



Curiosity.

BLACKWOOD
AFTER DARK

CHRISTINA C JONES

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BLACKWOOD AFTER DARK
BOOK ONE

CHRISTINA C JONES

WARM HUES CREATIVE

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One
∞

The mood will change promptly at midnight.
I blinked.
Blinked again.

That line hadn't been there when I read the invitation before – I was certain of it.

I'd pored over the thick, luxuriously black postcard multiple times, making sure the order of courses was correct, there were no misspellings, and so on. I didn't need to memorize it because it was seared into my brain.

This was the most important party I'd ever cooked for.

I chose to believe it was a steppingstone, being asked to do a private party of this caliber. It was usually weddings, the occasional brunch. Here and there, someone would hire me to come out on their yacht, to feed them and their drunk, rowdy friends all day.

I hated those the most, but they paid well enough to not take them off my service list.

Besides, that was where this client found me.

Supposedly.

I'd never spoken to them directly – the correspondence ran through an assistant who wasn't very keen on small talk.

The check was big enough that it didn't matter.

I *hoped* it didn't matter.

Hoped I wouldn't regret this.

I'd made so many concessions from my normal process that a thread of paranoia had been hanging in the fringes of my conscious since the contract was signed. So many *I don't usually do this* moments that the only "normal" thing about any of this was my satisfaction as the servers exited the kitchen with heavy platters of carefully, beautifully plated food.

Servers I didn't hire.

Another deviation.

The client had insisted on all their own people, had insisted on a grocery list to send someone else to do the shopping.

My first thought was that there was some need – or desire – to keep the budget down since my fee for doing this last-minute was honestly astronomical.

Then I saw the house.

Which I hadn't gotten an address for until the day of, and was tucked away in some ultra-exclusive, gated corner of Blackwood I didn't even know existed before this. At the house, when I'd been handed a black chef's coat and hat that were worth more than I'd made in the last quarter, I understood.

They weren't keeping the budget *down*.

They were making sure I was up on their level.

If I weren't so in awe of it all, maybe I'd be offended.

Instead, I happily used the luxury gas range of my dreams, professional quality knives I couldn't even imagine affording, ultra-fresh ingredients from the list I'd provided, some straight from the farm.

It was lovely.

I immersed myself in the experience, unbothered by the fact that I was there alone – it meant minimal distractions from the work.

And now that the last things were plated – the delicate desserts and signature cocktails that had been requested for serving *right* at the midnight hour, I was technically finished.

It had been made clear in my contract that I would not be responsible for cleaning. Staff had descended upon the kitchen in white uniforms and made quick work of it as soon as I sent out the last course. Since I'd only used the tools provided, there was nothing for me to pack.

I was about to hunt someone down to be escorted home when I spotted the invitation again, propped up on a little stand. Even though I was done now, and the party was in full swing, I'd stopped to look at it.

And there was that line.

The mood will change promptly at midnight.

What the hell did it mean?

I looked around the spotless kitchen, and then at the door separating the kitchen from the rest of the opulent modern home. I *really* should've been finding the driver who'd brought me here, or texting the assistant everything was coordinated through so I could go home.

Just go home.

The thought echoed in my head, bouncing around like a blaring warning. One I didn't heed.

Instead... I pushed through the door.

The transition from the kitchen into the party was like stepping into a whole new world. The brief flashes from the servers going in and out were no comparison to the *actual* atmosphere.

It was... *heady*.

The music was loud enough to feel, but low enough for conversation. The lights were dimmed to a deep indigo hue, and there was this scent in the air... not food though.

Maybe the slight smokiness caused the aroma, peppery and syrupy, and... *wicked*.

I couldn't help myself from breathing it in.

Deep.

I blinked hard, still taking in my surroundings when I realized everyone was paired off.

Well.

Not always paired.

A few small groups of three, four.

A passing server smirked at me, and I quickly averted my gaze.

Straight to where a woman was seated, legs wide open, skirt hiked up, on someone's lap.

I couldn't look away.

Her eyes were closed – maybe. It was hard to tell in the dark.

What *wasn't* hard to see were the hands playing with her exposed nipples, or the man on his knees in front of her, with his head between her legs while she sipped from a glass of champagne.

What the hell is this?

The question had barely gotten across my mind when I felt eyes on me – the man with handfuls of her tits.

He smirked at me, and then clear as day – without his mouth moving – he asked me a question.

Would you like to taste her too?

What?

What?

Confused, I watched as he lowered his head, opened his mouth, and then... sank his teeth into her neck.

Deep.

I watched on bated breath until I saw the trickle of blood.

What?!

What?!

I turned away, nearly crashing into another server as I took off, too shocked to bother making sure I was heading in the same direction I'd come from. As I moved, my gaze fell to other sets of people – some in conversation about mundane things, some full-blown fucking.

Right next to each other.

The mood will change promptly at midnight.

It was only 12:22.

I pushed through another door, sucking in a breath of fresh air that *wasn't* contaminated by the pheromones and incense and... whatever else.

I turned to look back at the doorway – just a simple slab, unadorned with anything that might indicate the debauchery happening on the other side.

Because the guests hadn't *needed* warning.

This had to be what they were here for.

I swallowed hard, taking another breath as I took in my surroundings, which were emptier than I would've expected.

Eerily.

In one direction, floor to ceiling windows looked out on a lavish pool area illuminated only by moonlight. The other direction led to a hall, which was where I took my chances.

Semi-public sex?

Scandalous sure, but nothing to be *too* twisted in a bunch about.

Biting people though?

Not a little throes-of-passion nibble, a fucking *bite*?

That was entirely too much.

It was *past* time for me to go.

I hoped the hall would connect back to the front entryway I remembered,

but it just took me deeper and deeper into the labyrinthian layout of the house. I was right on the verge of doing what I should've done in the first place – texting my contact person – when heavy, fast footsteps caught my attention in the hall.

Instant panic rushed through me.

The footsteps were getting closer, at a speed that gave me a clear impression whoever was coming my way wouldn't mean me any good.

I needed to hide.

I tried the door handle closest to me, and when that one didn't budge, tried another.

And another.

The footsteps were right around the corner when I tried one last door – to my *complete* relief, it opened. I hurriedly slipped inside, closing it behind me and turning the lock. With my ear pressed to the door, I listened for whoever had been coming.

After a moment, muffled laughter carried through the door, accompanied by the indistinct murmurs of at least two different people.

“*Hurry and unlock it,*” I heard, which made me take a quick step back.

But they weren't talking about this door – definitely another.

I heard the opening, the closing, the ensuing silence.

I heaved out a sigh of relief.

I'd probably hidden for nothing, but... still.

A soft blue glow behind me pulled my attention behind me to a wall of screens.

Security cameras.

My gaze flitted around, noting the pool area, the foyer, the kitchen where I'd spent the last hours working.

The party.

Each screen had multiple angles of whatever room they were in – knowledge that made an uncomfortable feeling spread across my chest.

Was I being watched while I was cooking?

I couldn't dwell there long – other screens pulled my attention.

Full color camera feeds from private rooms, crystal clear enough for feature film.

Some were empty.

Some... weren't.

On one screen, a man accompanied by two *gorgeous* women was getting

pegged by a massive dildo while he got head from the other.

They were all still in their party clothes.

Another screen had a couple on display – both full nude, self-pleasuring on chairs directly across from one another, barely a foot apart, if that much. Something on *that* screen really pulled my attention, making me step forward for a better view.

Of the puncture wound on her neck.

“You know you’re not supposed to be in here, right?”

I couldn’t help the scream that ripped from my throat before I turned around, searching for the source of that admonition. I found it — *him* — tall and imposing, standing right in front of the door.

Blocking it.

“I... um... I was just looking for the exit,” I said, backing up.

The man in front of me was beautiful, honestly – flawless dark skin glowing in the blue light from the monitors, an aquiline nose, thick brows, impeccably carved jaw.

Disturbingly black eyes.

His full lips quirked into a teasing smile, but his arms remained crossed. “Now Celeste... you understand why that might not seem like the truth?”

“How do you know my name?” I gasped, taking another step back – a move that brought the backs of my thighs in contact with the edge of the control panel desk.

Nowhere else to do.

“I know the names of every single person who walks through my door.”

My eyebrows shot up. “*Your* door. So... this is your house?”

“Indeed.”

“So... you’re the one who hired me?” I asked.

He confirmed with a nod.

Fuck.

“Listen, I’m sorry for being somewhere I’m not supposed to be, I just... I didn’t know how I was supposed to get home.”

“Did you contact Irina?”

Irina.

The assistant.

“No, not yet,” I admitted as he finally stepped away from the door, uncrossing his arms to push his hands into the deep pockets of his slacks.

“So then... were you *really* trying to get home? Or is naivete about to get

the inquisitive kitty disciplined for her prying?”

My eyes went wide.

Curiosity killed the cat.

Immediately, I shook my head. “No. I mean, no sir,” I stammered, not knowing what I needed to say. I just wanted out of whatever fucked up fantasy this was.

He continued stalking in my direction. “You sound scared.”

“I’m alone in a dark room with a stranger,” I countered, hoping that stating the obvious would get him to see what I saw.

“What’s scary about that?”

“I have no idea what you might do to me.”

“What do you *want* me to do to you?” he was right in front of me now – close enough to smell, which felt... dangerous.

Just like when I’d stepped into that party, I couldn’t help breathing in. It was different though – a clean, smokey sort of bouquet that was hard not to inhale.

Impossible, actually.

Any response I may have had to the question caught in my throat as he pulled aside my lapel to unzip my chef coat. I was dressed underneath, but it was just a tank top and bra. I couldn’t move, couldn’t say a word as he pushed the garment off my shoulders.

I didn’t breathe until he touched me.

And when I did, it was deep, gasping breaths as he put his fingers to my throat. Two fingers held in one spot as he looked me in my eyes.

“Calm down.”

I did.

As if he was more in control of my nervous system than I was.

He grabbed me by the wrist with his free hand, placing a big thumb under my palm.

Holding it there.

“How should I punish you?”

I blinked.

“What?”

His gentle hold on my wrist, the light touch at my neck, changed to viselike grips. “You trespassed.” His face nose touched my nose, lips brushing mine. “You shouldn’t have left the kitchen on your own.”

“I’m sorry,” I rushed out, barely able to form the words.

“I’m sure you are, gorgeous.” He pulled back enough that I could see the smile spread across his lips, punctuated by a glimpse of perfect white teeth. “Which is why I’ll be gentle.”

Suddenly, he let me go.

Took a step back.

“Unbutton your pants. Pull them down with your panties. Bend over the panel.”

I didn’t move.

“What?”

A flash of irritation transformed his face, from nonchalantly handsome to this sinister sort of sexiness that made me feel... *hot*.

“I can punish you here, or in front of everyone. Your choice.”

My hands went to my buttons.

Without even thinking about it.

Pants unbuttoned, unzipped, and yanked down with my panties.

“Good girl,” he muttered, moving toward me again. “What was the last part of your instruction?”

My mind blanked. “I... um...”

“*Bend over the panel,*” he growled, and I did so immediately, choose a smooth expanse with no buttons.

I didn’t get another *good girl* though.

Instead, he said, “Two more licks, since you want to be insubordinate.”

“How was I—”

“Two for talking back, too – you wanna keep going?” he asked, and I shook my head.

Why?

I had no fucking clue.

We’d traveled well beyond sense at this point.

Nothing could’ve prepared me for his hand on my ass.

“Fifteen,” he said, as the sharp smack reverberated through me, forcing me to bite my lip to keep from screaming.

I gave up on that by the time he was down to “*Nine.*”

Yes, because it hurt, but more because the pain was good, so completely antithetical to anything that had ever happened to me.

Ever.

“*Seven,*” he droned, after a smack that landed right on my exposed pussy, sending a fresh gush of arousal there. I was humming with pleasure, just

waiting on this part to be done so we could get to whatever was next.

He had his hand pressed to my back, holding me in place as he worked through the rest of my “punishment.”

Six.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

“*One*” was on my pussy again, and instead of removing his hand after the smack, he sank two of those big fingers into me, making me gasp. With just those fingers, he stretched me wide, fucking me faster and faster with them until he’d built his slow cadence to a punishing rhythm.

“Open your eyes,” he demanded, so I did.

Tension immediately flooded my shoulders when I realized I was looking at myself, bent over the panel.

He finger-fucked the anxiety right out of me though, and made me watch from changing angles.

Close ups of his fingers disappearing in me, his thumb pressing to my clit.

My face, mouth hanging open in pleasure.

A side view of my body rocking in response to his hand, my hips reflexively moving backward to meet him.

My thighs shaking, back arching as he made me cum.

I yelled myself hoarse.

I was still bent over the panel, watching, as he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, cleaning first me, then his hands with it. Instead of discarding it, he stuffed it into his pocket, then directed me to stand.

My knees were weak.

He helped me pull up my pants and underwear, put the chef’s coat back on me.

Wordlessly.

Led me back to the kitchen.

Wordlessly.

Irina was waiting.

“I’m sure I don’t have to explain the level of discretion Elias expects — correct?” she asked.

When I glanced behind me, he was already gone.

I nodded.

“Good,” she smiled, gesturing for me to follow her. “Let’s get you home.”

Still in a daze, I followed her out to where a car was waiting. Once I was buckled into the back seat, she reached in, handing me a black, sealed envelope.

“Thank you for your service tonight.”

She closed the door.

Immediately, the car took off, before I could even gather my thoughts. We were back in a familiar area of the city before I could pull together enough brain cells to open the envelope.

It was a check.

For *twice* the amount of the contract I’d signed.

“*Holy shit,*” I whispered, reading the numbers over and over, until they, along with the steady hum of the car, lulled me to sleep.

Next thing I knew, I was being dropped off at my front door. The car lingered until I was safely inside before pulling off.

I dropped everything – my cell phone, keys, the check, off at the table by the door, frowning as I glimpsed myself in the mirror.

I *looked* like I’d just cooked for a party of thirty.

I immediately started stripping stuff off, heading to the shower as I replayed everything in my head.

That shit had to be a dream.

There was no way any of that craziness had actually happened — maybe all of that was from my nap on the way home.

That made a helluva lot more sense than... literally anything else.

I took a deep breath, settling it in my mind.

It was just a dream.

It was just a dream.

It was just a dream.

If only there weren’t such clear handprints bruised on my ass in the bathroom mirror.

If it weren’t for those... maybe I could’ve believed it.

Two



There was a service request burning a hole in my inbox.
I should answer it.
Needed to answer it.

I was running a business, and needed to make sure I was professional.

The idea of virtually ignoring a repeat request from a client who'd written one of the biggest checks of my life was *ludicrous*.

But it would be even more absurd to *not* be hesitant, considering what happened that night.

The public sex.

The private spanking.

The *biting*.

I was still trying to convince myself I hadn't *actually* seen or experienced what I thought I had, that it was just some elaborate fantasy created in my mind.

And then the new service request appeared, forwarded to me by the team who managed the *Something Blue* co-op I was a part of, making it much easier for me to focus on the catering over the scheduling and vetting and all that. The vast majority of the jobs were wedding related, and then there were the corporate events. Private parties.

Only occasionally was there one like this.

The Black Gallery.

I didn't have to look up a single detail to know it was him.

There was just... this *feeling* that crept over me.

A feeling that wouldn't allow me to simply say, "*no, that shit was creepy!*"

Which was why I hadn't answered yet at all.

Because I knew the answer would *have* to be yes.

"Hey, you needed these, right?" Brosia asked from the open doorway of the industrial kitchen. She held up a bundle of vibrant hued hibiscus, and I nodded.

"Yesss, thank you boo," I said, putting down the knife I'd been using to slice fresh lemons so I could accept the flowers. "They're all so perfect!"

She grinned. "I aim to please – and I saw the cards with my name on them you printed to go on the beverage stand. You didn't have to do that!"

"The hell I didn't," I countered, pulling out a clean container to store the flowers in the fridge until I could clean and process them for inclusion in the artisan lemonade in the spread for my afternoon client. "Especially since you're coming through with a few last-minute arrangements I can use to decorate the charcuterie."

One neatly groomed eyebrow went up. "This is the first I'm hearing about arrangements for a—*Celeste*..."

"My baaaaad," I laughed. "I just had the idea literally ten minutes ago. I know the client was explicit about not wanting it to look overly feminine, but in my head, the layout just isn't pretty enough."

"When do you need them?" Brosia asked, crossing her arms.

"Two hours?"

"*Oh my God.*"

"I understand if that's not enough time," I assured, holding up my hands. "Like I said – I know it's last minute."

She rolled her eyes. "I'll have the damn flowers for you," she fussed. "But just know – I am *not* happy about this timing."

"I know. I love youuuu," I grinned, hooking an arm around her for an embrace.

"Yeah, yeah," she huffed. "Hey, you never told me about how the party went the other night."

My eyes went big, and I hurried to release her and take a step away. "What party?"

"Bitch."

I groaned. "I can't."

“Can’t *what?*” she asked, stepping around me to look me in the face.

“Talk about it.”

“*Bitch.*”

“Stoppsss,” I pouted, dropping to a seat at the counter. “I’m serious.”

“So am I, the fuck?” Brosia replied, stepping up to the opposite side of the counter. “What the hell do you mean you can’t talk about it? You signed an NDA can’t talk about it, or somebody is threatening your ass can’t talk about it?”

I sighed. “Neither. Well... kinda the first one. I *did* sign an NDA, but I don’t think it covers... I don’t know. Nevermind.”

“Bullshit,” she countered, propping her hands on the cool stainless-steel surface. “Start talking, sis.”

“There’s nothing to talk about.”

“If there was nothing to talk about, why would you say you *can’t* talk about it?” she questioned.

“Because I’m not that smart. Forget I mentioned it.”

“Impossible. Just spit it out, girl.”

I blew out a long, harsh breath. “I mean... rich people are freaky. Let’s leave it at that.”

“Let’s not though,” Brosia laughed. “Yes, those motherfuckers are disgusting, everybody knows that. What has you so shook that you needed to like... *say that* though? Did you see something just... hella nasty? Oh. *Oh.*” A smirk spread across her face as she leaned down. “You *did* something nasty, didn’t you?”

“Why would you land *there?*”

“Because your face is giving very much, *I was in an orgy and I liked it.*”

“I was *not* in an orgy!” I defended. “My spanking and finger-fucking were very much private, thank you!”

“Wow. Wow!” Brosia’s hands went up to her mouth, eyes wide. “*Who?*”

“Who what?”

“*Bitch.*”

“Elias. It was his house, and I... I kinda got caught snooping around.”

“*Elias?*” she questioned. “As in... Elias Black? As in... *the Blacks?*”

I shrugged. “*Bitch*, I don’t know!”

“I suggest you figure it out!” she shrieked. “The Blacks are...”

“Are *what?*”

“Not to be fucked with,” Brosia replied. “Do you remember me being all

excited about the piece of land I bought for my flower farm?”

I nodded. “Yeah, you built your house out there, right?”

“My house, a little greenhouse, and I planted a couple of flower varieties to start. And *then* I get a fucking cease and desist from the owner of the neighboring land, telling me I can’t plant roses, because they don’t like the smell.”

“You told them to fuck off, I remember that.”

“Damn right I did – but then I got a notice from the city about violating some ordinance, threatened with a fine that cost more than the land, all that.”

“That’s ridiculous!”

“Tell me about it! But what really gets me is, after I call around to see who I can hire for the removal, a crew shows up at my door ready to do the work. The neighbors had hired them.”

I sucked my teeth. “You sent their asses off, right?”

“Hell no. Those quotes all had too many zeroes for that. If they wanted those roses gone bad enough to pay for it themselves, I didn’t have shit to say. But back to the point – I saw the work order. Guess whose name was on it?”

“Elias?!”

“Well no, not him specifically – one of his fine ass brothers.”

My mouth dropped. “There’s more than one of them looking like that?”

“Mmmhmm,” Brosia mused. “I looked them up after that whole thing, but couldn’t find a lot – which is kinda creepy, but that’s a whole other tangent. How the *hell* did you go to his house to cater a party and end up with his fingers in your pussy?”

“I... was snooping around, I guess, and... he caught me. He said I had to be punished, so... he made me bend over and pull my panties down.”

She just stared at me for a moment. “You’re serious?”

“I’m so serious,” I told her. “He told me what to do, and I just *did it*, no question. I’ve never, *ever* done anything like that before. I don’t even know what that was!”

Brosia shrugged. “Well, you said it was like... a freaky party, right? Maybe it was just the expectation. Like an unspoken rule of their little freak nasty club.”

“I’m not in any club.”

“I kinda think you are,” she laughed, pushing away from the counter. “I’m going to go put these arrangements together for you and let you finish

your prep – we’re getting together tonight though, cause I need *details*.”

She left with a promise to talk about it more later, and I went back to what I’d been doing before she arrived – getting ready for an afternoon event. It was a grooms’ shower, and even though they’d insisted on not going overboard with overtly feminine touches, the hibiscus lemonade and a few tastefully put-together floral arrangements who give the perfect elegant touch.

With this being a smaller event, it was a no-help day, which was fine.

It meant I could have quiet in the kitchen, to mull over whatever was bouncing around in my head that day while I prepped, cooked, or cleaned.

Now it was time for that last part – leaving the kitchen absolutely spotless so I could get straight to work the next day. I had everything done, and was in my little private office space packing up when I felt... a shift.

“I don’t take kindly to being ignored, Celeste.”

Shit.

That voice made my chest warm, like I’d just taken a shot of liquor. I turned from where I’d been busy packing my laptop into my bag to find Elias Black draped in my doorway, filling it up.

“Mr. Black,” I smiled, trying not to look like my heart was about to claw out of my chest. “I don’t typically speak with clients without a pre-arranged meeting time. If you’d like—”

“I’d *like* you to not fuck around with me.”

He moved out of the door, not a trace of a smile on his face as he approached.

I took an involuntary step back as he invaded my space, trapping me against the desk.

“Accept the contract, Celeste. The sommelier says lobster, lamb, and wagyu should be appropriate for the wine I’d like to serve. Small bites. Very light desserts. You’ll have any assistance you need. Are we clear?”

“You don’t tell me what to do.”

It took everything in me to meet his gaze without breaking it as he stared back.

And then a smirk broke over his lips.

“That’s *not* the energy you had when I told you to bend over that control panel.”

“That was different.”

“Get on your knees.”

“No.”

I wanted to, though.

Overwhelmingly, intensely, so badly it made me ache.

“Interesting,” he murmured, raising a hand to cup my face.

“That I said no?”

“That you *can*,” he replied. I held my breath as his face lowered to my neck, followed by a deep inhale sweeping across my skin. He groaned as if I were fresh from some luxurious scented bath, but I knew better – I’d been working all morning, not wearing any perfume. There was no way I smelled like anything more pleasant than maybe salt, but the depth of that inhale said different.

“What do you want from me?” I asked, trying to slip away.

He grabbed me by the wrist, holding me in place. “In the immediate? I want you to cater the event at the gallery.” His free hand snaked into the fine hairs at the base of my neck, gripping me there as well. “Say yes.”

I was always going to do that anyway.

It just rolled off my tongue *extra* smoothly with his lips damn near brushing mine, and the weight of his dick heavy against my stomach.

I wanted to see it.

Feel it.

Taste it.

“In due time, gorgeous,” he said as he pulled back, moving his hand to brush his thumb over my bottom lip. “I’m gonna fuck that pretty mouth of yours until there are tears running down your face.”

I frowned.

Not because of what he said, but...

Did I say that out loud?

“Irina will send you the details.”

He was already back at the door.

And then, gone, before I could even ask questions.

Barely a moment later, Brosia came breezing in, holding a box full of greenery-heavy neutral floral arrangements. She stopped a few steps away, eyebrows raised.

“Uh... you good?” she asked. “You look... shook.”

I scoffed. “Well, yeah – Elias just left. You didn’t see him?”

She frowned. “Like... just now?”

What?

“Yeah,” I nodded, a little confused by her reaction. *Surely* she’d just seen

the man. “You had to have seen him leaving through the kitchen, it’s the only way back here.”

She shook her head. “I promise you – the kitchen was empty. Completely. So either ol’ boy is really fast, or he really has you in a daze and more time passed than you thought.”

Nobody is that fast.

I didn’t want to have Brosia thinking I was losing my mind, so I let it go with what she felt was the reasonable explanation. But I couldn’t shake the uneasy feeling lingering in my brain.

I’d agreed to doing the gallery event, but now I was wondering all over... shouldn’t I be running in the *opposite* direction of something this strange?

Three



The *Black Gallery* was exquisite.

With it being nestled right in the middle of downtown Blackwood, it was baffling to me that I'd never noticed it before – I passed it nearly every day. Somehow, it eluded my attention until I typed the name *Elias Black* into a search browser.

As soon as I saw the address, I had to go.

It was *not* time yet for the event he wanted to hire me for, and I had *not* yet signed the contract either. The vibe with all this was entirely too strange for me to just do what he said because he said it.

Even though something deep in me *wanted* to.

It craved being told what to do, but only by Elias.

Literally *any* other man would get laughed out of my face.

But *him*?

I had to figure out what the hell was happening, so I primped, plucked, and polished, slid myself into a dress and heels I hadn't had occasion to wear in... well, *ever*.

And then... I just walked in.

I took in my surroundings along the way – the luxurious black stone floors, elegant lighting displays, sculptures, paintings.

People.

Beautiful people.

Like an undeniable face card was damn near a requirement to get in.

“Champagne?”

I pulled my attention from the abstract painting I was trying to figure out to nod, accepting the glass with a smile.

“Thank you,” I said, and the server gave me a slight bow before turning to find a new guest without a glass in their hand.

As I lifted the drink to my lips, I felt eyes on me.

Not Elias though.

A slight shift in angle put me in a direct line of sight with a man who was familiar, but I couldn't place him. He smirked at me, which I didn't know how to respond to, so I didn't.

I turned and walked off, faltering a bit when I felt a flash of anger.

Not *from* me.

At me.

Eyes wide, I took a chance and glanced behind me again – *shit*.

He was stalking my way, and I could literally *feel* the agitation so clearly displayed on his face.

Shit.

Instead of waiting to see what he wanted, I turned and started walking, putting a bit of pep in my step as I navigated around people and walls in the unfamiliar setting, trying to put some distance between me and the pissed off stranger.

I wasn't *trying* to make a scene, and yet it felt like all eyes were on me as I moved. When I spotted the ladies' room, I made a beeline for it, giving my champagne glass to a server on the way.

I was relieved as soon as I was on the other side of the door.

For a moment, I could actually breathe.

Just a moment though.

I was in the mirror checking my makeup when the door swung open, revealing that same stranger on the other side.

“If I didn't know better, I might get the impression you didn't want to talk to me,” he said, stepping in and closing the door behind him.

Blocking it.

“I don't know you.”

Simple.

The truth.

He smirked. “Come on... you *really* don't remember me?”

I shook my head. “No. I'm sorry.”

He moved closer still, his mouth spreading into a smile. “What about now?”

“I could see you fine from where you were,” I told him, picking up my bag from where it had been on the counter – there was pepper spray on my keys.

“I don’t think you could,” he countered, and *that* was when I saw what he had to be closer for me to see.

His teeth.

Fangs.

“You were at that party,” I stammered, suddenly remembering as my fingers closed around the little aerosol can. “With that woman... you *bit* her.”

“You make it sound like something she didn’t like,” he mused. “But... you’re clearly a virgin, so I wouldn’t expect you to know.”

A virgin?

“Okay, I’m done with this conversation – you’ve got no business in here, so you can just—”

“I can just *what?*” he asked, moving so that there was barely space between us, fangs bared.

“*Leave me the fuck alone, that’s what,*” I told him, backing up and raising the pepper spray. “I’m not interested in your freaky games, weird dental work, none of that.

“*Dental work?*” he chuckled. “Oh, I am going to have *fun* enlightening you.”

“You’re going to leave her alone, is what you’re going to do,” a fresh voice came from the door.

I peered past the door to find Irina standing there, arms crossed.

“I got promoted – you don’t get to interfere with this, remember?” he sneered at her, then turned back to me. “This one is mine.”

“*Actually* – Elias would disagree,” she spoke up, her voice shifting into something... different.

Grittier.

“... what?” the man gave his attention back to her. “She’s inscribed?”

“Not yet. But as you know – she is untouchable in the meantime. And if you care to challenge that, Bradley, I have no problem ripping you from toe to tongue and serving you to our guests.”

Holy shit.

“It’s not even that serious, damn,” he huffed, lifting his hands as he

backed away from me. He was suddenly in a hurry to leave, but Irina stayed where she was, blocking the door.

“I’ll be talking to Parris about your “promotion”,” she said, glaring him in the face. “I don’t know what the fuck you think this is – *who* the fuck you think you are, *where* the fuck you think you are. But you’d better act like you know the hierarchy, and in case you *don’t*... I’m ten levels on top of you. So even if she didn’t already belong to someone, if *I* say she gets left alone, tell me what happens?”

I’d never seen the melanin drain from someone, not until that moment.

Irina was petite – short and slim, delicate facial features – I’d actually thought *Black Tinkerbell* the first time we met. Bradley had at least a foot and a half of height on her, and definitely a hundred pounds, and neither of those things mattered.

That pretty face was twisted into something outright sinister.

“She gets left alone,” Bradley answered, in a distinctly higher pitch than he’d been using just a moment before.

“I’m glad to know you’re paying attention. Leave.”

She stepped aside, and he got out of there, fast. When Irina gave her attention back to me, she was as perfectly pleasant as she’d always been.

“Celeste – you look absolutely beautiful tonight – what brings you by unexpectedly?”

I cleared my throat a bit as I tucked the pepper spray back into my bag. “Uh... I just wanted to check the place out before I confirmed the catering contract for the event.”

“Understandable,” she nodded. “Let me give you a tour — did you know there was a full kitchen?”

She didn’t wait for an answer before waving for me to follow her – which I did.

I quickly discovered that *full kitchen* was an understatement.

It was the sexiest commercial kitchen I’d ever seen, done in all black stainless steel. As much as I wanted to touch it, the drive to not put any smudges on the pristine surfaces made me keep my hands to myself.

I *had* to open the fridge though.

I frowned at the clear containers full of metal tubes my eyes landed on first, narrowing to understand what I was seeing. Before that could happen, Irina had pushed the door closed, and started ushering me out of the kitchen, towards a tucked away hall, and an elevator.

“That leads up to the offices,” she explained. “There’s storage space, studio space back here as well, that local artists use sometimes. And a couple of studio apartments upstairs. For when we have an artist-in-residence.”

“Oh wow, that’s really cool. How do they get chosen? Is it an application, or...?”

“Yes, an application,” she smiled. “Why, are you interested?”

“God no – I can barely straw a stick figure,” I laughed. “Just curiosity.”

“Got it – let me show you the exhibit from our most recent one,” she said, leading me back into the gallery. We stopped in front of a breathtaking wall of canvases – a set of nine in total.

They were beautiful for sure, but somehow also... terrifying.

Each of the hyper-realistic paintings were done in mostly black, but various hues of brown represented different skin tones. They were incredibly close up – an eye, a neck, half of a face, the arch of a back, a nose and lips.

Tongue, teeth, and... *fangs*.

A shift in the atmosphere made me whip around, eyes traveling wildly for the source of the sudden disturbance I felt deep in my spirit.

When I locked eyes with Elias, it made sense.

What are you doing here?

I blinked.

Hard.

That question had happened in my head, but *I* hadn’t done the asking.

It wasn’t even my voice.

It was... *his*.

What?

I was distracted by my confusion long enough that Elias could approach without me really noticing until he was damn near on top of me, staring like I was something to devour.

“What are you doing here dressed like this?” he asked, in this highly possessive tone I didn’t *want* to like, but... it made me squirm.

“Do I look bad?”

No.

I knew I didn’t.

I just didn’t understand why he had a problem with it.

He made this sound in his throat as he stepped even closer somehow, leaning to speak in my ear. “You’re gonna get somebody’s eyes snatched out.”

“For what?” I whispered back.

“For looking too hard.”

I smirked, tipping my head back to look directly at him. “What’s wrong with looking? Especially considering... I don’t belong to anyone.”

I felt like it had to be said – amid all the other weirdness, I’d caught Irina’s implication that Elias had somehow claimed me.

A discussion I’d had no part of.

Elias snatched me by the neck.

Not *hard*, just... *firm*.

“You’re working on another punishment – and this time, I’m gonna do it in front of everybody, to make it absolutely clear who you *belong* to.”

“I didn’t agree to be part of whatever this game is,” I replied. “I don’t even know you, remember?” I asked. “Your family is wealthy, and influential — great. I’m happy for you. But you can’t just do whatever you want and expect me to play along.”

“Why not?”

I frowned and grabbed his hand, trying to pull it away from me. “Because it’s not how the world works.”

“It’s *exactly* how the world works – you just don’t see it.”

“Oh yeah, you’ve got money – it probably *is* how it works for you,” I agreed. “But I don’t know if being some rich asshole’s plaything for a few nights is for me.”

“Not just a few nights.”

I laughed. “That’s the only part that raises an objection, huh?”

“I am rich. I am an asshole. And we *will* play,” he said.

“Just because *you* say so?”

He stared at me for a long moment, then tightened the grip on my neck. “*Beyond* your desire to simply be rebellious, look me in the face and tell me you don’t want everything I have planned for you?”

I... couldn’t.

Not because of his hold on me, not because I was afraid, I just... *couldn’t*. Couldn’t make the lie cross my lips.

He smirked, then let go of my neck. “That’s what I thought.”

I wanted to give back a smart remark, but he’d already started moving – with a hand gripped around my wrist. To avoid being dragged, I moved too, following him back to where Irina had shown me the kitchen and the elevator.

He pressed a finger to the panel on the wall to get it to open.

“Where are we going?” I asked, hesitating.

“The elevator.”

I rolled my eyes.

Clearly, he wasn't feeling cooperative.

I followed him inside, my gaze going immediately to the buttons to see what floor he would press.

He didn't press any.

He pressed the button to close the door, and then turned to me with a ravenous scowl that made me back away, into the wall of the elevator.

Then he dropped to his knees in front of me.

“What are you doing?” I asked, but made exactly *zero* attempts to stop him from reaching underneath my dress and pulling my panties down my legs.

“What you wanted to happen when you came to my establishment looking like you did.”

I wanted to ask how he knew.

Not that it mattered with my leg hiked over his shoulder and his face in my pussy.

Deep.

His nose was pressed against my clit, his breath teasing me as his tongue dipped between my folds, lapping up the arousal that had been building there since he grabbed my neck.

Still building.

With one hand, he spread me open, exposing my clit so he could cover it with his mouth. My knees buckled as he sucked hard, pushing *two perfect for this* fingers into me.

He knew exactly where to aim them this time.

Knew exactly how deep to go, how fast to do it in time with his tongue. My hands went to his head, sinking into the lush coils he kept a little higher than the faded sides, gripping to give me some semblance of control.

Even though we both knew *exactly* what this was.

My head fell back against the elevator wall, and I abandoned any commitment to decorum, letting out every moan, every whimper as Elias licked me into an absolute frenzy, then into an orgasm. Then, with my thighs still trembling, licked me clean.

He pulled my panties back up for me as he stood, then used the pocket

square from his suit jacket to wipe his face. He was so calm, so collected, like he hadn't just eaten my pussy like dessert – meanwhile, I was trying my best to smooth the wrinkles from having my dress bunched around my hips, trying to comb through the tangles in my hair with my fingers.

“*Shit,*” I cursed as I accidentally swiped too hard against an apparently *too* sharp corner of one of my earrings. I brought my finger in front of me, cringing as I watched much more blood than expected start pouring out of my skin.

“Do you have a first aid kit somewhere?” I asked Elias as he grabbed my hand.

The next thing I knew, my finger was in his mouth.

His gaze locked with mine as he sucked it, but his eyes were so intense I couldn't hold it. I had to look away. Instead of looking him in the face, I watched my finger in his mouth, caught between his teeth.

My eyes narrowed.

His canines were so pronounced.

Almost like—“That should be better,” he said, pulling my finger from his mouth, and wiping my hand with the same square of silk he'd used to clear my essence from his face.

When I looked at my finger, the tiny nick I saw there seemed to already be half healed, and certainly not big enough that it should've bled as bad as it did.

“You should get home,” Elias said, stepping out of the elevator.

I hadn't even seen him press the button to open the door.

“But what about—”

“*Go home, Celeste. My driver will take you. I'll see you for dinner tomorrow night.*”

He walked away.

Just... *left.*

A moment later, Irina appeared – I already knew to follow her. She deposited me in the car, just like Elias wanted.

In next to no time, I was back in front of my place.

Just as wet and confused as the last time.

Four



The package arrived just in time.

I was standing in the middle of my closet, on the verge of tears when the doorbell rang – Brosia had been the one to go down and answer. While she did, River and I flipped through everything I had one more time, certain that there had to be *something* among the hangers that felt worthy of dinner with Elias Black.

Brosia came back into the room, standing at the closet entry with the over-sized box in her hands – black velvet trimmed with black silk.

As it turned out, Mr. Black knew exactly what he wanted to see me in.
Designer.

From the ultra-soft expensive lingerie to the shoes I’d long coveted, but couldn’t bring myself to purchase. And the *dress* – my God. I’d never put on anything so sexy that actually felt good.

The delicate straps were barely there and yet, secure. The slinky black fabric clung to me, but didn’t suffocate. The opening at my lower back plunged daringly low, stopping *just* shy of scandalous.

Everything fit perfectly.

“He’s already dressing you?” River commented, pretending to turn up her nose – the obvious delight in her eyes gave her away. “Are we sure that’s not a red flag?”

“Red flags are good in a situation like this,” Brosia laughed, stepping forward to help me comb my silk-pressed hair into the soft, wavy layers that

would perfectly complement my look. “This is one of those situations where you have your damn fun while it lasts, and use the memories to keep yourself entertained when it’s done. The wilder the road, the better.”

“Unless my dumb ass gets murdered,” I countered, sitting down at the vanity to pull out my makeup bag. “Y’all keep glossing over the fact that these people are weird.”

River snickered. “He’s a ten, but he *might* be in a secret sex club of weirdos that think they’re vampires. What does that make him?”

“Still a ten,” Brosia chirped. “He looks like that and eats pussy in elevators. Who cares about a little weird cosmetic dentistry?”

“I care,” I laughed. “I don’t need *any* weirdness around me.”

“Or is weirdness *exactly* what you need, Ms. *Always Too Busy Working or Planning Work to Go Out*,” Brosia teased.

“Oh, she made time to go be nosy and get slurped up at the Black Gallery though.”

“Shut up Riv,” I gasped. “I wasn’t *planning* for that to happen, I just... let curiosity get the best of me.”

“A little healthy curiosity ain’t never hurt anything,” Brosia said.

I scoffed. “I feel like there’s no way that’s true. Curiosity has *definitely* gotten somebody into some shit before.”

“You’re probably right,” she nodded. “Even more reason to live it up as much as possible, before the *shit* reveals itself.”

Those were the words I held onto later, as the car passed through the gates that allowed access to the neighborhood Elias called home. It wasn’t that late, but it was dark, making it hard to really see the other homes in any detail.

If something happened, you’d never be able to describe how to make it back here.

Yet another reason it was utterly ridiculous to be going along with... whatever this was.

At the house, the driver let me out, and I halfway expected to find Irina waiting to usher me inside.

Instead, Elias himself was waiting at the front door, dark eyes boring into me as I traversed the steps to get to where he was.

“You look incredible.”

I tried my best to temper the giddiness the compliment made me feel, biting the inside of my lip to keep my smile at a level that didn’t make it

seem like I'd never had a man tell me I looked good before.

"Thank you," I said, giving him a little nod. "And thank you for the gift."

"Don't. It was selfish," he said, putting a hand at my waist to guide me inside. "I knew what I wanted to see you in."

"Surprising – considering the last time you saw me dressed up, you had a problem."

"My *problem* was that the first time I saw you outside of your professional attire, I had to share the view with everyone else. This time... it's just for me."

I didn't respond to that because I didn't know how.

He led me through the house and out to the backyard I'd noticed on my first visit, to a lovely fireside dinner table set up. He pulled out my chair for me, poured my wine, then his, and then... just stared.

"What is it?" I asked, picking up my glass to take a sip out of pure nerves, just to have something to do with my hands.

"Just admiring you. Are you bothered by that?"

"No," I answered at first, and then shook my head. "Actually... a bit," I amended. "All of this is very strange."

"All of what?"

"Your sudden intrusion into my life."

He raised an eyebrow. "That's how you characterize it — *intrusion*?"

"Are you offended by that?"

"I'm a hard man to offend about most things."

"But are you offended by *that*," I insisted. "By me calling your interest in me an intrusion?"

He smirked a bit, as one of his staff walked out carrying covered platters of food. Once there was one in front of both of us, the covers were lifted to reveal a crab cake, a bowl of ceviche accompanied by tiny fresh crostini, and a mixed green salad dressed with a citrusy balsamic I smelled immediately.

A first course catered perfectly to my taste buds.

"Does it appear to your satisfaction?" Elias asked, pulling my attention to him as the server poured mineral water into our glasses.

"It appears to be, yes."

"Good. I know chefs are notoriously picky."

"I don't believe I fall into that stereotype," I said, picking up my fork to cut through the creamy remoulade topping to take a piece of the crab cake. It was so buttery and flavorful I had to consciously stop myself from letting out

an audible moan. “I love eating good food I didn’t have to prepare myself.”

“But that word – *good*,” he grinned. “That’s very subjective, right?”

“Not as much as people like to make it seem. *Lots* of people’s food is *just bad*.”

He stopped eating to look at me. “So you don’t think it’s a thing of simply finding the right audience?”

“No. Some things are just objectively terrible. But... you work in the arts, so I’m sure you have a mentality of finding beauty in every piece.”

“*Hell* no,” he chuckled. “I’ve seen some ugly shit I don’t believe *anyone* should be subjected to having to look at.”

“Really? I figured you artsy people would just say it was... I don’t know, abstract or something.”

“Maybe some would,” he shrugged. “Personally, I only care to make room for the exquisite. Both in my life, and in my gallery.”

I only care to make room for the exquisite.

Wow.

He was talking *such* a good game.

And maybe if I were younger, less experienced, it would be much easier to fall for.

But as it was... I wasn’t completely buying it.

And I was massively curious as to what it was about *me* that made him think I would.

So I asked.

“Why me?”

“You want the truth?”

I frowned. “Of course I want the truth, why else would I have asked the question?” I snapped, not caring to lower my voice as the server returned to clear our starter plates, replacing them with the entrée.

Tenderloin, scallops, fingerling potatoes, broccolini.

More personal favorites.

My attention was on Elias as a vein at his temple twitched, clearly in reaction to the energy I was giving him.

I didn’t care.

This — down to him somehow knowing my favorite dishes — was all a lot, and there *had* to be room for me to be frustrated by the way it was unfolding.

“The truth is... that I don’t know,” he answered, looking me right in the

eyes.

I was the one who broke contact, choosing to examine my steak. “*Exactly* what every woman wants to hear while she’s in the middle of nowhere, alone in a house with a man she doesn’t know.”

“If you need clarification on my words, you could just say that, Celeste.”

“Or you can choose to not be purposely opaque.”

“Fine,” he nodded. “Transparency, then. The truth is that I was out on the lake with my brothers, our personal parcel, which connects to Lake Zecoria. You were out on the lake too - catering to a private party who somehow found their vessel on our Lake Black – no doubt seeking the beauty of the serene view, but... trespassing, nonetheless. Nothing a little conversation between the two captains didn’t clear up, but just enough of a prolonged interaction that I had the opportunity to lay eyes on you. And as soon as I did, there came the kind of shift that only happens once in a lifetime for a man like me.”

I raised an eyebrow. “So you’re telling me, you saw me sweaty on a boat serving cream puffs to some rich assholes, and thought, *that’s her.*”

“Is that a problem?” he asked. “I thought most women wanted to be appreciated for their natural beauty.

“Of course, but I was under the impression that wealthy men preferred their women a little more... polished.”

He chuckled. “Don’t get me wrong, I *do* love to see you dolled up, but... I also absolutely enjoy the sight of you completely undone,” he smirked, running his tongue over his lips. “Your face flushed, hair a mess, unable to hold back your moans... I want it all.”

I put a fork full of scallop in my mouth, more as a stalling tactic than out of genuine hunger, even though the food was amazing.

“Why *not* you?” he asked, and I almost choked over the food in my mouth, coughing a bit before I swallowed to clear my throat.

“What do you mean?”

He shrugged. “You said *why me* as if you were skeptical I’d genuinely want you. Is that question based on another of your presumptions about me?”

“Call it a presumption if you must,” I answered. “I’d call it an educated inference based on experience. I come in the contact with wealthy men all the time, and as I said, they usually prefer their women a bit more trophy-esque.”

“And you don’t think you fit that?”

I smirked. “I think I work too hard for that. And I think that I’m not

interested in it either, being a man's trophy."

"Not even if it meant having all your needs met, all your wants fulfilled, all your dreams brought within your reach?"

"It sounds amazing, but I'm not naïve enough to understand there's not a trade-off with something like that. And the tradeoff is rarely worth it."

"You think so?"

"I do."

He remained quiet for a long moment after I said that, long enough that I spoke again.

"So what now?" I asked. "Does that disqualify me from whatever little... poor working-class beauty fantasy you wanted to act out?"

He shook his head. "My plans for you are still very much intact."

"What if I walk out that door?"

"What about dessert?"

I scoffed. "What, your face in my pussy again?"

"Key lime pie, actually," he chuckled. "I believe it's your favorite. What you named though – that's mine."

I ignored the second part of his words, knowing they were a distraction. "How do you know my favorite foods?"

"I know many things about you."

"That's not an answer to my question."

"I guess not, is it?" he asked, sitting back in his chair. His penetrating gaze swept over, settling with his eyes pinned to mine. "I know your favorite foods because I make it a point to know as much as I can about people I'm interested in."

I nodded, uncomfortable with his scrutiny, but not willing to let him know. "And you're interested in me because when you saw me on the boat that day, you felt a "shift". Right?"

"Correct."

"How do you know it wasn't just heartburn?"

Elias tossed his head back, laughing at my comment – I *hated* the way the sound hit me, warming me like a sudden gust from the fire.

"You are a delight, you know that?" he asked, as the server returned to replace our dinner plates with dessert – a beautifully garnished individual key lime pie, just like he said.

"You just like my pussy."

"*Like* is a gross understatement, Celeste." He leaned in, over the table.

“But I assure you – in-depth exploration of your pussy is the least of my plans for you.”

I raised an eyebrow. “You have plans for me? What are they?”

“You’ll have to stick around to find out.”

Such an ominous statement.

Not overtly threatening enough to make me scared to eat that – phenomenal – key lime pie, but enough to make me ask afterwards, “So what’s next? You’re going to set me loose on the property and hunt me or something?”

“You’ve watched entirely too much TV.”

“Perhaps,” I said, shivering as a sudden gust of frigid wind swept by us, strong enough to make the flames dip low. “But I noticed you didn’t *quite* answer.”

“Hunting is a barbaric practice,” he said, standing from his chair to move to where I was. “Let’s get you inside.”

He helped me from my seat, planting a hand at the small of my back to guide me inside. It took everything in me not to moan over the feel of his skin against mine – I purposely moved slow, prolonging the contact.

“Sir,” one of his staff said as soon as we’d stepped inside. “It’s time.”

The man held up a small leather pouch, and Elias nodded, then looked at me. “Give me a moment, doll.”

He moved away, taking the warmth of his touch with him as he existed that parlor area where he’d guided me.

I gave myself permission to look around.

There were dozens of framed pictures around the room, and I took them all in – starting with one of Elias and two men who had to be his brothers.

They were *all* fine.

The pictures were from all different places, time periods. Most didn’t have a label, but I had to assume the subjects were all somehow important to Elias, to be so beautifully displayed in this manner.

Halfway up a wall, tucked into a corner, I found one that made my eyes go wide – downtown Blackwood, before the historic massacre. Known back then as *Sugarleaf*, which was emblazoned across the top of the photograph. I leaned in close, realizing I was looking at a picture of *The Black Gallery* when it was first built, with the rest of downtown.

The man standing out front holding the vintage camera looked *exactly* like Elias – at least, as much as he could in such an old photo.

This must be their father?

“You’ve got an eye for detail, I see.”

The sound of his voice *right* behind me almost made me jump out of my skin. I clutched a hand to my chest as he grabbed me at the elbows, steadying me. The position brought us so close I could feel his heartbeat, his breath on my face... his dick against my stomach.

Hard.

He let out a deep, ragged breath as he stepped back. “I think it’s time to get you back home.”

Five



I frowned, confused by what felt like a very sudden dismissal. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No. Absolutely not,” he assured, bringing a hand to my back again. “But it’s very late, and I believe you have a client in the morning, no?”

My gaze flicked to the clock I’d noticed on the wall earlier. It was already after midnight, and I needed to be in the kitchen at six am starting prep.

“Oh. I guess you’re right. But... how do you know my schedule?”

He smirked. “There is a large calendar on the wall—”

“In my office,” I finished, already filling in the details in my head. “Which you’ve been in. Uninvited, by the way.”

“You didn’t seem to mind too much,” he said, leading me back to the front entry. “But... something is bothering you now?”

I raised an eyebrow. “You know that because...?”

“It’s all over your face. What’s wrong?”

I swallowed hard, taking a step back from him – away from his touch. “This just feels like a very anti-climatic end to what I believed was a good night.”

“Ahh,” he murmured, rubbing a hand over the soft facial hair on his chin. “You wanted me to fuck you tonight – that’s why you came?”

“No!” I denied, flustered. “I wasn’t –”

“You’re disappointed – it’s okay to say that,” he said, closing the distance I’d put between us. “Don’t worry—I’ll be filling you to the brim soon

enough.”

“That’s disgusting,” I scoffed, shaking my head. “I thought you were attempting to get to know me — not my pussy. And yet, here you are, ushering me out the door to be tended to by your driver. It’s insulting – but it’s fine. I’ll take the hint.”

I turned to head out the door, and he followed, grabbing my arm before I could take the first step.

“I’m not a fan of your bratty behavior right now,” he said, dragging me against him.

“What if I don’t give a fuck what you’re a fan of?”

His eyes narrowed into a glare for a few seconds before he shook his head. “All this because I’d like to get you home at a reasonable time?”

“All this because you think I’m stupid, and can’t tell that *something* changed from when you stepped away for a moment and came back telling me it was time to go home.”

He sighed. “Fine – something came up. You happy?”

“No,” I laughed. “But, I’m going home, so... whatever, right?” I snatched away from him, headed to where his driver had already opened the back door of the sleek black luxury SUV for me.

“*Celeste!*” he called after me, but I’d already climbed inside.

“Can we go?” I asked the driver, who instead of looking at me, looked at Elias.

Because I wasn’t the one who signed his paychecks, obviously.

“Yes,” Elias agreed, and I sat back, relieved, as the door closed.

That relief only lasted a moment.

The door on the other side opened, and Elias climbed in, taking a seat beside me. He pressed a button somewhere that rolled up a partition I didn’t even know existed, then turned to face me.

“This is too much,” I said, crossing my arms.

“How is it too much, Celeste? You threw a tantrum to get my attention, now you have it.”

My mouth dropped. “Be for real right now – I didn’t want *any* of this. *You* barged into my life, my business, and my body, you’ve done nothing but *demand* my attention,” I snapped. “But the moment I let you know you’re being dismissive, you want to act as if I’m some clingy loser bitch? Boy, kiss my ass.”

“Wow,” he laughed. “I see I’ve upset you.”

“Impeccable powers of discernment,” I declared. “Perfect way to round out this *incredible* date.”

I was barely surprised when he snatched me out of my seatbelt, then my seat, dragging me onto his lap. No regard for the fact that we were in a moving vehicle. I didn’t make that shit easy though, resisting the whole way until I felt how hard he was between my legs.

It was like a switch suddenly flipped in me, anger and arousal fusing together to make me just... *pliant*.

“I’m sorry for the abrupt shift that happened at the house.” He paired his apology with a gaze locked on mine and a hand wrapped around my neck, keeping me from looking away. “I should not have invited you tonight – I was impatient, and expected you to simply... adapt. I see that was a mistake.”

I whimpered as his other hand slid between my legs, skimming the soft lace he’d chosen for me to wear under the dress.

“Nothing *came up* — I needed you away from me so I wouldn’t do this,” he murmured, pulling my face to his at the same time as he slid my panties aside for better access.

“But I *want* you to do it,” I admitted, rocking into his fingers. “I want you to fuck me.”

“Don’t say that,” he hissed, pushing deeper.

“Don’t say what?”

“That you want me to fuck you.”

“But I do.”

“Yes, but... if you keep saying it... it makes it harder to resist.”

“Okay,” I whispered against his lips, working my hands between us to access his buttons, his zipper. “Then just... don’t resist.”

If I didn’t know better, I’d think his eyes glowed, but I quickly realized we’d passed a traffic light – that *had* to be it.

At least, it was the only explanation my brain had time to process before Elias had done the work of freeing himself from his pants and boxers, then pulled me onto his dick.

He... was not exaggerating about filling me to the brim.

He covered my mouth with his, swallowing my cries as my body stretched to accommodate him. He grabbed me at the hips, his fingers digging into my flesh in a harsh grip as he pushed me off him and then pulled me back down.

Hard.

His mouth didn't leave mine, muffling both of our grunts and groans of pleasure as he moved me up and down his dick until I had the presence of mind to take over. Knees squeezing his hips, hands anchored on his shoulders, I switched up the pace, opting for a deep grind over the bounce he'd started.

Needing to breathe, I pulled back from the kiss, fixing him with a breathless grin as I watched his face.

He was watching me, too.

Eyes half closed, catching a red glow in the passing bursts of light.

He bit down on his lip, showing a flash of white teeth before he grabbed me at the neck again, roughly switching our positions so I was sprawled across the seats on my back. One leg over the seat, foot pressed against the roof, the other hiked over his shoulder as he dug into me with the slow, *deep* strokes of a man intent on being permanently embedded.

"*Fuck!*" My pussy clenched tight around him as my nails dug into his hips, clawing for something to hold on to as he stroked.

"This is what you wanted?" he asked, and I couldn't do anything but moan my *yes* in response as pressure built in the deepest parts of me. "Cum for me," he said, meeting my gaze with those half-lidded eyes.

My mouth opened, right on the edge of a scream.

The tension was too much.

"There it is, right there," Elias muttered, bring a hand to my clit as he stroked *just* a little faster, making that overwhelming friction build into a frenzy.

"*Please,*" I begged.

He nodded. "Tell me what you want, doll? You want more?"

Fuck.

Somehow, he found room to go deeper.

Harder.

I was going to *explode*.

"Just let it go. Come on. Come on," he whispered to me as he pressed into my clit. "Don't hold it back."

It was too much.

"*I can't,*" I whined as my toes curled and eyes clenched tight.

"Yes the fuck you can."

I... *did*.

And I saw stars when it happened.

My mouth was open, but I didn't yell, didn't scream, I just... *released*, with an intensity that touched every inch of my body. He'd wound me up so tight that it wasn't even a *pop*, I just... *crumbled*, into a mass of bliss and over-stimulation.

And he didn't stop.

As Elias kept moving, the orgasm kept hitting me in wave after wave, even after he grabbed me at the hips to slam into me one last time when *he* came.

On, and on, and on.

It took me a bit to realize that the car had stopped.

We were in front of my house, still catching our breath.

When he sat back, I looked between us, wanting to see his dick covered in *me*, illuminated by the streetlight. But as he pulled out, I looked away, horrified.

He was covered in *me* for sure.

"Oh my God – I'm so sorry. My period wasn't supposed to start for several more days – you can come inside and clean up, and I can wash your ___"

He shook his head, sitting back.

"Celeste... I can't come inside. You have to go."

He wouldn't look at me.

"Elias. I'm—"

"Go," he growled, and I didn't waste time grabbing my purse and yanking my dress down, scrambling out of the vehicle with my shoes barely on my feet.

There was no way I wouldn't look like the unfortunate victim of a severe crime if any of my neighbors glimpsed me outside. I made it to my front door as fast as I possibly could, digging my keys from my purse in record time.

Elias was already gone by the time I made it inside.

Six



I didn't want to show up at the gallery event.

That would've been beyond childish though – we were all grown, things happen.

Except, that particular thing, in that particular circumstance, with that particular look he gave me – or wouldn't give me, actually...

Suffice it to say, days later, it was still on my mind.

There had been no surprise pop-ups, no random demands for my presence at dinner – I was halfway expecting the contract to be canceled.

Of course, no such thing happened.

I arrived at the Black Gallery when I was supposed to, Irina greeted me normally and showed me to the kitchen, I met sous chef and waitstaff for the night, and...

I cooked.

Beautifully light, small plates, clear opulence.

Exactly the vision Elias had in mind.

While I was working, I rarely had the unfortunate experience of being worried about anything, and tonight was no exception – I could get lost in the breakdown of each individual task.

It was soothing, honestly.

“Running low on the fresh whipped cream here!” my sous chef called, which made me happy – I'd tried to make it clear, when I wasn't alone in my kitchen, I ran it with a community vibe – if you needed something, just say

so. I was finished with the candied lemon peel that would top the desserts she was plating – I handed her those so she could start utilizing, then moved to the fridge to get another tub of the whipped cream so I could join that station with her.

We were almost done.

As I approached the refrigerator, though... I noticed the door was slightly ajar.

Not enough to lose too much of the frigid air, but not ideal. I grabbed the whipped cream and tried to close it, but quickly realized something must be off.

“Hey, do you know what’s up with the fridge?” I asked, and the young woman shook her head.

“I noticed earlier that it wouldn’t quite close all the way, but couldn’t figure it out with a quick glance, so I moved on.”

I nodded. “Understandable. Give me a second, let me see if I can figure it out.”

The last thing I needed was some damage for that expensive ass refrigerator coming out of my check.

When I opened it again, a bit of investigation revealed that one of the big drawers at the bottom wasn’t fully seated, which was blocking the main door from falling into place. I tried to push it closed, but something kept that from happening. So I pulled the drawer out and bent down, peering to the back of the massive fridge.

Right there.

One of the little metal tubes from the day Irina had showed me around.

There was a weird feeling in my chest as I grabbed it, as if I were seeing something I shouldn’t.

It wasn’t a “tube”.

It was a metal casing around a syringe.

Filled with... *blood?*

Instead of tossing it onto the counter... I slipped the tube in the pocket of my pants, then replaced the drawer, and closed the fridge.

Completely.

While I was at the sink scrubbing my hands so I could join the plating station again, my mind raced, wondering what the hell I’d stumbled upon. Thinking back to the day I’d seen them without knowing what I was looking at, there had been *dozens* of those tubes, neatly lined up trays.

Maybe *hundreds*.

It's not actual blood, girl.

Yeah.

Of course not.

I had to remember, some of these people thought they were damn vampires – it was probably tomato juice or something, some fun interactive element for one of the night's signature cocktails.

As a matter of fact, the bartender had been in the kitchen earlier, grabbing supplies – that was probably how the vial in my pocket got lost.

Yes.

That made actual sense.

I finished my sanitation and went to help plate dessert – all four hundred plates went into the chiller up front for the servers to pass around later. Again, there was no cleaning in my contract – the gallery had hired people for that — but I hung around for a bit to help, just to make sure.

I didn't like leaving until the last course had actually gone out.

I'd been holding my bladder for what felt like the entire night, so as I soon as I could reasonably get away I did, leaving my chef's coat hanging in the kitchen. I made my way to the same bathroom that weird motherfucker had followed me into the last time I was here.

This time, there were many more people.

I had to wait in line a bit, so I was squirming by the time I sat down to relieve myself. On the way back out, as I was zipping and re-buttoning, my hand landed on the vial in my pocket.

I pulled it out.

It... didn't *look* like something for a bloody Mary.

It just looked like *blood*.

Before I could talk myself out of it, I was opening the vial, ignoring the blur of conversation on the other side of the stall door. Once it was open, I lifted it to my nose, *praying* for the scent of tomato, hot sauce, anything a normal person might consume.

I closed my eyes.

Copper.

I tossed the whole thing into the trash can and flung my way out of the stall to get to the sink.

My eyes were burning, stomach lurching, trying to understand what the *fuck* was happening as I frantically washed my hands.

It took me a second to realize the other women in the bathroom were watching me.

Staring at me.

One woman smiled, bringing my attention directly to her teeth.

Fangs.

It was time to get the fuck outta there.

Not just the bathroom – the whole damn place, period.

I went for the door, bursting out before anyone could say – or *do* – anything to me. I had to get to the kitchen, get my bag, and never see these freaky motherfuckers again.

“Celeste!”

I froze at the sound of Irina’s voice as soon as I stepped into the kitchen doorway.

“There you are,” she said, already linking an arm through mine. “Elias requires your presence.”

“Requires?”

She gave me a soft smile and nodded. “Yes. *Requires.*”

Somehow... I couldn’t argue.

I hadn’t seen him since the night I ruined his clothes and the back seat of that expensive ass car – I was fully under the impression I’d been understandably discarded. It was a new thing to wrestle with in my mind as Irina took me up the elevator, to the very top floor it offered.

“Woman to woman,” I said, stopping as she escorted me off, toward a carved black door. “What the hell is going on around here?”

She raised an eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“The fangs,” I said. “The biting. The *blood*. What is this? Some kind of vampire fantasy?”

With each word I said, a bit of warmth left Irina’s face. Our gazes were locked as I waited for her to give me an answer I soon realized wasn’t coming.

“Elias is waiting for you.”

“Okay, just tell me this,” I rushed out, and she stopped again. “Is he dangerous?”

“Absolutely,” she answered, no hesitation.

I swallowed hard. “Okay. Is he... a danger to *me*?”

A hint of a smile curved her lips, bringing a bit of warmth back to her face. “That depends on your definition of danger.”

With that, she led me to the door, pushing it open.

There was no point in me turning back – I couldn't make the elevator work. Irina had used her handprint or something.

So... I stepped forward, into the dark, and she left, closing the door behind her.

I couldn't see anything.

Not even my hand in front of my face.

“Let's get you cleaned up.”

I damn near bit a hole in my lip to keep myself from screaming when Elias spoke, just inches from my ear. His touch was familiar, soothing through the thin fabric of the tank top I'd been wearing under my chef's coat.

He easily steered me to a bathroom, where finally, a light came on.

He was beautiful as ever.

I couldn't even say anything as he stripped out of his suit, laying each item carefully across an upholstered chair at the vanity. Once he was down to his boxers, he came to me, stripping my clothing off an item at a time.

Even underwear.

“What's happening?” I asked as he put a shower cap on me, then ushered me under the hot spray of the shower.

No answer.

He washed me from head to toe.

Thoroughly, then rinsed me off.

Dried me.

Lotioned me.

All without a word.

It was driving me nuts.

Back in what I knew now was one of the apartments, Elias led me to a closet, where shoes, jewelry, underwear, and a dress were laid out.

He dressed me.

Put my shoes on.

Clipped stunning black diamonds on my neck, wrists, and ears.

“Fix your hair and makeup,” he said, pointing to another vanity before he moved back to the bathroom.

This is all so damn weird.

It was too much, really.

But that didn't stop me from following the directions I was given, making quick use of the tools I was given. I combed my hair out from the two French

braids I usually wore for work, fluffing it to frame my face. I used the brand-new makeup waiting in a bag to pull together a passable soft glam in the limited time he gave me.

When he came back, he was dressed again – no shirt under his suit jacket this time.

Somehow... it fit the vibe.

“What is happening here?” I asked, crossing my arms. “You say nothing to me for days after what happened in the car, then you bring me up here to bathe and dress me, for... for...” I sucked in a breath as something occurred to me. “This is some satanic shit, isn’t it?! You motherfuckers are about to use me to summon a demon or something.”

“Celeste,” Elias chuckled, shaking his head. “No, not at all. I see nothing for you to be afraid of.”

“You don’t *really* think that’s comforting, do you?”

“I understand why it might not be,” he admitted. “But all will be revealed in due time.”

“Let’s reveal it *now*,” I insisted. “I’ve been too naïve about all this, and I knew better, but... it’s gotten to be too much. *Enough* with the bullshit. Tell me why I’m here.”

He sighed, pushing his hands into his pockets. He looked so good standing there – tall and wide-shouldered, his chest decorated with scars. “I can’t tell you – I’d have to show you.”

“Then *show me*,” I pressed, tipping my head to the side.

“You don’t know what you’re demanding.”

“Okay, fuck this!”

I turned, hellbent on getting out of there even if I had to jump out a window. Elias was too fast, though, getting in front of me before I could make it very far.

“Celeste—”

I rounded on him, getting right in his face. “*Fuck off* unless you’re ready to give me some answers.”

“Answers would require you to stretch the limits of your beliefs about the world and the way it works – the people you walk among every day,” he said. “You’ll have to reject everything you previously thought was real, or possible. *Answers* will require your total submission to my way of life. I hoped to ease you into it, but... you want answers.”

I raised an eyebrow, head tipped back to meet his gaze as he crowded my

space. “Stop talking in riddles and just... *say it.*”

“Celeste... I operate in a reality you’ve only ever imagined — a realm the good citizens of Blackwood barely even know exists, even though we’ve been here since inception.”

I scoffed. “What... are you part of some secret society for you and your rich friends? Your little fake vampire club?”

Amusement tipped the corners of his mouth. “There’s nothing fake about it, doll.”

“You’re insane,” I told him, taking a step back.

But even as I did, I started noticing things – the sharpness of his canines, which I’d seen before and written off. The subtle red pulse of his irises that I’d explained away as a trick of the light.

The specific location of the scars on his chest – all across the middle and right, short wounds as if he’d been in a knife fight or something. Not slices, though.

Stabs.

Stakes.

Like someone had tried to stake him through the heart, but didn’t know the right side.

“No,” I whispered, shaking my head as I backed up. “That’s not... this isn’t...”

“You wanted to know – now you do,” Elias said, closing the distance in what seemed like two strides. Just as quickly as I tried to back up, he snatched me by the arms, yanking me flush against him. “You wanted to *see*... let me show you.”

Before I could respond one way or the other, his mouth was on my exposed neck, his teeth sinking in. I opened my mouth to scream, but nothing came out – a strange pulling sensation where he’d bit me suppressed it.

That was the feeling though.

No pain.

Just... that *pull* that somehow felt like it was connected between my legs. I couldn’t even focus on the intoxicating pleasure of that though – not with the unbidden images playing in my brain.

Lovemaking.

A relationship.

A wedding.

A baby.

All between me and Elias.

I gasped as he finally pulled back, leaving me weak in the knees, dazed between what had just occurred and what I'd seen.

“What... what the hell was that?” I asked, stumbling backward.

He tried to steady me, but I pushed him away, putting a hand to my neck to feel for the puncture wounds left by his fangs.

There were none.

“Our future,” he answered, and I shook my head.

“Absolutely not – this is *fucking* crazy,” I whimpered, glancing around.

For what?

Who knew?

This was *his* property.

There was certainly no help coming for me.

“You don't need *help*,” he said, and I quickly turned to find that he was right behind me, instead of a few feet away, like just a second ago.

“What did you do to me,” I stammered, taking another step away – this time tripping over my own feet.

I braced for impact, but Elias had already caught me.

“I've *elevated* you, doll. Welcome to eternity.”

Seven



Welcome to eternity.
Welcome to eternity.
Welcome to eternity.

Those words echoed in my brain, bouncing painfully off the fringes of my mind as I rode down the elevator with Elias. He stood on the other side of the metal enclosure, watching me.

I should be angry with him.

I should be terrified.

Instead, I felt... *powerful*.

“Am I... what you are, now?” I asked. “A vampire?”

He chuckled. “Yes and no, doll. I was born this way – a bloodline vampire. You’ve been turned.”

“So... second-rate, then,” I said, dryly.

“No,” he shook his head. “Your blood blond with me makes you... royalty. Elite. Don’t you feel it already?”

I looked away.

I felt... *horny*.

And hyper.

After being on my feet cooking for hours, plus a busy week, it was actually insane to be bustling with energy, to literally *feel* it coursing through me.

“What’s going to happen to me? Am I going to bite my friends? *Turn*

them? Drain them?”

“No,” he answered. “We’ve evolved beyond using our fangs for feeding. They’re used for welcoming newcomers into our fold, yes, but mostly they’re for use among our kindred. For fun.”

“Fun?”

“Fighting or fucking,” he replied with a grin, flashing his. “Don’t worry. I’ll show you.”

Those words made me squirm.

The elevator had stopped a while ago, but he hadn’t opened the door.

“If the fangs aren’t for feeding... how do you... I don’t understand.”

“You found a vial earlier,” he said, smirking at me when my eyes went wide. “Injections of purified blood.”

I closed my eyes as that information clicked into place, bringing another realization to mind. “That night at your house, when you stepped away – it was for an injection, wasn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“And when you came back... you suddenly wanted me gone. Why?”

He pushed away from the side of the elevator to approach me. “Because the injection – which I’d been skipping as a matter of conditioning – gave me back a deeper connection to my senses. When I came back to you... I could tell your menstruation was imminent.”

“And it grossed you out.”

“Quite the opposite,” he chuckled. “We weren’t yet at a place for me to indulge what I would’ve *liked* to do to you in that state.”

My eyes went even wider. “So when you put me out of the car after I made that mess—”

“It was so I wouldn’t traumatize *you* with my... enthusiasm.”

“That’s disgusting.”

He wrapped an arm around my waist, pulling me against him as he tipped the other hand under my chin. “You’ll come to love it. Just give it time.”

I believed him.

Shit.

“Why me?”

“I believe I’ve answered that question already Celeste.”

“I believe your answer is bullshit,” I countered.

“You can believe what you want, but the truth is the truth.” He shrugged, letting me go to step past me to open the elevator door. “There is someone for

everyone. A predestined partner.”

“So you just get to decide for me? What about my consent?”

He laughed. “You don’t have to fuck me if you don’t want to, doll. But following the call of my bloodline means more to me than your permission.”

My face twisted into a frown. “Are you saying you’d *force* me to bear your heir?”

“Not at all,” he clarified. “I don’t give a fuck about kids. But I’ve seen what happens when I try to buck my fate,” he said, gesturing toward some poor mortal’s failed attempt to stake him through the heart. “I’m interested in a much simpler existence now. So I followed my ancestral path. I turned you. I showed you what the plan is. I’ve done my part by making sure you’re around to fulfill it. But no – I won’t *force* you.”

He wouldn’t have to.

I already knew, despite my arguing otherwise.

I wanted nothing more than to push him on the floor and fuck him in the hall, with no regard for who saw.

Still... it was... so much to process.

“What will I tell my friends?” I asked. “You said I won’t... *eat them*, but... will I change? What do I say?”

He smirked. “Tell them whatever you want, but understand the value in discretion. I will say though, Celeste... I don’t know that all your friends will be as surprised by this as you are.”

“What?!”

I asked, but he’d already walked away, essentially forcing me to follow. I’d learned my lesson with the last party and had not tried to poke my head where it didn’t belong.

Only this time, I belonged.

I was on Elias Black’s arm.

A position that held weight.

People scrambled out of our way, stared, whispered.

Loud.

At least... I *thought* it was loud until I realized I wasn’t hearing whispers at all.

I was hearing... *thoughts*.

Lucky bitch.

I hate being around these stuffy viggas, I need to go to BB’s.

You’ll always have a headache if you don’t learn to tune it out.

Instantly, everything but the music went quiet, and I turned to look at Elias, who was studying me.

“Only the absolute most trusted people should ever know you can do this.”

I nodded my understanding, and he squeezed my hand.

“Good. Now – tell me what you think of the art.”

At first my gaze went to the walls – which were bare. I frowned, confused, until my gaze shift to the platforms sprinkled around the space, illuminated in red.

“This is what I meant when I said we used the fangs for fun.”

No clothes – not a single shred.

There were people – *vampires* – on those platforms, all engaged in some act of sex while people gathered around, watching.

Twenty minutes ago, I might’ve found it grotesque.

Now, I wasn’t moved by the sight of blood dripping from the “models” as they fucked in the most acrobatic of positions, managing to look beautiful in the throes of pleasure. It was... lovely, actually, all different body types, all shades of melanin bathed in red, skin on skin.

The smell of sex and blood and dessert from the platters being presented around the room mingled together, hitting me right between the legs.

“You were going to bring me to see *this*?” I asked Elias, turning to face him. “I thought you were planning to ease me into it?”

He shrugged. “Five minutes ago, they were just fucking,” he shrugged. “I would’ve had you out of here before *this* started.”

I nodded, but before I could reply, Irina had approached. She did a little double take after she’d looked at me, then looked at Elias.

“I see you couldn’t help yourself,” she smirked, and he shook his head.

“She insisted.”

“Undoubtedly a stretch of the truth,” Irina laughed, then turned to pull me into her arms. “Welcome to the fold, Celeste.”

“Uh... thank you,” I said, hugging her back. “So... you too, huh? That’s why you couldn’t answer when I tried to get the truth out of you earlier?”

“I’m sorry,” she said, with a slightly bowed head. “Blood first. You’ll understand.”

I was sure I would.

But for now, I was suddenly feeling dizzy again – something Elias immediately responded to, without me even having to say it.

“You need your first injection,” he murmured to me, encouraging me to lean into him as he led me out of the party.

Back up the elevator.

Back to the penthouse.

Back to the bedroom.

I watched it all – the preparations, the sterilization, the administering of one of those same little vials I’d disposed of earlier in the bathroom.

Already, such a strange shift to my entire... *being*.

The blood took effect quick.

All that sudden fatigue was gone, and I was right back to what I’d been before, observing the performance art downstairs.

Horny.

I looked at Elias, but he was already looking at me.

Ready.

The thought was barely across my mind before I was all over him and he was all over me, stripping each other down to nothing.

There was no preamble, just me shoved against the wall, legs hiked high around his waist as Elias tried his very best to impale me on his dick. This time, my pussy molded to him easily, taking every inch of girth and length as he rocked his hips up.

My hands went to his ass cheeks, nails digging in, encouraging him to give me more.

Faster.

Deeper.

I *loved* the sound of him slamming into me.

In no time, we were both wet and sweaty, and he *already* had me building into a fucking frenzy. His mouth went to my neck, teeth sinking in again, making my knees go weak. I was on fire in the best possible way, my nerve endings in a complete hysteria, pussy clenching trying to take him deeper, clit throbbing with the friction of him being pressed so tight against me.

I felt... *everything*.

He was in my head, lauding the feel of my pussy, the taste of my blood, the strength of my heart beating. I could feel his too, thumping hard against my breasts smashed between us, could smell the salt of his sweaty skin.

I could feel *his* pleasure.

The slick warmth of my pussy, the hit of euphoria every time he got deep.

My mouth was watering.

Such a strange feeling.

Such a *craving*.

Instead of fighting it, as he finally released his fangs from my neck to whisper the filthy shit in my ear instead of projecting it at me... I put my mouth to *his* neck.

Felt the twinge as my fangs pushed out from my teeth.

I let them sink into his flesh as he fucked me.

I didn't drink – something deep in me rejected the idea, letting me know that the goal was just... to savor.

So that's what I did.

I don't know if I could explain it – which was maybe why he didn't explain it to me.

All I knew was, being connected to him like this made me feel lightheaded and drunk all over again. He grunted deep in his throat, tightening his grip on my ass cheeks.

And fucked me harder.

Faster.

Deeper.

Until I was moaning into his neck, in absence of the ability to scream.

He fucked me until I had to let up, so I could let *out* all my cries of blissful adulation, until the orgasm hit me so hard everything went white.

Then he let my legs down, bent me over the vanity where I'd done my makeup earlier, and kept fucking me.

Until *he* was the one doing the roaring as he filled me with his seed.

After he'd pulled out, he smacked me on the ass, hard enough to leave a lingering sting.

I *loved* it.

Several minutes later, he had me immersed in the jetted tub, soaking in a bath of hot suds. I watched, enthralled, when he finally climbed in with me, then adjust himself to sit behind me, pulling me into his lap.

“So what's the next question?” he asked, pressing a kiss to the side of my temple before he leaned back against the tub.

I thought about it for a moment, then turned halfway to face him. “What now?” I replied. “You've thrust me into all this with little warning, and... I suppose I'll have to adjust. But... what's next?”

He grinned. “Next... you meet the family.”

-t he end.

The second book in this series, Caution, is available now!

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About the Author

Christina C. Jones is a best-selling romance novelist and digital media creator. A timeless storyteller, she is lauded by readers for her ability to seamlessly weave the complexities of modern life into captivating tales of Black characters in nearly every romance subgenre. In addition to her full-time writing career, she co-founded Girl, Have You Read – a popular digital platform that amplifies Black romance authors and their stories. Christina has a passion for making beautiful things, and be found crafting, cooking, and designing and building a (literal) home with her husband in her spare time.