A woman with long dark hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a black bra and a black harness with straps and buckles. She is looking to the left. The lighting is dramatic, with strong red highlights on her skin and hair against a dark background.

Q10
QUEEN OF
HEARTS

*Hard
Limits*

SUKI WILLIAMS

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First Publication: June 2021

Editing by: Michelle with Inked Imagination Services

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Formatting by: Jarica James with Inked Imagination Services

Publishing by Suki Williams

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QUEEN OF HEARTS BOOK ONE

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SUKI WILLIAMS

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For Sammi, who helped me get back to writing again. Thank you for taking a chance on me and letting me be part of the Violent Tendencies anthology. You'll never know just how much that means to me and our friendship that came from it.

To the amazing Mish and Cassie- I legitimately couldn't have written this book without both of you helping me along the way. If edits don't drive you crazy, then they aren't pushing you to do better.

To my cowifey, alpha reader, and one of my besties Jare- I don't know who hurt me, but I'm glad you're here for all of my darkness.

Note to readers:

Please do [not] message me with details of a Nic inspired life of sexy, bloody crime after reading this book.

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TRIGGER WARNING

This book contains: non con, dub con, BDSM scenes, torture, and other adult material that people could find triggering.

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NOTE FOR READERS

The main character, Nicholette, is a call girl, and she will maintain that job throughout her series. Sexual scenes with clients may be on page in her stories, but she will have full disclosure with her harem and their complete support.

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Nichollette

Monday

H *e's going to get me. I can't keep running forever.*

I could hear his heavy breathing and pounding footsteps as I desperately ran through the woods, branches snapping beneath my feet and pines rustling in the brisk fall breeze. The forest was quiet, our rapid steps and ragged breaths overly loud in the emptiness. My hair was up in a high ponytail, dark black waves bouncing with each step, but my expensive running shoes weren't helping me get away from him. Adrenaline had my blood pounding, each pump resounding in my ears as I ducked and wove through branches, not letting myself savor his annoyed curses when he tried to follow and got smacked by the low-hanging branches. Just a little bit further until I'd be at a parking lot. *Witnesses. Safety.* The determined gait of the giant behind me sped up as if he could sense my thoughts of freedom.

A low growl was the last warning I had before he tackled me to the ground. While I was young and fit, there was no way I would ever be able to fight him off, though I'd be damned if I didn't try. The man was built like a tank, and he used every

bit of his muscle mass to weigh me down, pinning me to the leaf-covered ground. One hand scrambled, trying to find anything that could serve as a weapon, while the other ineffectively tried to push him off of me. My desperate attempts just made the dark-haired man give a low, rumbling laugh, amused at my attempts of escape, and the deep bass of his voice made my stomach clench. *Traitor.*

Luckily, his amused laughter made him lower his guard just enough that I was able to grab a handful of dirt and leaves. Not letting myself second guess the decision, I threw it at him. He roared as the dirt got in his eyes, the sound so violent it almost seemed like the trees around us shivered. I managed to get out from under him, stumbling and almost falling before I started to run again.

I didn't make it far.

Pain erupted as my head was wrenched back by my ponytail, stopping my entire body in a violent jerk. Involuntarily, I cried out, gasping at his hold, but he ignored it, dragging me by my hair back into the depths of the woods. I tried to kick, punch, anything and everything to get away, but he spun me around until my back was pressed against the rough bark of a nearby tree.

Heated panting breaths filled my ear as the hand that held my hair moved to grip my throat in a punishing vise. I tried to pry his hands away, but it was useless. He easily towered over my own five foot ten frame. He was likely close to seven feet, if I had to guess, and his bloodshot brown eyes glared down at me.

“You little bitch. You'll pay for that outburst with the dirt.”

The hand that wasn't trapping me against the tree reached into his back pocket and pulled out a hunting knife. My heart

skipped a beat before speeding up, chills running down my spine when he smirked tauntingly at me. Holding my gaze, he lightly ran the knife up my arms and over both my breasts. He moved the knife down slowly until he got to the hem of my pants, taking his time. I tried to shake my head and plead with my eyes, but the coldness in his chestnut brown gaze only mocked me as he cut my pants and underwear from my body before cutting the straps of my tank top so that my breasts spilled free.

“No!” I tried to shout, but it was garbled thanks to his grip on my throat. He squeezed tighter, cutting off my air.

“You fucking whore,” he rumbled into my ear, pressing kisses and bites along my neck and collarbone on the way to my freed breasts. “You want it, don’t lie.”

I tried to shake my head in denial, but my body betrayed me by gasping when he bit down on the top of my boob hard enough to leave a mark before swiping his tongue over it. His long black beard added another level of sensation as he alternated between cruel yet soft whispers of kisses and brutal bites.

Was wore the fight out of me enough that by the time he moved away from my body to undo the zipper of his pants, I was a twisted mixture of fear, arousal, and desperation. He pulled the pants down so there was just enough room for his thick cock to spring out. Was wasn’t long, but his girth had my eyes involuntarily widening as they always did when he fucked me.

“I love the fear in your eyes,” he rasped. “Because even if it hurts you, it’s going to feel wonderful for me, and that’s all that matters.”

Not able to respond, I watched silently as my heart pounded, adrenaline making my body want to fight, run, *anything*, but I couldn't. He held me there like I weighed nothing, his grip on my neck not faltering as he reached into his pants again. The crinkle of a condom wrapper was my only warning before he wrenched my legs apart and positioned himself at my entrance.

“Beg me for it.”

“Fuck. You.”

My ears rang as I belatedly realized he'd smacked me, leaving behind fresh blood on my lip. Before I could process what had happened, he slammed his mouth on mine, licking up the blood and kissing me like he owned me. He was heated and powerful, using tongue, lips, and teeth to add another battlefield to our war. But here I could fight. I started to kiss him back, willing him to let down his guard, then bit down on his lower lip until I tasted the metallic sweetness of his blood on my tongue. I could feel his answering rumble of laughter as he briefly pressed his chest harder against mine.

“You fighting back just makes this sweeter.” He pulled back, unfazed by the red smear on his lower lip. Then, without trying to get me to beg again, he thrust into me. A scream clawed its way up my throat as my head slammed back against the tree.

I could feel every inch of his wide cock as he worked himself in and out of me, my body tense from his brutal violation. But even with my muscles clenching in denial, my pussy was wet, silently begging for something I would *never* voice.

“Oh, you sick and twisted girl. It seems your body is giving you away.” His heated breath filled my ear, and I was

ashamed at the whimper that escaped my throat.

After what felt like hours, he managed to slam home inside of me, my body forced to let him in. Only then did he release my throat to put his hands under my ass, lifting me so he could fuck me easily.

“Just fucking like that,” he breathed, praising me for giving into him then pressing an open-mouthed kiss onto my neck.

Pulling back, he searched my face, and I let my lips tug slightly up, indicating that I wasn't so far into the scene we had planned out that I wasn't up for continuing. He took me at my silent word and pulled out only to slam into me hard enough I could feel the tree bark scraping my back. This time, I couldn't hold back another scream. That was how we continued, our coming together a mixture of pleasure, pain, and blood as he took what he needed from my body. Using me for his own pleasure, not caring about mine, and in turn fulfilling one of my darker fantasies.

As I felt my own orgasm building, I wrapped my legs around his waist and started to ride him. Trusting him to hold me, I wrapped my arms around his neck and ground myself against him. He allowed me that small alteration of the scene, merely growling at my change in position. He shifted, tilting my head so that he could nuzzle my neck.

“I knew you were a useless slut, always hungry for a cock to fill you. I love hunting ones like you down,” he whispered, his voice almost primal as he spoke his fantasy into my ears. He was reclaiming control, showing me that letting me take over the pace meant nothing. “Ride me like you can't get enough because we both know you can't. You're all the same.

A woman just looking for a strong enough man to show you your place.”

I gasped at his words, and he bit down on my neck, slamming into me over and over again as he chased his own orgasm with no care in the world if I got mine. A few minutes later, he groaned, letting me know he had finished inside of me. His climax triggered my own, and I whimpered into the still forest air as I fell over the edge.

“You would come from that, whore,” he breathed against the mark on my neck before licking it gently. I shivered in his arms, his words making me clench around him, my body milking his dick again as he laughed at me before falling silent.

Rapid breaths once again filled the air between us, though they were different from the panting breaths of a mere twenty minutes earlier when he was chasing me down. I closed my eyes, resting my forehead against his as I tried to come back down and calm my racing heart. The orgasm and scene had made it harder than usual.

“Is it okay if I pull out?” His voice was soft as he checked in with me. I couldn’t manage words yet, so I merely nodded. As he withdrew and placed me back on my feet, I felt the twinges in my body and knew I would be bruised inside and out after this encounter. Bruised vaginas were no fucking joke, but damn if he wasn’t worth the recovery in between. Plus, he paid good money knowing how rough he used me when we got together. He tucked himself back into his pants after discarding the condom on the ground, then picked up the scraps of my workout pants before walking me, still half-dressed, further into the woods.

“Where are you taking me?” My voice was spacey, even to my own ears.

“Soon enough,” he shushed me, and I let him have his way for now, holding one of his hands so he could help me get over a fallen tree. This man, Vas Morozov, had been a client of mine for over a year now, so I trusted him enough to not hurt me any more than we’d agreed upon before our actual meetings. Even if that hadn’t been a legitimate concern for a call girl, my past had taught me that harsh lesson thoroughly.

I was pulled from my thoughts as we entered a clearing, finding his motorcycle parked near a cluster of trees and a picnic table. Looking around, I saw no one else was nearby. *Good thing too since I’m practically completely nude.* Moving slowly, he unwrapped himself from my grasp and sat me on the picnic table. He checked me over for a minute before going to a bag on the side of his bike. I shivered as a cool breeze swept through the open area, conscious of my half-dressed state and the cold weather settling over the park as the sun was setting in the distance. Vas was there a minute later, a first aid kit, a bundle of clothing, and a brown bag in hand.

“Let me check your back before you put on the clean clothes,” he instructed, setting the clothing down beside me and handing me the brown bag. “This is for you.”

“What did you bring me this time?” I asked with a soft smile, genuinely pleased by his attention.

“Sochniki. Nothing fancy, but I think you’ll like it.” Not only had he brought food, he’d brought a large water bottle as well. He tilted my face this way and that, checking over where he had smacked me before looking at my back. I could feel the bruise already forming, but I knew from personal and work experience that it would fade away in a few days. He hadn’t

put enough force behind it for it to look horrible; I didn't even feel much swelling on my face from the impact. He must have come to the same conclusion as he nodded silently and moved around the table. Unscrewing the cap, I took a long swig and focused on slowly eating the food as he tended to the scrapes on my back. The pastry had that wonderful homemade look, with crispy brown edges and filling spilling out over the sides. I took a bite and hummed with appreciation at the flaky pastry dough and tang of cottage cheese filling. This was so good, I thought I could easily eat a dozen of them.

I had been a call girl for almost two years, and I had been a prostitute before that for longer than I wanted to admit, even to myself. In all that time, no one had bothered to bring me homemade food or check on me after rougher sex like this. Not many people thought about aftercare when paying for a call girl, but Vas had done it each and every time we had gotten together for a date. That small thoughtful check-in after a scene made me feel like he saw me as a person, unlike most others who just wanted me gone afterward. Needless to say, he was prioritized over many of my other clients since he treated me like a human being.

Some didn't have time, merely coming to see me between business meetings or before going home to their wife for the evening. A number of them simply didn't care, only seeing me as a means to an end. I was a tool for stress relief, nothing more. Luckily, most of the others were delightful. They wanted company. They wanted someone to listen and look at them as if they were the only person in the room. I could do that, even if the man was pushing eighty and I was barely past the legal drinking age.

And then there were the men with darker kinks and needs. They were a different breed that most call girls didn't bother

with, but I had darker needs too, which my boss knew, so I got most of our more extreme clients. Two birds, one stone, and all that shit.

“Was it too much this time?” Vas ran a hand lightly along my spine, and I shivered at his light touch, realizing that I hadn’t even reacted as he cleaned me up. He moved to stand in front of me, his brown eyes serious as he studied me, and I gave him a sincere smile. “You’re more quiet than usual.”

“You wore me out, Vas. I was lost in thought.” He smiled, but I could still see concern in his eyes, so I took the last bite of the food he’d brought, gesturing at the clothes beside me. “You didn’t have to bring me clothes, though I appreciate it.”

“I wasn’t going to make you walk naked back to your car,” he responded with a small smile. “Even though it doesn’t look like you would mind that.” I let out a surprised laugh at his teasing despite my heated cheeks. As he opened his mouth to say something, his phone rang, interrupting him. A look of irritation crossed his face as he pulled it out then looked up at me with an apologetic expression.

I pushed myself off the table and grabbed the clothes. “I’ll get dressed, so you can answer that.”

He nodded at me, his face already hard before he turned away to answer the call. “Brother.”

Walking away to a cluster of trees, I took off my shredded top and put on the new clothes. It was obvious the clothes were his, which meant they were huge on me. It was thoughtful of him though, and I’d make sure to wash and have them ready to give back when I saw him again. I slipped on a large white undershirt that smelled like a mixture of grease, oil, mint, and some kind of citrus fruit I couldn’t name at the moment. It smelled just like him. I shouldn’t know that from

just a quick sniff. He was a client, nothing more, but sometimes my traitorous heart forgot that important detail. He was the only one who'd ever made my head, or dare I say it, my heart, begin to tiptoe over that professional line. I needed to stop that shit.

Next was a huge pair of sweatpants. They wouldn't fit me at all, but they were going to be *so* comfortable. *Maybe he won't be getting all his clothes back the next time I see him.* I put them on and immediately knew I'd be keeping them for myself. Plus, the pockets were fucking huge.

"You'll have to forgive me," Vas' deep voice called out as I emerged from the copse of trees a minute later. "There is somewhere I have to be."

"Forgiven," I told him easily as I got close. "After all, you paid me ahead of time for two hours."

He grinned at my sassy response, his arms wrapping around my waist to pull me in for a rough kiss once I was close enough. "I do like you in my clothes."

"Good," I replied tartly. "Because I don't think you'll be getting the sweatpants back. They are way too comfortable to give up without a fight."

He kissed me lightly then nipped my lip in retaliation. I laughed into the kiss before stepping back. "Good luck with your business."

He nodded at that, expression already distant as he turned and walked away, getting on his bike and riding off without looking back at me. I turned around and started making my way back to my car on the other side of the woods, glad I had time to wind down before I had to check my work messages. I didn't usually leave my phone in the car, but with this scene,

and knowing my clothes would probably end up ruined, I didn't want to risk losing it altogether. I was going to need some self-care and time to recover before I was with my next client.

A bath, wine, tylenol, and a good book. That was exactly what I needed tonight. The entire walk to the car, I daydreamed of the fancy bath I would be having when I got home. I grabbed my keys from the hidden box under my wheel well, one of those things people used to store a spare key in case they got locked out, and started up the car. As I waited for the heat to kick on, I opened the glove box to check my phone, all thoughts of a relaxing bath gone when I saw I had a message from my boss.

Boss: Come see me. I'm calling in that final favor you owe me.

I swallowed hard at those words and typed out a quick affirmative reply before starting to make my way back into the city. The thought of making a quick stop to change passed my mind when I looked down and was reminded of my current outfit, but I dismissed the idea. *When Maeve calls, you go.* It seemed that a relaxing bath would have to wait. Who knew what she would want me to do or get involved in? I shivered at memories of the things she had gotten me to do in the past, knowing that when it came to Maeve, a favor could really mean *anything*. Would this one earn my freedom? What would I even do then? Lost in thought, I drove back into Ashview Hills, anxious to see what she had waiting for me.

I WALKED into the upscale penthouse after a quick knock. The beautiful and modern space seemed quiet and empty, but I

knew that wasn't true. Quickly making my way through the hallway, down past the kitchen, living room, and a bedroom, I knocked on the door to the study. A soft "Come in" called through the door, and I opened the door to find my boss. She was sitting in her office chair, her head thrown back, as a woman ate her out.

"Sit down, darling. I have a job for you." Her cool tone left no room for argument, not that it ever did. I closed the door behind me before settling in the chair across from her, my gaze focused on the white-blonde, beautiful woman staring at me with a firm gaze, *not* the desperate brunette on her knees. It must be interesting indeed if she was interrupting her private time to ask something of me.

And I was right.

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Sacha

Monday

“**W**hat do you mean *you lost him?*” I kept my voice mild as I sat back in my chair, considering the two men across from me. Oliver and Bodhi stared at me, the former completely relaxed despite the irritation on his face. Bodhi was wisely nervous at my calm tone.

“I mean we lost him.” Oliver sighed and ran a hand through his hair, pulling at the ends while frustration slipped through his calm mask. “The fucker moved faster than I’d predicted based on previous data. By the time Bodhi got close to the warehouse, it was too late.”

Bodhi nodded in agreement. “The place was empty when I got there. No trace of what had been there or even that anyone had been there at all. He’s good.”

“The fucker,” Oliver cursed under his breath, but I could still hear him clearly.

I was rubbing my face, trying to figure out what to say, when the door to my office opened, revealing my brother and second in command, Vas, standing there. A brief look at him

showed that he was sweaty and relaxed— fucker had just had sex. I shifted in my seat, that minor realization reminding me that it had been too long since I'd had my own release. Something to think about another time though. Work first, then play.

“What happened?” Vas' deep voice asked as he walked over to settle on the only open chair left in the room beside Oliver.

“Warren moved ahead of schedule,” Bodhi answered softly. “We missed it.”

“The client is going to be pissed,” Vas commented unnecessarily, leaning back in the chair.

“We need a way to get close to him to figure out his plans,” Oliver mused aloud. “If we have a new plan, besides stalking him, to show her, then she might not be as mad. Irritated, yes, but I think that's to be expected given the delay of things.”

“Coming from you that's not a bad idea,” Bodhi agreed.

“Hey!”

“Enough,” I ordered, silencing them before their typical back and forth could ensue, then turned to look at my brother. “That *is* a good idea. There's no use in worrying about what happened since we can't change that. Do we have any idea of what we can use as an in?”

“Getting into his social circles didn't help?” Vas questioned, and I shook my head.

“No. He guards his secrets closely, it seems. Even my connections aren't getting a good read on things, much less me.”

“Well, we could always kill some people,” Oliver suggested with a wicked smile and cold glint in his hazel eyes. I rolled my eyes at his go to suggestion. Sometimes I thought he enjoyed that more than actual sex.

“Later,” I told him with a rough laugh. “You get to kill people later. When we actually know who we need to get rid of.”

“What if we get someone on the inside for his work?” Bodhi threw out. I turned to look at him, and he cocked an eyebrow. “He sexually harasses his employees to the point where he pays people off to make cases go away. We just need at least a reasonably attractive woman, and there you go.”

“Yes, but he doesn’t respect them or open up to them,” Vas countered, but he had a thoughtful look on his face.

“You’ve thought of something?” I inquired.

My brother didn’t say anything for a minute, thinking over his words before finally speaking. It was pretty funny actually. Vas, the huge intimidating guy, was always so careful with his words, whereas I only restrained my tongue when it came to business negotiations. “What kind of kinks is he into? We could always hire a whore to entertain him a few times.”

“You guys are going to make me look at his porn history, aren’t you?” Oliver groaned as he let out a dramatic shudder. “Well, unless he’s into some pretty weird shit, that shouldn’t be a problem for me.”

I rolled my eyes. All of us had been a team long enough that our sexual kinks, most of them anyway, were out in the open. *Especially* Oliver’s. He didn’t have a subtle bone in his body and was completely honest about what he was looking for when it came to his free time. Sex or murder, sometimes

both. His taste for knife and blood play didn't surprise me in the least. But him commenting about *weird shit* other people were into... given the looks we sent him, the irony didn't seem to be lost on anyone.

"I'm glad you can make that sacrifice for us," I replied dryly, and he sent me a smart alec smirk in return.

"But do we know a woman who might be interested?" I looked at Vas to see if he had an answer to Bodhi's question.

"Depends on what he's into." Vas shrugged. "The woman I see doesn't have too many limits. She might be interested, but I would have to talk with her. She is discreet, so if the pay was right, we could depend on her."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Exactly how long have you been seeing this woman, and how did we not know about this?"

"About a year or so," he answered absently, avoiding my second question, which just piqued my curiosity. Vas rarely, if ever, kept secrets from me. "But if she can handle me, then she might be able to handle a lot of things."

"Good to know she can handle a huge dick, but that doesn't translate into kinks," Oliver joked as he pulled out his laptop.

"Who says he even has some crazy kink?"

Vas looked at Bodhi, his eyebrow raised. "Guys like that always have something they're into that they don't want from their wives. And we know his wife... I think it's safe to say she wouldn't put up with a lot from him on the kink front unless she liked it too."

"Before we start trying to compare kinks again, let's focus. Things I never thought I would have to say out loud to you

people..." I pinched the bridge of my nose in annoyance.

"Glad we can keep you on your toes," Oliver snickered as he typed away on his computer. "But let's see what I can find. When he had me service his broken computer, I installed a trojan horse for a back way in. Hmm... looks like Warren likes to be dominated. Mildly kinky, but nothing too extreme." He raised a brow at Vas like he might have doubts. "With who he's married to, he should be getting that at home just fine. I'll look through his history tonight and get back with anything else I find before you reach out. Does that work for your girl?"

"I'll call her and set up a time to talk tomorrow."

At his soft response, I studied my brother, wary of his faraway expression. "You guys can leave, except you, Vas. I need to talk to you before I call the client about our change of plans."

Bodhi got up immediately, giving a small two-finger wave before waltzing out of the room. Oliver wasn't far behind after he bagged up his computer. I had no idea where they were headed, but I almost felt like I didn't want to know.

"Something you want to ask me, Sacha?" Vas didn't move from his seat, and there was no bite to his question, merely curiosity.

"I just find it interesting that you've been seeing a woman for almost an entire year, yet you haven't mentioned it to me... or anyone else on the team."

"I found someone who could handle the rough sex that I like." Vas looked me in the eye, a clear challenge in his gaze. "I didn't realize that was team information."

"Maybe not for some," I allowed, tilting my head to study him. "But with our history... we've always shared as a team."

Or we have, you and I, in the past. Is there something about her I need to know?"

"After the last time, I figured we all needed a break from sharing. It didn't end well," he replied, his voice growing quiet as he looked away, but not before I saw pain from the memories his words had stirred.

Words caught in my throat; I didn't have anything to say to that. Memories of Ava filled my mind. Her infectious laughter and the way she teased the other guys. She was the light in our darkness, making sure we didn't fall too far into our demons; too bad our darkness had taken her over. It wasn't long before the laughter wasn't as bright, but we hadn't seen it, not until it was too late. Ava left when we were at a job, and all we found was a note on the kitchen counter. That was the last we heard from her. It had been a long three years.

I shook my head, trying to escape the memories. "No, it didn't, but that doesn't mean you have to keep things quiet." Vas just hummed while I smirked. "Do I want to know why you're keeping her to yourself, brother? Or just how much you're paying her?"

He flipped me off as he let loose a rough laugh. "Both of those things I'm keeping to myself. Though she does like your cooking."

"You brought her some of my cooking?" I raised my eyebrows in shock. I'd never known Vas to care enough about any of his previous partners to do aftercare with them. Much less bring them food.

"Aftercare, Sacha." He stood up. "Besides, I can't cook for shit. If she had anything I made, she wouldn't like it at best. At worst, she would die."

“Cooking isn’t that hard,” I scoffed, looking up at him. “We need to figure out a plan for this job though. Do you really think your girl can handle him?”

His laughter died off, and an odd look filled his eyes before his expression became stoic. “Yes.” He didn’t elaborate on that, and I didn’t ask him to; his face told me enough. He liked her as more than a whore he occasionally paid to have sex with. *A complication I really don’t need right now.*

I had opened my mouth to say something when my phone rang. Pulling it out of my pocket, I saw Maeve’s name on the screen. *Fuck, somehow she knows we messed up. How?!*

“Maeve,” I answered smoothly. Vas focused all his attention on me at the mention of her name.

“Sacha,” her cool, cultured voice answered calmly. “I heard there was an issue with your operations. I asked for the best, and I was assured you and your team were it.”

“A minor setback is not a failure,” I assured her, putting confidence in every word. “This is nothing we cannot deal with.”

“My husband is dumb, but not completely worthless. Make sure you remember that going forward,” she told me mildly, and I clenched my teeth, keeping my retorts to myself. We needed this job. It wasn’t the highest paid one we’d ever been offered, but getting on Maeve’s good side and successfully completing a job for her would open us up to a new level of clientele we couldn’t pass up. “Not to worry though. I have someone who would be more than happy to assist you.”

“That’s not—” I started to protest, but she cut me off.

“It wasn’t a suggestion. I’ll send her your way in a day or two. She needs some time to... recover. I’ll reach out with

more details on when and where. Make sure you use this time to not fuck up again.”

Click.

I let out a shaky breath and slowly put my phone down. Vas eyed me cautiously as I stood up, but I couldn't hold the anger in long. With a yell, I shot a hand out and knocked everything off my desk, sending papers, folders, pens, and my laptop flying to the floor with a loud crash. Grabbing an old drink, I threw that at the wall as well before taking the paperweight and aiming it at the same spot, satisfied when it crashed, destroying the drywall.

“I take it the call didn't go well? Maeve is still the ice cold bitch queen that we met a month ago, I see.”

I shot a glare in his direction. “She's sending her own person in to join our team to *assist* us. The fucking nerve of her! This is our job and *my* team!” *This lady has some fucking nerve questioning us, me, and how we do things. Assist us. As if we need her or one of her whore's help.*

“Sacha,” Vas firmly said, obviously trying to calm me down, but I held up a hand, warning him off.

“No, not right now.”

“Chris Weston. Why don't we blow off some steam with him? A small side job is a good way to do that.” Vas grabbed my arm, and I refrained from lashing out and punching him in return. He was the only one who could ignore my warnings to back the fuck off. *Fucking brothers.*

“Fine, but I'll be in charge with this one. You didn't let the last one suffer long enough,” I grumbled, shaking loose of his hold and falling into step beside him as we exited the warehouse where we had set up our headquarters. “And you

might as well forget about your friend. It looks like we have someone else to help us with Warren.”

THE MAN, Chris Weston, gurgled and choked on his blood as he tried to crawl away from me. I scoffed, bending over to grip his ankle then pulling him back to the chair I'd had him sitting on a few minutes before. *Why do they always try to get away? It's so futile.*

“Why are you trying to leave so soon?” I crooned, propping him up on the chair. This time, I grabbed rope and secured his hands to the arm of the chair and ankles to the legs. “We are just getting started.”

“You can be a scary ass motherfucker,” Oliver praised with glee from where he was leaning against the far wall of the playroom. Bodhi was on the floor beside him, sitting with one leg bent, the other stretched out in front of him as he watched the struggling man with an intense stare, arousal stirring in him.

“Says you,” I threw over my shoulder. “Most of the things in here are yours.” He just let out a happy laugh as we took in the knives, tools, sex toys, and medical equipment that randomly filled the room.

“I do like variety in my life,” he agreed, then I heard a zipper open and a groan as Bodhi swallowed Oliver's cock. It seemed Oliver wasn't the only one turned on by the crying, bloody man. This kind of violence was one of the first things that had brought them together as a couple. It definitely hadn't lost its appeal if this, or any of the other times this had happened, was any indication.

“Why? Why? Why?” Chris softly asked, over and over again.

“Because we wanted to,” Vas leaned over and whispered in his ear. “Isn’t that what you tell the others?”

The man in the seat froze, mouth working but no sound coming out. I tsked and sauntered over to a wall of cabinets behind him and Vas, looking through the drawers until I found it. The variety of tools Oliver kept in his workroom was impressive. Walking back over, I settled in front of the blubbering man.

“Let’s try this again,” I told him sternly, forcing him to focus on me and not the show Bodhi and Oliver were putting on behind me. “Isn’t that what you tell your victims? That you wanted to and that’s all that mattered.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking—” He screamed, cutting off his words. Eyes wide in pain and shock, he looked down to where I had grabbed his tongue, closing a clothespin on the end. Not a traditional torture implement, but anything works if you put your mind to it. The things I could do to a man with a pen, no one would ever predict.

“No lies here. I don’t have the time for it.” I pulled roughly at the clothespin until he made another choking sound. “So let’s try again. Isn’t that what you tell them?”

“N-no,” he lisped, tears on his face.

“Then what are these?” Vas sneered, holding pictures of the girls Weston had seduced, harassed, and blackmailed. His face paled so much I almost thought he would pass out, and at this point, I didn’t care.

“Why don’t you get the pliers and one of those box cutters for me, Vas? After all, liars don’t need tongues.” Vas smiled at

my suggestion, dropping the pictures in the man's lap as he started to panic. I watched, detached, as Weston struggled, trying to get away even though he knew there was no use. The pictures fell onto the floor, scattering between us on the concrete.

The pliers and blade were held out in front of me, and I took the former as I stood up. "I'll hold him while you cut?"

"Deal."

Squeals filled the room as I clamped his tongue with the pliers, stretching it out far as possible. Vas started making one light cut after another along Weston's tongue. My brother took his time, small streams of blood trailing from our guest's mouth, soaking his shirt and pants, as Vas counted each one aloud.

"A cut for each lie or each woman?" I mused.

"Both," Oliver's voice rang out from the back along with a groan at whatever Bodhi was doing with his mouth. "He deserves it all."

I smirked and nodded at Vas who hummed in agreement as the man whimpered. I wrinkled my nose in disgust at the tears, snot, and piss that soon joined the blood on the floor around the bound man. Seemed he wasn't nearly as tough as he tried to be on all those women. *Fucking pathetic.*

Screams soon became sobs then choked gags as blood trickled down his throat until Vas got bored and decided to just cut the tongue off completely. *That works too, I suppose.* Crimson flowed like a million small rivers out of his mouth, his skin becoming paler as we watched.

"We could just put him down," Vas suggested, throwing the tongue down on the floor where it hit with a wet plop.

“I want to see the light fade from him, knowing that the last person he saw was me,” I responded, bending over the man and shaking him until he looked up at me. Leaning down, I got close to his face to whisper in his ear, “You’re so wet. I knew you’d like it. You always do,” I told him huskily, like a lover, repeating the words he’d told his victims. A moment later, he faded.

A grunt and cursing sounded from behind me, telling me that Oliver had come, and I looked back to find Bodhi swallowing around the other man’s dick, his own tenting his pants. “You’ll clean this up for us when you’re both done?”

Oliver waved a hand at my question, but I took it as a yes and walked out of the room, Vas joining me a minute later. “Did that help with your stress?”

“Yes.” I smiled serenely at the mental picture of the dead man we’d left behind. “I’m going to get a drink then head home. Want to join me?”

“I know the perfect place for us to go.”

I nodded, letting Vas take the lead as we exited the facility that Oliver owned. I didn’t bother to take in the industrial sights around us, instead getting into the passenger side, letting Vas drive.

“Home?” I asked, my exhaustion reminding me that I was glad Vas and I shared an apartment. It was easier for work since a job might require us to be gone at a moment’s notice. Of course, it helped that we usually got along. Since we were kids, we had always had each other’s backs. With our family’s... less than legal activities, my brother and I knew we could only depend on each other. Not that we turned out much better than the rest of them in the end.

“Home,” he agreed. “We have the best liquor after all.” I released a loud laugh at that and let my head fall back against the headrest. Belatedly, I remembered the blood all over both of us, another reason in favor of going home. *Fuck, I’ll have to get this car detailed. Again.*

But the light fading from Chris’ eyes filled my mind, and I knew it was worth it. I would now be ready to meet whoever Maeve was sending our way, and she would quickly know *I* was the one in charge.

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Nichollette

Monday

It was the middle of the night by the time I was finally relaxing on the couch, reading a book. The door suddenly slammed open, nearly making me lose my page, and I flipped Oli off without looking up. “You don’t have to slam the door every time you come in, you know.”

Oli had been my roommate for only a year, and I’d quickly learned that he didn’t just walk into rooms. He dramatically entered them, the slam of the door practically a requirement.

“What fun would that be?” he playfully shot back as he kicked the door shut behind him. He came to a stop as he got closer, looking me over. “Wait... where did you get those clothes?”

“Jealous?” I put the book down and gave him an amused glance. Luckily, the red handprint was faint on my face, but while the large white t-shirt covered most of the bruises on my chest, it didn’t do anything to hide the dark bruises and bite marks on my neck.

“What the hell happened to your neck?!” His eyes widened as he got the full glimpse of me now that the book was on my lap.

I smiled serenely at him, appreciative of his concern although it was wholly unnecessary. “Nothing I didn’t sign up for. You’re not usually home right now. Or if you are, you’re asleep already. What’s up?”

“Are you keeping track of my schedule?” he teased, though I could tell he wasn’t sure how to take my statement about the marks or me knowing his whereabouts. “Just need to do some work research before I crash for the night. Gotta watch some porn.”

I perked up. “Oh yeah? Anything good?”

He shook his head at my question, wicked amusement filling his face as he settled on the couch by my feet. “Want to watch some with me?”

“I’m never opposed to porn!” I told him as I put my now-forgotten book on the coffee table. “Do you care if I provide commentary about the cheesiness of it as we watch? Oh, and I *need* snacks if we’re watching this.”

He tried and failed to suppress a smile. “You want to mock porn videos with me? How have we not spent more time together? Think we can rate them as well?”

“Work,” I told him lightly, shrugging as I stood up. “And yes to rating. I’m picky about the porn I watch. But first, I’m getting beer and popcorn.”

“I’ll set up the videos!” he called out as I walked into our small kitchen. Our place wasn’t much, just a small two-bedroom apartment in a decent neighborhood in the city. The kitchen was a small galley-style that only one of us could fit in

at a time, but it served its purpose since it was rare we were here at the same time. As I started the popcorn, I thought about my roommate.

The first time I met Oli I knew he was quirky, funny, and secretive. Reading people was a skill that I'd learned long before becoming a sex worker, but I had secrets of my own, so I wasn't going to fault him for his. We didn't talk about anything deep when we were together. Both of us made some small talk, maybe watched TV together, but that was about it. Porn, though, that was a first. Beeping signaled that the popcorn was done, and I took it out before grabbing two bottles of beer.

Oli whistled as I came into view again, and I couldn't hold back my snort of amusement at the sound. "Man, whoever did that to you really went to town."

"He kept himself in check pretty well, actually," I replied dryly. "And do you see me complaining? Now, what kind of porn are you watching for *work*?" Oli had never seen me after a date with Vas, or he wouldn't be so surprised about the bite mark and bruises. *Though if this will be his usual reaction, I might have to make sure he sees them again next time.* I definitely got a little spark of joy from shocking people, especially my normally unflappable roommate.

"It *is* for work!" His eyes crinkled with his smile as he protested.

"Man, whatever you do for work must be hella fun then," I commented as I handed a bottle of beer to him and settled back on the couch.

He gave me a funny look as he hit play on his laptop, standard obnoxious music pouring from the speakers before some vanilla porn came onto the TV. "Oh yeah, my job is a

blast. And don't think I didn't notice you avoided answering whose clothes those are."

"I'm sure you did." I nodded then ate a handful of popcorn. "But that would fall under personal details that we didn't want to share when we became roommates." Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him open his mouth, so I gestured at the TV. "Come on, who's directing this?! This is awful."

Oli took a swig of his beer, accepting my not so subtle hints to change the subject and making himself comfortable by kicking his shoes off and sitting down beside me before focusing on the porn he'd put on. A grimace filled his face. "This really is awful."

A petite, big-boobed blonde woman was on her knees, sucking a huge monster cock that most men didn't sport in their pants. *Standard setup. Definitely not impressed so far.* It was easily an eleven-inch penis, and I winced in sympathy as the woman teared up, enthusiastically trying to deepthroat that son of a bitch. Deep throating took practice; sometimes, people could learn to overcome their gag reflex, but not always. *That's why they make throat numbing sprays. Why didn't they just use one of those for this?*

"I didn't picture you as the regular porn kind of guy," I joked before taking a gulp of my own drink. Oli reached over and took some of the popcorn from the bowl I had in my lap. I gave him a narrow-eyed look before jokingly moving the bowl to my other side to keep it for myself. He just winked at me, laughter lighting up his eyes. "Please tell me there's something with more spice coming soon."

"Interesting that you think of what kind of porn I watch," he commented, glancing over at me as the guy in the porno pulled the woman off his dick and threw her on the bed. He

immediately pushed into her, the woman letting out some *very* overexaggerated groans. *Wow, this didn't look amateur, but damn, you'd think they would find a better actor to play the part. I mean, he didn't even do any prep work for her to take that massive thing.*

“Do you want my actual guesses?” I lifted an eyebrow and met his stare, ignoring the train wreck on the screen.

“Yes.” He blinked at me in what was probably his best attempt at innocence, and I burst out laughing.

“Oli, you couldn't pull off the innocent look even without your gauges and tattoos everywhere.” I tried to get my amusement under control, but when he replied with a wink, it set me off all over again. After a few minutes, I put the bowl of popcorn on the coffee table and waved a hand in defeat. “Fine, fine. Let me think...”

I tapped my chin with a fingernail, considering my roommate. A handsome face, though not classically handsome, with hazel eyes and a chiseled jawline. He had gauges in each ear and wore his usual dark blue jeans, plain navy t-shirt, and a black zip-up hoodie. You couldn't see his tattoos unless he took the outer layer off; he had them all over his arms, and I had a feeling he had more under the rest of his clothing as well.

His secrecy didn't mean I knew nothing about him; in fact, his secrecy said *more* about him than he probably would like me to know. He had things worth hiding. Sexual preferences weren't necessarily influenced by things we did outside the bedroom, but high-stress jobs led men and women to do things many didn't think about. The more money and power they had outside the bedroom, the more ego they brought into the bed. Of course, some liked that power and wanted more unusual

requests fulfilled. But others, they wanted to not be in charge anymore. They wanted someone who could come in and finally make the decisions for them, pushing them to relax until they submitted even though their mind was telling them to fight it.

“You must be having some complicated thoughts over there,” he joked, propping his chin on his hand while watching me, the porn now completely forgotten.

“I think,” I started, bopping him on the nose with a freshly red painted nail, “you are into much kinkier shit than what’s on the screen.”

“Oh really?” He rocked forward to get closer to me, bringing with him the smell of leather, plums, and black figs. I inhaled deeply, savoring the smell. *God, what kind of cologne does he use?* “Then tell me what exactly I’m into then.”

“If I had to guess... I’d say you’re just as happy to be on the top as the bottom.” Shock flickered through his eyes before faint amusement was firmly back in place. *Interesting.* “I also think you would like much more pain and begging when it comes to your definition of a good time. More a paint the town red kind of guy, but not a metaphor. Or am I wrong?”

He licked his lips as he slowly sat back, putting distance between us, and roughly cleared his throat. Before he could respond, there was a knock at the door. Oli mumbled under his breath, “Oh, thank god” as he jumped up to answer. I snorted in amusement at his reaction as I waited to see who was here this late at night. It opened to reveal a young teen holding an envelope.

“I have a letter here for a.... Nicholette?” His voice cracked a bit at my name when I stood up, his eyes widening at the marks on my neck.

Oli moved out of my way when I made it to the door, holding out my hand for the letter. “Thanks.” When he didn’t respond or hand over the envelope, I quirked an eyebrow. “The letter?”

His young face flushed with embarrassment, and he thrust the envelope toward me while he stumbled back from the doorway. “Here- here you go. Bye.” With that, he almost ran down the hallway away from me, and Oli shook his head as he shut the door.

“Oh, to be young.”

“Like you’re old,” I replied dryly as I looked over the letter in my hands. My name was written along the front in a familiar script, no address listed beneath it or return address anywhere. *Oh no.*

“Way older than that kid,” Oli joked. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” I forced a smile as I put the envelope in a pocket of the sweatpants. “Just some junk mail. It must have gone in the wrong mailbox. So, what else do you have to watch for this job of yours? Anything with a horrible pizza man plot that we can make fun of?”

“Nah,” he replied, heading back to look at his computer. His face took on an irritated frown as he skimmed through whatever else was on there. “But it looks like it gets kinkier. Let’s skip this shit and go to some more fun stuff.”

I nodded as I sat down, unable to believe they’d found me. I’d thought they were going to leave me alone after my last move, but it seemed they weren’t as easily dissuaded. Of course, the police had suggested leaving town, but I had nowhere else I could go. The envelope felt like it was burning

me through my pants, my mind consumed by what could be in there.

I tried to pull myself out of my spiraling thoughts, but not even making fun of horrible porn with Oli could get me out of my funk. I played the part like I had a hundred times, making it seem like I was enjoying myself more than I really was. It was really a pity because I knew I would have enjoyed the night with him if I hadn't been so thrown off by that damn envelope. A few hours later, I told him I was exhausted and called it a night. Once I was in my bedroom, I pulled out the envelope, ignoring the way my hand shook as I carefully opened the letter.

A picture fell out, landing upside down on the carpet by my feet. Neat script was scrawled across the back, and I bent over to read it.

‘Found you.’

I flipped the picture over and felt my entire body tense.

I knew that face. That *look*.

It was death.

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Bodhi

Wednesday

“Why are you here?” The scratchy, sleep-filled voice broke the silence in the living room. I opened my eyes to find Sacha standing at the end of the couch staring down at Oliver and me with an alert gaze. It seemed Sacha had been getting dressed when he had heard Oliver working out here. He came out in black slacks and an open white button-down, pretty much as casual as Sacha ever got.

“What do you mean?” Oliver asked absently, typing away on his computer. “Working, obviously.” I snorted a bit at his flippant reply and sat up from where I had my head resting on his lap. Running a hand through my messy brown hair, I gave Sacha a small smile.

“I made coffee.” I nodded toward the peace offering, and he narrowed his eyes at us before letting out a resigned sigh. Sacha turned and headed straight to the kitchen, not bothering to respond. *Probably for the best. He can be a bit of a bear when he’s low on the morning caffeine.*

“Thank goodness it was you and not Oliver,” Vas commented as he walked straight into the kitchen to grab himself a cup. Unlike his brother, he came out in just red boxers. Unlike Sacha, Vas only dressed casually, and he didn’t care what state of dress he walked around in, something that had taken some getting used to when I first met the brothers. A few minutes later, both brothers came and settled on two of the empty armchairs, waiting in expectant silence, but Oliver was still focused on his computer. *When he gets into the zone, the rest of the world disappears.*

“So how was your porn research the other night?” Vas asked in a dry tone before drinking some of his coffee. “Anything interesting?”

Oliver smirked at that and looked up at Vas. “The porn itself was... bland, at least at first. He seemed to be using the vanilla shit on his computer as a front, had a way to hide the good stuff. I found an entire ghost drive that was filled with illegal shit. Snuff porn is apparently one of his favorites.” I shuddered at that, just imagining the type of shit that was on there since Oliver had started with snuff porn as an introduction. “But at least watching the vanilla shit was entertaining.”

“How would that be entertaining for you?” Sacha asked curiously as he ran a hand over his short beard. “I could see the snuff, maybe, if it was the right flavor of things for you, but not the vanilla porn. Don’t forget how well-acquainted Vas and I are with your preferences.”

Oliver laughed roughly at that and gave a slight nod. “Touché. But my roommate was actually home when I came in, so we ended up watching the boring crap and making fun of it until she went to pass out in her room.”

Jealousy made my heart jerk in my chest. *What the actual hell? He had waved off my offer to come over and watch the porn with him yesterday. Was it because he really just wanted to watch it with her?* I lifted my eyebrows and turned to look at my boyfriend, trying to keep my face blank. “You never told me that you were watching the porn with your roommate.” I hadn’t been told much about his roommate, and I’d never met her, but from the small details that I knew—tall, dark hair, pretty—she was just Oliver’s type.

“Never mind that,” Vas rumbled as Oliver looked at me in surprise. *Guess I didn’t keep the hurt out of my voice after all.* “You never mentioned you had a roommate.”

“I didn’t realize it would be important.” Oliver looked over at Vas as he reached out to put a hand on the small of my back as if to reassure me. My muscles tensed at the contact, and I leaned away from him, which made him freeze. Slowly, he turned back to face me, but before I could see his full expression, I shook my head and grabbed my empty mug off the coffee table.

“I’m getting a refill,” I muttered as I stood up and made my way to the kitchen. There was just enough for one mug of coffee, and I didn’t feel the least bit bad about filling mine up to the brim, leaving Oliver on his own if he wanted to get more. That was his problem as far as I was concerned.

Talk continued in the other room as I doctored up my coffee with some sugar, no room for my usual creamer. Petty would be a good enough substitute for me today. It wasn’t a secret that Oliver liked men and women. Hell, he had never hidden that from me. But the fact that I was almost never interested in women... It had created tension between us before. Him watching the porn with her made me feel uneasy.

Even though I knew it wasn't something he had planned out, that didn't make my feelings just go away.

When I walked back in a minute or so later, they were all focused on Oliver, frozen at the sight of whatever he had found on the computer. His fingers stilled on the laptop as his face drained of color. At his haunted expression, I swallowed my conflicted feelings and sat down beside him, trying to get a glimpse of what had him so rattled. Abruptly, he slammed the computer shut before I could see anything.

“What did you find?”

He swallowed hard and flicked his gaze up at Sacha and Vas. “Did Maeve ever say what Warren was involved in with a trafficking ring? Any clues?”

“No...” Vas scratched his chin as he looked over to check with Sacha, his brother responding with a shake of his head. “She said something about Warren being involved with product moving, but she didn't have specifics.”

“Or if she did, she didn't share them with us. We would have told you, which you already know.” Sacha sipped his coffee, focused intently on Oliver. “What did you find?”

“Some of what I downloaded from that ghost drive isn't porn.” Oliver's voice was grim, a tone that I rarely ever heard from him. “He has correspondence about moving *product* alright, but the product is people. Looks like women, children, young teens...” He swallowed hard as his words faded off.

Oliver didn't really talk about his life before he joined our team. We'd been together for three years, and I barely knew any of his past. Just that it was horrible and traumatic. He had nightmares like I did sometimes, but unlike me, he didn't share details of what happened. Oliver would just sit there

with this cold, distant look on his face and ask me to leave. I had theories, of course, but I cared about him enough to give him his space, especially since he never pushed me for details about my own past. For the first time in a while, something inside me was clamoring to press him about what he'd been through, his current reaction making me wonder just what his backstory was. "So he is involved in a trafficking ring?" Sacha asked thoughtfully. He drained the rest of his coffee before he started to button up the rest of his shirt. "That explains why Maeve hired us and wants evidence of what he is involved in before we kill him."

"It does?" I asked, trying and failing to follow his thought process.

"The Förstners run that business, and they are based in Boston. Any trafficking business around here, outside of their influence, is a rival," Vas answered. "Plus, trafficking rings can get pretty fucking violent to make sure their tracks are covered."

"She probably wants insurance," Sacha added, picking up where his brother had left off. "Information is a powerful tool, and I'm sure she knows that. She could use that knowledge to force his business partners to leave her alone or to point in their direction when the Germans or cops start asking questions. Nothing would lead back to her, especially since she hired us."

"Smart woman." I nodded slowly, half processing everything they were saying. Most of my mind was still on my boyfriend beside me. Oliver was still lost in his own world, haunted by what he had found. "Oliver?"

He shook his head at that and gave me a half smile. "I'll be fine. Just rattled me more than I thought it would. Who does

that to children?”

“Sick fucks who we’ll kill when we find them,” Vas promised darkly. “Even if it’s just for fun.”

“I knew I liked you the most, big guy.” Oliver shot him a sarcastic smirk, though it was just shy of his normal larger than life attitude.

The brothers just laughed a bit and stood up, both going about their own business and leaving Oliver and me alone in the living room again. He didn’t look at me right away, instead letting out a shaky breath like he was trying to hold himself together.

“Oliver?”

“You still mad at me about the porn stuff?” he asked, his voice sounding so careful and uncertain.

“Yes,” I told him honestly, tilting my head. “I told you I would watch it with you, and you said no. I think you can see why I would be a bit upset.”

He nodded a few times. “I get that. But do you think you could be mad at me in a little bit instead?”

“Why would I—” My question was cut off by his lips slamming into mine. I gave in on instinct, letting him lead the kiss to claim his domination over me. His tongue flicked along my lips, and I let him in with a whimper. I felt a ghost of his smile against my lips before he bit down on my bottom lip. I hissed at the unexpected pain, making him bite down harder until I sank into it, fully letting him have the control he needed at this moment. I loved moments like this when Oliver took what I offered him and then stole just a bit more, but that wasn’t going to keep him out of this conversation forever.

“Bodhi,” he murmured as he broke the kiss.

“You can’t hide yourself away forever, Oliver,” I warned as he trailed kisses along my neck and pulled me on top of him until he was holding me in his arms. Settling into him, I tucked my head under his chin and cuddled into him. There was something about this closeness that always made me feel safe. Instinctively, I knew he’d protect me no matter what happened. “Are you going to tell me this time?”

“Bodhi, I—” His voice stuttered, and I let out a resigned sigh. One day he would have to tell me what was going on in that head of his, but I wouldn’t be the one who would be able to break down the last of his barriers. The last person who almost did that was Ava, but after she left... well, his defenses were built up even higher than ever. Ava was able to push Oliver, both to try new things and open up to her. He was finally starting to when she left, and her leaving was almost as devastating as watching Oliver shutdown completely. I was afraid that any pushing or prodding just a tiny bit too far might just shut him down again.

“Keep your secrets, Oliver. I’ll wait until you’re ready to tell me.” I smacked his arm lightly. “But if you ditch me to watch porn with whatever roommate you’re living with again, I’m going to top your ass.”

He burst out laughing at my empty threat. Topping him would never happen, but his laughter was the entire point. One, he would never bottom, and two, well, I hated to top. It worked for us. I could feel a bit of him relax as he pressed another soft kiss to my lips. Oliver would have a thirst for blood after this. He needed it to fully unwind, and honestly, I wanted some too.

Now that I’d had a moment to take my focus off my anger about the mysterious porn pal, my curiosity was growing. *Who*

is this person? I'd be meeting them eventually, one way or another.

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Nicholette

Thursday

It had been two days since I'd gotten my newest letter. Two days of recovering from my time with Vas and worrying over when I would get another letter. Maybe a package this time? But there was nothing. Oli still came and went, doing whatever he did, and I stayed in, mostly trying to ignore the secret stash of letters and pictures I had collected over the past few years. The first day, I was fine, ignoring it like I usually did, but yesterday and today, my anxiety was making my head spin.

I had no idea who could be sending me these things, but the fact that this one was hand delivered... it freaked me out. After I had gotten the first three letters, no photos, I'd tried taking it to the police. But they said sending letters wasn't a crime, so there was nothing they could do. With no idea who was sending them, I couldn't even get a restraining order. I'd left it at that and kept a collection of everything I was sent, just in case something happened one day. Not that it would do me any good at that point, but at least they would see just what they'd left me to deal with.

By the afternoon, I was done running from my thoughts. All I wanted to do was fucking relax. Drawing myself a bath and throwing in some epsom salt, I was determined to think about nothing at all. Slipping into the hot water, steam rising around above me, I let out an appreciative sigh as my skin flushed with the temperature. *This is just what I needed.* Reaching over, I grabbed the bubble bath and poured some into the water. Baths were one of my favorite things, an indulgence really, that I fully enjoyed. I hadn't always had the kind of life where I could afford to spoil myself, so even though my life had taught me to be more conservative or cautious with my money, I let myself have some of the little things that made me happy.

I was daydreaming in the bathtub when my work phone started to ring, interrupting the music I had been listening to. I carefully snagged the phone, keeping most of my body under the bubbly water to stay warm. My boss's name on my screen made my anxiety come right fucking back.

I answered the call and didn't even get a chance to speak before she started talking. "Not a lot of time right now to fill you in, darling, but you have dinner reservations to meet the team I talked about. Tonight at Twelve Tables, six p.m."

"How will I know who I'm meeting?" I questioned, getting right to business. When Maeve was in a mood like this, it was better to just follow her lead. Any other topics could wait.

"Tell the hostess you're there for my party. It's going to be in one of the private dining rooms," she ordered, a car door slamming in the background. "And let me be perfectly clear, Nicholette... I don't care what you have to do to help them get the job done. Just do it. I helped you, and now you're going to help me."

“Understood,” I replied briskly. Respect, arousal, and nerves filled me at her tone and words. I never really knew where I stood with her. I owed her a lot, and while she could come off as cold and uncaring, which she mostly was, I knew that she at least had a tiny soft spot for me. “I’ll do everything in my power to take care of this for you.”

“I know you will,” she replied smoothly. “I trained you to be the best, and I know about your little... hobby. You were one of my best students, Nic. I’ve always liked that about you.”

Click.

I licked my lips, pushing past the satisfaction of her warm praise, and placed my phone down on the counter, fully processing her words now that the call had ended. *She knows about my hobby? How?!* My mind raced, trying to figure out how I’d messed up, but I was coming up blank. No, there was no way I’d messed up; she was just that good. After all, it took a certain kind of person to contract hitmen to kill your husband. Of course, she also took me in off the streets and trained me to be a call girl, all while having an affair with me. Maeve was the definition of a complicated person. I knew that all too well.

She always had told me that I could leave whenever I wanted to, that being with her wasn’t something I was obligated to do. I had loved her, almost lost myself in her, until I realized that I would never be enough for her. She didn’t feel even a quarter of what I had felt for her, and when I realized that, I had told her I needed to be done. Maeve didn’t ask for an explanation or even try to comfort me; she had nodded and left the room. The only times I saw or spoke to her after that

were for business. It was the epitome of a clean break-up, which I supposed I should be grateful for.

I shook my head, trying to dislodge my thoughts; no way was I going down memory lane for that shit tonight. I had a group of men to meet and business to discuss with them, not wallowing over things in the past. Looking at my phone, I saw it was almost four-thirty, so I reluctantly pulled the plug of the bathtub. There wasn't much time to get ready, but I'd work with what I had and still arrive on time. I knew that while she wanted me to make contact and keep her updated, any bad impression on my part would be relayed to her as well. I'd be a fool to think I was the only one who'd have her ear.

Luckily, I knew exactly what I was going to wear, a simple black dress, but it also meant I had plenty of bruises and bite marks to hide. I sat down at my vanity and went to work. After fixing my hair, I focused on my neck, blending makeup until the worst of the red and purple was covered, then I got to work on the rest. Eye shadow, eye liner, mascara, highlighter and blush, then lips. I made sure nothing was too heavy, accentuating my blue-green eyes with a light smoky eye and matte red lips. I looked myself over and nodded, happy with the end results, before standing up to go to my walk-in closet.

As I slipped into the dress, my thoughts kept turning, trying to figure out what this team would be like. Maeve had been married numerous times, that much I knew, and each of her husbands had mysteriously vanished or died. *A black widow after my own heart.* It was interesting that she was outsourcing the work for this one, in a manner of speaking. What was it about Warren that made her need to keep her distance? What was he wrapped up in? Maeve hadn't shared all the details, only dropping bits and pieces that she wanted me to know. She was the ultimate planner, already onto the

next chess match while I was at the beginning of this one. It reminded me of another close friend I'd made since moving to Ashview, always playing multiple games at once yet staying ahead in all of them. *Why do I always seem to attract complicated as fuck people?*

Resigning myself to an interesting night either way, I stood in front of my mirror to check my reflection. My long black hair was curled and finger-brushed so it fell in loose waves around me, stopping just along the neckline. The strapless black dress hugged every curve I had and ended right around my knees, showing just enough leg to draw attention. I turned around and checked to make sure there were no wrinkles or lines, crinkling my nose in dissatisfaction when I saw even the thong had left a line. *Guess going commando is the plan tonight*, I thought as I pulled off the underwear and threw it into my closet. Glancing over at my vanity to check the time on my phone, I realized almost an hour had passed, which meant I needed to catch a taxi if I was going to get to the restaurant on time. I hated driving in the city, too many cars and people, so I always took a cab if I could get one.

I quickly snagged my favorite pair of black heels and slipped into them before putting on a long red pea coat. After double checking I had both my personal and work phones in my small purse, I left and locked up the apartment. When I got outside, I waved down a taxi and told him my destination as I settled into the back seat.

It was a quiet ride, and traffic was backed up as we made our way closer to the center of town. Looking absently out the window, I watched the nice apartment buildings and local shops turn into chain stores and office buildings. They were made of cold steel and glass, completely contrasting the small historic brick apartment building where I lived. The only

greenery around were the trees randomly placed in the middle of the concrete jungle, providing a tiny peek of nature for the huge groups of people milling around, going about their business.

As I checked the time on my phone again, my mind wandered back to the meeting I'd had with Maeve a few days earlier.

Maeve pinned me with her icy blue eyes as I settled back into the chair with an expectant expression on my face. "Nicholette, darling, I see you've been having fun."

I shrugged lightly. "I was working; enjoying it was a bonus. You taught me that. But you asked me here about a final favor, so what's going on?"

"So eager to move on from our arrangement?" Maeve's breath caught as her eyes fluttered closed a bit from whatever the brunette was doing between her legs. I shifted in my seat, not unaffected by the memories that sound brought back. Maeve's hair against my stomach as she slid down my body, the harsh grip of her hands in my hair, the sweet taste of her on my tongue. I shook myself out of the nostalgia as quickly as I could, but when I focused on Maeve, she was studying me closely. Fuck.

I licked my lips, trying to avoid any of her comments. "I don't like owing people. This is the final personal thing between us, and then we're done. The rest is just business, exactly how we want it."

"Is that so?" she asked, her voice soft. After a silent moment, she pushed the woman on the floor away from her. "Sweet, I'll call for you later."

The woman didn't protest Maeve shoving her away or the cool dismissal. Instead, she licked her lips, honey brown eyes staring up in adoration. The woman nodded and stood up, walking out without giving me a second glance.

"What's going on?"

Maeve pursed her lips as she straightened her clothes. "Warren is becoming... more bothersome. I've moved up some of my plans, and in doing so, I found out some things that I wasn't aware of before."

I thought back to all the times Warren had roughed Maeve up and her stoic dismissal of my growing concern for her during our time as lovers. "It must be something bad if you're talking in such vague terms."

"I've hired help to deal with things," Maeve continued, not addressing my commentary. "Unfortunately, Warren is being difficult, even for this team of experienced mercenaries. They failed to get some things done on time, and I figured I'd give them a little assistance... you."

"You want me to help a team of mercenaries?" I lifted an eyebrow, unable to hide my disbelief. "What am I going to do, fuck Warren to death or sleep with the team for motivation?"

"Don't be obtuse, Nicholette." Her eyes flashed with anger at my retort, face tightening with displeasure. "You're something Warren wants. You can help these men get into places they can't right now."

"So I'm a useful tool?"

"Yes," she responded evenly. "There are things Warren is involved in that I need proof of before they kill him. I need you to help them get that proof and help dispose of him, if

necessary. Don't get distracted by good-looking men and decent cock, Nicholette. Do your job for me, then move on."

I smirked slightly at her. "Good-looking guys and decent cock? Must be more than that for you to mention it." I sobered a bit as I stood up, "I'll remember my place in your toolbelt, Maeve. At least until this job is done. Then I'm going out on my own. For everything." False bravado filled me at my bold declaration, though in reality, I was anxiously waiting for her reaction.

Maeve didn't say anything until my hand touched the doorknob. Her calling my name had me looking over my shoulder at the woman who owned a part of my heart, a bigger part than I wanted to admit to myself. "These aren't the gentlemen you're used to meeting up with. Fully expect a test of sorts to be initiated into their team. Men are always like that, after all. Though from what I understand you do know one of the team... so do try to focus on my end goal."

"Don't worry," I confidently called back as I opened the door. "I'm used to taking care of myself since I'm the only one who has ever put me first. I can handle anything they dish out."

My footsteps were loud in the silence of the penthouse as I left. The shaky breaths didn't escape until I was in my car a few minutes later. Tears started to fall, and I harshly wiped them off my cheek, angry that she could always get under my skin. I hated her, but just as much as I hated her, I wanted her in equal measure. And what did she mean that I knew one of the members of the team?

I shook my head, trying to focus on my surroundings and the meeting I was on my way to instead of the past. An alarm beeped, and I snapped out of my thoughts completely, logging

into my work phone at the designated time. After doing that, I attempted to get my mind back into the game and, ironically, channel the bad bitch attitude Maeve always gave off. She was my mentor after all.

I focused on Ashview Hills as it milled around the traffic. There wasn't much to do but people watch, studying the walkers wandering around the newly gentrified neighborhoods as we made our way toward the meeting place. Luckily, the restaurant I was going to was in the upscale part of town and not in the central business district. There were still modern buildings there, but they were carefully surrounded by trees, street art, and enough boutique businesses that it reminded me of the artsy, up and coming neighborhood I currently lived in. I had hated my small hometown for so many reasons, but something that had definitely stuck with me was a love of supporting mom and pop shops instead of chain stores.

My wandering thoughts derailed when the restaurant came into view. A fancy place, but no lines of people waiting to get inside. *That would be much too low class.* It occupied the bottom floor of a huge brick building, a place well known for its amazing food and incredibly long wait list. The last time I was there, the food and wine selection had been spectacular, and the service was impeccable. I didn't want to know how she had gotten a reservation on such short notice, but I wasn't going to complain about it.

Paying the driver, I climbed out and walked directly inside, heading straight to the host stand. An older man was there in a crisp and starched white shirt and black slacks, his lips twitching just slightly at my approach.

"It is wonderful to see you again, miss," he greeted with a slight nod of his head. The man was a master of discretion,

and he had a perfect poker face despite knowing what I did as my occupation. He was paid well enough that he didn't care if I was here for work or pleasure, and he'd never be so gauche as to treat me any differently than the others who dined here.

I smiled at him and leaned closer to tell him in hushed tones that I was here for Maeve's party in a private dining room. Pulling back, I noticed his face had grown pale before his professional mask was slapped back into place. *Oh, now I'm really wondering who's waiting for me. I know what Maeve told me isn't everything, but who knows just how much she left out.*

"Of course, right this way." He nodded then motioned for me to follow him. We walked through the quiet restaurant, our steps silent on the plush carpet underfoot. There were crystal chandeliers scattered throughout that paired perfectly with the neutral cream-colored walls and let the warm wood and deep red carpet be the highlights of the place. I ignored the looks I was getting from men and women alike as I followed him toward the back where the private rooms were located.

"Here we are, miss." He came to a stop at a set of closed doors. Giving him a sincere smile, I thanked him and held out a hand with a crisp one hundred dollar bill in it as a tip.

He took it and leaned close to whisper in my ear, "If you need help leaving, just signal me on the way to the ladies room. Be careful." Briskly, he stepped away from me, knocking three times on the door before spinning on his heel and quickly making his way back to his post at the front of the restaurant.

I was watching him walk away when a door opened behind me. Curious, I turned around and found myself completely unprepared for who I saw standing in the doorway. We stared

at each other, both surprised, before I firmly put a smirk in place and gestured to the room beyond him, silently asking if he would let me in. Nerves made my stomach twist in knots, but I was hoping my smirk hid that from him. *I have too much riding on this to fuck it up before the meeting even starts.*

Vas opened his mouth, but before I could find out what he was going to say, a cool voice called out, “Well, let her in, brother. No use just standing there. She can’t be *that* pretty.”

Vas shook his head before stepping back, and I sauntered into the room, ignoring him for the moment to take in the familiar yet unfamiliar stranger waiting for me beside the table.

His brother had the same golden skin and black hair, but that was where the similarities ended. He wasn’t as broad or muscular as Vas, but he was about half a foot taller than me. He was studying me just as closely as I was looking him over, and I found myself unusually nervous about what conclusion he would come to. I could practically feel the violence he hid under his suit of propriety, and it sparked my interest.

Unlike Vas, this man had a short beard, and instead of closely cropped hair, his was long and pulled back into a neat bun. How he pulled that off with a full suit on, I had no idea, but he was hot as hell. *Nic, you aren’t here to fuck them. You’re here to talk... Though Maeve did say do anything necessary... Fuck, time to focus.*

“You aren’t what I was expecting.” The man’s voice was smooth, even if his words were abrasive.

I gave him a condescending smile, trying to send the message that I didn’t really care what he thought. “You were exactly what I was expecting, actually. Why get men to do a woman’s job? Isn’t that why I’m here? Your *failure*?”

Anger made his cheeks flush, and Vas smoothly moved to separate us. “Why don’t I take your coat?”

I looked at him, easily noticing his own anger as well. It seemed he wouldn’t be acknowledging that he knew me. Oh well, I wasn’t here to play nice, and fucking was only one of the things that I was a master at. I slipped my coat off, keeping my focus on the other man and lifting an eyebrow in challenge. “Are you going to make introductions, or am I starting?”

“Sacha,” he bit out. “And that’s my brother Vas. Sit.”

I gave him an insolent half-shrug and made my way to the open seat at the end of the table. He clenched his jaw at my choice, but he didn’t comment. I smiled sweetly at him as he took the chair to my left, with Vas settling down on Sacha’s other side.

“You can call me Nic,” I offered as I tilted my head, examining them both. “Where are the other two members of your team? Late?”

“Traffic,” Vas explained, his voice low as he searched my face and found nothing of the woman he knew there. I could tell just by the way the last bit of faint familiarity dropped from his face. Maybe it was from the use of my real name rather than the professional alias I shared with clients. Or the fact that my full bitch mode was on for this meeting versus the accommodating woman he was used to. “They should be here soon.”

I had opened my mouth, about to ask something else, when there were two knocks before the door opened. *At least I didn’t have to wait long.* I looked over and was met with an attractive man, in a black sweater, charcoal skinny jeans, and black

boots. He pushed his floppy light brown hair out of his eyes as he nodded to me in a silent, uneasy greeting.

The second man came in, and my thoughts tripped over themselves, though I managed to keep a slightly amused expression on my face. My effort wound up being wasted when he didn't bother to hide his shock. He pulled back the hood of his jacket, leaving his dirty blond hair a mess, and his hazel eyes flicked back and forth between me, Vas, and Sacha.

“No. Fucking. Way.”

“Do you two know each other?” Sacha's smooth voice was cool as he stared at the man still by the door. Oli didn't focus on Sacha. Even despite the older man's tone, he kept his attention zeroed in on me.

“I should think so,” I answered for the speechless man, laughter infusing my voice as I sat back in my chair. “Oli is my roommate.”

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Nicholette

Thursday

I watched in amusement as Sacha curtly motioned for Oli to sit down, Vas and the other man glancing back and forth between the rest of us, waiting to see what would happen. I could practically feel the anger and annoyance from the dapper man beside me as Oli sat down in the chair beside mine. Vas looked on the verge of saying something, but he held himself back. Instead, he put on a blank face, boredom taking over as he looked over everyone. Oli just seemed genuinely confused as to what I was doing here.

“Well, this is cozy,” I purred, smiling at all of them. “Maeve filled me in on what you fucked up, so why don’t we start with what’s going right?”

Sacha reached out and clamped a bone-crushing grip on my wrist, tightening his hold until I looked over at him, unimpressed. “If you think you’re in charge here, you’re wrong. This is my team and my show. I don’t care what Maeve said to you. You came in here as a complete fucking bitch, and I’m not beneath showing you your place.”

I laughed, a carefree sound that seemed so out of place in response to his threat. “Sacha,” I managed as I reached up with my free hand to wipe at my tears, “so many people have tried teaching me my place. You can certainly give it a go though. I enjoyed breaking better men than you who attempted the same thing.”

“Wait, wait a minute,” Oli interjected, interrupting my exchange with Sacha. “*You’re Maeve’s person?*”

“Yes,” I responded, dismissing Sacha when he let go of my wrist and directing my attention to Oli. “I take it this is the job you were watching porn for? Not really sure how that translates to getting Warren, but okay.”

“Well...” Oli trailed off, looking over at Vas then Sacha.

“We were discussing a new plan before Maeve informed us you were joining us,” Sacha replied evenly. “Though she didn’t give us any information besides the fact that you were a woman.”

“Seducing him?” I realized, tilting my head and quickly looking them over before focusing on Sacha again. “I don’t really think any of you are his type.”

“Not us,” he bit out between clenched teeth.

“Ah.” I nodded, flicking my gaze to Vas at that. “How interesting... It seems we have similar ideas then.”

“Excuse me?!” Oli’s voice broke as Vas froze. Sacha, for his part, looked just as surprised as he studied me, his rich brown eyes hard while he considered my words.

“You? You don’t seem like the kind to get her hands dirty.”

“You don’t either,” I pointed out to him, which made the man beside Oli start coughing, and I looked over to find faint

amusement in his eyes despite his attempt to get himself under control. He was studying me intently, but I couldn't glean anything from the careful silence he was projecting. It made me wonder if Oli had told him anything about me because I could feel the weight of his judgment and his skepticism. Underneath all of that, I could almost sense a level of uncertainty as his gaze flicked away from mine. I made him nervous, but I had no idea why.

A single knock interrupted the growing tension. I looked over to find the head waiter standing there, two others standing behind him, with trays of food at the ready.

"Come in," Sacha called, his voice dangerously bland.

The servers entered and made quick work of passing out the drinks and plates. Water and wine to drink, then bread, pasta, and salad were all placed in front of each person before they filtered out of the room as quickly as they had entered it.

"I see you took the liberty of ordering food," I commented, looking it all over but not touching anything yet.

"It seemed the most efficient," Vas answered for his brother, and I shrugged.

"All the food here is great, so it was a good call."

"Let's circle back though," Oli called out, ignoring his food to lean toward me. "Seducing Warren. You had an idea."

"It would take a bit of work, but I know I could seduce or at least entice him enough to get him alone or to get information from him. Depending on what you were planning to do with Warren."

"Why you?" the other guy asked. "You don't look anything like his wife."

“I don’t have to. I was with her for almost a year, and she didn’t share me with him. He’s the type of guy that would want that conquest so he could shove it in her face.”

His mouth opened and closed, but he didn’t manage any words. Oli, however, didn’t have that problem. “You? And her? Together?”

I pressed my lips together to hold in my laughter, reaching for my wine and taking a sip while I let him process that fact. It seemed he wasn’t the only one having issues because, on my other side, Vas and Sacha looked like they were struggling to process what I had just casually divulged. I wasn’t really sure what part of that was surprising, but I’d take my fun where I could.

“Regardless, you’re in charge, Sacha. I can play along with whatever plan you want to do.” When he looked surprised, I grinned. “What? I can play nice.”

“Good, I was worried bitch was your only setting,” he mocked me, lifting his own wine glass to have a drink.

I reached out to clink my glass against his. “It *is* one of my favorite settings, to be honest; I do it so well. But can you blame me for coming here on the defensive? It’s not exactly every day I get to be in a room full of killers.” Then I took a long sip before correcting myself. “Well, that’s not strictly true, but I think you get the general sentiment.”

Sacha narrowed his eyes at me, but I could see his begrudging respect and curiosity.

Vas cleared his throat roughly, drawing our attention to him, but he just stared at his brother. “If the dick measuring contest is over, let’s eat.”

“I didn’t see any dicks getting whipped out,” Oli commented as he started to dig into his food. The guy beside him did the same. *I really need to figure out his name.* But I waited until he had a mouth full of food to reply.

“Good thing, I’m pretty sure I’d be packing more than all of you.” I couldn’t hide my growing laughter when Oli started to choke on his food. “With strap-ons, you choose your size.” I smirked as he looked up at me with tears in his eyes. “That’s so close to the perfect expression too.”

My teasing made everyone else at the table choke, Vas included, and I happily settled into my food. The others waited a few beats before doing the same. We enjoyed our meal in silence, and I didn’t try to bring up any business until we had all eaten our fill and the table had been cleared.

I leaned back in the chair when I was done, recrossing my legs under the table. “So what’s your plan, boss?”

Sacha slowly drank some of his water, considering me before looking at the others. “You’re going to seduce Warren, whatever it takes. Do you think you can handle whatever he’ll dish out?”

Tilting my head, I considered him. “Maeve really didn’t tell you my profession or anything about me?” He shook his head, and I let out a light sigh as he glanced at Oli. My roommate only shrugged, silently saying he had no idea. “I’m a call girl. That’s why she called me to assist you. Seducing Warren was also the same line of thought she had.”

“Maeve sent a whore to work with us?” he blurted out. I wasn’t surprised that she hadn’t told them my profession; she always wanted to feel like she had the upper hand in all her dealings.

I nodded, feeling zero shame. “A very expensive whore, who she trained and set up connections for. I’m the person Warren has been wanting to play with for over a year, but the answer was always no, so you have exactly what he wants—me.”

“But once he has you, that’s it,” Oli pointed out.

“Darling, there is a process and steps you have to take to be with a call girl. It’s not like picking up a prostitute in the red district. He knows the dance as well as I do. I’d require at least one to two meetings before anything sexual happened since contracts and limits have to be agreed upon. I usually take on more... demanding and unique clients.”

“So, basically, any kink he’s into won’t be an issue for you?” Sacha asked.

“You do look like someone who could take a lot of things. You don’t look like the classy call girls I’ve seen around,” Vas muttered softly. My jaw clenched, but otherwise, I chose to ignore him. Well, it seemed that the grouchy Vas was here tonight, and the guy who had brought me food as aftercare was nowhere to be seen. *Is he like this around other people, his brother?* It didn’t really matter. I wasn’t going to sit here and just fucking take it without firing a few shots myself.

“No, it shouldn’t be an issue. I’ve been with plenty of men who are into some pretty off the wall kinks. My other clients tend to be bumbling oafs who have no choice but to pay my fees since other girls won’t give them a second look.”

I could see Vas’ entire body freeze, and it was noticeable enough to everyone else that Sacha glanced at him while Oli and the other guy leaned back in their seats. “Is there something I’m missing here?”

Vas glared at me, anger and hurt warring in his eyes. Did I enjoy causing those feelings in him? No. Was I going to put up with snarky comments from him without biting back? Fuck no. “I’m sure those others are really just paying for you to leave at the end since no one would want to keep you around afterward. Nobody likes sloppy seconds, much less whatever serving you’re on.”

My lips curled into a cruel smile before finishing off my wine. I stood up and grabbed my purse off the table so I could leave after my parting shot. “I handle you well enough, Vas, and I get to leave with a few grand for putting up with you. Anyway, you know where to find me.” I waved a hand at Oli before walking over to grab my coat off the hook on the wall. There was no way I could stay here any longer without losing my cool, and that wouldn’t be good for anyone. Much less me when I had to tell Maeve how tonight had gone. “I have somewhere to be tomorrow morning, but besides that, I’m free.”

I didn’t stick around after that bombshell, walking out of the private dining room and closing the door behind me. Quickly leaving the restaurant, I threw on my coat as I nodded at the head waiter to let him know I was fine before heading out into the brisk fall night. I was about to lift a hand to hail a cab when a large hand wrapped around my arm and yanked me away from the curb.

Of course. I resigned myself to the confrontation as I was hauled away from the crowded streets and slammed against the brick wall of the restaurant. A pissed off Vas stood in front of me, but before I said anything, I looked around to find he was indeed by himself.

When he was silent for a full minute, I let out a long sigh. “If there’s something else you want to say about me, then say it.”

“You,” he snarled, eyes flashing with anger in the dim light that reached where we stood surrounded by trash. “You had no right—”

“To say that you’re paying me for sex? After your comments about me?” I gave him a haughty look. “It’s business, Vas. Besides, it’s true. I handle your shit pretty damn well, which most people wouldn’t be able to. Unless they don’t know what you’re into, sloppy seconds and all—”

A loud sound filled the air before the pain registered on my face. He had smacked me, not like he had done a few days earlier in the forest. This time, he had put full force into it, making my head whip to the side. Blood filled my mouth, and I slowly turned to look at him. His face had grown colder than the air around us as he stared at me like I was nothing. *Worse than nothing.*

“I’ll work with you to do this job,” his voice rumbled, “but outside of that, I won’t need your services any longer.”

I watched silently as he pulled his wallet out from his back pocket. Grabbing a few hundreds, he shoved them in my dress before walking away without looking back. Soon enough, before I’d even moved from my spot, he was gone, blending into the crowd. I grabbed the bills as I spat the blood onto the ground nearby, pushing the hurt I felt to the side. I would deal with that at home, not here for the world to see.

“He must have liked you, or at least your high class cunt, to be that angry,” Sacha commented, coming out of the shadows of the alley. I hadn’t been able to make him out in the evening’s dim light, but he seemed larger than life as he

approached now, crowding me until he had my back pressed against the rough wall. “You were all big talk in that dining room but look at you now.”

I tilted my chin up in defiance, ignoring the way my body wanted to relax against his when he moved even closer to me. “I’m sure it was just my cunt, seeing as he didn’t even know my real name until tonight. Unlike women, you men are prone to thinking with your dicks.”

“Maybe...” His voice was deceptively soft as he wrapped one hand around my throat, the other starting to feel up my leg and under my dress, slowly circling and moving higher. “But in the end, our dicks can break women, even women like you who think you’re so much better than us.”

Suddenly, he plunged his fingers into my pussy and squeezed my throat, cutting off my air. He continued to finger fuck me despite the tauntingly soft kiss he pressed to my lips. My body involuntarily started to respond to his attack even as I tried to push him away with my hands. He peppered kisses along my cheek until he got to my ear. “What kind of woman would get turned on by this? Being fucked in an alleyway full of trash? Or do you just feel right at home?”

That hit too close to the heart. I tried to stop my mind from going where it wanted to, tightening my hold on my purse as my vision started to tunnel. I brought it up and hit him across the face with it, satisfied with the crunch I heard on impact, and his hold on me loosened enough for me to gasp for air.

“If I can take Vas, I sure as hell can deal with you,” I told him coldly, looking him up and down and letting my expression show just how lacking I found him to be.

He growled at that and pulled his hand out of my pussy, unzipping his pants a moment later and pulling out his dick.

Sacha wrenched the bottom of my coat and dress up and spun me around, slamming my face against the cool brick. Wrapping a hand in my hair, he yanked my head back just as he thrust balls deep inside of me.

I gasped, almost speechless at his size and the viciousness with which he pounded into me. It almost reminded me of Vas during some of our primal play, but within those scenes, I could say no. I didn't think Sacha really cared about anything I said right now. Pulling my hair hard, he made sure my back was arched enough that the only way I remained standing was by his grip alone.

“You're so wet. Who would get aroused by this?” he taunted me, and I could feel my juices running down my leg as he pounded into me. I should feel shame at his words, but if anything, they made me more excited. *Who gets turned on by this? How could someone who had been raped, viciously at that, want this?* But I wasn't a doctor, so I couldn't say how my wires had gotten crossed enough that this did it for me. The dirty talk, the rough treatment, and me being absolutely *used* by him—it all just flat out did it for me. Though there was one big difference between right now and the last time someone took me without my full consent. Last time, I had said no, and this time, I couldn't bring myself to say it. He was right; I wanted it. He made me feel with every thrust inside of me, and as much as I avoided feelings as a side effect of my job, I was nearly desperate for what he was giving me right now. “A stupid bitch like you just needs to be shown your place. Say it.”

“Never,” I forced out in between thrusts. My already swelling and sore face scraped against the brick as he pushed my face back into the side of the building.

He let out a husky laugh which made my muscles clench around his dick. “One day, you’ll say it, and I’ll put a pretty collar on you to make you remember.”

My heart skipped a beat at his words, but his almost gentle tone made me pause. No, it couldn’t be. I thought I’d heard longing beneath his threat, but it almost seemed like *he* wanted to be the one wearing it. I didn’t know why I thought that, but something was there that I had only heard once before from a previous client. He had been so uncertain about his own kinks until I slowly showed him how wonderful it could be to have a Domme. But I didn’t get to think about that long since his pace increased until he started to come. He pulled out of me to spray his cum all over my ass and then pushed me away from him, finally releasing his hold on my hair.

Schooling my expression, I slowly turned around in time to see him tucking himself back in his pants and tossing me a cool look. “Not sure I’d pay thousands for that, but we can consider it a test drive for the job.”

I pulled down my dress, ignoring him until he started to walk away. “Sacha?”

He paused and threw a blank look over his shoulder. “It’s funny, but I think you’re the one who wants to wear the collar. The man who has to be in control of everything else yet you want that freedom of surrender.” I sauntered over to where he stood still, every muscle tensing the closer I got. “Your breath caught when you mentioned it, *longing* for it. Lucky for you, I know just the cage to put on you, so you can focus on what really matters. I don’t bother with getting back. I just get even. Remember that.”

I pressed a kiss to his cheek, happy to see the red mark of my lipstick on his face even as his cum soaked into my dress

and coat. *Both are completely ruined. I'll have to throw them away when I get home.* Then I brushed past him and tucked the bills from Vas into my coat pocket. Aware of his gaze on me, I hailed a cab and slid in, purposely not looking back as I told the driver where to take me.

A few minutes later, a vibration caught my attention, and I opened my purse, ignoring my swirling thoughts and the drying cum on my ass. I saw Maeve's name on the screen and answered swiftly. "I just left the restaurant."

"Did it go well?" Her voice sounded almost bored on the other end. The almost dismissive tone made my chest ache enough that I rubbed it, schooling my own tone to match hers. Given the way we interacted now, you'd never know we had a relationship of any kind.

And that tone always served to remind me why I had left her. Oh, I had stayed with her for a while until I realized that I wasn't the person that would draw her away from her set path. Once I understood that, walking away was the only thing I could do to protect myself. I loved and respected her much more than I feared her; that was why she was always able to get under my skin even now. It was what made still working for her so hard; she knew how I felt about her and manipulated that to serve her own purposes.

"It went as expected," I replied blankly. "A few words back and forth, along with a test drive. Just like you said would probably happen, though not in so many words. I think we will get along just fine."

She was quiet for a moment before replying with a warning. "There is a job to do, Nicholette. If they intrigue you personally or what have you, don't let it interfere with your job for me. Remember what I told you."

“That won’t be an issue,” I reassured her. “I’d only ever have my fun after work is done. I’ve been wanting to add to my collection anyways.”

“So bold tonight,” she mused, her voice turning husky while my lips reflexively curled in disgust. I wasn’t her plaything anymore, and her businesslike words didn’t make me inclined to drive down memory lane. *No more than I’ve already done today at least.*

“Lucky for you, that’s none of your concern.” My turbulent thoughts were making my tongue loose, and the response slipped out before I thought it through. It was too late to take it back though, so I continued on before she could respond. “I’ll let you know when I have updates.”

Click.

I let out a shaky breath as I tucked the phone back in my purse, ignoring the curious looks from the driver. Whenever I talked to Maeve next, she would let me have it for my tone, but right now my only thought was getting into the shower then maybe a long bath as I thought over tonight’s dinner.

It would be interesting to see how it all played out after this.

And what I’d said to Sacha was true. I’d get even with him if it was the last thing I ever did.

Vas

THAT DINNER WAS SO FUCKED. I rolled my shoulders as the spray of hot water hit my shoulders. The meeting hadn’t gone how I expected at all. From the moment I opened the

door and found Delilah standing on the other side to her disrespecting me in front of my brother and team... It was a shit show.

She had waltzed into that room with no intention of playing nice, no matter what she claimed. I'd known that woman for a year, at least in some capacity, but tonight had made me realize I didn't know her at all. She wasn't the woman who I had been taking out and fucking, but she was the only one who brought out the nicer side of me, who made me *want* to do aftercare to make sure she was alright. Just being around her made me want to be a better person. Maybe my brain, or heart, was mixing up how she treated me with real emotions, but needless to say, tonight had fixed all of that. Too bad my dick didn't fucking care.

I groaned as I wrapped a hand around my throbbing dick and started to jerk off, remembering the flare of anger on her face at my shitty comments. The pain in her eyes after I smacked her in the alleyway before storming off. The hint of blood that had collected at the corner of her mouth as she glared at me had made my cock twitch, and it had taken everything in me to storm away and not fuck her right there where anyone could have seen us. *Not to mention Sacha had been watching us from the shadows.*

Nic. Her real name echoed in my head as I twisted my hand around the head of my dick and threw back my head, not caring about the water hitting me in the face. I felt my orgasm coming already, embarrassingly quickly. She always made me lose control; usually, I was calm and collected, a balance to Sacha's tendency to lash out. But Delilah... *Nic...* she pushed me beyond all reason, and that apparently applied outside of sexual appetites as well.

I came with a loud groan, her name a curse on my tongue as ropes of cum hit the tile wall. Letting out a shaky breath, I opened my eyes and slammed the palm of my hand on the wall. I wasn't upset that the guys knew I was meeting with a call girl. If anything, they would get it, especially given the nature of our job. But her violation of my privacy and the snarky remarks— at the end of the day, she'd violated the confidentiality of our arrangement as a client and escort. My own shitty comments rang in my ears, reminding me that she might've had some help in falling over that edge, but I pushed them aside.

Roughly, I grabbed the washcloth and soap from the ledge and started to wash off. Even though that siren consumed my thoughts, I knew my parting words would stand. We'd get this job done, and that would be it. I'd already let one woman past my barriers, and she had done a top notch job of wrecking me. It wasn't going to happen again.

Not even with the raven-haired goddess that made me want to be more than the rough brute everyone saw when they looked at me.

Once upon a time, I was sure she'd seen beyond that exterior. Too bad I'd just ensured that was all she would ever see when she looked at me from now on.



Nicholette

Saturday

After last night, I knew I needed to take a moment to fully relax, so what was better than a relaxing bath? Oli and I lived in a pretty standard apartment in Ashview Hills, but one thing the place didn't skimp on was the bathrooms. The white tiles on the floor and walls, simple black single sink vanity, and the toilet were all basic, but my room had a shower/tub combo, and the tub was huge. Big enough for me to soak in, it was glorious. Being almost six feet tall made that harder than most people realized, so whenever I could, I took a bath and relaxed. Maybe I was addicted to baths at this point, but I honestly didn't see the downside to it.

It had been a few days since I started "working" with the men, but I hadn't seen or heard from them since the dinner at Twelve Tables. I hummed in thought as I sat back in the tub, running my hands through the warm water and bubbles that were all around me. After Thursday night, I'd had to toss some of my favorite clothes. Even more annoying, my face needed an ice pack for nearly an entire day thanks to Vas' unfettered

strike and Sacha's less than tender "test drive." Luckily, the swelling seemed to be down today.

I tilted my head back, closing my eyes letting myself relax. Seemed like I would finally be able to just chill, which was good since it had been a crazy week. *Not to mention my own fun last night.* I grinned, recalling what I had done. It was easy to find the right kind of john around one in the morning. All I had to do was visit the spot where I used to work the streets. After all, the night was really just starting right around then.

He was in a business suit, with slicked back hair and a smarmy smile that had my skin crawling. The other girls tried to signal me to stay away, which only meant he was exactly who I was looking for. Slipping into his car, neither of us bothered with small talk as he drove us to a pay-by-the-hour motel.

The guy paid for the room, and I followed him up there, kissing and laughing as we made our way into the simple space. We fumbled around, our clothes discarded this way and that, until he had me underneath him for something that could only be called a quickie... if I was being generous. He carelessly threw a twenty at me as if that was the price we had discussed not even twenty minutes earlier. My time was worth much more than twenty measly dollars. When I tried to point that out to him, he got angry. Words like ungrateful whore filtered through my building anger as he shook me by the throat. He spit on me then pushed me off the bed onto the floor, conveniently right next to the purse I had brought with me. The jackass was too busy getting dressed to notice me grabbing a syringe from my bag. Working quickly, I took the plastic cap off and moved as if I was going to inject myself with a drug, ready to get high now that my job was done. No one cared about whores, let alone the ones that were junkies, so there

was no need to be too inconspicuous. The man caught the movement and laughed cruelly as he took the needle from me, eager to steal and cheat me out of the high as well as my rightful payment. I let out a mock protest as he wrapped his tie around his arm then injected himself. He spat at me, calling me a dirty, useless whore before storming out into the night to a soundtrack of my fake protesting wails.

As soon as the door shut, I let the cry die in my throat and quickly got dressed, not wanting to lose him. After putting on the gloves from my purse, I snagged the condom we had used and tied it off, ready to throw it away down the street. No point in leaving DNA to trace back to myself. Then I also grabbed the used needle, wrapping it in the glove for later. Sauntering out of the hotel room, I ignored the other prostitutes, drug dealers, and homeless that were scattered throughout the area. The cool air wrapped around me, and I felt a cold smile pull at my lips as I saw a man in a suit stumbling not far ahead of me. I made sure to not get too close to him, enjoying the way he fumbled through the darkness as the drug took hold of his mind. He tripped in an alleyway, falling into a stack of garbage from an overflowing dumpster. I wrinkled my nose as I made my way toward him and crouched over his barely conscious body.

The businessman's mouth moved as he blankly stared up at me, and I smirked, grabbing the needle he had left behind and tossing it beside his body as his breathing became shallow. Fentanyl worked quickly, and the men I chose were never cautious enough to suspect that the "junkie whore" might have a deadly trick up her sleeve.

"Who's the dirty, useless whore now?" I laughed lightly as I stood there watching the light fading from his eyes. I refused to look away until he was gone. Power filled me as I stared

down at him, splayed out like a broken toy that had been thrown out. He would blend in with the other drug addicts down here, just another overdose thanks to the pandemic that was wreaking havoc on the city. A bad batch of heroin was what the cops always assumed. Bloody kills weren't usually my thing, no matter how much some friends of mine had tried to convince me otherwise. I didn't mind if things got bloody when needed, and I could appreciate why people liked it, but neat and quick were my usual preference. I just found it so eloquent that the johns I killed ended up among the trash they used and discarded. How fitting for them to become what they most scorned.

I let out a sigh, remembering the cadence of the man's dying breaths. It wasn't as much fun as some of my other kills, but it helped lower some of my stress. I needed to unwind more often. *Of course it was a bonus that Oli wasn't home when I got back from that, though he never noticed any of the other times I came back home from business or pleasure.* It wasn't as if it was easy to hide the bruises I usually got from my dates or some of the more revealing clothes that I typically came home wearing. Yet the guy never said a word.

Suddenly, a loud banging on my bathroom door had me sighing dramatically before grudgingly opening my eyes and calling out, "If you're trying to kill me, the least you could do is give me the courtesy of sneaking up on me quietly."

"It's Oli," he replied, his voice amused. "I've been calling your name, but you didn't answer me. Sacha and Vas have some info for us."

"And?" I lifted an eyebrow in curiosity even though he couldn't see me. "What does that have to do with me right now?"

“We’re all here, and they want to talk. *Now.*”

“Tell them I’m busy but I should be out in about another thirty minutes. Or you can have the meeting in here,” I retorted, closing my eyes again. “I’ve finally just been able to sit back and relax.”

“You... you want us to come in there with you?”

“The door is unlocked, Oli,” I called out, and I heard it creak open, then nothing. When he didn’t say anything, I reluctantly opened my eyes to find him staring at me. “What?”

“You want us to have the meeting in here? With you in the bath?” he repeated, trying to clarify my words.

“I just got in the damn tub,” I pointed out logically. “And I don’t feel like redoing all of it later, bubbles, bath salts, what have you. Besides, I’m sure all of you have seen a partially or fully nude woman, so where’s the issue?”

He studied me for a second before smiling wickedly. “You’re going to be fun, I can tell.”

“Oh, you don’t know the half of it.” I smirked as he left the room, presumably to get the others. I waited curiously until they all trickled in, not even a minute later. Sacha and Vas lurked near the doorway, their faces staying stoic, while Oli looked absolutely excited as he settled on the floor beside the tub. The other guy walked further in and settled on the floor between Oli and the brothers. *What the hell is his name?*

“Oli said you had something to share,” I prompted when no one broke the silence, shifting my position so I could see all of them.

“We know where Warren is going to be tonight,” Sacha answered blandly, finally meeting my gaze. “A club in Winchester.”

“And you want me to go?” I guessed. “I think most of the swelling on my face is gone, as much as can be expected at least, so that shouldn’t be a problem. The bruising I can cover with makeup.”

Out of the corner of my eyes, I saw that Vas had stiffened at my words, but I didn’t acknowledge him. The other guys looked at the bigger man, but he remained tight-lipped, no other reaction. Turning my attention to the man in the middle of the room, I gave him a small smile. “Also, do I get to know your name at some point since everyone else introduced themselves?”

Oh, it’s adorable how his cheeks heated at my attention. He cleared his throat loudly and swept his long brown hair out of his face. “Bodhi.” His voice was so delicate I almost had to strain to hear him, even in the quiet room. Long fingers traced the floor pattern as he purposefully avoided meeting my gaze.

“Now that the introductions are officially over with...” Sacha snarked, making sure I couldn’t respond to my new acquaintance. I looked over at him with wide innocent eyes, but he only rolled his own at my expression. “Do you want the club info or not?”

“I figured I should at least call him Bodhi instead of repeating ‘that one guy whose name I don’t know’ in my head.” I shrugged lightly. “But yes, the club details would be good.”

“Oh my god,” Oli muttered beside me, and when he turned his head to meet my gaze, interest and humor warred in his eyes.

“He’s going to be at Lucifer,” Vas ground out, taking over for his brother. Sacha didn’t react to his brother taking over, his attention not shifting from me. *Two alpha males that*

actually get along when it comes to leadership, and brothers at that? How interesting.

“The new dance club? I’ve been wanting to check that place out. I’ve heard some great things about it from a friend.”

Sacha was rubbing his head while Vas let out an annoyed growl. “You have to be on the list though— What are you doing?”

I sat up and leaned forward, not caring that they could see my breasts, then snagged my phone from the back of the toilet where I’d placed it earlier.

“What are you doing?” Vas repeated, his voice cold.

“Getting on the list,” I responded curtly, not bothering to look up at him. I was busy typing out my message to my contact, and being interrupted was always annoying when I was concentrating. Plus, it wasn’t like I wanted to give him attention after the other night. Okay, I was conveniently ignoring the line I had *also* stepped over, but ‘it takes two to tango’ wasn’t just a saying in the bedroom.

“Who do you know to get on the list? There is a month-long wait to even—” Oli started.

I sent off a text to my friend, receiving two immediate replies. “Done. Myself and a plus one. I figured more than that would draw more attention than you would want.”

“Well, that went smoother than I thought it would,” Bodhi commented, looking from me to Sacha. *Well, from my general direction to Sacha...* Bodhi was very carefully not fully looking at me as I sprawled in the tub. I honestly wasn’t sure if I should feel insulted or pleased that he was respecting my privacy.

“I could probably get a second person in if you want,” I offered while the brothers silently stared at me. “But as someone who knows Warren, I’ll tell you what I would suggest for this play and then you can make the call. Since you’re in charge.”

“You are much more agreeable this time,” Vas clipped.

“I’m getting paid to be nice to you,” I told him sweetly. “A concept I know you’re personally aware of.”

“Your idea?” Oli interjected before Vas or I could say anything else.

I didn’t take my hard eyes and sweet smile off of Vas as I answered, “Warren likes to feel like he won. A conquest.”

“Basically, he wants to seduce and take what belongs to someone else,” Bodhi summarized thoughtfully.

“Exactly.” I nodded. “So, whoever comes as my date will be the one who Warren is going to try to embarrass by attempting to take me away. Me having been with his wife will add an extra level of motivation, but with all your stellar personalities, I’m sure someone here could make him riled or jealous enough that he would want to embarrass you.”

“Well, that leaves me out,” Oli commented. “I’m too nice.” Bodhi and I burst out laughing at that, and even Sacha and Vas looked at him incredulously. “It’s not that funny!”

“My personal opinion, Sacha would be the best choice. You fit the part. You’re someone he would see as his equal, based on personality and appearance alone.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s an insult, but I have to agree,” Sacha replied, the slight downturn to his lips the only crack in his poker face. “We should be able to handle that alone, just the two of us.”

“Test drives do wonders for a man’s confidence,” I told him dryly. “Now, you just have to act like you actually like me to make it believable, so practice your acting until you come get me tonight. When are we meeting up?”

He narrowed his eyes at me while Vas turned and stalked out of the room. Oli and Bodhi both whistled softly and stood up at the same time. “On that note, we will let you two discuss things alone.”

I kept my gaze on Sacha as the door shut behind them. “Well? What time?” My confidence didn’t leave me as I found myself alone with him. I knew I could handle men like Sacha. *I certainly have before.*

“I thought you said you were going to let me take the lead,” he said softly as he approached the tub. When he stopped beside me, he squatted down until we were almost eye level.

“You have the final say so,” I told him. “I was merely saying what I would do if I were you, all of which you agreed to.”

“Nicholette,” he said, making my name into a curse. Guess Maeve gave him my full first name after updating her about our meeting. Great. “Do you understand topping from the bottom? Because that is exactly what you are trying to do.” He studied me for a moment before what looked like begrudging curiosity filled his face. “I wasn’t sure how you would react to seeing me again after—”

“You took advantage and raped me?”

“You didn’t fight me off.”

“I never said yes either,” I calmly retorted. “But if you think that’s the worst that’s ever been done to me... then you

lack imagination. Besides, Maeve said you were more of a hands-on kind of guy, so I was expecting it. Or did you think I normally dress like that and go commando? Well, maybe the commando bit, panty lines are never good when meeting clients.”

“Is that so?” he murmured, not bothering to hide that he was checking out my body beneath the water.

I sat up and leaned forward, the cold air making my nipples harden. “So you’re in charge, boss. For now.” Reaching up, I ran a soft hand through his beard. “From what my contact said, Lucifer doesn’t really get busy until ten or eleven at night, and I can’t imagine Warren would be there earlier than eleven, regardless. Meet me at nine. We’ll arrive together. You’ll do everything I say at the club.”

“And why would I do that?” he asked softly, grabbing my hand to stop my petting. He tightened his grip until it was just shy of being painful, making me shiver with unbidden arousal.

“Because if you’re good and do everything I tell you to do while we’re there, I’ll do whatever you tell me to do in the bedroom afterward. Though the bedroom itself is optional. If your dick wasn’t so hard, you could try to protest it,” I taunted him softly, “but we both know that after your small taste the other night, you couldn’t stop thinking about it. About *me*.”

“I’m going to make you regret that offer,” he responded, words heavy with promise and eyes fierce as he stared down at me.

“Maybe ask your brother for some ideas if you want to try something new. I get the feeling you might lack the imagination.”

Sacha squeezed my wrist harder in retaliation until I gasped at the pain. Taking advantage of the moment, he leaned closer and slanted his mouth over mine. I responded to the kiss immediately, already wondering what level of fucked up I had reached to be genuinely attracted to Sacha this quickly, especially after the other night. Our kiss wasn't soft or easy; it was brutal and painful, teeth and tongues at war as we both fought for dominance.

I bit down on his bottom lip, and he groaned into the kiss, but I released my hold to lick his lip before pulling away from him. We held each other's gaze, each of us searching the other for the answer to this fucked up attraction. I didn't know what he found, but I only found more questions in his brown eyes.

"I'll come over at ten to get you, not nine." He released my wrist slowly, and my heart skipped a beat as his touch went away. "Make sure you're ready."

Instead of responding, I watched him swiftly leave the room. The cold air finally hit me with his departure, so I got out and wrapped a thick towel around myself, leaving it behind after I'd dried myself off. Assuming I'd be alone, I walked out to my bedroom and found Oli laid out on my bed with Bodhi beside him, both intently looking at his laptop.

"I'm glad you made yourself comfortable," I told them with amusement. In my line of work, nudity wasn't something that made you blink twice, and frankly, neither of them was threatening or in any way putting me on edge. Oli glanced up, his jaw dropping a bit at the sight of me completely naked. Bodhi, for his part, simply kept staring at the computer, purposely avoiding looking at me. Tension filled him the longer I stood there, but I ignored it and smiled faintly at both

of them. “Is there a reason you’re in here and not in your room?”

“Yours is more comfy than mine,” he told me after he regained the ability to speak. “And Bodhi is staying over tonight.” I tilted my head, studying Oli as he made himself at home in my room. Bodhi glanced up at me silently, almost like he was bracing himself for a bad reaction. I guess us working together, for at least a time, had made us temporary friends. I could work with that.

I shrugged and turned to grab a large shirt before climbing onto my bed beside Oli and making myself comfortable. Bodhi moved his hand from around Oli’s waist when my shirt touched him, but he didn’t release his hold on the man between us. *Is he... is he upset I’m around his boyfriend? Or whatever they are to each other?* Maybe if I just ignored it and kept acting casual, he would get that there was no need to be nervous.

“Hold that thought.” Oli passed the laptop to Bodhi and climbed out of the bed. “Gotta take a piss.”

Oli ran out of the bedroom and down the hall to his room, leaving me staring in confusion, my gaze drifting from the door to Bodhi, who seemed frozen. “You think he knows that he could have just used my bathroom?”

Bodhi’s lips twitched up a bit before he took a deep breath as if he was fortifying himself. “Could you put on underwear? Sorry, I get that it’s your room but—”

“Of course!” I jumped out of bed and hurried to my dresser to pull out a random pair. I wasn’t used to being around someone who cared about the state of dress I was in. Maybe I should have been embarrassed, but it was oddly nice that someone wanted to be around me without nudity being

expected. “Sorry, it’s a professional hazard, I think, that nudity doesn’t bother me anymore. I’ll try to remember that going forward. I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“Just like that?” Bodhi asked, surprise clear in his voice. I climbed back on the bed, brow furrowed as I tried to figure out his question. Sensing my confusion, he continued, “Just like that, you’ll do what I ask so I’m more comfortable?”

“Yes?” I dragged out the word as I searched his face. “Look, I can tell I make you uncomfortable. I don’t know why, but I don’t need to; that’s your business. But I can try to not make it worse for you.”

Bodhi looked down at the computer on his lap, not responding right away. He bit his lip, and I could almost see the gears in his mind working overtime. “You’re his type.” His voice was so soft I had to strain to hear him.

“What?” I asked, blinking a few times at the abrupt change of topic. “I’m whose type? Oli’s?”

Bodhi nodded a few times and looked over to stare at me. “He told me he had a roommate, but not a ton about you.” *Typical Oli. Sometimes he was such a space cadet when it came to details. Of course, he didn’t give me details about his boyfriend either, so...*

“Well, Oli said he was seeing someone, but not many details. Given how extroverted he is, Oli seems really good at keeping things close to his chest.” I rolled my eyes at my idiot roommate. “And to be clear, just because I’m a call girl doesn’t mean I’d make moves on Oli or get in the middle of your relationship. If it makes you feel better, I only walk around naked in my room, not in general. I don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable, so if you want, I can leave you guys

to hang out. I can just sit in the living room until I have to get ready.”

“That’s it? You’ll just... do whatever to make me not feel insecure?” His repeated need for reassurance made me wonder just what had made him that insecure. *Who fought him tooth and nail about something so simple in the past that he’s awed by some basic consideration?*

“Of course.” I smiled at him, resisting my instinct to reach out and pat his hand to comfort and reassure him. I had a feeling that the sentiment might be welcome, but the action wouldn’t be. He seemed skittish as hell around me, and I didn’t want to make it worse. Bodhi stayed silent, but I could see the uncertainty on his face slowly fading away to be replaced with interest. Interest of what kind, I had no idea yet.

“I’m back!” Oli yelled out as he ran into the room, jumping onto the bed between us. Bodhi and I bounced on the bed at the impact. I nearly tumbled off the bed while unsuspecting Bodhi barely managed to keep the computer on his lap. “What have you guys been talking about?”

“About whether you’re a fucking asshole,” I retorted dryly. “We both came to the conclusion that you are.”

“Excuse you both! Me?” Oli put a hand over his heart dramatically, giving us puppy dog eyes. He was so damn dramatic, and those puppy dog eyes got me every time even though I tried to hide it by rolling my eyes at him.

“Definitely you.” Bodhi’s lips curled into a small smile as he handed the laptop back to Oli. This time, when we both settled in close to see the screen, Bodhi didn’t pull away when my side brushed his hand, though he still tensed at the touch. *Small steps.*

My quick peek at the computer screen had me shaking my head. “This is what you’re watching?”

“This is a fucking classic,” Oli retorted.

“*Boondock Saints*?” I questioned, unable to hide the hint of laughter in my voice.

Bodhi rolled his eyes. “Oli likes to imagine he’s a MacManus brother.”

“I could totally be a MacManus! I look just like them.”

Bodhi and I burst out into full-fledged laughter at that, and I shook my head. “You don’t even look a little bit like Norman Reedus or Sean Patrick Flanery. For one, they’re taller.” I held up a finger, ticking off the reasons. “Second, you don’t have dark brown hair. Third, you don’t even act the tiniest bit Irish.”

Bodhi whistled as Oli turned to glare at me. “Oh, you shouldn’t have brought up the height, but to defer this argument, I have a question.”

“What the hell happened when I went to the bathroom? You both are way too friendly now for my comfort,” Oli complained, but there was no real heat in the accusation.

“Yes?” I gave Bodhi my full attention, completely ignoring Oli.

“Why are you so nice to us and not to Sacha and Vas?” He searched my face as I mulled over his words, deciding how candid I wanted to be.

“Well,” I drawled out as I shifted, trying to get comfortable, “Sacha is an opinionated, controlling asshole, and Vas is a fucking jerk. So, I’m giving them what they give me.”

“You didn’t know that before you met them though,” he pointed out, curiosity clear in his gaze.

I shrugged. “I’m pretty good at reading people. Had to be. Sacha’s attitude was clear the moment I walked into the room, and it was the same with Vas, who I’ve known longer. At least in some capacity. But that’s not my problem anymore.”

“And us?” Oli asked, apparently letting the height comment go for the moment along with the fact that Bodhi and I ignored his question.

“You’ve never been a jerk to me and same for you, Bodhi,” I explained, gesturing at them. “Would you like me to be a bitch instead? Or you want to hang out here, keep an eye on me like Sacha obviously asked you to do, and watch the movie?”

They looked at each other then back at me before Oli gave me a sweet smile and wrapped an arm around my shoulders, pulling me down to join them. “I take option two. But you know you’re wrong, right?”

“Wrong about what?” I settled on my bed as Bodhi hit play. I expected him to act jealous of Oli’s familiar gesture, but it didn’t seem to trouble him in the least. If anything, that new spark of interest came back. I obviously made him nervous, but it seemed that wasn’t the only reaction now that we’d had our little talk. Casual interactions were only something I occasionally had with Oli, but I found that I liked it. It had been a long time since I was around anyone who wasn’t just there for sex. Being left directly afterward still hurt even when you had money to cushion the blow.

“I’m just as dangerous as the brothers,” he whispered, turning his face to make eye contact. “I do like killing people.”

A rough laugh escaped me at that, and I whispered back, “Me too. Now shut up and watch the movie.”

Settling in, I let the movie become background noise as I thought over my plan for tonight. The deal with Sacha had been a spur of the moment offer, but I couldn’t find it in myself to regret it. If anything, I couldn’t wait until our “after party.”

He intrigued me.

What a dangerous place for Sacha to be, the center of my carefully constructed web of intrigue, and I couldn’t wait until he figured that out.

By then it would be too late.

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Nicholette

Saturday

“**Y**ou’re late,” I commented as I opened the door to reveal Sacha standing there, fist raised to knock on the door. His expression remained blank as he looked me over, standing there in a red silk robe. His left eye twitched a bit when he realized that was all I was wearing. I hadn’t expected to not be ready when he got here, but getting a rise out of him was definitely a fun bonus.

“And you’re not ready,” he replied dryly, pushing his way into the apartment. “I thought I told you to be ready when I got here.”

“All I need to do is put my dress on,” I retorted, closing the door and stepping around him. He followed me into my bedroom and looked around as I took off my robe and threw it on my bed. Walking into my closet, I considered my options. I had all different colors and styles, my standard uniform changing from client to client and with each situation. Then I thought of what Sacha had on for the night: a button-up navy blue shirt, black slacks, and black dress shoes. Everything was

simple, but even in my brief glimpse of them, I knew they were all high end and probably name brand.

I hummed as I heard him approach, his body heat warming me when he stopped directly behind my back. “I thought you had everything all picked out?”

“Not the exact dress,” I told him, ignoring the way my body wanted to lean into his. Sacha softly ran his knuckles along my spine, making me shiver, and he let out a quiet laugh at my involuntary response.

“How about not a dress then?” he murmured, and I looked up to find his eyes flicking through the clothes I had hanging up. “Go sit on the bed. I’ll bring something out.”

I narrowed my eyes, biting my lip at his tone. Letting him have his control for now, I did as he asked and settled on my bed, not bothering to pick up the robe as it slipped onto the floor.

After spending time with Oli and Bodhi today, both had eventually told me I should start getting ready before they headed out to get food. I wasn’t sure what they had planned for themselves tonight, but I was sure it would come out eventually. A few minutes later, Sacha threw me a lacy black caged bra with a band of lace underneath and a black mini skirt.

“All black?” I asked, though I wasn’t upset at what he had picked out.

“Is that a complaint?” he asked as he walked over and stopped right in front of me. Not waiting for me to answer, he used his legs to push mine apart and stood between them, his cock right in front of my face.

“No,” I responded honestly, tilting my head back to look up at him. “I just find it interesting.”

“I don’t see how *interesting* it could be considering over half your closet is filled with black clothes,” he replied with amusement, threading a hand through my hair. He tightened his grip enough that I moaned at the rougher treatment. Sacha wasn’t actually trying to hurt me; this almost felt gentle compared to his brother Vas. But I could feel the strength in his hold and knew that if he wanted to hurt me, he could, and that was a *huge* turn on for me. “Most people wouldn’t be turned on by this, being with someone like me, after what I did to you.”

“I’m not most people,” I replied, my voice breathless. “But I think we are similar in the ways that matter.”

“You don’t even know me.” He used his hold of my hair to pull me to standing, and I made no effort to fight against his control. Leaning down, he closed the distance between us, no more than a single breath separating our lips while he waited for an explanation.

“Everyone loves to play with those of us that are broken.” I reached up and gripped the sleeves of his shirt, not letting him back away from me as I finished. “Until they find all our sharp edges. But you and I, we rejoice at every cut. Every scratch makes us *feel*, proving to us that we’re alive. I can see that we’re the same in that way, just by looking at you. You want to break me just as much as I want to break you, so we can play along those edges.”

I couldn’t tell if he was breathing at that point, and I wasn’t going to close that short distance between us. I’d leave it up to him. Searching his eyes, I saw I was absolutely right. We were like moths to a flame, so ready to go down in the fire

if it got us what we wanted. But after a few minutes passed with no response, I decided to change the subject.

“Does Vas know your plans after the club?”

A cocky, evil grin filled his face at my question. “Maybe he’s part of my plans for tonight.” Between his words and the look on his face, I think I could have drowned someone between my legs. Sometimes I felt so numb to everything, but it seemed being placed between two men who hated being attracted to me almost as much as they wanted to dominate me was exactly what I needed to *feel* something. *Sharp edges indeed.* I’d always loved kinky sex, and my time as a prostitute then a call girl had helped me find my limits. The thought of being together with the two of them at the same time, it was almost every wet dream of mine come to life.

“My promise to obey after the club only extends to you.”

“I’ll remember that.” He loosened his grip and stepped away from me. “Now get dressed. I’ll see you in the living room.”

I stood there, trying to calm myself, my eyes hungrily watching him leave the room with his confident saunter. *Obeying you during sex is one thing, but at the club, you’ll be obeying me.* Letting out a shaky breath, I turned and got dressed. I put on the lacy bra and the matching black thong before slipping into the short miniskirt. Then I grabbed a pair of red strappy heels from the closet and put them on, knowing it would be the perfect finishing touch for a night out.

Walking out into the living room, I found Sacha on the phone, and he held up a finger at the sight of me, turning to finish up his call. I shrugged and snagged the gold clutch I had already gotten together, checking my phones for any updates. My personal phone had an unknown voicemail, but I left it,

not wanting to deal with what was probably telemarketers, and put it back to check my work phone.

Boss: Delilah, Warren is in a mood tonight. Be careful.

I swallowed at that, remembering what she'd said about his moods. Every time I saw her body dappled with bruises, it had made my blood boil. She would end up calming me down, a knowing smile on her face, while saying she had a plan and that it would just take time. Maeve always had her secrets, things she never shared with me. Whenever I asked to know more, why she stayed, she would just shake her head and say it was better if I didn't know. Unlike Maeve, I was used to men who hit first and apologized second, if they bothered to apologize at all.

Delilah: I'll use that to my advantage.

I rolled my eyes at the call girl name she had selected for me, Delilah, as I put the phone away. As if I even looked like a Delilah, but it didn't stand out as much as my real name at least. At first, I thought it was some kind of joke when Maeve suggested it, but in the end, I never could come up with a new name to go by.

"Ready to go?" I looked up at Sacha by the door and nodded, walking toward the door to join him. "No jacket?"

I raised an eyebrow at his question. "It would ruin the outfit." I think he mumbled something about never understanding women under his breath as he opened the door for me. Chuckling, I locked up and then threaded an arm through his. "Let's go have some fun."

WE GOT in with no problem, bypassing a huge line of people hoping they would be able to get into the exclusive club. The entire first floor was made up of the dance floor and bar, a huge throng of people already pulsing to the music. We made our way to the VIP section, sweat, sex, and alcohol perfuming the place even though the night had barely started. Once we reached the second floor, we were checked off the list there as well and allowed past the velvet rope to a beautiful lounge area.

Low tables, plush couches, and a high-end bar took up most of the space. There were a few gorgeous waitresses walking around, checking on patrons, but it looked like if you wanted to dance, you would have to make your way down to the first floor. Keeping business separate from pleasure allowed those in the VIP section a valuable measure of privacy for whatever deals or purchases were being arranged.

Sacha picked a table and guided me toward it. It was perfectly positioned in the corner of the space, so we would have clear views of the floor below us and most of the second floor. The entire place was lit up in blues and purples with just a few hints of green behind the bar, highlighting the bottles. Loud pop and rap music pumped throughout the place, completing the atmosphere. This was the kind of place I'd love to go for a real night out, not just work. *One day, I'll have to come back here and see who I can meet on the dance floor.*

Sacha sat in the corner, so his back was to the wall, and I settled down right beside him, making sure our bodies were closely pressed together. He possessively wrapped an arm around me, and I smiled as I looked over at him. He was looking at me with heated eyes, playing his part to a T.

“Do you see him?” I asked softly. Sacha shook his head slightly, and I hummed in thought before pressing a soft kiss on his cheek. “She said he was in a mood tonight. That could work in our favor.”

“A mood?” he questioned, but before I could answer, one of the servers came over to ask if we wanted drinks.

“Gin and tonic for myself,” Sacha responded without turning to look at the woman. He ran a hand along my thigh, and I kissed his cheek again at the touch. “And a whiskey sour for her.”

I gave him an arched look as the woman nodded and walked away. “Pretty sure I’m in charge right now, not you.”

“For the plan.” He smirked at me and brushed a gentle kiss on my lips, his hand slowly climbing higher toward the bottom of my skirt. “Not in everything.”

I focused on keeping my breathing even as the server placed the drinks down in front of us. Unfazed, Sacha pulled out his wallet and handed her a hundred dollar bill. “Keep them flowing, and there will be more before we leave tonight.”

The beautiful redhead smiled widely at him and nodded. “You’ve got it, sir.”

I didn’t bother to hide my interest when she walked away, my eyes locked on her retreating body. She was curvy in all the right places, thick thighs, luscious breasts, and a wide smile that reached her green eyes. I instantly gave the club more points for having a waitress like her; I’d have to come back here at a later date, and maybe I would try to pick her up, forget the dance floor.

“Found something you like?” Sacha asked, curiosity clear in his voice. With a touch that was gentler than I expected, he

turned my head to look back at him.

I smiled, not at all ashamed to admit what I liked. “She’s gorgeous. I like to think of myself as more of an... equal opportunist when it comes to attraction. Do you disagree?”

Sacha smiled, a genuine one that reached his eyes and made my breath hitch. “An equal opportunist? I like how you phrased that. But yes, I have to agree. She is beautiful, but right now, we are here for work, not pleasure.”

“Lucky for me, most of the time, I get to have both at the same time.” I picked up our drinks and held his out to him. “To luck.”

He clinked his glass with mine. “To success.” We both took long sips, letting the tension between us build before my attention was drawn by a familiar voice.

“He’s here,” I told him before finishing the rest of my drink in one long gulp. At my words, Sacha looked around as if to signal for a refill, but he paused when he saw Warren walking into the VIP section. Dirty blond hair was slicked back and he wore one of his signature suits, a light brown tweed style that brought out his green eyes. He was surrounded by a few women who were falling all over him, but he didn’t pay them much attention as he walked straight to the bar and ordered a drink, his face darkening when the bartender said something in response.

She must have asked him to wait because he started yelling at her. Whatever he was saying had to be awful considering the way the poor woman’s face heated. Even from here, I could see the sheen of tears in her eyes. She hurried to make him a drink, which he didn’t bother to pay for right away, and he turned his back on her mid-sentence so he could find a seat.

A mood indeed, I thought, leaning into Sacha's neck like we were snuggling up to hide my grimace.

"Plans might have to change a little bit," I whispered, the graze of my lips against his neck making Sacha shiver.

"What do you mean?" He reached over and pulled me to straddle him, nearly managing to take me by surprise. I propped myself up by placing my hands on his shoulders, his holding my skirt in place so that it just barely covered my ass.

"Warren's moods are always violent," I quietly explained, licking my lips. "And not in a good or consensual way. He could make Vas' kinks seem like nothing but child's play. I've seen Maeve after she dealt with him like this, and it wasn't pretty."

"He *does* seem pissed off," Sacha said thoughtfully, keeping his gaze on me as he studied my expression. "But not —"

His words were cut off by people yelling, and I looked over in time to see Warren flip a table over. Glasses shattered on the ground as he threw people off the couch where he wanted to sit. One person landed on the floor, and I winced, hoping for their sake they hadn't landed on the glass.

"I stand corrected," he finished, his voice bland.

Reaching up, I turned his face to look back at me. "We need to attract his attention so he can see me. Then I'm going to go dance. He'll follow."

He stayed silent for a few minutes. "And you're sure of that?"

"Yes." And I was highly confident in that. I knew that Maeve being with me for an entire year bothered him. Most of her lovers lasted a few weeks, maybe a month or two at most.

But not me. In me, she'd found a young mind to mold and guide, to teach her ways to. Of course, Maeve wasn't a call girl, at least not anymore, but she still used men for her own personal gain, a skill that was supremely useful. She had taught me all the upper class skills and mannerisms that I needed to fit in. I was more than just a good fuck. I intrigued her mind, which was something I didn't think Warren had ever managed to do.

Sacha cupped my face in his hands, searching my gaze. "Then let's give him something to watch." That was his only warning before he kissed me. A heated, passionate kiss that had me whimpering into his lips before I could even process myself reacting to it. I kissed him back as my arms wrapped around his neck, digging my nails into his skin. Losing myself in him, I reveled in the taste of the gin and tonic on his tongue as he consumed me.

I surfaced from the madness this man brought out in me enough to realize we weren't going far enough to draw Warren's full attention. I smiled against Sacha's lips and slowed down the kiss until I could break away. Trailing pecks along his cheek, I nosed his face over to where Warren was sitting on the other side of the floor.

I ran my tongue along the edge of his ear before whispering, "Keep your eyes on him and remember to call me Delilah."

Not bothering to explain more, I reached down and unzipped his pants, pulling his hard cock out. I wrapped a hand around his hot length, stroking him slowly to the soundtrack of curses gritted out from his rigid jaw. My body stayed carefully positioned so that others couldn't see his dick.

“Delilah,” he groaned, clenching his hands on my ass, but that didn’t stop me. I smiled before biting down lightly on his neck. Not to be outdone, he reached a hand under my skirt and moved my thong to the side to thrust a finger inside of me. “Fuck, you’re wet as hell.”

Reaching down to pull his balls out, I rolled them between my hands as I responded, “I have been since my place.” My honesty was rewarded with two fingers thrust inside of me, and I made no effort to control the moan that slipped out.

I pumped his cock a few more times before reaching down to pull his hand out of me and lowering myself onto him. When he was all the way inside of me, I clenched my muscles around his dick, working him without even moving yet. His hands squeezed my ass hard enough that I knew I would have bruises later tonight, which made me moan in excitement. I rocked on him before starting to circle my hips, fucking him slowly. The arousal and thrill from the public sex, anyone being able to watch us, filled me. I liked a lot of things when it came to sex, and I had a job that let me explore those kinks along with new ones. But exhibitionism wasn’t something I had experienced often; I preferred the *idea* of us being caught more than the reality of it. Looking down at Sacha, however, I found that fucking in public just might be a new kink of mine. *Something to remember for later.*

Sacha turned his face away from where Warren was sitting to stare at me, his copper skin darker from the flush covering his cheeks as he started to thrust into me. He maintained eye contact and leaned forward to use his mouth to move one of the cups of my top down enough so my breast spilled out. He latched on, sucking harshly before flicking his tongue over the hard peak. I knew I should check if Warren was looking at us,

but watching Sacha as I ground down on him took over all my senses.

Pulling him off of my nipple, I captured his lips in a rough kiss. It was more teeth and tongue than anything, and we continued to fuck each other, forgetting the club around us for the moment. I lost myself in the perfect way our bodies moved together, totally in sync. The smell of him, some kind of citrus, cinnamon, and leather, was intoxicating.

It wasn't long before I was getting close to my climax, and he must have sensed my building desperation. Long, smooth fingers reached down and played with my clit, making me whimper into the kiss. He expertly built me up, and I came with a long groan that he swallowed into our kiss. Sacha followed soon after, bucking into me, filling me up with his cum. The kiss finally broke, and I rested my forehead on his, both of us panting to catch our breaths.

Sacha broke the silence first. "This wasn't part of the plan."

"The club was my part of the plan, and this most definitely was part of *my* plans." I smirked at him. "Besides, I don't even need to look over to know he has seen us."

"You don't care that other people saw too?"

He seemed genuinely interested in my answer which made me pause instead of giving my usual offhand response. I pulled myself off of him and quickly put him back in his pants with efficient movements. As I did that, Sacha righted my top, then my thong with a lingering touch on my thighs before I moved to settle down on the couch beside him, putting a slight distance between us before I answered. Sacha saw the slight distance I put between us but didn't comment on it, though he stared hard at me, waiting for my answer.

I had opened my mouth to respond when footsteps stopped me, and a few seconds later, Warren was standing beside Sacha. His cold gaze looked me over, a sneer curling one side of his mouth up. Then he shifted his focus to Sacha. “Morozov, right? I see you’ve made yourself at home here in Ashview with everything the city life has to offer.”

I didn’t respond to his veiled insult, waiting to see how Sacha would handle him, but I had a feeling I knew exactly where this was going to go now. Looking over, I saw Sacha give him a smooth smile, though his eyes remained cold when he looked Warren over.

“Hmmm... Cabbot, yes?” *Oh yes, make him think you have no idea who he is.* “Yes, I’ve found that there are certain enjoyable luxuries the city has been able to provide me. Do we have business tonight? Or do you regularly interrupt people’s nights out?”

The quick and dry wit of this man made me internally chuckle with glee, especially when Warren’s face quickly cycled through astonishment and anger. He wasn’t used to people calling him out on his bullshit, and I swear if I hadn’t just fucked Sacha, I would fuck him all over again just for that.

I gently placed a hand on Sacha’s knee, making him turn to me, and gave both of them a demure smile. “I’ll just go freshen up and leave you two to talk. I wouldn’t want to intrude.”

Standing up, I grabbed my clutch and walked away. Making my way to the bathroom of the VIP section, I was happy to see I was the only one in there. Entering a stall, I closed the door before trying to clean myself up as much as I could. *Condoms just make sex much cleaner. I swear I’ll be*

leaking his cum all night, and that's before whatever else happens tonight.

I let out a sigh, and just then, the restroom door opened though I didn't see the passing shadow of footsteps. Flushing the toilet, I walked out to wash my hands and found Warren leaning against the wall of the restroom, watching me with hooded eyes.

"This is the ladies' restroom, Mr. Cabbot." I kept my focus on the water as I washed my hands.

"Maybe, *Delilah*, but you're no lady," he taunted me.

"Mr.—" I started with a sigh, but he cut me off with a finger over my lips, appearing right in front of me too quickly for me to stop him. I stared at him wide-eyed, waiting to see what he would say.

"Shhh, just listen to me. I know how you were with Maeve, all the *training* she gave you..." He trailed his finger away from my lips, slowly making his way down my neck and along my collarbone before he lightly traced the fabric along the top of my breasts. "I think you're wasted on a man like Morozov. Come with me, and I can make you a fucking queen, not a quick fuck in a club."

"You'd take care of me?" I put a tremble in my voice, making it seem like I was the same worried and hurt girl he had first met.

"If you were a very, *very* good girl," he replied, his fingers slipping beneath the lace to squeeze my nipples, the painful sensation drawing a gasp from me. "But if you're bad, there would be consequences. I don't share, with anyone. Something my wife and I have in common."

I licked my lips, flicking my gaze to the door that anyone could walk through. “I— I don’t know,” I told him. I hadn’t expected this offer from him, not in my wildest imaginings, and it changed things. “I’m here for work, so I can’t leave him for long.”

“You know how to get a hold of me,” he finished, releasing my nipple and smoothing the fabric over my breasts. “Think it over. I can be a much better master than she is a mistress.” A finger under my chin tilted my face up, and he kissed me softly, so deceptively softly, before he stepped away and was gone a second later.

What the hell is he playing at? There has to be something else going on. We needed to figure out what that was. Fast.

Maeve didn’t want to keep Warren around, but images were important in their world. She kept her lovers discreet, and even though he didn’t bother to do the same, approaching a call girl and saying he would keep her as a queen wouldn’t fly with Maeve at all. Plus, she liked to know all the pieces in play so that her web of schemes wasn’t fucked up. A beautiful, deadly spider luring men to their deaths. *I’m just glad I’m not Warren.*



Nicholette

Saturday

“Change of plans,” I told Sacha as we left the club an hour later. I wrapped an arm through his and let him guide me out into the cold fall night. “You should call the others.”

“What do you mean?” He narrowed his eyes on me.

“Might as well tell you all at once, boss. Car first?”

He didn’t respond right away, but he eventually nodded, hopefully seeing the logic of my suggestion. He tipped the valet, and we both slid into the car. Once we were a few blocks away, Sacha looked over at me. “We’re going to talk to them in person; they aren’t far away.”

“Works for me.” I shrugged and glanced out the window, not bothering to ask for details of where we were going. I thought about messaging Maeve, but something made me pause. I turned the idea over in my head and decided that I needed their trust, not just lust, for them to include me in the team.

“Decided not to message the information to Maeve first?” I turned at Sacha’s question to find he had parked the car without me even noticing.

“I’m part of your team, for now. If I want you to trust what I can do, then I have to do the same for you,” I replied with honesty.

Sacha seemed surprised, but he slowly nodded at that, a faint spark of what might have been approval in his eyes. “They are inside, but one thing needs to be made clear before we join them. Anything said, done, or seen in that building, stays there. No exceptions.”

We both got out of the car, and I walked over to him, stepping around the oily puddles on the ground. “Understood.” And I did. My entire profession demanded discretion, not just about who my clients were but the things they did with me and not with their partners. There were secrets I would take to my grave.

He placed a hand on my lower back to guide me to the door, and I studied our new location for the first time. We were in the industrial part of the city, surrounded by mostly quiet; the only sounds were of a far-off plant that ran twenty-four hours a day. Some gunshots rang out and tires squealed, but I turned my attention to the warehouse we were approaching. There was nothing special about it, no signage on the side or anything obvious that would indicate what kind of business happened here.

Just as we got to the door, it opened, Bodhi on the other side, already gesturing for us to come in. I followed Sacha, the two of us walking behind Bodhi through the vast empty space of the warehouse. There was absolutely nothing inside of it to muffle our footsteps as we made our way to another door.

Bodhi opened it just as a scream ripped through the air, the violent sound echoing in the open space. There was some cursing as the screams were cut off by a gunshot, and I raised my eyebrows, following the two men nonetheless.

Inside, Vas was standing in front of a sink cleaning off a saw and some other tools I couldn't identify from where we stood. He looked over as we walked in, turning off the water with only a nod from his brother. Oli stood over a dead man that was tied to the chair, but I couldn't make out his face since it looked like his brain had been blown out by a gun. Oli looked at us, his bare chest and pants covered in what looked like blood spatter and possibly brain matter. Belatedly, I realized he was holding the gun that must have been responsible for the man's ruined face.

"What happened?" he asked casually; his only acknowledgment of the situation was in the way he shook his hand, trying to flick away some of the brain tissue.

"It seems we have some unexpected developments," Sacha answered vaguely as he tugged me along to the back of the room, away from the blood. I let him do so without protest, and we both settled on a navy blue couch placed along the back wall. "Nic?"

I crossed my legs and turned to Sacha as I answered his question. "Warren followed me to the ladies' room after our little show and your brief conversation."

"A show?" Bodhi asked, tilting his head as he sat down on my other side. Vas threw Oli a towel to wipe the blood off of him before the two of them approached us as well.

"I figured he would want a plaything," I continued, ignoring the question. "Something to show Maeve he could one up her... That's what she expected, at least."

“That’s not what he offered?” Vas asked.

I shook my head and bit my lip. “He offered to put me up as a mistress. ‘Make me a queen’ were his exact words. Which means he must know something is going on or...”

“Or he has plans of his own when it comes to Maeve,” Sacha finished, following my thought process with ease.

“What did you tell him?” Oli asked, tossing the towel down on the floor.

“I told him I’d think about it.” They all focused on me at that, more suspicion in some of their gazes than I liked. “I didn’t want to turn down the opportunity if it could be useful.”

“Did he give you contact information?” Oli asked. He walked away and came back a minute later with his laptop in hand.

“No need,” I replied, my lips twisted in a sour smile. “I know how to contact him if I want to take up his offer.”

“What?” Vas asked, his face darkened with anger.

I lifted an eyebrow, thinking of pushing him like I had before, but remembering his smack and money from the night of dinner helped me keep that urge in check. Not to mention the fact that I was making headway with being accepted in their group. I wasn’t going to let his issues jeopardize that for me. “My history with the Cabbots is complicated. To put it mildly.”

“We have time,” Sacha responded.

I looked at him, holding back a sigh, but just as I was thinking of where to start, a cell phone started to ring. *It seems fate has other ideas.* We all looked down at our phones, and I grabbed my bag, opening it to find my personal cell lit up. I

held it up with a question in my gaze, wondering if they would let me answer it. After a nod from Oli, I answered the call.

“Hello?”

Papers rustled before a tired voice came on the line. “Is this Miss Graves?”

Suspicion hit me at that because no one called me that. *Ever*. “Yes, who is this?” The others came to attention at my uncertain tone, and Sacha motioned for the phone, but I pulled away from his hands. Instead, I put it on speakerphone, needing to keep control of my device. I understood that there were things I would need to share with them while we worked together, but the small boundaries I could keep for my personal life were going to be established early.

“This is Detective Lewis with the Ashview Hills Police Department.” I didn’t think any of the guys were breathing at this point, and I could feel a cold mask slip over my face as I recognized the name. “I’m calling to talk about your case.”

“I don’t see the point, Detective. I’ve told you before—”

He cut me off. “We found a match, Miss Graves.” My grip tightened on my phone, and my vision started to tunnel. “We need to interview you again.”

“No,” I answered softly, not looking at the guys despite their stares drilling holes into me. I took the call off speakerphone and stood up, walking away from them. “I told you before I don’t remember anything. That’s not going to change two years later.”

“Other women have been assaulted by this man, Miss Graves. Would you really not tell me more to protect them?”

His words pushed me over the edge, and I snarled, “It’s *your* job to protect them, not mine! Why don’t you do your job

and stop blaming victims for what happened to them, *Detective?* If you contact me again, I'll report you for harassment.”

I ended the call and stood there shaking, fighting off the memories his phone call had brought up. Taking a deep breath, I turned around to find them all watching me closely, but I didn't go back to where I was sitting. “What were we talking about?”

“Why were the police calling you?” Vas asked.

I threw a cold look at him, angry that he thought he had a right to know about my past. “That is none of your fucking business, Vas Morozov.”

“It is now,” Sacha retorted in a threatening tone. “You want us to trust your word, prove it. Now.”

I narrowed my eyes at him, but he didn't back down from his order. My lip was caught between my teeth, as if I could hold back the words if I didn't release it. Not looking at them might make this a bit easier, but they wouldn't get everything from me. I turned to face the dead man, cataloging details about his body to help detach myself from what I was willing to share. *They haven't earned all the details.*

“I came to the city when I was seventeen after I was disowned and kicked out by my parents. I had five dollars to my name when I stepped off the bus, and I quickly realized I had two options to make it: sell drugs or turn tricks. I picked option two.”

I walked closer to the dead man, losing myself in the macabre picture he created instead of the memories coming all too quickly with each word I spoke. “I worked the streets for a few years until one night I got in the car with the wrong john.

Happens all the time.” I shrugged nonchalantly because it was the truth. I had so many friends on the streets who had been there one day and disappeared the next, I was almost used to it. “But he disposed of me in the park, over on James Street. His mistake, because I was found before I died. By Maeve.”

I turned to face them then, and I smiled, though there was nothing pleasant about the story or anything I was feeling right now. “She moved me into the apartment she keeps for herself and taught me how to survive here. She set me up as a call girl, among other things, which you all know.”

The men all stared at me with varying degrees of surprise before Oli raised his hand slowly. A rough laugh escaped me. “Yes, Oli?”

“This just occurred to me, but if you came here at seventeen...” Amusement filled me as I realized where this was going. “How— how old are you now?”

“Really? *That’s* the question you have right now?” Bodhi hit Oli on the shoulder.

“I think it’s an important question!”

“Twenty-two.” Their faces went slack with shock, and I chuckled at their expressions before sobering up. “I had to wait ‘til I was twenty-one to start being a call girl so I could drink with clients. Not worth risking a job over a fake ID.”

“Holy shit,” Oli muttered. “Oh god, my life flashed before my eyes, thinking you were younger. At least you can legally drink.”

“That somehow makes it better?” I tilted my head. “I mean, you’re standing there covered in brain and blood, but you’re worried about me being unable to legally buy a drink. Maybe you should think about your priorities?”

“At least I won’t go to jail for fucking you,” Vas muttered, and Sacha ran a hand over his face.

“Okay, focusing back on what we are discussing,” Sacha redirected the conversation. “Why would the police be calling you?”

“Apparently, they found a match for my rapist from the rape kit.” I kept my voice bland even though just saying the words made me want to lash out and hurt someone, anyone.

“But you remember nothing?” Vas asked, the hint of skepticism wholly unappreciated.

I gave him a shrewd look. “Of course I remember everything.”

“So, besides the guy being an ass, why not cooperate?” Bodhi asked hesitantly.

“Because my rapist is dead,” I told them dryly.

“Maeve got someone—” Sacha asked, and I shook my head slowly.

“No, *I* did. I wanted to look him in the eye just like he did me.” I gestured to the man behind me. “What happens here stays here, right?” At that, Sacha slowly nodded, an intrigued look entering all of their expressions. Oli and Bodhi especially looked at me with a single-minded focus.

“Who knows that?”

“Maeve,” I answered softly. “She helped me track him down. It’s why I owed her a favor, which is how she got me in with all of this.”

“I feel so special when you put it that way,” Oli teased, putting a hand over his heart. Then his phone started to ring. “What the actual fuck is going on tonight? It’s the landlord.

Hello?” Oli’s face grew more serious the longer the guy on the other end talked until he finally hung up.

“What’s going on?” I asked as he passed his computer to Bodhi and stood up.

“Our place was broken into, and the police are waiting there for us. They have some questions.” My face paled at that, but he kept talking before I could respond. “I’m going to take a shower then head over. You guys can take care of the body over there for me?”

“Sure,” Bodhi answered.

“I’ll help you,” Sacha offered. “Vas, go with them.” Vas looked like he was going to protest, but he swallowed it when Sacha walked away. He turned to say something to me, but I wasn’t in the frame of mind to deal with him yet. Not now. Not when my feelings were the equivalent of an exposed nerve, my self-control raw and almost failing to hold back what sharing my story had started to unlock. So I did something I didn’t normally do anymore. I ran.

Hurrying after Oli, I followed him out of the torture room, which I would totally be asking him about later, into a hallway.

“Did you need a shower too, or you just wanted to run from Vas?” Oli threw over his shoulder, amusement keeping me from answering with an edge.

“Can I say both and not be judged at this moment?” I responded as I fell into step behind him. “Our show was sex in the club, which means I definitely could use a shower.”

“You had sex in the middle of the club?” Oli stopped at a seemingly random door on the left-hand side and opened it to reveal a huge locker room with open showers. At this point, I

could feel cum starting to run down my thighs, so I was just happy to see any shower at all.

“In the VIP section on one of the couches,” I told him absently as I started to strip down. Throwing my clothes onto a nearby hook, I walked over to a showerhead, already looking forward to the hot water.

“I swear I’m going to have to put bells on your fucking clothes,” Oli bitched, and I snorted as I threw him a wink over my shoulder. “You just walk around like it’s not a big deal, looking like you do.”

“Oli, I’ve been a whore since I was seventeen. If I wasn’t comfortable in my skin by now, then nothing would do it.”

He hummed thoughtfully as he finished stripping down then padded over to start the showerhead beside mine. We were quiet for a while, simply focusing on getting clean. Luckily, there was a dispenser on the wall between us filled with shampoo and body wash. *Really, where the fuck did they find this place, and why didn’t I think of it?*

“I take it something happened with you and Vas at some point?” Oli broke the silence. “Besides the whole client thing, I mean.”

I didn’t look at him, letting the hot water pound over my back and staring at the wall instead. “Besides smacking me in the face and throwing money at me to say I was worthless after that dinner? Nope.”

Oli let out a loud whistle, and I burst out laughing. Shaking my head, I turned to grab some soap, but then I started to slip. Letting out a curse I braced myself for hitting the cool tile floor, but instead I fell into a wall of muscle. Opening my

eyes, I found myself looking up at Oli, my entirely too naked roommate having caught me before I could fall.

“I see why you usually take baths,” he told me dryly, but I could see laughter in his hazel eyes as he looked down at me. *I didn't realize how muscular Oli was under his loose-fitting clothes*, was my first thought. My second was even less helpful. *How did I miss the piercings?* He didn't have that many, but there were enough to pique my interest.

“Baths are more relaxing,” I retorted playfully as he righted me. I gripped his upper arms to make sure I had my balance before I let go of him. “Thanks. By the way, I had no idea you had more piercings than the gauges.”

He winked at me. “Unlike some people, I don't just walk around naked.”

“Pity, I think that was definitely my loss,” I told him honestly, and he slowly backed me up against the cool tile wall. He caged me in with his arms and body, and with him only being one inch taller than me, we were eye to eye.

“Did the others tell you that we used to share?” My eyes widened at his revelation, surprised despite it also making a strange sort of sense. “We're busy men, and work can be... consuming. We like sharing, and it can be convenient for everyone.”

“Is that so?” I asked, searching his expression. Whereas he was usually pretty open despite all the secrets he'd apparently been keeping, now he was more careful, guarded. “Why are you telling me this?”

“You've fucked Vas and Sacha,” he reasoned evenly. “Bodhi and I are both attracted to you. Just something to think over.”

“Sacha enjoys the fight to see who is more alpha between the two of us. Vas is... complicated.”

“Both of them are *always* complicated,” he said softly, slowly closing the distance between our lips but stopping just short of touching me. “Bodhi and I, we aren’t complicated like they are. We’re together. We both like women, and although Bodhi typically prefers men, he likes *you*. Whatever you guys talked about when I was gone earlier sparked his interest. Not many people do.”

“You don’t even know me. I mean, we’re roommates, but we didn’t spend time together. Not really.”

“Sweetheart, the same could be said about you with all of us,” he retorted immediately, maintaining that inch of space between us, hazel eyes filled with a hypnotic desire. “We aren’t good people. Hell, most of the time we aren’t even nice, but I don’t think you want someone nice.”

“Only a handful of days ago, you found out I’m a call girl, and you’re okay with that? You’re implying more than just shared sex with all of you. That doesn’t mean the others are interested in more than just a body to fuck until you move on. I just want to be clear about what the hell you’re proposing.”

“Sex, with the possibility of more. I can’t say more than that.”

I swallowed hard, lust and anxiety swirling in me as I thought over his words. Maeve had warned me to not get involved with them, that they were like her. Business always came first for people like them, and I wouldn’t be able to change that. But that was the one thing Maeve never understood about me, not fully. I was fine with business first, so long as I was on the list of priorities, but I was never one of hers.

For a second, I thought about questioning whether this was really okay with Bodhi. Given our conversation and his insecurity about me... I didn't want to cross any lines or complicate things. I didn't need to catch feelings *or* deal with anyone else's. But searching Oli's heated gaze, I only saw honesty there, and maybe it was stupid, but I believed him. Seeing how he had been with Bodhi all afternoon, I couldn't believe he would do anything to hurt him.

Not letting myself overthink things, I closed the distance between us in a rush, kissing him hard. He kissed me back with the same fervor, each stroke of my tongue against his making me almost moan at the taste of him. He pressed his body against mine, so I could feel the power in his muscles as he pinned me there, completely at his mercy. After breaking the kiss, he nipped his way down my neck to my sensitive breasts. Hard bites on my nipples then teeth scraping along my stomach as he dropped down to his knees in front of me. Oli pushed my legs apart, and I barely had time to gasp his name before he flicked his tongue against my clit.

I threaded my hands through his hair and placed one leg over his left shoulder, grinding my pussy against his face, which Oli didn't seem to mind at all. For a fleeting moment, I wondered what he thought about the taste of Sacha mixed with my own, but when he started to tongue fuck me, I lost all train of thought under his attention.

He ate me out with a single-minded intensity that was all-consuming, and I rode his face, enjoying the deep moans he released with every tug on his hair. *I wonder just how far he would let me go? It's been so long since I topped someone. Most of my clients are looking for bottoms. The few looking for a Domme were rare, but I did love them.* My orgasm started

building inside me, rising slowly with every lick of his skilled tongue.

“I’m close,” I panted, peeking down at him between my legs. The cocky way he looked up at me brought out my wicked side, and I smiled down at him. “Finger fuck me while you suck my clit, and don’t you dare come.” His eyebrows rose in question at my command, and my smile took on a darker twist. “Trust me.”

Oli’s eyes narrowed at that, but he did as I told him. Two fingers invaded me suddenly, making me gasp, and at the same time he sucked on my clit with single-minded focus. My hips rocked from the attention, and it wasn’t a minute later before I was coming on his face. I ground against him, not caring if he could breath, as I rode out a second wave while he started to lap up my juices.

Lowering my leg so I was standing on my own, I pulled at his hair to indicate he could stand. He rose immediately, his dick hard and dripping water and precum, pupils dilated from lust as I smiled at him teasingly. I kissed him slowly, making sure to keep distance between us so I didn’t touch his throbbing cock. I savored the taste of myself on his lips before I pulled back.

I reached down and gently started to jack him off, giving not nearly as much sensation as he wanted based on the tilt of his head and the groan he let out. Smirking, I whispered in his ear, “You have a skilled tongue, Oli, but that doesn’t mean you’ve earned the right to fuck my pussy. Besides, when you fuck me the first time, I already know exactly how I want it to go.”

“Yeah?” he ground out as I continued to just barely pump his cock. My other hand wandered down to cup his balls,

making him hiss, but he stayed still, letting me have control. *He's beautiful.* He had obviously enjoyed killing that man, and while blood wasn't normally my thing, I could work with it when it came to the right person.

“We will celebrate our first kill together.” I licked the edge of his ear when he froze at my words. “You aren't the only one with a bloody hobby. Did you think I was joking earlier? I'll have to show you my place soon. It's not as fancy as all this, but I digress...” I tugged at his balls slightly as his breathing turned a bit ragged. “The first time you fuck me, I want us covered in blood and celebrating, because you were right. I'm not a good person. At all. I'd much rather party in the darkness.”

I let go of his balls and reached back until I circled a finger around his asshole. “And you can fuck me, be in control of me however you want to, but before the end, I'll be fucking you here.” I pushed just the tip in, and he eagerly grunted, lines of cum covering my stomach as he came. “I'm going to own you, *completely.*”

Frantically, he slammed his lips on mine, forcing my mouth open. I slipped my finger out of his ass, instead focusing on returning his kiss and pumping every last drop of cum from his body. When he broke the kiss, he let out a shaky laugh. “I wasn't expecting that, but damn, I loved it. Bodhi is going to like you.”

“I don't get to take control that often,” I told him honestly. “But I love it.”

“A switch?” He pulled me away from the wall and back under the spray, the water long having since grown cool. “You'll fit in perfectly then. Now, we need to clean up, grab Vas, and get to the apartment. So behave.”

“Like this was *my* fault?”

“Well, I’m not taking the blame or explaining to Vas why we took so long. Now, get to washing.” He smacked my ass, and I let out a small yelp at the barely there spark of pain. He grinned cockily, but I focused on the task at hand. As I got more body wash and started to rinse his cum from me, I tried not to think too hard about the apartment. I had a feeling I knew what had happened, but I hoped I was wrong.

Cause there was one small detail I hadn’t told the guys.

I had a stalker.

And they had found me.

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Nicholette

Saturday

When we arrived at the apartment complex, two police cars were waiting there. The three of us made our way up to my and Oli's place to find it blocked off by police tape. *What the hell happened in there?*

"Hey, you three! You can't be here!" A uniformed police officer approached us, exasperated by us trying to get close to the apartment.

"Actually, we're the residents of that apartment," Oli responded calmly. "We were called to come so you could speak to us." The man stopped short at that and apologized quickly, introducing himself as the detective in charge.

"This is a bit excessive for a break-in," Vas commented, his shrewd eyes cataloging everything going on around us.

"I had the same thought," I replied as I wrung my hands together so tightly they were going white. His large hands covered mine, pulling them apart so he could hold them in his own.

“Hello, I’m Detective Allen,” an older man called out as he approached us. He was middle aged, with a head of salt and pepper hair and a boxy suit that looked a size too big on him. I smiled at him in greeting when he stopped in front of us and flipped his notebook closed. “Damn it.”

Vas looked back and forth between us. “You two know each other?”

Allen sized Vas up before looking at me, effectively ignoring the larger man. “So which one of you is the other roommate?”

“I am,” Oli answered, stepping forward so that he was beside me.

“Come on in. Don’t touch anything if you can help. Looks like one of your neighbors called it in after they heard a disturbance and found the apartment door left open.” The detective lifted the yellow tape, allowing us to enter the apartment. “The main damage is in your room, Nicholette.”

If the main damage is in my room, then fuck...

The television in the living room was busted, the screen so damaged it looked like someone had taken a baseball bat to it. Our sofa was slashed up so that every cushion was thoroughly destroyed. The kitchen cabinet doors had been ripped off, the cabinets’ contents strewn all over the floor, but luckily, there wasn’t much in there for them to destroy. Oli walked off to check his room, which I had never seen, while Vas and the detective followed me to my room.

My throat became dry when I was faced with the state of it, and I only managed a few steps into the room before my feet wouldn’t go any further. ‘You’re mine’ was painted on the wall above my bed in stark black letters. The mattress was

slashed up, the bedding all thrown onto the floor. Clothes were tossed everywhere, completely shredded. Everything I had was destroyed.

Vas didn't say anything, but he placed a hand on my shoulder. The weight and warmth of it made me look over at him, and the pain and rising panic in my eyes must have been clear because he pulled me into his side. At another time, I might have hesitated to accept the comfort he was offering, but right now, I was just trying to keep my anxiety and anger under control. I leaned into his touch, remembering all of our good interactions and pushing away his recent treatment of me. For now. He held me close as I took deep breaths, but every time I closed my eyes, I could see nothing but the words on the wall over and over again. I started to shiver, and Vas let go of me long enough to slip out of his leather jacket and wrap me in it.

"Can we have a minute?" Allen asked softly, and I jolted, finally realizing other cops had been in the room when we entered. *That's not good.* My awareness was the only thing that kept me alive when I lived on the streets; it couldn't fail me now, not when it seemed like the stakes were rising faster than I could keep up. I tried to pull away from Vas, but he locked his arms around me instead.

"Breathe, Nic. Breathe with me." He took slow deep breaths until I gave in and followed his lead. Tears fell down my face as my cheeks heated, and the fact that I was breaking down over this filled me with embarrassment.

"Nicholette," Allen said gently after I had calmed down. "I need you to talk to me. What's going on?" I looked at him in question, and he sighed just as Oli appeared in the doorway. "Close the door."

Oli did so after stepping inside, immediately walking over to join us. He let loose a whistle when he surveyed the damage. “Damn, Nic.”

“Off the record,” Allen prompted, giving me a hard look, “what the actual fuck is going on?” Vas and Oli looked between us, curiosity clear, but they didn’t try to stop me from talking to him. “And don’t try to bullshit me by saying it’s nothing.”

I let loose a rough laugh at his frank question and lightly pushed at Vas’ arms to get him to let me go. I took a few steps toward my vanity but didn’t bother with any of the drawers. Instead, I reached underneath and felt around until I retrieved the stack of saved letters and stood up. Holding them out to Allen behind me, I turned in time to see his brow furrow. A moment later, as he started to look through them all, fury filled his eyes.

“You have a stalker.”

I nodded at his flat words, my eyes straying to the other two men in the room. Oli and Vas silently watched us both, though I could tell Vas was barely holding himself back from commenting. “I reported the first few to the police, but I was told that getting letters wasn’t against the law, so there was nothing they could do. When I kept getting increasingly threatening ones, I was told to move, which I did. Recently, they found me again.”

He held up the bundle, trying to make eye contact with me. “Is this all of them?” There was no way I could tell him about the other letters, the one with pictures. “Nicholette?”

“Yes,” I replied, glancing over at him evenly. “Those are all of them.”

He studied me, searching my face as if trying to determine whether I was lying, but I held his stare until he gave up and started reading through some of the letters again. Oli reached up and snagged a few of the letters, handing some to Vas to read over. Allen just gave him a blank look, which Oli returned with a wide smile.

Shaking my head, I left them to look at the letters, walking into the bathroom. The entirety of my body sprays, bath salts, and bubble bath products were emptied all over the tub. I crouched down carefully, making sure to keep Vas' jacket out of the mess, to see if anything was left standing. Even more embarrassingly, tears filled my eyes at the one thing left untouched.

A small glass bottle filled with clear oil. There wasn't a name brand label or anything to note it as something special, but I would recognize that bottle no matter what. *What are the chances it escaped all this destruction?* I reached out and took it, not caring if it messed up the integrity of the police scene. Rolling it in my hands, I let out a shaky breath and held it close before slipping it into the inside pocket of the jacket, determined to keep it with me.

Standing up, I knew there was one other thing I had to have with me before I left. I walked back into the bedroom, bypassing the men going through the letters and heading straight toward my bedside table. I ignored the drawers, knowing I'd filled those with useless junk, and felt along the back. My fingers traveled along the rough, unfinished wood until my fingertips met the smooth edge of a photograph. Internally, I let out a relieved sigh and pulled it off, sticking it into the jacket beside the glass bottle before I turned around to find Allen glaring at me.

“What did you just take?”

“Something personal,” I told him curtly, trying to cut him off. I didn’t trust anyone with all of my secrets and *certainly* not this one.

“I can’t let you leave this apartment without at least knowing what it is you took.”

I gave him a cool look, trying to keep my irritation off my face. “A photograph. That’s all you are going to know. That, and the fact that I’m not leaving this apartment without it. Even if I have to step over all your dead bodies to do it. Can you work with that much information?”

Oli grinned at my threat, the smile only growing when Allen cursed harshly. “What have I said about threatening to kill people at crime scenes?”

“To only do it if I mean it?” I asked flippantly, shrugging at the implied warning.

“Exactly how many crime scenes have you been at?” Was asked, which made me smile a little bit.

“Too many, I’m sure, for someone my age, but here we are.” I gestured at the space around me. “I take it none of the clothes are salvageable?”

“No. It looks like they destroyed it all.”

Guess I was going to have to buy new clothes, which would be annoying to say the least. I didn’t care about the clothes themselves, but going out to buy it all was a major inconvenience. I hummed in thought, but before I could answer, Oli wrapped an arm around my waist.

“That won’t be an issue,” he said firmly, squeezing me to his side. “Is there anything else you need from us?”

Allen shook his head and started for the door, knowing he wasn't going to get anything else from me. Before he left the room, I called out, "One more minute before we join you?"

The detective didn't look back as he waved a hand in acknowledgment, quickly leaving us alone. I moved away from Oli and entered my closet, squatting down to push shoes and clothes out of the way. *It should still be here. If the police had found it, Allen would have questioned me about it. I can't imagine the stalker would have wanted me to not keep these other letters.*

"Nic, what are you doing?" Was asked, his voice close.

I looked up to find him standing behind me, and I had a flashback to Sacha being here just hours ago. Tearing my gaze from his, I kept up my search. "A box. It's a small photo box with blue and green stripes on it." Finally, I saw a flash of blue and green out of the corner of my eye. *There it is!* I snagged it just as the door opened again.

"Nicholette, your time is up. I'm sorry about the loss of your property and invasion of your privacy. Both of you," Allen stated formally. "If we have other questions, we'll be in touch."

"Thank you," Oli answered on behalf of us as Vas and I left the closet. I held the box under the warm leather jacket, close to my chest, daring Allen to mention it.

Luckily, he gave me a break, saying nothing about it as he escorted us out of the apartment. All three of us were silent as we made our way out of the building and then slid into the car, the men in front while I appreciated the space of the otherwise empty backseat.

“You bring out strong emotions in people, don’t you, Nic?” Oli joked as Vas started the car.

The latter reached out and smacked him in the back of the head, causing a totally unexpected laugh to burst out of me. “Something I’ve always been guilty of, if I’m honest.”

“So that box...” Oli turned around to look at me, but I shook my head.

“Not here. I’m sure the cops are still keeping an eye on us.”

Without question, I knew I was staying with them as Vas drove through the city. I’d figure my life out after a night’s sleep. If anything, I could always call Maeve, though it would mean another favor for her to call in. But with my box in hand, the weight of the glass bottle, and my irreplaceable picture in my possession, I found that I didn’t much care what happened next.



Nicholette

Sunday

Gaspings, I jolted awake. A nightmare. I tried to recall the details, but it faded more with each breath. *Ugh, I hate those.* Sitting up, I ran a trembling hand through my tangled hair and looked around, trying to calm my tumultuous thoughts. *Where am I? This isn't my apartment.* Then it hit me. I was at Sacha and Vas' place. My stalker had broken into my apartment and destroyed it. I shuddered as I recalled the message written above my bed.

Trying to think of something else, I studied the luxurious bedroom. There wasn't much filling the open space of the room, but what was here was good quality. Cherry wood furniture, plush white bedding, and warm cream-colored walls. In the corner beside the bed was an armchair, Vas' leather jacket neatly laid across it along with the blue and green box.

I curled my legs and wrapped my arms around my knees as I stared at the chair. When we got here last night, Bodhi and Sacha weren't back yet, so Vas showed me to a room then left me alone. I hadn't bothered to shower or change. Instead, I had carefully laid down the box and taken off the jacket before

stripping, laying down, and trying to get some sleep. Most of the night had consisted of tossing and turning more than sleep.

Looking over at the clock on the bedside table, I saw it was only five in the morning, and I groaned. There was no way I would be able to go back to sleep right now. I rolled out of bed and padded into the bathroom to splash some water on my face and take care of the necessities. Coming back into the bedroom, I slipped into my clothes from last night and grabbed Vas' jacket. I slipped the leather coat on and inhaled Vas' comforting scent as it enveloped me. *A feeling I don't want to examine any time soon.*

Reaching inside the inner pocket, I touched the picture before pulling it out slowly. Gently laying the jacket down again, I studied the photo for the first time in months. It was a bit ragged and faded, so I always handled it with care, not wanting to damage it. But this time, I couldn't help myself. It was from a birthday party, the young blond-haired boy in the middle blowing out five candles with a wide toothy grin. Behind him was a tall brunette, her arm wrapped around his chest in a big hug. Her face was hidden from the camera, but the tight grip on the boy was evidence of her love for him. I ran my fingers along their faces, the tell-tale sting in my eyes warning me of what was coming.

Tears fell on the picture and I quickly wiped them off, though I didn't bother trying to brush them off my face. That girl was almost a stranger, her modesty something I had shed long ago due to my circumstances. But the boy, my little brother, his image was crystal clear in all my memories. Oh, I knew he would be different by now. Living with our parents would change anyone. But I treasured this one picture I had managed to grab as I was being kicked out of the house. I had thought about trying to go back for him, but what did I really

have to offer? Safety? Obviously not. I closed my eyes tightly and took a deep breath before leaning over to slip the photo into the nightstand drawer. I would come back and get it before leaving, but that would keep it safe for now.

Next, I pulled the glass bottle out of the jacket and rolled it in my hands like I had done last night. A bittersweet smile filled my face with the memory of how I'd got it and the man who'd given it to me. We were eating at a restaurant on one of our dates. We had been seeing each other for a few months at that point, and Vas had pulled out a small bag as we were enjoying dessert.

"What is this?" I asked, confused as he pushed it toward me.

"It's for you." He motioned for me to open it.

I gave him a modest smile and slowly opened the bag to find a small bottle of oil sitting there. I looked it over as Vas shifted in his seat self-consciously.

"It's just something simple, but I remembered you said your birthday was soon, and I wanted to give you a gift. Unless that's too awkward," he explained. His voice was rough, unsure, and adorable.

"Thank you," I told him softly, smiling as I reached out to place my hand on his. "I love it." My own voice was thick, emotion choking my words. This was the only birthday present I'd received since I turned seventeen, my last birthday before I was kicked out of my house. But clients, no matter how friendly, didn't want to hear your sob story, so I stayed silent.

"Smell it." He nodded at the bottle, my honest acceptance clearing some of his unease and bringing back some of his usual self-assurance. "It reminded me of you."

I sent him a teasing look and pulled my hand from his to open it. “If this smells like grease and oil because that’s what you smell like—”

He let out a booming laugh. “If I want you to smell like me, then I’ll just fuck you, Delilah.”

“Such a sweet talker.” I winked at him then closed my eyes, letting myself focus on his gift. The scents of coffee and vanilla hit me first. With another breath, afternotes of oranges, pears, and jasmine filled my senses. None of it was too heavy, the blend a perfect light combination. Tears pricked my eyes at the sweetness of his gesture. Fuck, get yourself together, Nic.

“If you don’t like it—” he started, but I shook my head, looking up at him. He seemed surprised at the tears in my eyes, but I smiled.

“I love it,” I told him sincerely. “It’s perfect.” Then I did something I didn’t usually do with clients. I leaned across the table and kissed him. It was our first kiss; even during sex we had never kissed. That kind of intimacy, because it was strangely more intimate than the sex itself, had to be negotiated in pre-meeting discussions, but I couldn’t not kiss him in that moment.

He didn’t hesitate to kiss me back. He took control of the kiss as he threaded a hand into my hair. Tilting my head just so, he nipped my lip, drawing out a gasp in return. His tongue slipped into my mouth, tasting me. I moaned at the attention, and his grip on my hair tightened before he pulled away.

“We should get out of here,” he nearly whispered, not commenting on the kiss. I nodded in agreement, and he let go of my hair, signaling to the waiter that we wanted boxes and the check. I held onto the bottle with a firm grip before slipping it into my purse when we stood to leave. I knew from

his possessive look on the way out that we would be having some crazy sex that night, and he didn't disappoint.

In fact, that night was probably the best sex of my life so far. Or at least in the top three, and given my profession, I'd had plenty to compare it to.

Vas was the only person in years to give me a birthday present or even remember the date. I never bothered to celebrate on my own, each year feeling more like a sentence than a reason to celebrate. But that night, I had celebrated and loved every moment of it. Opening the bottle gently, I took a deep whiff of the perfumed oil and smiled, still finding the smell divine a year later. I didn't use the oil often, only sparing a couple of drops when I was meeting with him or if I was feeling too much of my very lonely reality. Until recently, when I'd managed to fuck everything up, thinking of Vas had made me feel a warmth that I desperately missed.

The memory of him slapping me and his cold words wasn't far off, but so were my sharp words goading him at dinner just days ago. Was it only days ago? *How can some days pass you by in a blur and others feel like years?* I shook myself from my thoughts and decided that I needed coffee. Coffee could cure many things, and hopefully that included this unwanted melancholy.

I carefully placed the bottle on the bedside table, an easy place to find it if Vas happened to walk by, and left the room to search out my miracle cure. Every footstep on the wood floor seemed loud in the pervasive silence. More sane than I currently was, they were likely still asleep. The kitchen was top of the line from what I could see in the semi-dark, though I expected nothing less if Sacha lived here, but that also meant I was faced with a monstrosity instead of a regular coffee pot. I

didn't know how long I stood there, contemplating if going out for coffee was worth it or not, before footsteps made me jump.

“Need help?” The deep voice was rough with sleepiness, and I looked over to find Vas watching me with amusement. He stood there in just a pair of black boxer briefs, and I tried to focus on his face and not the full display of muscles lightly dusted in dark body hair.

“I need coffee,” I grumbled, gesturing at the espresso-whatever machine in annoyance. “Just a fucking black coffee. Does Sacha even know what black coffee is?”

“No,” Vas chuckled, shaking his head. “I don't think he's ever had just plain black coffee. He likes the fancy stuff. Go sit. I'll take care of it. If you break it, I'll never hear the end of it.”

I grumbled some not so nice things about his brother as I pulled myself up to sit on the kitchen island. He grabbed what he needed from the cabinets and must have done some kind of magic because it wasn't long before the delicious smell of coffee filled my nose.

“You're a miracle worker,” I thanked him with a half-smile.

He snorted at that, leaning on the counter across from me. “You'd be the only person to call me that.”

“Then they've never had to face that machine,” I muttered with a shudder.

He didn't say anything to that. Instead, his eyes lingered on his leather jacket, watching me without trying to continue the conversation. Awkward silence filled the space between us as we waited for the coffee to finish, and when it dinged, I could barely wait to get my mug and run back to the bedroom.

I moved to push off the counter, but Vas was suddenly standing in front of me, his hands braced on either side of my body.

“We need to talk,” he said, his voice gentle despite the undercurrent of anger.

“Yes, we do,” I agreed steadily. “If you give me a giant mug, I’ll sit here while you yell at me. But fair warning, if you try to hit me again, I’m throwing the hot coffee on you.”

Vas nodded slowly in agreement before handing me a mug filled almost to the top. I took a long sip, sighing at the bitter flavor that hit my tongue. I knew some people hated coffee, but honestly, some days I just needed the pick me up.

“So, let’s talk,” I said when he stayed silent. “I assume you mean about dinner?”

“My anger got the best of me,” he started to explain, his voice almost painfully low. “You pushed. I didn’t acknowledge you for a reason, yet you outed us anyway.”

“So you were mad I admitted that you were hooking up with a call girl?” I arched an eyebrow, waiting for him to explain exactly where his thoughts were going. *My coffee has not gone into effect enough for me to fully participate in a conversation about emotions.*

“No,” he retorted, giving me a harsh look that swiftly shut me up. “You took my control from me, Nic. That was *my* decision, not yours, and you didn’t respect me enough to let me make that call. Then you taunted me with that smartass mouth of yours. My privacy, my business, is *mine*. Not anyone else’s unless *I* choose to share it. Me, not you.”

I licked my lips, carefully taking a drink before I looked up to meet his dark brown stare. “Even if you’ve all shared a

woman before? Oli told me about that yesterday.”

“Apparently, people are really fucking chatty around you,” he commented, but he didn’t give in to the subject change. “But do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I whispered in agreement, surprised when he took the hot mug out of my hands. “What are you doing?” I tried to grab the mug back, but he set it aside then cupped my face in his large hands and kissed me. No build up or teasing, just a hard kiss that chased away any lingering melancholy the coffee hadn’t.

He hadn’t offered me an apology so much as an explanation, though maybe that was the closest he’d ever come to the former. While I hadn’t struck at him physically, my words had seemed to touch a nerve within him. We’d both hurt each other, and I wanted to take this olive branch he was offering. I’d never known anyone like Vas, and the idea of him walking away like he had threatened... It affected me more than I wanted to admit, even to myself. I kissed him back all the same, committed to savoring the happy moments even though I knew that was all they’d ever be. Moments. Fleeting and rare, nothing that would stay around for long.

I wrapped my legs around his waist just as he lifted me from the counter. My miniskirt rode up, and he groaned when he felt the heat of me through the thin cotton of his underwear. Without question, I gave in as he strode out of the kitchen. Suddenly, we were in the bedroom I’d borrowed for the night. He kicked the door shut and tossed me on the bed, my mind lost in him, in us, with zero fucks given about the slamming door or the fact that the others must have heard it.

“Get naked. Now,” he growled, yanking his underwear off.

Making quick work of the lacy top and short skirt, I tossed them onto the floor and waited for him to tell me what to do next. But instead of focusing on me, his gaze was staring off to the side. I glanced over and realized he was looking at the glass bottle.

“I got it last night,” I told him quietly. “It was one of the only things not destroyed in my bathroom.”

He swallowed hard as he walked over and stopped in front of me, his thick cock standing at attention. “I didn’t realize you still had it.”

A genuine smile filled my face. “It was my first birthday gift in five years. Of course I kept it.”

Some strong emotion flickered across his face, maybe some weird mix of pleasure and surprise and even a hint of anger, before he gently pushed me down onto the bed. I gave him a soft smile at this new gentleness, though I wasn’t sure how to process it. He climbed over me and kissed me softly, almost reverently. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pulled him down on top of me. Vas was deliciously bigger than me, built like a fucking freight train. Large rough hands slid down my sides until they got to my thighs and he broke the kiss. Desperately, I tried to pull him back, but he shook his head, making me still on instinct.

“Hold the rails of the headboard and don’t let go,” he ordered.

I had just grabbed a hold of them when he thrust two fingers inside of me, making me arch my back. He chuckled roughly before leaning down to take a nipple in his mouth. Vas slowly swirled his tongue around the hard peak as he used his thumb to lightly tease my clit. I began whimpering, my hands clenching around the railings. Then he bit me hard enough to

make me gasp, my body suspended between the pain of my breast and the pleasure he was bringing my pussy.

He let go of my right nipple with a loud and wet pop before doing the same process with my left. Vas carefully balanced the levels of pleasure and pain at just the right amount, expertly keeping me in a constant build-up that never reached orgasm. Sweat covered my body before he finally moved his mouth up to my face. I tried to kiss him, but he pulled back, denying my pleasure. This wasn't like our previous times together; usually, we played out a scene, and yes, he was in control, but slow build ups weren't exactly his thing. Or they weren't in his past with me.

Vas withdrew his fingers from inside me and held them up. "Lick them clean." I opened my mouth, sucking and licking his fingers, enjoying the taste of myself on him. "Good girl. Just like that. I have plans for you."

I whimpered around his fingers when he pushed them further into my mouth and down my throat until I started to gag. Tears filled my eyes, but I held his gaze. He pulled back, letting me gasp for air while he spread my legs further apart, brushing the head of his cock along my soaked folds.

"Vas!" I called out his name as he thrust into me, balls deep, not letting my body get used to his size. Instead, he pounded into me. It was as if he was possessed, every nearly painful thrust into my body was teaching me a lesson and claiming me at the same time.

"Such the perfect fucking pain slut." My pussy clenched with his words, turned on by his crude praise. "Fuck yes. You're always so hot and needy. Your pussy begging for it even when you try to deny it."

My grip on the railings tightened enough that I could feel my hands starting to hurt. *Don't let go. Don't lose your grip.* The mantra played on loop in my head as he kept whispering dirty things in my ear, pounding into me before slowing to a barely there rocking motion. He played with my body expertly, pushing me to almost orgasms time after time before making me hold off.

“I’m going to come inside of you, Nic. You and I are going to know that out of all of us, I was first. That when it comes down to it, I can control you in the bedroom like no one else can. Your pain, your pleasure— it will be all of ours, but when you’re with me, it’s wholly mine.”

His bold words pushed me off the edge, my orgasm hitting me so hard I let go of the headboard and dug my nails into his back. A dark laugh escaped him before he bit down on the top of my left boob, finishing with three painful thrusts until I felt the heat of him spilling inside of me. We had always used a condom during our meet-ups, which made this moment stand out even more in my mind. The feel of him pumping inside of me and filling me with his cum was something I knew I wouldn’t forget no matter how many more times we were together. It was like he was claiming me, marking me beyond all shadow of a doubt.

I gasped, trying to relearn how to breathe as he released my breast and nestled his face into my neck. A whisper of a kiss against my neck made me shiver before he pulled out and shifted our bodies around so that he could hold me close and lay beside me. I let myself snuggle into him, enjoying the warmth he was offering. This aftercare was new. Usually, he would check me over and make sure I was okay, but holding me or even fucking on a bed, that was all new. I wasn’t going to let myself over think things, I’d save that for later, but right

now I was going to live in the moment and enjoy the comfort he was offering me.

“Vas?” I asked after we laid in silence for a few minutes. He hummed in answer, his hand gently stroking up and down my ribs. “What you said before... Does that mean you don’t share during sex? Curiosity and all.”

“You know the saying, curiosity killed the cat?” I could almost hear his smirk as I ran my hand along his chest.

“Yes, but this cat has nine lives and plenty of experience,” I teased.

“I only share with my brother,” he answered after being silent for so long I thought he wouldn’t answer me at all. “Oliver and Bodhi are... their own brand of crazy.”

“As are you and Sacha.” I pulled back to look at him, wanting to see his response.

“Sacha can play with them more than I can,” he admitted with a slight shake of his head. “I have my kinks, but theirs can run a bit more extreme than even mine.” *Oh, that sounds interesting. I’ll have to find out those kinks in detail, and soon.* “But for now, it’s you and me. And we are going to shower. After that, I’m going to rub that oil all over you just so you know your place.”

I sat up and stretched before rolling out of bed and heading into the bathroom. “On top and in charge?” I threw a wink over my shoulder at him, loving his responding growl as he rushed to join me.

The shower ended up taking much longer than we had planned since he fucked me against the glass doors before I dropped to my knees and sucked him off. The water was cold by the time we finished, but I had absolutely no regrets. Once

we were warmed back up, I let him slowly work the oil all over my skin, savoring the focused attention. I savored the feeling of him rubbing the oil into my skin, letting him claim me with each drop. This didn't take away our bad encounter after the dinner, but it did add another good memory for me to associate with him. That was good enough for me.

The coffee was long cold on the kitchen counter when we finally made our way back out there, the others all still in bed. Taking the opportunity to enjoy the early morning hours, Vas lent me a large shirt and made a fresh pot before we settled onto a couch together, talking and waiting for the others to wake up.

A few hours later, Oli stumbled into the living room to flop down beside me. His hair was sticking up in all directions, making me smile, and I handed him my coffee mug. After all, it was my third of the morning. He took it with a look of thanks until he tasted it, his face screwing up in distaste. I freely laughed, feeling zero guilt over not warning him. "Not a fan?"

"Who the hell would drink it black?" he groaned painfully as he stood up, taking my mug with him to doctor it up.

I shook my head and leaned back into Vas. "Reasonable people who like coffee and not sugar milk."

As Oli sat down beside me again, Sacha and Bodhi both walked out, the two of them cleaned up and dressed. Sacha looked Vas and me over with a silent nod.

"Glad you two sorted things out." He focused his brown eyes on me, his expression blank. "Nicholette, you need to fill us in on your stalker. They are now interfering with our job, so we need to know everything you do." I nodded slowly, not excited to rehash it but understanding why it needed to

happen. Once I was finished explaining the evening's events, there was a beat of silence before he asked, "So, how do you know this detective?"

A faint smile tugged at my lips. "We have a mutual friend. I've met plenty of interesting people through my job." Then my face sobered a bit. "But I didn't tell him everything."

"Then what's everything?" Sacha sat down on the coffee table in front of the couch and leaned toward me. Making up with Vas also seemed to have affected how Sacha talked to me. There was more respect and care in his gaze than there had been before.

"Can someone bring me the blue and green box I have in the bedroom?"

Bodhi got up from where he had settled beside Oli, returning a minute later with the box in hand. He gave it to Sacha, and I motioned for him to open it. Sacha froze at the sight of the contents before looking up at me with a carefully blank expression.

"I gave Allen the regular letters I got but not those." I nodded at the box as I sat up, moving slightly away from the heat of Vas' body.

"Do you know who they are?" Sacha placed the box on the table so the others could see the letters and pictures inside. Each one was of a different corpse. At first it would look like there was no connection, the corpses varying in gender, in age, but they all carried the unmistakable pallor of death. And something else...

"Yes and no," I told him softly. "They are all johns of mine. From when I was a prostitute working the street. There

are only a few from my time as a call girl. Harder to kill one of the rich upper class without it getting noticed.”

I felt all their stares on me, but I focused on Sacha, scrutinizing his stoic expression to keep myself calm as I revealed to them what no one else knew. “I don’t know who’s doing this. I tried to get the police to do something, but letters aren’t against the law. When I tried to take the pictures in to show them, I was brushed off since the on-duty officer knew me from when I turned tricks.” I shrugged. “Allen is the only detective I’ve spoken to about anything, and only some of it.”

“We’re going to have to take care of this,” Oli said in an uncharacteristically hard voice. I looked over to find Bodhi nodding in agreement.

“Yes, we are,” Sacha and Vas echoed.

Another kind of woman would have questioned why they cared or just how they were going to figure out who the person was. But other questions came to mind. The warmth of Vas and Oli on either side of me made me think of my time with Maeve, when things were good and I hadn’t started to ask for more. *Will they be like her and never really let me get close? Or will they actually be people I can depend on to be there for me?* Time would tell, but against all reason, I hoped it would be the answer I wanted.

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Nichollette

Sunday

“**A**ll of these are johns? You don’t know them any other way?” Oli asked, an odd distant note in his voice as he kept his focus on his laptop screen. *I’m not sure what was unclear about what I said earlier, but sure, I guess I can expand on it more for him.*

Shrugging nonchalantly, I tucked my legs underneath me on the couch, fully leaning into Vas who still sat beside me. “Yeah, they’re all old johns. I don’t know any of these outside of my job. It’s all the ones who are dead. I’m assuming the stalker killed them.”

“So not one of your kills?” he asked, and I felt Vas stop breathing against my back while Sacha looked up at me slowly, his eyes curiously studying me.

“Nope.” I let the ‘p’ pop as I shook my head. “It looks like a lot of them were strangled. Not exactly my style.”

“What *is* your style then?” Bodhi asked. I tilted my head as I considered the man who was leaning into Oli’s side, his serious brown eyes waiting for my response.

“Depends on my mood, I guess.” I started to run a hand along Vas’ arm, lost in sudden memories of my first kills and the people I’d met along the way who had helped... hone my hobby skills. “Usually drugs, but if I’m really upset, knives are some of my favorites.”

“You say that like it’s your favorite carnival ride,” Sacha commented dryly, but I saw a spark of welcomed heat in his gaze. Vas moved his arm to pin me against him, and I shifted, turned on by the obvious excitement he was feeling from even my vague description. It was gratifying that he recognized the killer instinct in me and didn’t dismiss it given what I looked like or what I did for a living. If anything, they seemed to want to dive into my darkness, and I was beyond tempted to invite them.

“Well, it’s a fun ride for me,” I told him, remembering the last man I had killed, the pompous asshole in the suit who’d thought he was stealing my drugs. The man I had killed because of my stalker’s note and the two men closest to me. “I got better as time went on... I had friends who taught me how to be more efficient.”

“Sounds like a good story,” Vas responded, and the question about the curiosity in his voice. I bit back a smirk, loving that they genuinely wanted to know more about me. There were only a handful of people in my life, if that, who actually cared about where I’d been and what I’d done in my life. Even more amazingly, now that things were more settled between Vas and me, I wasn’t as bothered by the thought as I would have been just a few days earlier. There was actually this strong feeling that maybe, given better timing, I would *want* to explain more of this to them.

“Multiple stories.” I nodded, directing my gaze to Sacha. “But what does that have to do with my stalker?”

“It could be one of your... friends?” Oli asked evenly.

A laugh burst out of me, my head throwing back with its force. I turned my face into Vas’ shoulder, trying to get myself under control so that I could look at the guys without losing it again. “Darlings, if it was one of those friends I’d just be dead. There is only one person who would enjoy the cat and mouse game, and they aren’t anywhere near here, the last I heard. Plus, you’d never find a body if it was them.”

“Your friends would kill you,” Bodhi said slowly, focusing on me with a confused look. “And you’re laughing about it?”

I looked at him in dry amusement. “Well, it’s the truth. I’d be grateful for death long before they’d ever give it to me, any of them. I’ve met a lot of important people in my job—helps build up a collection of favors I can call in, small and big debts. Maeve taught me a lot of things, one of which is that money is important because it can make your life more comfortable, but information is power.”

“Well, for now,” Sacha cut in when Bodhi opened his mouth again, “let’s focus on the stalker. Tell us everything you know. Don’t leave anything out.”

“There isn’t much to tell.” I shrugged, focusing on Sacha and barely holding back the urge to reach out and run my finger through his beard. *I really do have a fascination with beards, but they always feel so soft.* “I get the letters. Some are short, while others are rambling. The pictures are more inconsistent, but they come in spurts. I actually got one a few days ago.”

“The letter that was hand-delivered?” Oli turned his full attention to me. “When we were watching porn?”

I nodded, and Bodhi looked between us at that, no jealousy on his face like I expected at the mention of what his boyfriend and I had been doing. It didn’t look like news to him, so Oli had obviously told him about it. “Yeah, that one. All it said was ‘Found you’ and the picture. It’s the first one I’ve had hand-delivered to me, at least at this apartment. The letters were one of the reasons I had to move.”

“How long has this stalker bullshit been going on?” Vas asked as he pulled me tight against his side. It was adorable that they were getting protective over me, but I was more than capable of taking care of myself. I had to be. And that survival instinct didn’t go away just because they wanted to protect me, which meant that while I would give them the general details, I had no intention of telling them everything.

I bit my bottom lip, thinking over the timeline. “Probably since I was seventeen and got to Ashview? A lot of the pictures of johns are from when I worked the streets, but I can’t really figure out a pattern between them. Some were really nice or at least weren’t complete assholes, so I’m really not sure why they would have specifically been targeted.”

“Like some people in this room?” Oli asked. Although he somehow kept a serious expression on his face, his hazel eyes sparked with amusement when he flicked his gaze up to Vas behind me.

“One day I’m going to shoot you,” Vas grumbled, but there was no heat in his threat. “I won’t even bother to make it look like an accident.”

“I swear these people acted like grown ass adults before you got here, Nic,” Sacha commented dryly before even he

cracked a smile. The smile transformed his face. It didn't make him look more approachable; it made him look deadlier, and that made my heart skip a beat. *A thin line between lust and fear indeed.* “Well, not Oliver and Bodhi, but Vas definitely acted more mature than this.”

“What can I say?” I told him sweetly. “I bring out the best in people. Bitch mode and all.” Sacha laughed a bit at that, likely remembering the first time we met. It was funny how these men, these killers, could be so... normal. Though maybe that applied to me as well if I really thought about it. Maybe that was what made us even scarier, that we could be so normal then blow someone's brains out without blinking or feeling any remorse.

“But really, I don't know anything about my stalker. Everything I have is in that box.” I motioned at the box Sacha had placed beside him on the coffee table.

“Any ideas as to where we can start looking to figure out who this is?” Vas asked after I brought the conversation back to my stalker.

“I'll look into our security cameras at the apartment in case I can see who paid the kid to drop off the letter,” Oli said, getting serious. “Might be able to find something that way to start us off.”

“Sounds like a good plan. Now that I've filled you in on everything about my bullshit past, we should call Maeve and let her know about last night.” I thought about asking for more details about Warren and what they were hired to do, besides kill him, but I was exhausted. The lack of sleep was getting to me, and I was just mentally tired after going over the distinct lack of info I had on my stalker.

“There is nothing to update her on,” Vas rumbled beside me.

I lifted an eyebrow in derision. “Besides telling her that Warren is looking for a mistress and not just a one-time thing to throw in her face? That’s not a small detail.”

“From everything you’ve told us and what we know about her,” Oli called out, joining the discussion from where he now sat at the kitchen counter on his laptop, typing away, “she won’t care about him getting a mistress.”

“No,” I replied slowly, watching him even though he wasn’t bothering to look my way. “But she would want to know what he’s up to. She might have some ideas we don’t know about his reasons; she *is* married to the asshole after all. Always use all your resources, boys, and for this job, Maeve is one of those resources.”

“Did you just call us boys?” Vas’ voice was incredulous, and I couldn’t hold in my laughter when their narrowed eyes and raised brows conveyed that they all shared his reaction.

“Maybe,” I teased before standing up from the couch and starting to make my way to my bedroom. “But I’ll be calling Maeve and telling her the fun news about her loving husband. I’ll put her on speakerphone for you all.”

I didn’t hear them reply before I grabbed my phone from the room and came back out, pulling up Maeve’s contact info. Two taps of my finger and two rings later, her cool voice filled the air.

“Nicholette, did you have fun last night? I heard you gave the Russian a good ride.”

Oli let loose a loud laugh while Bodhi shook his head, a slight smile curling his lips. Unlike his grumpier brother, Vas

smirked, that little twist of his lips making him much too attractive. Sacha just tilted his head, anger sparking in his gaze, and I could tell he was about to say something stupid so I spoke before he could retort.

“Did you want to know about the job you trained me to do or the update we have about Warren?” I kept my voice even as I redirected her irritation. Whatever she was angry about, it wasn’t me, that much I knew. She didn’t care enough about me to be jealous of who I was with.

“Tell me.”

I looked up at Sacha, and he nodded slightly, approval sparking in his dark eyes at my deference to him. “Warren approached me after my *ride*, as you so aptly described it. He offered me much more than a night together—he offered to make me his mistress. It seems he wants more than just a one night stand to throw in your face.”

There was a moment of silence before her husky laugh broke the quiet. “What did you tell him?”

“That I would think about it,” I told her, licking my lips, my mouth dry at her reaction. *A laugh at that update isn’t exactly what I had expected. Anger, yes. Laughter, no.* “It’s a good opportunity if we need a more direct in, and I already know the layout of your house—”

“He doesn’t bring mistresses to my home,” Maeve interjected, and I rolled my eyes.

“Neither did you... until me.” She didn’t respond to that statement, and I shrugged even though she couldn’t see it. *Oh well. Moving on...* “Either way, would there be a reason for him to want more than just a night or two with me? Something that could help us?”

She clicked her tongue, thinking over what I'd said. "You're already getting more bold, Nicholette. I'm not sure I like it."

"Good thing that doesn't matter." I replied flippantly enough that Vas looked at me sharply while Sacha raised his brows at me. This didn't have anything to do with them though. This was the dance Maeve and I did almost every time we talked, though this time I had strayed from our normal back and forth to directly questioning her... I was honestly surprised she was reacting so calmly to this whole new level of defiance.

"I'd watch yourself, Nicholette," Maeve warned in a soft voice that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. "You're still mine."

"For now," I shot back coolly. "I'll let you talk to the boss man; you two can figure it out."

I tossed the phone to Sacha and walked over to where Oli and Bodhi were sitting, both watching me closely. "I don't give a shit what you're doing, distract me."

"What if I suggested more porn?" Oli lifted an eyebrow as Bodhi remained silent, gaze intent when he looked up at me.

I let out a groan. "Then I would say you can watch it with your boyfriend and I'm going back to sleep. My rest was shit last night. Let me know the plans for later."

"It's only ten a.m.," Vas called out, having overheard me. Sacha glared at all of us before walking into the kitchen, still on the phone with Maeve.

"I had a busy morning." I winked at him over my shoulder, which was met with a rumbling laugh. "So, sleep. Wake me up later."

I padded down the hallway until I got to the room that I was already considering mine then flopped down on the bed. Maeve could drive me to insanity, something she knew all too well. It felt as if sometimes she would push and push, just to see how far she could go until I broke. She might have won this time since my mental walls were compromised given everything that had happened in the past twenty-four hours, but there was still the war to win.

This time I would get my freedom from her.

No matter what it takes.

SLEEP MUST HAVE OVERTAKEN me immediately because the next thing I knew, I was woken up by a couple of hard knocks and the door slamming open.

“Oli!” I bitched, rolling over and hiding my face in the pillow to avoid the annoying as fuck person who was waking me up. With that grand entrance, it could be no one else.

“Wakey wakey!” Oli taunted before jumping onto the bed, making me bounce. I reached out blindly, feeling around until I could smack his stomach in retaliation.

“You’re the fucking worst,” I moaned, looking at him under the pillow with a squinty glare.

He grinned at me, eyes sparkling with mischief as he placed a hand over his heart. “Even compared to Vas and Sacha? Should I feel honored?”

“Can I stab him?” I yelled out to the others, feeling sure they were still in the apartment.

“Just don’t make a huge mess. The clean up is on you,” Sacha answered evenly, and I looked over to find him watching us from the doorway.

“Hey!” Oli protested. “How is this my fault?! You two are the assholes of the group, not me. It’s almost like I want to grow up to be just like you.”

Sacha stared at Oli with a hard look before motioning for him to get out before he said anything else stupid. He laughed and sauntered out of the room without a backward glance. Sacha shook his head before stepping into my room, shutting the door behind him with a soft snick of the lock.

“You seem upset,” I murmured, not bothering to move from where I was on the bed. “I don’t see how you could be irritated with me if I was asleep.”

“What makes you think I’m irritated?” His voice was low as the bed dipped down, him settling on the bed beside me.

“Your tone, I’ve heard it often enough before the blows started,” I told him bluntly, not mincing words.

Sacha didn’t respond right away, and I didn’t check his reaction to my too-honest revelation. “Our father was the same way,” Sacha explained evenly, his voice nonchalant. “I *am* irritated, but not with you. Maeve is...”

“Complicated? A complete bitch?” I supplied, moving the pillow off my face to look up at him. He glanced down at me with the faintest hint of amusement softening his eyes.

“That’s one way to put it. I don’t get what you saw in her, if I’m honest.”

I sat up and leaned against the headboard beside him, staring straight ahead though I could feel the weight of his gaze on me still. “Maeve isn’t always a cold-hearted bitch...”

she just usually is. She saved my life, and I apparently have a thing for assholes who sometimes care about people. They seem to be consistently good lays.”

“That’s it?” he asked blandly.

“What else is there? In my line of business, I don’t have any use for feelings and emotional entanglements. They’ll just get in the way because I don’t have a backup plan to replace being a call girl. This is it for now, and I’ve accepted that. Hell, it’s not like I hate my job. Sure, some of the clients are assholes, some are weird as fuck, and others are probably plain dangerous, but there are more than enough of them who want just a simple thing that I can provide: some temporary company and a distinct lack of judgment for whatever kinks they’re too ashamed to show the world.”

“Including unconventional types of relationships?” Sacha asked softly.

I glanced over at that, his gaze curious as he studied me, waiting for my answer. Licking my lips, I was about to give him a flippant answer, but then I saw how serious he was, and it made me curious. *Exactly what kind of relationships is he talking about?* There were so many unconventional ones that I really had no idea where to start, but I’d give him an honest answer. “Yes, sometimes. At least the sex parts, anyway. Like I said, emotions and dating aren’t *usually* my thing. It would take some very interesting men or women to get me to consider more.”

Sacha didn’t respond at first, staring at me steadily, waiting for me to say more. But I’d be patient and wait him out, make him voice the question himself. Almost as if he could read my mind, the corner of his mouth twitched up. “Would some of us

be enough to interest you in at least... a temporary arrangement?"

"Some or all of you?"

He grabbed the side of my face with a firm grip to keep me from retreating. Holding my gaze, he leaned forward, maintaining a slight distance between us as he searched my face. "Is that so? You're interested in all of us?"

Swallowing hard, I forced myself to not tense under his intense stare. "I've only known you all for a week."

"You've known my brother for a year, and Oliver too," he countered, matching my soft tone.

"Vas was a client I saw for a few hours at a time, and Oli was almost never at the apartment. I think the most time we spent together was when we watched porn for this job." My lips twitched at that before my expression became serious again. "I won't lie to myself or you guys; I find you all attractive, and I do have needs. But anything besides sex... I'm not really offering, and no matter who I'm with, they will not control what I do or with whom. I'm a call girl, and I have my own *hobbies*, and that's just who I am. Really, I'm not so complicated."

"Well, we're complicated men, Nic." He leaned forward just enough to brush his lips gently against mine in a barely there kiss. "We all have needs... I can't make any guarantees about feelings and all that shit, as you say, but we can all keep each other company until things end."

"An amazingly unromantic proposal." I smiled as I met his lips in a hard, brief kiss. "I like it when others speak my language."

Sacha responded by pressing his lips to mine, pushing me back down against the bed, and I let myself drown in him. The taste of coffee on his tongue and the heat of him against me chased away the taunting thought that my heart was already getting involved.

Stupid.

So fucking goddamn stupid.

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Nichollette

Monday

Leaning back against the headboard in what had been deemed my room, at least for the foreseeable future, I opened my work phone and bit my lip. I didn't have any clients booked for the next two days, but I had a regular on Wednesdays that was expecting me. I wasn't sure what Maeve had planned since she asked me to do this job for her, and I was half tempted to reach out to her myself and ask. I sighed in frustration at my uncertainty. This was why I always worked alone. I much preferred when the only person I was answerable to was me.

I had just locked my phone when a knock sounded at my door, saving me from making a decision right away. I was surprised to find Sacha standing there, dressed in a Hugo Boss light gray suit with a light blue button-up underneath. He fussed with his gold watch as he approached, then sat down by my feet and studied me, his eyes trailing over my body. Vas' shirt had been too hard to resist, so I was currently enjoying the oversized, comfortable reminder of him wrapped around me.

“What’s wrong?” his smooth voice questioned, making me quirk an eyebrow.

“What makes you think something is wrong?”

He smirked as his dark brown eyes narrowed at my retort. “Because you’re being defensive, and you sounded way too relieved to have someone interrupting you at nine a.m. on a Monday morning. So I’ll ask again, what’s going on?”

I rolled my eyes with a huff. “It’s bullshit you can read me that easily already. You know that, right? I’m trying to figure out what I’m supposed to do with my regular clients that I have scheduled. Maeve told me to help you guys with all this.” I waved a hand around in a vague gesture. “But not if that was affecting my clients. She didn’t exactly give me a time limit as to how long this was going to take, but I have a business to keep up and shit to pay for.”

“How many regulars do you have?”

It was my turn to narrow my eyes at his casual question, tilting my head at the lack of judgment in his tone. Everyone had opinions on what I did. Hell, he did when we first met a few days before. “Including Vas?”

“Besides my brother.” Sacha’s lips twitched as he ran a hand over his beard. “I think it’s safe to say he won’t be seeing you for regular appointments if you’re both living here while we’re doing this job.”

“Or until the apartment is ready to move back into,” I tacked on, unable to keep myself from holding on to that possible out.

“Or that.” Sacha nodded slowly, dragging his words out. “Now, how many regulars?”

I opened my phone again and looked at my schedule. “I have three regulars besides Vas. I also have two new clients this month and a weekend booked with a semi-regular. I’m going to have to tell Maeve to cancel them all, aren’t I?” I answered Sacha’s smug grin with a middle finger and *totally* not dramatic sigh. “I better get a really good cut of your payout if I’m losing all this income and even potentially losing clients.”

Sacha reached out and grabbed the side of my neck, forcing me to focus on his cold face. “Why are you a call girl, Nicholette? I get that you did what you needed to do after you moved to the city, but after you were attacked... why continue? Why let Maeve turn you into a call girl?”

I swallowed hard, my throat drying into sandpaper thanks to the anxiety filling me. *How do I explain this to him, and will he understand?* In theory, my profession didn’t bother him, but I knew in the end it was always the big final line between me and people. I was a whore, and no amount of fancy clothes, badass attitude, or etiquette practice was going to change the monetary exchange between myself and others. Most people viewed me as a commodity, a possession, not a person. A few years ago, I might have agreed with them, but once I became a call girl, I’d come into my own, that newfound confidence doing wonders for my backbone and my ability to not impress other people’s judgments onto my life and my career. That being said, I knew it was unrealistic to believe that my profession didn’t stand a huge chance of eventually getting in the way of whatever *this* was.

My breath caught as he stroked his thumb along the column of my throat, a small comforting gesture that didn’t match the stoicism of his face. Before I could answer him, a

swift knock sounded at the door, and my eyes shifted to find Bodhi standing there with a curious expression.

“Yes?” Sacha asked, not taking his eyes off of me.

“Oliver found something,” Bodhi answered softly. “He thinks he found some correspondence about the product he’s moving.”

“Product?” I asked, eyebrows raising at Bodhi’s revelation. “What kind of product would Warren, of all people, be involved in moving?” *Maybe now I can ask what the hell Warren was involved in that would warrant Maeve calling in help and the guys needing proof before killing someone.* Could it be drugs? That didn’t really fit what I knew of the man. Warren was type A to the extreme, completely dedicated and focused on his appearance and social image. Drugs would ruin both of those things.

“Product,” Sacha repeated grimly, not expanding on what they had found. He squeezed my throat once more, as if to tell me he wouldn’t forget his question, before standing to join Bodhi. I blinked slowly, trying to process Sacha’s actions and his abrupt deflection of my question.

“You’re not trusting me with more than that?” I asked carefully, my mind reeling as I tried to figure out exactly what I was feeling. *Anger? Betrayal? Hurt?* I was still technically working with these men, albeit it coworkers with benefits, but feelings were already becoming a problem. *Fuck me.*

“If this goes to shit, plausible deniability,” Sacha answered, not looking back at me as he left the room. Bodhi lingered for a moment before taking off after the boss man.

I narrowed my eyes at his vague answer but let it go. *For now.* Flopping back into the bed, I quickly debated then

decided against asking Maeve what was going on. For some reason, one I wasn't ready to look at too deeply, I wanted them to tell me, not her. *I just want them to trust me to be a real part of the team.* Maybe if I said that enough, I would even start to believe it. I pulled at the large shirt I was wearing then grabbed my phone one last time and texted Maeve.

Delilah: Do you have a plan for my regulars while I'm doing this favor for you? It looks like working like usual isn't an option.

It didn't take long for her to respond.

Boss: No reason why you can't multitask, Delilah. Figure it out.

I licked my lips at her impersonal, cool response. *As to be expected after our back and forth yesterday. Maybe it was because it was over text versus us actually talking? No, you idiot. She doesn't give one fuck about you besides what you represent as a benefit to her.* I hated that she could twist me like this still. Flashes hit my mind—our lips meeting in rushed kisses, the sting of her biting my bottom lip as one of her soft hands gently ran down my side.

Shaking my head, I pulled myself out of memory lane. Maeve was a drug, one that I was hoping I would be able to detox from soon enough. *The guys might not make it so easy when they walk away.* My lips twisted at that, and I rolled my eyes at my asshole mind. I never expected people to stay anymore. This was just a job, some fun sex, and then we'd all go our separate ways. Good enough for me. Because it wasn't like I could imagine staying roommates with Oli or seeing Vas as a client once all of this ran its course and fizzled out.

Rolling off the bed, I dug through the dresser and slipped on the one outfit I had left, tugging on the fabric to make sure

my ass was as covered as it could be.

Fuck these emotions and blasts from the past. I needed to be practical. And practical meant getting new stuff since all my shit was destroyed. Clothes, makeup. Essentially, I needed to replace everything that my asshole stalker had ruined yesterday. I did some math in my head and nodded a few times to myself. I should have enough money for everything without touching my savings. It was a good thing Vas paid a premium price to see me because it helped cushion my bank account much faster than I imagined.

Slipping out of the bedroom, I padded down the hallway and toward the front door where my heels were sitting, and I had almost gotten to them when someone called my name. Looking over my shoulder, I found all the men in the kitchen watching me with curious expressions.

“What?”

Oli tilted his head. “Where are you going?”

I slipped into one heel and then the second, taking my time with answering. “Shopping. In case you didn’t remember, all my shit was trashed last night so I need to get some stuff. And by stuff, I mean... everything.”

“You’re going... shopping?” Bodhi asked.

“Well, it’s not like I can seduce Warren in the same outfit for however long this takes. And I have clients to see. Maeve is all for multi-tasking, so it looks like you all get to share me.” I opened the door and smirked. “I’ll see you guys afterwards. I’ll be gone all day so don’t wait around for me.”

I was kind of surprised that no one followed, but I couldn’t say I wasn’t relieved. I hadn’t lied; I *was* going to go shopping, but I also had some other things I needed to get, and

I wasn't obligated to share everything with them. *No matter what Sacha thinks.*

Walking out of the fancy apartment building, I ignored the looks of passersby assuming I was doing the walk of shame home. I waved down a taxi and slipped inside, telling them to take me to Market Street, the center of the shopping district. It was an uneventful drive there, and I handed the guy a couple bills before getting out of the car. I would take all the chaos-free moments I could. I confidently walked into an upscale boutique, casually noting that the dresses in the window would cost the average person a couple months' pay.

"Welcome to Olive and Grove," a bright customer service voice called out. The man who approached was in a pristine suit, his clear blue eyes sharpening when he saw me standing there. "Oh, it's you, Nicholette. What in the world are you wearing?!" Gabriel dropped his over-the-top persona and gave me a genuine smile. Seeing the real him was a benefit of being a loyal customer since Maeve introduced me to the shop a year ago.

I winked at him before greeting him with a light kiss on each cheek. "It's one of my date outfits, but that's not important right now. I need a new wardrobe, Gabriel, so of course I came to the best."

He took a step back to let his gaze inspect me, a hard glint in his eyes. "An entire new wardrobe?"

"Well..." I shrugged lightly. "Not everything I need will be from here, but I do need some things for my more... high-end dates and nice events. Who else would I trust with that besides you? I know you don't have anything like this outfit here, but I can easily get that from somewhere else."

“What happened to all the clothes you got from me a week ago?!” He crossed his arms, indignation written in his body language. Gabriel took a lot of pride in his clothes, and his attachment to the beautiful pieces he sold didn’t end when the client walked out with them.

“Someone broke into my place... all my stuff is destroyed,” I told him, forcing my voice to stay even. I was barely winning the battle against the slightest sting of tears, so I turned from him and walked toward a beautiful red dress on display. It was tight fitting, but the length was modest. At least by my standards. Circling around to check out the back, I saw there wasn’t much of one at all, most of it was open. It was gorgeous.

“Oh my gosh, are you alright?!” Gabriel exclaimed. “You can’t just come in here, say something like that, and not expect me to ask questions.”

“I know.” I smiled a bit to myself. “But right now I really need some new clothes and preferably something I can wear out of here. My walk of shame outfit isn’t impressing anyone, and I still have quite a few stores I need to hit up before I get to go back to where I’m staying.”

Gabriel’s mouth twitched slightly, but I could tell he didn’t miss how I dodged his question and concern. “I think I can help you out. First off all, that dress would look amazing on you. I’ll add it to your purchase, but I’ll need to hem it a bit to fit you. I also have something else that would be perfection on you. Stay right there.”

He hurried back to the backroom, and I ran a hand along the side of the red dress. If I wore this around Vas, he would lose his damn mind and probably rip it off of me, literally. *Note to self: save this for a client because there is no way I’ll*

be spending... I checked the tag and let out a huff of amusement... *two thousand dollars on a dress for it to end up as scraps.* A vibration caught my attention, and I opened my small purse to see my work phone lighting up. I didn't recognize the number, but I had a feeling I knew who it would be.

"Hello," I purred, a smirk curling my lips when a laugh met my greeting.

"If that's how you answer the phone, I can't wait to see how you sound gasping around my cock," Oli replied, the heat in his voice far outweighing any laughter. There was some mumbling in the background, but it didn't sound anything like the other guys.

A chuckle escaped me at that. "I might be able to arrange that, but did you call me just to sweet talk me?"

"Man, I need to up my game if you think that's sweet talking," Oli retorted, but then his voice became serious. "Sacha said you were checking your schedule. We need to know what it is."

"I'll send you the days I'm booked once I'm out of this store," I responded just as Gabriel hustled toward me with a professional, determined look. "But I'm not taking on anyone outside of my regular clients until our arrangement is done."

"Nicholette," Gabriel chided as he looped an arm through mine, "you know how I feel about phones in my store." I rolled my eyes at him, earning a tsk in mock disappointment.

"I gotta go try some clothes on," I told Oli quickly before Gabriel took my phone out of my hand. "If there's anything specific you need me to do, let me know. I'll make sure I get everything I need before I get back tonight."

“We’ll do that,” Oli told me, sounding oddly stiff before hanging up.

I shrugged, ignoring that as I put my phone away and looked over at Gabriel with a genuine smile. “So what do you have for me today?”

He gave me his ‘cat got the canary’ smile that only peeked out when he found something he knew I would love. “I’ve been on the lookout for some of the things you said you’d love to have last time you were here. I found a few of them, including the black suit you showed me.”

“You are a god, Gabriel,” I squealed, squeezing his arm in excitement. “Or should I say an angel?”

“Don’t you start, Nic,” he warned me with a teasing glare. “Now, get in there and strip. Show me each outfit so I can see what might need an adjustment or two. Not that you ever need much.”

“Nearly the perfect sentence,” I sighed as I went into the curtained-off dressing room. “What about other customers?”

“I’m closing the shop so you have some privacy and take your time. I know you’re good for everything you pick up, no window shopping for you.”

“I do love how you treat me so well.” I pulled off my top and pushed my skirt down so I was just standing there in a bra. “You wouldn’t happen to have any underwear I could get as well?”

A masculine chuckle reached my ears before a pair of black silky fabric was thrown over the curtain. “I’m always prepared when it comes to you, love. Besides, you treat my bank account wonderfully.”

“And you do wonders for my closet,” I told him as I slipped into a red dress like the one I had loved. He was right; it would need to be altered a bit to fit me, but it would be worth the wait.

Pushing the curtain open, I sauntered out to the small platform in front of a set of mirrors. Gabriel was there instantly, pinning the dress so it could be tailored. Conversation flowed easily between us, and for the first time today, I just felt totally at ease.

A few hours later, I walked out of the store with a handful of bags that were filled with dresses, tops, pants, and a few jackets. Gabriel was one hell of a salesman, and even though I considered him a type of friend, he also knew I was a great buyer. It was refreshing to have someone in my life that was upfront about what they wanted from me. Not to mention the fact that our relationship didn't involve sex. I mean, I loved sex, but I was still a fucking person, and Gabriel might have been getting something from me, but he *saw* me, asked what I thought, and picked pieces just because he knew they would make me feel happy and beautiful and strong. I shook my head, dislodging that train of thought. I had too much shit still left to get derailed by analyzing the path my life had taken. I needed to hit up Ulta or Sephora, a lingerie store, sex shop, and probably a thrift for some casual clothes and maybe some sexy ones like my club outfit. *Oh, and I need to send Oli my schedule.*

NOW THAT I was in the simple black pantsuit Gabriel had ordered me, I didn't have to deal with judgmental looks. The long, skinny pant leg, paired with my heels, a rich red flowy

top, and a black suit jacket, was perfect. One of the sales girls at Ulta gave me a face of makeup to complete the look after I spent a few hundred dollars getting the basics. The sex shop was also a success, and I ordered some lingerie, toys, and supplies to be delivered to the apartment that afternoon. A few bags at the lingerie store and five thrift shops later, I had amassed quite a lot of bags and a decent cache to replace the clothing that had been taken from me.

When I got back to the apartment building, I flashed a hundred dollar bill at the guy behind the desk, and he instantly offered to help me carry my bags to the apartment. Money always talks. He took the majority of the bags, and I smiled sweetly at him in thanks as we got to the apartment door.

“Thanks for your help,” I told him, handing him some cash as a thank you for helping me. Oli opened the door, eyebrows climbing higher as he realized how many bags I had between myself and the guy helping me.

“Did you leave anything at the store?” He moved out of the way so I could get inside, then swiftly grabbed the bags from the guy and waved him off before shutting the door.

“Of course I did.” I rolled my eyes at his exaggeration. “But all my shit was torn apart by whoever broke into our place, which means I had to replace it all. Plus, most of this is work stuff. A girl has to eat.”

Oli didn't say anything in response to that, but he did carry the bags to my bedroom. He tossed everything on the bed—good thing I had all my makeup bags—and flopped down to watch me start sorting everything.

“Where is everyone else? Are we the only ones here?”

“Working,” he told me, mischief in his eyes as he gave me an exaggerated leer. “Are you looking to do dirty, naughty things with me?” I burst out laughing, tears coming to my eyes. Every time I started to calm down, I looked at Oli’s put-out expression and cracked up again.

“I don’t think all that laughing is really necessary,” he grumbled, though the humor in his eyes told me he wasn’t actually offended.

“There’s so much to put away,” I said, waving at all the bags on the bed before taking all the makeup and bathroom stuff into the bathroom. As I put the bags down in there, I called out, “Oh, also, I should be getting a delivery in the next hour or two. I couldn’t carry everything home with me. The sex shop said they could get everything sent here.”

“Sex shop?” Oli’s perked up voice made it clear how he felt about that news.

I came back in and wagged a finger at him. “For work, Oli.”

“You can’t tell me you went to a sex shop and *only* got things for work. That’s not realistic at all. Who would even do that?”

“I mean... you’re not wrong. But what I’m saying is don’t go through my shit. Most of it is for work and needs to stay in packages until I need them.”

“Aye aye, captain!” I flipped him off in response to his salute, but I was smiling and he knew it.

“I’m keeping my eyes on you, Oli.”

“What, you don’t trust me?” he gasped, but then he sobered up. “But serious question.”

“Yes?” I asked, giving him my complete attention.

“Dinner? Sacha fucking *cooks* so there’s food here.”

“We’d end up killing each other or blowing up the kitchen if we tried to cook,” I told him solemnly. “Pizza?”

“I’m glad we’re on the same page.” Oli grinned. “I’ll order some while you put away all your unmentionables, then we can eat pizza and watch TV while we wait for all your sex toys to arrive.”

“We aren’t watching porn this time!” I yelled at him, smirking when it was his turn to laugh.

Shaking my head at his antics, I started putting stuff away before a thought stopped me dead in my tracks. I felt comfortable around Oli, like fully comfortable to a level I hadn’t felt around anyone, maybe ever. As I staggered to sit on the bed, the full weight of that hit me like a fucking train. The closest I’d ever felt to this was with my ex-girlfriend from high school, Wrenn, before the fateful night that changed *everything*... She had felt like a safe haven. A person I could just be myself with.

And if I was honest with myself, it wasn’t just Oli that made me feel that way. I had a feeling that if Sacha and Bodhi, who I didn’t even really know yet, tried to knock down the remaining walls around my heart, I’d never be the same. And Vas... the man who I’d known as a client, one of my favorites. He had cared for me, in his own way, and I felt safe during our times together. But now that line had been obliterated, and I’d been in his space. Now that he knew my name and saw *me* as I got to know *him*... There was no hope of Vas not becoming dangerously real to me.

But they weren't promising feelings, hell, I didn't *want* feelings. I was so fucking screwed.

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Oli

Monday

The sex shop delivered about seven large bags of stuff an hour after Nicholette got back to the apartment. *Seven.* What the hell could she have gotten that would fill that many bags? I shook my head as I stood in the doorway of the bedroom, watching her look through the bags as I fought off my curiosity. She had taken her heels off and was standing there in a black suit and red shirt that looked amazing on her, the long black waves of her hair and pale skin making her a delicious temptation. *Calm the fuck down. She hasn't even done anything remotely sexual!* I tried to convince myself. But the memory of her naked body and the taste of her on my tongue made my dick twitch. *Time to distract myself, or I'm going to have to take the edge off.*

Pulling my phone out of my pocket, I checked to see if I had any waiting messages from Sacha, Vas, or Bodhi, but there was nothing. Bodhi was off to check out a new warehouse I had found information on, searching for any evidence of the trafficking ring that Warren was rumored to be part of. The information had come as a shock, and even Maeve seemed

surprised when we found more information to back up that claim. That was when she demanded more concrete proof before we killed him for her. She wanted insurance to cover her ass, and I couldn't blame her. The Förstner Family in Boston ran their own ring and any competition against them... well, they didn't last long, and they were never found after disappearing. Cold rage filled me at the thought of the rings and the ones who ran it. Memories of suffocating darkness, cages, and unending pain were trying to resurface and tug me down into my past when Nic called my name and pulled me from memory lane.

“Yeah?” I cleared my throat and glanced up to find her watching me with a shrewd gaze.

“I'm done putting everything away.” She tilted her head, and I felt my mask slip into place, an easy smile filling my face.

“Well then, let's finish the movie. There's no way you're leaving me to watch the ending of this alone.”

She didn't say anything for a minute. *Just let it go.* Right now, I didn't think I could put off her questions nicely. Nic must have realized that because she smiled a bit and snagged one of my hands as she walked by me. “As if I could let you watch it all by yourself. Besides, do you ever really know if you're alone?”

“I swear to god, Nic, if you even try to scare me, I will beat your ass so badly you won't be able to sit for a week,” I growled at her.

Instead of fear or shock, she looked back at me with amusement. “Did you just try to imitate Vas?”

Right then the door opened, revealing none other than the man himself. “Who is trying to imitate me and why?”

“I think the correct question is, do you want to know,” Sacha replied as he walked around Vas, Bodhi closely following soon after.

“He tried to growl at me and said he would beat my ass if I made him watch the end of the scary movie alone,” Nic supplied, unhelpfully in my opinion, as she tapped a nail on her chin. “Oli’s growl isn’t really as fear inspiring as yours though.”

“Excuse you!” I protested. Sacha and Bodhi were laughing at my expense while Vas gifted me and Nic with a lazy grin. “I could scare you if I really wanted.”

“I’m not saying you couldn’t,” Nic replied smoothly, amusement lighting up her blue-green eyes. “But your growl is definitely not the way you’d be doing it. Now, are you done procrastinating so we can watch the end? Oh, guys, we got pizza if you want some.”

“There was food in the kitchen,” Sacha grumbled as he looked down at the pizza, some of the irritation lifting when he finally noticed the logo on the side. I had made sure to order from the fancy pizza place he liked, knowing I’d never hear the end of it if I ordered from anywhere else. Sacha could be a snob about stuff like that, needing name-brand this or that, but I had to give it to him, he had good taste. Though I’d never admit that to the man.

“I don’t cook,” Nic replied evenly. “I wouldn’t want a kitchen fire to destroy your fancy coffee maker. You might have to slum it with a regular one if Oli or I attempted to make anything. I don’t think the stove in our apartment was ever used. Pretty sure the fridge was filled with leftover take out

and microwaveable food. Pretty sure we're both low-maintenance out of necessity."

Sacha looked up to glare at Nic as Bodhi tried and failed to hide his smile. Nic ignored the grump, tugging on my hand again until we both sat down on the couch so she could unpause the movie. I felt a slight shift on my other side and smiled when I found Bodhi sitting down beside me, throwing an arm around his shoulder so he could lean against me. Bodhi didn't return the smile, but his brown eyes were a little less cautious as he watched Nic look for the remote. Bodhi hadn't had an easy time adjusting to Nic's presence in the apartment, but he seemed to slowly be warming up to having her around. I knew he was attracted to her, that much was obvious, but I need him to warm up and grow comfortable enough that he would act on it. I was more than willing to give him a little push or lead him into getting to know her in a more... familiar way.

"You fucking asshole, you hid the remote?!" Nic scowled at me over her shoulder. "Where is it?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I told her cheerfully as I leaned over and took a bite of Bodhi's pizza. Bodhi glared at me, but I just winked at him, not the least bit intimidated.

"What did Oliver do?" Sacha asked as he and Vas joined us in the living room.

"And what the hell are we watching?" Vas added as the brothers sat down on the second leather couch.

"He hid the remote," she complained, but her smile made it easy to see that she was mostly amused by my diversion tactics. "I think he's scared to finish the movie."

“The chick is deaf, and she’s being stalked in her own home by a serial killer! It’s creepy as hell.”

“Oh, you’re watching *Hush*?” Bodhi’s soft voice followed my loud protest. “I love that movie.”

“What the fuck, Bodhi?!” I looked over at my boyfriend, who just gave me a half smile. “Betrayed because of the pretty woman in the room. Unbelievable.”

Nic threw her head back and laughed at that, her wavy hair sliding down her back as the four of us watched her, more than a bit entranced. I’d never seen us like this... not even with Ava. Ava was Nic’s opposite in practically every way. Short, bright blonde hair, and bubbly, Ava had a lightness about her when we met. Though that brightness didn’t last long after being in our company.

Nichollette was a woman who piqued all of our interests, even hard-to-catch Bodhi. Vas stared at her with barely contained lust; the normally in control man seemed to be slowly unraveling since Nic joined us for this job. The more I saw him around her, the less I understood how he’d been able to keep distance between them for a year. With someone like her, how could he hold himself back and just be a client? The man had some kind of iron willpower despite the obvious fact that it was now running awfully thin. Sacha, now, his reaction was a bit more subtle than his younger brother’s, but he looked like a cat that had found something to play with just to see what they would do. He would tease her and antagonize her just so he could enjoy the scratch of her claws down his back when she finally struck him back.

As for myself, her laughter changed to cries and begging in my mind as I imagined running my knives along that precious pale skin, my dick twitching when the red of her shirt made

me think of the blood that would flow from her as I fucked her. *Shit...I needed to think of something else. Anything else.*

“After seeing your place, it’s hilarious that you can’t do scary movies.” Nic pulled me from my thoughts once again. “You’d think they wouldn’t bother you.”

“Horror movies are different,” I told her defensively as the other guys snapped out of their Nic-induced trance as well. Sacha and Vas both helped Nic look for the remote while Bodhi stayed close to my side. Eventually, Sacha found it, but instead of handing it over, Sacha snagged Nic around the waist and pulled her down to sit on his lap before pressing play. A piercing scream filled the room from the woman on the TV screen, and I shuddered a bit against Bodhi. *I hate scary movies. How did she talk me into watching this one again?* She didn’t fight it like I thought she would; in fact, Nicholette sent him a wicked smile before kissing him lightly.

I really didn’t get them. If anything, Nic and Vas made more sense than Sacha and Nic. But as I watched Nic settle down without complaint and push her bare feet under Vas’ thigh, I couldn’t help but admit she fit right in with us. We were fucked up, having plenty of secrets between us. Nicholette could wreck us, and I had a gut feeling that the destruction she could bring would make Ava leaving us without warning seem like child’s play.

Just sex, that was the promise. But looking at all of us, even Bodhi, whose gaze kept straying from the movie to the woman on the other couch, I had a feeling that Nic would make us all feel something even if we didn’t want to.



Nicholette

Wednesday

“**W**hat do you mean, you have a *date*?” Vas asked as I stood there in nothing but lacy nude-colored lingerie in my bathroom, trying to get ready. Everything about his posture was radiating with something almost akin to jealousy as he watched me pull out my bag of makeup. I wasn’t sure what look I wanted to go with for the evening, and I couldn’t let this little interlude make me late.

“It means I have a date,” I told him evenly, pulling out what I would need. I thought of the cream-colored dress I would be wearing, very demure and classy. *The nude eyeshadow palette would be perfect.* “I don’t see why you’re getting upset about this.”

“You don’t see—“ Vas bit off, shaking his head.

“Vas,” I said patiently, starting to apply the first color on my eyelids. “We’re working together, not dating. I’m doing my job. In case you don’t remember, working with you all isn’t the only thing I’m doing. Besides, you don’t need me tonight. My temporary role with your team is to seduce

Warren, nothing else. It's not like what I do is a surprise, especially for you."

The large man didn't respond to my reasoning; instead, he cursed loudly before turning on his heel and practically ripped the door from its hinges to reveal Sacha walking by at that exact moment. Vas brushed past his brother, his body practically vibrating with violence, and the apartment was silent until I heard a door slam shut down the hallway. I rolled my eyes at his dramatics before focusing again and selecting the second eyeshadow color. *If he's going to act like this all the time, I'll have to go back to my apartment sooner rather than later.*

"What happened?" Sacha asked as he sauntered into the room and came to a stop where Vas had been standing just a few moments beforehand. He lifted an eyebrow, waiting for me to answer.

"I have a date tonight," I informed him bluntly, internally bracing for his outburst to match his brother's. Instead, Sacha watched me quietly like he was waiting for me to say more. "Vas seemed annoyed about it, and I simply pointed out that this is my job. I'm not taking on new clients while I'm helping you guys out, but canceling my normal clients would just make Warren suspicious. Plus, I'm not losing my business while helping all of you with yours."

Sacha clicked his tongue a bit as he stepped fully into the bathroom, reaching behind him to close the door softly as I finished my makeup for the night. "I understand that. You have a job you are dedicated to doing, just like we are with ours. Both equally unconventional."

"To say the least," I responded slowly, looking at the closed door in the mirror then meeting his cool gaze. "Is there

something you wanted to say to me, boss?”

A half smile flashed across his face so quickly that had I blinked, I would have missed it. “Do I make you nervous, Nicholette?” I shuddered at the way he said my full name in that honeyed tone of his. He stepped closer until he was right behind me, his body heat warming me from mere inches away. I watched him in the mirror, loving the way our closeness highlighted the six inches he had on me. Not to mention, the nonexistent distance between our bodies was making me *very* aware that I was standing there in just lingerie while he had on a full suit.

“Sacha—” I started to ask what he was up to just as he brought his hands to my sides, exerting just enough pressure that I felt his strength. Sacha yanked me close, my back flush against his front. He slowly slid his hands up until his fingertips teased just under my breasts, making my breath stutter at the barely there touch. I licked my lips, our eyes locked to one another in the mirror. “I have to get ready. I can’t be late.”

“Are you coming back tonight?” he asked in a too-gentle voice. I nodded jerkily, nearly lost in the way his brown eyes heated with a darkness that called to me. A cruel smile teased me just before he pushed my wavy hair out of the way so he could press a soft kiss on my neck. “You owe me a night. A night where you do anything I tell you to do in the bedroom. We got interrupted by the police and Warren a few days ago. I’m calling in that promise tonight.”

“I can do that,” I told him huskily, remembering my promise to him after the club. He had insinuated his brother would be involved, and honestly, after Vas’ jealousy, I was

turned on by even the possibility of him taking that out on me later tonight.

Sacha's hands continued to move as he kissed my neck again. "When do you have to leave?"

A shaky breath escaped me as I looked down at the watch on his wrist and saw it was four o'clock. "A car is coming to pick me up at four thirty."

"Then we have plenty of time for what I have in mind," Sacha murmured. Roughly, his hands pulled my lacy underwear down before he turned me and sat me down on the counter to face him. I gasped at the feeling of the cool counter on my bare ass as he pushed me to lean back against the mirror, shifting my ass until it was close to the edge. He got down on his knees, forcing my legs apart so he could be between them.

"Sacha..." I cursed when he just knelt there, looking at my body but not doing anything with it.

"Your date tonight, what are you doing?" He brushed fingers along my folds, teasing me.

I swallowed hard, trying to remember how to string words together in spite of the lust rising within me at his touch. "Meeting and then dinner. That's it." He rewarded my answer with a slow lick down my center, the sensation wringing a groan from my lips.

"That's it? No sex tonight?"

I shook my head slightly. "No. Not tonight."

"Good," he answered succinctly before he grabbed my thighs in a punishing hold and flicked his tongue along my clit. I cried out at that and tried to buck, but he held me still, forcing me to go at his pace. He was obviously skilled at

eating a woman out, using teeth, lips, and tongue to work me over, building up my orgasm, until he suddenly pulled away from me.

“No!” I shook my head, but Sacha grabbed my chin in a hard grip, forcing me to stop and meet his gaze.

“I’m the one in charge tonight, not you, my little whore,” he murmured darkly, taunting me. I attempted to rub my thighs together, my body desperate for any kind of sensation as I tried to avoid acknowledging that his new pet name made me horny as fuck. He shook his head at me, amusement lighting up his brown eyes as he used his free hand to keep my legs from moving together. “Keep your legs apart and be just like this when I get back. If not, you’ll be sorry.”

I nodded more frantically than I’d like to admit, a pleasant buzz filling my head. He shook my face harshly until I focused on him. “A real answer, Nicholette. “

“Yes, boss.”

He smirked a bit, my breathless tone giving away just how turned on I was by him being in control of me. Leaning over me, he captured my lips in a brutal kiss, his hand tightening on my jaw until it was just this side of pain before he pulled away. “I’ll accept boss from you, makes me reconsider all the times you’ve called me that outside of the bedroom.”

Abruptly, Sacha let go of me and walked out of the bathroom without another word. He left the doors open in his haste to do god knows what, leaving me on display if any of the others came in to talk to me.

As I sat there for probably close to five minutes, my horniness started to turn into anger. *If he doesn’t come back here, I’m going to kill him. Fuck drugs. For this, I’d stab him*

so many times they wouldn't recognize him. My vicious thoughts didn't last too long since he *finally* came back. He kicked the bedroom door shut as he approached with something unrecognizable in his hand.

Sacha didn't let me in on his plans; instead, he crowded me, capturing my lips in a thorough kiss. Our tongues battled for control, and I lost the moment I felt something cold brush against my pussy. A gasp escaped me, and Sacha pulled back so he could watch my face while he pushed something inside of me. It didn't take me long to realize that it was a Ben Wa ball. *Make that two Ben Wa balls.* I clenched my pelvic floor muscles to hold them inside and shuddered at the feeling of fullness.

"I want you to keep these inside of you during your date," Sacha ordered, his voice deep and possessive. With the command, he slowly and gently ran a thumb over my bottom lip. "You're going to spend the whole date sitting there, full, and wish it was my cock inside of you instead. Every time you clench down on these, you can think of riding my cock in the nightclub."

"Is this a game you guys will be playing before all of my dates while we work together?" I asked as Sacha slowly slid my underwear up my legs.

"Are you objecting?" I lifted my butt up so he could pull the small fabric up all the way, his touch lingering.

I swallowed hard when he cupped my pussy, staring at me in challenge as he waited for my answer. "Depends. Do I get to do the same thing to you? You want to show me you own me, let me do the same to you. Give you an outlet to let go, boss," I said, reminding him of the promise I'd made in the alleyway.

His face was flushed, but he didn't respond right away. I sat up and leaned forward to whisper in his ear. "I want to break you too, boss. I want to run myself all along your edges until the only things left are the pieces of us in the room." Delicately, I ran my tongue along the edge of his ear and chuckled when he shuddered. Whether the reaction was to the touch or my words, I wasn't sure. My control over him in that moment was heady, making me feel untouchable, powerful. "I could show you your place after another man uses me, forcing you to see just where you belong, underneath me. Or... I could make you prove that you're man enough to claim me, remind me who I belong to after one of my clients fucks me? Do you like that?"

Sacha answered by grabbing hold of my throat and squeezing as he brushed his lips against mine. "You're going to be late if you don't hurry, Delilah." Just as quickly as he grabbed me, he let go. He left me sitting there as he waltzed out of the room, not even looking back at me. I carefully got off the counter and walked into the room to slip into the fancy dress, a smirk playing along my lips.

Sacha would be worth the wait. I could just imagine what it would be like to have him on his knees, staring up at me, begging. I had to stop and take a calming breath, needing a little moment of zen to help me get through the rest of my date prep. My thoughts and the Ben Wa balls inside of me were such an erotic combination, I'd be lucky if I made it through the dinner without orgasming. *That would be an interesting thing to explain to William.*

Now I just had to make it through the next couple of hours and then I'd get to find out what Sacha has planned for me. I couldn't fucking wait.

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Nicholette

Wednesday

My dinner date ran late enough that by the time I made it back to the guys' place all I wanted to do was kick these heels off my aching feet and finally have that orgasm that Sacha's toys had been building in me all night. Luckily, William hadn't noticed anything, or at least the man was too much of a gentleman to make a comment about it. He was an older man whose wife had passed away two years ago, and he was trying to put himself out there more. He seemed more lonely than anything else, which was where I came in. We had met while I was on a date with someone else, and I started seeing him on the side. William was more interested in my attention than having sex with me, which easily made him one of my favorite clients. Some nights we'd meet up for dinner and conversation, with perhaps some sporadic flirting on the side, but we never went beyond that into the bedroom.

I reached the apartment door, but before I could get out the spare key Oli had tossed me, the door opened. Sacha stood before me, still wearing the suit from earlier, but the top three buttons were undone. There was a relaxed demeanor to him

that hadn't been there before. If anything, seeing him this way ramped up my adrenaline more than seeing him all deadly serious. I licked my lips as I tried to look past him into the apartment, checking if Vas was anywhere nearby, but I couldn't see anything since all the lights were turned off.

"You're late," Sacha said lazily, his hooded gaze completely focused on me.

"I never said when—" My response was cut short when one of Sacha's hands shot out and tightly squeezed my throat. He used his hold to yank me into the apartment, whirling around to slam me into the wall as he kicked the door shut.

"Already back talking," he crooned, taunting me as I struggled to breathe. "Oh, my sweet little whore, did you forget how tonight was going to work?"

"You want me to submit, boss?" I managed to push out as my heart hammered in my chest, and I could feel my arousal starting to wet my thighs. *As if the Ben Wa balls didn't get me ready enough.* "Make. Me."

Sacha gave me a lazy smile at my challenge, the hungry excitement only growing clearer with each squeeze of my throat. He squeezed hard enough that it made dark spots appear in my vision before he suddenly released me. I didn't have long to catch my breath before he slanted his mouth over mine, our tongues gliding together while he used his body to pin me against the wall. I could have given in then; him in complete control was almost as delicious as the thought of him letting go for me. But where was the fun in that? I wouldn't be me if I didn't make him work for it.

I kissed him back slowly, letting him take charge until I bit down on his lower lip hard enough to draw blood. The coppery taste filled the dark kiss between us, and I wrapped

my arms around his neck until I could grab his hair. Wrenching his head back, I broke the kiss, satisfied by the brush of his hard erection against my stomach. He growled at my hold, his face promising retribution, and I smirked, silently telling him to bring it on.

“Isn’t she wonderful, brother?” Vas’ deep rumbling voice cut through the building tension in the room. I glanced over to find him sitting on one of the couches, his eyes locked on us and his dick tenting his pants. The sight of him sitting there, watching us, made me lick my lips, my mouth watering with the need to get a taste of him.

“I can see why you paid so much for her.” Sacha used my inattention to break my hold on his hair and pull me toward him. He spun me so that my back was to his front while he bent down, sinking his teeth into the spot where my neck met my collarbone. I hissed at the sting of it, but Vas just laughed, the sound deep with sinful promise.

“She sings so well for me. Worth every damn penny,” Vas reassured Sacha, and I couldn’t stop the shiver of arousal that ran through me at how they talked about me. The memory of him chasing me in the forest ran through my mind, turning me on even more. Another kind of woman would hate it, fuck, maybe I should, but if they respected me out of the bedroom, they could degrade me all they wanted during sex. I had my hard limits, but anything outside of those was fair game, and they knew it too.

“I’ll be the judge of that for myself,” Sacha whispered against my skin. His hands palmed my curves, sliding along my rib cage until he got to the zipper along my back. Instead of unzipping it slowly, building me up, he surprised me by ripping the dress down the middle.

“Sacha! That was brand-fucking-new!” I protested, shocked enough that it broke my mind through the cloud of lust.

“I’ll buy you another damn dress, Nic.” He pushed the fabric off of me, so I stood in front of them both in just my lacy bra and underwear. *Fucker’s still going to pay for that later.* Vas let out a low laugh as he nodded at my damp underwear. “I can see she liked your game.” Him mentioning it made me more aware of the toys inside of me, and I tried to rub my thighs together, but Sacha stopped me.

“Get on the couch, Nic. Hands and knees, face toward Vas.”

I let out a shaky breath and kicked off my heels before walking slowly to where Vas had scooted over to make room for me on the leather couch. Vas leaned back against an armrest of the sofa as I climbed onto the couch, orienting myself so that I was facing him and his erect cock. Rich brown eyes watched me intently as he slowly jacked himself off.

A snick behind me had me tensing up and starting to look back, but a hard smack on my ass forced a surprised whimper from my throat. It seemed Sacha wasn’t holding back anymore, which was a whole different level of enticing. Before I could open my mouth again, another loud crack filled the air, and I moaned.

“The perfect plaything,” Vas praised as he brushed his rough hand along the side of my face.

“She’s dripping wet,” Sacha commented right before I felt something cool slide between my pussy and the lace of my underwear. *Oh fuck, it’s the knife.* That was my last thought before he cut the lacy material away from me, the cool air of the apartment hitting my exposed body. I couldn’t hold back

the moan that escaped me or the arousal that filled me at Sacha's possessive streak coming through. Knife play was something I hadn't done often, but it had been one of my fantasies for a long time.

I was about to say something snarky about him cutting through my new underwear right after ripping my dress, but then I felt warm breath against my exposed folds and a tongue swirling around my opening. Automatically, I tried to rock back into him, but Sacha gripped my thighs, keeping me still and open for his slow, methodical pace.

Just as I opened my mouth to cuss him out, Vas saved me from myself. Another snick, *what is it with these two and knives*, and Vas reached down to cut away my bra, letting my breasts spill out. Instead of tossing the knife aside like Sacha had, Vas traced the underside of my breasts with the tip of the knife, making me bite my lip to keep myself from panting.

"You are perfection." His deep voice was rough in a way I'd only heard when the two of us were together. He reached forward to pull my lip from between my teeth. "But we want to hear you sing for us, Nic."

Sacha pulled his face away from my pussy at that, fingers coming up and slowly pulling the balls out of me, making me shudder at the empty feeling. He tossed them onto the coffee table with a loud thud. "Tonight, you're going to do everything we say. If we tell you to crawl, I want you on your knees. I want to see how far we can take you and see if we can break you, just enough to be fun for us."

I was panting when Vas tilted my chin so I had to meet his cruel stare. "Same safeword we agreed on. Just say red, and everything stops. Saying no, stop, or mercy isn't going to get the play to end. Do you understand?"

“Yes,” I answered breathlessly.

His grip on my chin turned punishing, and I could almost feel bone grinding together as he glared down at me. “Excuse me?”

“Fuck you.” Apparently, my go-to defense was going to be all over the place tonight, and I regretted nothing even when he hit me across the face, like he had in the woods just days ago. Unlike the evening of our dinner meeting, this slap was meant to correct my bratty behavior, not a hit from *real* anger. A laugh slipped out as I wet my bottom lip with my tongue. “You’re going to have to do better than that.” A smirk tugged at Vas’ lips, promising violence, as a flush covered his face.

“Oh, this is going to be fun.” Sacha brought a hand up and tangled it in my hair. “Why don’t you put that smartass mouth to use and suck him off? Maybe if you’re really good, Vas will go gentle on you.” Without waiting for a response, he pushed my face down to his brother’s cock. I opened my mouth, eager for the taste of him on my tongue, and his cock filled my mouth and throat. Only when I started to choke on the thick girth did Sacha let go of my head to let me set my own pace.

“Fuck,” Vas hissed as I swirled my tongue around the head, just how I knew he liked it. He threaded his hand through my hair, but he didn’t pull like Sacha had done. Instead, he used my hair as an anchor while Sacha shifted my body so my chest was lower to the couch and ass high in the air. Rustling sounded behind me, signaling that Sacha was undressing, and I braced myself, expecting him to slam home inside of me. But I should have known that with Sacha nothing would go as I first expected. In fact, he’d apparently made it his goal that I would never be able to guess his next move.

Sacha settled on the couch behind me, taking his time as he licked my folds again, demonstrating an overly frustrating amount of self-control. I was caught between the two men, my arousal building as they both played with my body. When Sacha started to use teeth, I moaned around Vas' cock, making him pull me off of him. A whine almost escaped my swollen lips, but he cut off the desperate sound when he captured my lips with his own. Vas' long beard brushed against me as I felt Sacha shifting slightly. I broke away from the kiss to look down and found Sacha laying down between my thighs. He looked up at me, holding my stare as he scraped teeth along my clit. My eyes rolled back in my head at the sensation, but what tipped me over into my first orgasm was Vas harshly twisting one of my nipples between two of his fingers.

Hands held me as I cried out their names, riding Sacha's merciless tongue that pushed me into my second orgasm before my first fully ended. Vas kept playing with my nipples, alternating between harsh twists and soft swipes of his tongue, and I lost count of the number of orgasms that wrung from me.

It could have been hours or just minutes later when I belatedly realized both men weren't forcing more orgasms from me. Instead, two sets of hands, one callused and the other smooth, were running along my sides. A hum of contentment escaped me as Sacha chuckled, a slight tug on my hair making me turn to look at the man.

"Now that we've warmed you up for the night, let's go to the bedroom."

Warm up? I blinked slowly at him, trying to process what he was telling me. *There's no way...* Vas' rough hands gently rolled me off the couch and onto the floor by their feet.

"My bedroom," Vas commanded.

“And don’t even think of walking there. I’ll use my belt as a leash if you can’t follow directions.” I glared at them, earning a tsk from Sacha while he cupped one of my cheeks. “But you’re going to be a good little whore, aren’t you? Crawl for us.”

Oh, I’d remember this when I got him on his knees in front of me, and by the look in Sacha’s eyes, he understood that. I wasn’t even sure if I could walk or even crawl to a bedroom. They had wrung at least... three, no, five, orgasms from me, and we were just getting started. But when Sacha leaned over to grab his belt from the pile of clothes because I wasn’t moving, I found the motivation to start crawling on my hands and knees toward Vas’ bedroom.

I wanted indignation to burn in me at what they were making me do, but all I felt was the wet arousal trailing down my thighs, and the knowledge that they were walking behind me meant they could see it too.

These men would take me further into the dark than I thought possible, and for as long as it lasted, I’d go willingly. Unlike everyone else in my life, they weren’t pushing me into it; they were walking right beside me to play in it too.



Sacha

Wednesday

The spark of defiance that formed in her blue-green eyes at our command, not to mention me threatening her with using a leash, was fucking perfect. Vas and I walked into his bedroom while Nic knelt by the door, watching us with lust-hazed eyes. She might not want to admit that she liked crawling, but the glistening juices on her thighs indicated otherwise.

“So, how do you wanna do this?” Vas’ deep voice pulled me from my thoughts. I looked over at him with a wide grin, which he matched with one of his own. The benefit of being brothers meant he understood what I wanted with just a brief look. It helped that we’d shared enough women over the years that he knew most of what I liked. Me submitting though... the only person ever close to drawing that out of me was Ava, but she wasn’t a top, so I’d held myself back. But Nicholette, after taking one look at me she had known, and my dick jumped with just the thought of her ordering me around like we were doing to her now. *One thing at a time, Sacha.*

Honestly, as much as my brother and I shared, I wasn't sure I would ever be able to fully submit with him as an audience.

“Think she can handle it?”

Instead of answering me, Vas sat on the edge of his bed and crooked a finger at Nic. She crawled over to sit by his feet, but she didn't stay there long. He grabbed her hair, pulling her up onto his lap, and I caught her shuddering at Vas' manhandling.

He didn't bother to respond to my question before he claimed Nic's mouth in a heated, dominating kiss. She melted against him with zero resistance, wrapping her arms around his neck as she kissed him back.

I let out a pleased sigh as I walked over and grabbed a bottle of lube from Vas' bedside table. Walking back over to stand behind Nic, I wrapped my hand around her throat, effectively breaking their kiss, not wanting to be left out of the play any longer. Not bothering with words, I claimed her swollen lips in a kiss of my own. Instead of the violent claiming Vas had done, I languidly kissed her, taking my time to taste her like a fine wine.

I knew the moment Vas thrust inside of her. Nic gasped into our kiss before I swallowed the whimper that escaped with her body's effort to accommodate him.

“Fucking perfect,” I praised, pulling back from our kiss. Vas gripped her waist and directed her movements to get her to start riding him. Watching her ride my brother shouldn't turn me on, but it was fucking erotic how Nic surrendered herself to the moment. Head thrown back, inky waves tumbling down her pale back, she met his every thrust with equal strength. I couldn't fucking wait to join them.

I studiously ignored my slightly shaking hands as I pumped my hand over my own throbbing dick. At the snick of the lube opening, Nic turned to see what I was doing behind her, and I nearly came at the surprise and arousal that filled her expression when she realized my plan. Vas could fuck that pussy of hers, but her ass, that was all mine.

“Lay down, Vas, and get her ready for me,” I ordered them in a rough voice. Vas followed my instruction, pulling Nic down so she was sprawled across his chest, his cock seated fully inside of her. My brother grabbed her ass, holding her cheeks open so I could easily get to her hole, and Nic moaned at the exposure.

“You like being on display, Nicholette?” Vas let out a rumbling groan while Nicholette whined at the first press of my finger inside her. I wouldn’t be going easy on her, so I’d take my time getting her ready, especially since she was handling both of us. “Maybe I’ll drop you somewhere and hunt you down again, but this time I’ll do it with others around. They could watch as you get caught, arousal clear on your thighs as you try to deny how much you love it. Would you try to beg them to help you? Or maybe they’d love the show just as much as me. I’d make you look them in the eye as I degraded you and fucked you... I’d make you beg me for more before I even *thought* about letting you come. Would you like that, Nic? You’d be the star of their every fantasy after that, but only *I* would know exactly how good that pussy of yours feels.”

“Fuck,” she moaned between us. Whether it was from me pushing in a second finger or Vas’ words, I wasn’t sure. I had a feeling it was probably both.

“Maybe we should take her to a work meeting, Vas,” I mused calmly as I scissored my fingers, stretching her out. “Fuck her in front of them until that pretty mascara is streaming down her face. Let them all watch so they know exactly who she belongs to.”

“I like the way you think, brother.” Vas rocked into Nic, his hips making only the slightest bit of movement. “But you better hurry the fuck up, or I’m going to blow before you even get inside of her.”

“So impatient,” I taunted, but I pulled my fingers out long enough to line my dick up with her entrance. I started to slowly push inside, giving no warning. I’d already been more than generous to make sure it wouldn’t hurt her more than we both might like. With Vas inside her cunt, I had to fight for every inch, and the sensation tore a groan from my lips. Nic panted, a shuddering breath that was music to my ears, as I felt her fight to relax against my invasion.

But I didn’t want her relaxed; I wanted Nic wild between us.

“Vas.” That was all I had to say as I reached around to hold up one of Nic’s breasts for his attention. Vas let out a sinister laugh before she jerked between us, letting out a cry that ended in a whimper. Vas had bit down on her breast and started working her over at the same time I slammed the rest of the way inside. Nicholette screamed as we started a relentless rhythm, forcing her body to adjust to both of us fucking her.

When Vas pulled out, I pushed in, refusing to allow her even a moment of emptiness. We set a bruising pace, but Nic didn’t tap out. In fact, the rougher we were with her, the more turned on she seemed to get. I could feel her juices running

down her body as she hoarsely cried out our names, that beautiful crack in her voice our only warning before Nic's orgasm hit her. The climax had her body milking my dick, and I felt my rhythm falter for the first time. Looking over at Vas, I saw he was at the same point as I was. He nodded at my questioning look.

Reaching down, I wrapped an arm around her chest and pulled her up between us. She whimpered at the change of angle, but I stayed still while Vas sped up, chasing his own orgasm. I grabbed her chin, forcing her to look at me. Her wild eyes met my own, and I smirked at her cruelly.

"You're going to come with him," I told her.

"I can't," she protested.

I reached down and started to rub her clit, making her body jerk in my hold. "Oh, but you can, my little whore. You're going to come and milk his cock, then I'm going to do the same thing in your ass."

She cried out when Vas tightened his hold on her hips, his knuckles turning white. "*Our* whore, Sacha. She's *our* whore."

"For now," Nicholette interjected breathlessly. "I'm yours... for now."

Matching snarls escaped both of us at her words. A loud smack resounded in the room, which made Nic cry out in more pain than arousal as Vas got ready to hit her other breast. Both of her breasts were already red, decorated with random bite marks from his earlier attention.

"I think she should pay for that." Vas raised a brow at me as he hit her other breast, making Nic jerk between us.

"I agree. Keep fucking her. You'll learn your place soon enough, Nicholette. When you're in bed with us, any of us, we

own you completely. I hope you learn your lesson tonight. But don't worry. If you don't, it's more fun for us. I can already tell we are going to *love* punishing you.”

Nic could only gasp as she looked down at Vas fucking her with a violence that even had me wondering how the fuck she was handling him at all. Her swollen breasts bounced with every thrust, and the sight of my brother's markings all over her made me yearn to mark her myself. Just as I felt the flutter of her tipping over into another orgasm, I signaled my brother, and we both pulled out of her. Her wail of frustration almost made me orgasm, but I clenched my teeth, holding back, as Vas held her thighs open with a tight grip.

Nichollette jolted in our hold, tears sliding down her cheeks as she begged for something, *anything*, to sooth the denial she'd just experienced. I wished I could see her pussy trying to clamp down on anything to make her orgasm pleasant, but we held her between us, empty, not letting her have any of the extra sensation she craved.

“Next time we do this, I'm setting up a camera,” Vas taunted, thumbs running lightly along her thigh as he held her fast. “I think I could watch us ruin you for hours. It's almost hotter than you coming on my dick.”

“Vas!” she keened, my brother answering with a surprised whistle.

“Did she ruin again at just the thought of that?” I asked harshly as Nic threw her head back to rest against my shoulder.

“Fuck yeah, she did.” Vas' voice was so deep it sounded distorted. “Our perfect, dirty little whore.”

She let out what almost sounded like a sob when we released her, letting her fall to the bed face down. Vas rolled her over, forcing her to watch us as we both started jacking off. Neither of us lasted long before ropes of our cum covered her. She watched us with a dazed gaze and flushed cheeks, the sight enough to *almost* make me regret not finishing inside her.

Vas leaned over and captured her mouth in a slow kiss. She didn't roll into him, but I saw her kiss him back slowly. I reached down and ran a hand through the cum covering her, rubbing it into her skin to stake our claim on her body. Nicholette was right; it was just for now. But for as long as it lasted, I was determined to work her over until no matter who she saw, my name was always on the tip of her tongue.

I'd own her in my own way before she walked away from us. But as I ran my hand along her lithe body, watching her make out with Vas, I had a feeling that although she would walk away, her presence would remain, haunting us. My heart clenched at the idea of letting anyone in again like we had with Ava, but Nicholette had barged into our lives, reflecting our darkness back at us with an enticing flavor that was all her own. When the fuck did emotions start to come into play? With *her* of all people, my brother's whore. *And now mine too.* Looking down at Nic, I couldn't deny the possessive need that filled me when she broke their kiss to meet my stare. A spark of happiness filled her blue-green eyes, along with something far more elusive, and that was when I knew we were in trouble.

Would the end of this break us like Ava had? The part of me that liked the pain, be it physical or emotional, was dying to know. I was a glutton for punishment, after all.



Nichollette

Thursday

“**Y**ou have a thing with baths, don’t you?” I smiled and looked over to find Oli standing there, a smile on his face as he joined me in the bathroom, sitting down on the toilet.

“Baths are par for the course in my job.” I shrugged lightly, running a hand through the water. “Helps heal bruises a bit faster than just a shower. You learn quickly when you get more of the... heavy-duty clients.” Plus, I had started having cramps earlier, and I wasn’t sure if that was from last night’s rough sex or that my period was coming, but either way, the bath helped.

Oli tilted his head as he mulled over my statement before nodding a bit. “How was yesterday’s date?”

“You really want me to tell you about my date?” I lifted an eyebrow, surprised.

“Why not? I mean, it’s your job.” Oli smiled, though I saw a bit of uncertainty flicker through his hazel eyes before the

poker face slipped back into place. *Interesting. Is that jealousy, or does he have an issue with my job?*

“It was mostly uneventful,” I told him seriously. “William is one of my easiest clients. He picked me for my looks, not because of my kinks. I go out with him a few times a month, usually for dinner and some other things, then he drops me off.”

“Isn’t it odd that he pays thousands just for dinner?”

I turned, propping my arms up on the side of the tub and resting my chin atop them to stare at Oli. There was just genuine curiosity in the question, so I decided to answer it honestly. “Despite what people think, call girls aren’t just paid to have sex. When I started, most people didn’t even want sex. My clients were usually older men who wanted the company of a woman. And if that company just so happened to be a beautiful, younger woman, all the better. They wanted to be with someone who focused all their attention on them and wasn’t using them for their money. They paid me for my company outside of the bedroom, not in it. Sex is a separate rate. If they wanted, they could add it onto their tab, but it wasn’t a guarantee.”

A faint knock made me turn my attention to the door. Bodhi was standing there, his body ever so slightly tense until he saw Oli sitting in the room with me. *Is that because I make him nervous or something more?*

“What’s up, Bodhi?” I asked him with a smile.

He swallowed, a blush coloring his cheeks. “Sacha is looking for you, Oliver.”

“Why are you looking—“ Vas called out from the hallway, his question cut off when he looked further in and saw us all in

my bathroom.

“Is it going to be a regular thing that you all have meetings with me in a tub?” I lifted an eyebrow and stared Vas down, the man making no attempt to hide the way he looked me over. There weren’t bubbles or anything to hide my body, so I was fully on display.

“With a view like that, I don’t see why not.” Oli leered a bit at me while Bodhi rolled his eyes and settled on the ground by Oli’s feet. Bodhi hit his boyfriend’s leg with the back of his hand, but Oli just ran his hand through Bodhi’s light brown hair, the man’s soft moan the only indicator that Oli might have given it a tug.

“I won’t be complaining.” Vas’ smile was full of promises, and after last night, it made me shudder. Last night wasn’t something I would be forgetting anytime soon. Whispers of their dirty talk echoed in my mind, and, god, when they hadn’t let me shower after sex so I would stay marked with their cum... definitely got a little itchy, but the dirtiness of it was hot as hell. I had fallen asleep between the two brothers not long after we finished. This morning, I had woken up to find them gone, but a hot thermos of coffee was waiting on the bedside table, and that more than made up for their absence. My client rates might be high, but in my off-time, I was apparently cheap as fuck.

“Where the fuck is everyone?” Sacha yelled out from the living room, and I couldn’t contain my laughter at his annoyance.

“I think your boys have an internal alarm when I’m taking a bath, boss,” I called out, humor bubbling out into my voice.

“Boys?! Who the hell are you calling boys?” Oli protested, glaring at me. I winked before turning my eyes to the door

where Sacha was strolling into the room. He came to a stop beside Vas, the two of them fully blocking off the doorway. The possessive Sacha from last night was nowhere to be found; in his place was the cool, put-together man I had met at the restaurant. The contrast between those two sides of him turned me on. *I'll make him crawl for me one day.*

“Everyone in the living room. You too, Nic,” he informed all of us. Although I froze at the chilly tone, everyone else immediately moved to follow his instructions. I contemplated following them but decided to wait until they were all gone, not needing to have Sacha scold me for distracting them when he obviously wanted us out there *now*. Though I didn't miss the second glance Bodhi sent my way before catching up with Oli.

I let out a sigh of annoyance at my bath being cut short. Really, if they were going to keep cutting into my time, I was going to start locking my door. Carefully getting out of the tub, I dried off quickly before throwing on underwear, a large shirt, and Vas' sweatpants. I didn't want to make them wait for me to get dressed up since it seemed like Sacha was all business at the moment.

Padding out into the living room, I settled into the corner of the couch beside Oli and Bodhi. They were all serious as they talked about needing to set up another meeting with Maeve if they didn't make any progress soon. It was irritating that they wouldn't fill me in on everything to do with their job, but even Maeve didn't tell me everything. It was an annoying habit she sometimes displayed in an effort to protect me, or so she said. I'd come to realize that Maeve just did it as a power play against me, something to hold over me while I was under her thumb. As far as the guys went, I thought part of it was they didn't want an outsider to have all their intel. I would

never hold anything against them or use the information to manipulate them, but they barely knew anything about me. They certainly didn't have a picture of who the real Nicholette was, so how could I blame them for being cautious? It was definitely annoying, but I couldn't claim it was unfair. "You could probably look at his place when he's at the tracks next Saturday," I offered, pushing myself into the conversation when I heard them complaining about needing an opportunity to search some of his properties. They all turned to stare at me, but I couldn't read their faces. "What?"

"He usually goes to the track on Wednesdays," Bodhi refuted as he tilted his head.

I hummed, unable to resist playing with them by stalling just the tiniest bit. "Usually, yes. But his favorite horse was moved to a race on Saturday. He complained about it last night at the restaurant."

"Wait... you saw Warren at dinner last night? And you haven't mentioned that until now?" Oli shot me a stern glare, but he'd have to try much harder to rattle me.

I smirked. "If you have a problem with me not saying anything until now, you can glare at your two industrious leaders. I was busy when I got back last night."

Bodhi suspiciously started to cough as Sacha narrowed his eyes at me. "Tell us."

Smoothing out my expression, I explained, "William usually does one-on-one dinners, but he had a last-minute business meeting to attend, so I went with him."

"Which Warren was part of?" Vas leaned back propping one leg on his knee, completely focused on what I was telling them.

I nodded. “Yeah. Warren invests in William’s business, so it was a check-in of sorts. Warren didn’t say anything directly to me besides saying hello.”

“He didn’t corner you again?” Sacha asked evenly.

I shook my head in denial. “He was busy discussing the price points of William’s products and services; he runs a local shipping company. But I made sure to play it up with my date, and he definitely noticed.” Vas’ jaw clenched at that, but I ignored him to focus on Sacha and his all too cool eyes. “A few scathing comments to William about how I was wasted on him, but that’s it. Really, it was almost a regular dinner with the man.”

“Oliver, I want you to look into this William guy. See what you can find and if he is involved with Warren’s other... endeavors.” Oli immediately got up, presumably to grab his laptop and start working.

“Why look into William? He doesn’t really seem the type to be involved in anything shady,” I countered.

Sacha narrowed his eyes, nostrils flaring in annoyance. At this point, I had no clue what was really happening here. He had seemed fine with me going on a date, albeit deliciously possessive afterward, but now there was just something off that no one cared to explain to me. I was starting to get annoyed, but I wasn’t ready for a blow-up yet, so I bit my tongue. “We are looking into anyone with close business relationships with him. Besides, you don’t seem like you’d be a call girl, but here you are.”

“Ironically, you always come off as an asshole whether you’re in a suit or not,” I retorted sweetly.

“You want to be a team player, then act like it,” he snarled, anger flashing in his brown eyes. The others, except Oli who was busy on his computer, watched the exchange, but none of them stuck up for me or questioned Sacha’s choices.

I narrowed my eyes at all of them but didn’t bother to try and get more details from them. *One can hardly be a team player when they’re held back from the team. More bullshit, just like Maeve. Get the dick and leave, Nicholette. Get your emotions under control.* Standing up, I tried to ignore my rising anger and annoyance, stretching my arms above my head until my back cracked loudly enough that it made even Oli glance up at the sound.

“Is there anything else you guys need from me, cause—?”

“Yes,” Sacha interrupted curtly. “You said you had a weekend booked. Is that next weekend?”

I shook my head. “No, that’s near the end of the month. I do need to touch base with them though, make sure that’s still happening, because I haven’t gotten any updates since they booked.”

“You could always cancel,” Oli offered, already typing away on the laptop again.

“Why would I cancel a paid vacation?” I deadpanned, ignoring the tic in Sacha’s jaw and the way Vas’ hand had clenched until his knuckles were white. “Anyway, if you need anything else, just knock. There are some things I need to take care of today.”

“You don’t have anything booked tomorrow?” Vas barked out the question. His tone made Bodhi stare at him in concern before scooting closer to Oli’s side. *I wonder what made him do that.*

I hummed, thinking over my schedule as I started to walk out of the living room. “Luckily no. Nothing ‘til next week actually. William was my only client this week. I don’t have to have more than about five or six dates a month to take care of my general expenses.”

“Then what business do you have to take care of?” Bodhi hazarded. I glanced over my shoulder at him and smirked, enjoying the hint of nervousness that was painted on his face. *What in the world does he think I’m going to say?*

“Consider it trade secrets, Bodhi. I don’t get the details about your job, and you don’t need mine.” The room was so silent you could hear a pin drop. Spinning on my heel, I started to make a beeline for my room when there was a knock at the door. I froze at the sound and turned around, figuring the guys would be expecting someone; unfortunately, they looked just as confused as I was feeling. Sacha’s face was grim as he pulled out a gun and nodded at his brother. Vas stood up, his own gun in a hip holster for easy access, and opened the door. *How did I not notice they were armed? Maeve would kick my ass if she knew I’d missed that. Don’t get distracted by dick... It seems I’ve failed already.*

The open door revealed a guy in a neat uniform that indicated he worked in the apartment building. His name tag read Paul, and he didn’t look like he could be a year younger than sixty.

“Mr. Morozov.” The older man nodded crisply. “I have a letter for a... Miss Nicholette.”

Ice entered my veins at his announcement, and Vas didn’t even glance back at me before taking the offered letter. “Who did you get this from?”

The man blinked slowly at Vas' growl, though he didn't seem concerned. Instead, it appeared more like he was just considering his words carefully, using the sort of thought one might with a cornered animal. "It was left here from the night shift. I was told to deliver it this morning when I got here for my shift."

"I'll need to see the security video," Oli said, standing up and pushing his computer to Bodhi.

"I think I need to ask my supervisor—" The guy's face paled when he looked around the apartment and realized Sacha was still holding his gun at the ready.

"You do that," Oli deadpanned as he stalked out of the apartment and past the guy, "on the way to the security room. That wasn't a question. Hurry up!" The poor guy scrambled to catch up with Oli's determined gait, face growing more flushed with each step.

"Breathe, Nic," Sacha commanded me, his hand clamping down on the back of my neck. My body instinctively followed his instruction, and I gasped for air, making me realize I hadn't been breathing at all since I saw the letter. I tried to brush off his hold, but he simply tightened his grip when I attempted to walk away. My mind let go of my earlier anger and irritation at him when I met his hard stare. There was no irritation there anymore, just an almost blank expression. "Open it."

Vas followed the order, the tear of paper becoming background noise as I kept my gaze locked on Sacha. I let him center me, needing his hard hold and those empty eyes to try and calm the emotional turmoil building inside of me. *How has this guy already found me after the stunt at my apartment?*

"It's just a picture," Vas announced. "Some guy in a suit."

My head whipped around at that, breaking Sacha's grip. My eyes zeroed in on the picture Vas was holding up. "Let me see that."

I stalked over to Vas and ripped the picture out of his hand. The man's face gave me flashbacks to the suit I had killed recently. This was him. And how he looked when I walked away was exactly how he looked in the picture. I studied his features closely, realizing that he appeared newly dead, showing none of the stiffness that would've come with being found hours later. *Oh, this is really fucking bad.*

"What is it?" Bodhi asked gently. The two alpha men in the room studied me, silently demanding answers. "Do you know who that is?"

I swallowed hard. "I don't know his name, but yes, I know him."

"There is something you aren't telling us," Sacha stated coldly, fingers running along the back of the couch as he walked slowly toward me.

"There are plenty of things I'm not telling you," I snapped. "Same could be said for you guys. I don't owe you shit." Panic and anger were making me lash out, and Sacha was the perfect target. *Run ourselves along our edges indeed.* He could take anything I dished out, and I wanted him to make me bleed so I could feel in control right now.

He stalked closer to me, refusing to rise to the bait. "Nicholette."

"Don't," I almost whispered, my voice cracking and a hand held out to stop him from getting too close. "I don't care. I've got too much shit to do to deal with this right now."

“We will help you find them,” Sacha told me softly, respecting my silent plea for him to give me some space.

Instead of responding, I forced myself to walk to my bedroom, picture in hand, and kept it together until I secured myself inside. I propped my back against the door, staring down at the picture in my hand. *How did they get this picture? I was mad that night, yes, but I wasn't sloppy. How did they get so close to me?*

I almost messaged Maeve, to see if it was her, but I knew it wouldn't be. *This isn't how she would shove it in my face.* I chewed my bottom lip. Maeve would rather deliver this in person when she needed something from me, not slowly torturing me through the mail, one picture at a time. She could play games with the best, but she didn't bother with cat and mouse unless it came to husbands.

Though maybe that wasn't strictly true... Sacha and Vas could be assholes, but even in the short amount of time I'd known them, they had reasons for doing what they did. Neither played games, which made me wonder if Maeve was the reason they were being so tight lipped about their job with Warren. I let out a sigh, not having it in me to try and dive into one of Maeve's complicated games. *I'll leave these thoughts for later.*

There is no way this could get worse.

A gush down my leg told me that I was really fucking wrong. *Guess the cramps weren't from rough sex.* I cursed as I pressed my head against the wall. Of course, my motherfucking period would hit right now on top of everything else.

Just great.

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Vas

Thursday

“**S**he ever come out of her room?” I asked as I opened the door to the apartment. Bodhi was sitting in the living room, alone, on his phone, so I supposed the answer should have been obvious. I wasn’t sure if Bodhi would still be here, alone in the apartment with her, if she had come out to stay near him. The fact that he had stayed despite that being the possibility told me that he was *very* interested in her.

He looked up at me with a nervous expression. “She had food delivered. She came out to pay for it, but other than that, she’s stayed in her room.”

My eyes narrowed thoughtfully. Emotional reactions didn’t really seem like Nic... of course, it was possible I didn’t know her as well as I thought I did, but my gut reactions weren’t usually wrong. Her reaction as she recalled the birthday present I got her made me think that Nic needed special or extreme things to pull an emotional response from her. *What could have happened with just Bodhi here?* I almost wanted to push and ask if he had tried to talk to her, but I knew what the answer would be. Bodhi’s history with women was

complicated to say the least. His interest in Nic was clear to those who knew him, and after Ava, I hadn't thought that would happen again. *But that doesn't mean that he would approach her on his own.*

"I did knock on the door and asked if she needed anything," Bodhi offered in a hushed voice. "But she just said she was fine. Something about needing a nap after last night." A smirk filled my face, memories of last night flashing through my mind. Her choking on my dick, the sight of her wet pussy as she crawled to my room, and her cries as Sacha and I fucked her together. I cleared my throat, adjusting myself in my pants as Bodhi chuckled. "It must have been a good night."

"It was," I agreed smoothly, not bothering to hide my arousal from just recalling the details. *I should check on her though. I want to make sure she is okay after that letter came today.* I had started toward her room when Bodhi softly called my name.

"Oliver wants to sleep with her, together." I stopped and looked over my shoulder at him, watching conflicting emotions flicker across his face—uncertainty and lust, in equal measure.

"What do you want?" I kept my tone neutral, turning to face him. I wanted to read his body language as he thought over my question. Bodhi wasn't always the best at actually voicing his needs; but his face and his body had a way of betraying what he might not know how to say.

"I want her. But I don't know—" he whispered roughly. "I'm attracted to her, but I just don't know if I can..."

"Oliver knows you, Bodhi. And if you give Nic clear limits, she'll respect them and not ask questions. A benefit of

her profession.” I considered him a moment, the way his fingers fidgeted with his phone. “You know, if you spent some time with her, one on one, and didn’t avoid being in the room with her, you’d get to know her first. That could help you make your decision.”

Bodhi didn’t respond to my suggestion; he just bit his bottom lip before standing up. “I should see if Oliver needs help looking up info on William or the race on Saturday.”

“Did he ever get back to you about the security footage yet?” I asked as he headed toward the door.

Bodhi nodded as he opened it. “Yeah. Looks like someone tampered with the footage. There’s nothing on there for us to use.”

“Fuck,” I murmured, letting him run out of the apartment to find his boyfriend. I hoped he got comfortable around Nic soon. He always found a way to avoid being alone with her, which, given his past, I understood. Bodhi didn’t have a good history with women, and he was fighting his interest in Nic every step of the way.

I shook my head; there was no way I was going to figure out their emotional bullshit when I had my hands full. This job was my main focus, not whatever everyone else had going on. This morning’s news about William might have been the break we were looking for. We knew that Warren was involved in moving the people, but we couldn’t figure out how. On the surface, he had none of his own connections or businesses that would easily point to his method of transportation. Now, with the knowledge that he had an associate whose entire business was transport, well, the connection was too on the nose to dismiss.

Not long after Nic had run away to hide in her room, we found more of a connection between them than we originally thought—emails and messages between them going back for months. Oliver was working on getting phone and bank records now, but that would take a bit more time. Currently, he was off grid, working on hacking into that for us. Sacha was also busy, meeting with a few friends of his to see what he could find out about William from some legitimate channels.

All these thoughts were turning over in my mind as I slowly walked over to Nicholette's room. I knocked twice before opening the door, giving her just enough warning that I could say I tried. *I want to know what's going on with her.*

“Well, come right in,” Nicholette drawled, not moving from her curled-up position on the bed. She had the comforter wrapped around her, and the only part of her I could see was the bit of her black hair that wasn't quite tucked under the covers.

“Nic, I just wanted to check on you.”

She laughed derisively at that. “The asshole of the group wants to check on me.”

I cocked an eyebrow at her attitude and propped myself up against the door frame. “Sacha is the asshole of this group, not me.”

“I think it's fair to say both of you are assholes.”

“You didn't seem to mind last night,” I told her with a snort.

“Good dick is good dick... even when it's attached to an asshole.” Nic chuckled a bit as she pulled her covers down enough so she could turn and look at me. She looked tired and paler than usual, but given the new letter from her stalker, I

wasn't too surprised at that. As tough as she was, it had to be disconcerting to know that someone was watching your every move. After we got more info on William, we were going to look into the security footage Oliver got a hold of. "What are you doing here?"

"You've barely been out of your room all day. I wanted to check in on you. Sacha and I didn't hurt you last night, did we?"

Nic's face softened a bit at that, and she shook her head, "Not any more than I wanted to be hurt. Just the picture and my fucking period started today. I ruined my comfy sweats."

I lifted an eyebrow. "You mean *my* sweats you stole when you got here?" The ones I had originally given her were destroyed during the break-in, and she had wasted no time stealing a new pair for herself—not that I minded. Seeing her in my clothes was definitely an added bonus, especially since I was sharing her with my brother. It was nice to know that along with the oil I'd given her, she still liked to wear something else that marked her as mine.

"You gave them to me," she countered. "I merely kept them, so now they're mine."

I laughed and looked around, finding the sweats she was talking about balled up on the floor. Not saying a word, I snagged them and walked out. Taking them to the laundry room, I sprayed it down with stain remover before tossing it into the washer to soak in cold water. *Not her most pressing issue at the moment, but that's at least something that I can try to fix for her.* Making a quick stop in my room, I grabbed another pair of sweats before going back to Nic's bedroom. She silently watched me walk back in, and I tossed the new sweats at her.

“Here.” She sat up, looking at the sweats then back at me, an uncertain crinkle in her nose that I’d never seen before. It was... cute. “It won’t bite you.”

“I don’t understand you.” She sounded lost, and she still hadn’t touched the offered replacement. “And I’m too tired to figure shit out right now.”

“Fine by me,” I told her, ignoring the ache in my heart at her hollow tone. Her tone made me want to get into her head and figure out what made her sound that way. But I knew that prying wouldn’t get me anywhere, and unlike my brother, I could be patient if it got me what I wanted. I kicked off my shoes before slipping out of my shirt and pants, leaving only my boxers on. Without saying anything else, I climbed onto the bed behind her, pulling her against me.

“I didn’t say you could lay with me,” she grumbled, but she didn’t fight my hold on her. In fact, she nestled up against me, the comforter between us. I didn’t try to move it out of the way, letting her have that small barrier between us for now.

“We don’t have to figure everything out right now, Nic.”

She didn’t respond for a moment, and when she did, I could barely hear her, even being right beside her. “We have to remember there isn’t anything to figure out. This is all temporary until we all go our separate ways. I have my job, and you guys have yours.”

“That doesn’t mean this couldn’t work,” I retorted gently, running a hand down her covered leg. My mind froze at the implied offer that had slipped out. *I want more?* Complicated was an understatement for this situation, but the more I was around her, the more I knew I couldn’t stand watching her walk away. I wanted to possess every inch of her, and if sharing her with my brothers, by blood and otherwise, was

what it took to keep her, I would. Her job... I hadn't thought that far, and right now I wasn't going to think about it.

"No emotions, Vas. First rule of the business," she reminded gently, but her cool tone made me freeze. Her rejection was not something I saw coming. "Besides, no one wants to be with a woman like me. Not for long anyway... The novelty tends to wear off."

I couldn't think of a response, but it wouldn't have mattered anyway. Between one second and the next, she passed out. I could hear her light snores from underneath the comforter, and I squeezed her closer as a sense of rightness filled me. She was mine; I knew it with a gut feeling that I couldn't shake off. I'd share her with the others, but I would *always* think of her as mine, especially in these moments alone.

Nic shifted slightly, turning over so her face was tucked under my chin, her lips against my neck. She pulled a hand out and placed it on my chest, right over my heart.

"I'm not letting you go without a fight, Nic. Even if the person I'm fighting is you." I placed a soft kiss on the top of her head, hoping that she'd fight—it would be half the fun in making her stay.

"FOOD?"

I instantly jolted awake at Nic's question, looking over to find her right beside me, legs entangled with mine. Furrowing my brow, I realized that I had fallen asleep beside her and she had thrown some of the covers over me at some point. I was

still in only my boxers and Nic in a large t-shirt and underwear.

“Vas?” She poked my side sharply, drawing my focus back to her. “Food? And by food, I mean we can order something ‘cause I really don’t cook.”

“We can get Sacha to make something because I don’t cook either,” I replied roughly, pulling her flush against me. “Or did you think he would fuck you without even making you dinner?”

“Most of the time the dinner comes before the dick,” she said, giving me an amused half smile. I was just glad she wasn’t as upset anymore. “Think we can get dinner without moving from bed? My uterus hates me.”

I chuckled and leaned over to snag one of my shoes then threw it at the door. It wasn’t long before I heard cursing and a door being thrown open. Nic chuckled beside me, turning her face into my chest as I waited for the annoyed footsteps to get closer, expecting my name to be yelled with a few fucks thrown in. Instead, there was a soft knock before Bodhi opened the door. In the background, I could hear my brother yelling in Russian, threats about throwing my damn boots back at me.

Bodhi tried and failed to keep a straight face as he asked, “You needed something?”

“Food?” Nic gave Bodhi a pleading pout as she sat up, the expression broken by a flinch at the movement.

He instantly zoned in on the hint of pain. “Are you okay?” Bodhi might be a little anxious about spending time with her, but he would never ignore someone in need.

Nic gave Bodhi a reassuring smile. “Cramps. I’m gonna take a hot shower and see if it helps. Then I’ll be out.” She slipped out of bed and padded to the bathroom, shutting the door behind her. The entire time, Bodhi watched her closely. The moment she was gone, without looking back at me, he left. Getting out of bed, I quickly dressed then picked up the sweats I had offered her, placing them on the bed. When I turned to leave, Bodhi was walking back into the room. He tossed a bottle of water and a bottle of aspirin on top of the sweats before leaving again without a word.

I followed him out and made a quick detour to move the other sweats into the dryer. But instead, I found the pants neatly folded on top of the dryer, no stain on them. I had a gut feeling Bodhi had done that for me while we were asleep, but there was no way I would call him out on it. I didn’t want to make him even more uncomfortable around Nic than he was already, so I grabbed them and took them to Nic’s room, placing them on the dresser. Just as I shut her door, the shower turned off.

When I entered the kitchen a minute later, Sacha shot me an annoyed glare from where he stood by the stove, already cooking. “How many times have I told you about the shoes?”

“It’s the easiest way to get your attention when I don’t want to get out of bed.” I shrugged at him, laughing when he threw a nearby orange at my head. I caught it and started to peel it so I could eat something. *The joy of irritating my older brother never got old.* Bodhi stood on the other side of the island, taking a step further away from the yelling that was potentially about to happen. “What are you making for dinner?”

“You’re making dinner? I’m definitely staying then.” Oliver popped into the kitchen with the rest of us. He walked up behind Bodhi and wrapped his arms around the man, resting his chin on Bodhi’s shoulder. Bodhi settled back into the embrace, the slight tension from today fading away now that Oliver was back with him. It reminded me of broaching the idea of more with Nic before she passed out, and I shifted a bit as an unfamiliar sense of loneliness hit me. That closeness that they had together, I wanted that for myself.

“You’d be staying anyway,” Sacha replied dryly. “Your apartment is still taped off. I wonder why they haven’t released it yet though. It’s just a case of burglary and destruction of property, not a murder scene.”

“No idea,” Oliver replied. “Where’s Nic?”

“Here,” she answered just as I popped a second section of the orange into my mouth. She walked up to stand beside me in sweats and a black cami. “Did someone say something about food? I’m starving.”

“Wings?” Oliver suggested hopefully, but Nic wrinkled her nose at his suggestion.

“I’m making something, so you guys stop ordering shitty fast food,” Sacha declared, waving his hands to shoo us from the kitchen. “Now get the fuck out so I can do it without you guys fucking it up.”

“I’m definitely in the fuck-it-up category here,” Nic joked. She turned to leave, but Sacha called her name, making her freeze.

I turned her around and pushed her toward my brother as the rest of us left the kitchen, making ourselves at home on the couches. Oliver and Bodhi started talking about what movie or

show to watch while we waited, and I scrolled through emails on my phone. It wasn't long before Nic joined us, her lips a bit swollen, and she looked a bit more relaxed. She sat down on the other end of the couch, curling up in a ball as she pulled out her phone and started swiping at the screen. A frown marred her face for a moment before it smoothed out. *Weird.*

It wasn't too long before Sacha called out he had made pasta. Nic moved faster than I thought was physically possible; I think I had managed to get to the kitchen by the time she was leaving with a huge bowl piled high with spaghetti. Following behind her, Sacha had a more reasonable bowl in one hand, two glasses of wine in the other.

We all settled on the couches, eating our food with single-minded focus. The silence was only broken when Nic stood up maybe five minutes later and came back with a second bowl. Oliver looked at her in shock, and without missing a beat, Bodhi shook his head.

“Don't say it, Oliver,” his boyfriend tried to warn him.

“I just don't see—“

“Listen to your boyfriend, Oli, or I'll stab you with this fucking fork,” Nic threatened, the sweet tone of her voice slightly muffled by another forkful of noodles. Oliver stared at her for a beat, opened his mouth, and promptly closed it again when Bodhi hit his arm. “You're a smart man, Bodhi.”

“Unlike Oliver, I grew up around women.” Bodhi didn't smile as he met Nic's gaze. “I learned early.”

We all stilled at his comment, knowing his history, and Nic looked up slowly to stare at him, something in his tone alerting making her body tense. Instead of commenting right away, she

ate slowly until she finished up her food and set the bowl on the coffee table.

“Yeah, some mothers are just bitches,” she finally said, sounding far away. “Even when you trade them in, you don’t get a better model. Anyway, did you guys pick a movie or show yet? I have a few ideas.”

“Fuck no,” Oliver protested at the wicked smile growing on Nic’s face. “Absolutely not! You’re going to choose some horror movie and then make fun of my reactions. No way.”

“Oooh, the big scary killer is afraid of horror movies?! The opportunity to tease you is too priceless to pass up. *So* many jokes to make!” Nic rubbed her hands together, a gleeful brightness lighting up her eyes in a way I’d never seen before.

“I think we should go with Nic’s pick,” Bodhi said softly, with a small twitch of his lips. Oliver’s jaw dropped before he whipped his head around to face his boyfriend.

“You traitor!” Oliver yelled out dramatically, clutching his chest, and I laughed despite myself.

“Always a diva, Oli,” Nic sang out as she leaned forward and snagged the remote.

“What are we watching?” Sacha interrupted their banter, taking a sip of his wine.

“*Hannibal*.” She grinned at all of us, settling back into the couch. “Mads Mikkelsen is a god among men.”



Nicholette

Next Saturday

It had been a long week after I told the guys that Warren's schedule had changed. They were gone at odd hours of the day and sometimes gone for more than a day at a time. I still wasn't brought into the loop of things by them or Maeve, but by now I had stopped caring, just wanting the job to be over with. Or at least I wanted to be back in my own apartment. I missed having my own space without the men running around. I'd been independent far too long to keep this up, and I hated feeling like I didn't belong. *How could I when I'm constantly kept on the sidelines?*

It wasn't that I didn't like having them around; in fact, I was starting to feel comfortable around them, and that was part of the problem. They all put up with my mood swings during my period. Sacha cooked so well that if he demanded I suck him off while he cooked, I would have. Vas got deliciously jealous when I talked about my clients, and we had messed around a bit over the past week, but not much since they were so busy. Oli, for his part, seemed to be gone a ton, but when he was here, he always put up with my scary movies or shows,

with plenty of commentary of course. Bodhi... well, he was the one person I couldn't figure out. If we were alone in the apartment together, he kept his distance. He would talk to me, but not for long. Every time I entered a room, he would find a reason to leave soon after unless someone else showed up. He seemed interested but hesitant, which only made me want to know more.

There were no developments on the stalker front. They hadn't been able to find a trace of anyone on the security footage. Oli was trying to mess with it to see if it had been tampered with, but he hadn't said anything to me. I was either being kept out of the loop on that too, which would majorly piss me the fuck off, or he hadn't found anything. It was frustrating, but I honestly wasn't surprised. The photo didn't have any fingerprints; it was a Polaroid like all the others I had received. *A whole lot of fucking nothing.* They were frustrated with not being able to find anything for me, I could see it on their faces, but the fact that they cared enough to even try was more than I expected regardless of their declaration to help me. I'd learned a long time ago to only rely on myself, but they seemed hellbent on testing that.

Of course, they didn't know I killed some of those Johns myself, but it wasn't my fault if they jumped to conclusions. If they were keeping shit to themselves, turnabout was fair play. I mean, I had told them I'd killed people, but I think Oli was the only one who really believed me. It was better to let them draw their own conclusions; the truth would hit them later. Besides, it wasn't like the stalker was threatening to reveal me to the police. I think the pictures were more about showing they knew all about my extracurricular activities rather than any other scheme. So, it wasn't likely to hurt me that the guys were being too pigheaded to take my honesty at face value.

“Nicholette, did you hear anything I said?” Sacha was annoyed *again*, a state he frequently seemed to reach when he was trying to boss me around.

I blinked, refocusing on the man beside me with a smirk. “Not a word, boss.”

Across from me, Oli bit his lip, trying and failing to hold in his laughter. Beside him, Bodhi just shook his head, but I could tell he was amused. Sacha, however, wasn’t pleased. He leaned toward me, grabbing my thigh in a punishing grip to force me to focus on him.

“You’re sitting this out, and you’re going to help Bodhi coordinate things in the warehouse.” He tightened his vice-like grip on my thigh, making me gasp at the pain. “Is that clear enough?”

“Yes,” I replied breathlessly, not hiding how that spike of pain had turned me on. Sacha’s brown eyes darkened at my tone, flicking down to look at my lips before loosening his hold. Though he didn’t remove his hand from my body, which likely meant he was feeling some kind of reaction too.

“Eat. It’s going to be a long day, and you’re going to have to pay attention.”

I licked my lip and glanced at Bodhi to find him studiously contemplating his plate. I expected him to protest us being thrown together, but it seemed he was the go-with-the-flow one out of our cozy group of crazies.

“What is the plan, anyway? Do I get to know that much since I’m helping out?” I asked tauntingly as I slowly took a bite of my toast.

“I’m going to be at the horse race,” Sacha answered slowly, and I got the feeling he had already explained this

when my thoughts were wandering. “Vas is already staking out his apartment. Oli is breaking into his place to see if he can find any information that will be useful.”

I tilted my head. “But I thought breaking into places and stuff was Bodhi’s thing?”

“It is,” Bodhi answered. I looked over to find him staring at me. “But this time we need information from his computer, which is Oliver’s area of expertise. So, I’ll walk him through anything if he gets stuck, but we’re mainly going to keep an ear out on the police scanners and some cameras Oliver set up as extra back up.”

I finished off my toast as I mulled over Bodhi’s summary. There were worse ways I’d spent my days. “Works for me. When do we leave?”

“As soon as we’re done eating,” Sacha replied dryly. “So I suggest you hurry up.”

Shrugging, I dug in, not willing to snark back when it came to food. His cooking was too good, and I’d spent too many days going hungry to chance him trying to take it away. Taking the hungry girl off the streets did not fix the ingrained urge to take advantage of any and all opportunities to eat. Sacha continued to eat his food while Bodhi and Oli started talking on the other side of the table. A slight pressure on my thigh caught my attention, and I looked down to where Sacha still had a possessive hand on my thigh. He was gently rubbing his thumb along the inside of my leg, the gesture feeling strangely intimate. Unlike the tight grip that he must’ve known would turn me on, there was something softer about this touch, which wasn’t something I would’ve expected. From Vas, sure, but we had more of a history between us. What did it mean

that Sacha was doing this now? He had agreed with me that this would all just be a momentary thing.

These guys were doing a mindfuck on me, and I needed to get a grip on myself before I found myself tripping into the same bullshit Maeve had given me—just enough affection to string me along and keep me coming back but never enough to make our connection feel truly two-sided. Part of me argued that they were different, but past experience won out, reminding me that no one stayed. Gathering my determination, I polished off my food and stood up.

“I’m going to get dressed so we can go,” I threw over my shoulder as I hurried out of the dining room. I had just gotten to my door when I heard footsteps behind me, but it wasn’t Sacha like I expected it to be. When I glanced back, it was Oli. “What’s—”

He cut off my question by pushing me into my room and kicking the door shut behind him. I looked up at him in confusion, but he didn’t let me say anything. Grabbing one of my hands, he pulled me close and kissed me. It wasn’t a gentle kiss, his teeth nipping at my bottom lip before his tongue flicked over it to soothe the sting. Moaning into it, I let him take the lead, tilting my head and grabbing his hips to press myself against him as I fell into the kiss. He tasted like coffee and syrup from breakfast.

He broke the kiss, pulling away with a dark chuckle when I tried to follow his lips. “We haven’t spent any time together since the shower.”

“Work keeps us busy.”

“Sacha and Vas have been keeping you occupied,” he countered in a light tone. There was no jealousy in his hazel eyes, just excitement.

“You excited for tonight?” I asked, a grin filling my face.

He gave me a lazy smile. “Yes. It’s been a while since I’ve gotten to break into a target’s house. Bodhi does it so well, and it usually goes smoother with just one person there.”

I hummed slightly and pulled away to grab a change of clothes, searching until I found a pair of black leggings and an oversized navy-blue sweater.

“You and Bodhi will be looking at some stuff on computers; everything is already set up at the place. He knows the passwords to log in,” Oli informed me as he sat on the edge of my bed.

“Sounds good,” I told him as I pulled off my pajamas, tossing them onto the bed beside him then slipping into my clothes. “Is Bodhi going to be okay with that?”

Oli didn’t respond, and when I looked over, he was watching me with a focused gaze. Walking over to him, I pushed his legs apart to stand between his thighs, making him look up at me. “Oli.”

“Yes?” His voice was rough enough that he cleared his throat at the sound.

I looped my arms around his neck, leaning in close. “Is Bodhi going to be okay being alone with me? I haven’t missed that he pretty much avoids more than a minute of being alone with me.” “Bodhi likes you, but women aren’t usually his preference. I think he’s not sure how to deal with that fact. He didn’t expect to like you, and change can be difficult for him to handle sometimes. Especially when it involves a woman. Ava was the last woman he was with, and it didn’t end well for any of us.”

“You mentioned her before. What happened?” I asked, curiosity getting the best of me.

Oli gave me a crooked smile, but his eyes became guarded, and I knew he wouldn't be answering my question. He smacked my ass and stood up, forcing me to take a step back. “After the job tonight, you're mine. I'm claiming a night with you. You have a promise to live up to.”

“You want me to top you?” I purred. “Or did you want to ride the adrenaline and top me tonight?”

Bright laughter bubbled from him, and he pressed a quick, hard kiss to my lips. “Let's see how tonight goes, and I'll let you know when I come claim you.”

“Deal,” I promised him.

He walked toward the door and pulled it open, gesturing for me to lead the way. I shook my head at him and followed him out of the room. Luckily, I had put on deodorant and brushed my teeth when I got up this morning, so I was ready to go. I hadn't had a date all week, so I'd spent all my free time at the apartment. With a call to Allen, I had found out they would be releasing our apartment in a few weeks, something about a backup with forensics and covering their asses. Annoying but believable.

Bodhi was by the door, talking with Sacha, and both of them looked over as Oli and I approached. I slipped into one of my flats by the door. “Ready.”

“You're going to behave,” Sacha ordered, and I looked over at Oli.

“You heard boss man, Oli. Behave.”

“I always behave!” Oli countered.

Bodhi chuckled as I turned to give Sacha a wide-eyed innocent look, or as innocent as a murderous call girl could ever get. “I tried to help.”

“I swear to god, I’m being tested with all of you. Get out.”

“Yes, sir!” I winked at him as Bodhi opened the door.

“I’m so whipping your ass, Nic,” Sacha promised darkly as I passed him.

I bit my lip, eager for my time with Oli but still feeling that prick of hunger that Sacha had awoken earlier. “I sure hope so.”

“Let’s go before you add more punishments for yourself,” Bodhi suggested softly.

Letting out an exaggerated sigh, I looped an arm through his, figuring I might as well dive right into this. Maybe if I started making contact with him, little by little, I’d wear him down. Plus, he’d probably be much more comfortable with the touch since the others were still around us. “You’re right. I wouldn’t want to wear out the old man’s arm or anything. So embarrassing if he can’t keep up with a young twenty-two-year-old.”

Bodhi choked on air at my joke while Oli lost it. I pulled Bodhi away as Sacha growled at me. “You’re going to pay for that, my little whore.”

I threw back my head, laughing with abandon. Waving over my shoulder at them, Bodhi and I left. As soon as we were outside, a cold breeze whipped my loose hair around us, and I couldn’t help but shiver.

“Shit, sorry. If I had known it was this windy, I would have thrown it up,” I apologized to Bodhi since the man was still trying to brush strands of my hair off his face.

He smiled a bit, brushing his long bangs out of his eyes. “You’re fine. My car is a block or two over.”

“I’ll be fine that far,” I told him gamely. It wasn’t something I wanted to revisit, but I’d spent nights far windier and colder than this out on the street, waiting for customers. *Thank god that’s in the past now.* I kept my arm looped through his, internally grateful that he hadn’t pulled away once we stepped outside. His body heat would keep me warm enough until we reached his car, and unless he signaled that he wanted his personal space back, I wasn’t letting go.

His car ended up being a white Toyota Corolla. It was obviously older, but it was clean and started up easily when he turned the key. Buckling up, we drove over to the warehouse in silence. It wasn’t exactly uncomfortable, but it *was* filled with a bit of obvious tension. By the time he parked near the warehouse, I couldn’t take the quiet anymore.

“Bodhi.” I turned to look at him right after he put the car in park. “I know you’ve been avoiding being alone with me besides when we talked at my and Oli’s apartment.” His body froze at my statement, but he didn’t protest. “Oli told me you’re not usually comfortable around women. No details or anything, but I just want to remind you that if I ever make you feel uncomfortable, for any reason, just let me know, okay? Those aren’t just words to me. SSC. Safe, sane, and consensual doesn’t just apply in the bedroom. I respect your boundaries, regardless of what they are.”

Bodhi licked his lips and gave me a slight nod before opening his door, and I waited until he couldn’t see me anymore before I let out a sigh. I wished I could see more of him, have him open up to me, so I knew what was going on in

that mind of his. I had a feeling that there was a lot more than met the eye.

Still waters run deep, and I wanted to know what swam in those depths.

I wanted to be part of it.

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Bodhi

Saturday

I wasn't sure what to make of Nicholette. Nic. She came in here like a hurricane, sweeping into our team and leaving chaos in her wake. But in her chaos, we seemed to be finding our place. She fit in with us, able to be serious when it came to her job then joking right along with Oliver.

Nic was such a contrast to Ava, the last woman who had affected us all like this. She had been so innocent, maybe naive, and the longer she was with us, the less she laughed. That was the one thing I remembered about her, that laughter fading until I couldn't really recall the sound anymore. But with Nic, we didn't run that risk, and that scared me almost as much. It would be dangerous to let her in, because when she left, it would hurt so much more. I had a feeling that she could, and would, take all of us as we were, and to have that acceptance and then lose it... Well, that wasn't something I was really sure I'd be able to survive.

"Bodhi?" Nic's voice pulled me back to reality. Her blue-green eyes were uncertain as she searched my face. "You good? I called your name a few times."

“Yeah, yeah.” I rubbed a hand over my face and attempted a reassuring smile that probably came out as a grimace. “Sorry, just lost in my thoughts.”

She nodded but didn’t push for me to explain. Instead, she gestured at the computers in front of us. “Any updates?”

“No.” I shook my head and let out a sigh. “No news is good news at this point. Oliver will probably download any info he finds onto a drive to bring back here. No digital trail back to us. And the security at the tracks shows Warren still there, and Sacha is with his contacts not far away.”

“Sacha gets the pretty comfy jobs,” she commented lightly, but I didn’t miss the way her gaze lingered on him. “What about Vas?”

“He messaged a few minutes ago saying it’s all clear on his end too.”

“This seems pretty boring,” Nic sighed as she flopped back on the couch, her feet brushing my thighs as she looked over at Oli’s play area. My body didn’t reactively recoil from that gentle touch, so I kept myself perfectly still, waiting to see if she touched me more. Part of me wanted her to just as much as the other half was scared as fuck that she would. I was never sure what else to call his torture area, and honestly, he did more things there for fun than business per se.

“It’s definitely not the fun part of the job,” I agreed ruefully. “But it’s important.”

“I can see that,” she agreed after a beat of silence. She settled back and closed her eyes, though I could tell she wasn’t asleep. A line of tension remained in her body. “I can feel you watching me.”

“Can I ask you something?” The question slipped out before I could stop myself.

Her eyes opened, and she smiled. “Sure.”

“Why are you a call girl?” I swallowed as her bright eyes clouded over a bit. “Not that there’s anything bad about it. I just meant... God, I suck at this. I mean, why are you a call girl if you were assaulted when you were a prostitute?” Her expression was serious as she sat up, and when she remained silent, my foot bounced, trying to get my nervous energy out. “You don’t have to answer that—“

“I don’t have a lot of options,” she finally answered, her soft voice sounding far away. “I got kicked out of my home at seventeen, two months before graduation. I couldn’t find any nearby place to stay so that I could finish out school.” She let out a derisive laugh. “It was a small town, so everyone knew everyone else’s business. But needless to say, I don’t even have a high school diploma. What else could I do? With what money would I finish school?”

“I could finish school now, I suppose, but I don’t see the point at the moment.” She shrugged lightly, avoiding my stare. “I’m not the first or last prostitute that will be hurt by a john; you can almost call it a professional hazard. Don’t get me wrong, it was horrible. Because of that guy, I have some limits now that I didn’t have before. Maybe he’s why I like rougher kinks, gives me a turn to go through something similar and get my power back. I can use a safe word, and the person I’m with actually stops. The ultimate power. How fucked up is that?”

“I don’t think that’s fucked up,” I whispered, her words hitting a bit too close to home. She focused on me at that, and I bit my lip. *I guess if she could open up, I can too.* “My mom was a drug addict, so I was mostly raised by my sister.

Protected by her, really. She was always so much stronger than me.”

Nic slowly scooted closer to me, though she carefully left a foot of space between us. “Was?”

Tears pricked my eyes. “She died while protecting me from our mom. Mom was horribly violent when she was high or looking for her next fix. I think she would have been even worse than anything I ever witnessed, but my sister protected me as much as she could, so I never had to find out. One day, I heard her screaming for me to run, and I didn’t hesitate to hide. But unlike all the other times, she never came back to tell me it was safe to come home.”

“Bodhi—” Nic breathed, gently placing an almost trembling hand on my shoulder. “I’m so sorry.”

“Thanks. It’s been years, but some days it seems like it just happened.”

“Did you live on the streets?”

I shook my head and gave her a rueful smile. “No. Police found me and put me with my aunt. She was just as bad or worse than my mom, in different ways.”

“My dad knocked me around, and I always made sure to draw his attention, so he didn’t hurt my little brother,” Nic offered after processing what I had told her. “My mom knew it was happening and never intervened. At first, I thought he was hitting her, but it was just me. What still stings is the thought that she let my pain buy her own safety. I think she knew that if she stepped in, he’d hurt her too, but she didn’t think saving me was worth it.”

I reached up and placed my shaky hand over her own, squeezing it slightly. A shared experience I would never wish

on anyone was helping me really see the fragile woman behind the badass, temperamental Nic she put on for everyone else. I felt the walls around me crack a little, but I wasn't ready to focus on it.

"I'm glad you made it through all of that," she whispered.

"Today, I am too. I'm happy to be here, with you. I'm glad you survived it too."

The moment between us felt heavy with something, maybe the weight of our shared histories, and I wasn't sure what was going to happen next. Part of me felt like I was balancing on the edge of something, and I had to decide whether to let myself fall or jump back. Before I could make up my mind, my phone buzzed, and I knew I couldn't ignore that while on the job. That could be the difference between life or death. Vas had sent a text saying Oliver was out and everything seemed to be good to go. I shot a message off to Sacha and let him know, then checked in with Oliver, finding out that he was meeting up with the brothers to compare notes.

I cleared my throat, not sure how to recapture the moment or whether I even wanted to. "They finished."

"Good," Nic answered. A hand on my face lightly pushed me to turn and stare at Nic, the faint pressure making it clear that I could choose to stop the motion if I wanted. "Bodhi?"

"Yes?"

"May I kiss you?" Her tone was still gentle, almost like she was afraid she would scare me off. And maybe she would. I had no idea how this would all work out, but I did know that my gut was nudging me toward only one choice.

My throat was so thick I was afraid I would fuck up trying to answer her with words, so I gave a sharp nod, the only

signal she needed. Moving slowly, she held my gaze as she leaned forward and brushed her lips against mine, once, twice, three times. These barely perceptible butterfly kisses shook me to my core. I groaned at her teasing, and I could feel her smile against my mouth.

Tilting my head, I threaded my hands into her long hair and deepened the kiss. Our tongues slid sensuously against each other as we made out like teenagers. I couldn't believe I was doing this. All the fear had disappeared when she asked to kiss me. Then when her lips brushed mine... *butterflies*. Butterflies I hadn't experienced since the first time Oliver and I kissed. Her hands came up to cradle my face, those teasing fingers playing with my soft beard. We broke apart, our foreheads pressed together as we caught our breaths.

"I didn't think you even liked me, regardless of what Oli said," she commented with a rueful note in her voice.

A chuckle escaped me as I shook my head. "I did, I *do*. I'm just... not good around women. They make me nervous."

"Are you still nervous, Bodhi?" Her eyes searched my face, worry creasing her brow. I didn't want her to always look at me like that, like I had 'handle with care' stamped across my forehead, but I also knew that I would only hurt myself and her if I lied. If she stuck around, maybe one day I could firmly say no to that question, but for today, I was barely holding my shit together.

I gulped. "Yes, but how much I want you is more powerful than my building anxiety."

"Any time you want to stop or I do something that's not okay, you'll tell me," she ordered, the tone allowing no argument. I nodded in agreement, her and Vas' reassurance from before coming back to me at Nic's command. It was a

relief that she'd expressed more than once that she was willing to do what I wanted or needed in order to feel comfortable. I wasn't used to that kind of consideration, and it was helping to put me a little more at ease. "Good."

She slanted her mouth over mine again, taking control and kissing me until I was nearly dizzy from the lack of oxygen, or maybe it was just the power her kisses had over me. Every brush of her lips and touch of her skin against mine made my nerves calm, peace settling over me. Oliver was the only one who was able to do that for me; not even Ava had been able to calm me like this. But Nic wasn't like anyone I had ever met—so unapologetically herself and just present in each moment as they came. If I could develop feelings for someone other than Oliver, it would be her.

I'm in such deep shit was my last full thought before Nic tugged my shirt over my head and pulled me down on top of her.

Oli

I DIDN'T KNOW what I was expecting when I came into the warehouse to meet with Nic, but her and Bodhi making out and being all over each other on the couch wasn't even on the list of possibilities in my mind. He was on top of her, shirtless, with Nic's hands digging into his back at something he was doing to her neck. Her gasp filled the room, but the delightful sound was cut short when the door swung shut behind me.

They both looked over at the sound, and I gave them a wicked smile as their gazes fixed on me. "Well, I can see why

you didn't respond to my text saying I was on my way to the warehouse."

My boyfriend's face flushed as he sat up, revealing that Nic was naked from the waist up, but unlike Bodhi, she wasn't the least bit bashful at being caught. No, she looked at me with growing amusement, her eyes following my hand when I adjusted myself before walking over to the couch. Excitement and lust filled me at the sight of them together, like they were getting warmed up and ready for me to get back from the job. *I could get used to this.* That thought made me pause. What the fuck did that even mean? We weren't here for keeps, not by a long shot.

"Oh shit, I need to check if—" Bodhi started to get up, but I held out a hand to stop him.

"Vas and Sacha are fine. They're headed back to the apartment. Probably to drink from the sounds of how boring the track was for Sacha," I replied, not willing to let him excuse himself off of that damn couch.

"That's probably because he hasn't had sex at the tracks," Nic replied, laughter dancing in her eyes when we both turned to look at her. "I'm just saying that I had fun the few times I'd gone."

"I had plans for how I wanted tonight to go," I mused aloud for both of them as I came to a stop in front of the navy couch. "But now it seems I can come up with all new ways to have some fun." Nic and Bodhi both licked their lips at the same time, looking at me then at each other. "That is, if you're game, Bodhi?"

He cleared his throat, biting his lower lip as he gave a slow nod. My heart skipped a beat, happy at the change in him. Nic was good for all of us.

“So, are you topping then, Oli? Or am I?” Nicholette turned to look at me, inky black waves falling down the side of the couch.

“You ordered me around in the shower, so now, it’s my turn.” Plus, letting me stay in control would probably help Bodhi feel more comfortable. I wanted this so badly, and I was determined to help him become more comfortable with her.

She let out an exaggerated sigh. “Guess our bloody victory sex will have to wait then.”

“Soon,” I promised her. “But first, get warmed up, you two. It’s going to be a long night.”

Bodhi’s answering whimper was cut short when Nicholette pulled him down to start kissing her again. She rolled her hips into his, her readiness obvious thanks to the moan that left her lips. His hips snapped into her core, making me smile. I was glad he was working through his issues when it came to Nic and that she was letting him do it at his pace.

It was going to be a fun night for all of us.

Who needed sleep when we could run on blood, sex, and caffeine?



Nichollette

Saturday

I kissed Bodhi with growing hunger, but nothing could stop me from being all too aware of all the noises Oli was making as he got ready. Considering where we were, I was almost nervous to ask what he had planned. As if he could hear my thoughts, he called out, asking if I had any work coming up.

Breaking away from the kiss, I gulped down air as Bodhi started to press kisses along my shoulders. “Yes. But not until Wednesday night.”

“Perfect,” he replied, his raspy tone full of dark, twisted promise.

I had opened my mouth to ask him why when Bodhi moved down my chest and latched onto one of my nipples. He swirled his tongue around the hard peak before scraping his teeth over it, making me hiss. I could feel his smile against my breast, and I threaded a hand through his brown hair, pulling lightly in retaliation. I could feel his dick twitch, betraying his excitement at the slight hair tug.

“Did you like that?” I purred, grinning as I added a little more force.

“Bodhi can handle rough,” Oli answered for him as he walked over to us. He grabbed a hold of Bodhi’s shoulder and pulled him up until he was sitting. “Isn’t that right, sweetheart?”

Bodhi shuddered, eyes immediately dazed at Oli’s affectionate, teasing tone. “Yes, sir.”

“Do you have any limits, Nic?” Oli asked, not taking his eyes off of Bodhi.

“Nothing permanent, no fisting, no enemas, no watersports, and no needles.” I lifted an eyebrow as both men focused on me and simply blinked at my list. “If you do anything or try something that’s a new limit for me, I’ll say yellow. Red is for stop. Keep it simple, if that works?”

“I can work with those.”

“What about you?” I asked curiously, making Oli pause. “What limits do you have that I should know about?”

Oli gave me a lazy grin at that, but I saw a flash of appreciation in his and Bodhi’s eyes. “For tonight, just don’t do anything to me that’s permanent or would break bones. I’ll also make sure we keep within any boundaries Bodhi might need. When you’re in charge, we can go over more details.” He suddenly let go of Bodhi. “Both of you stand up and strip.”

He sauntered away, automatically knowing we’d follow his order. Bodhi and I scrambled off the sofa, tossing clothes aside. Oli was on the other side of the warehouse, and my brow furrowed, trying to figure out what he had thought of.

“Do you like to be hunted, Nic?” The question was so casual it took me a minute to fully grasp what he was

proposing. “I know Vas likes to do primal scenes. Has he done any with you?”

“Yes, I do, and Vas has.”

Oli’s eyes glittered, and my heart skipped a beat with his dangerous, lazy smile. “Good, but remember I’m nothing like Vas.” He hit a button on the wall, causing darkness to descend in the warehouse. There were no windows where we were, and you couldn’t see the hand in front of your face. Oli’s taunting laughter rippled through the air above the pounding of my heart in my ears. “Here’s the game. I’m going to hunt you both here in the dark. Put up a fight, and I’ll remind you why I’m the one in charge, and if you give in... well, I’ll just be disappointed you don’t want to play my game. I don’t care if I fuck you in here or outside, if you make it that far. So run for me, darlings. Run.”

Bodhi scrambled away from me, hitting the sofa in his haste to get away. I slipped off in the other direction, trying to recall how the room was set up. Instead of running in a panic, I moved slowly, feeling my way around our clothes and away from the furniture. Diagonally from where I had been sitting was where they tortured people, featuring a chair, table, and cabinets along the wall that I assumed were full of different tools. If I could make it over there, I could play his game in a way he wasn’t expecting.

I think the space between myself and the cabinets was clear besides the chair and table, though only the chair is right in front of the cabinets. I can do this. A rustle of clothing and the light padding of shoes along the concrete made me freeze, knowing Oli was the only one dressed right now. My adrenaline kicked into high gear when he passed near me. I struggled to keep my breathing quiet.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” he sang out, making the hair on the back of my neck stand up on end. There was a scrape of furniture followed by pounding footsteps, then the hard impact of flesh on flesh like Oli had body-slammed Bodhi. Slight cursing and laughter followed, confirming my guess, then both were cut off by a whimpering cry and moan.

Use the noise to cover your movements.

I took the opportunity to swiftly cross the room. Holding out my hands, I felt for the chair, moving around it until my fingers touched the cabinet. I opened one of the drawers, sending up silent thanks that it slid open quietly, and felt around, finding a smooth handle and a heavy rubber head. Mallet. Cool metal was next, and I thought I could make out five holes, with heavy chunks of metal in between, maybe brass knuckles? I could see the usefulness for their jobs, but not exactly something good for right now.

“You aren’t even going to fight, are you?” Oli taunted the other man. “I didn’t expect anything less. You’d take my dick however I wanted you to, wouldn’t you, slut?” Bodhi begged Oli to stop, to keep going, to do anything he wanted. “You’ll take what I give you, Bodhi. Remember that,” he growled, followed by a breathless whine from Bodhi.

Oh, sweet Bodhi, you’re into rougher stuff than I thought you would be. I’ll remember that.

Closing the first drawer, I carefully searched through three more as whimpers, groans, and begging filled the quiet between the slapping of flesh on flesh that told me Oli was roughly fucking Bodhi wherever he had found him. *I* wouldn’t be disappointing him by not fighting back though. Closing my

hand around a pocketknife, I grinned, making sure to close up everything as Bodhi yelled out his climax.

“Now it’s your turn, Nicholette,” Oli called out sweetly. “Don’t worry, I didn’t finish. I wouldn’t want to disappoint you. And I’m sure you’ll be giving me the fight I’m looking for, won’t you?”

You bet your sweet ass I will.

I felt my arousal wet on my thighs and barely contained my instinct to rub them together or to reach down and touch myself. I loved a good game of cat and mouse. The build-up of anticipation, the fear, and the adrenaline were their own kind of heady aphrodisiac. Deciding to up the ante, I moved widely around where I had heard him and Bodhi fucking, heading for the area where I’d showered the last time I was here. Or at least I hoped so. Once my hand closed on the door handle, I wrenched it open, purposefully letting it slam so he could hear me, and ran down the dark hallway.

Bright laughter came from the other room before pounding footsteps signaled that Oli was following me. I tried to remember which door led to the showers, but as the footsteps picked up, I just reached for the closest door, panic building in me. A few steps into the room, I felt the concrete give way to tile. *The showers.*

Hard arms wrapped around my waist, yanking me back so my body slammed into Oli’s now very naked front. “Hello, sweetness. You’re a good runner, but this isn’t really the fight I thought you’d give me.”

“Yeah?” I asked, taking in a deep breath through my nose to calm my nerves. I flicked my wrist and opened the pocketknife I had grabbed. Whirling around, I brought up the blade and pressed it to his neck. “What about now?”

“Oh god yes,” he rumbled, excitement making his erect cock twitch against me. “I knew you’d be fun.”

“I’m all kinds of things, Oli. And if you want me to submit, you’ll have to earn it.” That was the only warning I gave him before I moved the knife away from his throat, slashing a shallow cut along his upper arm. He hissed at the sting, and I smirked before pulling back and punching him in the stomach. Air slammed out of him as I danced back, getting out of immediate grabbing range.

“You’re going to pay for that.”

“I thought you wanted a fight,” I taunted, “but I guess you were right. You aren’t Vas. Maybe you can’t handle me.” He growled at that, and I just laughed at him.

“Come play with me, Oli. Show me just how much of a sadist you think you are—“

“That’s it,” he snarled.

Before I knew what was happening, Oli rushed me, slamming my back against the floor of the shower. I gasped, the wind knocked out of me at the impact. Hard hands grabbed my own, wresting the knife away from me. My hips surged up, trying to knock him off of me, but he acted like it was nothing. After a few minutes, he managed to pin both hands above my head with one of his. My heart raced along with the cadence of his breath on my cheek.

“You’re going to eat those words, princess,” he promised in a tone so gentle I shuddered against him. “I’m going to make you scream for me.”

“I don’t feel much to scream about,” I retorted tartly, my nipples brushing across his smooth skin and the metal bars of his nipple piercings. The memory of him naked in the shower

filled my mind, and I could practically feel more of my juices wet my pussy. Oli had a full sleeve of ink, both nipples pierced, and a Jacob's Ladder.

“We'll find out soon enough. It seems like your body likes what it feels,” he whispered as his free hand came between our bodies. He thrust two fingers inside of me, making me groan. “So fucking wet.” He pumped his fingers in and out of me a few times, and we could clearly hear just how wet my pussy was from his game. “But not wet enough.”

I had opened my mouth, trying to figure out what he had planned, when the sharp edge of the knife glided against my ribs. A whimper escaped me as I fought his hold, but he laughed at my futile attempts as I tried to maneuver my legs up to kick at him.

“No, no. None of that now. You wanted to play with a sadist, challenged just how much of one I really was.” There was an icy edge of cruelty in his voice, just enough to keep my pulse racing but not enough to make me think of stopping anything. “Let me give you a small taste of what I like.”

The sharp blade ran along my skin as I tried to calm my breathing, not wanting to turn his tease into a real injury. He slowly ran it along each rib on my left side before doing the same on my right. The blade moved up until he teased the end of my erect nipples, making my hips jolt up into him as I let out a groan.

A sudden sharp sting made me hiss and body tense. Instinctively, I looked down even though the darkness still blanketed us. He had cut me along the side of my right breast. Not deep, but enough that I could feel blood on my skin. Oli wiped his hand along the blood, squeezing my breast hard to make the blood flow increase. I gasped at the pain, finding no

pleasure in the sensation as he kneaded my flesh. I was going to be *so* bruised tonight and tomorrow.

“Bodhi, turn on the lights,” Oli ordered, startling me.

Blinding light seared my eyes making me hiss and squeeze them shut as I saw spots of color float across my vision. “A little more warning would be nice,” I complained.

“Come hold her hands down for me.” Soft footsteps approached, and Oli let go of my wrists just for a pair of hands to grab hold of them half a second later. When I opened my eyes, a naked Bodhi was kneeling by me. His face was slightly bruised already, jaw swollen on the right side from where it looked like Oli had hit him. I pushed up to test his hold on me, but it was no use. Apparently, Bodhi only looked slender because I couldn’t even get my hands off the floor.

“If you’re going to keep struggling, I could get your clothes from the other room and tie your legs open,” Oli commented calmly, as if he wasn’t starting to paint my body with my own blood before cutting the other side of my chest. A whimper escaped me at the sting, and Oli smirked, his eyes following the fresh trail of crimson down my torso. “Are you going to sing for me?”

“You want me to sing? Be more creative,” I challenged, and now it was Bodhi who laughed as Oli’s eyes sparkled with glee.

“You really have issues, Nic,” Bodhi said as Oli repeated his process to help me bleed more. “Oli is going to remember this for next time. He can be... quite creative.”

“So can I,” I breathed, a smile curling my lips upward.

Oli gathered more of my blood on his hand, but this time he didn’t paint designs along my ribs. Instead, he reached

down to his throbbing pierced cock and coated it with my blood like it was lube. Hazel eyes were eager, he lined himself up at my entrance and then thrust balls deep inside of me. My spine arched at the absolutely mind-blowing sensation of his piercings running along my wall.

“Fuck,” Oli cursed as I hooked my legs around his waist, rolling my hips to meet every punishing thrust with one of my own.

“Bodhi,” I called out to him, my hands gripping his now, trying to ride out the brutal pace. The man above me was too focused on watching where Oli was fucking me to hear me. I dug my nails into his wrist to get his attention, and I watched as he slowly blinked and looked down at me, face flushed an adorable pink.

“What are you up to, Nic?” Oli whispered before pressing a kiss on my shoulder.

“Yes?” Bodhi’s voice was rough with arousal.

“I want to suck you off while Oli fucks me,” I gasped as Oli made a particularly deep thrust, hitting my cervix.

“What makes you think I’ll share you right now?” Oli asked as he pulled away from me.

“Please,” I managed as he wrapped a hand around my throat and squeezed.

“Please what?”

I swallowed as best I could despite his hold. “Pl-please, sir.” He tightened his grip for a few seconds before loosening it, letting oxygen rush back into my body.

“Babe, fuck her throat and don’t hold back. I want to hear her choke and scream around your cock as I fuck her.”

Oli yanked himself out of me and flipped me onto my stomach, pulling my ass into the air. A loud smack had me crying out. “Hands and knees, Nic. You wanted his cock, act like it.”

I pushed myself up onto my hands. Bodhi was watching me, a hungry expression on his face. His cock was long, with a slight curve to the side, and I licked my lips, eager to get a taste of the precum I could see glistening on the tip. Oli slammed into me from behind, making me gasp when he wrapped my hair around his hand and yanked my head back.

Bodhi shuffled over on his knees and wasted no time before thrusting his cock into my waiting mouth. I ran my tongue along the underside of his dick, loving the way he shivered. Oli continued to brutally fuck me from behind, his piercings rubbing inside of me like an extreme ribbed condom.

“I’m going to come inside of you, Nic. I will own every fucking inch of you in this moment.” Oli yanked my head harshly as he started to thrust into me even faster. The only sounds in the showers were of skin slapping skin, moans, and gagging. Blood dripped down the sides of my chest, my bruised breasts swinging as they both used me for their own pleasure. Bodhi and Oli leaned over me at the same time, making out above me, and I moaned around the cock in my mouth.

Oli let go of my hair as they broke apart. He reached down to grip my hips, steadying me while he somehow picked up speed as he approached his orgasm. Bodhi reached down and gathered my hair in a gentle grip, pulling it up so he could see me as he fucked my mouth.

“Such a perfect fucking cunt,” Oli crudely praised behind me. “Wait ‘til you get a feel of her, Bodhi.” Oli grunted, his

pace stuttering as I felt his cum inside of me, filling me up as I whimpered, my own orgasm just out of reach. He pulled out of me a moment before Bodhi came down my throat. Concentrating, I swallowed him down, not letting a drop of him spill from my mouth as he pulled away.

I tried to rub my thighs together, but Oli grabbed them, keeping me from getting any relief at all. “I have something you’ll like much better, Nic.” He pressed an open-mouthed kiss to where my collarbone met my neck, his hand reaching down to cup one of my breasts. “Bodhi, follow me.”

Oli scooped me up and carried me out of the showers, back into the warehouse. He sat down on the couch, letting my back rest on his front as I sprawled out while Bodhi stood nearby, waiting for Oli’s next direction. “Nicholette didn’t come from my game, Bodhi.” Oli cupped one of my breasts with each hand as he spoke to the other man. “Take care of that for me. The number of times you get her to come is the number of blow jobs I owe you.”

Bodhi stared at Oli in surprise before he settled in between my spread legs. He seemed a bit nervous, though I thought that had more to do with me than Oli’s offer. Reaching up, I hooked an arm around Oli’s neck and brought his face down to kiss him, letting Bodhi decide what to do at his own pace. Oli understood what we both needed; he took control of the kiss, flicking his tongue along mine before nipping my bottom lip.

A gentle breath on my pussy was the only warning I got before Bodhi swiped his tongue down the center of me. My cry was swallowed by Oli’s kiss, but my hips thrust up, instinctively seeking more. Oli’s hands came down, pinning my thighs so I was immobile, right as Bodhi teased my clit and thrust two fingers into my pussy. He pulled them out, and I

heard him suck those fingers clean, moaning at the taste of myself and Oli mixed together. Then Bodhi settled in earnest, working his tongue inside of me as if he were determined to chase that taste.

I broke away from Oli to stare down at Bodhi, my body jostling when Oli let out a warm, breathless laugh. “Bodhi has a very skilled tongue, Nic. I hope you’re ready for a long night.”

Before I could snark back a reply, my orgasm hit me out of nowhere. My entire body tensed, my legs shaking as I called out their names—as a prayer or curse, I wasn’t sure. Bodhi didn’t let me come down; he pushed me higher, tongue and now teeth teasing me as Oli forced me to stay open to his attentions. As I cried out again, my second orgasm rolling into the first, I swore I could hear Oli sigh.

“Perfect. Fucking perfect.”

Then he bit down on my neck, hard enough that the pain made the orgasm all that much sharper.

I lost track of the orgasms they wrung from my body. No windows meant that time was meaningless as we lost ourselves in each other.

Hours? Days? later, Bodhi pulled back, my juices, blood, and Oli’s cum painting his face, a look of satisfaction, happiness, and exhaustion clear to see. Mustering up the last of my energy, I pulled away from Oli and leaned over Bodhi, slanting my lips over his in a lazy kiss, savoring the taste of the three of us together. We pulled away from each other at the same time, and a rough laugh escaped me.

“What’s the laugh for?” Bodhi asked, sleep making his voice deep.

“Just that if you guys were clients of mine, I’d charge you extra for almost killing me.” I shook, slightly hysterical with giggles as I settled back into Oli again. “But what a way to go.”

Bodhi gave me a goofy smile as Oli shook me with his quiet laughter. “We need sleep.”

“My body is out of commission for at least the next twelve hours. I don’t care what’s going on. Bodhi, be my blanket?” I held out my arms, and Bodhi let out a noise of protest before he scooted up to lay on me, his head resting over my chest. *That’s going to hurt in the morning.* But that was the last thought my mind was capable of before sleep pulled me under.

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Nichollette

Sunday

I was sore. Actually, that was an understatement. My body *ached*. Every time I shifted, trying to get comfortable, one of my breasts would throb, my back was covered in bruises and muscles tight from being slammed on the tile floor, and my legs felt like I'd just finished an intense leg day after all the shaking they did thanks to Bodhi's talented tongue. My legs even gave out this morning when I tried to move; the only thing that stopped me from collapsing on the floor was Bodhi and Oli catching me.

After my legs stopped acting like Jell-O, we showered, then Oli cleaned and bandaged the cuts he made. It was a good thing I hadn't bothered with a bra because there was no way I was going to be wearing one for a few days. I threw on my leggings and the bulky sweater before slipping into my flats as the guys got dressed.

"Coffee?" I looked at them hopefully.

"Definitely coffee," Oli and Bodhi agreed at the same time as we all started for the exit.

“Let’s go then! I need coffee so I’m prepared when Sacha yells at me.”

“And why is Sacha yelling at you?” Oli asked me as he held the door open for me. The easy question was filled with amusement, and although it was at my expense, I definitely didn’t mind the small smile on his face.

“I don’t know.” I shrugged. “But he always finds a reason to start something. So whose car am I riding in?”

“Mine,” Oli claimed. Neither of them argued with my comment about Sacha since we all knew I was right. “Both of you. We can get your car later, Bodhi.”

His boyfriend nodded in agreement and had moved to sit in the back when I shook my head at him. “Oh no, you get to sit up front with Oli. The backseat is all mine.”

Bodhi stopped, pushing his hair back a little with a sweet, confused expression on his face. “Most people want the front seat.”

I arched an eyebrow. “And most people didn’t have their boobs cut then beaten up like punching bags last night. So I’ll be taking the middle seat in the back for obvious reasons.”

“Was I too rough?” Oli asked, real concern coming through despite my light teasing.

I shook my head then winked at him. “I didn’t say anything like that. Just that it takes time to heal and that seatbelt is not going to be my friend.” In fact, I was glad the three of us got to have a moment to be together. I saw a side of them I’d just had small glimpses of before and Bodhi was a little bit less of a mystery after last night. Now, if I could figure out how not to get attached, that’d be fucking great.

We all got into the car, and as we drove back toward the apartment, I pulled out my purse, checking my work phone for any messages or missed calls. *Nothing*. Good thing I remembered to look; I only had fifteen minutes before my program went into effect and deleted all my shit. The car came to a stop a little while later, and I looked around for the coffee shop, a smile growing on my face when I saw a Dunkin' close by.

“Dunkin’, my love!” I rubbed my hands in excitement as part of my totally not awkward victory dance, the move jostling my boobs enough that I winced.

“You know Sacha hates Dunkin’.” Bodhi side-eyed Oli as he pulled into the drive-thru.

“Sacha isn’t here,” Oli retorted, giving his boyfriend a cocky smile. “Besides, it seems Nic loves it, and since we fucked her ‘til her legs gave out, we should at least get her the coffee she wants.”

When Bodhi didn’t disagree, I leaned forward to give them both kisses on the cheek. “I’m also excited I don’t have to figure out the monstrosity that Sacha calls a coffee machine. It’s coffee, not rocket science.”

“Don’t let him hear you talking about it like that. The man practically worships that thing,” Oli said with a chuckle.

We rolled up and ordered our drinks, and I, the wonderful caring person I am, ordered drinks for Sacha and Vas as well. A few minutes later, we were all caffeinated and on our way back to the apartment. Oli dropped us off at the front with the drinks, and we made our way up to their place. As soon as we walked in, we saw Vas and Sacha sitting on the living room couches; both of them stopped talking to stare at us.

The brothers looked me over as if they could see my bruises even through my clothes. With a smirk, I held up the drink carrier. “We bring coffee!”

“That’s not coffee.” Sacha was quick to dismiss my words, but I ignored his dry commentary and put a cup beside him before giving one to Vas. Vas tried and failed to hide a smile as Sacha stared at his coffee cup with uncertainty.

“I got you an Americano, boss. I figured you’d want some of that fancy shit,” I told him tartly before walking away with my own coffee in hand. “I assume you guys want to talk business, so I’m going to go relax and protect my poor innocent ears from whatever nefarious plans you all have. Don’t have too much fun without me.”

I sauntered straight to my room and collapsed on my bed right after the door closed behind me. A groan slipped out as I made myself comfortable, letting the aches and pains settle in. I stretched out slowly, loving how every movement reminded me of something we had done together. The low murmur of voices filtered in through the door, and irritation cut through my happiness. After our last conversation when the latest stalker letter was delivered, I’d had a lot of time to think over my interactions with the guys. It made me ninety-nine percent certain that they were probably following Maeve’s instructions to not share information. Though there was still one percent that wondered if they just didn’t want to involve me in their business—I was just a fling after all, nothing more.

Ignoring the way those thoughts made my heart twist, I pulled out my phone and checked to see if anything new had come in since I’d checked my phone in the car. *Shit*. There was a missed message from Maeve, but before I could open it,

my phone started to ring. My curiosity was piqued when I saw the name on the screen.

“Hey, Em! How’s it going?” I asked before taking a sip of my black coffee.

“Delilah,” Emmerich greeted me cheerfully. I heard some screams in the background of the call before the sound was abruptly cut off. “Sorry about that, babe. I’m doing better now that I’m talking to you.”

“You probably say that to all the girls, Em. But go ahead and call me by my real name if you’re alone,” I teased him lightly with a genuine laugh. Emmerich was someone I had known for a few years, and while I knew he was dangerous as hell, he was nothing but nice to me. *Well, nice enough and rough in all the ways that mattered.* I shivered, recalling the last time we had met up. The marks had lasted three days, and I couldn’t walk without a tremble in my legs the next day.

“Only the pretty ones, Nic.” I could almost picture his cheeky grin. “How have you been?”

“Not too bad, helping Maeve out with something, which is taking up a lot of my time. But that’s not why you called me. What can I do for you?”

“So many answers to that question, love. Are you free a week from now? I have some business to attend to in Ashview, and I need a date.”

I hummed as I opened the calendar on my phone and checked over my schedule. “What day?”

“Friday night.”

Biting my lip, I thought it over. I didn’t think it would affect my ability to help the guys and Maeve. Plus, I needed money, and Emmerich always paid me well. “Just let me know

when you're picking me up, and I'll send you my temporary address."

"Temporary address?" Emmerich asked, voice cool at the new information. *Damn him and his cautious ways, there is no way I'm going into the details of my stalker breaking in right now.*

"Just some issues to sort out with the apartment and then I'll be back," I lied smoothly. "Shouldn't be much longer from what I know." It was Emmerich's turn to hum over the line, and I rolled my eyes. "I'll keep an eye out for a message from you. Is the date your usual?"

"Yup," he agreed. "I'll wire you half to secure the date and the rest the day of."

"See you then, Em."

"Sounds good, Nic."

Click.

I put the date into my work calendar and tried to think what the guys would say about the date with Em. Not because of who he was, I didn't think they would really care about that, but I wondered what they would think of me taking on a new date after saying I wouldn't while I was helping them. *Wait, it really doesn't matter what they think. This is my job, my body, my choice.* And it wasn't like I would ever depend on anyone else to pay my bills; I couldn't even depend on my parents to do that for me, so there was no way in hell I'd depend on a man or men to do it either.

Then why did it feel like it *did* matter?

Just because it's good dick doesn't mean I need to get emotionally involved. Don't be that dumb, Nic. But I knew in my gut it was too late for that reminder.

Sacha

“EVENTFUL NIGHT?” I asked, raising my eyebrows as I gingerly took the coffee Nic had brought me.

“Fun night.” Oliver grinned, a dark twinkle in his eye as he made himself comfortable on the sofa beside me. Bodhi sat down much more sedately beside Vas, more relaxed than I had seen him in a very long time. It seemed Nicholette had gotten through his guard after all.

“At least she walked in here on her own two feet,” Vas said with good humor, taking a big gulp of his hot coffee.

“She wouldn’t have been able to earlier this morning,” Oliver commented with a smirk on his face. It was a bit crazy to see the difference Nic had made. Hell, even Vas and I were happier with her around. A wave of possessiveness hit me at the thought of her leaving when this was all over.

“Nic ordered that specifically for you,” Bodhi spoke up, watching me hold the coffee instead of sipping it. He seemed amused by my uncertainty and maybe a bit defensive on Nic’s behalf. “We went to get stuff just for us, but she insisted we get something for each of you.”

“She did,” Oliver confirmed, tilting his chin at the cup in an unspoken order for me to try it.

I rolled my eyes at their not-so-subtle peer pressure, but I wouldn’t deny it was a nice feeling to have someone think of you when it came to the small things. Raising the cup to my lips, I took a small sip, willing to try it for the thought alone. The bitter flavor immediately hit my tongue, and I found I was

pleasantly surprised it wasn't complete trash. It wasn't my usual choice, and it wouldn't be my new preference, but in a pinch and if Nic got it for me... I guess I would drink it without complaint.

A flash lit the room, and I glanced over to find Oliver pointing his phone at me. "What? I think that moment needed to be recorded with photographic evidence." I flipped him off as the others laughed.

"We started going through the files you downloaded from Warren's computer," Vas stated, redirecting the conversation back to business. "With some of the emails you found from William, it definitely shows they are in business together for the trafficking ring."

"Anything specific from yesterday?" Bodhi asked, leaning over to see Vas' screen.

"Some more porn on this computer," Vas replied with a hint of frustration. It might not be obvious to just anyone, but I knew my brother. "They're good at hiding this shit, and we don't usually do this much fact digging before taking care of things."

"It's annoying as fuck," I complained, running a hand through my hair and tugging at the ends in frustration. "I just wish we could figure out how they were communicating. Even if it was coded, we could figure it out."

"Or if Maeve actually just told us what she fucking wanted us to find, that would be great," Oliver complained.

"Or if Maeve didn't tie our hands about asking Nic for help," Bodhi tacked on, his soft voice edged with annoyance. "Why send us someone to help and not *actually* let them help?"

A chuckle sounded from the kitchen before Nicholette came into view, amusement and irritation in her blue-green eyes as she shook her head. “Maeve doesn’t do specifics. And before you get annoyed, I didn’t hear anything beyond her not wanting you guys to share info with me. I’m too hungry to pay attention to the parts before that anyway.”

“Damn,” Vas whistled, running his gaze up and down her body, and I couldn’t help but agree. She had changed into shorts and a cami, her new outfit revealing purple and blue bruises along the top of her breasts and finger marks on her skin, along with bandages on both sides of her chest. Along with that, I noticed her wrists and thighs had hand-shaped bruises as well. Those weren’t as pronounced as her chest, but I had a feeling there were plenty more hidden.

Nic winked at us. “It’s not the most banged up I’ve been after a good time. But since you guys were bitching about Maeve, maybe I could help. I know her more than most.”

I mulled her offer over in my mind, trying to figure out just how much we could tell her without getting us into some deep shit by going against Maeve’s wishes. After all, Maeve held the purse strings, and we wanted the money and connections this job would bring us. We didn’t quite need them, being successful enough on our own, but they could certainly help. They all waited for my decision, even Nicholette. To my surprise, she just stood there, calmly waiting. She wouldn’t show it or say it, but I had a feeling she hated being on the outside. I knew I would have been livid. “She wants dirt on Warren, but she never specified what kind or how much of it she wanted before taking care of him.”

Nic clicked her tongue. “Half the game with Maeve is usually you figuring out what she wants, and if you don’t,

there are consequences. But without specifics of what's going on, I can just suggest that you gather everything you find and give it to her. She already has an idea of what she wants, and she can piece everything together how she likes it.”

“I have a question.” Oliver leaned forward, focused on her with an unusually serious face. “If you know Maeve, then you know Warren—at least somewhat, yes?”

“Not as well, but sure.” Nic shrugged, tossing her hair over her shoulder.

“If he was hiding something important, something he didn't want anyone or Maeve to find, where would he do that?” I blinked at that, appraising Oli again, impressed he had thought to ask her that and wondering how the hell we hadn't asked her that a while ago.

Nic's expression turned thoughtful as the microwave dinged in the kitchen. Without a word, she turned around and grabbed whatever food she had been heating up then came back a few minutes later with a left-over burrito on a plate. “Secure it in one of his apartments that he doesn't think Maeve knows about, if I had to guess.”

“What if it was all electronic?” Vas asked.

“I'm not sure about that.” Nic looked apologetic. “But I can tell you what I would do if it was me. If I had shit I wanted to hide through email, I'd make it look like spam emails since everyone usually deletes or ignores them. The real message would be hidden inside for those who know what to look for, nice and secure. It's the perfect way to communicate out in the open but under the radar.”

Oliver's jaw dropped at that before he whipped around and grabbed the laptop I had been using. Without missing a beat,

he opened the emails he had taken from Warren's inbox. I shook my head at the simple brilliance of the idea, and she just smiled. *Like she didn't just offer something that none of us, professionals, hadn't thought of yet.* We had definitely underestimated her. "Glad I could help, boys. Now, I'm eating this and taking a nap because I can."

She had started to walk away when Oliver's curses filled the air.

"What?" I asked Oliver, though I kept my eyes on Nicholette.

"His spam folder is password protected."

"Try Sarah, with an 'h', 65," Nic offered. "That's his mother's name and when she was born. He was really close with her until she died of cancer."

"It worked," Oli answered, voice already distant as he lost himself in checking all the emails. My eyebrows just rose further at the nonchalance of her brilliance.

"My work here is done. Don't wake me up unless there's food."

"Priorities," I joked, and she flashed a wide smile then blew me a kiss.

"Exactly."

As soon as we heard her go into her room and close the door behind her, we all let out a sigh. I leaned back into the couch, happy to let Oliver handle the electronic crap. "It's crazy how much she knows about them."

"There's a dynamic I can't wait to see in person since Maeve wants Nic at our next meeting," Vas replied, tipping his cup back and finishing off his drink. *Which begs the question*

of why Maeve wants Nic there if she doesn't want her to know the details. Not my problem.

“I’m looking forward to seeing their exchanges in person, that’s for sure.” I dropped my head to rest on the back of the couch, letting myself have just this moment to relax.

“If this actually gets us the info we need, that means the job for Maeve is almost done,” Bodhi added softly. I turned my head to find him still watching the hallway where Nic had been moments before.

“Better jobs and more money.”

“And Nic will be gone...” Bodhi’s voice trailed off. He’d been so quiet up until now that it took me a minute to register what he had said. But when it did, my heart twisted, a painful reminder that her leaving us was inevitable. *Or is it?*

Even Oliver stopped typing at that, and Vas let out a long sigh. “She’s got us all wrapped around her finger, doesn’t she? Think we could convince her to stay?”

“I think the real question is,” I said softly, staring hard at my brother as I spoke, “can we handle her job? Asking her to stop would be the same as her asking us to quit. And she doesn’t seem like the type to be comfortable with relying on others for her needs.”

“We’re already with each other.” Oliver shrugged. “As long as she’s safe, I don’t care what she does. I get that there’s things she couldn’t tell us because she’d need to be respectful of her clients’ privacy, but I trust that she’d be transparent about whatever she could. I get the feeling that she cares how other people feel, for real, not some fake surface shit where she’ll claim she does but then fuck off when it’s time to prove it.”

“Same,” Bodhi agreed readily.

Vas remained silent, eyes bright with jealousy, but I could tell he was mulling over his response before speaking. It was ironic that he reacted this way with Nic, considering he was usually the more even tempered of the two of us. Usually, it was me flying off the handle with a quick and hot temper that was easy to set off, but it seemed that while Nic helped calm me, she riled up Vas in a whole new way.

“I don’t know,” my brother answered roughly. “But I can try. Regardless, this doesn’t matter unless she wants to stay and deal with us.”

“Plus our crazy job and being gone all the time,” I added. “Let’s settle things with Warren then see what happens. We need to help find her stalker as well.”

“Have there been any updates on that?” Bodhi asked, but I shook my head.

“Nothing, and the police don’t have updates either,” I replied, annoyed.

“We’ll find something,” Vas promised. “Even if we need to do a more thorough questioning of our own.”

We all grinned at that, even Oliver though he kept his eyes on the screen in front of him. I considered my team, wondering if Nic would be joining us for that questioning and just what she would really think of that side of us. It was as important of a question as my earlier one about Nic’s job. This was a part of us no matter what. It was easy to be into rough play, a bruising grip, and a teasing knife within the safety of a consensual scene, but it was entirely different to know that there was a life about to be snuffed out or a crying, pleading man on the other end who’d had no say in being at the end of

our *persuasion techniques*. Could she really handle stepping over the line into that darkness? Would she think we were worth it?

She wants to run herself along all the sharp edges of people to feel alive... guess we'd be putting that to the test soon enough.

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Nicholette

Wednesday

A cry fell from my lips when my orgasm hit me, my back arching while the man on top of me thrust a few more times before cursing as he filled up the condom. We both gasped for air as he collapsed on top of his forearms, making sure I had space to breathe.

“Fuck, that was good,” Anthony commented as he rolled off of me. He swiftly went about untying my wrists then made his way toward the shower. I preferred it when they sent me off me like that; it avoided any awkwardness. I’d even gotten used to the cold dismissal. Not all clients offered me a snack and aftercare like Vas. Actually, most didn’t. “Money is by the door on the way out, Delilah.”

When the bathroom door clicked shut behind him, I sat up on the bed. I let myself catch my breath as I rubbed my wrists then my ankles. Running through my quick mental checklist, I stretched my arms, making sure nothing was excessively or unusually painful. Nothing was, so I stood up and slipped into the black dress that I had worn on tonight’s date.

The shower started as I made my way to the front door, finding the envelope where he'd indicated it would be. I slipped into my heels as I opened it, making sure it was all there before leaving. Anthony wasn't a bad client, but he definitely fell under the 'pay them to leave when the sex is done' category. It wasn't a bad thing; he never tried to push my limits too far or make me do anything too crazy, so I kept him on my regular rotation. He wanted stress relief from his high-powered political job, and that was it.

A few minutes later, I was in the lobby, the doorman nodding at me as I exited. I gave him a quick grin, recognizing him from previous visits. "Night, John. How are those grandkids?"

"They're doing great, Miss Delilah. Getting bigger every day and driving their parents crazy." His eyes lit up with warmth while talking about them.

I pulled out two hundred dollar bills from the envelope and grabbed his hand to slip him the cash. "Tell them Merry Christmas early. You stay warm."

"Miss— you don't need to do this," John stuttered, surprise on his face.

"Nonsense." I winked at him. "You've always treated me wonderfully even though I know you know what I do for a living. The epitome of discretion. I won't take it back. Plus, knowing some of the people who live here, they probably don't tip."

The beginning of a grimace escaped at that, but he managed to keep his expression professional. "Okay, but the next time you pass through, I'm showing you pictures of them, so you know who you're spoiling."

“That sounds wonderful,” I replied as I turned and started toward a waiting cab.

“Well, if it isn’t Delilah,” a familiar voice called out before I could grab the handle of the car. I consciously made sure that I didn’t tense up before I looked over to find none other than Warren stalking down the sidewalk, sharp anger rolling off him in waves.

“Warren.” I infused warmth into my greeting but kept a touch of caution. I’d seen the aftermath of nights when he was in this kind of mood, but I knew I couldn’t just walk away from this opportunity. “It’s been a while since I’ve seen you. How have you been?”

“Don’t pander to me with polite talk,” he snapped, dismissing my greeting with a rough wave of his hand. “Have you thought over my offer? I could make you the envy of many women in this city.”

“I know you can,” I replied, stepping away from the cab as someone else left the apartment building. I didn’t want other people overhearing this conversation and didn’t want to be in the way of the cab getting a customer. “It’s a very tempting offer.”

“It’s Maeve, isn’t it?” His voice turned soft, almost condescending, as he stepped into my personal space. He brought up a hand and ran a gentle finger along the top of my dress. I saw John start toward us at the gesture, but I gave him a small shake of my head to let him know I was fine. There was something *off* about Warren, always had been, and I didn’t want the sweet older man on Warren’s radar. “I didn’t want to tell you, but you know she replaced you the day after you left? Given how fast she did, I imagine she had the girl on the side already. If you hold some kind of allegiance to her, then you’re

the only one.” It was a testament to Warren’s true nature that he went straight for something that he knew would hurt me.

I swallowed hard at that, pain filling me at that revelation, and I didn’t bother to hide it. I didn’t like showing this man anything real about me, but in this case, it would be a useful tool. “She did?”

He smiled at the crack in my voice, though he was quick to hide it. “Like I said, I didn’t want to tell you, but I don’t want her to hurt you even more than she already has. Maeve likes to use people, and you’re just a footnote in her long list of victims.”

The irony of his warning wasn’t lost on me, and I let out a broken laugh at that. “She does seem to have a list of people ready to use.”

“So... my offer? I’m not Maeve. I could make you my one and only.”

“Outside of Maeve?” I asked, purposely softening my voice. I reached up to run my hands over the lapels of his tan suit jacket. When I felt him lean ever so slightly into the gesture, I curled my fingers into the fabric and pulled him against me.

“I can’t leave her,” he answered huskily. “But you’d be the only one who mattered. I won’t hide you.” *No, he’d just use me as a weapon against her.*

I stood up on my tiptoes and brushed my lips against his, steeling my spine to avoid any stiffening in my body. He wrapped an arm around my waist, moaning at the contact, and deepened the kiss. It should have been awful, horrible, but it was way better than just decent. He tasted like smoke and tequila, kissing me with an intensity that had me responding

despite myself. I pulled him against me, matching his fire with my own.

Then the guys popped into my head, making me break away from Warren. Vas' sweet moments, along with his jealous ones, Sacha possessively holding me, Bodhi's shy blushes, and Oli's devil-may-care attitude. I cared about them more than I cared about what Maeve wanted me to do, and the realization made me flash hot then icy cold.

I shook my head and stepped back with heavy breaths. "A little more time, Warren... This is— this is a lot to process."

Irritation flashed in his green eyes before understanding filled them. "I understand. I can be a lot to handle, and the revelations about her... The next time I see you, try to have an answer. I've wanted you too long from the sidelines."

Bringing up my fingers to his lips, I nodded slowly in answer. He placed a soft hand on the small of my back and walked me to the curb, raising a hand to hail a cab. I shivered as a cold breeze blew through, thankful when a cab pulled over right away.

"I'll see you around... Delilah," Warren promised as I climbed into the car.

"Goodbye, Warren, for now."

He shut the door between us, and I swallowed hard as I turned to give the driver the apartment address, aware Warren was still watching me. When we pulled away, my pained expression smoothed out, and I thought about what he had just told me, trying to figure out if he had revealed anything useful. I had known about Maeve's new plaything right after I walked away, but the reminder still stung. For all her cold exterior, Maeve didn't like to be alone, so she always had a back-up

plan or ten in the wings. That was one thing Warren had right; Maeve was an entire chapter in my book, but I was just a footnote in hers. It was interesting to see how Warren saw my relationship with Maeve... as if Maeve had actually given a damn about me when we were together. *News to me.*

The next thing I knew, the driver was telling me we had arrived at my destination. I gave him a blank smile and reached out, handing him a fifty and telling him to keep the change. I tried to focus my thoughts on the bright side of things as I stepped out of the car and got into the elevator. At least I had a new Warren run-in to hopefully help them get their job done. *The sooner they're done, the sooner they leave.* I wasn't sure if I was happy or sad about that right now.

A minute later, I was walking into the apartment. Sacha was sitting in the living room, book in hand, with a cup of coffee nearby. Instead of what I'd come to consider his usual attire of a suit, he was in jeans and a sweater, and fuck if he didn't look just as delicious with his hair loose around him. He didn't look up as he greeted me, turning his page as though he hadn't even lost his place.

"Were you waiting here for me to get back?" I asked, slipping out of my heels. He tried not to react, but a hint of a smile curled his lips before it was gone. My chest warmed at the feeling of someone waiting to make sure I got home safe. It was new to me, but nice.

He looked over at that. "No. Did you go out without a jacket? It's freezing." And there was the prickly judgment that passed as concern for him.

I shrugged, though he was right, I was freezing. "I wasn't outside very long." An involuntary shiver hit me, and I rubbed my arms to get some warmth in me. "I saw Warren tonight."

Sacha's focus sharpened at that, dark brown eyes intent enough that he put the book down. "Where did you go for your date?"

"His spare apartment," I told him blandly, not sure how he would react to specific details. I thought he would be jealous, like Vas, but instead, he waited patiently for me to keep going. "We fucked, I took the money, and left. On the way to the cab, Warren was there."

"Like he was waiting for you?"

I furrowed my brow. "I don't think so? More likely he was there for his own good time or walking by. I was at The Hamilton. Lots of people with money have second apartments there for meetings with people like me. Plus, he was walking down the street, so I'm not sure he was ever in the building."

Sacha hummed as he nodded slowly. "What did he say?"

"He pushed for an answer to his offer," I told him honestly. Walking into the living room, I settled on the arm of the free couch, facing Sacha as I filled him in on what Warren said. "It was almost like he was trying to hurt me by reminding me of what Maeve did after our split."

"Interesting. Do you think he would actually put you up as a mistress, or is he doing it to make Maeve jealous?"

"He might genuinely be interested, but I doubt it. He might talk down about Maeve, but he is the exact same way. No matter what he says, no matter what face he puts on in front of others, he's nothing more than a predator with his own agenda." I shrugged. "But he was set on selling the idea, so I let him think the news about my fast replacement was something I hadn't known and that his attempt at comforting words was consoling me. It seemed to work. If you need me

to, I could accept his offer the next time I see him. He wants an answer soon. I don't think he will take the cat and mouse game for too much longer."

"Selling his idea, huh?" Sacha reached out and snagged one of my wrists. I pulled back, but he wasn't having any of it, yanking me down to sit on his lap. "What did he do to sell his idea, Nic?"

"You don't have anything to say about my date?" I asked, searching his face for a reaction. "No commentary or thoughts?"

"You were doing your job," he responded, tilting his head as he kept his arms around me, not letting me attempt to get away. "Unless you're out meeting with a boyfriend we don't know about, I don't care what you're doing."

"I don't see how the boyfriend would matter, boss. This is a job too," I reminded him gently.

"Does it still feel like just a job to you?" he asked softly. I stiffened in his arms and tried to lean back, but his hold prevented even that much movement away from him. "You can say it does, but I don't want to play cat and mouse with you—well, not about this." I chuckled despite myself, and Sacha reached up, grabbing my jaw and forcing me to face him.

"Mixing business and personal things gets messy," I replied vaguely, not letting myself give in. My heart was pounding in my chest, and I swore he could hear the traitorous organ like the predator he was.

"We aren't Maeve. My brother will get jealous of your job, but that's something you two can work through. The rest of us

don't care who you're with as long as it's a job and you're open with us. No secrets."

"The same could be said about you guys with your job," I retorted. "I don't know anything about what you guys do, not really."

Sacha didn't look surprised; if anything, he seemed amused. Knowing him, he'd already put together how I felt about their vague answers and dismissals. "We can arrange for you to see more, but not with Warren. Maeve specifically stated she didn't want you brought into the details of that, and we can't rock the professional boat, so to speak. If you have an issue with that, you can bring it up next week when we meet with her." The revelation about Maeve wasn't surprising, but I had to bite back a frown nonetheless.

"I had already figured that was her doing before I overheard you talking the other day. Well, that or maybe you guys weren't sure about trusting me." I narrowed my eyes at him, waiting for any sign he was playing me. Considering they hadn't known I was listening the other day, I was mostly certain Maeve's interference was the real truth, but old suspicions were hard to break. When I found nothing but honesty and curiosity, I let out a sigh.

"He kissed me."

Sacha blinked, a tic of his jaw betraying his anger. "Who did?"

"Warren. Outside of the apartments to try to convince me to agree." I licked my bottom lip, taking that little pause to prepare myself for how he might react to the next part. "I kissed him back. For a man that awful, you'd think he'd be a horrible kisser, but he wasn't. Kinda hate him for that alone." Instead of the jealousy I was expecting, I felt Sacha's hard

dick twitch against my ass. “Does that turn you on, boss? The thought of me with someone else? No wonder you don’t have a problem with my job.”

“That’s not—“ He stopped when I pressed a finger to his lips, halting his protest.

“I think it is,” I replied huskily. “Me out there with a man fucking me, making me come, while you’re here... alone. Would you want me to come back and let you claim me, to remind me just who I belong to? I seem to recall you and Vas having a great time doing just that.” His breathing was ragged as I reached up to grip his throat, tilting his head back so I could run kisses along his jawline to his ear. “Other nights, I could make you see just what others did to me. I could fuck you and own you, letting you know someone else got what you didn’t earn. Would you like that?”

Sacha’s hips ground up into me, and I moved away from him to stare at his molten brown eyes, their depths filling with desire. I slanted my mouth over his, biting down on his lip hard enough to sting before swiping my tongue over it to soothe him. Using my hold on his throat to maintain my power over him I kept control of the kiss as he groaned into my mouth. Heady power filled me, knowing I could bring this much desire out of him, my domme side missing this so much that I wanted to play right now. But it wasn’t the time or place. Another time, I had plenty of games I wanted to play with him.

A minute later, I pulled back, tightening my grip when he tried to follow me, his eagerness making him groan. “Thank you.” He stared at me for a minute, his brain trying to catch up. I smiled as I let go of his throat, “For getting rid of the

taste of him. I don't kiss on dates, by the way. It's too intimate. Warren knows that."

"He'll be dead soon enough," Sacha replied gruffly, clearing his throat as he shifted on the couch.

I stood up and stretched. "Where is everyone else?"

"They're asleep." He watched my movements closely, eyes still following me when I started to head toward the hallway. "You never gave me an answer, Nicholette."

I didn't bother to turn around, continuing to walk to my room. "Let me talk to the others, and I'll give you my answer then." When I didn't hear a response, I looked over my shoulder to find him staring at me. "But for what it's worth, Sacha, it hasn't felt like just a job for a while now."

At that, I hurried to my room, determined to not let any more emotions slip out of me if I could help it. Undressing quickly, I showered and threw on a silk cami and shorts. I was getting comfortable and going the fuck to bed. If I had to have emotional talks with multiple damn people, I needed at least a full night's sleep to face that. But after tossing and turning for a few hours, I huffed and got out of bed. Padding out of the bedroom into the now dark hallway, I knocked softly on a nearby door before opening it.

Inside was a sparse but nicely decorated bedroom, everything looking to be high quality. A king-sized bed dominated the room, with black sheets and a comforter that blended into the darkness. Sacha didn't open his eyes at my intrusion, though I could tell he was awake. His breathing was much too slow, intentional, for him to be asleep. He just flipped down the sheets, and I didn't question the silent invitation. Hurrying over, I slipped into the bed, and he

grabbed me, pulling my body flush against his. I tugged up the sheets to cover myself and smiled, cuddling into his warmth.

A brush of lips on the top of my head was the last thing I felt before I let myself be lulled to sleep by the feeling of *home* that radiated from the stronghold of his arms.

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Nichollette

Monday

It was an odd feeling, getting off the plane with Christopher, knowing I had people waiting for me to get home. I had a lot of fun in Miami, plenty of sun and nights out on the town, along with nights in. Needless to say, I didn't get much sleep all weekend, but I was hoping I could get more tonight. At least I didn't have to worry about jet lag or time changes.

“Thank you for this weekend,” I smiled at Christopher. The older man grinned at me, genuine happy at my thanks and attention. Christopher was in his late fifties, one of those eternal bachelor types. He loved to have a good time with a lot of people and a beautiful woman on his arm. I had run into him during a date with a previous client, who was a friend of his, and we hit it off. Me being a call girl wasn't a problem; in fact, that was a big plus for him. Christopher had money, *big* money, and while he wanted someone to spend time with and spoil, he didn't want to jeopardize his money by getting entangled with a gold digger. So we went out, had a good time, he showered me in gifts, then we parted ways until the next

time he felt a little lonely. I wasn't going to complain anytime soon.

The only downside was that I actually missed being around the guys. Even if it was only a few days I'd been gone, this trip made me realize just how comfortable I had gotten around them. Little things had me thinking of them, like running into a coffee shop and seeing some fancy espresso I knew even Sacha would have approved of. A couple talking about a scary movie had me biting back a smile as I thought about Oli's overly dramatic reactions. But focusing on my client ensured that I kept my job, so I didn't let my smile falter as I reminisced. Christopher needed to know that my attention was his—he'd certainly paid enough for it.

"Me too." He grabbed my hand gently and pressed a kiss to the back of it. His hair was still a thick light brown, no facial hair, and he had olive skin that was dark from our time in the sun over the past few days. Christopher threaded my arm through his, blue eyes twinkling. "Let's go get our luggage, and I'll get you home."

"That sounds wonderful." I let him lead me to the baggage claim, where he grabbed our bags as I quickly ran to the restroom.

After I took care of business, I turned on my cell phones. My work phone didn't have any notifications when I logged on, but my personal one showed a few messages from the guys. Oli and Bodhi had texted randomly over the weekend; I had managed to talk to them after my conversation with Sacha last week. So long as it didn't affect what I had with them, they had said they didn't mind my job, though time would really reveal the truth of that. Vas, however, was harder to get alone, and I wasn't sure how to feel about that. I scrolled

through the rest of my messages, hoping one might be from him, and realized the most recent had just come in a few minutes ago. Sacha's text was a reminder that we had a meeting with Maeve tonight. Vas', however, just stated that he wanted to see me when I got back.

My stomach twisted at that simple message, anxiety filling me. But I knew Christopher was waiting for me, so I splashed some water on my face and hurried out of the bathroom to where he was waiting patiently. He gave me a knowing look when I got back, but I just waved off it when he started to ask what was wrong.

"Let me pick you up some coffee on the way home, at least," he offered as we stepped outside. I hugged my jacket closer to me, not ready for the chill in the air after my getaway.

"You don't have to—"

"I insist," he replied firmly, opening the door to his car. I slipped in and buckled up as he put our bags in the trunk. A few minutes later, when we were pulling out of the airport, he asked, "So what's going on?"

I sighed. "You know that this is supposed to be about relieving your stress, not taking on my stuff, Christopher."

"Ah, a man then." He nodded knowingly, and I laughed despite myself. "I've had a long life, Delilah, and I've been that asshole you're sighing about. I can imagine being in a relationship when you do this profession is hard."

"I wasn't exactly looking," I admitted ruefully. "But I'll figure it out."

"You're not asking for my advice," he started, his eyes serious when he glanced at me quickly, "but I'm going to give it to you anyway, and you can take it or leave it. No matter

who you are, communication is key. Don't let things fester and build up, or it will tear you apart. And keep your money separate. I can set you up with a lawyer for a pre-nup."

I placed my hand over top of his, a genuine grin on my face. "Marriage is *so* far off my path, Christopher, but I appreciate the offer. I'll keep that in mind in case I ever need it."

"And give him hell," he said gruffly, a bit of amusement sparkled in his eyes. "It's always good to keep us men on our toes."

"You might be one of my favorite people," I blurted out. *Giving them all hell is definitely part of my plans, and they all know it.*

"Of course I am," he replied with a loud laugh. "Now, let's get that coffee 'cause I know you didn't like the plane crap. Even I didn't like it."

I WAS WALKING to the apartment, my rolling bag in one hand and fresh coffee in the other, when the door opened. Oli and Bodhi came out, the former chuckling when his eyes locked on my cup. "You have a coffee addiction, don't you?"

"Coffee or baths," Bodhi joked, a spark of humor in his brown eyes. It had me smiling right back, a bit of my tension falling away at the sight.

"I'm glad I only got a cup for myself then," I huffed in mock annoyance. "When is tonight's meeting?"

"We're meeting over dinner," Oli answered. "There are some things Bodhi and I have to do this morning. We'll be

back in a bit.”

“I’m glad you’re back.” Bodhi brushed his hand down my arm as he passed, and Oli winked at me. A moment later, the two had disappeared into the elevator and I was walking into an empty apartment.

I didn’t see the brothers anywhere, so I made my way to my room to shower off the plane smell. As soon as I opened my door, I found Vas sitting on the side of my bed, messing around on his phone. *Interesting, I figured he would make me wait or go to him.* I carefully closed the door behind me while my heart started to race, nerves hitting me.

“You look more nervous than when I was chasing you through the woods,” Vas stated dryly as I placed my coffee on top of the dresser. He was right, unfortunately.

“You just said you wanted to talk, basically one of the worst sentences in the English language,” I replied tartly. “What did you want to say?” Okay, maybe I was being a little bit bitchy, but what did he expect? Every man should know better than to use that sentence on the woman he was sleeping with, especially if it was going to be followed by total silence.

I stared at the hand he held out, my eyes swinging up to his face for a moment before I cautiously placed my hand in his. He guided me to stand right between his legs, and I took the opportunity to really study the man I’d known for the past year. Despite being the one I’d known the longest, I somehow felt the most distant from him, especially lately. His long beard had been trimmed recently, some of the shagginess gone, and his neck had been cleaned up, I assumed for the meeting tonight. Unable to help myself, I brought a hand up and ran it through his short hair while he kept those serious brown eyes locked on my face.

“I know Sacha talked to you about making this, with all of us, more,” he started. The words were coming slowly, as though he was thinking hard about each one. He wasn’t exactly the ‘talk about your feelings’ type, and I almost laughed at his discomfort.

“And you’ve avoided talking to me about it whenever I tried to bring it up.”

He nodded. “I did. You bring out a possessive side of me, Nic. One I wasn’t really prepared for since there is really only room for one hothead in this group. Sacha claimed that role a long time ago.” I chuckled at that despite the seriousness of the moment, and Vas smiled just enough to make a tiny crack in his solemn poker face. “You’re *mine*, Nic. In a way I won’t share with *anyone*, not even my brother, Oli, or Bodhi. I’ll share you with them, but I want something to be completely clear; when you’re with me, that’s it.”

“That doesn’t sound like you can handle sharing at all then.” I kept my voice soft while I tried to process his contradicting words. I knew exactly what he wanted, but I gave him the chance to get the words out in his own way, at his own pace. Control was something he was clear about wanting when it came to our dynamic, and, with him, I was willing to hand some of it over.

“I can share you with our group just fine,” he rumbled. “But I don’t want to hear about your dates unless it has to do with a job. I don’t want to think about the people you’re with outside of us because it will take everything in me to not go beat the shit out of them. I’d kill them all and not give one damn about it.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck, oddly touched at how open he was being. Sure, we talked about wants and needs

when we were negotiating a scene, but this was a real vulnerable moment because this was about us for real, Nic and Vas, not just Vas and the call girl he'd hired for a few hours. "I don't think there is any way I could think about anyone else but you when we're together, Vas. You consume me until there's nothing left but you."

He growled at that, his large hand grabbing the back of my neck to bring me down so he could claim my lips in a hard kiss. I fell into it, letting him overwhelm me as we fought with lips and tongue. I broke away right when he tried to lean back on the bed. His eyes narrowed as I stepped away from him, but he let me go.

"So, does this mean I'm with you guys? All of you? Just so I'm clear about what's happening here," I asked. If this was going to work, communication was something we needed right off the bat, and I wasn't going to be shy when it came to demanding it from them. *Of course, I know I need to work on myself with that... but at least I recognize it's an issue? I'll take self-awareness as progress.*

"Yes," Vas declared. He continued to watch me with laser-focused intensity, his arousal clear. "I could yell out to them right now if you want them to all be aware..."

"That won't be necessary," I laughed at him. "No need for you to pull an Oli. But there are other ways you could stake your claim..."

Vas lifted an eyebrow, lips twitching with the effort of suppressing his usual smirk. "Oh yeah?"

"I need to shower and get the plane off of me," I told him, slowly pulling my shirt over my head and dropping it on the floor. "Care to join me?"

He stood up, a wicked smile filling his face, and backed me into the bathroom, making use of every inch he had on me. “I’ll make sure to clean you up before I get you dirty all over again.”

“Big words, Vas. I hope you live up to them,” I taunted him.

He shook his head at me, heat flaring in his eyes. “I can’t wait to come up with all the ways to get your bratty side back for comments like that.”

“Not trying to keep me in check?”

“Why would I do that when I love seeing your ass in bright shades of red?”

Now in the mood to hurry, I reached back to turn on the shower, looking forward to whatever he had planned for me. I just hoped it included a nap before dinner ‘cause I had to be on top of my game at the meeting with Maeve tonight. There was no way she would miss the change in our dynamic, and I was curious, but nervous, to her reaction to it.



Nichollette

Monday

“Nic, move your ass! How you get anywhere as a call girl when you are always running late, I’ll never know,” Oli yelled from the living room, making me roll my eyes. I was staring at my clothes, trying to decide what to wear. The clothes I needed to have altered had been delayed for some reason or other. *I need to remember to follow up about that with Gabriel.*

“Oliver Smith, if you want to get any kind of sex from me, you better rethink what you just said,” I called back to him, fighting to keep my voice even. Maeve had seen me around clients, sure, but she’d never seen me around someone that I had actual feelings for. And that was what I had, real feelings. I wasn’t quite sure how deep those feelings were or how deep they might grow, but they were undeniably there and *undeniably* causing me extreme anxiety at the moment.

“We’ve been together for a couple of hours, and you’re already trying to withhold sex to get your way,” he griped. “I don’t like relationships.”

“I’ll just fuck Bodhi and make you watch,” I shot back sweetly.

“I’m not opposed to that plan,” Bodhi interjected, his comment almost buried beneath the sound of Oli’s protests.

“Are you going to take longer just to annoy him?”

I glanced over my shoulder to find Sacha leaning against the door frame, watching me with amusement. He was utterly drool worthy in a charcoal suit, white shirt, and dark brown shoes that fit him perfectly.

“I have no idea what to wear, and we aren’t late. It’s only going to take like ten minutes to get to the restaurant. Oli is such a drama queen.”

“Worried about what Maeve will think?” I could hear the double meaning in his question, and I shook my head before shrugging.

“Clothing is another way to protect yourself.” My reply was soft. “Maeve used to be a call girl; that’s how she trained me. How to talk, how to act. The right things to say and how to say them. I owe her a lot, good and bad.”

“And as your ex?” Sacha walked over to me, stopping directly behind me and running his hands down my arms.

I leaned back into his warmth, letting my head rest on his chest. “I care more than I want to admit, and I hate it.”

Sacha just hummed, and I could feel the deep resonance of it against my back. He stepped away from me and motioned for me to wait there. I stood still, curiously watching the door, and he came back a moment later with a garment bag in hand. When he held it out, I felt my brow furrow, confusion written on my face.

“You got me a dress?”

His lips twitched slightly. “I ripped one of yours, and I told you I would replace it. Here you go.”

I blinked a few times and slowly reached for the zipper, opening the bag. My mouth dropped open at what I saw. It wasn't an exact copy of the dress he had torn apart; it was even better. An emerald green dress with a deep V-neck and long sleeves. The bottom of the dress would probably hit me right at my knees, and it would hug every curve I had along the way. It was simple and elegant. Beautiful.

He pulled it out of the bag and took it off the hanger, motioning for me to put it on. I stepped into the dress and let him pull the fabric up my body, moving my hair out of the way so he could do up the zipper. Sacha pressed a kiss on the back of my neck as he finished, and I couldn't suppress a shiver of desire that ran through me at the touch. He wrapped his arms around me then turned us so that I could see myself in the mirror.

“Do you like it?”

“It's kind of hard to see given you're covering half of me,” I joked, but my voice cracked, betraying my feelings of awe and thanks. Deep, rich greens weren't something I was normally drawn to, but I couldn't deny how wonderfully it complemented my pale skin and black hair. And it was fitting Sacha was the one to find such a perfect match.

“You look so elegant.” He pressed a tauntingly soft kiss on my neck. “But remember, you'll always be my sweet little whore.”

“You still owe me for the lingerie you cut off,” I reminded him, almost surprised by my lighthearted tone. *How does he*

make me feel this way?

“Talk to Vas about that. I got the dress.” He stepped back and smacked my ass. “Now get your shoes, or we will leave without you.”

“That will go over very well with Maeve,” I shot back when he motioned for me to hurry up.

I slipped into my four-inch black heels and grabbed my favorite gold clutch before heading out of the room. Striding into the living room, I paused, enjoying that the guys stopped talking as soon as I came in. I tapped my foot and waved toward the door. “Come on, guys. I’m not waiting around for you lot all day.”

Opening the front door, I let out a small breath of laughter at the snorts of disbelief from everyone but Sacha. I hurried into the elevator and hit the close button before the others could get there, waving at them mockingly from between the closing doors. I was pretty sure I heard some promises for a spanking from Oli and Vas, but I let myself enjoy my fun for now. *Granted, I’ll enjoy the spanking later too.*

I heard someone call my name as soon as I stepped out of the elevator. Turning, I saw one of the receptionists holding up an envelope, and I hurried over to take it. I immediately noted the familiar handwriting that made my stomach turn and shoved it into my purse without reading it. *One crazy ass person at a time. Right now, it’s Maeve’s turn. My stalker will just have to wait.*

Just then, the elevator dinged, and I schooled my face into an amused expression as the guys approached, completely intent on me. Bodhi had on his signature outfit, a plain black sweater and dark washed jeans with boots, while Oli wore an oversized leather jacket over a hoodie with jeans and chucks.

My eyes flickered to Vas, inspecting his button-up white shirt with black slacks, the middle ground between Oli and Bodhi's casual and Sacha's full suit look. All thoughts of stalkers and envelopes were gone as I drank them in. They looked absolutely delicious, and I was sorely tempted to show them just how much I appreciated the show, apartment lobby or not.

"Whatever you're thinking right now," Vas growled as he came even with me, "save it for after dinner."

"No promises," I told him, letting him lead me out of the building. "Maeve is... a force of nature."

"That's a polite way of saying 'capable of being a complete and total bitch,'" Oli deadpanned. "Let's get this update over with."

"My thoughts exactly."

"YOU'RE LATE," Maeve's icy voice greeted us. She was sitting at the table in the reserved dining room, her white-blonde hair pulled neatly back into a high bun, wearing a gold silky shirt and white pantsuit set that made her look equally terrifying and beautiful.

"Beauty is pain and time," I replied smoothly, giving her own answer back to her as I took a seat at the end of the table. I sat down in the chair near hers, but I did angle my body toward the men, a move that didn't go unnoticed. The guys had taken the other open seats, Sacha settling into the chair at the opposite end, showing he was also in charge during the meeting.

“So it seems.” Her voice was bland, but her blue eyes were sharp and focused when she turned to Sacha. “What have you found for me?”

“Emails and photos. Along with a possible connection in the same business,” Sacha replied confidently. He slid over a manila envelope with all the specifics she didn’t want me to know. *Why is that a specific request of hers? Why does she care if I know what Warren is into?*

“Good progress. It seems Nicholette is providing you all with the proper motivation to focus.” She turned to me, looking me up and down shrewdly. “Any updates from your angle?”

“He wants an answer now about whether I want to be his mistress or not. I can’t tell if he’s impatient because he wants to rub it in your face or if he has other plans,” I answered simply, keeping my tone detached. “Warren brought up you replacing me with Aurora after our split.”

“Interesting that’s how he tried to get in with you.” She waved a hand dismissively. “What did you tell him?”

“I acted surprised.” I brushed my dark waves over my shoulder, a casual gesture of my own. “It seemed a more... useful response than the truth.” Maeve’s eyes flashed at me in warning, but I just pursed my lips, waiting for her to move along. I knew she wanted more details as to what Warren had said and done, but the dismissive look in her gaze annoyed me. I deserved more than for her to direct that emptiness my way.

The weight of the men’s eyes were on me as well, but I ignored them in favor of waiting for Maeve to continue talking. She leaned toward me, her lips set in a flat line. “I hope a few dicks haven’t made you forget who you work for.”

“Would you rather I said that you threw that girl in my face the next day when I called you? Because if that’s the case, then he must not know his *loving* wife that well after all.”

Maeve let out a cruel laugh before angling her head a little bit to whisper in my ear. “As if it’s hard to replace someone like you? A simple girl with big dreams, ready to be used and abused by everyone while asking for more.” She pressed a tauntingly gentle kiss on the edge of my ear as her hand slid onto my thigh, squeezing tightly in possessive warning.

Red clouded my vision, but I somehow managed to keep calm. “I did learn from the best. Isn’t that all you wanted me for?”

“I think it’s time for you to run along, darling,” Maeve intoned drolly. Leaning back, she took her hand off my leg. “Let the actual adults handle the business side of things. I’m sure you can find someone to use your services elsewhere. God knows there’s no shortage of tasteless men who’d be perfect for you.”

Dismissed before the drinks even managed to show up, a new record. I could feel the anger radiating from the men but ignored them in favor of smirking coldly at my ex and boss. “Not one of the more creative positions, but if you can’t do well, then teach, yes? I have some more interesting business to take care of tonight anyway. I’ll see you later.”

“Do play nice, *Delilah*,” Maeve called out to me as I stood and turned to make my way out.

“I don’t have much experience in nice.”

Leaving the restaurant on that note, I walked outside and hailed a cab, not interested in staying longer than necessary.

Playing nice wasn't something I was really interested in tonight.

I wanted pain.

I wanted death.

I wanted to *feel*.

Oli

CLENCHING my hands under the table was the only thing that kept me from reaching across it to knock Maeve out. Well, that and Bodhi's trembling hand on my leg. He was terrified.

I slowly unfurled my hands, my muscles trembling with the effort, until I could press one of mine down on top of his. The women hadn't yelled at each other; if anything, they were viciously polite as they exchanged barbs until Nic's face smoothed to an empty expression I definitely wasn't interested in seeing again. Bodhi's shaking slowly stopped as the pressure of my hand helped center him, and I could only imagine what memories were racing through his mind.

The dynamic between Maeve and Nic was eye-opening. But even with how beautiful Maeve was, I didn't see how Nic had fallen so hard for her. The calculating look in her eyes made my skin crawl, and there was this lack of warmth, the very same warmth that drew me to Nic. Our girl had a light inside her that wasn't tainted by the darkness that lived within her desires. Now, Maeve... something about her just felt hollow, like she'd taken and taken from Nic, thinking that our girl would have been enough to fill her up, but then discarded Nic when she realized she'd never be more than a shell.

“Back to important matters,” she announced, shifting to face Sacha. “I need this wrapped up in the next two weeks. Get more information and send it to me. Then you can take care of him however you usually do. Just no trails back to me. The payment will be sent as discussed.”

“We know how to do our job,” Sacha replied, the tic along his jaw the only sign of his anger.

“How did you find all this?” Maeve gestured at the envelope Sacha had passed her way.

“It was Nic’s idea.” I spoke up, not caring enough to keep the annoyance out of my tone. “With her knowledge of his password, we were able to get all of this about the trafficking ring.”

“There is correspondence going back years,” Sacha tacked on. “This is just the past few months, but we’re going through and getting more. That should give you enough insurance for whatever you need when everything plays out.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Maeve retorted, not an ounce of thanks in her tone. *What a fucking bitch.*

My phone vibrated in my pocket, distracting me. Maeve kept talking to Sacha, but the sound of their conversation faded into the background of my mind. Not caring what anyone else thought, I pulled out my cell.

NIC: Come play with me. I’m going hunting.

Oliver: Where?

Nic: Apartment. I need to change.

Oliver: On the way.

I GRABBED Bodhi's hand and pulled him to stand up with me, unwilling to leave him anywhere near the frigid bitch. Right now, we were beneath her notice, but I cared about him too much to take even the tiniest risk that he could be caught by her radar. She was a predator, and there was no telling when she'd next feel like chasing new prey. Ignoring Maeve's side eye, I glanced at Sacha and Vas. She might be paying us for this job, but I deferred to our team leaders, not her. "Got some business to take care of."

Not bothering to explain anymore, I pulled Bodhi out of the room after me. We stalked past the diners and made it out to the sidewalk before Bodhi asked what was going on.

"Nic is going hunting." I squeezed his hand. "I also figured you'd want an out to get away from the bitch in there."

"I did. Am I invited too?"

"Yup. You mind if I kill with her?" I threw my arm around his shoulder while flagging down a cab.

"No," he murmured, shifting from foot to foot. "I think it would be hot as hell."

"I do love the way you think." When he turned to smile at me, I kissed him, an odd feeling of happiness filling me. Bodhi was by my side, and we were on our way to meet Nic and have some fun.

It was shaping up to be a great damn night.

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Nicholette

Monday

T*hat stupid ass fucking cunt.* I stood on the corner, waiting for a john to approach. By the time Oli and Bodhi had come to the apartment, I was walking out of my room in a much sluttier outfit than the one Sacha had bought for me. The short navy-blue halter dress barely covered my ass and was so tight that nothing was left to the imagination.

“You joining us?” I asked Bodhi, manhandling Oli into facing the front door again.

“Yes?” Bodhi’s voice was hesitant, a definite sign that his boyfriend might not have filled him in on what was about to happen.

“Perfect,” I replied succinctly, snagging his arm to pull him along with me. “I need to de-stress, and we’re doing this my way, at least partly. I mean, I’m open to suggestions.”

“And how do you do things?” Oli asked as we stepped into the elevator. I glanced at both of them, glad they were wearing more casual clothes than Vas and Sacha had been in for dinner.

“They weren’t upset that you left them alone with Maeve to be with me?”

“I didn’t tell them why I was leaving.” Oli smirked, anger sparkling in his eyes at the mention of Maeve. “Just said I had business to attend to.”

“Are you both always like that?” Bodhi asked, tilting his head to the side, serious eyes waiting for my answer.

I let out a loud sigh, flipping my long hair over my shoulder as the elevator doors opened. “No, not always. But it’s always really good or really bad, no in between when it comes to her. The good times are really good, and the bad... well, tonight wasn’t bad.” By the time I’d finished my answer, we had reached the ground floor.

He stopped in his tracks, letting Oli and me walk past him into the lobby. “That wasn’t bad?” Bodhi asked. “She was jealous.” I shrugged, dismissively. “But onto more productive topics, I’m going to pick up a john and kill him.”

“That’s it?” Oli asked, staring at me curiously before I started down the street. “It’s kind of cold to be walking.”

“Prostitutes don’t take cabs, Oli,” I called out. “And sometimes simple works.”

“How do you do it?” Bodhi fell into step beside me, and Oli was surprisingly quiet, probably waiting for the answer just like Bodhi was. We stopped at an intersection, waiting for the signal to say we could cross.

“Lately? Drugs,” I told him bluntly, not sure how he would react after admitting his mom was a drug addict. He didn’t seem to be disgusted or angry about it; he gave me a simple nod and fell quiet, not pushing for any other information.

“I think we should come up with a new game plan together,” Oli broke in, a wicked smile curling his lips. “If you’re up for a more... hands-on approach?”

“I’m listening,” I purred, so ready to try something new with them. Both men looked at each other and then focused on me with similar intense expressions. As we made our way to my hunting grounds, our plan came together.

OLI’S HANDS-ON approach was exactly what I needed, and I didn’t even have to let the guy fuck me first. I found us a john and got him back to the same pay-by-the-hour motel I usually went to, but instead of the stranger fucking me, followed by me drugging him, Oli knocked him out. The guy was a creepy middle-aged man, maybe thirty or forty, but all the girls I had talked to said they’d been warned away from him. The shit he liked to do... I didn’t feel an ounce of remorse for what we were doing to him. The police didn’t care about what happened to women and girls like me, so it was time we dealt out our own justice.

Screams pulled me from my wandering thoughts, and I smiled, focusing on the sight of Oli dragging a knife down the side of the man’s cheek. The skin parted like butter, lines of red running down his face like he was crying. We had stripped the guy down and tied him to a chair, waking him up with a cattle prod Oli had pulled out from the storage cabinets in the warehouse. The place was a playhouse for the dark and sadistic, and I couldn’t wait to see what he had hidden away.

I guess there’s more to Oli than I originally thought.

“W- why?!” the man blubbered. It was at least the twentieth time he had asked that same question, and the crack in his voice sent a delicious shiver down my spine.

I smiled coldly at him, pushing myself off the wall I had been leaning against so that I had the perfect vantage point. There was something beautiful about watching Oli work the guy over. “Because I can... or maybe I should tell you what you say to all the women you fuck up? *‘I paid good money for you. I’ll do what I want.’*”

His face paled even more at my taunting tone. Like the others, the bastard probably thought that no one knew what he said to the girls when he pushed for more than they’d agreed upon. His particular breed of asshole always thought that if the only witness to his abuse was a girl he’d already paid for the “privilege,” then it meant the crime didn’t exist. “I don’t- I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Why don’t I refresh your memory?” I purred, turning toward Oli. “Pick something for me to use to help spark his memory.” His eyes lit up with both joy and heat while my own followed the slow trail of his tongue over his lips.

“You really are perfection.”

“Knives,” Bodhi called out from the couch. He had yet to get his hands dirty, but I didn’t mind if he chose to leave that to Oli and me. Having an audience was a thrill I had quickly learned I loved. “Let Nic feel him die as he bleeds out over her skin.”

Throwing back my head, I laughed. “I do like the way you think, Bodhi. Knives, it is.”

Oli handed me the knife he held, carefully pulling me forward to press a soft, taunting kiss on my lips. “Give him

hell.” He let go of me and stepped back, though he didn’t go far. Through the fabric of his jeans, I could see his dick hardening, telling me how aroused he was. Also a perfect opportunity to make our victim more violated before we finally kill him.

“I think he really likes the way you cry and beg us to stop...” I trailed off as I walked over to our victim. Tsking as if I were disappointed, I shook my head. “What was your name again? With everything we’re going through, it seems like I should at least know your name.” The guy responded with just a glare, but I didn’t let it throw me off. “I’ll just call you John; it seems fitting, considering what got you here. Anyway, John, I think my friend here likes hurting you.”

“Is there a better aphrodisiac than screams and blood?” Oli agreed. His hazel eyes were lit with maniac delight as I made a show of considering his question.

“I don’t think so. And I have some ideas for what to do after you’re taken care of.” I leaned down to whisper in the naked man’s ears, wanting to keep that little secret from the guys to build up their anticipation even higher. He shuddered, trying to jerk away from me, and a mocking laugh burst free. If he hadn’t yet figured out that his fear was making this all the better, then that was his problem.

“Let’s see what kind of fun we can have pulling you apart.” I wasn’t going to stab him or go for any of the obvious places for a fast kill. I wanted to take my time; I wanted him to suffer and know that every single moment of pain was his own fault. Running the sharp edge of the knife along his legs, I made sure to push deeply enough to cut, but not enough to cause severe blood loss. He would be conscious for every pound of flesh that he owed those unsuspecting girls.

I moved up his sides, arms, and face before I started to draw designs in his skin, making him one of my best pieces of art. He jerked away from the sting of the blade more often than not, whimpering each time I smacked him and reminded him to sit still. I stepped back maybe half an hour later to admire my work. Most of him was covered in rivers of blood, only his eyes and hair free of that crimson. “You look glorious,” Oli whispered in my ear as he wrapped his arms around my waist from behind. “Splattered with blood all over your body... that cool detachment in your eyes... Where have you been hiding from us all this time?”

I moaned as I tilted my head back onto his shoulder, leaning into him. “Do you remember what I told you in the shower? That I wanted us to fuck, covered in our victim’s blood, and then I’d fuck your ass. It’s all I’ve been thinking about since you started working him over with your fists.” The man in question was now too weak to offer even a single whimper in protest. *Pathetic.*

“Nic,” Oli breathed eagerly. His cock twitched against my ass, a tease that was *almost* too hard to ignore.

“Kill him with me. Then I want to play with *you.*” He brought up a hand to grip my jaw, capturing my lips in a hard and passionate kiss. I fell into it, letting him control the pace and intensity of the moment. He pulled away slowly, and without breaking eye contact, I called out to Bodhi, “I’m the one in charge tonight. Do you want to join us or watch?”

Bodhi didn’t respond for a moment, though I did hear him shifting on the cushions. “I want to join.” A smile curled Oli’s lips, wicked enough to tempt an angel. *Good thing I’ve always been more comfortable playing in hell.*

“Strip. Now.” Bodhi quickly moved to follow my order, both Oli and I watching until he sat there in the nude, his hard dick hitting his stomach. “I want you to play with yourself, but slowly. No coming, just warm yourself up for me.”

He reached down and wrapped his hand around his cock, slowly stroking up and down, keeping his eyes on us. Those lips of his parted in a soft groan that was just barely audible.

“How do you want to do this?” Oli asked, anticipation clear in his upbeat tone. I winked at him before lashing out at ‘John,’ slashing across his throat and spraying both of us with warm blood. “That works too.”

“I have better things to do than drag that out any longer,” I told him, tossing the knife onto the dead body. Grabbing the hem of my dress, I pulled it over my head and tossed it aside, raising my eyebrows when he just stood there, looking at me. “Are you joining me or not?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Oli replied enthusiastically, shucking off his clothes with a speed that impressed me. *I’m surprised he didn’t get whiplash considering how fast he pulled that damn thing over his head.*

I grabbed one of Oli’s hands and pulled him along with me to where Bodhi was still slowly jacking off. Pushing Oli down onto the couch, I straddled his lap, and as if he knew what I was about to do, he reached down to hold up his dick so I could sink onto him, taking every inch he had to offer. His barbell piercings rubbed along the inside of me, making me even more aroused. Bodhi whimpered, but he somehow managed to keep up the slow pace I’d demanded of him.

“Do you want to know my plans, or would you rather it be a surprise?” I teased, leaning forward to nip at Oli’s neck. I started to slowly rock against him, not really fucking him yet,

reveling in the bite of his fingers digging into my hips. They were both doing so well with letting me take control. *They might deserve a bigger reward later.*

“Tell me,” Bodhi decided when all Oli could do was hiss as I brushed fingers against one of his pierced nipples, twisting them.

“I’m going to fuck you, Oli, while you suck Bodhi’s cock,” I told them with a wicked smile on my face. “And you better do a good fucking job of it, ‘cause that’s the only lube you’re going to get before I use Bodhi’s cock as my own to fuck you with. After all, I keep my promises. Even if I have to improvise.”

Oli’s dick jerked inside of me as Bodhi cursed and abruptly let go of his dick. His jaw was clenched, hands fisted hard enough for his knuckles to turn white like he was trying to hold off from orgasming thanks to my words alone.

“I take it that works for you both?” I laughed right before I started riding Oli’s cock in earnest. “Then you better get to sucking your boyfriend off, Oli. I won’t be lasting long, and it would be a shame to hurt your ass too much.”

Bodhi scrambled until he was standing on the couch, Oli’s hands on his ass as he swallowed down his dick. With a gasp, Bodhi threaded his slender fingers through Oli’s dirty blond hair, each breathy noise giving me a clue into how well Oli was doing with his job.

Leaning forward, I felt Oli moan when my breasts brushed his chest. He shifted, and I whimpered at the intensity of all those rungs of his Jacob’s ladder rubbing inside of me. The sensation was nearly getting the better of me, but I needed to concentrate. Topping them was going to be so much more satisfying than just getting off on my own. “How does it feel

to know that you're just getting that cock ready to fuck your ass, Oli? Your boyfriend here is going to top you instead of the other way around. Does that excite you? I think it's definitely exciting for him."

I moved closer so I could run my tongue along one of Bodhi's balls, making his body jerk. Oli's hands squeezed Bodhi's ass, giving one cheek a hard smack that had Bodhi cursing our names in a jumbled, gasping mess that was nearly incomprehensible. Giving his balls a few more teasing licks, I leaned back and rode Oli harder, too excited to watch Bodhi fuck him to make this last very long. A few minutes later, my climax slammed into me, making me see stars as I rode out not one but two orgasms on his dick before sliding off to fall on my side on the couch. Oli had taken Bodhi out of his mouth as I came, trying desperately to stop himself from joining me, his jaw clenching from the effort.

"Fuck, that was hot," I praised him, running a hand over his smooth chest until his breathing evened out. "I want you on your back, Oli. I want to watch you as you get fucked."

Moving out of the way, I gave Oli space to shift around until he was on his back, legs splayed to the sides, while Bodhi knelt between them, looking unsure. I walked around and joined him on the sofa, wrapping him in my arms from behind. "Have you topped before?"

Bodhi shook his head slightly, and even through Oli's lust, I could tell he was watching both of us carefully as I pressed a soft kiss to Bodhi's neck. "No, I wasn't—haven't—"

"Shhh, that's okay," I replied softly. "I can help you if you want."

He swallowed hard, making me smile. "How?"

“I’m going to direct you. I’m going to use your body as if it’s my strap-on. Nothing but a tool for our pleasure. How does that sound?” Bodhi jerked slightly when I reached down and wrapped a hand around his cock, pumping him. “If you want to make it easier on him though, I suggest you start fucking him. His spit is going to dry soon, and that will be very painful for both of you.”

Pushing his body with my own, I shifted him closer to Oli, and, still holding his dick, I positioned him at Oli’s puckered hole. Not letting either of them prepare, I gripped Bodhi’s hips and slammed my body into his so he rammed into Oli’s ass, balls deep, with a single stroke. Oli’s back arched, a groan escaping from either pain or pleasure or both, while Bodhi trembled between us.

Using my hold on his body, I pulled Bodhi back then pounded into Oli without mercy.

“Oh, you’re a fucking perfect toy, Bodhi. My perfect little pet,” I praised, alternatively kissing and nipping his neck. A light sheen of sweat covered his skin, and I couldn’t help but lick along the edge of his shoulder before leaving a harder bite behind. “Maybe I’ll put a collar on you and use you for all kinds of pleasure. Would you like that?” He didn’t respond with words, but his body jerked, making Oli moan, and I smiled against his heated skin. “I want to see you both come apart together under me, pet. Jack him off while I fuck him.”

Bodhi’s hand trembled as he reached down to jerk Oli off, his motions growing rougher and more frantic with each gasp of his boyfriend’s name. Oli hissed at the contact, and I decided to take a bit of mercy on him, but not much. I gathered some spit in my mouth and leaned over Bodhi’s shoulder, stilling his hand with one of my own so that I could spit on his

dick. Oli's dick jumped at that, more pre cum wetting the tip of his hard cock.

"That should help," I told them. "It's not blood, but it will do in a pinch."

"Fuck," Oli hissed as Bodhi earnestly started jacking him off again.

Watching them fuck was hot as hell, Oli arching and gasping while Bodhi barely kept up a rough pace. I leaned forward and ran my tongue along the edge of Bodhi's ear, relishing the moment when he shuddered against me. "If you don't slow down, he'll blow early, pet. This moment will be over too soon."

"I don't know if I—"

I shushed him, smiling as a wonderful idea came to me. "Slow and steady, Bodhi. Keep it slow and steady, and I'll reward you. Open up." I held out two fingers in front of his mouth; after a slight hesitation, he opened up, sucking and licking my fingers as I pushed them in and out as if I were fucking him. Looking up at the two of us almost frantic, a light sheen of sweat making his hair stick to his forehead, Oli cursed.

After just a few thrusts, I pulled them out and trailed my wet digits down his back, not stopping until they rested between his asscheeks. He whimpered, his dick slamming into Oli hard enough that he cried out. "Gentle, pet. Don't break him."

"That wouldn't break me, Nic," Oli managed breathlessly.

I smirked and slowly worked my fingers into Bodhi's ass, making the man between us freeze and moan. "Maybe not before, but I think he might after I do this."

Slowly thrusting in and out of him, I let Bodhi accommodate my fingers before searching for that perfect spot. His keening cry and the slam of his hips told me I found it barely a minute later. Not bothering with gentleness, I pressed inside of him over and over, making sure to hit that sweet spot every time. His thrusts into Oli became harder and harder, making Oli curse both our names as his head thrashed against the sofa.

It was fucking perfection.

They were both so aroused that it didn't take long for them to come. Oli came first, a cry falling from his lips. His climax pushed Bodhi over the edge, and I let go of his hips as he thrust a few more times, filling Oli up with cum before collapsing on top of him. Giving them a moment to catch their breath, I leaned back on the corner of the couch and let out a contented sigh.

“This is just what I needed to help with my stress levels.”

“Sign me up for all future stress relief.” Oli raised his hand as if he was volunteering. Oh, I wanted to keep this man. As much of a masochist as a sadist, it was like I'd custom ordered him just to suit my tastes.

Bodhi laughed as he propped himself up and pulled out of Oli before collapsing again, “Ask me when I can feel my face again.”

Oli and I both chuckled at that, and I pet his leg, which was the closest part of him, as Oli ran his fingers through his hair. “Oh, poor little pet, I'm sure you're fine. How was your first time topping?”

Bodhi hid his face in Oli's neck, and I just smacked his ass playfully. “That good, huh? I'll remember that. So... does

anyone want food?”

“Oh my god, she *is* trying to kill us!” Oli playfully whined as he threw his head back.

“And who is taking care of our friend over there?” I nodded at the body.

“I’ll ask Vas to come by,” Oli said, but he didn’t reach for his phone. I couldn’t blame him. The two of them had put on such a lovely show tonight.

“I’m asking Sacha for food,” I announced, standing up and grabbing Oli’s pants and Bodhi’s shirt.

“Isn’t that—“ Bodhi started, but I simply blew them a kiss as I walked over to grab my phone.

“Not yours anymore!” I sang out, grabbing my phone to text Sacha. Before I could write him a message, I saw the new letter from my stalker and some of my euphoria slipped away. There was nothing I could do about it right now, so I stuffed it back into my purse as violently as I pushed the thought away.

It would still be there tomorrow; no way was I letting this ruin what had just happened. Plus, food was a priority right now. My stomach grumbled, reminding me that I hadn’t had dinner yet.

Clean up.

Food.

Sleep.

That was my plan for tonight. The stalker could wait.



Nicholette

Wednesday

You're mine. MINE!!! How could you do this? Live there, with THEM?! As if they could ever be good enough for you. I thought you had learned that when you made me destroy your apartment. You just need to listen, to see what I see. But don't worry, you will.

Soon.

I folded the newest letter and tossed it in the box of old notes and pictures, letting out an annoyed sigh. There were no leads on the person stalking me. The guys couldn't find anything. No surveillance videos, the desk clerk remembered nothing, and the doormen all said no one had stood out. The police weren't any help, though they did release my and Oli's apartment yesterday. That wasn't something we'd brought up again after Oli got the phone call from Detective Allen, but it was something we would need to discuss.

I hadn't told the guys about this newest letter. The meeting with Maeve and the subsequent play with Oli and Bodhi had helped me push it from the front of my mind. After that, I just

hadn't wanted to deal with it. I mean, they had found *nothing*. Not a damn thing. We were at a standstill, no matter the strength of their conviction that they'd eventually find out who my stalker was. Placing the lid on the box, I shoved it into my closet and went back to sit on my bed.

Tonight was our next plan to draw out Warren and get more information. I was going to be bait while Oli and Bodhi broke into a new property the guys had found, hoping to find more evidence of whatever he was involved in. They still hadn't given me any specifics, and nothing I said or tried got them to give in. I grudgingly respected them keeping their word to Maeve, but it was still annoying as fuck. *Honorable assholes*.

"Penny for your thoughts?" Bodhi asked, leaning on the doorframe of my room.

I smiled and patted the spot beside me on the bed. Without hesitation, a sure sign that he was much more comfortable with me now, he walked over, eyes curious. "Just a little lost in thought... thinking you're all assholes for not telling me more about Warren. But I somehow respect you all for keeping your word." The husky sound of his laugh and that cheeky grin were an adorable combination. A part of me wanted to sigh with the realization that I wanted him once again. There was just something about these men.

"And I'm trying to decide when I'll be going back to the apartment."

He tensed up at that, going motionless. "Why would you go back?"

"I can't stay here forever," I reasoned. "Besides, I'm still paying rent on that place. The landlord didn't even let us have

a month off from paying even though it was a fucking crime scene.”

“You could stay,” he suggested softly, almost sounding lost.

I reached out and squeezed one of his hands, leaving my own to rest atop his knee. “Just because I wouldn’t live here doesn’t mean we aren’t seeing each other.”

“Nic—” I didn’t know what he was about to say, but I cut him off with a kiss. Not caring that I would need to touch up or redo my makeup, I gently kept my lips pressed to his. Small light kisses deepened into harder ones until he was on top of me, the two of us sprawled across the bed, making out. As he ground himself against me, I broke the kiss, panting. *There’s no way we have time for that before I have to leave. Unfortunately.*

“Bodhi, I want you to listen to me. Are you listening?” I urged him to answer me, and he nodded, the gesture softly rubbing his nose against my neck. “I’m not leaving you. Me living somewhere else doesn’t mean you wouldn’t see me or that I’m not with you anymore. Besides, this is all hypothetical because I don’t even know where I’m living. This room was offered to me *temporarily*, so I’ll have to figure something out eventually.”

“It doesn’t have to be temporary,” Vas’ deep voice replied, and I looked over to find he had been eavesdropping by the door. *I need to put bells on these men.*

“Is the room just always open for nosy people, or do you guys do this to each other too?” I asked tartly, but Vas crossed his arms across his chest, making his muscular arms look even larger. Something about the stance just dared me to challenge

him, and fuck, I was tempted. I knew that whatever the punishment was, I'd enjoy it.

“Your door is open. We hear things when we pass by. Plus, I was coming to see if you were ready to go.”

“Yeah.” I nodded and gently nudged Bodhi to roll off of me. He didn't move for a few moments, making me wonder if I was going to have to roll him myself before he flipped over. Vas waved to get my attention, motioning for me to hurry up, then left, probably giving Bodhi and me a moment to talk. “Bodhi—”

“You didn't respond to Vas about this not needing to be temporary,” he interrupted. “Why?”

“I don't like depending on other people,” I replied softly, laying down beside him so we were almost nose to nose. His dark brown eyes had a sheen of tears to them, making my heart twist and break just a little bit. “I learned really early on that I couldn't depend on anyone. That includes staying somewhere I'm not paying rent. And no... dating or fucking doesn't count. I use my body as part of my job; if I'm going to be on even footing in a relationship, there needs to be something besides an exchange of my body for something else. I need to have some kind of control beyond whether or not I open my legs.”

“That's not all you are to us,” he said, his voice barely a whisper. I could feel my heart twist a little at the hurt in his tone.

“For now,” I responded slowly, trying to think over everything before saying it out loud. “But things change. I've never done... this. Not since Maeve. I don't want to go too fast and fuck things up, because I always *do* end up fucking it up. Epically. Or life does. Apparently, my karma sucks ass.”

He smiled a little bit at that, and I smiled too, relieved some of the pain was gone from his expression. “I better go. You know how extra Vas can get from waiting too long.”

“I heard that!” Vas called out.

“That’s not a protest,” I retorted, not caring that it basically sealed my fate of a bruised ass tonight. *Worth it.*

“You better go before he adds more punishments to whatever he’s already planning,” Bodhi urged, not moving from my bed.

“Probably the smartest move,” I agreed. I hurried over to my bathroom, straightening my dress before finger combing my hair. Luckily, my makeup was still fine, so I grabbed a purse with my two phones and blew Bodhi a kiss before hurrying to Vas.

He was waiting for me at the door, impatiently adjusting the sleeves of his t-shirt. He rarely fidgeted unless he was annoyed or anticipating something. My mouth went dry at the sight of him—black jeans, white V-neck t-shirt so thin I could see his chest hair and every fucking inch of muscle on him... fuck, did we have to go on a date? I could just let him fuck me right here.

“Whatever you’ve got going on up there,” Vas growled as he reached for my hand, “remember it for later tonight.”

“But none of what I was thinking had anything to do with later tonight,” I replied honestly, managing to slip on heels before he escorted me out of the door. “What about the others?”

“They aren’t leaving until later. Want to make sure everything is in place first,” Vas replied, his large hand still wrapped around mine.

Swinging his arm, I tucked myself into his side and looked up at him with a smirk. “It’s been a while since we’ve gotten to do this. Almost like a full circle kind of moment. I hadn’t realized that I was missing these dates with you.”

“Did you know Oliver first?” He looked down at me, a hint of warmth in his brown eyes that made me snuggle closer. *Fuck, snuggling? He’s turning me into a snuggler!*

My brow furrowed as I thought it over dates. “No... I met you first, actually. By two days. We had our first meet up, and a few days later, I met Oli. Small world.” He gave a noncommittal grunt, but I heard the hint of satisfaction in his voice even though he tried to hide it. *Possessive asshole.*

“Small world or not, we have a job to do. Let’s get this club visit over with and then come back for our own private party.”

Hopefully, it wasn’t anything too crazy since I had a date Friday night... that I still hadn’t told them about. That would be an interesting conversation to say the least.

But one problem at a time. Just like that stalker letter I hadn’t told them about yet.

I had the tiniest feeling that this was all going to bite me in the ass.

THE CLUB WAS PUMPING, lights going crazy around the wild mass of people dancing to the rap music that filled the air. The smell of sweat and alcohol mixed together to complete the atmosphere, and I was curious just what Warren was doing here of all places. Warren liked high-class places, and that

included where he went to drink and dance. Maeve wouldn't get within ten blocks of this club. I almost asked Vas but held my tongue, knowing I wouldn't get a straight answer. *Guess it's time to just embrace the moment and enjoy myself.*

"So, drinks or dancing?" I leaned up and yelled to be heard over the loud music.

Vas gestured to the bar, grabbing my arm to bring me along. "I don't dance."

"Everyone dances," I snorted. "You just don't want to."

"I'm horrible at it," he insisted, glaring at me. "Don't you get any ideas."

I let out an exaggerated sigh, making sure he saw the roll of my eyes. "You're telling me I got sent here with a guy who won't even dance? We're at a club!"

"No." I gave him my best pout, but he didn't relent. Instead, he protected me from the crowd of people pushing to get to the bartenders for a drink. Looking around, I tried to see if I could pick out Warren, but it was such a mad house I couldn't really tell anyone apart.

In the craziness of it all, I got pulled away from Vas, drawn into a group of guys who all looked like they were around my age, out for a good time. At this rate, he'd find me easier if I stayed in one place, so I settled in with the group and started talking to them. If it would make Vas jealous, well, that was just a bonus.

They were all in their last year of college, stressing about finals and getting a job after graduation. A pang of longing hit me; these guys were all living a life I would never have. Even if I went back to school now, I'd never have the rose-colored glasses they still wore.

With a smile, I accepted their offer to dance and followed them out onto the dance floor, jumping around with them. A few women joined our group, everyone losing themselves in the music. Letting loose, my hips swayed with the beat. I closed my eyes and freed myself of my swirling thoughts, stalker stress, and the newness of being with the men. I used to dance all the time when I was a teen, but I hadn't in a long time, at least not outside of my room, alone. It was such a liberating moment.

A grin filled my face when the familiar scent of citrus, mint, and motorcycle grease surrounded me as Vas wrapped his arms around me from behind. His body followed my rhythm, and he tilted my head back to look at him. Opening my eyes, I found his face flushed and a stern look in his eyes. "You were supposed to stay right beside me."

"The crowd pushed me away, and then I couldn't find you." I shrugged lightly. "I thought *you* were getting drinks?"

"I drank yours when I saw you dancing with other men," he growled in my ear, making me moan. I didn't care about the strangers around us or the fact that we were supposed to be looking out for Warren. At that moment the only thing I wanted was Vas.

"Jealous? I was just dancing," I teased, playing along. In one smooth move, I pulled my neck out of his grip and turned to face him. "I even made sure I wasn't dancing with an individual person, just in a group. See how considerate I am of you and your... jealousy issues?"

"I'm going to spank your ass until it's black and blue, woman. You and that smartass mouth of yours only get into trouble."

“If I didn’t like trouble,” I purred, running my hands up his abs to his chest, grabbing handfuls of his t-shirt, “we wouldn’t be together.”

I leaned up the same moment he pulled me flush against him, our lips meeting in a possessive kiss. He kissed me as if he was punishing me, unrelenting and demanding. I couldn’t get enough of him, losing myself in his scent and the taste of vodka on his tongue. Vas’ beard rubbed my face, making my skin extra sensitive, and I whimpered into our kiss, making him knead his fingers into my ass.

We broke apart at the same time, both of us panting hard and staring at each other as we slowly became aware of the world around us again. I licked my lips, and his gaze flicked down to my mouth, following the movement. “We need to stay focused,” I reminded both of us.

“I am focused,” he countered with a smirk.

“The sooner we finish this cat and mouse game, the sooner you can fuck me, big guy.” I chuckled when he smacked my ass, the contact barely more than a gentle love tap. “I think we found a nickname you like.”

“You’re the fucking worst. That’s going to stick, isn’t it?”

“Of course!” I gave him a look of mock offense. “Everyone loves my nicknames for them.”

“That’s what you would think.”

“I know for a fact that Sacha likes when I call him boss.”

It was Vas’ turn to roll his eyes. “Well, of course he would.”

Movement behind him had me tensing, and I caught sight of a familiar face through the crowd. But it wasn’t the one we

were on the lookout for. Bright blonde hair was highlighted in the flashing lights, and a heartbreakingly familiar laugh drifted over to me, making me swallow hard while anger made my hands shake.

“What’s wrong?” Any lightheartedness in Vas’ voice was gone, and it made me wonder just how much of my reaction I had shown on my face. Enough, apparently.

“Nothing.” I cleared my throat when my voice cracked, trying to push down the growing mixture of pain and rage. “I’m good. Bathroom, and then I’ll meet you?”

Vas didn’t say anything as he searched my face. Finally, he sighed. “I’ll be at the bar, getting us new drinks.”

I nodded, pulling away from him and pushing through the groups dancers to the bathroom. I needed to get myself together. There was no way that was *her*. *Don’t do this, Nic. You can’t go down memory lane right now.*

Focus.

As if fate wanted to smack me with that reminder, I ran right into someone’s chest. Stumbling back, I started to apologize until I found Warren Cabbot himself, looking at me with cruel amusement.

“Delilah,” he crooned. “Just who I was looking for.”

“Warren,” I pushed out past my nerves.

“Come with me.” He snagged my arm and started to pull me away from the dance floor, away from the bathroom. *I’m getting a bad feeling about this.*

“I was going to the bathroom—”

“This won’t take long,” he cut me off briskly, voice clipped. What had annoyed him or pissed him off, I had no

idea. He led us through the throngs of people and into the back of the club. Opening a seemingly random door, he shoved me into a storage closet, the door slamming shut with a loud bang as he joined me.

“Warren, I’m with a client,” I said evenly, not sure how to handle the coldness in his blue eyes when he looked me over from head to toe.

“I saw you,” he hissed. “With the group of boys and then *him*. That brute. *That’s* who you’d rather be with than me?”

“I never said that.” I shook my head. It wasn’t like my job was a secret, so his outburst didn’t make sense. Then again, it was Warren. Really, anyone who’d been in a relationship with Maeve couldn’t be entirely sane. I knew that I had a few of my own screws loose, for sure.

He stalked closer, pressing me against some of the metal shelves. Cleaning products rattled around as he pushed me into the unforgiving bars with enough force that the metal edges felt like they were cutting into my skin.

“You haven’t given me an answer,” he countered. “I would treat you like a fucking queen, give you everything. Anything you want, you could have with a phone call. But you’re still seeing clients like a fucking whore.”

“I *am* a whore,” I snapped back, anger filling me. “I was trained by your wife to be one. You have an issue with it, take it up with her. And you knew my profession already. Why offer to make me a mistress if my job makes me so repulsive?”

“I’ll have you, one way or another,” he growled. He pulled back a hand as if to hit me, and on instinct, I smacked him across the face. The loud crack filled the tiny closet, sending a

spike of satisfaction through some of the panic that was threatening to set in.

“I have my answer.” I pushed him away from me when he froze, staring at me in shock. Even if it changed our plans, I wouldn’t deal with his judgment or anger. “Hell no. Stay the hell away from me, Warren. I’ll *never* be your plaything. Go back to your wife.”

“You bitch, I’ll show you exactly what you are!” he roared, reaching for me. We struggled until he spun me around, slamming me into the shelf hard enough to knock the breath out of me. Before I could get my balance back, he pushed my dress up and over my ass, planning to make use of the only weapon that weak men like him could ever wield against a woman who was strong enough to fight back and reject their pathetic offers to better our lives.

Knowing what was about to happen, a moment of cold clarity hit me. I could work with this. He might use me for a few minutes, fucking me so that he could have a few seconds of power. But if I had learned nothing else from Maeve, I knew that getting leverage against people was one of the most powerful weapons I could have. It could help her case, or it could just help me; at this moment, it didn’t matter. I scrambled for my purse and tried to kick him, bucking my body back to fight him off. Finding my work cell first, I managed to start recording a video without unlocking it. I knew it wouldn’t capture everything, but I’d make sure it was enough.

“Bitch, just stay still!”

“No! Stop,” I protested, putting up a fight until he wrapped his hand around my throat, squeezing until he cut off my air supply. My hand never left my phone, the feel and purpose of

it keeping me grounded even as unconsciousness teased the edges of my mind.

I gasped for breath when he removed one hand from my throat to push my underwear down to my knees before slamming into me. His hard cock tore me open more and more with each punishing thrust. Choking for air, black dots flickering across my vision, I didn't have to fake tears. If he didn't let up, I'd lose consciousness, and then who knew what would happen next. Letting my body fall slack, I hoped my giving in would signal that he could loosen his hold. Luckily, that was exactly what he did. His grip loosened enough for me to gulp down fresh air as he pounded into me.

Looking down, I saw a trickle of blood running down my leg from his brutal attack. His thrusts became easier with my blood lubricating his way; each pant of his hot breath against my skin made me want to claw his eyes out. But no, now was the time to think of the future game, not immediate satisfaction. I cried as he raced toward his own pleasure, whispering *no* over and over again, just loudly enough for the phone to pick up the sound.

He didn't last long, coming just minutes later. His grunts overwhelmed my senses, the erratic thrust of his body into mine accompanying the nauseating feeling of his seed pumping inside of me. When he pulled out, I didn't hold back the whimper, hating the show of weakness but needing every moment of documentation to make sure I was the one who really held the power here. He smacked my ass hard after he zipped up his pants, and then he trapped me between his arms, leaning close to whisper in my ear. "No one, especially not a fucking *whore* like you, *ever* tells me no."

“You just raped me,” I responded, the hollowness of my voice sounding all too familiar. I needed to be those poor girls that I avenged. Warren had been too smooth, too instinctual, for this to have been his first time taking something that wasn’t his to take. He probably got off on the trail of tears down his victim’s cheek, savoring those little whimpers and whispers in his next moment alone with his right hand and empty life.

“Is it really rape considering what you do? Or is it just stealing? Can you even say no at this point?” he crooned in my ear before stepping away. “I’ll get your real answer the next time we meet.”

I kept facing the wall until I heard him leave the room. The second he was gone, I sagged against the shelf, tears running down my face until I reached over and turned off my phone. I hit end on the video and swiped away the last of the tears, using a nearby roll of paper towels to clean myself up. *Pathetic, really, he only lasted maybe two minutes. You’d think the power of raping me would make him last at least a bit longer.* I watched the video, satisfied with what I had managed to capture. I saved it as a file on my screen, labeling it ‘If I Go Missing- Start Here.’ That would do.

Reaching for the doorknob, I yanked the door open and ran back into the club. Coldness filled me at what I had just done. With the “opportunity” over, it seemed the “normal” side of my brain had clicked back on. That strong part of me that took the lead when I was dealing with men like Warren had slunk to the backseat, leaving me in the aftermath of questions I didn’t want to answer right now. Was this a new low or high for me? Maybe just a new level of fucked up? Either way, I wanted to leave. Now. I shoved people aside, not caring about the cursing that rose up in my wake. Vas must have noticed the

commotion because he met me halfway, concern on his face as soon as he saw me.

“What—”

I shook my head and pulled him toward the exit. “Tell the others they need to get out. Warren is beyond pissed; I don’t know how long he’s going to stay out at this point.”

“Nic—” He tried to get me to talk, but I shot him a cool look.

“Not here, Vas. I need a shower and a lot of wine. Warren is an asshole.”

As soon as we were out of the club, Vas pulled me into his side, arm around my shoulders and his voice filled with worry and a hint of that growl. “What did he do?”

“He was just pushy,” I lied, giving him a cool smile. “But I rejected his offer. Let’s see if his anger makes him sloppy and easier for you guys to finish up with.”

Maybe I should tell him about what happened? But immediately, I knew I couldn’t. Vas would lose it. My fierce teddy bear was an asshole, even to me, but he was also my protector. I wouldn’t give him this information that would push him over the edge and possibly jeopardize their job with Maeve.

Plus, telling them gave them my leverage. Once they knew about it, it was no longer my video to do with as I pleased. They would want to use it in their own way, and I would let them because they were worming their way under my skin and into my head much too quickly for me to totally arm myself against their presence. Right now, the power was all mine, and I wanted that.

No, I *needed* it.

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Nichollette

Friday

It had been two days since my date with Vas and the run-in with Warren. When I had gotten back to the apartment, I had tossed the dress in the trash and taken a thirty-minute shower. By the time I had gotten out, I was pink all over and I grabbed one of the Plan B's I had under my bathroom counter in case a client's condom broke. I had an IUD, not wanting to worry about a missed daily pill, but it was better to have insurance than a career-ending surprise. *Note to self: get tested again soon.* I was negative at my last appointment, but with Warren...I wanted to be sure.

But now wasn't the time to be thinking about Warren or his bullshit. I had something way more important to do tonight than deal with that limp-dicked asshole. Tonight was going to be... interesting. With everything else going on, I had never told the guys about my date with Em. Vas didn't want to know the details of my date, whereas the others didn't seem to care, but them being aware that I had one planned... that seemed like fairly broad information that I should be telling them all. Even Vas, who I knew would get possessive the next time we

were alone together. *I'll bring it up when someone asks. I won't lie to them, and it's not like I'd actually make it out of the apartment without one of them seeing me.*

Seeing the time on my phone, I knew that I needed to focus and get ready. I had gotten out of the shower and started to pick out what I was going to wear when Oli waltzed into my room, going on about something he'd found. When he looked up and inspected my appearance, he hopped onto my bed.

“What are you up to?”

“I have a date tonight,” I told him casually, not sure how he or the others would react to the news. I wasn't making money, not like I used to, working the Warren angle with them; instead, I had been going through money I had been saving up so I could replace all of my clothes and necessities since that had been destroyed. Working was something I had to do. My career wasn't a forever one. I had a limited window of time I could do this, and I was going to take advantage of that while I could. “Short notice, but one of my regulars and a friend of sorts.”

“Who is he?” His tone was casual as I flipped through a few dresses I was considering.

I looked at him, curious to see his expression as I gave him my answer. “Emmerich Förstner.” Oli choked, on air I guess, not removing his eyes from me despite his coughing fit. “Do you know the name?” I asked sweetly, not surprised by his reaction given the guys' business.

“What's going on?” Bodhi asked as he and Sacha stopped in my doorway. *Well, if Vas happens to walk by right now, the whole gang will be here.*

“I have a date booked tonight. With a friend.” I turned back to my clothes and flipped through a few more options, none of them feeling right. “Apparently, Oli knows him.”

“Working tonight? I was wondering when you’d be booking more clients,” Sacha answered evenly.

“Who is it with?” a deep voice asked. *Ah, there’s my giant fierce teddy bear.*

“Emmerich Förstner,” Oli managed to reply for me. “A *friend* of Nic’s.”

“A *friend of sorts*,” I corrected him, bursting out in laughter at the shocked looks on all their faces. “Why are you surprised?”

“You do know who Emmerich is, right?” Bodhi asked. Because it was him, I knew the question was meant sincerely. The man didn’t do condescension. It was kind of adorable that he assumed I wouldn’t know what Emmerich did.

“Of course, I do. Part of the German Family based in Boston. We met when I worked the streets under circumstances I can’t discuss. I’m sure you can use your imaginations as to why.” I turned back to my closet and finally found what I was looking for. The black top was made of straps, and the style was just what I needed for our date tonight. A choker clipped around my neck, connected to two thin straps that traveled over my collar bone, stopping at the swell of my breasts where each strap split off into a Y-shape, no padding or fabric covering my nipples the way a typical bra would. By joining with the thin black band that circled my torso, the harness emphasized my assets, leaving it all on display if I removed my top layer or decided to go without one. Putting that on, I then slipped into a short and slinky black dress that dipped low in the front and barely covered my

ass. The cut of the dress clearly showed off the details of the harness, more than enough to tease without giving everything away. *Perfect.*

When I turned around, I had four sets of eyes watching me closely, so I turned slowly for them with a teasing smile. “What do you think?”

“I think if you were going out with anyone but him,” Oli answered huskily “we’d send you out with something from all of us. That way, while he’s showing you off, the only thing you’re thinking of is us.”

I sauntered past Sacha and straight to Oli until I was standing right in front of him. “Are we talking about cum, bruises, or cuts?”

He grabbed my ass and pulled me between his legs, smiling at me fiercely. “Why not all three?”

“Too bad she’s going out with Förstner.” Sacha’s voice was dry as he interrupted our flirting. “But can I suggest underwear without you taking offense?”

Oli kneaded his hands into my ass as I looked over my shoulder at Sacha, amused. “Panty lines, boss. That wouldn’t do.”

“Panty lines will be the least of your fucking worries later,” Vas muttered under his breath, and I winked at him. “I am tanning your fucking hide when you get home tonight.”

“Tomorrow,” I informed him as I turned and sat on Oli’s lap. If I squirmed a bit to get comfortable, well, was it my fault that it was so much fun to torment him?

“Fuck the belt. I’m getting a cane.” Vas shook his head and walked away.

“Are you going to do that after each one? You know, for future reference,” I yelled out to him, and Vas growled loudly enough that I heard him from down the hall. I smirked, unfazed by his promises. “Well, that will be fun later.”

“Give us a minute?” Sacha asked the others.

Oli sighed against my neck. “I’ll deal with you after Vas does.” He pressed a teasing kiss on the back of my neck before moving me to sit on the bed. Bodhi walked out with him, though not before he mouthed ‘later’ to me. I nodded then focused on the man in front of me.

“Yes?”

Instead of approaching me, Sacha stayed in the middle of the room, intently watching me. “You didn’t tell us you were going to be adding more clients and bookings. Why?”

I didn’t answer right away, mulling over how to phrase my response. “I wasn’t sure how all of you would react to me fucking other people, among other things. Not since our last discussion about it. The hypothetical and reality of my job are very different.” *Especially when it comes to new clients.* “I’ve been helping you all with the Warren job for almost a month, meaning I didn’t make more than my base income. After a month of nothing else and no word on this arrangement ending... well, I need to get back to work and add in more than just my regular monthly clients. Being gone for too long could kill my business.”

He nodded and slowly approached me this time, stopping just short of touching my legs. “Nicholette,” he said softly and firmly, reaching out and tilting my face up to look at him. “There is no judgment here, from any of us, about what you do. Hell, that’s how we met you. So go, as long as you come back to us.”

I swallowed hard at the understanding in his statement and gave him a small smile of thanks as he let go of my chin then walked out of the room without looking back. Letting out a shaky breath, I flopped back onto the bed, trying to calm the emotional storm and arousal his words had started. The L word wasn't something any of us had said or even hinted at, but damn, that statement... it was pretty fucking close in my book. I guess we all just liked complicated things. Plus, they really didn't care if I continued working as a call girl? I still wasn't sure how to process that. I appreciated that they supported me working, especially since I didn't have a plan B to fall back on. Given my early departure from my parents' house and all that followed, it wasn't like I had some kind of real education to fall back on. Definitely couldn't put "lack of modesty" on a résumé.

A light knock on my door pulled me from my swirling thoughts, and I looked over to find Bodhi watching me. Without a thought, I motioned for him to join me. He shut the door, a smile on his face as he closed the door and made his way over to me. I returned the grin as he laid down on the bed beside me, our faces so close our noses could brush against one another.

Reaching out, I pushed his long brown hair out of the way, so I could see his honey brown eyes. "What mischief are you up to, Bodhi?" He was the one it had been hardest to connect with. Oh, the attraction was there, but connecting with this soft-spoken and shy man had taken *work*.

Sacha and Vas preferred for the sex to be one on one, though occasionally they could, and did, share. Oli and Bodhi seemed to find sharing just added another level to the fun. Since they'd been together before I came along, it was a relief that we could spend time together as a trio without anything

feeling awkward. It was even better that we could spend one on one time too, and neither of them ever got jealous. *Hopefully, once this Warren shit is dealt with, we'll have more opportunities for that to happen.*

“Oli and I wanted to send you off with something to think about while you were out tonight,” he explained, his eyes lighting with humor. “But then Vas pulled Oli off to do something for a current job. I think they’ll be planning their payback in detail together, so good luck with that.”

“I plan to enjoy it immensely,” I promised him with a sultry purr as I ran a hand through his hair, letting my fingernails lightly scratch his head. “You’re here to send me off alone then?” He nodded, a small smile tugging at his lips. I looked at the clock on the bedside table and then back at him. “You have thirty minutes.”

Instead of responding with words, he leaned forward and gently brushed his lips against mine in a barely there sensation that had me grabbing the back of his head to deepen. My tongue slid along his as my eager hands tilted his face to get the angle I wanted. He whimpered at my tight hold and pressed his body against mine so I could feel his arousal.

“I take it,” I asked softly after breaking the kiss, “you had an idea for a send-off?” He nodded slowly. “Go ahead.”

Bodhi slid off the bed to his knees and pulled gently at my legs until my ass was along the edge of the bed, almost falling off. His long fingers pushed my short dress up, bunching it around my waist. *Oh god, I love the way this man thinks.* I spread my legs instinctively, and he leaned forward to press a soft kiss on my pussy before he licked me lightly.

I groaned, reaching down to thread a hand through his hair and pulling lightly. I could feel him smile against me before

his skillful tongue started to eat me out. Teasing flicks along my clit. Long licks down my center, his tongue held flat. Just the right amount of teeth scraping over my core as he thrust a finger inside of me. Bodhi ate pussy like a man starved and the only thing he could survive on was you. One day, I was going to have him eat me out all day. Making phone calls with him on his knees, fucking me with his tongue all day long. I moaned at the thought alone, grinding my pussy on his face.

He whimpered at the motion and thrust his fingers into me again then slid them out, moving them backward until he teased my ass with those wet digits. I looked down at the touch to find him staring up at me, question clear in his eyes. Nodding with consent, he held my gaze as he pushed a finger into me, lightly scraping his teeth along my clit. I exploded and saw stars as I rode his face to two orgasms.

Breathing hard, I felt Bodhi fix my dress before a dip in the mattress signaled he was back on the bed at my side. I turned to find him watching me with a satisfied smile, lips and chin shiny with my juices. With a swipe of my thumb along his chin, I helped clean his face, offering my finger to him in return. Without a second thought, he sucked it into his mouth, cleaning me off this time.

“You come back tomorrow?”

I nodded slightly, touched and amused at the need in his voice. “Late morning, I think. Think you can wait that long for me?”

He smiled at that. “Oliver won’t be happy, but yes, I’ll tell him you said so.”

I laughed, pressing a brief kiss to his lips. “You just want him to beat *my* ass tomorrow instead of yours. I’ll remember that when I decide to play out my next fantasy with you.” His

breath caught at my promise, but I pushed myself up to standing, knowing I needed to head out. “Right now, I need to get going, or I’ll be late.”

He laid there watching me without protest as I walked over to grab my thigh high boots and put them on. After one more quick check in the mirror, I fixed my hair a bit then snagged my gold clutch off the top of the dresser.

“Be safe,” Bodhi told me as I got to the door.

I turned around and blew him a kiss. “Always.”

As the apartment door shut behind me, I had an odd feeling that I was actually leaving something behind.

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Nicholette

The Next Morning?

A throbbing in my head had me cursing as I came to. *God, what did Emmerich get me to drink this time? I groaned and tried to bring a hand to my forehead, only to find I was tied up. Wait... Em would never leave me tied up overnight.* Awareness slammed into me at that, and my eyes shot open to see that I wasn't at Emmerich's place or the guys'.

I was in a dirty concrete room that looked like an unfinished basement with just a few small rectangle windows along the top of the walls. I shifted around a bit and realized I was tied to one of the concrete support pillars along the middle of the space. *This is not good, not at all. What the hell happened?!* That question seemed to unlock everything, my memories slamming back into me quickly enough to leave me breathless.

I walked out of the fancy apartment building, looking out for the black town car Em always sent for me when we went out. After about five minutes, I opened my clutch to realize I only had my personal phone on me. Hell, I can't go up and get

my work one now. What if the driver comes when I'm gone and leaves since I'm not here? *I let out a frustrated sigh, but just then a town car pulled up to the curb. A man in a suit stepped out. "Delilah?"*

"Yes." I smiled at him, quickly sizing him up. He must have been someone new since I didn't recognize him. Em always sent me details so I could confirm who was picking me up; he was always very thoughtful in following all arrangements for my safety, and he'd never given me reason to doubt him. Without my work phone, I couldn't check the details he'd sent, but... Well, it's just for one night. I should be fine.

He opened the door for me, and I slid into the backseat. After the driver got inside, he didn't say anything else to me; instead, he focused on driving until his phone rang a few minutes later.

"Excuse me, ma'am. I need to take this." He met my gaze in the rearview mirror, and I just nodded absently, a driving partition rising as soon as he had my affirmation. That's weird. My gut was telling me something was wrong, very wrong. No driver of Em's would take a business call while driving me.

I tried to be quiet, keeping my movements and breathing calm as I reached for the handle. A bit of anxiety stirred when the handle didn't immediately give, so I tried unlocking the door and pulling at the handles, but nothing happened. Just as I started to pull on the handle of the other door, the air began to take on a strange taste, the gas quickly becoming too much for me to easily breathe through.

Wait, panic isn't going to help. Think. Then it hit me—I had my phone! Grabbing my clutch, I scrambled to get my phone unlocked, the simple action made increasingly difficult

by the growing fuzziness of my head. I opened my messages and found the last person I had texted, Bodhi. I tried to explain everything until I couldn't think straight anymore then hit send. Thinking of Maeve and her edict, always cover your tracks, I powered it off right after. My vision was quickly going black, so I fumbled around, finally managing to open the small slot on the side and take the SIM card out. I threw it down on the ground and smashed it repeatedly with my heel until I saw it fall apart into small pieces.

I might not be able to save myself, but I would save them.

A door opening disturbed my thoughts, returning my mind to its concrete prison, and my jaw dropped when I saw the person walking down the stairs to come to a stop right at the bottom in full light. A maniacal smile filled the usually serious and pretentious familiar face.

“Hello, Nicholette. You’re finally awake and coherent!” Warren Cabbot greeted me enthusiastically. “I’m so glad you finally understood my messages.”

“Warren?” I asked, my mind trying to wrap around the idea of Maeve’s husband, our target, being the one who’d taken me. “Why? Why would you do this?” *How did we not see this coming? How could we have?* The second question was more haunting than the first one ever could be.

“I knew the moment Maeve took you in.” He ignored my question in favor of rambling, the sick light filling his eyes only becoming more and more obvious as he walked toward me. “I knew you were something special, but you didn’t look my way. No, it was always Maeve; it’s *always* been Maeve. The others I could let go since we both had our dalliances, but you almost pulled her away from me.”

I shook my head at that. “No, no. She would have never left you for me. She loves you.”

He backhanded me, and blood filled my mouth, my cheek stinging from the large gold ring on his hand. He lifted my head, using a rough grip on my hair to control the movement. “Don’t interrupt me again, angel. You really do need to learn manners. Don’t make me angry anymore.” I nodded slightly, not having to force the fear in my eyes as I looked up at him. “Now, what was I talking about? Yes, *you*, the homewrecker.”

“I wanted you too, you see. But Maeve,” he growled, shaking his head while a snarl twisted his face, “she wouldn’t share. Not her *precious Nicholette*. Others, we enjoyed together. Did you know that? But she kept you all to herself. When you left, all I wanted was you. I needed to see for myself what had captivated her.” I would have laughed if not for the situation; Maeve didn’t care about me the way he thought she did.

I watched as he ranted, pacing back and forth along the length of the basement, awareness of all my cuts and scrapes fully hitting me. *How long have I been down here? What did he do that I don’t remember? He said I was finally coherent... What did I say before now that I don’t recall?* His words became increasingly angry and erratic as he talked, his hands sharply lashing out to emphasize what he was saying. *I hope Bodhi got my message. Please be on the way, please.*

“You moved after my first letters, but not to worry, I found you again. You were living with that tattooed scum!” My head snapped up at that. *What did he just say?!* He looked at me with a condescending smirk. “Oh, did you not figure it out yet? You don’t remember our previous talks? I was sending you love letters, but you never responded. How very rude.

Then I went to your apartment, trying to wait for you to return from the club. I just knew I could convince you to come with me. I would treat you like royalty. But then..." His mouth twisted in a grimace, his green eyes flashing with anger as his sharp jaw clenched. "I found those men's clothes in your stuff, and I knew I had to destroy it all. You didn't understand. You're mine! *Mine!*"

He yelled the last word in my face, and flashbacks filled my mind. Him telling me this and my subsequent rejection of him. Screams that made me flinch, kicks that made me lose my breath, and countless other hits rained down on me before the quick prick of a needle. Coldness seeped into my blood before everything went blank. *Oh god, no. Anything, anything but that. Stay calm. I need to be calm. Live through this now, so I can freak out later.*

Those quick flashes made me remember one of the first friends I had made in the city, Kandy. She was another prostitute, and she'd made the effort to show me the ropes. The others had just ignored the new kid on the block.

"Sugar," she said, taking a long drag of her cigarette before blowing the smoke in my face. "If you ever end up with some crazy john, like absolutely bat shit, tell them what they want to hear. Go with it. Live through it. Never apologize for what you have to do to live. They won't ever apologize for what they're doing to you."

I nodded frantically, opening my eyes wide to seem sincere. "Yours. Of course, I'm yours. Those men, they just use me." I swallowed the bile in my mouth as I agreed with him. *I need to play along. I need to do this to survive. I will live through this, no matter what.* Maybe if I said it enough, in different ways, I'd believe it. "But not you, you're the only

one that saw me. Not even Maeve did. She must have known I would have never wanted her back if she shared me with you.”

Warren stared at me, face uncertain despite the hope filling his gaze. Slightly emboldened by that little bit of headway, I added, “I asked to be with you. I had heard that you two shared lovers before. But she was cruel, keeping us apart. That night at the club, I was positive they were watching me, they always are, so I had to fight back. I didn’t want to, but they would have known. I’m sorry it took me so long to see it. Maybe I was overwhelmed by what you make me feel? I’m ready now though. You’ve shown me just how much I mean to you. We are meant to be together, Warren. All these people, they just got in the way. But now... now, we can be together. You and me. Just like we both want.”

I forced myself to not tense up as he lifted his hands to cup my face. “I don’t know why I thought you wouldn’t understand, but you get it. You know it’s true. You and me.” He kissed me, lapping at my split lip and blood in my mouth. I made myself kiss him back, returning his affection with a confidence that my life depended on. *Survive*, I told myself like a mantra. *Survive and get back to them*. The guys I was falling for filled my mind. Vas, my fierce and dangerous giant, my own personal teddy bear who took care of me. Sacha, the quick to anger leader who only knelt for me, even if right now it was only figuratively. Oli and Bodhi, the men who played twisted games with my body and made me laugh like no one else. And Maeve, the woman who was my first adult love, who’d loved me as much as she could. The woman who helped me shape myself into a weapon. I loved her still, even though I didn’t want to.

I thought of all of them as Warren kissed me repeatedly and lifted the hem of my short dress. He fucked me against

that cold concrete pillar, my hands still bound behind me, whispering *mine* over and over again in my ear until he came inside of me. I forced myself to call out his name when I came, my body brought to completion even though my mind had completely dissociated from what was happening. He kissed me again, promising to be back soon, and once I was free, it would just be us.

I kept it together until he closed the door behind him and I heard the snick of the lock turning. Footsteps above me tracked his movements through the ground level until he left a few minutes later. The place was completely empty except for me, half-naked and tied to a cold pillar, tears running down my face and his cum leaking from me. What I'd learned flashed through my mind. Warren was my stalker. Out of everyone I'd thought it could be, he had never crossed my mind.

Then his final words hit me. I would be free, and then it would just be us.

What does that mean for the guys? Maeve? I couldn't live with myself if I lost any of them.

Find me. Figure it out.

Please.

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Bodhi

Friday

Oliver and Vas had just gotten back and were giving me the rundown on the files they wanted me to break in and steal from our current target's house. Sacha was sitting beside me, half listening to what the others were talking about, and my brow furrowed when my phone buzzed. *Who would be texting me?*

I pulled my phone out and saw Nic's name on my screen before it faded to black. *Isn't she on the way to her date?* The memory of what I'd done before she left, the taste of her still on my tongue, made me shift a bit in my seat.

"Are we boring you, Bodhi?" Oliver asked lightly, though his eyes flashed with annoyance.

"It's Nic," I told him, opening up the text. Panic filled me as I started reading the broken and disoriented message.

"Why is Nic— What's wrong?" Vas asked sharply, reading my face. The others snapped to attention at his tone, their focus immediately homing in on the phone in my hand.

Nic: Wrong town car. Black. Probably fake plates. Gassed.
Check work phone. Password personal. Losing consciousness.
Stalker?

Bodhi: Nic? What's wrong? What happened?

Automatic Message: The phone you tried to reach is no longer in service.

I held out my phone to Sacha with a trembling hand, letting him read her message aloud because there was no way I could do it. My mind was racing, already trying to figure out what she'd said.

“That’s the message? That’s all she said?” Oliver sounded frantic, and it was completely out of the ordinary for him to question anything Sacha had said. Sacha didn’t take it personally; instead, he held out the phone for the other two to read it themselves. I stood up and ran to her room, grabbing her second phone from where it still sat atop the dresser. *It must have fallen out of her purse when she grabbed it.*

I walked back into the living room and held it up. Oliver motioned for me to pass it to him, but my heart sank when he cursed a moment later.

“What’s wrong?” Sacha asked calmly.

“She has a special program on the phone. Basically, if she doesn’t enter her password in every set amount of hours, all the information is erased. Great for if she got arrested, not so great for us.” Oliver shook his head. “And if I enter the wrong password, it will delete everything.”

“What could her password be?” Vas asked, and the other stayed silent, trying to think it over.

“Her birthday?” Oliver proposed, but Vas shook his head.

“She doesn’t care about her birthday. She never even celebrates it.”

I chewed on my lip. “We should ask Maeve.”

“What?” Vas asked.

“Well, they were together. Nic and Maeve,” I reasoned with them. “They were together for a year. Maeve had something to do with Nic getting off the streets, saved her from turning tricks with just anyone to survive. She loved her. Maeve might know, and I think she would help Nicholette. How they are together, even now. I mean, you saw them together when we brought Nic along to our last meeting with Maeve.” I shook my head. “There are still feelings there for both of them. There was too much heat and anger in their exchange for them to not care about each other. It’s when you stop fighting that the feelings are gone completely.”

“You’re right.” Sacha nodded, though he still frowned. “Guess I’ll be making that phone call.” He was pulling his phone out when a sudden pounding shook our door.

“Nic! Delilah! Whichever name you’re going by right now, where the fuck are you?” a loud male voice called out.

“Guess we also have Emmerich Förstner to talk to as well,” I offered unnecessarily as I started toward the front door. “If they *are* friends, even sort of, he could help. I mean, he called her Nic. He’s gotta be close to her in some way.”

“This is going to be chaos,” Vas commented darkly.

“For Nic, it’s worth it.” Sacha’s firm words were met with silent agreement from the rest of us.

A few seconds later, I opened the door to find Emmerich Förstner, the son of Ansel Förstner, giving me a cocky smile as he held a gun to my face. “Where the hell is Nic?”

I wasn’t fazed by the gun, simply moving back and gesturing him in without missing a beat. The others stood up as Emmerich came in, steadily maintaining his aim at my face. “She’s missing. Taken,” I explained after I calmly closed the door. “She thought she was getting in your town car.”

“If you put the gun down, we could use your assistance. For Nic,” Sacha told him, aiming his gun at Emmerich. “If not, I’ll kill you where you stand because I’ll consider you in our way.”

Emmerich considered all of us before letting out a wild laugh and lowering his gun. A tattooed hand came up and pushed his long dark brown hair out of his face. I got the barest glimpse of the designs covering his arms as he threw his coat onto a nearby chair.

“You are fucking crazy to make that threat to me, which I respect. I’ve heard of you four. You do good work. Interesting who Nicholette finds herself falling in with.” He gave us a wolfish grin. “What happened?”

“I need to make a call, then we can tell you both at the same time,” Sacha told him coolly as he opened his phone. A few motions later, he had the call on speakerphone, and Maeve’s voice soon answered, irritation clear in her voice.

“Sacha, this better be—”

“Nic has been taken,” he interrupted, briskly cutting her off. Maeve instantly fell silent, not even a whisper of sound to hint at what she was feeling. “She was meeting a client for a date, and it seems her stalker got ahold of her. She sent one

message to Bodhi a few minutes ago, but her phone is now unreachable.”

“Tell me,” she ordered, and Sacha repeated the message out loud for both Maeve and Emmerich, whose expression darkened the more he heard it.

He started cursing by the end of it, and Maeve hummed in thought before speaking. “Good to hear from you so soon, Emmerich.”

“Maeve,” he greeted the older woman respectfully.

“I take it she was going to meet you?”

“Yes,” he confirmed, irritation clear in his voice at the circumstances.

“Her work phone is password locked, and she said it would be personal,” Oliver interjected. “We only have one chance to unlock the phone, or all the information is erased. Do you know what it could be?”

Maeve once more went silent. “She has a picture she keeps close. *Private*. Find that and you might be able to figure it out. Her password isn’t something she shared with me, but that’s the only personal thing I know she always kept hidden and for herself.”

“I know where that is,” I spoke up and hurried out of the living room again. I walked straight to the nightstand and felt around until I found what I was looking for. An old photograph from a kid’s birthday party stared up at me. My nightmares were too invasive for me to sleep alone, so I had spent several of my nights switching between her room, Oliver’s, or the three of us camping out together. One of the nights it was just she and I, I hadn’t been able to sleep. I couldn’t remember the reason why just now, but I had gone

into the nightstand, looking for something, and had stumbled upon the photograph. I slowly walked back into the room, handing the photo over to Sacha. Immediately, he drew it close to inspect it.

“You found it?” Maeve asked.

“Yes.” I cleared my throat, making myself speak up for her to hear me better. “It looks like an old family photo. A teen girl, probably Nic, and a younger boy. Blond.”

“Her brother,” Emmerich supplied, and even Maeve stayed quiet at that. “He’s a lot younger than her and was just a kid when she got thrown out. She misses him a lot.”

“What’s his birthday?” Oliver asked. “If that’s the one personal thing she keeps close, it makes sense that it would be her password.”

“What are we hoping to find on her work phone?” Maeve interrupted. “She sent you that message for a reason. Why?”

“I don’t know what his birthday is,” Emmerich answered, resigned. “She didn’t tell me that. And you’re right, Maeve. Did she want you to open it just to find me? Cause I’m here.”

“Can you help us figure out where she was taken?” Sacha asked him, eyebrow raised.

Emmerich looked thoughtful then snapped his fingers. “I know someone who can.”

“Keep trying to figure out the password anyway, Oliver,” Sacha ordered Oliver, who nodded in agreement. “Just in case it wasn’t about Förstner.”

Emmerich got on his phone, asking whoever was on the other line to hack into nearby traffic cams, find all black town

cars, and send the info to him. “Hopefully, we get lucky and can go through them all quickly.”

“Do you know who her stalker is?” Maeve questioned, the loud question reminding us that she was still on the line.

“No idea,” Vas answered for us. “We’ve been trying to track them down, but they’re thorough. Even the police haven’t figured anything out.”

“Interesting.” Maeve made a clicking sound with her tongue. “Let me check my contacts. I’ll be in touch.”

Sacha put his phone back in his pocket after she disconnected the call and looked over the photograph carefully. Vas walked over, joining his brother in studying it. “Wait, is there something on the back?” He reached out and flipped it over to find numbers written lightly in pencil.

“How the hell did you see that?” Sacha asked him before holding it out to Oliver. “Try these. I’m making coffee.”

“Have anything stronger than that?” Emmerich followed after him. “Vodka by chance?”

“Do I look like a fucking stereotype?” I heard Sacha retort.

“No, you look like a man with good taste. So... vodka?”

There was a bit more back and forth, but their conversation became softer, making it hard to understand. Vas and I sat down on either side of Oliver as he punched the numbers in and the phone unlocked. I closed my eyes, letting out a deep sigh of relief. *Thank god.*

“What did you want us to see, Nic? What were you hiding?” Oliver muttered as he started looking through her phone. After a few minutes, Oliver’s expression froze, but

when I leaned over to get a look, he locked the phone with a slight shake of his head.

Sacha and Emmerich came back a few minutes later with a bottle of vodka and a pot of coffee. Right before Emmerich could even open the bottle, his phone rang. His expression immediately became serious when he answered the call.

“Atlas,” he answered curtly, “talk to me.”

“You’re lucky,” a lazy voice answered on the other end, not the least bit bothered by the bristling German man. “There are only two black town cars that passed by that address in the time frame you gave me. And yes, I also checked an hour on either side of your time frame and the week beforehand as well in case they cased the building, which narrows your search to one vehicle. I’ve messaged you the photos and license plate.”

I whistled at that. For his part, Emmerich didn’t seem as impressed as the rest of us. “You’re going to charge me extra, aren’t you? Even if this is for Nicholette. I think I should be considered family at this point.”

The man snorted. “Just for that, I’ll charge you even more. Blake would be disappointed in me if I didn’t.” His dry voice practically screamed sarcasm, and I didn’t know if I should be worried for this man speaking to a Förstner that way or just really fucking impressed. “I also sent you the information I could find on the owner of the car. A Warren Cabbot. Some fancy bigwig in Ashview, apparently.”

What? My mind raced, trying to fit the puzzle pieces together with that bombshell. *Warren Cabbot, the man we’re hunting? The one Nic has been baiting for weeks?* This just went from horrible to worst case scenario. The others had similar looks of horror in their eyes, though our faces were wiped completely blank before Emmerich saw.

“Thank you, Atlas. I’ll wire you the money when we get her back safely.” Emmerich hung up the phone, not letting the man say anything else. “I’m helping you get her back.”

“Good,” Sacha answered quickly before calling Maeve back.

“Sacha—”

“It’s Warren. Your husband has Nic, *and* he’s her stalker,” Sacha interrupted coldly. “Where could he be hiding her?”

“Warren?!” Maeve’s voice cracked with surprise before a coldness I never knew was possible entered her voice. “He is worse than dead. You have all the documents I needed you to get?”

“Almost all of them. I didn’t have time—” Oliver answered slowly.

“Send me what you have. I’ll be taking care of Warren. Personally.” I shivered at her words, fear skittering up my spine at the deceptive softness of her voice. “I’ll send you everything about his other residences. Not to worry, I’ll still pay you for your work.”

“I don’t care about the work,” Sacha interrupted again. At this rate, I thought we were just lucky that she was too concerned about Nic to realize how many times that had happened tonight. “We care about Nicholette.”

Click.

“Send her everything, Oliver. Then we are going hunting until we find her,” Sacha ordered.

“And if we find Warren before Maeve does,” Vas rumbled, “we all get a piece of him.”

“I like the way you run things, Russian,” Emmerich commented lightly, but his eyes were deadly serious as he threw back a glass of vodka. “I have the manpower to help expedite things, but even so, it could take us days to get through all his personal and business properties. Let me make a few quick phone calls.”

Sacha nodded curtly before striding out of the room, Vas not far behind him. I was sure they were getting guns or weapons of any kind to prepare for what was about to happen. Oliver was emailing things to Maeve, but without looking up, he motioned for me to sit down beside him. Oliver always seemed to know when I needed him or wanted to be close. Emmerich got on the phone and walked away, rapidly talking in German to his people.

Quickly, I settled into Oliver’s side, resting my head on his shoulder. “We will find her, Bodhi.”

“If we find Warren before Maeve,” I said carefully, “I want a turn too.”

Oliver tensed in surprise, processing my words. I didn’t kill people myself. My role in the group was being the thief. I was in and out, undetected. No direct confrontation myself. Too many memories and trauma that could trigger. A woman’s haunting scream filled my mind, and I shook with the echo of sound. But for Nic, for retribution, I wanted part of it. No matter what the nightmares cost me afterward.

“If we find him,” he whispered softly, huskily, “I’ll help you.”

I nodded against his shoulder, remaining beside him and zoning out until the three leaders of our group entered the living room again, armed and ready to go. Glancing up, I

smiled at the ferocity in their expressions, each one assuring me we would find her.

Even if we tore the city apart to do it.

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Sacha

Friday

“We need a plan,” I asserted, looking over at Vas then Emmerich. My brother’s cold mask was firmly in place, absolutely dead focused on what was going on right now and surely bottling up his feelings for later. The latter was completely unreadable to me. “If we don’t, we’ll just get in each other’s way and the search will be fucking pointless. I don’t want to delay finding her because we let emotions take over.”

“Very smart.” Emmerich nodded at me, respect filling his gaze at my declaration. “Do you have information about what holdings this Warren guy has?”

“Yeah, let me get a list,” Oliver called out before pulling up information on his laptop. Emmerich grabbed his phone and made another phone call. There must have been no answer because he called again, switching to speakerphone and redialing until an annoyed voice answered.

“Emmerich, if you aren’t lying in a ditch and about to die, I swear to god you will be soon enough,” the person on the

other end threatened. I raised my eyebrows at that, but Emmerich just laughed, completely amused by the answer.

“I’m calling because I need your expertise, oh sibling of mine.”

“Take both the cannoli and the gun, Em. You have two hands.” I wasn’t sure whether the dry reply had come from his sister or brother. There was something ambiguous about the smooth voice.

“Haha, very funny, asshole. But seriously, Nicholette was taken,” Emmerich answered; his voice was professional, detached even, as he reiterated the information to whoever he was talking to.

“What do you need from me? I’m not exactly in the neighborhood to help.”

“What kind of property would you take her to, Blake?”

There was silence for a few beats before we heard movement and a male voice asking if everything was okay. “I guess it depends on what your guy wants her for. Does he want to torture and kill her? Keep her trapped and stuck with him? Or just keeping her *safe*, in his mind, until he can eliminate those he views as being in his way?”

“His notes all said Nic was his, *mine*. He destroyed all her stuff in her apartment a few weeks back,” Bodhi interjected.

There was a low murmur on the other end of the phone, and Emmerich’s face paled when a new voice started talking. “Sounds like your guy wants to get rid of the competition. So, while you’re on the lookout for her, he will be hunting you.”

Blake tacked on more after that. “Which means he probably wants to contain Nicholette and not hurt her. If she plays along, that is, which she will. She has always been a

fighter. If I had taken her, I'd need privacy... industrial buildings and homes far away from people. Definitely a basement if you're looking at a house; attics are too much of a bitch. Besides, basements are usually easier to hose off when things get messy."

There was a bit of muffled talking on the other end of the line before Blake came back on. "If you look at the history of the home, you might be able to find out whether there was any remodeling done. Soundproofing or the addition of a basement to an already existing home. Industrial properties can be a bit trickier to narrow down."

Emmerich's eyes narrowed. "Fair. Are you alone now?"

"Don't start this bullshit, Em. I don't think it matters who the fuck I sleep with. Why don't you worry about your own damn self and finding Nic before I have to come do it myself?"

"You're a fucking bitch," Emmerich shot back, but his eye roll and grin betrayed the fondness he held for his sibling. Whoever they were, I wouldn't want to fuck with them, but they didn't sound like a bad ally to have on Nic's side. "Just for that, I'm getting Atlas to ask for double whatever he is charging you." A slight pause, then, "Do *I* get to know who else is there, oh brother mine?"

"The group led by the two Russian mercenaries."

I tilted my head, not really sure how to take being described that way. Bodhi, for his part, started coughing, though it suspiciously sounded like a laugh, and Oliver's lips twitched with his effort to suppress a smile.

"Tell Vas I said hey, and his brother as well. I haven't met him, but his cooking is amazing."

“I never brought you any of his cooking,” Vas said, surprisingly amused despite the serious situation.

“I never said you did.” Equally amused laughter filled the air. “You had a nice place, and your brother actually gives a shit about good coffee. You need my help for anything else, Em?”

“No, though we are definitely talking about who the fuck you’re with right now after all of this is settled.”

Click.

“Well, that was... interesting,” I observed. “Did anything Blake said help you narrow down the list of places to look?”

Oliver nodded slowly, typing away on the computer. “Yeah, there are still a good number of places to track down. But it’s not nearly as bad now.”

Walking around, I stood behind him and stared at the list on the screen, mentally mapping out how to split up the search.

“What was on her phone?” Vas asked.

If I hadn’t been behind Oliver, I would have missed the way his hands stuttered for just a moment. He cleared his throat for a minute and shook his head. “It didn’t have anything that could help us locate her.”

“But it was important enough for her to message about as she was being taken,” I pointed out, trying to keep my voice even. When he didn’t respond right away, I took the phone out of his lap and punched in the date Vas had found on the back of the photograph. I wasn’t sure what I was looking for until I saw the video file saved on the home screen. Once I tapped the file, it began to play; the image was a bit blurry, but her screams and Warren’s threats were not. We all sat there,

frozen, listening to Warren rape Nic until the screen blacked out.

“I hadn’t played it yet.” Oliver swallowed hard, his face pale. “The starting thumbnail of it was enough.”

Bodhi stood up slowly, but instead of leaving like I thought he was about to do, he reached for the phone. I held it out to him but didn’t let go of it in case he decided to lash out and destroy the phone. Bodhi didn’t have much of a temper; in fact, I didn’t think I’d ever even seen him truly angry. But this... I knew he had nightmares about things he’d witnessed in his past. This could set all that off again.

Against all of my expectations, he hit play. Face intent, he listened to it again. When it was done the second time around, he hit play and watched it.

“Is there some sick fucking reason we have to listen to this on repeat?” Emmerich asked, snagging the open bottle of vodka from where he sprawled in a chair.

“She’s being raped,” Bodhi said slowly, brow furrowed. “But... she’s acting and playing it up.”

“What?” Vas asked, voice sharp.

Bodhi shook his head and turned to look at his boyfriend. “She protested more sincerely when you hunted her down, and even then, she was playing the part. Fuck, even the tears weren’t sincere. Oh, they might look that way to people who don’t know her, but... There’s something off about it.”

“Are you saying she made it look like rape?” I asked cautiously.

“No. Warren was definitely raping her, but she *is* playing Maeve’s game. Think about it.” Bodhi waved his hands as he started to go off on his explanation. “We are gathering all this

information to cover Maeve's ass. That's exactly what Nic did. The video doesn't start at the beginning. She hit record right before he thrust inside of her. Nic purposefully recorded the rape and left it as insurance on her phone for us to find if something happened."

"Not because she had any idea Warren was her stalker," I continued softly, anger building in me as I realized the full capacity of what Warren had done to our woman. *My* woman. "She got the video as more evidence we could use if we needed it."

"And information she could use to blackmail him if she needed it," Vas continued grimly.

Emmerich whistled, impressed by Nic's thinking. "Rather genius." A ding sounded on his phone, and he jumped up from where he was sitting. He reached down and grabbed the bottle of vodka before starting toward the door. "Send me a list of the addresses you want me and my men to search, Russian. I'll keep you updated with each property, and you do the same. How far do you want us to take the search?"

Coldness filled me as I sent him a sinister, promising smile. "Whatever is necessary to get her back."

"Consider it done."

Emmerich waltzed out of the apartment, vodka and jacket in hand as the others turned to me, waiting for direction. I felt like I should have more thoughts or worries about what was going on with Nicholette, but right now, all I felt was numbness and a cold, sharp clarity as I planned our next moves.

"Oliver, send Emmerich all the industrial properties from your list. Let him and his men search those since they will take

the longest. He probably has more manpower and can search them quicker than us.” I slipped Nic’s phone into my jacket pocket. “We will take the homes one by one until we find her.”

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Nichollette

Tuesday?

Pain. That was my world now. Constant and neverending pain whenever my eyes opened to find Warren there. His haughty expression flashed so quickly between concerned, angry, and perverted delight that I was never sure what version of him I was getting. Just like Maeve had always warned me, Warren didn't need much provocation to lash out. If he thought I *looked* at him wrong, he lashed out. I had lost count of the blows and kicks he'd aimed at my vulnerable body. By the third time I woke up, I could barely feel my hands. There was no real sense of time, no way of knowing how long I spent in the intermittent darkness of unconsciousness.

But the beatings he gave me weren't the worst part, nor would I be broken by the rape—no matter how many times he used that tactic. No. The worst moments were when he made me act like I wanted it. When I had to muster every bit of my strength and guile to act like I loved him, an emotion I wasn't even sure I understood. My parents had loved me, until they didn't. Wrenn, my ex-girlfriend before Maeve, had said she loved me, but she betrayed me. Maeve had acted like she had,

but never did. Me acting like I loved Warren... well, that just kind of fit what I knew of the emotion. A fleeting moment of closeness, the tiniest hint of vulnerability and opening a door inside yourself to someone else, followed quickly by torment.

Then the prick in my skin, sometimes the crook of my arm, or other times it was on the back of my hand, when Warren would inject drugs into my system. It was his immediate response if I got too excited by him showing up, ensuring my compliance. What he was giving me or how it would affect my body long-term, I didn't know. *Survive. No matter what happens, survive and worry about healing another day.*

Suddenly, he sang out my name, bringing the fragmented strands of my attention back to focus on him. The excitement in his voice made my blood run cold. "Angel, it won't be long now. Soon, it will be just us, and we will have the life we always deserved. Together."

"What?" I mumbled, my mouth swollen and dry. When was the last time I had water? My mind was too foggy to remember even that detail.

"Shhh, angel. Don't worry your little mind about that. I've gotten it all taken care of. Now, send me off with some good luck."

He pressed his lips against mine, and I kissed him back. Though I barely moved my lips, he forced me to open my mouth so he could deepen the kiss. It took every ounce of my self-control to not bite down on his tongue, but I knew it would be futile. I didn't have enough strength to fight back or take another beating.

I'm so tired.

Just so very tired.

Bodhi

“IT’S BEEN DAYS!” Vas roared, knocking down all the pictures from the fireplace mantle of the home we were in. We all watched silently as he vented his anger in a truly Sacha fashion by destroying the living room. “Days of searching and he still has her.” It was a sentiment that we all felt, a dark void hanging around us, a constant reminder that every minute without her was another minute we were failing her. Yes, she was strong, but really, how long could someone stay whole at the hands of a rapist? Who knew what else he was doing to her.

“We are going about this as fast as we can,” Oliver tried to reason with him, but Vas cut him off with a dark glare.

“No, we aren’t,” he hissed. “We should split up. We’d cover more houses that way.”

Somehow, Warren had his hands in rental properties, vacation homes, and land investments, which meant he had properties all over the city and beyond. Even with Emmerich’s help, there were still plenty left to look through. As it was, we were barely sleeping, but we needed to be somewhat in control in case Warren had some kind of backup. Obviously, we’d overlooked a key bit of craziness in the man, considering we’d seen no signs of him being Nic’s stalker, and didn’t that make us all feel like incompetent bastards.

“We can’t get sloppy, brother,” Sacha told him softly. “The sooner we get in and out, the faster we get to the next place. It’s the safest *and* fastest way to find her.”

Vas scoffed, but he kept all other protests to himself. We knew it was frustration, anxiety, and that fucking cowardly feeling of helplessness making him lash out. All of us felt the same way, but I had to agree with Sacha. We were doing everything we could. If we split up, it would just take longer to search every house.

“Any word from Maeve?” I asked as we all made our way out of the back door and toward our car waiting in the gravel driveway.

“She has Warren. He’s still alive and not talking,” Sacha answered grimly.

“Which means no one is checking on Nic or giving her water and food,” I replied quietly, not wanting Vas to lash out again. “She’s running out of time.”

“Then we better hurry,” Oliver told me briskly.

“I hope Maeve gives him hell.” My comment was met with hard looks and nods of agreement from everyone. Second to that was a spark of irritation. We wanted to be the ones working him over, making him hurt for what he had done to Nic.

Sacha shuddered. “When I spoke to her earlier, she was.” Oliver threaded his fingers through mine, the physical contact highlighting the shiver that ran through him. “I don’t know what she was doing to him, but let’s just say, as a man, I’m not sure I want to know the details beyond what I heard.”

I swallowed hard, trying and failing not to picture just how Maeve was coaxing Warren to start talking. There was a faint cry in the distance, and I stopped, trying to ignore the others as I listened for the noise. “Shut up!” I called out, motioning for them to stop. They all looked at me, shocked and surprised. I

spoke my mind when I had something to say, but no one would ever mistake me for the type to give orders.

“What’s going on?” Oliver whispered.

“I think I heard something,” I replied quickly, and when it came again, I just reacted. Running away from the parked car and into the woods, I dodged low-hanging branches and stumbled over large roots as I tried to home in on where the sound was coming from. It was just five minutes later when I stumbled into a clearing, the others not far behind me.

“Bodhi, what— the hell?” Oliver’s exclamation turned into a question as we all stared in shock at a house tucked in among the trees. It was a small log cabin, holding maybe two or three rooms at most, but it was what was outside the door that was the most telling.

The dead body of a man. He was dressed in a suit, with a single gunshot to the head, and given the smell, he had been out here for a few days. Flies were buzzing around him, and maggots crawled over his flesh. I gagged a bit then tried to focus on getting inside the house. The place was pretty bare, having only minimal furniture and a tiny kitchen you’d find in a studio apartment. Basically, it was a typical cabin.

“Spread out and look for anything that could lead to a cellar or basement. Tear the entire place apart if you have to,” Sacha ordered. None of us wasted time trying to organize who went where, instinctively moving in different directions to search every square inch of the place from top to bottom.

A few minutes later, I heard Oliver cursing then calling for Sacha. We all rushed into the bedroom where Oliver was standing, finding clothes, boxes, suitcases, and shoes strewn everywhere. He gestured to the open closet doors, and I

glanced over to find a metal hatch in the floor. There was no handle to open the door, only a number pad.

“Can you hack into that?” Sacha asked breathlessly.

“If I had my equipment, maybe.”

Before any of us could respond, a strained scream came from below, and the moment I heard it, I knew. *It's Nicholette.* It brought back horrible memories of another woman screaming, but I managed to force the memories away. Around me, my teammates were all showing signs of strain. Vas' face drained of color as the scream died off. Sacha closed his eyes, but not before I saw the glassy look of tears. Oliver swallowed hard and took a shaky breath before he lowered himself to the ground.

“Nic! Nic, can you hear me?” There was no response, but he didn't let that stop him. “We're here. We found you.”

“I'm going to call Maeve, see if she knows the code or if she can get it out of Warren.” Sacha pulled out his phone and walked out of the room to talk with her.

Oliver looked over at Vas. “Can someone call Emmerich? He needs to be told we found her, and if we can't get the code out of Warren, he can get my stuff so I can break into this damn thing.” Vas swallowed hard and nodded a few times, looking more out of sorts than I'd ever seen him, before I held out Nic's cell. I had been holding on to it since Sacha gave it to me for safe keeping, playing her video over and over again over the past few days, trying to get inside Nic's head.

The noise in the house grew overwhelming with Oliver trying to reassure Nic through the floor and the brothers on the phone in the other room. The only sounds I could hear were my breathing in slow motion and my heart pounding in my

ears. Everything around me slowed down as my anxiety rose. Shaking my head, I stumbled back.

“Bodhi?” Oliver glanced up at me, worry in his eyes.

I held up a hand to ward him off before staggering out of the room and back outside, barely managing to keep myself from puking in the woods. The memory of gunshots rang in my ear along with the burning smell of gunpowder, making me gag again.

Bodhi!

My sister’s voice filled my mind right as the metallic tang of blood made me fall to my knees. My whole body shook as my memories overcame me. Numb, I started rocking back and forth as I felt myself starting to spiral into a living nightmare of my past. Even in the fog, I was cursing myself for being vulnerable, drawing attention to my trauma when Nic was suffering through enough of her own.

Rough hands on my shoulders had me flinching back defensively, but when I looked up, it was to see Sacha standing above me. “Breathe with me.” He slowly inhaled, taking deep, exaggerated breaths, holding his hands to either side of my face as I tried to calm down. When my breathing didn’t slow down and I could feel my head starting to grow fuzzy, Sacha began to cuss.

Before I could try to wave him off, he slanted his mouth over mine and kissed me fucking stupid. Maybe he meant to shock me, which he certainly succeeded at, but what I didn’t expect was for me to start kissing him back. I should have shoved him away, fuck, I was with Oliver and had been for years. Now there was Nic too. There was no way I needed to add any more complications into my life, even if it was all just in my head, but he filled my senses and chased away my

demons until all that was left was calm. Sacha deepened the kiss when my lips parted, tasting me as if he was trying to memorize every inch of my mouth. *What the fuck?*

He pulled away a few moments later and watched me with careful eyes, licking his lips before releasing his hold on me. “Better?”

“I don’t know if that’s the word I’d use,” I replied honestly, my voice hoarse. Sacha laughed, his own voice just as rough, before he adjusted himself and stood up. *He liked it. He liked kissing me. Me?* When did completely alpha Sacha fucking Morozov start liking guys? I mean, I hated fucking stereotypes as much as the next person, but I’d known him for *years* and had zero inkling his interests lied anywhere other than between a woman’s legs.

“Bodhi!” Oliver hurried out of the house. “Are you okay?”

I nodded slowly, my eyes tracking Sacha’s walk to Vas who had just stepped outside. “Yeah, yeah. I’m good. Sacha helped... um, helped calm me down.”

“Panic attack?” Oliver asked, offering me a hand up off the ground.

“Yeah,” I started, unsure what else to say, but I trailed off when I heard another faint cry.

The others started talking about what they had learned from Emmerich and Maeve as I approached the house. My heart was hammered in my chest when I rounded the corner and saw small windows at ground level. Afraid of what I would or wouldn’t find, I crouched down and looked through the dirty glass. Inside the basement was Nicholette, naked and bloody, chained to a concrete support pillar. As if she could sense the weight of my stare, her eyes opened slowly, her

normally bright gaze dull and empty. She tried to move her mouth, but it was obviously painful for her. A few tears ran down her swollen and bruised face as she made the effort to talk.

Bodhi.

She was calling my name.

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Vas

Tuesday

“Is everything okay?” I asked Sacha as he fidgeted with his hands, lost in faraway thoughts. He had been so focused on finding Nic and keeping us all together for the past few days, I wondered if he was finally going to break down.

Sacha cleared his throat and shook his head, letting Oliver take the lead in telling us about his talk with Emmerich. Even he could tell something was up, given how closely he was watching my brother, but before we could question him, Bodhi called out for us. The panic in his voice had us immediately on edge until we spotted him around the back of the house.

“What’s going on?!” Oliver asked him, confusion clouding his face until Bodhi pointed toward the foundation of the house. There were windows. *Of course the damn basement had small windows. Why didn’t we think of that earlier?*

“She’s down there,” Bodhi’s voice shook, the edge of another one of his panic attacks much too present. “It’s not—it’s not good.”

I shared a quick glance with Sacha and stalked forward to peek through the window. The basement was neat, nothing out of place, which made it that much easier to see the evidence of what he had done to her. Bruised body, swollen face, and blood splattered around her. Nic's shredded clothes and the trails of dried blood down her thighs left no doubts that he had raped her.

Our woman.

My Nic.

A growl had me looking over to see Oliver's hazel eyes filled with ice cold rage. Every line of his body was tight with growing anger. Bodhi was shaking with intermittent trembles as though his body was physically fighting against his panic, but he stayed right by Oliver's side. Sacha was silent and frozen. I didn't think he even blinked. Slowly, he reached for his phone and hit a button.

"Maeve." I shivered at the blankness in my brother's voice. "We found her, and she's alive. We don't need Warren alive any longer." There was some murmuring on the other end of the line, but I wasn't close enough to hear what she said to him. Sacha's expression stayed eerily distant as he listened. "I want evidence of his death. Don't care how you do it, but find a way. Make sure he suffers, because if he doesn't, I don't give a shit who you are, I'll get the blood debt from you instead."

Click.

He ended the call and dropped the phone back into his jacket pocket, all while keeping his gaze on Nic. "Maeve is taking care of Warren now. When is Emmerich getting here with the equipment to break into the basement?"

“He said he would be here in about an hour,” Oliver replied calmly, but I could see the flash of annoyance at the delay flickering across his face. “It will be dark by then.”

“Might be for the best,” Bodhi answered softly, and we all looked over at him. He licked his lips then explained, “If we get her out of there at night, she might not see the evidence of everything he did to her.”

“True,” I agreed reluctantly. “What hospital are we taking her to?”

“Maeve is setting up a private room,” Sacha answered as he pushed himself up to standing. The calmness in him had me worried. Hotheadedness and gut reactions were Sacha. This... this wasn't him at all. He didn't say another word as he walked away from us, moving around the corner to the front of the house. We all remained quiet, waiting for the inevitable outpouring of rage, but there was nothing.

I'd give anything for him to lash out right now. The only time I'd ever seen Sacha like this was when our babushka died in a random drive-by shooting. Our grandmother had taken care of us while our parents flitted in and out of jail, basically leaving us to survive on our own. After her death... it was us two against the world.

“When he cracks, it's going to be bad,” I commented, forcing myself to stand as well. Being tall meant horrible joints, and as much as I wanted to keep my gaze on our girl, I knew she wouldn't be going anywhere until we got her out.

“If there wasn't fucking wire mesh in the glass, we could break in and at least be with her.” Bodhi sighed, settling into a seated position. “I'll stay here until we get her out.”

“I’ll stay with you,” Oliver offered, to which Bodhi nodded in acceptance.

“I’m going to find Sacha. Can you update Emmerich and confirm with him that we found Nic?”

“You got it.” Oliver pulled out his phone to call the German.

I started for the front yard, but my brother was nowhere to be found. Ignoring the dead body, I made my way into the cabin and came across Sacha just standing there, staring off into space. I tried to be quiet, but his gaze shifted to look at me out of the corner of his eye.

“You know what I’ve been wondering since we found out Warren was Nicholette’s stalker?” Sacha asked, his tone alarmingly soft.

“What?” I tilted my head, trying to follow his thoughts.

“How did he cover his tracks so well until the night he finally took her? For weeks, we looked for any trace, and *nothing*. Then he finally gets her to himself, and his identity is discovered within minutes. That’s too sloppy.”

I blinked, thrown by the unanticipated direction of this conversation. It was true though. Oliver had scanned multiple security cameras, we had questioned countless people, yet we’d come up with nothing. “Could the guy who works with the Förstners be better than Oliver?”

Sacha snorted. “Maybe. But Oliver looked at those same cameras before, and the tapes had nothing. It’s almost as if it was too easy to realize it was Warren.”

“Are you thinking Warren isn’t her stalker?” I questioned, incredulous.

“He definitely is,” Sacha retorted, exasperated enough that he rolled his eyes at me. It was an emotion, at least, so I let it slide. “But it’s almost as if finding him this fast was a distraction. As if there is more going on than we realize and someone wants us so wrapped up in Nic that we don’t realize there’s a larger plan developing around us. It took us a while to find her, but that’s on Warren and all the goddamn property he owns. I just think that the evidence is something we should look into. If there is someone else hiding in the darkness, they could spin their web of chaos and stay undetected for that much longer if we don’t take a closer look. Who’s at the center of the web, and were they watching Warren, or were they watching Nic?”

“Are you distracting yourself by looking at this like a job?” Sacha nodded sharply once, and I nudged my shoulder into his, trying to gather my own anger so that I could channel it productively. “Okay. Well, you’re right. It was way too easy to find them. Are you thinking someone handed up Warren on a silver platter? Why would they do that?”

“Maybe he was higher in the trafficking ring than we thought?” Sacha mused, tugging his hair out of the bun so it fell around his face. “They could have let us catch him because he was becoming a big liability?”

“He could have messed up since he was so excited to finally get ahold of her? In the heat of the moment, he slipped up?” I offered, and Sacha hummed, tugging at the end of his hair as he started to pace.

“Maybe... but it doesn’t add up. Plus, Warren might have been stalking her, but Nic didn’t even tell us about the date with Emmerich until right before she left. How could he have known about that?”

We threw ideas back and forth until we heard people approaching the cabin. I walked to the door just as Emmerich and his group of men broke through the trees. None of them blinked at the dead body, simply walking around it as Oliver and Bodhi came to join all of us.

“Nicholette is in the basement,” I informed them grimly. “We need to get her to a doctor ASAP.”

“And Warren?” Emmerich asked, pushing past us to get into the cabin.

“Maeve is handling him.”

Emmerich whistled at that as the men walked straight to the bedroom and started to work on breaking into the basement. Moments later, Oliver was right there in the thick of it with them. The German ran a tattooed hand through his dirty blond hair then met my gaze.

“How bad is she?”

“Not good,” Bodhi answered blankly. “I saw her through the windows along the back of the house. It’s not going to be pretty when we get down there, but it’s not as bad as it could have been.”

“She must have played into what he wanted then,” Emmerich responded. “Good for her. Once we get her out, I need to let Blake know I found Nic. They’re going to want a full update.”

“And Blake is higher than you?” Bodhi asked, curious.

Emmerich gave my brother a dark chuckle and a smile. “Blake is my younger sibling, but they’re a force of nature. You’ll understand when you meet them. There are no words to describe them.”

“A force of nature might be an understatement,” I added dryly, recalling meeting them a few years back. Even then, she—*they*—were deadly. I couldn’t imagine what Blake was like now, but there were more important things to think about than going down memory lane.

“How long until the door is open?” Sacha called out to Oliver. His voice had lost its hollow tone, anger making his question hard.

Oliver kept typing away, not pausing his work to look at us. “You’ll know as soon as I fucking do.”

Emmerich chuckled, checking his phone as we waited. “Glad to see this is a big bonding moment.”

It felt like we stood there for hours, waiting for Oliver to work his magic. Emmerich offered to shoot out the lock and blow it up at least three times, but we told him no, not knowing how close Nic was to the door. We didn’t want to put her through any more damage than she’d already suffered. Finally, the keypad beeped and unlocked.

Without a second thought, I raced forward, ripping the door open and descending down the stairs, rushing right to where Nicholette was chained up. She was slumped over, and I saw red when my eyes caught on the track marks and bruising on her arms. *He had drugged her.* Fucking drugged her while he had her chained up. How much could she have fought him? Nic’s face was black and blue, swollen, and her breathing was shallow as I tried to gently lift her up to take the pressure off her hands. She whimpered slightly but didn’t respond beyond that.

“Is there a way to cut these things off of her?”

“Got it.” Sacha hurried over with bolt cutters, making quick work of the chains. I kept my hold on her, gathering her close to my chest as we ran back up the stairs. Emmerich paled when he got a good look at her, the man looking more shaken than I would have thought possible. Whatever relationship he had with Nic, he obviously held her in high esteem.

“We’re driving her to the hospital,” I announced, shouldering past everyone to rush her to the car we had driven out here.

“I’m coming with you.” Emmerich fell into step with us as he addressed his men. “Take care of the house and the body out there before heading back to the city.”

“You got it,” one of them answered him with a sharp nod.

Sacha jumped in the driver’s seat, and Emmerich slid into the front passenger seat. I carefully climbed into the back with her, unwilling to let her go. I was a possessive, domineering asshole who liked to order her around, hunt her, and get as physical as she would let me, but there was an even larger, louder part of me that craved taking care of her. Those moments of aftercare were precious to me, feeding my need to know that she was alright, that the connection between us was strong and healthy. This... what he’d done to her, knowing that there was no care I could give her right now beyond holding her close so that she wouldn’t be alone, was almost painful.

Bodhi and Oliver joined me in the back, Nic laying across all of us as Sacha sped down the dirt road to the hospital. The only thing my brain could concentrate on was Nicholette’s harsh and shallow breathing, my brain itching to catalog each of the bruises that painted her face and body. I buried my face in her hair, breathing in the scent of her, and prayed that she

would make it. I just wanted her to open her eyes so I could lose myself in her. I needed her to be okay.

If she didn't, I could already safely say that no one in this car would be whole after losing her. Whether she liked it or not, she had become important to us. More than we could put into words.

Nic shifted slightly, moaning in pain, and turned toward me. Her face rubbed against my beard, and she let out a light sigh then whispered, "Vas."

After that, she went frighteningly still.

"Sacha!" I called out.

"On it." His grim voice could barely be heard over the rev of the engine as we picked up speed.

Hold on, Nic. Hold on for us.

For me.

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Nicholette

Thursday

Beeping was the first thing I heard when I woke up again. I frowned, trying to figure out what could be making that sound in the basement. With a blink, my eyes opened, and I hissed at the bright fluorescent lights that blinded me. *Fluorescent lights? The basement didn't have lights on.*

The constant beeping of the machines filled my ears as I looked down at a thin pale pink hospital blanket and the IVs in my hand. *Hospital*. I hated hospitals, too many bad memories. Looking around, I was surprised to find my guys scattered throughout the room, all asleep. Then a faint rustling captured my attention. I flinched when a hand came into view, but then I noticed the tattoos covering the tan skin, and reassurance filled me.

“Em?” My voice cracked.

“Nic,” he answered gently, moving into my line of sight so I didn't have to shift much to see him. He brought his hand back to his side and didn't try to touch me again. “We came as fast as we could.”

“How long?” I whispered. Memories tried to push their way to the surface, but I shut that shit down quickly. *This will not break me. Warren isn't going to get that much power over me. He isn't worth it.* Instead, I wanted to focus on the realization that they'd found me. *They'd stayed.*

Em's face was grim, but he held my gaze, not hiding from my reaction to what I was sure would be unpleasant news. “Three full days. It's Thursday now. You've been in and out of it since you got here Tuesday evening.”

Dread filled me as I swallowed. “I don't remember everything. He did... *things.*” I shuddered, my gaze straying to the bruises that decorated one of my arms and hands, telling the story of the drugs that had been forcibly pushed into my system.

“We came as fast as we could,” he explained, nodding at the others. Then he gave me a wicked smile, a familiar teasing glint in his green eyes. “You found some good guys here. Which one are you keeping?”

I didn't say anything, giving him a small smile, which he returned. “Fine, keep your secrets. You do love them almost as much as my family does. Whenever we meet up again, I'll be the one to pick you up. You understand?”

“Okay,” I whispered. “Thank you, Em.”

“For you, just ask.” He leaned forward and pressed a brief, gentle kiss to my forehead. “I'd stay, but Blake called me. It seems they need some help up in Seattle, so I'll leave you in their capable hands, Nic. Oh—” he added, spinning around right before he got to the door, “in case you were wondering... Maeve took care of Warren, so you don't have to worry about him anymore.”

The sound of the door opening made Sacha stir, and Emmerich silently tilted his head to me before waving goodbye. In the moment it took me to breathe, Sacha made his way to my bedside, his face full of concern as he studied me. He didn't look anything like himself; his usually perfectly styled hair was a mess, and it didn't look like he had trimmed his beard in days. However long he'd slept hadn't taken away any of the dark circles under his eyes.

“Nic?” His voice was rough.

“Sacha.” I breathed his name like a promise, and he closed his eyes, but not before I saw the hint of tears. I reached out slowly, my bruised body throbbing with the movement, to brush his hand. He turned it over and held mine carefully, as if it were fragile, and brought his eyes back to my face. “What happened? I don't—I don't remember you guys getting there.”

“You were unconscious.” Vas' normally deep and rumbling voice was rough as sandpaper as he answered for his brother. He slowly walked over to stand on my other side. His face was also ragged, and he was in the same clothes I had seen him in last. Even before they explained, I knew they had done what no one else had ever bothered to do. *They'd torn the world apart to find me.* “When we got there, we found you tied to the pillar, passed out on the floor. We couldn't wake you up, and we saw the marks—”

“Maeve paid for this private room, no questions asked, so they could take care of you,” Oli interjected, joining in on the explanation. I looked past Vas to find him and Bodhi awake and watching me from the chairs they had slept in. I appreciated the fact that they weren't crowding me completely, but at the same time, I wanted them all. In my own bed, where I felt safe, *not* this cold hospital bed. I wanted to go home, and

that was a scary thought. *When did I start thinking of their apartment as home? More importantly, when did I start thinking of them as home?*

“We couldn’t figure out the extent of your injuries... though some were obvious.” Bodhi’s voice was barely a whisper as he squeezed his eyes shut, body shuddering with whatever he was picturing.

My body mimicked the motion at the disjointed memories of Warren drugging me. Fucking me. At the words I’d had to say to make him believe I wanted to be with him. Revulsion swept over me until I sat up, my body physically rebelling. Sacha moved quickly to grab the trash can, and I threw up, bile making my mouth bitter as I tried to expel the memory of Warren from my body.

“You’re safe now,” Sacha murmured, hand petting my hair. I slowly sat back, even that small burst of movement burning through my energy.

“Thank you for coming for me,” I told them, exhaustion already making my eyelids feel heavy. “I’m so tired.”

“Sleep,” Vas ordered. “One or two of us will always be here when you wake up.” I nodded and drifted to sleep, unable to fight off his command even if I wanted to.

THE NEXT TIME I woke up, Bodhi and Oli were beside me. My eyes traveled around the space, but Sacha and Vas weren’t in the room.

“They went to the apartment to shower, change, and eat,” Bodhi said, noticing I was awake. I looked over to find him

watching me closely. “They’ll be back soon.”

“I’m sorry.” It was the first thing that came to mind when I saw him sitting there in his usual all black, brown hair falling across his face, hiding away from everyone.

Bodhi’s brow furrowed, trying to follow what I was saying. “Sorry?”

“I didn’t—” I tried to swallow, but my throat was so dry, I teared up from the effort. Bodhi moved quickly, handing me a cup full of ice chips. “I didn’t stay safe,” I finished my sentence.

His eyes were serious as he searched my face, recalling the last thing he’d said to me that night. “But you came back. I’m sorry it took so long for us to find you. He did things—”

I gave him a sad smile, not ready to be dragged back into those memories again. “I’m glad I had people looking for me this time.”

“This time?” Bodhi asked, eyes suddenly hard. I looked away, eating more ice chips and avoiding the question. One day, I’d tell them, but not today.

“We will always look out for you,” Oli promised, his voice uncharacteristically serious.

“I want to leave,” I told them firmly. “I want to sleep in my own bed.”

Oli nodded, no sign of argument in his eyes. “I’ll talk to the doctor. Be back soon.”

“And the rape kit?” Bodhi asked before Oli left the room. Oli froze at the door and looked back at me for my decision.

I shook my head. “Unless Maeve needs another nail in his coffin, tell them to toss it. If he’s dead, then it doesn’t matter to

me.”

Oli nodded silently, respecting my decision, and quietly left the room. Bodhi, for his part, just kept looking at me until I patted the bed beside me. “Come here.”

“I’ll hurt you,” he argued, his voice breaking.

“No, you won’t,” I told him gently. “I’ve survived Vas and Oli’s tender attentions. This is nothing.”

Bodhi carefully climbed onto the bed, immediately cuddling into me, and I rested my chin on top of his head. I ran a hand along his back, soothing him. I wasn’t sure how much time passed before the door opened, and I was fully prepared to face a disapproving nurse, but instead Sacha and Vas were standing there. They looked at Bodhi and nodded to me before closing the door to let us have this time alone.

I hadn’t expected to find a home among this odd assortment of criminals, but right now, that was exactly what it seemed I’d found, a place to belong.

I’d enjoy every moment with them.

It was funny because Warren had offered to make me his queen, but I hadn’t needed him.

I was the Queen of Hearts, *their* hearts, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.

Epilogue



Unknown

“No!” the woman beneath me screamed, her keening voice crumbling into a broken sob. It’s sound was like nails on a chalkboard, instantly setting me on edge. I cocked back my fist, needing to make it stop. Raining down hits on her, I didn’t stop until the only thing I heard were whimpers and wet breaths through the blood decorating her swollen face.

She was a subpar replacement for what I wanted, not as pretty or curvaceous. I’d had to dye her hair the right shade of black, and it wasn’t as long or as soft as *hers*. I growled, frustration building in me until I grabbed a knife and thrust it inside of her. The woman screamed, eyes going wide at the pain. Finally, there was something to admire. The patterning of the red webs in her eyes, blood vessels burst from the exertion of her screams and sobs, was almost hypnotizing. I slowly withdrew the blade from her body, wanting her to feel every agonizing slide of the serrated edges against that tender flesh.

Tossing it aside, I eagerly lined myself up with her bloody entrance and thrust. She twisted her body, trying to get away from me, but she was too weak to do more than press me

further inside of her. Tears ran down her face, and I pushed the hair out of the way so I could look into her blue-green eyes, but my lips curled in disgust when I realized her brown eyes were too dark for the contacts to really change her eye color.

I tried to take a deep breath, closing my eyes to just enjoy my moment. This woman was a poor substitute for who I really wanted, who I deserved.

Nicholette.

Nic.

She was mine. *Mine.*

Looking over at my wall of inspiration, I felt my anger spike and thrusts speed up as I studied the photos of her latest victim, a man she had seduced on the street. Instead of drugging him like normal, *he* came out of nowhere. With average height, tattoos, and piercings, this *boy* came and knocked the person out. When the body was disposed of, I saw the cuts, and my vision went red.

They had killed together. *That was going to be ours.* To show the world she belonged to me in a way no one else ever would.

The keening wail started up again, and my annoyance got the best of me. I mean, really, who could stay hard with all of that fucking miserable noise? And she had claimed *I* was the monster.

Not wanting her to ruin this moment any more than she had, I grabbed her head and wrenched until her neck snapped. She went limp beneath me, all the fight gone from her newly dead corpse.

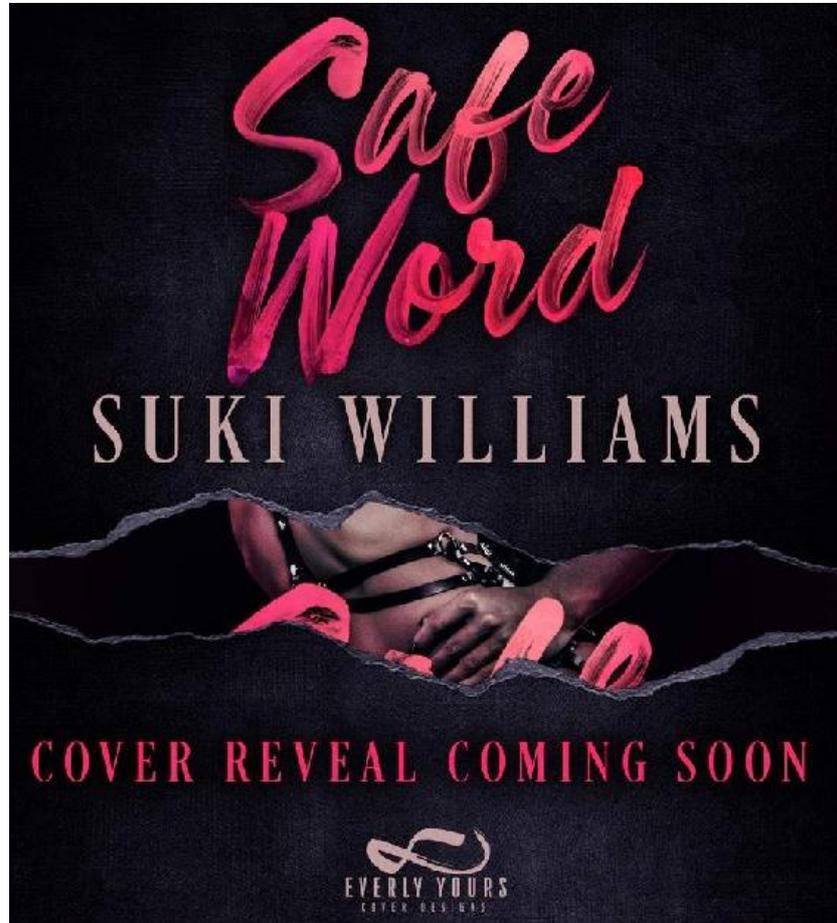
Finally, silence.

My rhythm increased, slamming into her body over and over again, the slickness of her blood and body easing each punishing thrust. With the blessed silence, I was free to take my pleasure without a care for the bitch's unwanted soundtrack. Blood pooled around us on the concrete floor until my orgasm took over. My body shook and back arched as I rode out my climax all while staring at a picture of the only woman I would one day claim as my own.

Nicholette Graves.

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Book Two of the Queen of Hearts Trilogy is available for preorder here: [Safe Word](#)



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Turn the page for Chapter One of Beauty Of Corruption!

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BEAUTY OF CORRUPTION: CHAPTER ONE

Conrad

I'm going to fucking hear about this later, was the only thought that went through my head as the guy's fist connected with my stomach, knocking me to the ground.

I attempted to get myself oriented, but he got in a few kicks to my ribs before I was finally able to grab a hold of his foot. Twisting, I used his forward momentum to slam him down onto the carpet.

Tumbling around on the floor, each of us threw punches until he gained the upper hand and slammed me against the wall with both hands around my throat, squeezing. While uncomfortable, the idiot was putting pressure on the sides of my throat but not restricting my breathing. *Amateur.* The hold on my neck made my dick start to twitch, resulting in a frustrated groan from me. I didn't need to be turned on while he was trying to kill me.

I tried to refocus my thoughts, knowing that a surprise attack was my best option for regaining the upper hand.

Instead of fighting him, I grabbed his face and pulled him toward me to gently brush my lips against his. The guy's hands tightened around my neck, and he gasped in shock. Unwilling to miss my opening, I quickly deepened the kiss,

pushing my tongue past his lips. His brain seemed to catch up with what was happening soon after my tongue flicked along his, which made him try to push me away in a panic. Removing the glass pill of cyanide from the inside of my cheek, I seamlessly passed it off to him mid-struggle, and he didn't seem to notice when he swallowed it.

Pulling away, I watched as he stood there panting, disgust and anger warring on his face. As he took a step toward me, I looked down to see his hand beginning to tremble. He crumpled to the ground within seconds, his body jerking uncontrollably. A few minutes later, he fell still, finally succumbing to the poison.

Reaching into my jacket pocket, I took out some disposable gloves and quickly checked for a pulse.

Nothing.

Making my way into the bathroom, I thoroughly cleaned myself up. In doing so, I caught sight of myself in the mirror and let out a sigh. Brushing my shoulder-length blonde hair out of my eyes, I winced at the color blooming on my face. *There's no way I can hide my bruises.* Wulfric was going to make me pay for being sloppy, but to be fair, fast-acting poisons weren't my favorite way to do my job. I preferred slow deaths that hit several days later, taking my victim by surprise. In truth, it lessened the chances of a trail leading back to me. *Hopefully, Wulfric is having a smoother night than I am. Then again, he always enjoys his job.*

Remembering the last time we'd had an assignment together, I shivered in anticipation. As a smile crossed my face, I made my way out of the hotel room and placed the *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door before walking away.

I pulled out my burner phone and let Robin know the room was ready to be cleaned, which was code for getting rid of the body and any traces I might have missed. No matter how sloppy other parts of the night might have been, this would get taken care of before I went back down to the party. Not waiting for acknowledgment, I tossed the phone into the trash bin by the elevators and pulled out my second one.

Just as the elevator signaled its arrival, my cell phone vibrated in my hands. I read the text on the screen before slowly putting it back in my pants pocket as I stepped onto the elevator. In the reflection of the closing elevator doors, the smile on my face almost completely faded away.

Wulfric

Basements always seemed so cliché for this kind of thing, but they were easy to hose down when you were finished. What would usually be a dimly lit room was instead full of the annoying fluorescent lights I hated. The steel table was also an overused cliché, but once again, why fix what's not broken?

Currently, I had Leo Segreto strapped down onto the cold metal slab, his blond hair stark against the table's surface and the strap that held his head down. In an effort to ensure he couldn't escape, I'd also strapped down his hands, waist, and feet.

The movies are always wrong—by not strapping down the middle, your victim can continue to fight and mess up all the work you're trying to do. The least they could do is be accurate.

Halting my wandering thoughts, I turned to put on “L’Arlesienne Suite No. 1: Prelude.” *Perfect.* I began humming along to the violins as the gentle music relaxed my mind, letting me drift into that killing calm, the numbness a familiar comfort. Pivoting on my heel, I faced the wall behind me and stared at my many options. *Where to start?*

“No—please, I don’t know anything else. I’ve told you everything already,” the man pleaded.

I dropped my head to stare at the floor in mock disappointment. “Couldn’t you have at least come up with something original to say? I’ve heard this all before. Of course you don’t know anything.” I chuckled gently. “We both know you’re lying; you’re a top-ranking member of the Segreto Family.” Spinning, I faced the man and smiled deviously before adding, “Besides, I have it on good authority that you know more than you’re telling me. Before you waste your breath arguing, you should know that I always do my research when undertaking a new project.”

“I—I—“ The man began to argue, regardless of my generous warning.

I held up my hand to halt his stammering, the sharp planes of my face growing stern.

Settling down onto the chair beside him, I asked, “Is there anything else you would like to say before we begin?”

Gently, I brushed my hand through his hair and waited for him to answer. Opting for silence, the man just shook his head, his jaw set in a hard line.

Sighing in mock disappointment, I sat back and turned to face the wall again. Slowly, I ran my hand along the handles of the various knives, scalpels, hammers, needles, a saw, and the

few other mundane things that really held none of the imagination I craved. Sadly, I knew I had to get to the party to meet Conrad. Because of that fact, I wouldn't be able to have as much fun as I normally would. *No, this requires something much more—efficient*, I decided.

Letting out a huff of resignation, I grabbed a rag and bucket. *It's always best to go old school first. Less mess to clean up if this breaks him.*

Swiftly, I filled up the bucket and returned to stand at the head of the table. For a moment, I stood and silently watched as the realization of what was about to happen struck him. Even if he had no idea exactly what I had in store, we both knew how it would end.

“Did you change your mind and decide to make this easy on yourself?” I asked curiously.

“Fuck you,” the man responded, his voice full of venom.

I felt a smile stretch my face unwittingly. “Oh, you're not my type. However, I have other plans for you, don't you worry.”

Gently placing the rag atop his face, I slowly began pouring water over his nose and mouth. Just as the man began to gag and choke, I increased how much fluid was falling over him. Steadily, I continued the stream of water for several minutes until I only had a little remaining. Pulling back the bucket, I removed the rag from his face. Some of the numbness leaked away as I stared down at him, a hint of excitement filling me at the power I had over him. Life and death in my hands; it always got me worked up in the best ways. Needless to say, I loved what I did for a living.

He tried to cough the water out of his airways, and I made absolutely no move to help. The moment he realized that he couldn't move his head to clear his airways, his eyes began to plead for a reprieve. This time, I did move, but it was only to cock my head, finding another angle to impassively study him. *Does he really think he can move me to help him?* Just before he started to lose consciousness from choking, I tilted the table enough that he could expel the water, quickly righting it once he could breathe enough to stay alert.

Gasping for breath, he watched me, contemplating what I was going to do next. A wicked smile was my only response as I reached over and brought another bucket into his line of sight, this one filled to the brim. He shuddered, fear filling his eyes as he saw he'd have to survive another round if he didn't give me what I wanted.

I lifted an eyebrow in silent question, and after a moment of tense silence, I deftly put the rag back over his face and dumped the contents of the bucket onto him, not slowly dragging it out as I had done the previous time.

While the man gasped and choked for air, I walked toward the wall, leaving the wet rag on his face. Lovingly, I stroked each of the metal tools as I considered what to do next.

After selecting a hammer, I strode back to the man on the table. *This is going to be fun.* Standing over him, I ripped the cloth away and held up the hammer for him to see.

“I love getting to the more... physical route of dealing with people. Who did you get to? Who flipped?” I asked one final time.

The whites in his eyes were completely visible as he watched me raise the hammer even higher before finally slamming it down upon his right knee. The resulting shatter

and high-pitched screams coincided with the upbeat tempo of the music to create a wonderful new sound all its own. It was the perfect blend of classical beauty and crescendo of pain. Lust trickled into the coldness of my mind, my thoughts straying to Conrad. I'd get to play with him this evening, and oh, how I'd get him to cry out for me too. It was going to be a long, worthwhile night.

"I think you can take some more, don't you?" I taunted gently. "Let's not waste time talking. But don't worry, I won't gag you. I like hearing what my partners think of my performance, so don't hold back with me."

Leaning over, I purposefully pressed down on his splintered kneecap as I placed a gentle kiss to his lips. I wanted to show him that in this moment, I was the one in complete control. Whether it was through the shattering of bone or a mockingly soft kiss... I owned him *and* his death. Not bothering with a warning, I leaned back and immediately slammed the tool down onto his left wrist.

Time for a little more variety. While I waited for his screams and whimpers to subside, I turned to retrieve a knife from my wall of toys. I loved knives. So many varieties to choose from and the closeness it allowed to your victim... There was nothing like seeing pain glaze over their eyes then ripping it away when you twisted the blade deeper. Sauntering over, I began to carve four lines into his stomach. Each slice through his tender flesh made his breathing stutter, unfortunately messing up my perfect lines. *I'll never get it right if he doesn't calm down.*

"Shhhh," I whispered as I ran my hand through his hair in an effort to quiet him. Within seconds, his cries became soft, tender whimpers. Though that didn't last long. *It never does...*

Returning the knife to his already mutilated stomach, I went back to my carving. It wasn't my best, but it would have to do. After I had finally finished, I placed the knife down on a nearby counter and stood back to admire my work.

“Four cuts for each strike and waterboarding you endured. The most I think I have ever gotten to with someone was seventeen,” I muttered as I reminisced about old times. The echoes of that man's screams and pleading still filled my dreams. I always remembered them with a fondness and sense of respect that they had held out that long. *No one had ever gotten close since then.* Shaking my head to clear my thoughts, I added, “Are you looking to beat that? I can always cancel my plans. After all, it would be rude of me to leave you here all alone.”

I watched as the man trembled against the restraints, his futile attempts betraying how little control he had.

“N-no, no, I'll talk,” he stuttered, nearly hysterical by the time he had finished his sentence.

Disappointed, I tried to keep my emotions from showing. *No one is any fun anymore. Either that or I have been doing this too long.* Ignoring my sadistic thoughts, I got comfortable in the seat by his head and waited.

“Tell me.”

Immediately, the man began explaining how the Segreto Family had new operations and plans to expand into our territory, but while that information was important, he told me nothing about who the mole in the O'Callaghan Family was. We had been searching for the leak in our organization for months, with little to no headway. I was hoping Leo would have had more information for me, but he was just another dead end.

By this point, he was just babbling, so I reached out to undo the neck restraint.

The perfect thing about my particular skill set was that instead of making people tell me anything to stop the pain, I could toe the line. The desperation to only live a moment longer made them tell you more, more to the point of being obnoxious. Give me the man who barely got out a few sentences as he strained to breathe around the gurgling blood in his lungs. He would give you what you needed, not what he thought you wanted. Unfortunately for me, he didn't know who the mole was.

“Shush. I've got you. It's over now,” I whispered. Without hesitation, I grabbed his neck and shoulder and gave a violent twist, quickly and efficiently breaking his neck.

While I did enjoy the torture for information part of my job, the hunt was what I truly loved. Once I had gotten what I wanted out of my victim, I wasn't particularly interested in hanging around for more. The game was over.

Checking my watch, I saw that the party had started nearly an hour ago. *Conrad should be almost finished with his business, and I can meet him there—I'm only slightly behind schedule.* I wasn't usually late, but considering Conrad normally was, we should arrive around the same time.

Grabbing some gloves and the bleach out of one of the cabinets, I got to work cleaning up.

A short while later, I shut the door to the basement and pulled my phone out of my pocket. I went in search of Robin's name, nearly missing a step when I saw it on the screen. A damn reflex that I'd never been able to get rid of since we'd split. He could still throw me off balance more than anyone else. As I righted myself, I sent him a text to let him know that

the body was ready for disposal once he finished at the hotel. I took a fortifying breath as I put my phone away and continued upstairs to get ready for the evening.

Quickly turning on the shower, I set out a suit for the party in anticipation of the evening's events.

Now it's time for a whole different kind of hunt, and I can't wait.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I've always loved reading and writing. Both have been a part of who I am since I was a kid and while my taste and preferences have changed over time, my love for the written word has not. I have a Bachelor's Degree in English from Virginia Tech.

I am about to move to New England with my family and am lucky enough to be a full-time mom and writer. Listening to crashing waves, walking through the forest, and eating chocolate are some of my favorite things.

The best way to stay up to date with my work is to join my reader group, sign up for my newsletter or check out my website, www.authorsukiwrites.com!

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