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MARIAN TEE

*too
scared
TO
love*

A Billionaire Age Gap Romance

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**This book was previously published as The Greek Billionaire and I*

When Greek billionaire Mykolas Sallis finds a misplaced cellphone...

Snarky-and-curvy schoolteacher Velvet can't believe the stranger she's been "texting" with turns out to be a man way, way out of her league.

Even more surprising: she ends up saying 'yes' to a marriage of convenience while pretending she isn't head over heels with Mykolas.

Note: Steamy feel-good read. HEA guaranteed.

TOO SCARED TO LOVE

By Marian Tee

Previously published as *The Greek Billionaire and I*

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PROLOGUE

Six years ago

The wail of a police siren destroyed the silence in what was usually a peaceful neighborhood, causing curtains to flutter as curious neighbors peered outside their windows. Front doors slammed open, one after another, and in minutes the street was filled with on-lookers.

And in the center of it all was Dotty Garfield, a young figure huddled under an emergency blanket that had been wrapped around her shoulders by the paramedics, her beautiful face carefully devoid of emotion as she watched her parents, Wayne and Lindy, being hurriedly taken away on stretchers.

Behind Dotty, her family's home looked like it had been ransacked – and it had been. Broken windows, gunshot holes on the walls and door, and overturned potted plants on the front yard. The entire scene didn't paint the whole story, of course, but she knew that those who really knew her parents would be able to piece everything together soon enough.

She could feel people's eyes on her, and this caused Dotty to raise her chin and stand proud even if all she wanted to do was just sink into the ground and cry. She wished she were a year younger. If she was seventeen, that meant she was still a child and had the right to cry. To bawl like a kid and wait for someone to comfort her and take care of everything.

But she was eighteen now, and the legality of her age weighed down on her like a brick around her neck, drowning

her in responsibilities that she couldn't even begin to comprehend.

“Miss?” It was one of the paramedics, a middle-aged woman with sympathy in her gaze.

Dotty dug her nails into her palms, the look on the woman's face making her want to cry. But that wasn't going to happen. *Nope. Nuh-uh. Not now, not ever.*

“Would you come with us to the ambulance? We need to go now.”

She nodded, allowing the woman to assist her inside the ambulance and seat her next to her mother's unconscious form. Dotty forced herself to look at Lindy even though she knew it was just going to make her want to cry more.

Why, Mom? Why?

But she didn't bother asking it out loud. What was the point? She had learned early on that some people were innately good...but weak. And their weakness made them bad. Wayne and Lindy were like that. They had been loving parents to Dotty, but in the end it was obvious that they loved the green goddess more.

Lindy's breathing was shallow.

Dotty forced herself to ask, “Will she be okay?”

“We'll do our best, hon.”

Which meant they weren't sure. Again, the urge to cry hit her, but she mentally pushed it away. *Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, weak is a dick.* It really didn't mean anything, but she

had once read a book that encouraged people to use affirmations – preferably those that rhymed – to keep one positive and strong. Since Dotty was no word master, it was either that...or “Cursed are the weak, for they shall inherit pee on their meat.”

The ride to the hospital was quick, and when they got there she saw her father already being wheeled inside. She was taken to admissions first and made to sign papers – lots and lots of papers.

Behind Dotty, she heard one of the paramedics say that the man they had just wheeled in was “critical”.

This caused Dotty’s fingers to shake, and the pen wriggled out of control, leaving a crooked line on the sheet.

She tightened her hold on the pen. *Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, weak is a dick.*

When she was done signing, Dotty asked if she could see her parents. The nurse looked over Dotty’s shoulder, and when she turned around, a policewoman was behind her. “Ms. Garfield? Would it be all right if I speak with you privately? Your parents are being operated on at the moment, and we thought we could ask you a few questions for now. I know it’s been tough, but your answers can help ensure we catch your parents’ attackers.”

Dotty wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. *It’s been tough?* She had been seven when she had figured out her parents were junkies and that when they wanted to be left alone, it wasn’t to make another baby. She had been ten when she had learned that the scary-looking men who knocked on

their doors late at night were never there to deliver pizza but were instead asking for payment for weed. And now, on her 18th birthday, which was supposed to be a milestone, she had just survived a shootout between her parents and their pissed-off suppliers when the latter found out that instead of selling the product, Wayne and Lindy had been idiotic and addicted enough to *consume* it. Consume – not like a taste test but a freaking buffet, leaving not a single gram for sale.

It's been tough?

Under-freaking-statement of the year.

And so she had to mentally chant ‘weak is a dick’ several times before she could make herself look at the policewoman and say, “Yes.” In minutes, they were ensconced inside a private office. Dotty answered the questions honestly, leaving nothing out. When it was over, she made a move to stand up, but the policewoman told her to stay because someone else wanted to talk to her.

A woman in a lab coat came inside the room right after the policewoman. *Shrink*, Dotty thought. Maybe they thought she was about to have a nervous breakdown?

“Hello, Dotty. I’m Dr. Nelson,” the woman said with a smile that was just the right mix of friendly and impersonal. She claimed the seat the policewoman had just vacated, which placed her directly across Dotty.

“Are you talking to me because you guys think I need therapy?”

“I volunteered to talk to you.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Why would you do that?”

“Because,” Dr. Nelson said gently, “I was once in your position, too. My parents were like yours, and when I found out about what happened, I thought you might need someone to talk to.”

How...nice. It was really nice of the doctor, and since that kind of niceness hadn't been much in evidence in the past few weeks, it had Dotty's hands curling into fists on her lap. *Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, WEAK IS A DICK.*

Elizabeth sensed the young girl's struggle to maintain control, and her respect for Dotty Garfield grew. She was an exceptionally beautiful girl, but unlike most pretty girls the doctor had come across, her looks didn't appear to have any effect on Dotty's ego.

Instead, she looked to Elizabeth as someone well-rounded, sensible, and composed. *Too composed for a girl her age,* Elizabeth thought with a pang, and because she, too, had once been like that, she knew it wasn't a good thing at all.

“The reason I wanted to talk to you is because what happened will cause changes in your life, and I do not want you to feel alone when those changes occur.” At the young girl's nod, Elizabeth continued softly, “Your parents need to go to rehab. I want to be frank with you about this. If you don't get them to go, I don't think they'll last the year.”

“I see.” *Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, weak is a dick.*

“If you manage to get them to rehab, it will, however, mean you'd be all alone. Normally, in cases like this, someone

from Social Services would ensure you're taken care of. But you're already eighteen, and I just learned that your parents have no direct relatives to take you in temporarily. Do you know of any friends of your parents..."

"They're all like them." *Weak is a dick. Weak is a dick. Weak is a dick.* "I'll figure something out. I'm used to doing things on my own."

"But that's just one of the changes, Dotty," Elizabeth said quietly. "There's also the financial aspect to consider. Do you know if your parents have money set aside for your college education? There will be regular bills to pay for your home. Also, rehab costs money..."

"I...see." *Weak is a dick. Weak is a dick—*

A choked sob escaped Dotty, and the sound of it horrified and shamed her that she quickly covered her mouth and did her best to keep it inside.

"Dotty—" Elizabeth reached out to the younger woman but when Dotty shook her head profusely, Elizabeth knew better than to insist on comforting her.

"I'm...okay." Dotty managed a smile.

The way the girl was trying to be so brave made Elizabeth smile, too, albeit shakily. She just saw herself too much in Dotty that it was hard to maintain a professional distance. "Just this once, Dotty, I'm going to forget I'm a doctor. Just this once, I want to talk to you as one survivor to another. Because you will survive this—"

Dotty almost wanted to cover her ears. Cruelty, she could handle. Idiocy, she was used to. But this kind of niceness? This kind of support? She squeezed her eyes shut. *Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, weak is a dick.*

“I know that right now, you’re thinking you can do it on your own. And maybe you can, but that’s not the point. Don’t let your pride force you into a corner, Dotty. Accept help when you can but be wise, be careful, be selective about the people you trust.”

She forced the words out. “I’m scared.” Dotty felt like she was drowning in shame as she admitted the truth. “Mom and Dad were supposed to be there for me, but they *weren’t*. I know they need help, I know I shouldn’t be angry, but I am... I hate myself for hating them, but I do.” She struggled to control the emotions rising inside her, but it was too late. Dotty started to cry. “Why can’t they be strong for me? Why do I always have to be strong for them?”

This time, when Elizabeth drew the girl into her arms, Dotty didn’t resist. “I’m sorry, child. Some people are just weak. Some people just can’t be trusted, and there’s nothing you can do but be strong for yourself...until you find people who love you enough to be strong for you.”

CHAPTER ONE

Mykolas Sallis nodded in acknowledgment as the school employees he walked past on his way to the library respectfully murmured his name in greeting. Although he rarely visited his stepsister's school, it came as no surprise to him that everyone seemed to recognize his face. The owner of the school, Rose Thorn, was supposedly very good at flattering the egos of its school's wealthy patrons. Considering the amount he donated every year to support the school's arts program, Mykolas suspected that GAYL's employees probably even knew his favorite food.

“Do you have a private room here where I would not be disturbed?” he asked the librarian upon entering the library, which was thankfully empty. Waiting at the school hall had proven to be too exhausting, with school girls tittering all around him.

The librarian answered nervously, “The faculty room of the library is currently unoccupied, Mr. Sallis.”

“That will do. Please let my sister know where I am when she comes.”

The faculty room was at the far end of the library, tastefully decorated and with one side made entirely of glass, allowing Mykolas to see those who entered the library. Taking one of the chairs, Mykolas absently scanned the room, and his gaze eventually fell on the iPhone next to a heap of books. Reaching for it on impulse, he found the phone without a password, causing him to grimace as he was very big on security.

Idly deciding to check the phone's messages, Mykolas almost choked when he read the one sent by someone named Andrew to the phone's owner.

10:01 *Can I borrow the keys?*

10:01 *You already have it.*

10:02 *What?*

10:03 *The keys to my heart.*

10:07 *Velvet?*

10:08 Sorry for the late reply. Busy killing myself coz your stupid jokes drove me to suicide.

Keys to my heart? Mykolas didn't blame the phone's owner for attempting suicide at that. He moved to the next message, which was sent by Thomas, yet another seemingly ardent admirer.

13:15 *How about going for a movie tomorrow night?*

13:16 *Thomas, you're a good guy, so I'm going to tell you the truth once and for all.*

13:17 *What is it?*

13:18 *I'm a lesbian. I want your dick – but not for the reasons you're hoping for.*

The next one came from a third admirer, Greg.

14:24 *I'm serious, Velvet. I don't think I'll be able to live without you.*

14:25 *But I CAN live without you, and that's the problem.*

Mykolas shook his head, reluctantly impressed by the woman's answers, which were always snarky but witty. It would be interesting to find out who this Velvet was, and a second later, an idea came to him, causing a smile to play on his lips as he pocketed the phone.

"I think I left my phone somewhere," Velvet admitted unhappily to Mandy as she fell in step next to her friend.

Mandy groaned. "You just almost lost it yesterday. See? You should have taken my advice and used a strap or chain to keep it with you at all times." A slim dark-haired girl, Mandy was a very practical sort, the kind that would accept charity even from her worst enemy if she was down on her luck.

Velvet hated spending for unnecessary things, but maybe Mandy was right and that strap was more of a necessity than a frivolous purchase. "I'll buy it soon as I find my phone. I think I left it..." She had a light bulb moment, which caused Velvet's jade-colored eyes to flash brightly. "I think I know where I left it! I was at the library this morning and I must have forgotten to take it with me when I was called to sub for Andrew's class."

"Want me to go with you?"

"No, it's okay," Velvet said over her shoulder. "Let's just meet later for dinner." When she got to the library, she was hailed by the librarian even before she could take another step past the counter.

“Ms. Lambert? A gentleman found your phone in the faculty room.”

Velvet accepted the phone, bemused at the way the librarian was looking at her with interest. “A *gentleman*?” That seemed an odd way to refer to one of the male teachers, so she asked the younger girl, “Who is it?”

“He says he’ll call you.”

“Oh. Okay. Umm, thanks.” Slowly, she turned around and left the library, feeling like she had just had the oddest conversation in her life, and that was saying something. As she headed to the teachers’ dorm, her phone buzzed in her pocket, startling her.

Fishing it out and seeing an unidentified number, Velvet answered the call. “Hello?”

Mykolas leaned back against the plush cushions of his yacht’s custom-designed sofa. He had hoped to meet the intriguing Velvet Lambert – a little digging in her phone allowed him to figure out her name – but his meeting with his stepsister had to be cut short because of an emergency back in Athens.

Velvet’s frown was evident in her voice, and this made his smile widen. “You have found your phone then.”

The voice at the other end of the line was decidedly Greek, a deep accented baritone filled with sensual confidence and natural arrogance. *Oh no*, Velvet immediately thought. Her friend Mairi’s Greek billionaire sounded exactly like this, and look what had happened to her. Granted, Mairi and Damen

Leventis were a couple now – they had just gotten engaged last night, in fact – but even so, the sheer amount of drama the two had gone through to earn their happy ever after was too much for Velvet.

And so she said crisply, “Yes, I did. Thank you for handing it to the librarian. Goodbye.”

Mykolas gazed at the phone in amusement. That was the first time a woman had hung up on him.

Velvet’s frown became more pronounced as her phone vibrated, signaling an incoming message. *Persistent just like Mairi’s Greek billionaire.* This really wasn’t good.

I have a confession to make, Velvet Lambert. I went through your phone and read a couple of your messages.

About to cross the street to get to the dorm, Velvet abruptly stopped walking with an infuriated gasp. How dare he?

All of them had come from your ardent admirers. Their devotion to you makes me want to see you and find out whether you are as desirable as they make you sound to be. However, I am not like most men who are easily swayed by appearance. I want my woman not only wonderful to look at but wonderful to spend time with as well.

I am sure that you are the same. So I propose a bet.

And that was that.

Velvet waited for another incoming message, but none came. If he thought leaving her hanging like that would make her call him—

Velvet's phone rang, and she froze. *Don't answer it, Velvet*, an inner voice cautioned inside her head. To distract herself, she resumed walking, crossing the street to get to the teachers' dorm. She took the stairs steadily and tried to keep her heartbeat at pace with her steps.

Her phone stopped ringing just as she slid the key into the knob and unlocked her door.

Good, Velvet told herself. He's lost his patience. She pushed the door shut with her hip and after dropping her bag to the floor, she threw herself on her bed and gazed up at the ceiling. Seconds ticked by. Slowly, she placed her hand on her heart, which was still thudding. Restlessness built inside her, and Velvet realized that she hadn't been this annoyed – or this intrigued – in ages.

The librarian had called the person who found her phone a *gentleman*. Most likely, he wasn't working for the school then. Was he a visiting professor? The thought had her wrinkling her nose.

Her phone rang again.

Before she could think twice, Velvet answered the phone. "Hello?"

Mykolas purred, "You sound breathless."

Damn it, but she was. "Don't take it personally," she managed to quip. "I'm always like this when talking to potential stalkers."

"You'd be lucky if I stalk you."

Damn it, damn it, damn it but why did this man's voice sound so sexy to her? He was arrogant as hell, which was usually a turn off for her but right now, it was the opposite. There was just something about his voice that told her this man had every right to be arrogant. He was that...*desirable*.

She gripped the phone more tightly, needing a few seconds to make sure her voice was *not* breathless as she said, "Dream on." It was a lame ass reply, and Velvet knew it. By the way the man chuckled, he seemed to know it, too. And to rub salt into the wound, the sound of his chuckle was also sexy as hell. *Damn it.*

"While I'd love to keep talking to you more, *agape mou*, I unfortunately have an urgent business meeting to attend to. May I talk about our little bet?"

"It's not *our* little bet."

But the man only continued to speak as if she hadn't spoken at all. "While I know your name is Velvet Lambert, I chose not to look you up online. As such, I do not know what you look like. All I know is that men find you...*irresistible*."

The way he spoke the last word made it sound like both a promise...and a threat. He would find her irresistible like the other men, but *unlike* the other men, he would do something about it. Thinking about what that "something" was caused Velvet to scowl. It was that – or shiver, which she would do only when hell froze over.

"And now, let me tell you a little about myself. My name is Mykolas Sallis."

Mykolas Sallis. Her lips parted, moving to mouth it silently as if his name alone was irresistible. The thought had her shaking her head. What was wrong with her? This man was a stranger, and here she was, mentally sighing his name!

“I gave you my name so that we both know what to call each other. But like me, you shall not look me up.”

“And why wouldn’t I do that?”

“Because that’s the bet, *agape mou*. The way you have men enslaved intrigues me. I want to see if you can do the same to me even if I have not seen you.” He paused. “And I want to know if I can do the same to you without you seeing me.”

“If I see you—”

“—you will want me to fuck you.”

Velvet choked.

Mykolas smiled. “The loser of this bet is the one who asks to see the other first. If I win, I will have the pleasure of making you mine to command in the bedroom.”

“And if I win?” Velvet wanted to smack herself the moment the words came out. *Asking means you’re interested, dummy!*

“Trust me, *agape mou*,” Mykolas purred. “This is not something you would not want to win.”

CHAPTER TWO

“Are you done yet?” Mykolas murmured the question two days later over the phone while reading a draft for a shipping contract his secretary had given to him. He was at his Athens office, working overtime, and he couldn’t remember the last time he had enjoyed himself this much. And it was all, surprisingly enough, because of Velvet.

“Nope,” Velvet answered as she tallied the correct answers and wrote the student’s final score on the top margin of the answer sheet. She was alone in her bedroom – and probably also the only one right now inside the dorm. It was a Saturday after all, and most teachers generally took advantage of the weekend to leave the island and have fun elsewhere.

But here she was, happily checking her students’ tests. She had even turned down Mandy’s invitation to go out, and it was all because of *him*. “What about you?”

“In an hour, I’ll be finished with the draft and have to meet a business associate over dinner.” They had been talking for over an hour now, a record for him. Mykolas kept waiting to be bored but instead, he had only found himself more and more intrigued. Maybe it was because most of the women he had dated were too self-absorbed, and as such almost everything they had to say was about them.

But Velvet was different. Getting her to talk about herself was like pulling a tooth, but by now, he had talked to her long and often enough to figure things out. And so he asked in a deceptively casual voice, “Why did you choose to become a schoolteacher?”

She answered absently, “Because I wanted to give hope...” Velvet caught herself in time and scowled at her phone. “Ha-ha. Very funny.”

“There’s nothing wrong about me getting to know you better,” he responded even as he mulled her words over. Whenever Velvet lost herself in her work, she was prone to slip and reveal things about herself. And so now he knew she wanted to be a teacher because she wanted to give hope. Was this because her parents were the same – or the opposite? It usually was one or the other.

“There’s *no need* to get to know me better because we are not meeting, period.”

“You know it’s inevitable that we meet, *agape mou*. The chemistry between us is too hot and too rare to ignore.”

“You and I,” she said sweetly, “we’re like negative and positive forces. Ne’er shall the two meet.”

“Two words, my soon-to-be-lover: opposites attract.”

Velvet...grinned. She couldn’t help it. Practically every man who had tried to hit on her only had lame comebacks to give whenever she rebuffed them. But Mykolas was... different.

“I can feel you smiling, Velvet. My brain is a turn on, ne? You will find my body even more so, I promise you. And when I fuck you, I will fuck you so good you will wonder why you postponed our meeting for so long.”

“You are so full of it.” She wanted to sound haughty, but all she managed was to sound like she was running out of

oxygen. *Damn.* “From my experience, men who talk big are just that. All talk.”

“How many times must I tell you, lovely Velvet? I am not like most men. I am Mykolas Sallis, and on the first day we fuck, I promise you. You will love my cock.”

Daaaamn. Why was his arrogance such a turn on? “I bet you have a small one.”

“Sometimes, women do wish it’s smaller.”

She rolled her eyes. “You are just really so full of it...”

“It’s true.”

He said it so simply she couldn’t help but challenge him, “How long is it?”

Mykolas shrugged even though Velvet couldn’t see him. “I’ve never tried to measure it.”

An imp inside her made Velvet say naughtily, “Then do it now.”

He snorted.

“No, really. I want to know. Measure it. Now.”

“And what would be my reward if I do?”

She thought about it. “I’ll say something dirty.”

“Done.”

Mykolas had answered so swiftly it made Velvet laugh. She listened to him rummaging, probably going through his drawers.

“I never thought I’d do something like this, *agape mou*,” Mykolas admitted with a grimace as he finally found a ruler.

She asked curiously, “Would you be able to, umm, measure it if...”

“I don’t have a hard-on?”

Velvet coughed. “Yeah, that.”

He unzipped himself. “Do not worry about that. I’m always hard when talking to you.”

“Mykolas!”

Her embarrassed gasp had him smiling as he took out his cock, but a grimace replaced the smile as he brought the ruler next to it. If anyone found out about this, he would probably kill himself. Only insecure bastards cared to know numbers of this kind.

Unable to stand the suspense since she was genuinely curious, Velvet demanded, “Well?”

“It’s long enough to make any woman delirious.”

“Come on, give me a figure.”

Sighing, he said, “Eleven point five.”

Velvet’s jaw dropped. “What?”

“You heard me,” Mykolas answered patiently as he swiftly disposed of the ruler and put his engorged cock back into his pants.

“Maybe you measured it wrong?”

“*Velvet.*”

Eleven point five. Surely that was an exaggeration? But... Mykolas didn't seem to be the type to exaggerate. "I mean, if that's true, you should have worked as a porn star."

Something occurred to him at Velvet's words and he asked, "I know you're a schoolteacher, but do you have any idea what my job is?"

"It doesn't matter what your job is."

Mykolas' brow lifted at Velvet's unexpected answer. "Why is that?"

"Because I know you're a Greek billionaire."

Mykolas stilled.

Velvet smirked. "*Relax.* I didn't check you out online. It's just that I also know a certain Greek billionaire—"

Jealousy, an unfamiliar emotion to him but was nonetheless recognizable, flared up inside Mykolas and he asked coolly, "How well do you know him?"

She asked innocently, "Are you jealous?"

He returned silkily, "Would you like me to tell you that I also know a certain schoolteacher..."

Velvet grimaced. "Touché."

Mykolas' face softened slightly. He liked how Velvet was easily able to admit she was wrong. "As long as you do not refer to any other man when talking to me, *agape mou*, we will be fine."

"He's not like what you think. You see, my friend is engaged to a Greek billionaire. Maybe you know him. Damen

Leventis?”

“I do,” Mykolas said, surprised. “We are not close friends, but we are on good terms and we have done business together in the past. I was under the impression he was engaged to a local girl though. The Kokinos’ only daughter, I believe.”

“Yeah, well, that was true then. But he fell in love with my friend so now they’re the ones engaged. Anyway, I don’t really know him that well, but Mairi never stops talking about him and that’s how I knew you were a Greek billionaire.”

“Are you implying we are similar then?”

Mimicking his quizzical tone, she said, “Begging to differ, Mr. Sallis, but it is my hypothesis that the two of you are of the same specimen as you share one integral characteristic, and that is the fact that you two are the most arrogant men who have ever walked the face of the earth.”

There was a moment of silence before Mykolas burst into laughter. “I think this is the first time I’ve ever dated a woman who knows the word ‘hypothesis’.”

She said sincerely, “That’s really sad.” She thought about it then added, “And we’re not dating.”

“Of course we are, Velvet. We’ve been dating the moment you decided not to put the phone down when I told you about the details of our little bet.”

Velvet’s mouth opened and closed. *There was nothing to say*, she realized grumpily, *because it was damn well true.*

“Change of subject please.”

Chuckling softly, he took pity on her and changed the subject to something just a little bit less disturbing. “What kind of cock do you like the most, Velvet?”

Velvet groaned. “Are you seriously asking me that?” Her face turned completely red as Mykolas’ question made her wonder what *his* cock looked like, what *type* it would be, and how it would *feel* to have his cock inside her.

A wicked smile curving on his lips at the sound of Velvet’s acute embarrassment, Mykolas slowly leaned back against his chair. “You now know I’m bigger than most men. I want to make sure that you were okay with that.”

Silence.

Mykolas’ smile disappeared. “Velvet?”

She said finally, “I wouldn’t know. I’ve never had sex before.”

Silence.

Velvet blinked. “Mykolas?”

“Tell me you’re fucking joking.”

“I-is it a problem?” Damn, but she hated how her voice shook as she spoke. It was as if she cared too much. If he had a problem with it, then so what? Right? His loss if he didn’t want to do her. Right? And not that she wanted him to do—oh, God, she was so confused and it was all his fault!

“I’ve never fucked a virgin before.”

“Err...oh?” His voice didn’t give anything away, and she couldn’t be sure if what he said was a good thing or not.

Mykolas closed his eyes. “I can’t believe you’re a virgin.”

“Yeah, well...” Her voice trailed off, her mind drawing a blank as to what she should say.

“Why are you still a virgin?”

She didn’t answer for a long while. But in the end, Velvet was too innately honest to lie, and so she said gruffly, “I’ve never met a man I wanted to have sex with.”

The words had him groaning and his cock hard and throbbing like it would die if it didn’t find its way to Velvet Lambert’s pussy soon.

Velvet’s eyes widened at the groan. That was definitely a sound of pleasure, and that meant he was...aroused.

Mykolas Sallis was aroused.

She had aroused Mykolas Sallis, and just like that, her breasts started feeling a little heavier, her nipples more sensitive, and her panties becoming slightly damp. She wetted her suddenly dry lips, the silence from the other end of the line torturing her, making her feel restless. “Mykolas?”

“You make me want to touch myself, Velvet.”

Velvet bit her lip hard.

“I haven’t touched myself – haven’t had a need to since I first fucked a girl at thirteen, but I have a feeling,” Mykolas confided tautly, “it’s going to be a daily habit until we meet.”

She asked unsteadily, “Does this mean I’ve won the bet?”

Doing his best to ignore his aching cock, he said flatly, “It means, my beautiful Velvet, when *you* lose the bet and find

your way to my bed, you will have a lot of making up to do.”

Slowly, quietly, Velvet squeezed her legs together. She had never felt like this before, and she just didn’t know what to do.

“Are you alone right now?”

She almost didn’t want to answer the question. She wasn’t stupid. She knew where that question was leading.

“Answer me, Velvet.”

The commanding note in his voice should have made her bristle, but right now, all it did was make her squeeze her legs more closely together as she whispered shakily, “Yes.”

“Lock the door if you haven’t yet and make sure you’ve got your curtains drawn shut or the blinds down. I don’t want anyone seeing you while I make you come.”

“You’re crazy if you think I’m going to do what you say.”

“Yes,” he said thickly. “I’m crazy with desire for you, and so what you’ll do for me is make this ache inside my pants a little more bearable by doing what I say.” In a steely voice, he ordered, “Do it, Velvet. Do it before I decide not to play our little game and just storm into your place and take you and to hell with what everyone says.”

She wanted to put the phone down. She wanted to hiss at him that she was not his to be ordered about. She wanted to end this, once and for all, before she did the worst thing possible. But what she wanted was different from what she *needed*.

And right now, what she needed...

Oh God, what she needed was to follow him.

Velvet locked the door. Drew the curtains shut.

And when she was back on her seat, she snapped, “It’s done.”

Mykolas let Velvet’s bitchy tone pass. Both of them knew it was just her way of hiding the desire burning inside her. “Do you have a mirror in your room?”

“Yes.”

“Can you see it from where you’re sitting?”

Velvet’s eyes widened. “No way.”

“I want you to see how I can make you come, Velvet.”

She shook her head. “This has gone too far. I’ve never even...”

“Touched yourself?”

“Yes.”

“Then it only means we should start now. When I fuck you for the first time, it will be too painful if we don’t make your pussy a little less...tight.”

“Stop assuming we’re going to fuck.”

“Stop pretending we aren’t. Now, be a good girl and face the mirror as you undress yourself.”

Velvet strove to resist the command in Mykolas’ voice.

“*Now.*”

Her eyes squeezed shut in utter mortification at the way her body literally swayed as if wanting to be closer to the voice. Slowly, she felt her fingers moving, undoing buttons. Her clothes fell to the floor.

“Everything, Velvet.”

Gulping, she unclipped her bra and pulled her panties off. She turned pink all over when she saw her naked reflection on the mirror. The image she created was so blatantly carnal it should fill her with shame. But now, all her inhibitions had left her. Now, all she could feel was a yearning to feel more...by doing what Mykolas Sallis wanted.

“Cup your breasts, but don’t touch your nipples.”

Slowly, she did as commanded.

“Describe how your breasts look. Do they fill your hands?”

Velvet whispered, “Yes.”

Slowly, Mykolas closed his eyes. Lust took over his consciousness, and his voice was thick with need as he spoke. “Let your hands run over your waist...your hips...tell me what your body looks like. What it feels like...”

She ran her hands down her curves. “It’s soft...and...I’m not thin.”

“That’s good news for me, *agape mou*. I want some flesh in my woman.”

“I’m...curvy.”

“Even better. I swear to fuck, my cock feels like it grew an inch longer at your words.”

She whimpered at the image of his already large cock becoming even larger.

“Go back to cupping your breasts, *agape mou*, but this time I want you to gently touch your nipples. Very gently...” The whimper from the other end of the line told Mykolas Velvet was doing what he said. Fuck, the sound was so fucking hot.

He unzipped himself. “Twist your nipples harder.”

Velvet gasped, the pleasure and pain of her nipples being twisted in such a way taking her by surprise.

Fuck, fuck, fuck that was hot! Mykolas took out his cock again. “I want you to look at the mirror again, Velvet. This time, I want you to never take your eyes off the mirror.”

“Y-yes.”

“Move one hand down and slowly open yourself wide.”

Her hand shook as she moved to do as ordered, and Velvet couldn't help but let out a little moan as she felt herself stretching to open wide. It was a very strange sensation, completely unfamiliar but addictively sensual.

“Do you think my cock will fit?”

“No.”

Then that meant she was fucking tight. The thought had him stroking himself, harder and faster than he intended.

“If that's the case, I need you to open yourself wider.”

“I d-don’t think—”

“It’s possible, *agape mou*. Trust me.”

And so she did, and her pussy opened more widely, her entrance becoming moist as if in preparation for welcoming Mykolas’ wonderfully large cock.

“Now, I want you to use your other hand to touch your clit. You know where it is?”

“I...” She let her other hand move and after a few strokes, she found it and gasped, “Yes.” She couldn’t stop stroking herself now.

Fuuuuck.

He knew exactly what Velvet was doing, and his hand moved accordingly, rubbing his cock in furious movements. “Are you close to coming, Velvet?”

“I...yes...”

“When you come, I want you to say my name.”

The command was more than enough to push her off the cliff she had been hovering over all this time. With furious strokes on her clit, Velvet gasped, “Mykolas.”

“*Velvet*.” Mykolas came furiously, her release triggering his.

When her eyes fluttered open, she found herself draped limply against her chair and still seated across the mirror.

“Velvet?” His voice was still a little uneven. He had never experienced such a powerful orgasm. It blew him away, and

because it had, he knew that for a virgin like Velvet, the experience would have been more shattering for her.

His fists clenched as a surge of possessiveness went through him. This definitely clenched it. Velvet Lambert was his. Maybe not now, but she would be. It was only a matter of time.

It took a long time for Velvet to speak. Somehow, this man – this Mykolas Sallis, whoever he was – had gotten under her skin, and life wouldn't ever be the same again. She felt so vulnerable and exposed she was tempted to put the phone down. But in the end she couldn't, and so she muttered, "I'm here."

"Velvet...do you want to meet with me now?" Mykolas' body became rigid with tension as he waited for her reply.

Fear and need battled inside her. Finally, she said, "Not... yet."

CHAPTER THREE

Dusk had turned to dawn and Mykolas' jet had already been airborne for over ten hours by the time Mykolas was done with his conference call with his managers and had entered his private cabin. Loosening his tie, Mykolas made short work of his clothes to take a quick hot shower. As water cascaded down on his head and back, the thought of Velvet Lambert came to him, unbidden. A second later, he was unsurprised to find his cock fully erect and aching.

Pressing a button, he said, "Play voice mail from Velvet Lambert."

A moment later, the voice-automated system had processed his command.

Hello, asshole.

Mykolas snorted.

I got your gift. Asshole.

His gift, meaning the expensive clitoris vibrator he had sent her, prettily wrapped in gold and placed inside a box that was the same size and shape as a jewelry box.

You knew I'd think it was a ring, didn't you, asshole?

He grinned.

And I opened it in front of Mandy!

"Call Velvet Lambert." But because he was laughing too hard, he had to repeat the command thrice before the system was able to make the call.

Velvet slowly woke up to the sound of her phone ringing. Peeking, she became wide awake when she realized who was calling her. Fumbling for her Bluetooth speaker, she connected it to her ear as she answered his call. “ASSHOLE.”

“I missed you, too, Velvet.” The groggy sound of her voice hit him then and Mykolas grimaced. “I forgot about the time difference. My apologies, *agape mou*. It’s...three in the morning there, isn’t it?”

Knowing he was about to hang up and not wanting him to, Velvet lied, “It’s okay. My alarm clock was about to go off in a minute anyway. I have an early breakfast meeting with my advisory class.”

“Then we can talk?”

“About you being an asshole? Anytime.”

“You like my gift then?”

“No, asshole.”

“Have you used it yet?”

“Never, asshole.”

“Mm...maybe you’re right. I think I would like it better if I was with you when you use it the first time.”

“In your dreams, asshole.”

“If you say ‘asshole’ one more time, I’ll send you another gift.”

Not missing a beat, Velvet asked pleasantly, “What are you doing right now?”

He let out a bark of laughter, and it took a moment for him to recover enough to answer her question. “Want to guess?”

She listened hard, heard the sound of running water in the background, and choked. “Are you talking to me in the *shower?*”

He said with a smirk, “I am,” and chuckled when Velvet hissed his name in a way that told him she was both embarrassed and aroused. “I only had to think of you and I got hard as fuck.”

Her knees went weak, and Velvet was absolutely thankful she was already on her bed. If she had been standing, she probably would have lost her balance at Mykolas’ words. His Greek accent was so pronounced right now, and that meant only one thing.

“Mykolas, not again,” she protested weakly. They had played this game before, more often than what was right for two people who had never met.

“Yes, Velvet. Again. Because it’s your fault I’m suffering right now. Until you surrender, until you ask to meet me, we’ll be doing this again and again and again.”

She couldn’t answer, her teeth sinking into her lower lip to keep herself from moaning.

“Take off your clothes, Velvet.”

Her eyes widened, her nipples immediately coming to life at the command even as she made herself snap, “No!”

“Yes.” He allowed a little bit of steel into his voice. In the two months he had “known” Velvet, he had learned how

strong and fiercely independent she was. It gave him a kick to know that he was able to exert his will over her...the same way they both knew it turned her on to submit to him.

“I want to come while imagining I’m fucking you, Velvet. And for that I need you naked.”

The unbelievably hot words had her burning up, forcing Velvet to kick off the covers in hopes that the cool air would keep desire from taking over her body. But it didn’t. Nothing could. This desperate insidious craving for Mykolas could only be satisfied...by Mykolas himself.

“One last time, Velvet, or I’ll have to punish you.”

“You’re not scaring me.” It was and wasn’t the truth.

“Am I not?” His voice was very soft as he challenged her. And because her IQ tended to drop whenever she was talking to Mykolas, Velvet wasn’t surprised to feel a thrilling sensation run through her at the sensuous tone of his voice. With him, she forgot about being sensible. With him, her stupid, silly side emerged. With him, she found herself weak and seduced by the way he could sound oh so powerful and authoritative even without raising his voice.

Wanting Velvet’s total surrender, Mykolas continued softly, “I don’t have to touch you to punish you, and you know it. If you don’t take off your clothes now, I won’t be calling you for a week. Do you want that?”

Silence.

He waited, patiently, like a predator knowing when he had his lovely prey cornered.

Finally, she choked out, “No.”

He heard the rustle of clothes from the other end of the line. “That’s my girl,” he murmured in approval. He started shampooing his hair, imagining it was Velvet’s hands running through it. “Are you naked now?”

“Yes.” And she felt so horribly exposed because of it, never mind if she was alone and her room was submerged in complete darkness.

Irritation and arousal blended in her voice as she answered, making Mykolas imagine Velvet futilely trying to resist him even though she wanted to fuck him as badly as he wanted to fuck her. The thought had him saying roughly, “I wish you were here with me, *agape mou*.” He started soaping his body. “I’m imagining it’s you behind me, your hands running over my body, and I feel your soft plump breasts against my back.”

The erotic image had her moaning silently, her body arching with need, begging to be possessed.

After rinsing his hair and washing the soap off his body, Mykolas reached for his painfully aching cock. “I’m imagining your hand on my cock, *agape mou*. You can’t quite wrap your fingers around it, but you’re holding me so tightly and stroking me hard and fast that I feel like I’ve died and gone to heaven.”

This time, Velvet couldn’t stop herself from letting out a whimper.

“Imagine me trying to please you, too. Cup your breasts and pretend they’re being covered by my hands. My palms are

rough, and they make your beautiful breasts even more sensitive. Imagine me pinching your nipples, making them harder than they already are...”

Velvet did everything he said and as she pinched her own nipples, imagining it was indeed her beautiful stranger tormenting her breasts, she couldn't stop her body from arching off the bed, her lips parted in a silent moan as moisture pooled between her trembling legs.

“Do you want me to make you come now, Velvet?” he demanded unevenly.

She choked out, “Yes.”

The need in her voice made him shiver. It made him grip his cock hard and start stroking faster as he said in a guttural voice, “Then imagine me touching you.” Each word was accompanied with a quick hard stroke of his cock. “Touch yourself there, Velvet. Imagine it's my finger lining your folds, becoming wet with your essence. Imagine my finger sliding inside your sweet little pussy and taking you...”

Velvet slowly touched herself, using one finger to draw a line against her folds, just like Mykolas commanded her. And as her entire body shook at the pleasure of it, she slid one finger inside her.

“Push it deep inside you. As deep as you can.”

And so she did, pushing her finger inside her as deep as she could, imagining all the while it was Mykolas finger-fucking her to a sweet oblivion that she had learned to crave because of him.

“Now start fucking yourself with your finger and never stop imagining it’s me doing it to you.”

She started moving her finger, in and out, imagining that it was Mykolas. It was all Mykolas. Her beautiful, mysterious Mykolas making her want him so even with just his dark voice and seductive words.

The little whimpers Velvet released heightened his pleasure, making Mykolas stroke his cock faster and harder. The pleasure inside him flared with every stroke, and as he reached his peak, he growled, “Come with me, Velvet. *Now.*”

Mindlessly obeying Mykolas’ command, Velvet used her other hand to stroke her clitoris even as she finger-fucked herself faster and harder. She came with a choked little cry, the pleasure so intensely beautiful she almost fainted at the strength of it. A second later, she heard him growling as he came. “*Velvet!*” The sound of her name on his lips had her gasping and causing aftershock tremors of pleasure to burst from her. She had come so much that even now she could feel herself dripping, her come running down her thighs.

Oh my fuck.

The thought had Velvet closing her eyes. Mykolas Sallis was officially a dangerous obsession. If he could make her come this hard even without showing himself, what chance did she have against him once they did meet?

The alarm clock went off.

Dammit!

Velvet fell off her bed in her haste to silence her alarm, but it was too late. Lying down in a tangle of covers on the floor, she waited with bated breath for Mykolas to crack a joke about catching her lying her ass off to him.

But he didn't.

Oh...fuck.

And that was when she knew it was game over for both of them. Her secret was out, and someone had won the bet.

“Velvet?”

His serious unsmiling tone had her heart thundering. “Y-yes?”

“You weren't really supposed to be up earlier at three, were you?”

“No.”

Triumph surged up inside him, but Mykolas did his best to keep his voice soft when he spoke, knowing that right now, Velvet needed to be treated with kid gloves. “You know what this means, don't you, *agape mou?*” She was like a trapped little filly. She knew she had nowhere to go, but she still needed a gentle guiding hand so she wouldn't bolt.

Velvet swallowed. “Yes.”

“We can dance the same dance again and again, but now we know where this is heading. There's no point beating around the bush, is there?”

“N-no.”

In a voice that both wooed and commanded, Mykolas murmured, “Then say the words.”

Closing her eyes, Velvet whispered, “I want to see you, Mykolas Sallis.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Heads turned as Mykolas walked past them like a Greek god come to life. Taller than most men and with looks that could rival even the beauty of the many perfectly sculpted specimens gracing the museum, Mykolas also exuded the kind of power and authority that easily caused many of the people around him to drool in jaw-dropping awe.

Women of every age and walk of life fell over themselves in an attempt to catch his attention, but the Greek billionaire was not even aware they existed. He only had one goal in mind, and he was not in the mood to waste his time or effort for anything else.

His heartbeat made itself felt when Mykolas reached the third floor landing. He was, plain and simple, exhilarated. Today was the day he would finally meet his woman. After almost three months of unintended celibacy, he would finally have Velvet Lambert under him. If he had his way, he would have her in every position imaginable. But even then, he doubted his obsession with her would be so easily slaked.

He took his time checking each hall. He had no idea whether she was blonde or dark-haired. For all he knew, she might even have colored her hair completely blue just to mess with him. That kind of prank was not far-fetched at all as far as his woman was concerned.

Only when Mykolas' pulse started to go crazy did he stop. A striking-looking redhead was standing in front of a Byzantine piece of art, her tall, voluptuous form made more mouth-watering by the form-hugging dress she wore. For all

intents and purposes, it was a very modest dress, high necked, with sleeves, and the skirt falling an inch past her knees. But all of those things ceased to matter because of her curves.

If he closed his eyes, he could easily imagine himself running his hands over her body, tearing her dress off and plumping her delicious breasts for him to devour.

Inside his pants, his cock rose into attention, and Mykolas felt a teardrop of premature ejaculation slip out.

It was her.

His Velvet.

His woman.

Every day, thousands of tourists and locals came to visit the Acropolis Museum, which could be accessed using the ancient road that led to Acropolis Hill or what was once known in classical times as the city's "Sacred Rock".

Velvet had arrived at the museum early, taking her time to explore and appreciate the innumerable artifacts of the museum, with some of them dating as far back as the Bronze Age in Greece. It was only when she had been at the museum for about forty-five minutes that she slowly realized the entire room where she was in was empty.

And then she heard the huge doors shutting closed behind her, and she knew *he* was here.

He was a Greek billionaire, all right. He hadn't really confirmed or denied her assumption, but *this*, Velvet thought

almost hysterically, was proof of it. If she needed some kind of evidence that he had unlimited money at his disposal, then getting even part of the Acropolis closed down for *his* benefit was it.

“Turn around, *agape mou.*”

His voice, heard this close, sounded even sexier to her ears. It was seduction itself, pure and simple, and Velvet had a feeling everything Mykolas Sallis could say or do would be the same. Every sensible part of Velvet urged her to run away. She still had time to put all this madness behind her. She didn't know Mykolas Sallis at all, and yet she had practically been having an affair with him since the first day he contacted her. Only a fool would go through with this.

“*Velvet.*” This time, he unleashed his command in his voice. This time, he discarded the unusual role of being gentle, something he had tried to adapt earlier because he didn't want his beautiful filly afraid. But now, he realized that was not the way to handle Velvet this time. She was strong and fierce, but like any strong woman, she wanted a stronger and more powerful master to possess her.

Since his every intention was to chain Velvet Lambert to his side for as long as he desired her, Mykolas had no problems being that at all.

“Playtime's over. Turn around and come to me now.”

The command in his voice was irresistible, and Velvet felt herself turning around even as she was torn between resentment and thrill at his hold over her. The first thing she saw was a pair of Italian handmade shoes. She had always had

a good eye of quality, and she knew at first glance those shoes cost more than her month's wages.

His black pants and matching blazer were of the same quality – the kind that never came with price tags because those who ordered them didn't need to know how much they cost. Custom-designed to exquisitely mold to his long, tall, and muscular form, the suit emphasized the breadth of his shoulders, his lean waist, and his sculpted chest.

Velvet's breath caught in a mixture of helpless excitement and terror of the unknown as Mykolas Sallis slowly walked towards her. With each step he took, he made the vast hall seem smaller. Around them, ancient works of art seemed to turn into spectators, watching their every move, waiting for Mykolas to claim Velvet like a Greek god who had been given a virginal offering.

When Mykolas stopped just an inch before her, her blood started to sing, heat turning her body into a tingling mass of anticipation.

“Look at me.”

Each word was like a whip of passion on her skin, making her tremble as she slowly raised her gaze to his.

He was beautiful.

Every feature of him was hard and perfect, and Velvet found herself more than a little faint at just how larger than life Mykolas Sallis felt. Ebony black hair, gold-brown eyes, and smooth, hard bronze skin all over that made her fingers itch.

Her head whirled at the realization that this was the man she had been talking to all this time.

Finally, Mykolas thought as the most dominant part of him exulted at the realization that his Velvet was within reach at long last. She was spectacularly beautiful, her every feature exotic and vibrantly alive. Her hair burned red gold under the museum's gentle overhead lights, long flowing tresses that swayed against her back. Her eyes were a lively shade of green, molten jade that could turn into a turbulent sea if she was mad...or aroused.

The thought had him looking at her lips, her wonderfully pink colored lips, so beautifully plump they tempted him to sink his teeth into them so he could know how soft it was.

Velvet swallowed. "You're staring at me." And, Velvet was ashamed to admit, the way he was staring at her made Velvet feel hot and bothered. Restlessness churned inside her, making her dress feel like it had suddenly turned into a heavy, suffocating chain of armor. She wanted to get out of her dress. She wanted to be naked. And she wanted to be in his arms.

Dear God, how in the world had Mykolas Sallis been able to turn her into a full-fledged slut overnight?

He didn't smile. "You're staring at me as well."

"I can't help it," she quipped to hide her nervousness. "You look so pretty."

This time, his lips curved slightly. "I'll take that as a compliment." His smile widened at the look of frustration that

flashed in her expressive green eyes. “Were you perhaps trying to taunt me into having a reaction?”

She was, but she would rather die than admit it. “Of course not.”

“You only have to ask, and I shall give it to you.”

She knew right away what he meant and she snarled, “Never.”

Mykolas laughed, the full-bodied sound dark, sweet, and forbidden. It made her senses come alive and caused her nipples to prick against the cotton fabric of her dress.

When he stepped forward, she immediately tried to move back, but his hands were suddenly there, one hand going around her waist and another clasp her hip. Her body slammed against his the next second, his engorged cock immediately making itself felt as it pulsed strongly against the softness of her belly. The contact had Mykolas gritting his teeth and Velvet quickly swallowing back a whimper.

When she looked up at Mykolas, his face was devoid of any softness. It was harsh, his eyes lit up with fierce lust, and his voice was gravelly as he demanded, “Tell me.”

She shook her head defiantly, but a cry broke out from her as he pulled her more tightly against him and began grinding his cock against her already-drenched pussy. Her eyes squeezed shut, Velvet not wanting him to see just how much his cock was tormenting her.

“Tell me.” He ground his erection harder against her.

“Why do you want me to say it? Isn’t it enough that you made me ask to see you? Is this some kind of power trip for you just so you know that you’ve succeeded—”

“I want you to say it,” he growled, “because I want to hear, I want to goddamn know that I’ve made you mine since you’ve already made me yours.”

His words hung between them like a bomb that could detonate any second, and the air around them became rife with sexual tension.

Velvet’s wide-eyed gaze was filled with incredulity. She couldn’t believe he had said that he was...hers. “Did you really just fucking say you were...*mine*?”

Mykolas glared at her. “Did you really just say ‘fucking’? Don’t you know what that’s making me want to do?”

Even with him glaring at her, Velvet couldn’t help but smile. He really had said it. He had said he was hers. The sheer beauty of the thought had her senses reeling, her body tightening in anticipation at the knowledge that soon, she could be truly his, too.

She whispered, “I want you to kiss me, Mykolas Sal—”

Fingers sunk into her hair, her head brought up, and lips that were firm and smooth at the same time crushed hers.

Velvet gasped at the kiss. It was blatantly sexual, fiercely passionate, and unapologetically possessive. With that one kiss, Mykolas was branding her as his. Her arms wrapped around his neck, and right after, Mykolas hefted her up,

causing her to gasp and automatically wrap her legs around his waist.

Without breaking their kiss, Mykolas walked them towards the end of the hall, where he could have her leaning against the wall. Keeping her up against the wall with just one arm, he used his other hand to take a hold of the skirt of her dress.

“Mykolas!” His name was torn out of her as she felt him rip the skirt out of the way. But he only kissed her again, harder, his tongue diving into her mouth as his hand continued to move.

Riiiiip.

She gasped against his mouth as Mykolas ripped her lace panties off her, leaving her completely naked from the waist down. Cool air-conditioned air kissed her legs, causing her wetness to scent the room, and she flushed in embarrassment.

“You smell lovely,” he whispered, sensing Velvet’s emotions and correctly interpreting them for what it was.

She was so embarrassed he had figured out her feelings. Velvet hid her face in the crook of his neck. She bit his neck, too, as if in punishment for embarrassing her, but this only made him chuckle. He moved her up again, and Velvet instinctively tightened her arms and legs around him.

Her dazed eyes absently roamed the hall, and again she had this disturbing feeling that every ancient piece of art was a pagan spectator, waiting for them to consummate a union that was destined. But she forgot all about it the moment she felt

Mykolas' hand slipping between their bodies once more, his questing fingers delving down.

“Mykolas!” She couldn't help crying his name out loud as he suddenly sank two fingers into her pussy. Although she was already soaking wet and their many late-night chats had somewhat eased the tightness of her inner passage, his fingers were much larger than hers. With just two fingers, he made her feel so full, and she gasped his name again as he started to fuck her with them.

“Do you like it?” he purred.

She squeezed her eyes shut at the sheer pleasure of his fingers filling her pussy. Damn, damn, damn, but she had never felt this full and it wasn't even his cock. But even as she could feel herself near to passing out at the way his fingers thrust in and out of her, Velvet managed to say, “It's tolerable.”

Mykolas chuckled. “I guess I have to do better then.”

Her eyes widened. Oh shit. “Mykolas, no, I—” She ended up moaning, her head falling back against the wall as he sank a third finger into her. He moved his fingers faster, too, fucking her harder as he nuzzled her arched neck.

“Mykolas, please.”

The way Velvet sobbed his name out made him growl and suck on her neck. She stiffened, and as he sucked harder, she started to sob his name, her hips thrusting wildly against his fingers.

He lifted his head, capturing her gaze with his as he growled, “Who do you belong to, Velvet?”

This time, she had no thoughts of denying the truth, not with her breasts heaving against his chest with each thrust, and not with her pussy stuffed full with his fingers.

“You,” she whispered, and when his thumb started stroking her clit even as his other fingers continued to fuck her pussy, Velvet cried out as her orgasm crashed onto her. “I belong to you!” She started to sob his name over and over, her body shaking hard in his arms for his fingers still hadn’t stopped thrusting and her pleasure nub had become so sensitive under his thumb it, too, shivered under each stroke.

As Velvet’s soft limp body fell against him, Mykolas couldn’t remember feeling so alive. The time he had spent wooing this woman was more than worth it. Velvet Lambert was his perfect match in every way, her passionate nature complementing his own. With this, he knew that he would never let her go – and he had an idea how to ensure this.

CHAPTER FIVE

“I can’t believe you had the entire museum closed down just because you were horny,” Velvet said over an hour later with a shake of her head. She was seated across Mykolas, enjoying a late lunch in the cozy dining area of his private yacht.

“You should be flattered then.”

“I should,” she agreed, “but I think it was just an ego trip for you.”

He laughed, knowing she had only said so because Velvet – even as beautiful as she was – appeared unable to graciously accept compliments. “No. It wasn’t. I simply wanted to know if you tasted as good as I had imagined for the past months. Now, finish your meal quickly and no more talking until you’re done.”

“Why are you in a hurry?” she complained even as she did try to hurry with her steak.

“Because you have to eat something else.”

Velvet was astonished. “I do?”

He grinned. “My cock.”

She choked on her last forkful of steak and had to drink several gulps of water. When she had stopped coughing, she glared at him and said succinctly, “Asshole.”

But Mykolas didn’t seem to hear her. He was looking at her empty plate in approval. “Good. Normally, I love to watch a woman eat, especially when she knows how to appreciate

good food, but now I find myself hungrier. We'll have coffee up at the deck and then after, I'll fuck you until you pass out."

Velvet laughed at the businesslike way he discussed today's itinerary as she let him drag her back up. "You're *so* romantic."

"Romantic cannot give you an orgasm, *agape mou*. Remember that."

The words had Velvet's smile fading a little, and she was thankful Mykolas had his back to her. The more time she spent with Mykolas, the more she feared she wasn't *just* sexually infatuated with him. Now that she knew what he looked like – and God, he was so much more gorgeous and sexy than she had ever hoped he would be – everything that had happened between them since the day he found her phone had taken on more meaning. It had become more vivid in her mind...more *special*.

Up on the deck, Mykolas arrogantly asked her to rub sunblock on his back and give him a massage as well. She politely told him to drink the sunblock and massage himself to death.

Mykolas, who was lying on his chest on the wooden lounge chair, lifted his head and turned to her, saying silkily, "If you do it, I may be persuaded to share a little about myself."

She snatched the sunblock from his hand. "Give me that," she grumbled and pushed him back down on the chair.

Mykolas obeyed with a grin, and he let out a grunt of pleasure as Velvet's soft hands rubbed oil on his back.

Mykolas' back was smooth, hard and all sculpted muscles. Velvet would never admit it to a living soul, but she loved giving Mykolas a massage, loved the feel of his sinewy muscles reacting to every stroke of her fingers.

Mykolas turned his head to the side so he could watch Velvet. She was dressed in a skimpy red bikini, one of the many things he had personally ordered for her weekend wardrobe. And good thing he had bought her clothes, since the first thing he had ended up doing when they met was rip her dress apart.

"Ask then." It was something she had frequently pestered him about whenever they were talking on the phone or exchanging texts.

"Tell me something about yourself that no one knows."

He thought about it carefully. "It's not a good thing."

"Tell me still."

He looked at her squarely. "I believe everything, everyone, has a price."

Velvet blinked, her hands momentarily stopping its ministrations. "Oh. You're right. That's a totally shitty thing to believe."

"But it is true, *agape mou*. It does not mean that there are no good people left in the world. It only means that for the right price, every person can be made to do something."

She shook her head. “What about love?”

“Can still be bought.”

Her parents came to mind, and her smile faded. “I guess.”

Mykolas was stunned at Velvet’s agreement. And though he would never admit it, he was bothered by it, too. He didn’t like seeing the dark look in her eyes, didn’t like at all the thought that she had to suffer to understand his words were true.

“It is your turn. Tell me something about yourself that no one else knows about.” And he had a feeling there were quite a lot, for Velvet had long proven herself to be a woman who held her cards very close to her heart.

Velvet couldn’t help but laugh at the arrogant command. “And what if I don’t?”

“Then I do this.” Before she could react, Mykolas had captured her wrist and tugged her down, causing her to fall on him, her breasts squashing his face. He readily took advantage of course, and when he started to suck on one bikini-covered nipple, that was when Velvet realized how she would pay if she didn’t agree to his demand.

“Okay, okay,” she yelped as pleasure threatened to take over and make her forget everything but the agonizingly sharp pleasure of his mouth on her breast, “I’ll tell you one thing.”

Reluctantly, Mykolas released her nipple.

She immediately pulled away, and just to be safe, she inched back to keep herself out of reach.

“Tell me.”

“It’s not nice either.”

“I’m tough, *agape mou*.”

Velvet’s lips twisted. “Well, that’s the thing. That’s my secret. I’m not tough at all.”

Pain.

Too much pain in her jade-green eyes that it made him swear and pull her close. As she fell on top of him, he demanded, “Who has hurt you?”

She shook her head. “It’s not some kind of breakup heartache. It was just that...there were people I thought I could trust, only to find out that they weren’t trustworthy.” She forced a smile as she met his gaze. “So I guess, I believe the same thing, too. Given the right incentive, people can be made to do things that you believe they could never be capable of doing...” Her voice trailed off, Velvet biting her lip in time.

She did believe in the same thing. How could she not when her parents had chosen themselves over her?

But then there was Mykolas.

For some stupid, inconceivable reason, her heart was trying to convince her that Mykolas Sallis could prove her wrong. That maybe, maybe with Mykolas Sallis, she had found someone who would *never* betray her – never choose anything or anyone over her.

Because now she knew...

Oh my God!

Velvet fell to the floor.

“Cristo!” In the next second, Mykolas was out of the lounge chair and bent down on one knee as he helped a dazed-looking Velvet up. “Are you all right?”

“I...I...”

I love you.

Shiiiiit!

Velvet bit her lip hard.

No, no, no!

How could she be in love with Mykolas Sallis when today was the first time they had met? That was impossible! Impossible!

But was it really, an inner voice asked. Today may be the first time they had met, but hadn't they known each other far longer than that? Hadn't Mykolas proven himself in many different ways that he treasured her over others?

She remembered the one time she had to stay up late, working on her lesson plan to present to the dean, and he had stayed up late with her because she had stupidly confided to him that she was worried about falling asleep.

“Wake up, Velvet.”

“I wasn't sleeping.” But actually, she had been.

“Of course you were. Focus on me, Velvet. Focus on my voice and if you are really feeling sleepy, focus on my long hard cock going into your beautiful sweet mouth. If I have

your mouth stuffed with my cock, you wouldn't be able to sleep, would you? You'd be too busy sucking."

"You are so fucking obsessed with sex!" But his trick had worked, and she hadn't been able to sleep because she had then been too busy trying not to think of her going down on him.

She remembered the time she had been suffering from a bad case of migraine. The pain had been so great she had been forced to take a day off.

"You sound like you are dying, dammit. Let me send a doctor to you."

"Too tired. Argue. Please."

"I can't just do nothing when you're clearly about to die!"

"Not. Dying. Asshole."

Mykolas had laughed, but the sound had been shaky, making Velvet realize even in her weakened state that the Greek billionaire really was worried about her. "Will be. Okay."

"Tell me what to do. Anything."

Eyes still squeezed shut at the pain, body curled in a ball, she whispered without thinking, "Sing."

"The fuck?"

"Sing... Taylor Swift."

"I'm going to put the phone down now."

She didn't say anything.

A few moments later, “Are you fucking serious?”

“Please.”

“God. Damn. You.”

Vaguely, she heard Mykolas’ fingers tapping on his device.

“If you tell this to any living soul, I’ll strangle you. No, better yet, I’ll fuck you in front of the entire school and you will never find a job as a teacher again.”

Somehow, she had found the strength to smile. “Because you’re. An asshole. Two. Taylor. Swift. Songs.”

“God. Damn. You.”

But Mykolas had ended up singing three Taylor Swift songs that night.

“Velvet?”

Mykolas’ low frantic voice had Velvet crashing back to the present. Mykolas was cupping her chin, forcing her to look at him. “Answer me, Velvet! Are you all right?”

Oh God.

She was in love with him.

Velvet looked at Mykolas and wanted to burst into tears. How could she be so stupid as to fall in love with a Greek billionaire? Hadn’t she learned anything from Mairi? Her friend had also fallen for one, and now she didn’t even have a job, and everyone thought she was Damen’s mistress.

She made herself look into Mykolas’ eyes. His eyes... those eyes...she wanted to drown in those—

Velvet almost groaned.

Oh my God, had she just thought she wanted to drown in his fucking eyes?

“VELVET!”

She stammered, “I’m okay.”

Mykolas scowled. “Something’s not right. Why did you fall?”

I fell because I love—

Velvet clamped her mouth shut.

His scowled darkened. “You are worrying me—”

She shook her head. “No. I’m okay. I...I l...” *I can’t say that! Oh my God, what’s happening to me? Why can’t I stop thinking about how much I love him?*

“You l...what?”

“L...L...” Dammit, if he kept asking her, she would likely slip up and blurt out that she loved him. She loved Mykolas Sallis, the Greek billionaire who thought everyone could be bought. Riiiiight. She could totally see that going down well with him.

“What?”

“L...let’s fuck!” Before she or Mykolas could say another word, Velvet threw her arms around him and covered his lips with hers.

CHAPTER SIX

One moment, they were talking. The next, Velvet was tackling Mykolas to the floor and practically trying to rape him. That was normally a good thing, but it was also quite sudden, leaving him bemused and aroused at the same time.

“What the fuck’s gotten into you?” Mykolas demanded as he finally managed to wean Velvet off him.

She had a mulish, desperate expression on her face. “No more talking. Let’s just fuck. Please?”

“We’ll fuck in a moment. You’re crazy to think we won’t be doing it. But tell me——”

Tell me.

Those words terrified her. She didn’t want to tell him *anything*. Discovering her feelings for him had turned her into such an emotional wreck, she was afraid she would end up blurting out her love if they talked some more.

“Mykolas, no more talking. Let’s just fuck. Please?” And so he wouldn’t argue, she reached behind her to unknot her bikini.

His eyes widened. “Are you insane?” he hissed. “A photographer could be watching us from anywhere! Do you want your topless photo showing up on the Internet tomorrow?” But Velvet didn’t show any signs of stopping. With a curse, Mykolas swiftly scooped her up in his arms just before her bikini top fell off her body. His arms tightened around her the same time she pressed herself against him, her soft bare breasts flattened against his chest.

A shudder ran through him as he carried her back down to the stateroom. *Dio!* That was a close call. No fucking way would he ever let any photographer see her naked! He looked down at Velvet in consternation. “What’s gotten into you?”

She hid her face in the space between his shoulder and neck. “Nothing.” Feeling him sigh in exasperation, knowing that he likely wouldn’t stop asking her until she gave him a plausible explanation, Velvet made her move the moment they entered the stateroom and she felt him lowering her to the bed. As quickly as she could, she wriggled out of her bikini bottom and threw it to the floor.

Mykolas gaped. “What the fuck?”

Velvet whispered, “Don’t make me beg.”

He was out of his board shorts in no time and lying on top of her.

She immediately wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him.

Mykolas’ hard body trembled at the kiss, the sensation magnified by the way her breasts brushed against his chest and her long silky legs snaked around his. “You’re a virgin, dammit,” he muttered even as he couldn’t help kissing his way down to her neck, sucking the very same spot he had left a mark on at the museum.

“You should be wanting me to take this gently.”

Velvet’s eyes had fallen close. “No. I don’t want gentle.” It was true. She wanted everything hard, fast, and mind-blowing so that she wouldn’t ever have a free second to think of what

this would do to her. She loved him so much. And if they made love, she knew she would love him forever. It was such a stupid risk to take, but she couldn't help it.

As his lips continued to trail down, Velvet surrendered herself completely to Mykolas' command. She only allowed herself to feel, and feel she did, moaning as he lovingly kneaded her breasts before sucking on her nipples one at a time. He sucked them so long and so hard she couldn't stop moaning and writhing under his body, couldn't stop sinking her fingers into his hair so she could push his head closer to her breast and make him suck harder.

She moaned long and hard when she felt his hands moving, parting her pussy the way he had taught her so long ago. He stroked her, and oh God, but it was a thousand times better than the best orgasm she had when touching herself.

These were Mykolas' fingers touching her folds and thrusting into her pussy. She no longer had to imagine them, and the realization that her sensual dreams of Mykolas possessing her had finally come true pushed her to the brink of release.

"Mykolas," she gasped, body arching, hips moving to meet his fingers' thrusts. "I think I'm gonna come—"

"Then come, *agape mou*." And to make her come, he moved down so he could suck on her clit while fucking her with his fingers.

She screamed, and she was still screaming, her body shaking at the tremors of her orgasm when she felt him settling

on top of her. Her dazed eyes opened, meeting his the same moment he nudged her legs wide open with his knees.

And then he was pushing inside her.

“Oh...God...” She couldn’t believe how big he was.

Mykolas’ face was filled with strain, and his teeth were clenched tight as he told her with harsh regret, “This will hurt, Velvet.”

She swallowed. “I don’t mind.” And she didn’t. Because she loved him, and there was no one else she wanted to give herself to.

Mykolas kept his body under rigid control as he pushed his cock further in, bit by bit, doing his best to give Velvet time to get used to his size. But soon, he felt the head of his cock meeting the barrier of her virginity and he knew there was no longer any way to be gentle.

“I’m sorry.”

It was her only warning before Mykolas’ cock broke past her hymen.

She gasped, her face whitening with pain at his possession. She had been prepared for it to hurt, but not that much. And he was not even done. Velvet’s lips parted open in shock, her gaze flying to his face in sheer disbelief as she felt Mykolas continue to push his cock further and further in. Oh my God, how long was he again? Oh my God, if someone measured her from front to back, would she be almost one foot long?

“Just a little more,” Mykolas gritted out.

Velvet looked at him in panic. “I don’t think there’s any space left.”

His hands slid under her body and, gripping her buttocks, he moved her at an angle that allowed him to push his cock fully inside her.

Velvet felt faint. So, so full. Oh my God, she had never imagined she could feel this full with...cock. With Mykolas’ cock.

Mykolas gazed down at her. “Does it still hurt?”

She said baldly, “Yes.”

Her tone would have made him smile if only he wasn’t in such pain himself. Everything in him demanded that he move. She felt so fucking good, so unbelievably tight, that his body was trembling at the effort it took to keep himself still.

“Are you sure it still hurts?”

Again, her panicky gaze flew to him and her nails dug into his shoulders. “If you move, I’ll kill you.”

“Says the one who practically raped me,” he managed to tease.

She glared at him. “Move. Kill.”

More unbearably agonizing moments passed.

“Still hurts?”

“Move. Kill.”

He clenched his teeth harder. Goddammit, this would go on forever if he didn’t do something.

Velvet squeaked when she felt Mykolas starting to move. Even the tiniest move of his cock inside her made Velvet feel raw, and she couldn't prevent a lone tear from slipping down her face.

He saw it, of course. "I'm sorry," he said tautly. "I'll make it better." He slid his hand between their bodies.

"You can't—"

Mykolas kissed her, swallowing the rest of her words with his mouth the same time he started to tease her clit back to life. He kissed her tenderly, passionately while keeping his strokes on her clit just fast enough to make her hot and wet. He kept kissing her even as he could feel her inner muscles relaxing, wetness slowly flooding back into her passages, and Mykolas could have groaned with sheer relief when he finally felt her legs fall wide open the same time her hips started to move.

He lifted his head. "Now," he whispered, "I can fuck you."

Before she could think of what to say to that, he was already being true to his word. He fucked her long and slow at first, and when she was gasping and writhing under him, that was when he thrust faster and harder into her, pounding into Velvet's pussy again and again. He pounded into her so hard she could see stars and God, she wanted more of those stars.

"More," she begged, feeling like she could never get enough of Mykolas' cock. She clung to him tightly, trying to meet every thrust. Her hands moved down, gripping his smooth hard buttocks, and her nails dug deep into the skin, urging him to take her as deeply as he could.

Mykolas groaned at the feel of her hands on his body. “You want it harder?” he rasped just before pulling out almost completely and then slamming back inside her, sinking his cock to the hilt. He did this again and again, and each time Velvet would scream his name, the sound of her pleasure working better than any aphrodisiac and making him fuck her harder with his every thrust.

She raked her nails across his back, her head tossing left and right as she could feel her body twisting inside, getting ready for an orgasm that was sure to make her pass out. “Mykolas...” The words *I love you* burned inside her throat, but knowing she couldn’t say it, she pulled him closer to her instead and sank her teeth into his shoulder hard.

The pain and pleasure from her unexpected bite had Mykolas gasping, his back arching as his orgasm came out of nowhere. “Fuck!” His movements became frenzied, and even as he started coming he had the presence of mind to take Velvet with him. Inserting his hand between their bodies, he easily found her clit and gave it a hard little twist that had Velvet abruptly coming with a gasp, her eyes rolling back at the sheer strength of her release.

When she woke up, her first thought was that she had to leave. It was Sunday, and all teachers of GAYL were expected to be back in their dorms tonight. She had no choice but to leave...Mykolas.

Mykolas was lying on his side, head propped on one arm. She found him gazing at her steadily when she slowly opened

her eyes. Again, the words *I love you* burned inside her, but she knew she shouldn't say it.

“Good morning, *agape mou*.” Idly, he stroked her cheek, mesmerized by its soft pale beauty. He had been awake for quite some time, and every second of it he had spent merely watching her. He knew without a doubt that he could never let her go. He had known it earlier, the first time he had a taste of her. But now, the earth-shattering experience of his possession of her body had cemented the truth.

She was his, but it had to be on his terms. They had to do this right, with no false expectations. Everyone had a price. Even his mother, his beautiful gay mother who he had once thought the world of, had eventually sold eight-year-old Mykolas to his grandfather when life became too hard and she realized that she loved being rich more than she loved her own son.

“Good morning.” Velvet found herself captivated by the look in Mykolas' eyes. Oh...damn. She wanted to drown in his gaze again. This was fast becoming a really bad habit. She had to ask Mairi if there was a cure for obsession with Greek billionaires. Then again, Mairi was Mairi – the only thing she probably had was a potion to *stay* in love with Greek billionaires, no matter if they acted like the greatest bastards on earth.

“I have a question for you...” He brought her hand to his lips, and kissing it, he said softly, “I want you to be my wife.”

Velvet's eyes widened. She couldn't believe Mykolas Sallis was asking her to be his wife. Did it mean that he felt it,

too? Did it mean he had also fallen in love with her even before they had seen each other? But before she could answer, he was talking again.

“So tell me. What is the price for your hand in marriage?”

And just like that, her heart crashed. A part of her ached to tell Mykolas that her love had no price. That it was his for the taking and would forever be his. But she knew...it was not time yet. She needed time to convince him that love need not have a price, but for that to happen, she had to lie.

Quietly, she gave him a price.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“A gold-digger, you say?” Mykolas drawled over the phone to his father hours later. He was seated at one of the bar stools while admiring the way Velvet’s hips swayed as she moved about the yacht’s tiny kitchen. She had insisted on preparing them brunch. She had also warned him she had no domestic skills at all, but since he was about to be her husband, Mykolas was expected to eat everything to the last crumb and tell her she was the most fantastic cook in the world – even if she was not.

Pausing in her careful slicing of prosciutto, Velvet made a face at Mykolas’ words. After accepting his business proposal and giving him a few conditions of her own, he had given her a little bit of his background, his wry tone hiding a wealth of emotions when he spoke of his father.

‘You can look up the sordid details online. But it all boils down to the same thing – he’s a billionaire who cares too much about himself. But he did teach me a good lesson, and that is it’s better to expect less from everyone so they do not end up disappointing you.’

And considering that line of thought, Velvet supposed she couldn’t blame Mykolas’ father for thinking she was a gold-digger. After all, no one had heard of her and here she was, suddenly engaged to Mykolas Sallis – and their marriage set one week from today.

Grinning at Velvet’s look, he cut off his father’s furious tirade – which consisted mostly of dire warnings about getting fleeced of half of his wealth – he said, “We have an iron-clad

prenup, Papa. You have no need to worry. She may be my wife in name, but it is only so I can buy her as my permanent sex slave.”

Velvet picked up a piece of cucumber and launched it at his face with perfect aim. Unfortunately, Mykolas also had perfect aim and he caught the cucumber handily and munched on it instead. *Asshole*, Velvet thought, but if she was honest, she was thinking of him more fondly than irritably. He very well knew that the amount she had asked was *beyond* reasonable. What was a hundred grand to him when he had billions?

And if he finds out that the hundred grand is to start a non-profit foundation, her busybody inner voice demanded. *What then?*

By the time that happened, she answered herself stoutly, *Mykolas should well be on his way to falling for her*. She didn't know how she was going to make that happen, but she was determined it would.

When Mykolas ended the call, Velvet told him succinctly as she placed a plate of sandwich in front of him, “Asshole.”

Since she was within reach, he pulled her into his lap and nuzzled her neck. “I plead guilty. But you must admit. It's good retaliation after you told your friend Mandy I was so in love with you I gave you a hundred grand on the spot—”

“But you did,” she pointed out innocently.

“While I was completely naked, with a rose between my teeth.”

“I guess I must have exaggerated.”

“You also sent a text message to your friend Mairi about how I ripped you apart with my cock that you had to be professionally treated.” That one had him grimacing.

“You are a financial expert and you cleaned me up, right? So technically,” she told him piously. “I didn’t lie. Besides, I thought you’d be flattered that I’m boasting about your big hard cock.”

When she fluttered her eyelashes outrageously at him, Mykolas couldn’t help but smile even as he pulled her close to give her a punishingly hard kiss. “I’d rather you not talk about it at all if the alternative is that you’d make me sound like an unfeeling rapist.” He gave her a reprimanding look. “You must stop with the antics.”

“Okay. I promise. No more lies or exaggerations. You can even listen to me make my final call.” And Velvet then dialed her employer’s number to let Rose Thorn know of her decision to marry Mykolas Sallis, stepbrother to one of her students.

She tried to be very professional about it, prepared to work whatever kind of notice Rose needed because she did like her job, but all thoughts of being nice and accommodating fled when Rose started calling her several names.

Velvet started mentally counting sheep.

But then Rose made the mistake of mentioning Mairi.

Mykolas knew the exact moment Velvet lost her composure. She didn’t shout or scowl, but the flash of pain in her eyes told him the other person must have said something

that hit her on the raw. In a perfectly sweet voice, Velvet began weaving a tale.

“Thank you for the sermon about my loose morals. It would have been so much more believable if I didn’t know that you’ve also accepted bribes from parents to get students in your oh-so-highly-esteemed school. It would have been so much more believable if I didn’t know for a fact that *you* want a Greek billionaire for yourself. At least I want mine for the super-hot, mind-blowing, earth-shattering sex. You just want one so you can finally stop working...”

Mykolas didn’t know whether to laugh or grimace when Velvet ended with “...and let me tell you this. While you’re having fun with your vibrator, I’m having sex twenty times a day because my fiancé can get it on *anytime!*”

Chest heaving, Velvet pressed the button to end the call with relish. When she looked back at Mykolas, he raised an eyebrow at her. *No more lies or exaggerations, eh?*

“It was *not* an exaggeration. We can do it twenty times, right?”

He just looked at her.

She said defensively, “It’s her fault, really. I hated how she made Mairi sound like a scheming gold-digging bitch when she’s not one at all! Just because she dreamt of marrying a Greek billionaire doesn’t make her a gold-digger!”

He said truthfully, “I’m sure what you say is true but from where I’m standing, that *does* sound a trifle suspect.”

“You’ll know what I’m saying is true when you get to know Mairi,” Velvet said dismissively, used to everyone’s initial misconceptions of her friend. “And you know,” Velvet added hotly, “she even refused to give Mairi a proper reference —”

“But she had a right to do so, *agape mou*,” he pointed out gently. “What Leventis and his new fiancée—”

“His *only* fiancée,” she corrected sharply, bristling. She didn’t like the insinuation that her friend was a momentary infatuation and the other Greek billionaire could very well replace Mairi for another woman just as quickly as he had dumped his first fiancée.

She had seen how much Mairi loved Damen. It would be heartbreaking for Velvet if the two were to break up. *Especially now*, Velvet thought. If those two didn’t make it, then it was like a bad omen for her and Mykolas as well.

“Let’s not argue about them,” Mykolas was saying. “I’d rather we concentrate on our own upcoming marriage.”

His serious tone had her looking up at him. She still felt a little awkward sitting on his lap. It felt too wanton, but Mykolas seemed to consider this as a favorite position for them so Velvet tried to be blasé about it.

“You have seen how people have reacted to our engagement. It won’t get any easier or better when we do marry. Do you think you would be able to handle it?”

Mykolas tried not to hold himself too stiffly as he waited for her answer. His father’s third wife, Chantal, had been

unable to. Chantal had been like a second mother to him – the only one of his father’s wives who had truly treated him like a son. But in the end, she had been unable to handle all the snide and backbiting remarks that had gone with the territory of being Mrs. Sallis No.3. When she had left, she never looked back – never attempted to contact him even once, and that had been one of the most painful things Mykolas had ever experienced.

Mykolas’ tension was palpable, and knowing a little of his background now, she had a good guess why he remained wary of her ability to handle their marriage of convenience. Her heart ached as she imagined Mykolas as a young ten-year-old, waiting every day for just one message from Chantal until his father had brusquely told him that none would come since Chantal was too busy having fun spending her divorce money.

“It won’t end like that between us, Mykolas,” she said, swallowing. The fact that he cared this much to make sure she was not another Chantal was proof that he was well on his way to loving her, wasn’t it?

At that moment, her heart was overflowing with so much love for him it was pure torture not to tell him. She tried to find the right words to comfort Mykolas without blurting out her feelings, but none came to mind.

Mykolas was still tense.

Velvet blurted out, “Let...” *Let me love you? No way!* “Let me...suck your cock!”

Mykolas blinked. He also didn’t know whether to ask if she was delirious or get Velvet on her knees. “Did I truly just

hear you say that?”

Her face was completely red now, but damn if she would back down. “I heard from really good authority that, err, blowjobs make very effective therapy.”

He asked dryly, “Have you ever sucked a cock?”

She answered right away, “Since you’re so big, would it matter if I did?”

Since the implied meaning there was that he had the biggest cock in the world, Mykolas felt his lips curve in a smile. “You are very good at flattering a man’s ego.”

“And you talk too much,” she said truthfully while still struggling to get her blushes under control. My God! Couldn’t they just go to the cock-sucking part now so she could forget the fact that *she* was the one who had so blatantly started this?

A second later, and she learned that she really did have to be careful about what she wished for. The next thing she knew, she was on her knees and Mykolas had adjusted the height of his stool so his cock would be on the same level as her face.

It was her first up-close-and-personal look of his fully erect cock, and it was an impressive sight.

Actually, Velvet thought with a gulp, *it was a terrifying sight*. Surely her head from front to back didn’t measure a foot long either? What if it hit the back of her throat? Would it then curve downwards?

When she heard Mykolas choking, she realized that she had spoken out loud in her panic. Velvet glared up at him. “It’s a serious worry, you asshole!”

“Would it relieve you to know that women have sucked my cock and survived the experience?”

She paled a little, and her voice was stiff when she asked, “How would you feel if I told you other men had sucked *my* pussy?”

His face became grim. “I’d feel murderous.” But he got her point. Running a hand through her hair in apology, he said quietly, “I cannot change the past, *agape mou*. But I will not talk about other women again. Frankly, I have not had any desire to think about anyone but you. It was only your question that caught me unaware.”

“You better be sure about that,” she said gruffly and before she lost her confidence, she just went and did it, taking the head of his cock into her mouth.

The sudden feel of Velvet’s warm moist mouth on his cock had Mykolas groaning out loud. “So fucking good.” His fingers went to her hair, gripping the locks while his thumbs tenderly caressed the sides of her face.

Feeling her struggle to get the right rhythm while taking more of him in, he said grittily, “Relax your throat. Stop thinking about the size of my cock and just focus on sucking.”

Velvet did her best to follow Mykolas’ instructions, and gradually, she felt herself settling into a rhythm, her tongue instinctively learning how to best stimulate her fiancé’s desire. *Her fiancé*. The thought was exciting, thrilling, and terrifying, and it had her hot and bothered right away. It fed her desires, making her suck longer and harder on Mykolas’ throbbing cock even as her body became tighter and wetter.

“*Yes. That’s it...*” The words hissed out of his mouth, the pleasure of Velvet’s sucking driving him nearly out of his mind. Velvet was a proud woman, a strong woman, and the fact that she had initiated this act when he had never even thought of asking it from her made him feel more than satisfied. It made him feel wanted as a man and not as a billionaire.

Soon, he was unable to keep himself from guiding her head to move faster and have her suck him harder. “You need to let go now if you don’t want me to come in your mouth,” he warned in a growl.

But Velvet wanted him to come in her mouth and so she sucked him harder, holding on to his bare buttocks for balance.

Mykolas cursed, and a second later he was spilling his seed as he fucked her mouth hard, his cock hitting the back of her throat as he came in long strong spurts. He watched in amazement as Velvet did her best to swallow it all, and the way she tried to suck him dry made him groan out loud again.

When he was fully spent, Mykolas dragged her back up, leaning against the wall as he cradled her on his lap. “You are fantastic.”

“Thanks. I guess.” She tried not to show how much she treasured those words, even if it was just about giving good head. Velvet wanted to bang her head on the counter. God, was this what love was all about? Being goo-goo eyed and weak-kneed all the time? Even at this moment, she could not take her eyes off him, her chest squeezing at the way he looked like

a sexually sated Greek god, uncaring of the fact that he was fully naked and she was not.

And then he was suddenly on his feet and carrying her back to the stateroom. “You haven’t eaten yet!”

“I’ll eat it for dessert. Your pussy will be my main course for now.” And he gave her no time to argue as in only a few moments, Mykolas already had her naked, on her back, with his face between her legs.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The days leading to Velvet's wedding passed her by like a whirlwind. Everyone who had the chance to ask them why they were marrying so soon did, and she and Mykolas took pleasure in giving different answers.

She's not letting me have her until I have a ring on her finger, was Mykolas' answer to one insistent bank owner who had bumped into them when they were out dining in Athens.

I want to get him down the altar before he changes his mind and realize I'm after his money like some other people. This was her answer to the supermodel who had asked her the same question when the three of them had found themselves in the same red carpet event. The supermodel had been one of his ex-flings and unable to hide her envy and loathing. But at Velvet's pointed barb, the other woman had flounced off in her super small dress and super high heels.

Remembering the distasteful conversation had Velvet sighing. She had a feeling tonight's party, hosted by one of Mykolas' business partners in celebration of their wedding the day after tomorrow, would have many of the same incident. Especially since the party was hosted in one of Athens' most popular nightclubs and half of the guests already appeared quite sloshed.

After talking to another well-wisher, Mykolas turned to his fiancée and saw a frown marring Velvet's smooth forehead. This did not sit well with him, and he immediately tugged her close and lifted Velvet from her stool and into his lap.

She immediately curled her arms around his neck even as she glared at him and muttered under her breath, “What is with you and having me on your lap?”

If he were truthful with her, Mykolas would have to tell Velvet that he had no idea as well. He had never done this with any other woman. He had actually hated any kind of public display, and his ex-lovers had known that all he would tolerate of them were occasional touches. *Perhaps*, Mykolas thought, it was because he had instinctively known all those women would be clingy if he had given them the chance.

On the other hand, Velvet was the opposite. She practically bristled every time he had her sitting on his lap in public, and it was precisely because of that reason he liked her close.

Velvet suddenly bit his ear, making him look at her with a raised eyebrow even as his cock rose to attention.

“You were miles away.” Velvet had to say everything close to his ear. It was either that or shout to be heard over the loud, heart-pumping music played by the club’s DJ. “What were you thinking?”

“Your question.” His words tickled her ear, making Velvet shiver. When he chuckled and pulled her closer, she knew that he had intended her to react that way.

“Asshole.”

Mykolas only smiled. “But I *was* seriously thinking about it, *agape mou*.”

“Oh. Have you thought of the answer?”

“Yes.” And he breathed to her ear, “I just like making you mad.”

This time, a full shiver did run through her body, goose bumps popping up all over her skin even as she gaped at his answer. *Seriously?* Seeing his steady look, Velvet realized Mykolas did mean it, and she said sweetly, “Asshole,” before promptly biting his ear in punishment. Mykolas always warned her not to arouse him in public. It was the greatest distraction, he had told her seriously, and he hated being less than a hundred percent alert when surrounded by people he didn’t trust.

Of course, when he warned her that way, it only made her want to arouse him even more. *Sort of like how he wanted her to act like a sex kitten in public even though he knew she sort of hated it*, Velvet realized in surprise. The realization that they had the oddest similarities secretly pleased her, enough to make Velvet bite his ear again.

“What the fuck, Velvet?” But the way his cock was rubbing her told Velvet he wasn’t exactly unhappy with what she did.

“I think I want to fuck you now,” she whispered to him.

He looked at her like he wanted to strangle *and* fuck her at the same time.

She fluttered her lashes at him. “Please?” And then she was laughing. He always moved so fast whenever she was the one to ask for sex first. In seconds, he had her inside the ladies’ room, locked the door, and had her up against the wall.

“Wicked tease.” His voice was a rough sexy growl, lust glinting in his eyes just before he kissed her hard.

“But you like it, don’t you,” she purred breathlessly. He had already freed his cock from his trousers and in the next second, Mykolas had again ripped her panties away, the torn pieces joining her discarded purse on the floor. She pretended to sigh despondently. “Panty Ripper.” But the words were barely out of her mouth before she gasped, his cock sliding home into her already wet pussy.

Mykolas didn’t bother talking, fully focused on fucking Velvet hard. He kept his eyes on her all the time as he shoved his cock in and out of her, loving the way her own eyes became unfocused with desire. He loved those little whimpers she did, knowing she only ever made those sounds for him.

His cock still inside her pussy, he carried her towards the counter and flipping her to her chest, Mykolas bent her halfway so he could enter her from behind. “Hold tight.”

Velvet did as ordered, and thank God she did because this time Mykolas wasn’t holding back. He pounded into her so hard and good she could no longer make a sound. He had turned into a rutting beast, his hands squeezing her breasts hard, and oh God, she couldn’t get enough of it.

Even the slapping sounds of his balls against her thighs was hypnotic, and so were the wet plopping sounds that his cock made each time it shoved into her tight and quivering pussy. Soon, she couldn’t stop gasping, her heart racing, her body tightening and tightening—

Mykolas gripped one bare cheek hard before reaching under her to pinch her clit. “Come for me, my love.”

My love.

Velvet screamed, Mykolas’ unexpected words triggering her release, and she kept screaming as Mykolas roared her name from behind, hot sticky come bursting out of his cock and flooding her until they started dripping down her thighs.

She knew of course that ‘my love’ translated to ‘*agape mou*’ in Greek, and that the latter was a common endearment. But tonight was the first time he had said the words in English, and God, how those words made her feel so...loved.

Inner turmoil had Mykolas stiff. He had a hard time believing he had called Velvet ‘my love’. He hoped she would not read anything in it. The words were an endearment. He repeated this to himself several times as if trying to convince himself. She was a fool to think it was anything other than that. And he would be a greater fool to worry if she did. It was not his problem if she did. What they would have tomorrow was a marriage of convenience – and nothing more than that.

Mykolas was quiet as he cleaned her, wetting his handkerchief to wipe away the come from her still sensitive flesh and her thighs. Seated on the counter, Velvet looked down at Mykolas and said, “It’s okay.”

Slowly, he lifted his head. “What’s okay?”

Her lips twisted. “I’m not the kind to beat around the bush, so I’ll just say it as it is. It’s okay that you said something you might not have meant. I get it, Mykolas.” She forced a smile.

“You didn’t mean it when you called me ‘my love’, and it’s cool.”

Mykolas only spoke when he was done cleaning her and was back on his feet. “I never thought I’d say this, but…” He kissed her softly on the lips. “I’d rather you call me an ‘asshole’.”

Velvet blinked, then a laugh escaped her as the tension in the air noticeably lessened. She said obediently, “Asshole. You motherfucking goddamn asshole.”

“That was a little bit more than I asked for, *agape mou*,” Mykolas asked with a wince as he helped her down the counter.

“Consider it a bonus,” she replied promptly.

She and Mykolas were both quiet as they stepped out, the two of them busy with their thoughts that they were completely oblivious to the line of gaping women queuing to use the ladies’. When they reached their seats by the bar, Mykolas ordered a drink right away. Velvet took her phone out, checking for incoming mail or messages, but it was really to distract herself from the fact that she was a BIG FAT LIAR.

She was cool with Mykolas Sallis not meaning to call her his love?

Like she said, big fat---

The breath was knocked out of her, and the rest of her thoughts completely disappeared when she realized the unread email in her inbox was from her lawyer, Lester Wilkins. He

was a dear old man, having taken her on *pro bono* when she was eighteen and without a clue as to what to do with her life.

I have received a letter from Mr. Garfield, forwarded by his lawyer. I have, of course, reviewed the contents and it is my professional opinion – as well as that of a surrogate father to you – that you do not bother with it. But of course, it is still your right to read it if you wish, and I have scanned the content in the event that you prove stubborn and disregard my advice.

Velvet would have smiled if she could. Lester Wilkins was a cranky old man, and most of his *pro bono* clients tended to back out after just one hour spent in his office. But she hadn't, and in the end, she had gained herself an invaluable ally.

Mr. Wilkins knew her very well. She *was* stubborn. She really didn't have a choice. That had been the only option that allowed her to survive.

Velvet clicked the attached file to open it.

I swear this is the last time, Dotty. I need money—

The words shoved her back to the past. She was eighteen, and Wayne had shown up in her dorm, clearly out of it. He had woken up everyone on her floor with all his heavy knocks and loud cries. He hadn't cared that everyone would know she had druggies for parents, and that they loved their green goddess more than they loved their own flesh and blood.

My friend Ernie told me about this excellent opportunity to make good and fast money. After this, I won't ask you again. Never.

She was twenty and had thought the world was hers to conquer because Wayne and Lindy had successfully completed rehab. Velvet had thought they would be a family again. But the day they came out, they had borrowed money from her for one last joint. *One last joint*, Wayne had told her in a singsong voice. *Please understand Mom and Dad. We need to do this.* That was when she realized Wayne, Lindy, and the green goddess had always been a family – and she would never be a part of it.

You've done so much for me and your mom. If you want to meet with us anytime, you know we're here for you. We love you very much, baby. We really want to see you.

Velvet remembered the first time she had refused to give them money and Wayne had gone berserk. Had slapped her so hard he had knocked her down. And Lindy was no better, urging her husband to knock more sense into their ungrateful brat. Didn't Dotty know how close she had been to getting an abortion? Velvet owed them her life. Maybe she needed a couple more hard slaps to remember that.

I promise nothing's going to happen to you this time. No one's gonna hurt you again. And you know, I keep telling you it was a misunderstanding. I told her to insist that you lend her money. I didn't tell her to rob you or threaten to kill you.

That was Wayne's version. Velvet's version wasn't as rose-colored. He had sent his girlfriend – one of the many Lindy didn't know about – to Velvet's flat, and the older girl had been accompanied by teenage boys who were also desperate to do anything just to snort more cocaine into their systems.

It had been the worst night of Velvet's life. Worse than the first time she had heard gunshots and realized her home was no longer a safe haven. At least when she was eighteen, when the bad men came, Velvet knew she had her parents on her side. That it was them versus the bad men who demanded blood or money.

But that night when she opened to the door to Wayne's girlfriend? Her parents were the bad men, and they might as well have been there when the older girl threatened to give Velvet to the boys if she didn't hand over all the money she had in her possession. Her parents might as well have been the one to hold the knife to her throat, might as well have been the one to terrify Velvet so much that she had jumped out of the third story window in an all-or-nothing attempt to escape.

You gotta put that behind in the past. It's not good to hate.

He was so fucking wrong. Even with her name changed, her identity held a secret as ordered by the court, she could never – would never – escape the past. It was with her all the time, coloring her judgment.

The past was what she thought about every time she scrimped and saved every penny of her salary, the fear of being helpless and alone like she had been at eighteen making Velvet fanatic about building a nest egg for herself.

The past was what made her hold a small part to herself, just so Velvet could be sure she would not be completely reliant on anyone – not even with Mandy or Mairi or even Mykolas – and risk having her heart broken when the people she trusted failed her. Again and again.

Your loving dad,

Wayne

Velvet closed her eyes.

Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, weak is a dick.

How so fucking easy it was for Wayne to call himself her loving dad. And how fucking funny was it that those three words made everything so clear.

Of course Mykolas Sallis had not meant it when he called her his love. How could she expect someone like him to love her when even her own dad thought a gram of marijuana was more important than her life?

No matter what she did, no matter how much she had changed, she was not really Velvet Lambert. She was Dotty Garfield, and she had to remember that so she wouldn't end up believing she could have her own happy ever after.

CHAPTER NINE

Mykolas was restless. Something had happened last night, something that had changed Velvet. When they had gotten home, she had pretended to have a headache. And this morning, she had pretended to be asleep. It was clear that she did not want to talk to him, and he had no fucking idea why.

Or did he?

Color stained Mykolas' high-boned cheeks as he recalled the time he had taken her at the ladies' room and he had called her something he had never called any woman before.

My love.

He leaned back on his seat and closed his eyes wearily. Goddammit, why did he end up saying those words anyway? And why did she have to make such a huge deal out of it? She hadn't batted an eyelash even when he called her the same thing in Greek. So why now?

Besides, he was marrying her tomorrow. What more could she ask for?

But still the feeling persisted. He was not in the habit of leaving the office early, but he found himself curtly informing his secretary to cancel all his meetings for the day and driving back home at ten in the morning.

Damn you, Velvet, Mykolas thought even as he overtook another car in his haste to get back. He had a fucking feeling that if he didn't get back as soon as he could, the worst kind of shit would hit the fan.

And he was right.

Velvet counted ten full minutes since Mykolas left before she got out of bed. Leaving herself no time to think, she moved as quickly as she could as she took a shower and began packing her things. She might not have a job now, but at least she had enough money saved to tide her over until she figured things out.

Memories crowded her as she went through each room of Mykolas' penthouse residence, which was really more like a one-floor mansion. A single floor that was probably the size of a basketball court –bleachers included.

The spacious kitchen with its gleaming granite countertops and shiny silver equipment, rarely used until she had come to live with Mykolas. Now, it was one of the most used rooms in the house because Mykolas liked having her as breakfast before the actual thing.

The balcony, with its marble balustrade, was where she and Mykolas sometimes had coffee before he left for work and if she was in the mood to tease him, where she would insist on giving him a blowjob because she knew that only with her was he amenable to risking what he considered as exhibitionist sex.

And there was the library. There, he would work at night after dinner, and she would be with him reading a book. Sometimes, she would get him to talk and other times he would get her to talk. They never went all out with their confidences, but it was easy to read between the lines when you loved the other person so much.

But it was not the same for him.

She had to remember that.

Their bedroom – no, *his* bedroom – had the most memories, and each one of them hurt. Sure, they had fantastic sex here all the time, but it wasn't just that. She loved the after-sex part even more, the times when he would want her close and they would just talk. When he was tired, she would try to make him smile by telling him of her outrageous plans about what she would buy once she became Mrs. Sallis. His hard body rocking with his silent laughter would be her first reward, the second of course was having Mykolas go down on her.

It was here in this bedroom that he had also given Velvet her engagement ring, the first morning she had spent on his bed. She had woken up with a beautiful ring on her finger, with Mykolas cheerfully telling her he had bought the most audacious and gaudiest ring he could find.

This way, he had told her in a mock serious voice, you can make every woman envious when you tell them you only had to flutter your lashes to get me to buy the biggest rock in town.

Velvet blinked her eyes furiously. They were good memories, but she couldn't hope it would be like that forever. She had to leave now before she lost herself in her dreams and made herself vulnerable again.

Velvet was in the act of dragging her suitcase down the stairs when she heard the door being unlocked. Her heart jumped to her throat when it started to open. For a moment,

she felt like she was about to face intruders again, and she was all alone to defend herself.

But it was only Mykolas.

She almost breathed a sigh of relief when the thought hit her.

Oh my God, it was Mykolas! What was he doing here?

Velvet was so stunned that she dropped her suitcase, and she screamed bloody murder when it fell on her foot. As usual, Mykolas moved lightning fast in such situations, and Velvet found herself being swooped up in his arms as he carried her to the sofa.

Down on one knee, he gently took off one ballet flat and lifted her foot for inspection. “This will likely take a day or two to heal.” Looking up, Mykolas was indifferent when he saw Velvet’s teeth clenched with pain. “Do you think what happened to you is fate’s way of punishing you for trying to leave me?”

She glared at him. “Asshole.”

Normally, that would have made him smile, but this time Mykolas’ face only hardened. “Why are you leaving me? And why like this?”

“None of your fucking business.” *And that was all she was going to say about it*, Velvet thought, lips clamping shut and her gaze resolutely fixed on the gold-stenciled decoration of the wallpaper behind Mykolas. Whatever happened, she mustn’t look at Mykolas. If she did, it would be all over. Completely over.

“What are you doing here so early anyway?” she muttered as the silence between them grew and became heavier with tension.

He asked sarcastically, “I apologize for not asking what time I’m allowed to be in my house. Is it too terribly inconvenient for you?”

She snapped back, “Kinda!”

Losing his patience, he forced Velvet to meet his gaze. “No more games! Why are you leaving me? Have I treated you so badly in any way that you have no choice but to leave?”

Goddamn him, Velvet thought as she tried her best to stop a furious rush of tears. If he had made it seem like it was her fault then she would have known what to say, could have taken the offensive because he was being an ass. But he hadn’t. He was asking what *he* had done when in truth, it was all her.

Mykolas cursed when Velvet only glared at him, her eyes sparkling with unshed tears. “You are so fucking stubborn. I don’t even know why I put up—”

“Then don’t,” Velvet shouted before she could stop herself. Oh my God, she was turning into a shrew right before her very eyes. If she had any ounce of pride and dignity left, she would leave right now before it got worse and she said more stuff that shouldn’t be said.

But Mykolas only shook his head at her. “You are not making any damn sense—”

“I’m leaving you, and that’s it!” The words left both of them shell-shocked.

Mykolas’ face had whitened. Hearing the words said so clearly brought the truth home. He tried imagining Velvet out of his life, but everything was dark and pointless. “Why the fuck are you doing this to me, Velvet?”

She shook her head. “I just have to leave.”

“That’s not an answer.”

Tears started to fall down her face, and she struggled not to drown under all the emotions crashing down on her. “I just have to leave——”

“Answer me, damn you!”

“Because I have to! Before you make me weak, I have to go!” The emotional dam had burst, and now she just couldn’t stop spilling her heart out. “Tell me, Mykolas. Tell me the truth! Why do you want to marry me so quickly? *Why?*”

Mykolas was aghast at Velvet’s sudden outburst. Her eyes were wild, her voice choked with tears. She looked like she was about to crash any moment. “Calm down——” He tried to hold her, but she slapped his hand away. She tried pushing him off balance, too, but he was too strong and her tears had weakened her.

“You can’t answer me, can you?” she snarled. “You can’t...or you don’t!”

Again, he tried to hold her and again she struggled like a wildcat, trying to kick him away this time but ending up hurting herself as she forgot about her injury. “Shit!” She

sobbed in pain, and stupidly or not she blamed Mykolas for it, too.

Mykolas finally managed to hold her down, keeping her arms to the sides so she would stop trying to beat him. “Will you please calm the fuck down? You’re worrying me, dammit!”

“Well, you’re *killing* me! Why don’t you ask me the same question? *Why?*” She glared at him even as more tears fell from her eyes. “Don’t you want to know why I’m in such a hurry to marry you? Don’t you want to know why I just asked one hundred damn grand when I know you can afford to give me a billion? ASK ME,” she shouted.

“Why then?” he shouted back. “Why—”

“Because I love you!”

All the strength went out of her as the words spilled past her lips. She looked at Mykolas, and her chest squeezed so hard it was as if she was about to have a heart attack. But of course it wasn’t that. It was only because she loved him so much.

“I didn’t want to. You scare me, Mykolas Sallis. You scare me when I’ve worked so hard not to be scared. I’ve fought so hard to be strong, but you make me weak. You made me fall for you, and you made me lie. You made me name a price when there wasn’t any price at all for me to marry you because...*I love you.*” She struggled to breathe, struggled to get the last words out so her humiliation would be complete and with it, closure and perhaps a chance to move on. “I love you so much, Mykolas,” she whispered. “Love you so much

that I wanted you tied to me before you realize the truth and think I'm lying—”

“Stop.”

And as if that was not enough, he hauled her to him, his lips crushing hers in a kiss. She tried to struggle at first, but this only made him kiss her more deeply, tongue diving aggressively into her mouth so he could remind her that she was his.

Terror – sheer fucking terror – was growing inside him like a damn infection, but he forced himself to ignore it. Forced himself to play deaf to all the cynical warnings his past was now blasting out at him. He believed her. He believed every word she said, and that was the terrifying part of it. If he allowed himself to believe, then he would be risking everything of him – like she was risking everything of her to love him.

“You are so fucking stubborn,” he said hoarsely against her lips. “I’m sure your brain’s told you a thousand times that letting me know you love me is the worst decision you’d ever make.” He lifted his head, and his lips formed a smile when he saw her glaring at him. “But you ignored your own advice.”

She snarled, “What’s the point of this?”

“The point, *my love*—” And he had to kiss her again when fresh tears stung her eyes at his words. Goddammit. A woman like Velvet wasn’t supposed to cry like this, and he hated the fact that he was the cause of it, hated how he had made her feel like she didn’t deserve to hear him say those words.

“—is I’m damn stubborn, too. Because right now, the sensible part of me is telling I’d be taking a lot less risk if I toss you out of the house in favor of a bride who’d just ask me for a billion dollars.” He cupped her face and said unevenly, “A billion I can afford to lose and earn back. But my heart?”

A sob escaped Velvet. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Oh God, was this true? Was this really happening?

Something raw and tender squeezed his chest as he watched Velvet start to cry again at his words. “You’re trying to steal my heart, Velvet, and I have to say you’re doing a damn good job. If you end up stealing it, there’s only one of it so you better fucking take care of my heart.”

“Right now,” she said shakily, “I hate you so much for making me cry I’d gladly stomp your heart to pieces.”

He laughed, and she laughed and then they were kissing again, Mykolas falling to the floor and Velvet falling on top of him. “Before I fuck you,” he told her seriously, “and punish you at the same time for attempting to leave me when you know you’re *mine*, is the wedding still on for tomorrow?”

She pretended to think.

He slid his hand under her dress and into her panties.

Her eyes widened.

One finger slid in.

She moaned.

He pulled his finger out but didn’t push it back inside again. Mykolas raised a brow. “Care to answer now, *agape*

mou?”

She tried pushing herself down, but he was good at keeping her off his delicious finger. Glaring down at him, she snarled, “Yes, now please—-” Three fingers were suddenly thrust inside her, and moaning, Velvet forgot what she had to say.

CHAPTER TEN

The wedding was almost perfect.

A judge that was also a family friend of Mykolas had officiated the wedding in his office, which had been kept private. Guests had then been invited for dinner at the ballroom of Mykolas' office building, a sixty floor corporate center that he also owned.

The 'almost' part mostly had to do with the guests. Neither Mairi nor Damen were able to attend, and Mandy hadn't been able to contact them to ask why. Mykolas' father had come but was accompanied by a barely-legal wannabe actress, whose idea of proper wedding attire was a dress where her boobs were in danger of popping out.

Her own parents hadn't come of course. They didn't even know she was getting married, and she preferred to keep it that way. Mykolas had asked about her family once, but she had told him they were dead. They might as well have been anyway.

Despite all that, Velvet still found herself floating on cloud nine, and Mykolas appeared the same, with both of them unable to stop smiling and stealing kisses throughout the night.

Mykolas loved her. He hadn't said it straight out, but he loved her. So yes, that was definitely a good reason to be happy and think her wedding was the most beautiful day *ever*.

"You're giggling," Mykolas told her, his lips curving as he spun his bride around on the dance floor. She looked incredibly beautiful tonight, and he wouldn't be lying if he

described her as the most beautiful woman in the room. That was how she had seemed to him – had *always* seemed to him. Her wedding dress was an exquisite blend of white and gold, silk and lace, and hand-sewn pearls. It had a strapless corset-styled top and a semi-ballerina skirt that fell a little past her knees. Matched with her sky-high white heels, she was perfection. She was Velvet Sallis, and she was fucking his for eternity.

Velvet looked up at her husband, knowing full well that she had stars in her eyes and didn't give a damn about it. "You're staring."

He brought her close and whispered to her ear, "I can't stop. You're so damn beautiful, Mrs. Sallis." She shivered in his arms, making Mykolas laugh.

She beat him on the shoulder. "Stop trying to turn me on in public."

He pulled back to give her a wide-eyed look even as he continued to twirl them around. "I'm not doing anything."

"Shut up! You know you just have to look at me like—"

He gazed at her with lidded eyes.

Velvet's breasts became heavy, and she hissed, "Like that!"

Laughing, he lowered his head to kiss her, and around them the guests shouted, *Twenty-six!* This had both of them laughing even as Mykolas continued to kiss her. This had been their 26th kiss since they had been made man and wife, and Velvet had a feeling it would be a three-digit-figure by the time the night ended.

When he lifted his head, she couldn't help but mouth, *I love you.*

Something in his eyes flashed before he mouthed, *Sneaky.*

This made her laugh because she knew it was in reference of her being good at stealing his heart.

Tenderly, Mykolas pressed a kiss to his bride's forehead. "Are you thirsty?" They had been dancing and entertaining guests for hours.

At her nod, they moved off the dance floor and headed to the refreshments table. Velvet looked up at her groom and... grinned.

He raised a brow. "What?"

She told him in a confidential whisper, "You look seriously hot."

He laughed. "Coming from you, I will treasure that compliment."

"So hot I want you to fuck me right now." And it was her turn to laugh when Mykolas abruptly cut his off.

"Velvet, dammit. Now, I know you want revenge." And now he had also gone from partially aroused to about-to-go-crazy-all-11.5-inches-are-out-aroused, his cock about to rip past the zipper of his pants.

"Not really," she said honestly. "I just want a quickie."

Dio. The thought of having a quickie was infinitely appealing. It was better than having to wait for a few more

hours before their party officially ended and he could finally have his damn wedding night.

She gave him her best puppy-eyed look. “*Please?*”

“Behave yourself.”

“No.” He softened his rejection by stroking her cheek.

“Tonight, I do not want any one person here mistakenly thinking I do not respect or cherish you, *agape mou*. For once, we will do it the right way, hmm?”

Even as she thrilled to his words, Velvet pouted. She had never really pouted in her entire life, but now seemed a good time to try and by the arrested look on Mykolas’ face, it seemed to be working. So she pouted some more and the next thing she knew, Mykolas was cupping her face again and kissing her hard.

Twenty-seven, the crowd roared.

But neither of them really heard it.

It was about four in the morning when Mykolas and Velvet prepared to leave for his vacation house in Santorini, which was where their month-long honeymoon would start. The party was still full swing, but it was clear to see virtually all of the guests were too drunk to notice their departure. While Velvet made her goodbyes to Mandy, he headed back to his office to ensure that everything was in order before he left. He planned not to work a single minute of his honeymoon since he would be too busy enjoying his wife’s charms.

Mykolas scribbled last-minute instructions for his secretary to go through the next day. As he was about to leave, he caught sight of Velvet's purse and smirked at his wife's forgetfulness. It wasn't normal of her to be forgetful. It was proof that she was so heady in love with him that she forgot all about her purse.

Picking it up from the console table, he realized too late that the bag was unzipped and her iPhone tumbled out. When Mykolas picked the phone up, he saw a new email alert on the screen and clicked it unthinkingly.

The email was from a lawyer named Lester Wilkins.

I've sent \$100,000 as requested to his lawyer, and he'll be providing you with a receipt as well as a draft of the contract for your approval.

You are as always too kind by half and stubborn, too. You are also unfortunately blinded by love. Wayne Garfield is a lost cause, and he will never stop ruining your life for as long as you keep hoping for the impossible. He will not and he can never love you the way you want him to and certainly never the way you love him.

Three seconds of absolute silence passed.

Three seconds of the most unbelievable agony.

Three seconds of the most devastating betrayal.

Mykolas threw Velvet's phone against the wall, and as its screen smashed into pieces, he grimly wished he could destroy his feelings for his duplicitous wife just as easily.

“My husband wants me to go to his office?” Velvet was bemused. Mykolas had told her to wait here so they could leave together and now this?

The waiter nodded. “Right away if possible, Mrs. Sallis.”

Oh!

Her lips curved. Mykolas had decided to give in and indulge her need for a quickie then. She smiled and thanked the waiter and hurried to the elevator. Would it be too much if she took off her underwear now?

Imagining the look on his face made her decide on the spot, and she hurriedly stepped out of her lace underwear just before the elevator’s doors swooshed open. Of course, this left her with the evidence in her hands, and she impulsively decided to hide it inside his secretary’s drawer and come back for it later. Or at least she hoped she would remember to take it out later. *Most times*, Velvet thought fondly as she opened the door to his office, *he made her forget everything but his name*. He was just that good at—

And that was when she saw it.

“What the fuck are you doing?” she screamed.

No, this was not possible.

This was not possible.

THIS WAS NOT POSSIBLE!

She didn’t pause to think. She just reacted, just ran towards the couple in the dark and grabbed the hair of the woman who was on her knees and giving Mykolas head. And then she was

slapping Mykolas. Slapped him so hard because she knew whatever hurt she inflicted on him wouldn't even be a fraction of what she was suffering right now.

“Why?” she screamed. “Why, damn you, why?” Tears blinded her, but she didn't need to see him anyway. She would see him forever now, and it would always be Mykolas being pleased by another woman.

“Because,” he said savagely, “it gave me a fucking kick to let you know that you're not irreplaceable.” He caught her flailing wrists and forced them down. “It gives me a fucking kick to hurt your damn pride because that's all I can hurt since you don't have a fucking heart!”

He had the urge to shove her away, but he forced himself to simply let her go. He needed the damn practice and told himself that this was more like a necessary excision, like cutting a fucking infected limb before it ended up killing the rest of his system.

Velvet felt like she had been punched in the gut when Mykolas suddenly released her, in a way that made her feel she was toxic and he no longer wanted himself contaminated by her presence. God, it hurt so badly, almost to the point that she wished he had just pushed her away. At least that showed he cared enough to hate her.

His words didn't make any sense at all, but did it matter? All she knew was that she had been wrong. He didn't love her.

But in the end, she found herself begging. Dammit, she couldn't stop herself from begging. “Please make me understand.”

And yet the coldness never left his face. “There is *nothing* to understand. *Nothing*. This farce is over. Get the hell out of my life and if I ever see your face again, I’ll have you arrested for stalking.”

Weak is a dick, weak is a dick, weak is a...

She couldn’t lie to herself anymore.

Dick was not the one who was weak. It was her. Velvet was weak. No, not Velvet. It was Dotty who was weak.

Dotty was weak. Dotty was weak. Dotty was weak.

Somehow, she took pleasure in chanting the words in her mind as she turned her back on Mykolas and left his office. She didn’t even feel the slightest need to look back. There was no point. He was part of the same past where Wayne and Lindy existed, a part of her life that she had to ignore if she didn’t want it to kill her.

It was only when she got to the lobby that she realized she didn’t have any money. She had left her bag in Mykolas’ office. She wouldn’t even be able to withdraw from the bank, not when there was nothing to withdraw since she had stupidly – oh God, how stupid she had been all this time! – used all her money this morning to buy a fucking gift for Mykolas. It had been her proof to herself that she was not weak – that she was strong enough to love and trust.

Yeah, well, stupid her.

Dotty was weak. Dotty was weak. Dotty was weak.

Another thought occurred to her, one that almost sent Velvet to her knees.

Oh God, she even didn't have panties on.

All she had were memories and...

Velvet forced herself to turn around and face the gaping security guard, who had been trying all this time not to make it obvious that he had been staring at her. Tugging the rings off her fingers, she gave it to him and said, "It's your lucky day."

And then she started to walk to the airport.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“Are these *all* her financial records?” Mykolas asked the next day, his face cold and unreadable as he took the documents from the head of his security team.

“They are *everything*, even the ones that should not have been publicly accessible.”

When the other man left, Mykolas remained motionless behind his office desk for a while. Even now, he loathed himself for being so gullible. Even now, he questioned his motives for wasting his time tracing Velvet Lambert’s every move. What did he hope to find with these papers? A reason or an excuse he could cling to so that he would be able to take her back without hating himself for being a lovesick fool?

In the end, the reasons didn’t matter. He simply had to know. He had to know.

And when he started reading, he found that none of the figures matched with what he had expected.

Velvet had two bank accounts.

The first one had been opened the year she had arrived in Greece. It had an impressive initial deposit, but the cynical part of him wondered whether it was the result of another successful conquest brought about by Velvet’s irresistible beauty. What followed were regular deposits and very minimal withdrawals except for the occasional checks she sent to Wayne Garfield.

The last two transactions were completed online in the morning of their wedding day. The first was another check of

\$100,000 transferred to her lawyer Lester Wilkins. The remainder, a sum amounting to a little over \$2,000, was withdrawn as cash.

Her second account was even more perplexing. She had opened it a week ago. And when he read the details of the one and only transaction for the account, Mykolas realized that it was the \$100,000 check he had given to her.

It remained untouched, even today.

Mykolas moved on to the next group of documents, and that was when the alarm bells started to ring. They were application forms for a non-profit foundation intended to benefit victims of crimes related to drug abuse. The initial capital was \$100,000.

Was the non-profit to be a front? Would she use it to ask for more money from him for her lover?

The thought had his fist clenching, and he had the strongest urge to flip his table and destroy every piece of evidence that suggested Velvet Lambert had been untrue to him.

Why? Why, damn you, why?

She had sobbed and screamed the question at him. He wanted to roar the same question at her. The pain of her betrayal was so great it nearly crippled him. Same fucking question, but at least he meant his. With her, he knew it was all a fucking act. She did not care about him. All she had ever cared about was his money, and God, how skillfully she had played him. She would probably be laughing her way to the

bank when she found out that on the same morning she had sent Wayne Greenfield a hundred grand, he, Mykolas Sallis, had torn their prenup contract.

The memory of his stupidity was like acid, and a second later he did end up destroying his desk. Punched the wall. Smashed glass into pieces with his bare hands. He destroyed everything in sight, but the pain remained because he could not destroy the memories he had of Velvet.

Why? Why, damn you, why?

It was almost ten in the evening when he arrived at his home. His manservant received him stony-faced, and Mykolas was tempted to fire the damn man on the spot. In all the years Dodds had been working for Mykolas, he had rarely spoken or given his opinion. The old man had even preferred to work around the apartment only when Mykolas was not there to “disturb” him when he was cleaning. But somehow, Velvet had managed to fool the old man, too. It was obvious in the way Dodds looked at him that the crusty old man blamed him for Velvet’s absence.

“You have a visitor,” Dodds informed him woodenly. “A Mrs. Chantal Blakely.”

The shock of realizing that his stepmother was in his home was enough to make Mykolas briefly forget his black mood. When he strode into his living room, Chantal was indeed there. The years that passed had made little difference to her, other than the fact that she wasn’t as thin as she used to be.

“Do I merit a hug, Mickey?”

She had been the only one to call him that. It had first been her way of getting his attention by making him angry but in the end, it had turned into a term of endearment from mother to son.

His fury over Velvet’s betrayal had left him tired, vulnerable, and looking at Chantal, Mykolas wasn’t even able to summon up an ounce of resentment. All he could remember were the good times. He said gruffly, “Of course, Chubby.” *That* had been his way of retaliating when he was a boy.

She laughed, he smiled, and they were in each other’s arms. When Chantal was seated across him and Dodds had finished serving them drinks, she said wistfully, “I’ve always hated myself for giving in to the pressure, you know.”

“You were young,” he murmured. “I understand what you went through—”

“I wasn’t the young one then. You were. I loved you like a son. I made you see me as a mother and yet in the end, I gave you up and I’ll never...” Chantal inhaled sharply. “I’ll never forgive myself for that.” Tears made her eyes hazy. “Even when I remarried and gave birth to my children, I always thought of you as my child – my firstborn and I...I told my children about you, too. I told them that maybe one day, you’d be able to forgive me for not standing up to your father.”

Mykolas’ lips twisted. “If you mean you wished you had been able to change him so that we could remain a happy family, then that would have been impossible.”

Chantal shook her head. “No. Not that.” She looked at him with dawning realization – and pity. “You don’t know, do you?” Before he could answer, she sighed, “Oh, Mickey. How you must have hated me all these years.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I asked your father if I could see you again. And it seemed to hurt his pride, offended him somehow, that I wanted to see you more than him, so he threatened to destroy my life – even my parents’ – if I ever attempted to contact you.”

Mykolas’ face was white by the time Chantal finished speaking. Damn his father. He had always been a vain, jealous fool and Mykolas could easily see how his pride had made him see his own son as a rival. “You are right,” he said tightly. “I should have realized you would not give me up so easily—”

Chantal started to cry at his words, and Mykolas drew his stepmother into his arms. “I’m sorry you married the old bastard.”

“I’m sorry the old bastard is your father.”

Chantal’s teary quip somehow reminded him of Velvet, but he stoically pushed the thought away. He would get rid of her, every fucking memory, even if he had to die trying.

When Chantal pulled away, she asked with an eager smile, “And your bride? Where is she?”

Mykolas stiffened. “She’s...not here.”

“Oh.” Chantal’s smile became teasing. “She seemed to be a very headstrong woman. I bet she can easily run circles around you. When I first read her letter—”

He asked sharply, “She wrote to you?”

“Surely you know—you don’t?” Chantal paled. “I thought...when you didn’t throw me out of the door, I thought she had told you everything and you were expecting me.”

Alarm bells started to ring inside his head, and there was a heavy aching sensation in his chest that made it hard for Mykolas to breathe. “When did she write to you?”

“Yesterday. She sent an express mail and gave me a roundtrip ticket to Athens. I live in the States now. I actually went to your house in Santorini first and when I learned you were still here, I thought there had been a mix-up and I...I didn’t want to waste this chance to meet you again so I came here.” She looked at him entreatingly. “Please tell me you’re not angry at her for contacting me?”

“No,” he heard himself say hoarsely. “I’m not.” Confused was what he was. And terrified. So damn terrified that even if it did not seem possible, he had gotten everything wrong.

“I was hesitant and scared to meet with you, you know. But her letter was so beautiful. She told me that *I* was her wedding gift to you. That she wanted you to feel it wasn’t wrong to trust or love someone. When she said those words, how could I not risk saying ‘yes’? Because I have always loved you like a son, Mickey. And this time I wanted to prove to you that I really do love you.”

When Chantal left, Mykolas made another call to his head of security. “I know you’ve uncovered everything you could about Velvet, but this time I want you to look for any connection possible between her and Lester Wilkins – a

lawyer – and an American named Wayne Garfield. I don't give a fuck what you have to pay or whose arm you have to twist, but I want information. Now.”

And then he sat back down and waited.

It was the longest wait of his life even though he knew only hours came to pass.

It was afternoon the next day when he heard back from his security expert. Mykolas had not slept a single moment, feeling like if he did, God would punish him and give Mykolas news that he would be too late to act on.

When he saw that his employee had sent him numerous pages of court documents, Mykolas did not know what to make of it.

The first pages were of crimes committed by Wayne and his wife Lindy Garfield. The fact that the other man was married made Mykolas grimmer. Was this man some kind of pervert who had preyed on Velvet when she was young and vulnerable, made her fall for him even if he was a married man?

The next set of papers was about a case filed by Dotty Garfield, Wayne's daughter. There was a grainy photo of her attached to the document, and Mykolas paled when he realized it was a younger version of Velvet.

Below was her handwritten plea to the judge for a change of her name as well as withholding her identity from her parents.

Your Honor,

My name is Dorothy Garfield. I am called Dotty by family and friends. I was seven years old when I found out about the unhealthy and dangerous habits of my parents. I was ten years old when I was first exposed to the individuals who had chosen to turn such habits into profitable trades. I was eighteen years old when I survived a shootout between my parents and the suppliers they had failed to pay.

I am twenty now, and last month my father had provided my address to strangers with the intention that they steal my money and any valuable possession they may find in my home. I fear that this will not be his last attempt.

I have been advised by my legal counselor to press charges against the individuals and my parents, but I fear that this would only create a cycle of hatred. Instead, I request that all individuals who choose to profess their guilt be sent to rehabilitation and for a permanent restraining order be filed against them for my protection. Charges will be filed against those who choose not to submit a guilty plea.

Lastly, I would like to request for a change of my name. If in your kindness you see fit to approve my request, I would like my name to be changed to Velvet Lambert. Velvet is to remind me of the fabric worn by the woman my father had sent to my place of residence to perpetuate a crime. Lambert is to remind me of the last name of the couple who had called 911 when they found me bleeding in front of their door.

This is to remind me, Your Honor, that the evil in this world requires me to be strong but the good in this world will not allow me to suffer alone.

I humbly beg you for your consideration. It is in your power to grant me a second chance to live my life and start fresh. When I was eighteen, I was able to speak with a professional drug counselor and doctor – she, too, was a victim of crime caused by drug abuse. She told me that my best chance of surviving this ordeal was to free myself from bitterness and to love freely and without fear. I have no idea if I will be able to do this, but I want to. With your help, Your Honor, I have a chance to. So with utter humility, I beg that you approve my unconventional request.

Sincerely,

Dorothy Garfield.

Slowly, the pages slipped past his fingers, falling to the floor like daggers dipped in innocent blood. A dagger he had cruelly and mercilessly wielded to reduce Velvet to tears and used to cut her heart out.

Mykolas looked down blindly on the floor, seeing the drops of his tears splash against the papers. *Velvet*. Her name echoed in his mind like a melody from heaven that he had no right to hear. *Velvet. Velvet, Velvet.*

He remembered her screaming at his face, screaming with so much pain. God, he would never forget the pain in her eyes when she had seen him with another woman. And he had deliberately made her see that.

Everything was so fucking clear now. The money she had given away, the money she had spent on Chantal's ticket...the money she had saved all these years had acted like a security

blanket for her, a way to make her feel strong even if she was alone.

But when she had met him, when she had made the mistake of falling for him, she had given it all away. She had burned all of her bridges because she wanted to prove to herself that she trusted him. She trusted him to love her and protect her.

And yet, all he had done was humiliate her.

God, God, God, what he had done?

And what the fuck would he do now?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Five weeks had passed, and there still wasn't any sign of Velvet. His men constantly monitored all planes and ships bound for America from every exit point in Greece, but so far none of them had yielded any records about having a passenger named Velvet Lambert or even Dorothy Garfield.

And today, his visits to all of Velvet's known acquaintances, including a particularly hard one to her closest friend Mandy, had all been unproductive, leaving Mykolas exhausted and deeply worried. If anything happened to her, he might as well die. He would not be able to live with himself if she had been hurt because of his cruelty.

“Mr. Sallis?”

His secretary's hesitant voice made him pause before entering his office. “What is it?”

“I was cleaning my drawers this morning and I, umm, I found something that may have belonged to...” As if unable to continue, his secretary simply handed him a brown box.

Opening it, Mykolas was stunned to find a recognizable piece of Velvet's underwear – the very same one she had worn...

For their wedding.

He knew because he had been the one to help her put it on himself.

“Thank you,” he said roughly before striding into his office and slamming the door shut. He gripped the small piece

of fabric hard. It was at that moment he wished he really was an idiot – or at least stupid enough not to be able to piece the clues together and figure out how his wife’s underwear had gotten there.

But unfortunately, he was only a fucking idiot when it truly mattered.

And so his mind recreated the scenario for him.

Velvet, learning about his request for her to meet him at his office—

Velvet, thinking he was no longer able to wait to have her before they left for their honeymoon—

Velvet, taking off her panties in hopes she could surprise him—

But Mykolas had ended up surprising her instead, and in the most humiliating way possible.

With shaky hands, he pushed the panties into his pocket. Right now, it felt like his only link to her even if he doubted it would yield any kind of information regarding Velvet’s whereabouts.

Taking his seat behind the desk, Mykolas closed his eyes wearily and tried to place himself in Velvet’s shoes one more time. She had left her bag in his office. She had spent all her money, and after what he had done, she wouldn’t even think of spending his.

She would feel vulnerable...naked...because of his callous actions, because of how his betrayal had turned her supposedly pleasant surprise into a twisted joke. She would have wanted

to bolt. To hide. He was sure of that, but he also knew she would be too proud to ask for help from any of her friends.

What was left to her?

And that was when it hit him.

She had nothing left but a ticket.

Velvet was tired.

Not just physically, but inside, too, where the exhaustion went bone-deep. Maybe even deeper, to the point that even just *thinking* made her feel like passing out.

It was a Friday night, and the bar was rowdier than usual. More drunkards, too, but she hoped to God none of them would be as violent as the truckers from the other town last week. They had almost demolished the entire bar, costing Mr. Rodrigo thousands in repair work. They were put behind bars, of course, but that hadn't given the bar owner recompense for what he had spent.

"Order, Table 3," Bell, the British waitress, told Velvet as she passed her by while balancing two trays filled with empty plates.

"Got it," Velvet murmured and did a quick about turn to head to where the customers wanting to order were. She had to maneuver herself out of reach of groping customers as she did, but this was something she was well used to by now. It still felt demeaning and terrifying, but at least it no longer made her want to cry.

She wasn't weak now.

She was getting stronger.

Or at least she thought she was until she saw who her customer in Table 3 was.

Mykolas.

Dressed in a black shirt and jeans, he was at his most casual, his clothes seemingly chosen to make him blend in with the crowd.

What a joke.

He was Mykolas Sallis.

Whatever he wore, he would always draw attention to himself. He was too used to possessing and wielding power not to stand out. Even now, all the women in the bar were staring at him, some of them open-mouthed, others near to drooling. And the men were not much better. She had a feeling they would have challenged him to a fight just for the sake of bloodying his pretty-boy face if not for the pair of intimidating-looking men behind him, their blazers partially pushed behind them to reveal the guns holstered at their sides.

God, she hated him.

She hated him for finding her, hated him for seeing her wearing tight clothes that exaggerated her curves and made her boobs look bigger. But most of all, she hated him for making her believe someone like him could love her.

Mykolas was shaken by the sight of Velvet. He had hoped she would be here, had hoped that the promising trail he had

followed from the airport wasn't a dead end and when he did find her, it took everything in him not to snatch her into his arms just to make sure she was fucking real.

She had become thinner, her curves less prominent, and her face gaunt with stress. It fucked him a million times over to see her defeated, acting like she had no right to defend herself from the men who attempted to grope her. Seeing it had made him feel like killing every single one of them, and maybe he still would, after...after he asked for Velvet's forgiveness.

When Mykolas stood up, panic cured the paralysis that had befallen her limbs. Spinning around, Velvet started to run away only to find herself spun right back and held captive in Mykolas' arms. Velvet immediately struggled, his touch burning her, and she no longer cared who would see and what would happen. All she wanted was to get away from him.

His eyes fully focused on Velvet's tear-stained face, he said to his guards, "Get them out."

A few seconds later, and the club's music was shut down and someone was announcing over the speakers that everyone who left the club within five minutes would receive a thousand euros.

And then they were alone.

"Let go of me, please," she said stiffly.

"Only if you promise to hear me out," he said tautly. "Just hear me out, Velvet. I won't force you to do anything. Just hear me out."

Slowly, she made herself nod. She would agree to practically anything just to get his hands off her.

Swallowing at the revulsion on Velvet's face, Mykolas slowly released her, and his fists clenched as she immediately took a step back, as if wanting to put as much distance between them.

“I want to explain about the last time—”

The words made Velvet blanch. “No,” she whispered. “I don't think there's anything to explain—”

“It wasn't what you—”

She covered her ears, screaming, “I don't want to hear you say it!” Her voice cracked. “*Please!* I don't want to remember that time—” Sobs choked her voice and she squeezed her eyes shut, but still the tears kept falling. “If you want me to beg then I'm begging you. Please, don't make me remember —”

So much fucking pain, he thought in agony as he looked at Velvet's tormented expression. So much fucking pain and he was the cause of it. Tearing her hands off her ears, Mykolas said roughly, “Listen to me, Velvet! It wasn't what you thought! I did it because I thought you had betrayed me.”

Her head shot up at his words, her voice filled with anguish as she cried out, “Why would I betray you when I loved you?”

The fact that she had used the past tense when referring to her feelings for Mykolas terrified him, but he did his best to move past it because he still owed Velvet too much. He said in

a hard voice filled with self-loathing, “Because I thought you were having an affair with Wayne Garfield.”

“*What?*” She couldn’t believe what she was hearing, couldn’t believe that Mykolas even knew her father existed. “*Why?*”

“Before we were to leave for Santorini, I came across your phone—”

Realization hit. “You read one of my lawyer’s emails,” she finished dully.

“I didn’t know he was your father then. When I read his email, I thought...I thought he was your lover and the two of you had been scheming behind my back to steal my money.” He forced himself to meet her gaze. “I thought you didn’t love me at all. But I also knew you were proud, and so I did that, knowing it was the only way I could hurt you...”

“I...see.” But she didn’t. And she didn’t want to. She was just over this.

“I know everything now. About your parents, about why you changed your name. About the non-profit you wanted to put up...about Chantal.”

His last words made her cringe in humiliation. He really did know everything, even her last bit of idiocy.

“Say something,” he begged rawly. “Please. Say anything. Shout at me. Curse me. Just please fucking let me know what you’re thinking...”

But she could only look at him. There were no words enough to express how much she had died when she saw him

with another woman.

Something in her eyes made him desperate, made him realize that even when they were standing in front of each other, Velvet had never been so far from him as she was now. “I love you, Vel—” Mykolas’ voice trailed off when Velvet shot him a look of despair.

“You don’t get to say that, Mykolas. You just *don’t*.” Everything inside her was crying out in pain at hearing him say the words, knowing that he could never be trusted again, no matter how much she wanted to.

“But it’s true,” he said fiercely. “It will always be true and even when I thought you betrayed me, I loved you and I knew I wouldn’t really stop.”

She could see that Mykolas believed he meant those words, but she also knew that she would be a fool to believe he did. “I’m sorry.” A look of utter devastation crossed his face, and God help her, it hurt her knowing that she was causing him pain. Even after everything, she just couldn’t bear the thought of him hurting.

And when he started to sink to his knees, when it was clear that he was about to beg her, she cried harder and reached out to him. “*Stop.*”

Mykolas stilled.

“Please stop. Please don’t do this. Please let’s just end this.” Each word was ripped out of her throat.

His face was gray by the time she had finished. “Just one more fucking chance, my love...”

“Mykolas, no...”

He swallowed. “Outside this bar, the whole world is waiting. I made an announcement earlier, told them I had news to share about our marriage.” Slowly, he took out the papers he had kept inside his back pocket. Unfolding it, he gave them to Velvet.

She took them with fingers shaking so much it was hard to keep the papers still enough for her to read them. And when she finally did, a silent gasp burst from her.

He had changed his name to Lambert.

Mykolas laid his heart out. “You’ve risked too many things for me, my love. And this was the only thing I could do to show you that I’m willing to take every goddamn risk to prove to you that I love you, and that if you just give me one...” His voice shook and became raw with emotions. “Just one chance, my love, and I will love you like no man can ever love you. I’m yours forever, no matter...no matter if you have me or not.”

Velvet closed her eyes. She didn’t want to see his face as she whispered, “Or not.”

And then she was turning her back on him, walking away, and he didn’t make even one sound. She wanted to look back but she forced herself not to, telling herself it was better this way. Blindly making her way to the back exit, she found herself stunned to see Mykolas’ manservant, Dodds, waiting for her.

“I was instructed to wait for you in the event that you went out through here, Mrs. Sallis. He believed you would be more comfortable with someone you know to drive you to your choice of destination.”

She allowed the older man to walk her to a waiting car, and a hysterical laugh started to bubble inside her when she saw that it was a limousine. Of course it had to be a limousine. Mykolas Sallis was a proud Greek billionaire. Only limousines were worthy enough for his butt. He was that proud – so proud he had changed his name to hers. For Velvet.

No, no, NO!

She was not going to think along those lines.

It was better this way.

Inside the car, Dodds had used his own set of controls to switch the TV open. She started to tell him that she wasn't interested in watching it when she realized that the sneaky old man had chosen the channel where a live interview of Mykolas was being broadcasted.

Oh God.

She shouldn't watch this. It would only complicate matters. She knew all these but she just couldn't tear her gaze away the moment the camera focused on Mykolas' face. He looked haunted, grief-stricken, and her heart squeezed hard.

“Is it true that you've changed your name to Lambert?”

“What does this mean? Should we call you Missus now since we know who's wearing the pants in the family?”

“We heard your wife left you for another man and she got half of your fortune in a Swiss bank account. Anything to say about this?”

More questions were shot at him in rapid succession, all of them viler than the last. But throughout it, Mykolas remained stoic, as if he was punishing himself...

A strangled sob escaped her throat.

It was as if he was punishing himself, turning the tables around so he could feel how she felt when he had tried to hurt her that night, when he had tried to humiliate her and accused Velvet of so many things she didn't understand because she hadn't done anything wrong.

“What happened to the part of your vows about sticking together through thick or thin, better or worse, richer or poorer?” Another reporter jeered.

Someone laughingly answered, “Or not.”

The whole crowd laughed.

Except for Mykolas.

For those two words had broken him where all other insults had failed.

I'm yours forever, no matter...no matter if you have me or not.

Or not.

She looked at Dodds. “Please take me back to him.”

“Right away, Mrs. Sallis.” And with a swift turn of the wheel that had her clutching the handlebar for support, Dodds

drove them quickly back to the bar and made a turn so they could get to where Mykolas was.

His security team immediately allowed them to pass, and she realized that the press had only been able to get close to him because Mykolas had allowed it. Fresh tears stung her eyes as she came to understand that it was yet another way for him to punish himself.

When Dodds stopped the car, she threw the door open and jumped out. Dodds started honking his horn, creating a furor that allowed Velvet to force her way to the front. She was so bent on reaching Mykolas that when she finally found herself past the crowd, she lost her footing and ended up crashing into him.

Mykolas looked down at the woman who had crashed into his arms and was stunned to find a crying Velvet meeting his gaze. He said dazedly, “Velvet?”

“L...L...L...” God, it was so hard to say the words even though she knew this time she had to. Because this time, she also knew that how she felt about Mykolas was the same way he felt about her.

“What are you doing here?” he demanded hoarsely.

“L...L...” She looked at him, begging for him to understand. But it was as if he didn’t want to allow himself to hope, fearing that if he did and it wasn’t true, he would never be able to get over it.

Velvet swallowed, inhaled, and tried again. “L...L...Let’s fuck?”

WHOA. Camera bulbs started flashing more quickly, the whole crowd suspended in disbelief at her words, which she had apparently spoken more loudly than she meant to.

Mykolas on the other hand was looking at her as if he didn't quite know what to make of her. "You want to fuck right now?"

She stammered, "No, I mean, yes..." She glared at him in frustration.

Mykolas felt like she was waiting for him to say something, but damn if he could figure it out. All he knew was that she was here, and he might...he might still have a chance. "I love you, Velvet," he whispered. He couldn't help it. "You are and will always be my love."

Oh.

She threw her arms around him, and suddenly the words were so easy to say. "Love you," she whispered. "So much."

EPILOGUE

“Happy first monthsary, Mr. Lambert!” Velvet jumped out of her hiding place.

“What the fuck?” Since all the lights in their living room were closed and it was a few minutes past midnight, his wife had almost succeeded in giving him a heart attack, coming out like a ghost from one darkened corner. “You gave me the scare of my life...”

The lights switched on, revealing Velvet’s crestfallen face.

“...my love,” Mykolas hastily ended. God, he kept forgetting pregnancy had made her sensitive and moody.

When her face lit up with a beaming smile, Mykolas knew he had done the right thing.

“I just wanted to surprise you,” she admitted to him with a pout.

The pouting lip never failed with him, and in seconds he had her in his arms and was kissing her hard. He was aroused, too, very much so, if the way his cock was practically grinding into her pussy was any indication.

And that was a good thing, Velvet thought with a sigh as Mykolas lifted his head, considering what her gift to him was. “I have another surprise for you,” she told him excitedly and immediately pulled him towards the stairs.

“Just remember I’m a lot older than you are,” he reminded her half-seriously.

Velvet only snorted. “You just turned thirty.”

“With the way your surprises turn out, I’m thirty going on sixty.” It was not an exaggeration. Last week’s surprise had started with Velvet bursting into tears while they were having a candlelit dinner in a fancy restaurant. With everyone glaring at them, Mykolas had felt like the world’s greatest jerk even though he had no fucking idea what he had done wrong and was even more clueless and desperate about what he should do to make Velvet feel better.

It was only when he was about to go insane with worry did she stop crying long enough to tell him she was pregnant.

Velvet was standing next to the door of their bedroom, a naughty look on her beautiful face. “Ready?”

“Ready,” he affirmed even though he wasn’t really sure there was a way to be ready for Velvet’s brand of surprises.

She threw the door open. “Ta-da!”

For a moment, all he could do was stare.

A second later, Mykolas recovered from his surprise and whistled, making her laugh. “Do you like it?” she asked as she pulled him inside the room with her.

“It depends,” he murmured, a wicked gleam in his eyes. “Will you be using it now?”

“Of course. This is one of my risk gifts, after all.” Since they had gotten back together, she and Mykolas had taken turns giving each other gifts that showed how much risk they were willing to take to prove their love.

He raised a brow. “And you’re taking the risk of...?”

God, she loved it when he raised his brow like that at her. It was so sexy, the way he could make the look so powerfully commanding. It was as if he knew he only had to raise an eyebrow and she'd take off her clothes and beg him to make love to her.

“Velvet?”

Oh, damn. She had zoned out on him. Seeing where he was looking, she said, “Isn't it obvious? I'm taking the risk of making an ass of myself with this.” And not waiting for him to speak, she shrugged out of her robe, letting it fall slowly down her shoulders, her arms, and legs to reveal the costume she had underneath.

Mykolas' jaw dropped.

And then in the next moment, he seemed to recover and moved about the room with incredible speed, drawing the curtains of the balcony shut and triple-locking the door.

Velvet burst into laughter. “Are you crazy? No one's going to spy on us here.”

“You can't be too careful. Your body is *mine*, my love, and having anyone see you wearing something like that is *not* the kind of risk I fancy taking.”

She ran a hand seductively down her curves. “You like it?”

The costume was that of a belly dancer, with a low cut bikini top and a matching barely there skirt that would likely fly up if she wriggled her butt the tiniest bit. Both were made of gold silk, and bejeweled cords dangled from both her top and skirt.

He said thickly, “Damn right I like it.”

The way he looked at her made Velvet swallow, and she hurried to where her iPhone was on standby, already connected to the speakers. She pressed play and a Shakira song filled the room as she started to dance. She was a really bad dancer, but she genuinely did her best to emulate Shakira with her movements as she whirled and twirled herself around the dance pole she had installed in their bedroom.

When she saw Mykolas’ lips twitch as she almost lost her footing with the last pose she struck around the pole, Velvet scowled. And then an idea hit her and she turned her back to him. When she was facing him again, her breasts were completely bare.

The smile was immediately wiped off and an enthralled expression had replaced it on his face.

Mykolas did his best to control himself as he stared, mesmerized, at the way Velvet’s breasts jiggled so beautifully with every movement she made. His fingers curled into fists to prevent himself from reaching out to her, but when in her next twirl she had also dispensed with her bikini skirt and was now completely naked, his control broke.

“Mykolas,” she shrieked in surprise and laughter when he whirled her around in his arms. She wasn’t able to say anything more, his mouth hungrily closing over hers. His hands rushed all over her naked body, and then he was turning her around again. She sighed and stretched as he ran kisses down her back, and she gulped when she felt him shaping her buttocks then slowly parting them wide open.

“Umm...Mykolas?” He had never touched her there before.

He whispered to her ear, “Scared?”

“Absolutely.”

Laughing, he took pity on her and released her buttocks. “Perhaps after you’ve given birth.” For a moment, a tender smile curved on his lips as he wrapped an arm around her from behind and rested his hand on her womb. “Thank you for giving me this, my love.”

She leaned back against him. “L...Love you.” It was getting easier and easier to say the words.

He bit her ear. “Love you, too, but now, I want you to say the other words.”

Other words? Frowning, she asked, “Let’s fuck?”

“Gladly.” And then he was taking off his clothes, and making her grip the pole tightly, he nudged her legs apart and made her bend forward before slowly and steadily pushing his cock inside her. She was already wet, and the fact that she always was for him warmed Mykolas to the core.

Idly, he caressed her breast with one hand and played with her clit using the other while he continued to torture her with slow and steady strokes, knowing it was going to drive her insane.

“Mykolas,” Velvet choked out.

He made his thrusts even slower.

Velvet gritted her teeth. “Stop torturing me, dammit.”

“But what do you want?”

She glared at him even as she gasped, “Harder—” And she screamed as he started thrusting hard into her, enough to have her breasts slam against the pole again and again with every hard and heavy thrust. Her heart thrummed with every shove of Mykolas’ cock, and she couldn’t help but moan when he started pinching her nipple while setting the pace of his thrusts.

Mykolas suddenly lifted one of her legs up, almost to the point that it was vertical to the pole. When he pushed back into her, his cock slid deeper into her with the new position, and the feel of him filling her so fully made Velvet see stars.

“Mykolas!” She screamed his name with each pounding of his cock. Each time, she wanted it harder and each time he did succeed at thrusting into her harder. With her leg up, Velvet was left completely open to his possession, and she couldn’t recall ever feeling this full. Every thrust sent her to new heights, and soon she was gasping, “Mykolas, I’m coming—”

The words, spoken in Velvet’s sweet husky voice, were more potent than any sex pill, making Mykolas’ balls tighten as it readied its release. Swiftly, he turned her head to the side so he could capture her mouth in a kiss the same time he shoved his cock as deeply as he could inside her – deep enough to reach her womb.

She screamed into his mouth as she came, and he growled her name against her lips as he came with her. The orgasm took forever but at the same time, it felt like it didn’t last long enough.

Velvet was limp with exhaustion when it was over, and she gladly surrendered herself to her husband's ministrations as he took them to the shower and soaped her body. By the time it was over, she was so sleepy she could barely keep her eyes open as he rubbed her dry and brought her back to the bedroom.

"Pole...hide..." She knew she was mumbling incoherently, but she just couldn't rouse herself long enough to tell Mykolas that she still had to figure out how to stop Dodds from seeing the pole. *It would be so embarrassing if he did*, Velvet thought drowsily.

"Sleep, my love," he murmured soothingly as he pulled her to him, spoon fashion. "I'll take care of everything." He meant every word, and it didn't matter what she would ask of him. Losing her once – twice – had taught him a precious lesson the hard way, and he did not need it repeated again. Not in this fucking lifetime. Velvet was his heart. His life. He literally could not live without her the same way a man wouldn't be able to survive without a heart that beat.

Velvet reached for his hand under the covers and brought it to her heart. "L..."

He kissed her head. "I know. I feel the same."

She still made herself say it even as she felt herself drifting further into unconsciousness. "Love you." Only then was she able to sleep, safe and happy in the knowledge that she had been able to tell Mykolas she loved him.

When she woke up the next day, it was already mid-morning and Mykolas was no longer at home. She was also

relieved to see that the pole was gone from their bedroom. *Sweet man*, Velvet thought with a smile. *He had really taken care of it*. When she checked her phone for the time, she saw a message from her husband.

Come to the office as soon as you can. It's my turn to show you my risk gift.

Oh my God! You risked going to work late for li'l ole me? I am soooo flattered!

Stop being a smartass if you don't want to risk a spanking.

Smiling, she made haste in taking a shower and dressing up before having one of the drivers take her to Mykolas' workplace. The entire building had been redecorated, down to the color of the walls. No excuses had been made, but when she saw for the first time how much change his own office had undergone, Velvet knew it had been all for her.

Mykolas didn't want her to have any bad memories of the place.

And she didn't, knowing and appreciating the lengths he had gone to to make the memories disappear.

As she took the elevator to get to his office, Velvet wondered what kind of risk Mykolas was taking for her. The damn man wasn't exactly afraid of taking a lot of risks, after all. In fact, the only risk she knew of was being caught having sex in public, and that was only because he was possessive about her and did not want to have anyone see her naked.

Mykolas, looking sophisticated and dazzlingly handsome in a sleek gray suit and a pink tie, was waiting for her right

outside the elevator when the doors slid open. She found herself a little dazed – but happily so – when he welcomed her with a more passionate kiss than usual. Normally, he liked to be circumspect with his staff.

“Umm, everything okay?” As they walked to his office, she couldn’t help but notice that everyone working on his floor was staring at them, whispering, giggling, and smirking.

“Perfectly fine.” There was an indolent air about him that made Velvet’s eyes narrow.

“You didn’t just masturbate, did you?”

He choked and demanded under his breath, “Why the fuck would you think I’d do that?”

She answered in a low, accusing voice, “Because it’s like you just had sex!”

“You’re almost right.” His lips formed a smile that had shivers running down her spine for some reason. “You just got the timing wrong. I’m *about* to have sex.” He opened the door to his office.

Her eyes widened and her jaw dropped. She now knew why everyone had been giving them odd looks. Mykolas had reinstalled her dance pole in his office – and everyone here had seen it! “Mykolas!” But she was being gently but firmly pushed inside his office and when she whirled around to face Mykolas, she saw him locking the door and then slowly taking off his blazer, his fierce glowing eyes focused on hers.

Everything in her became hot and wet. “*Mykolas.*” Her mouth ran dry.

“My risk gift,” he told her wickedly even as he continued walking towards her and undressing himself.

She slowly started backing away. “Mykolas, you can’t be serious. This is your office and they know...”

“Like I said, my love. It’s my risk gift.”

He was bare-chested now, and the sight of all his smooth golden skin had her flustered, so much so she didn’t realize she had backed away so much she ended up bumping into his desk.

“Why didn’t you say so,” Mykolas purred. “If you wanted to try my desk first before the pole, I’ll gladly oblige.”

Velvet’s face flooded with color. “Mykolas!”

But he was already flipping Velvet around, making her grip the edge of the table as he lifted her skirt up and reached for her pussy. “Table it is,” Mykolas whispered as he stroked her pussy until it was ready to welcome his cock with a soaking wet entrance.

~ **The End** ~

Thank you so much for reading *Too Scared to Love*.

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Thank you so much again!

Until our next journey,

Marian Tee