind, the twin entities that knew every corner of the vast psychic network that connected all Psy on the planet but for the renegades, had been unable to find her—regardless of how many times he'd made the request or how much information he'd given them in an effort to narrow the scope of the search. Kaleb had been inside her mind during retrieval, had needed to be to complete the teleport, and even then, he wouldn't have known it was her if he hadn't had incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. The person she'd been was gone.

Whether what remained was anything more than a broken shell was yet an unanswered question.

“Drink or I'll leave you to wallow in your filth.”

He used words that would've once caused her to react—but he didn't know if that part of her existed any longer. The file he'd so meticulously put together over the years, the file he'd studied until he could recite the contents in his sleep, was going to be useless. She was no longer that girl with her hair brushed straight and shiny and midnight eyes that seemed to see far beyond the skin.

“Perhaps you enjoy smelling like something from the garbage.”

The rocking increased.

Logic said he needed to get a Psy-Med specialist in here as fast as possible. But Kaleb knew he wasn't going to do that. He trusted very, *very* few people and he trusted no one when it came to her. Since his current approach wasn't bearing the results he wanted, he shifted focus with the ease of a man who had no emotional attachment to a decision.

“Your lips are cracked and it's clear you haven't had enough fluids for at least twenty-four hours.” In the split second that he'd teleported into the white-on-white room where she'd been held, the overhead light cutting in its torturous brightness, he'd seen the bottles thrown at the wall, the liquid soaked into the floor.

His initial assumption had been that the painful brightness was a normal part of her existence, but it may have been a punishment, her captors attempting to break her will. That it wasn't already broken. . . yes, it said something about the woman who refused to interact with him on any level.

“If you wanted to kill yourself,” he said, watching for even the most minor response to the brutal words, “there are easier ways than dying of thirst. Or aren't you intelligent enough to work that out?”

The rocking accelerated further.

“I can as easily pin you to the wall and force the water down your throat. I won't even need to touch you.”

She hissed at him, dark blue orbs glinting behind the tangled mass of her hair.

He didn't move, didn't betray any reaction to the fact that she'd responded in some fashion at last, even if it was nonverbal. "Drink it. I won't ask again."

Still she resisted. Unexpected. Her mind might be broken, but it wasn't—had never been—unintelligent. No, her intellect was so piercing, her teachers had struggled to keep up with her. She had to be aware that refusing him wasn't an option. The power of a cardinal telekinetic was vast. He could crack every bone in her body with a fleeting thought, crush those bones into dust if he so chose. Even if she no longer understood that, she'd experienced his strength when he teleported her from her cell and to his home; she had to comprehend her precarious situation.

Her eyes flicked to the glass in his hand, teeth biting down on her badly cracked lower lip. Yet she didn't reach for the water she so patently needed. Why?

He took a moment to think, consider the circumstances in which he'd found her. "It's not drugged," he said, talking to a face that held no recognition, no sign that she remembered their final blood-soaked encounter, an encounter where she'd screamed for so long and in such agony she'd caused damage to her throat that would've needed medical attention to repair.

"Infused with the minerals and vitamins that you need," he continued, "but not drugged. You're no use to me in a coma." Holding her gaze when it finally connected with his, he took a healthy swallow of the water, then held out the glass.

It was snatched from him a second later. He'd teleported in another full glass from the kitchen before she finished the first. She emptied them both. Getting rid of the glass with a negligible use of his telekinesis, he rose from his crouched position in front of her. "Do you want to eat first or shower?"

She stared up at him, eyes narrowed.

"Fine, I'll make the decision for you." He brought in a plate of fresh, uncut fruit, as well as a thick slice of bread spread with butter and honey. It wasn't the kind of food he ate—like most Psy, he lived on nutrition bars, for Silence thrived in the absence of sensation, and taste was a powerful one.

His guest's Silence, however, had been shattered a lifetime ago. Sensation might well be the key to bringing her back from the mental wasteland where she'd retreated, her personality and abilities entombed.

Teleporting in a knife, he sliced the bread into four smaller pieces, then, going down on his haunches, held the plate out to her. She stared for over a minute before selecting a piece not in the quick jab he'd expected, but with measured deliberation.

So, her captors hadn't starved her. She'd chosen not to eat.

It took no effort to reach out with his mind, set the water to boil in the kitchen, prepare a mug of tea just hot enough that she could sip it. He dumped three teaspoons of sugar in the mug before bringing it in for her. This time, she didn't hesitate, cuddling the mug to her chest.

Heat.

Realizing she was cold, he adjusted the thermostat to further warm up the already warm room. She didn't react except to take another quarter of the bread. As she ate with slow neatness, he had the sense he was being evaluated. It would've been easy to jump to the conclusion that she wasn't as broken as she appeared,

that this was all a clever act, but the fleeting moments he'd spent in her mind told a far different story.

She'd been splintered from the inside out.

The intelligence that judged him at this instant was more akin to the primal hindbrain that existed within every civilized being, the part that knew how to identify predator from prey, danger from safety. It wasn't the level of function he needed from her, but it was better than total catatonia or actual physical brain damage.

Her brain was fine. It was her mind that was broken.

Picking up an apple, he went to cut it, but her eyes flicked left to the grapes. He didn't say a word, simply put down the apple and turned the plate so the grapes were close to her hand. She ate four, took a sip of tea, and stopped.

Half a slice of bread, four grapes, two glasses of water, and a sip of tea.

It was a better result than he might have initially predicted.

"I'll leave this here for you," he said, rising to put the plate on the small table on the far side of the bed. "If you want more, or something different, you'll have to get it from the kitchen yourself."

That got her attention.

The subtle rocking that had restarted when he rose to his feet stopped, and he knew she was listening. He had read *Psy-Med Journals* in preparation for the eventuality that she was broken when he found her, had even sat in remotely on countless lectures on the subject, but where the specialists recommended quiet, calm, gentle interaction, he knew the primitive mind behind those eyes of midnight blue would see right through such an act.

He was the monster that stalked nightmare, and they both knew it.

"You can move around the house as you please," he told her, calculating how many years it had been since she'd been allowed any kind of freedom. The entire span of her captivity? If so, in this he could understand the impact on her psyche better than any stranger with psycho-medical training.

"The reason this room has no windows," he said, answering the question she hadn't asked, but that had to be at the surface of her consciousness, "was to negate the possibility of panic on your part at being removed from a closed environment."

Her shoulders stiffened. Perhaps, he thought, there was more than an animal mind present within the fragile shell of her body. Perhaps. "If you prefer another room, choose it. For now, the bathroom is through there." He pointed to the door on the other side of the bed, having deliberately chosen the smallest suite in the house for the same reason he'd given for the lack of windows.

He'd built the suite for her, for this exact possibility.

It was impossible to predict how she might react to the wide-open vista that encircled the house. He had no neighbors within screaming distance . . . further. The one side not bounded by grassy fields housed the terrace—and it was flush up against a jagged gorge. A terrace, he realized all at once, that had no railings, and could be reached by any number of rooms in the house, including the bedroom across from this one.

He was already retrieving the supplies to fix that oversight as he spoke. "If you wish to continue to smell like

a pigsty, that's your choice. However, when I get sick of the stink, I'll simply teleport you into the shower, clothes and all, and turn on the water while pouring liquid soap over your head."

The rocking had stopped totally by now.

"There are civilian clothes for you in the closet." Not every piece would fit her emaciated frame, but she'd have enough for the time being. "If you're attached to your institutional uniform"—a white smock, white pants, both filthy—"there's a clean set in the dresser." He'd sourced it a few minutes ago from a medical facility that would never notice the lack.

The woman in the corner remained mutinously silent.

Turning, he walked to the door, his fingers playing over the tiny platinum star in his pocket. "It's after midnight. Sleep if you wish—if not, the house is yours to explore. I'll be on the terrace." He left without further words. This chess game was the most important of his life, each move as critical as the next. Those who'd held her captive had treated her as one might a dumb animal, but she was not that. No, she was far more gifted a prize. One he would do nothing to jeopardize.

As he would make no final decisions.

Not yet. Not until he knew how much of her they'd broken.

Kaleb could've built the barrier between the terrace and the gorge using his telekinetic abilities, but he stripped, changed into thin black sweatpants designed to keep the body cool and took on the task manually. As a Tk, energy was his lifeblood, but right now, he had an excess of it—not on the psychic plane, but on the physical.

Had he been human or changeling, the sudden spike in his energy levels might've been put down to excitement in achieving the goal that had been his driving force for seven years, in having her in his home and within reach. But he wasn't a member of the emotional races. He was Psy and he was Silent, his emotions conditioned out of him when he'd been a child. His path to that Silence had been erratic at times, but the end result was the development of a coolly rational mind that held no shadow of fear or hope, anguish or excitement.

He had once had a large structural flaw in his conditioning, a bone-deep fracture in his Silence, but that had been in another life. The fracture had sealed to adamantite hardness, the weak spot morphing into the strongest part of his Silence, but he knew that behind the stone, the fault remained.

The day it no longer did . . . it was better for the world if that didn't come to pass.

Wiping the sweat off his brow with his forearm, he turned up the voltage on the outdoor lights and began to drill in the screws that would ensure the metal barrier he was putting in place wouldn't collapse even in a major earth tremor. He hadn't searched so long for his quarry to lose her through a lack of preparation.

Even as he concentrated on the task, he kept an ear open for his guest. Some would say "prisoner" was the more apt term, but the words didn't matter. Only the fact that she was in his grasp.

CRASH!

Drill abandoned, he'd teleported into her room before he consciously processed the violence of sound.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Maryann Goldberg:

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Ron Taylor:

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