



BEAUTIFUL VENOM

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
RINA KENT

BEAUTIFUL VENOM

VIPERS
BOOK 1

RINA KENT

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ALSO BY RINA KENT

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*To those who run in the dark, where beauty and danger are two sides of the
same coin*

AUTHOR NOTE

Hello reader friend,

Beautiful Venom marks the start of an exciting new side of the #Rinaverse and can be enjoyed as a complete standalone.

If you're new to my books, you might not know that I write darker stories that can be intense, unsettling, and even disturbing. My characters and their journeys defy societal norms and aren't meant for everyone.

Beautiful Venom contains themes of consensual non-con, dub-con, and primal play. It also includes on-page depictions of road accident-related trauma and violence. Please be mindful of your triggers before diving in.

For more things Rina Kent, visit www.rinakent.com

BLURB

In a den of vipers, revenge is the deadliest venom.

They shattered my world; now, I'll bring down theirs.

The problem? I have virtually no way to trace the puppet master.

My only lead: The Vipers.

An elite college hockey team that rules the ice—and the shadows beyond it.

To infiltrate their secret society, I set my sights on their weakest link.

Kane Davenport.

The charismatic captain and the lone green flag in a nest of serpents.

But too late, I realize I've enticed the most venomous snake.

Kane's friendly façade hides a predator more dangerous than I imagined.

He quickly unveils the monster lurking beneath the surface.

A monster who lured me in only to trap me in a lethal game with no escape.

PLAYLIST

The Girl Who Stole My Heart – Blue October
Little Girl Gone – CHINCHILLA
Rip Me Apart – Unlike Pluto
Black Dahlia – Hollywood Undead
Shadow – Livingston
Cake – Melanie Martinez
Sick Thoughts – Lou Bliss
Hell of a good time – Haiden Henderson
Bad Timing – Blindlove
Backbone – KALEO
I Can't Go on Without You – KALEO
Lilith – Halsey & SUGA
Vicious – Bohnes
Neon Gravestones – Twenty One Pilots
Game Of Survival - Ruelle
All That Pretty Love – Atom & Breathe
SINS – Red Leather
Feeling You – Harrison Storm
Fickle Game – Amber Run

You can find the complete playlist on [Spotify](#).

DAHLIA

Life as I know it has been shattered into tiny, unrecognizable pieces.
The silver lining? I have nothing to lose.

No one to go back to.

Nowhere to call home.

So nothing stops me from pursuing the bloody path I've carefully traced.

My fingers tremble against the smooth plastic of the stadium seat as I remain hidden. My muscles burn and my knees shake, creaking from the crouched position I've forced myself into for twenty minutes or more.

A blast of icy air envelops me, frosting the beads of sweat coating my temples and upper lip.

The thing is, I'm not supposed to be here.

And I don't mean in this position per se, but in the whole place.

I certainly wasn't supposed to set foot in Graystone Ridge or on the campus of Graystone University—also known as GU. Most importantly, I'm not supposed to be sneaking around in their notorious Vipers Arena, home to the school's prestigious Vipers hockey team that just won a spectacular game.

'Just' is metaphorical, because that game ended hours ago and everyone has evacuated the premises.

Except for me.

And the three players below.

Loud thuds fill my ears as the puck checks the boards. The swish of blades on the ice adds a symphony of undiluted violence.

I peek from between the dark blue chairs, holding my breath despite the magnitude of sounds echoing in the arena.

The seating inside Vipers Arena, which has a capacity of over ten thousand, rises steeply, giving a dizzying, vertigo-inducing view of the ice below. I can still hear the roar of the crowd from earlier as if it's a physical force, reverberating in my chest in a persistent thrum. The clapping and chanting that ricocheted off the walls, rising to a deafening crescendo, was dull compared to the sound of the three players' fast-paced late-night practice.

Or should I say meeting?

I catch a glimpse of 'VIPERS' printed on the boards across from me as the ice gleams under the harsh, blindingly bright lights, casting a bluish tint over the rink. The crisp, biting sound of skates slicing across the ice sends chills through me as I follow the players' cutthroat maneuvers.

I've watched the Vipers dominate the arena countless times during my research, so I can recognize who has the puck without even checking their number.

Some might call this an obsession, and maybe it is, but if it can get me closer to the team, I'll be a simp. Or a stan. Or whatever correct term means I'm an expert on this bunch of snakes.

I lower my baseball cap over my face, switch my weight from one foot to the other, then rest my clammy forehead on a tiny spot between the two chairs.

The three of them are so fast, so vicious, and so ruthless in their play, they nearly blur together in a sea of sharp glides.

My eyes cross as I attempt to keep up. They're alternating and playing two against one, probably to improve their flawless attack synergy everyone was singing praises about earlier tonight.

The reason those three play well together is probably because, even after everyone went home, they took to the rink again.

I've heard rumors that they often have these late-night 'meetings' and had to confirm it myself. Which is why I went to the restroom, stayed there until the place was nearly deserted, then snuck back into the arena and hid behind the chairs in the corner close to the ice but out of the players' field of vision.

However, I had to be dead silent because this place echoes even the slightest noise.

The three of them come to a halt in the middle of the rink, clacking their sticks together before tossing them onto the ice.

“That was lousy defense.” Number 71, Jude Callahan, is the first to remove his helmet and shakes his soaking-wet black hair before he tosses it back like a dog.

He’s the tallest and bulkiest of the three, standing at a whopping 6’5”, and is the definition of fucked up. Jude is the most feared right wing in the college league. The rival teams’ offense thinks twice before getting into his zone, and the defensemen can’t handle his sheer size and unhinged energy.

Jude has anger issues and chose hockey to beat people the hell up. Everyone knows it, and anyone who has any dreams of a hockey career has learned to stay out of his way.

Number 13, Preston Armstrong, throws his helmet at the back of Jude’s head, his deep voice carrying in the empty arena with a note of sarcasm. “Chest slamming is not an offense strategy. You would’ve been penalized for that. As always. Don’t be a liability.”

Preston is often labeled as the league’s prince, probably because of his gorgeously attractive face, always styled sandy-blond hair, and Caribbean-green eyes. Despite his sleek appearance and refined mannerisms, he’s known to be the most vicious snake on and off the ice.

His appearance is just another tool he uses to achieve his goals. Whatever those are.

In spite of my extensive research on Preston, I’m still in the dark about his true personality, and I doubt his teammates have a clue what he’s truly capable of.

Unlike Jude, a notorious mass of muscles who acts with no regard for anyone, Preston is calmer and more calculated yet exudes a somber undertone.

Still, if I had to choose, I’d go with the latter. I can handle mind games, but Jude’s brand of unhinged violence is hard to stomach.

As if on cue, Jude slams his body against Preston’s with so much power, they both crash into the boards with a loud thud.

I hold in a gasp when Jude sits on top of Preston as if he’s a chair. “What was that, dick?”

Preston’s head bumps against the boards, and despite his lack of a helmet, I hear the echoing thump in my chest.

They clutch each other by the collar and Jude attempts to pick Preston up, probably to throw him across the rink, Neanderthal style. Preston, while not as bulky or as tall as Jude, is still 6'3" and manages to maneuver Jude's brute force by flipping him and then smashing him against the ice before jamming an elbow to his throat.

13 wears a smile as he speaks close to 71's face. "I said you're a liability, *dick*. Learn to control your animal strength. It's okay to look like one, but acting the part is too much, don't you think?"

I take it back.

There's no way I can handle Preston. I can't tell if he'll release the huge guy underneath him or choke him to death while smiling.

I nearly lose my footing and give away my position as Jude's face goes from red to blue in a matter of seconds.

In a blur of motions, Jude kicks Preston and then they're rolling on the ice like a couple of polar bears.

Without head protection.

The third player, Number 19, removes his helmet with a sigh, revealing damp tousled dark-brown hair and a soft frown between his thick brows.

Jude and Preston's fight filters to the background as the view of the Vipers' captain and center grips my throat with invisible hands.

And the worst part? This isn't the first time he's stolen my attention.

For some reason, I've often found my eyes unconsciously flitting to Kane Davenport, and I can't figure out why.

Yes, he's handsome, probably the most beautiful out of the three of them. While Jude has angular features and Preston is more of the princely type, Kane's beauty is unnerving.

His sharp, chiseled jawline affords him a naturally commanding look. His usually neatly styled hair is now haphazard, and he runs his fingers through it, making his thick strands look casually polished.

At 6'4", he's also tall, but not as threatening as Jude. Kane's lean yet muscular build complements his role as a dominant player on the ice. His body is sculpted for both power and agility, and his controlled movements reflect his innate leadership. He carries himself with confidence, his posture always straight and composed, giving off an aura of quiet authority.

And yet...his blue eyes are so pale, so blank, they're akin to those of an arctic wolf instead of a human. They're piercing, cold, and unreadable.

Despite his outward calm, there's a flicker of danger lurking just beneath the surface.

And yet he's the only safe option on the team.

Kane is a responsible captain, a powerful leader, and the one who calms his teammates when they slip out of control. He's also the only senior player with a normal-ish personality.

Well, as normal as these assholes can get.

He's still part of that fucked-up organization no normal person would choose of their own volition. I glance at the black obsidian ring on his right index finger that doesn't shine under the light. I can't see it clearly, but I know there's a compass rose branded on the top of it, a depiction of his family's symbol.

The ring is proof of his monstrous ties.

He skates to the other two and forcibly breaks up the fight by shoving his body between theirs. Preston instantly jumps up and skates in circles, his rhythm and provocative facial expression taunting without his having to say a word.

Jude fights against Kane's hold, and his strength and thirst for violence form an invisible halo around him, eliciting goosebumps on my skin.

"Enough." Kane pushes him, and while the movement looks relaxed, it actually isn't. There's no way he'd be able to shove away a bear-like man if that were the case.

That's the thing about Kane. He somehow manages to make things look effortless when they're far from it.

"Is that all you got, big man?" Preston tilts his head to the side and pouts at Jude, mimicking an innocent kid. "I'm disappointed."

Jude dashes toward him. "You fucking—"

Kane extends his hands, punching them both simultaneously in the stomach. "I said enough. Save the energy for the rink."

Jude snarls. "I'll pummel his pretty face to pieces so he stops talking shit."

"Ruining my face won't stop me from dragging your ass." Preston grins wide. "It'll just show your inferiority complex. That jealous of my looks, peasant?"

"Your looks?" It's Jude's turn to mock laugh. "Which looks? Sickly and disturbing?"

“Said no one ever. But hey, I can find you a good plastic surgeon. Also a neurosurgeon so he can fix your messed-up personality.”

“Only if your personality will undergo the same surgery.”

“Blasphemy. I have a wonderful personality. Yours, however, revolves around mommy issues.” Preston pouts.

“I’m going to fucking bury you.” Jude charges, and Kane uses his body to absorb the shock and still gets pushed back.

“Pres.” Kane stares at him. The energy shifts without his having to say anything else.

Preston lifts his shoulder. “What? It’s fun to mess with him. Besides, he needs to be drained so he can sleep. Like a kid.”

“The fuck you just say?” Jude asks in a dark tone.

“See?” Preston lifts his hands as if he’s proving a point.

“Save the trash talk for the game,” Kane tells him.

“Hmm...let me consider it.” Preston taps his chin. “I refuse.”

Kane sighs as if he was expecting the reply. “Did you use that same antagonistic energy to get that player penalized?”

“I suppose. Told him that his mom is letting his coach fuck her in all her loose holes so that a mediocre player like him can be kept on the team.”

Sick bastard.

“No wonder he nearly killed you and was penalized for five minutes. Twice,” Kane says in an unnervingly calm tone. “You’re effortlessly annoying.”

Preston grins. “I know, right?”

“That’s not a compliment.”

“Did she?” Jude asks, seeming to have forgotten about his vow to kill Preston.

“Did she what?”

“Let the coach fuck her in all her holes for her son?” Jude asks in a cryptic tone, and Kane watches him closely as if looking for something, though I can’t pinpoint what.

“Dunno. Probably? Who cares as long as the story served its purpose.” Preston releases a sigh. “People are so easy to mess with, it’s getting boring.”

Jude removes his gloves and throws them at Preston’s face.

The latter scrunches his nose. “Uncultured as always, Callahan.”

My gaze zeroes in on the black ring on Jude's index finger. Similar to that of Kane's, though his is branded with his family's symbol—a caduceus wrapped in thorny vines. Preston has one as well. His has the symbol of a sun and a crescent moon.

They weren't wearing them during the game, probably due to regulations. They must have them on now because they're practicing on their own.

Maybe they don't want to be seen without proof of their allegiance.

Or proof of their power in this place.

People think Graystone Ridge is a sprawling, affluent town nestled in the US's Northeast, where history and wealth blend seamlessly with modern ambition. The heart of the town's center offers a mix of upscale cafés, designer shops, and historical landmarks lining cobblestone streets.

People also believe Graystone University, which is perched on the edge of the town, is a prestigious institution known for producing both academic and athletic powerhouses. Its historical architecture has aged well, harmonizing with its surroundings. While it offers renowned programs in business, law, sciences, and sports medicine, its true pride lies in its hockey program, which has become a breeding ground for future NHL stars.

The student body is a blend of wealthy legacy people—like Kane, Jude, and Preston—and ambitious scholarship students, drawn to Graystone for its connections and prestige—like me.

What people don't know, however, is that beneath this shining exterior, the university hides a shadowy influence: Vencor. The secret society tied to its and the town's founding families. Power here is not just earned but manipulated and handed down through generations.

Every corner of this place whispers power for the elite families who shaped the town.

The Davenports, Callahans, Armstrongs, and Osborns live in a gated enclave called Ravenswood Hill on the outskirts, in the mist-filled forest that looms above the town. Behind heavy iron gates, their secluded mansions reflect a legacy of influence and control over the town. The roads leading to Ravenswood Hill are lined with towering oaks and hidden security systems, creating an air of exclusivity and mystery.

The Hill has always been off-limits to outsiders, which is why I have to approach these three at college instead.

Or more like one.

Kane is my best bet. I don't think he's an idiot I can fool easily, but he's at least a pacifist. Over the past few weeks, I watched many of his games online and in person—call the stalking police—and have never seen him indulge in violence.

Not *once*.

That's kind of a miracle in a physical sport like hockey.

If anything, he's an expert at breaking up fights. His cool is never ruffled and his authoritativeness can be felt through the screen. Probably why he effortlessly snatched the captain's position.

I'd rather not get close to any of them, but I have to, so it has to be Kane.

"Anyone you'll invite this time?" Kane asks Jude as he skates to the bench area.

"No," the latter says without turning around.

"Sure about that?"

"Yes. Fuck off." And with that, Jude leaves the ice and heads to the tunnel, disappearing out of view.

A faint mechanical hum from the ice machines overpowers the silence as Kane looks at Preston for a few heavy seconds. "You?"

"Contemplating it."

"You're expected to vet and bring someone to the initiation, Pres."

"You didn't tell Jude that."

"It's better he doesn't. He'll just force someone off the street to accompany him, and we don't want to deal with that mess. You're different. Use your conviction skills. I mean manipulation skills."

"Last time I did that, she didn't want to drink my blood. Nearly killed her before she was kicked out." He frowns. "How could anyone refuse *my* blood?"

"Normal people?" Kane asks what I'm thinking. Seriously, maybe that guy is only in Vencor because he was born into a founding family.

He obviously doesn't belong there.

"How about you?" Preston asks with a raised brow.

"I'm all set. Worry about yourself."

All set? Does that mean he already has someone in mind?

I was supposed to worm my way into his life so that I'd be that someone.

Not too long ago, I applied to be an intern for the team's physician, which is still on hold. My classmate said it was impossible that they'd accept a girl for the position while gloating that he'd be the best person for the job.

If he's right, then my chances of getting closer to the team are slimmer than ever before. I could apply as an assistant to the administrative manager or even volunteer. However, those aren't guaranteed with a popular team like the Vipers.

"All set, huh?" Preston repeats with a knowing tone.

"Go home, Armstrong."

"Aye, aye, Captain." Preston mock salutes, a sadistic smile painting his lips before he skates away. "Time to drown Callahan in the showers."

As silence befalls the arena, Kane stands in the middle of the rink for a few seconds, then picks up the pucks they left lying around and stores them in the appropriate compartment.

My legs hurt from the strain, and I know if I don't leave soon, I'll fall over and give my position away.

I bite my lip and remain motionless.

I'll leave after Kane does.

There's no way I'd be able to sneak off while he's there.

Stop being a Goody Two-shoes and go already.

The sound of skates blends with the ice machines and I get distracted with massaging my legs, so I don't notice that Kane has skated to my side of the stands.

As I lift my gaze, he stops right opposite my hiding spot.

Cold seeps into my bones, and the air becomes so crisp that it hurts to breathe.

In the oppressive stillness, Kane's calm voice carries through the empty arena. "You can come out now."

I hide further, hoping—no, praying—that he's speaking to someone else who was brave—or foolish—enough to sneak into Vipers Arena late at night.

"I know you're there. I suggest you show yourself while it's only me. I can't promise the others will be as understanding."