



GRUMPY
BOSSY

Doctor

EMMA SPENCER

Grumpy Bossy Doctor

**A Billionaire Mistaken Identity
Romance**

Emma Spencer

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Contents

- [1. Mistaken Identity](#)
- [2. What the Heart Wants](#)
- [3. One-Sided Reunion](#)
- [4. The Tugging of the Heart](#)
- [5. A Heart Torn in Two](#)
- [6. The Daughter's Turmoil](#)
- [7. Kiss Me, Not Him](#)
- [8. With the Older Twin](#)
- [9. Something Wrong](#)
- [10. With the Younger Twin](#)
- [11. Twin Problems](#)
- [12. The Prince Meets a Princess](#)
- [13. The Prodigal Son Returns](#)
- [14. The False Twin](#)
- [15. Resignation to One's Fate](#)

- [16. The True Twin \(Part One\)](#)
- [17. A Trip to France](#)
- [18. Charming](#)
- [19. He Returns](#)
- [20. Forbidden Fruit and the Desire to Eat](#)
- [21. The Date in the Romance Capital of the world](#)
- [22. The False Twin and Prince Charming](#)
- [23. The True Twin \(Part Two\)](#)
- [24. Bring us Back](#)
- [25. What Parents Want](#)
- [26. Meet the Sullivans](#)
- [27. Prince Charming Returns](#)
- [28. The HEA of the Sullivans](#)
- [29. More by Emma Spencer](#)

Chapter One

Mistaken Identity

Ian
I am Ian Sullivan, the youngest of the Sullivan brothers. I'm not antisocial, as I enjoy the company of people; but unlike my twin brother who casually expresses his desire to socialize, I'd rather wait until I find someone who wants to understand that part of me.

Being the youngest of men who are classified as gods makes you realize that they will forever cast a shadow over you. Not on purpose of course. Take my brother, Benjamin Sullivan, for example, an honest man who believes that everyone around him should shine. A surgeon who mainly does transplants, he has saved more lives than he can count.

At the age of fifteen, he was likened to a prodigy. My father didn't try to show it, but it was obvious who his favorite son was. It bothered Ethan slightly, but I didn't care. It's absolutely normal for a father to see the first son as his source of pride.

Ben mastered the business of medicine with skills so that good experts around the world, paid to see him work. A giant he was not only in stature but in heart as well. He was acclaimed as a conductor, the operating theater likened to an orchestra. He eventually mastered love. He got married but lost the love of his life, reminding us medical doctors that we can't save everyone. He struggled to take care of his daughter. With several women to choose from, he remained alone. But eventually, he fell in love again.

Then there's Ethan. My twin brother and the man I envy the most. He was the clumsiest and most careless man I had ever seen. Time and time again, it seemed not to affect how he interacted with people. His communication skills put mine and Ben's to shame.

For someone so clumsy, he had the highest success rate for any medical emergency brought to him. "The man with machine-like hands" is what they called him. He was a playboy, with several women at his beck and call any time he desired.

And then there was me, the one who wasn't kind enough. The one, unable to speak up and the twin no one wanted, except my family. I was slowly getting sick of it.

Romance had never been my forte, and I don't want to blame anyone but Ethan. The classic example was Miriam. Hair as red as the sunset's sigh, eyes as blue as the sky, and a voice

that seemed to say that she was once a werewolf seeking a strong alpha male.

I watched her from a distance and summoned the courage to speak with her. For some time, I thought she was into me. Well, it was high school, and I intended to ask her to the prom. I looked forward to it and prepared accordingly. Ben didn't go to his own prom, but it didn't mean I wouldn't attend mine.

Imagine my surprise when she finally asked me to help her convince Ethan to ask her. Of course, I didn't tell him, but I didn't go either. I didn't understand it. Don't get me wrong; I never hated him. It was just frustrating. I could feel the stares of women when I walked by, so I was definitely attractive. But it just seemed like they weren't truly interested in me.

They wanted Ethan. The clumsy twin. Maybe it was a gap thing I couldn't comprehend. It wasn't always downhill, though. With time and patience, I finally got my first girlfriend.

“You aren't going to say anything?” she asked.

Hannah Stone with black hair and brown eyes was a giant. She was a model I had met during a hospital visit. She wasn't at my hospital for anything related to plastic surgery, but she demanded that I attend to her. My heart was stolen immediately. Her voice put me at rest, and although I found it difficult to steady my heart whenever she was around, she was my source of peace. But my inability to communicate with women placed me at a disadvantage.

“You’re doing great medically, that is...” I replied as I tore my eyes forcefully away from her.

“Otherwise? Is there anything I am not doing well in?” she asked as she lay across on the hospital bed, the gown she wore for the examination slowly riding up. As she stretched herself, she groaned gently.

“Maybe it’s the way I phrased it,” I said as I focused on her exposed thighs. “You’re perfect all-round.”

“Thank you,” she said as she flashed me a smile.

Moments like this made me glad that I was her doctor. Everything was green. There was no way she’d choose to see me in the guise of wanting to be a patient without having some sort of feelings. I was getting tired of the hospital visits and sought a way to have her spend time with me without the need of playing the doctor and patient card.

“When will your brother be back?” she asked.

Ethan was in Glen Allen, seeking a way to support the love of his life without ruining it. She wouldn’t have known where he was.

“I don’t really know. He has his hands occupied,” I replied and thought of a way to steer the conversation. “How do you spend your free time?”

“Nothing much. I just visit restaurants or practise my walk,” she replied and turned on her back.

“That’s nice,” I said. “Can I watch you walk?”

“You normally would have to pay for that,” she teased.

“Really? Hopefully, it’s something I can afford,” I smirked.

My communication skills with women sucked, but they seemed to be working on Hannah.

“Billionaire joke?” she chuckled, as she got out of the bed. “I have to go now.”

“I have nothing to do after this,” I said. “I want you to have dinner with me.”

Her shoulders dropped. I couldn’t miss her eyes diverting, like she had just stepped into the most awkward situation ever.

“That’s nice but…” she started to say, seeking the right words to convince me.

“Is there a problem?” I asked, although I came to wish I never did.

“Well, Ian. I’ll be honest,” she replied.

Here it comes.

“I know I came here interested in you, but…” She looked away and rubbed her arm.

“You wanted Ethan,” I completed her statement.

“Oh uh, it’s not really like that, but basically yeah,” she defended. “It’s just he was away, and I thought… you know, being twins and all. I thought there’d be some similarities between you two. I could understand what goes through his mind, but you’re really nothing like him at all.”

I looked away and walked over to my desk; as I took my seat, I couldn't help wondering where I had gone wrong.

Do I really just suck at this?

“What do you mean exactly?” I asked without even looking at her.

“I don't know... you're awfully quiet, so it's hard to tell if you're really into someone. And you can be a little brutal if you want to. There's really nothing wrong with that,” she replied. “It's just that Ethan gives off an energy such that it's easy to know what he's thinking. It makes me want to protect him or at least help him out. But you...I don't know. It's hard to really know you. It's like you're a different person to everyone. I don't think we know how to pick up on that.”

“That was good feedback,” I replied with a smile. “Thank you.”

“I don't mean to hurt your feelings,” she said, still panicking after her outburst.

“I'm not hurt,” I assured her. “Everyone has the right to like what they want to like. If I'm not what they prefer, I either improve or move aside.”

“Oh thank goodness,” she let out a sigh of relief. “I was really worried that you hate me now. I can still come for my medicals, right?”

“Right,” I replied. “Why would I chase away a high paying patient?”

“At least your desire for wealth is completely visible,” she replied.

As she left, I was abandoned with my thoughts and the sudden weight of my loneliness. Walking around to inspect my prized achievement, that being my hospital, I thought of various ways of getting my mind away off the fact that I had just been turned down...politely. But the universe seemed to have other ideas about what I could think about.

Walking through the semi-crowded halls, the chatter of nurses, patients and their loved ones, could be heard without trouble. The smell of medicine tablets, methylated spirits and so on, greeted my nostrils. I welcomed some patients and tried to make them comfortable. Some were expectant fathers, with wives in labor. Others were wives, with husbands having major surgery. Some were children waiting for the results of their aged parents. I even walked into a room and noticed a patient fast asleep.

He seemed to be around my age with the same blonde hair. I recalled him as the patient I had attended to the previous night. He had had surgery where everything that could went wrong, and I corrected it. The dark-haired woman by his bedside, holding his right hand in both of hers, was someone I hadn't met before.

Her eyes as she looked at him while he slept were the kind I was used to seeing – laden with hope, admiration and the desire to continue being with someone. Olivia had looked at Ben with those eyes as well. My mother made sure that Father

had his daily dose of them as well. In some cases, I had seen Ethan's lovers look at him with similar eyes.

The closest I had ever gotten to receiving such a glance was when they'd mistake me for him. I leaned against the door frame and watched her kiss his hands repeatedly, again and again. A pang of jealousy tugged at my heart. It wasn't fair. How come everyone easily got what they wanted and then there was me – someone who couldn't get at least one.

She turned to look at me and smiled. "You must be Dr. Sullivan. Thank you for saving my fiancé."

"It wasn't all me; I also had the staff helping me. And your fiancé did the most of the work being able to hang in there for this long," I said.

"But still..." she said as she turned to look at him, stroking his hair lovingly and gently. "Thank you. I don't know what I'd do if he wasn't here anymore."

I had heard that phrase over and over by the relatives of the many patients I had saved. I wondered whether I would ever have someone who would worry about me if I weren't here anymore.

"You're a good person, Dr. Sullivan," she complimented me.

"Please. There are three Dr. Sullivans," I said. "Just call me Ian."

With Ethan gone to chase his love interest in Glen Allen, Ben and I took turns checking on Ethan's hospital. I didn't mind

going. It gave me a certain peace.

“Ethan? Or clean hair, it’s Ian.”

“Welcome back, Ian.”

“Ethan’s still not back?”

His staff, aside from the first comment, knew the difference between us. But whenever I was there, they treated me like they would treat him. His office had a relaxed laid-back atmosphere that still maintained an air of seriousness about his drive to save human lives. It was the same air that I wanted to have at my own place. Mine had a more focused atmosphere with everyone working diligently at the job at hand.

I didn’t blame them. They were only representing my conduct. It was usually...stressful. Like Hannah had mentioned, I was difficult to read and that seemed to make my staff steer away from me if it concerned conversations unrelated to work.

At Ethan’s, it was different. They automatically treated me like they would him and included me in their conversations even if I hardly did anything other than listen. For the first time in a while, I came to the conclusion that I envied my brother. Everything I desired was easy access for him, despite his being a klutz. As I made my way to his office and sat on a chair, I thought about a lot of things.

If I was born before him, would I have ever enjoyed the life he had?

I thought about switching positions with him. Even moments when I had to act like him in meetings or whatever he needed

a cover for, I felt different. But I couldn't act like him if I wanted to all the time. However, it would be abandoning my own sense of identity.

Whatever that is.

As I looked around his office, I spotted awards and certificates all over the walls and photos of himself with his staff, smiling happily. It made me realize just how far apart we were when it came to relationships with other people.

The door opened and he made his way in. Ethan was surprised to see me. "You're back," I said spontaneously.

"You're still here?" he asked.

"Just like the rest of our places, the members of your staff are competent, so I basically come here to relax," I replied. My tone was cold.

"You alright?" he asked.

"I am," I affirmed and got up to leave.

"You sure? I just got back we could have tea and catch up or something," he suggested.

"It's fine," I said as I made my way past him.

"It doesn't seem so," he said quietly.

As I walked past him, I couldn't help asking, almost in a whisper, "Why is it always you?"

"Huh?"

The envy had started to strangle me, and I sought a place to clear my head.

Glen Allen.

A year had passed since I had joined my family for a barbecue at Crump Park. We had divided our respective roles. Ben would provide the meat, I was to bring the entertainment, and Ethan was in charge of the drinks. Ethan didn't have to do it, but we didn't want him to feel left out, so we assigned it to him.

"I'm still going to bring the drinks," I said to Ben when Ethan was out of hearing distance.

"I think you should leave it to him," he replied. "He's a father now. I trust he's more responsible and will be able to handle things on his own without being careless."

There was paused silence between us. We watched our brother try to look for his car keys while they were in his hands. He eventually found out before trying to look around to make sure no one saw it.

"There shouldn't be any alcohol," Ben said to me.

I couldn't help smiling. In a way, it was admirable how Ethan tried to put effort into fixing himself. Maybe that was what I should have done. Rather than complaining about how I got little to no return in matters of the heart, I should have worked on myself. It would have made things a little better. At the park, as we set up, Ethan had some news for us.

"So, my family and I will be going on a vacation," he announced.

Stacy and Jason were new additions to the Sullivan family. To be honest, I was relieved that he ended up with her compared to the other women he had been involved with.

“A vacation? Why now?” I asked.

“I just realized that I haven’t been spending proper time with them,” he replied.

“I’m still in Glen Allen most of the time, and he’s grounded in Richmond,” Stacy explained. “Even in marriage and although just a thirty minute ride away, it still feels like we’re long distancing it.”

“You could always take breaks and close earlier,” Ben advised while helping Chloe set the table. “Worked for me.”

“Well you two work in the same hospital while Stacy owns hers,” Ethan sighed. “Are you sure you guys don’t need my help setting down the things. I could fire up the grill too.”

“I can handle that,” I said.

“I know how to handle a grill,” he affirmed and frowned.

“I can handle it better,” Stacy said with a smug look. “We wouldn’t want you burning down the park, now would we?”

“Is that so? Then handle the grilling all by yourself,” he asked as a sinister smile formed on his lips.

“What? You think I can’t do it? Or are you trying to trick me into doing it so you and the boys won’t have to do anything?” she asked with a look of scepticism.

“I’m sure you can,” he said. “Honestly, I’d rather not burn the park down. I say you and the ladies do it. You can play against me in a simple game of chance and whoever loses handles the meal.”

“You’re on,” she said, buying the bait.

It was a simple game of rock/paper/scissors, and Ethan decided to play against my sisters-in-law and niece. I’m guessing Stacy agreed to his deal because she assumed he’d lose due to how clumsy he was. If only she knew that Ethan could be deadly smart if he wanted to – such a cunning man. Obviously he won, and the women were stuck handling the barbecue.

Ben didn’t object to the outcome and neither did I. None of us really wanted to cook. I’m not comfortable cooking for people I’m not completely close to, like my sisters-in-law. But I think Ben and Ethan just wanted an excuse to eat their wives’ cooking.

“So, as I was saying,” Ethan continued as we were left alone, and the women started to work on the grill. “I’ll be away for a month. Preferably the Maldives, or Malaysia. I don’t know. The wife will decide.”

“Someone’s gotten a little smug because they finally got to settle down,” I teased.

“Maybe you should settle down too...and upgrade your smugness,” he smirked.

“Enough you two. We’re adults for God’s sake,” Ben groaned.

“Only two of us,” I sneaked in.

“Want to go?” Ethan growled as he showed me his fist.

“I could use the warmup,” I said and wound my arm ready to duke it out.

“Soccer gentlemen,” Ben said. “Dad isn’t here to separate the both of you. I’m in no mood to handle it myself.”

If we fought as kids, Father would separate the both of us. But Ben, his idea was to pummel us. It’s a wonder he grew up to be gentle.

Fatherhood.

“Yeah, whatever,” Ethan sighed.

We found a group of dads and joined them. It was a peaceful moment. I decided to help him out when he’d depart and watch over his hospital. But as I watched them interact with each other even as we settled down to eat, I couldn’t help but feel lonely. I wanted what they had. And Ethan forgetting the drinks was enough to distract myself.

“There you are,” a voice called as I brought out the cooler filled with drinks.

It was from a beautiful woman, with golden hair and green eyes. My heart was stolen immediately. She ran toward me and embraced me. “I heard you were in Glen Allen, so I came here to find you.”

“Okay?” I raised a brow.

She kissed me deeply and pulled back. I was lost for words.

“You look confused, I’m so sorry,” she apologized and stepped back. “I’m Dr. Natasha James.”

Why did that name sound so familiar? If I knew someone as beautiful as this, I’d be sure never to forget her.

“I know you once setup a date between myself and your older brother, but the truth is, I’m actually in love with you,” she said.

I did? She is?

“Ethan? Aren’t you going to say anything?” she asked.

She thought I was Ethan.

*Do I tell her the truth? Or do I become the person she desires?
What is this feeling in my heart that desires her in return?*

“Was it...too...impulsive?” she asked as the dread of realization started to sink in.

I couldn’t take it anymore. Those emerald eyes didn’t deserve to water or darken as they did. At that moment, I made a decision.

“It’s alright. I haven’t had any woman kiss me before without me knowing too much about her,” I confessed with a warm smile. “It was very nice.” I touched my lips gently and muttered, “I can still feel your lips against mine.”

The last part wasn’t a lie.

She let out a sigh of relief. “I’m so sorry about that. I just let an impulsive thought take over me.”

That would make both of us.

“Natasha!” a voice called from the distance.

“Looks like time’s up,” she said and looked over where the voice had called from. “I’ll call you. It’s been a year. We have a lot to talk about.”

“I don’t use that number anymore,” I quickly announced.

It was a lie. But I had taken the first step, so what difference would a few more make?

“Is that so?” she asked as she brought out her phone.

I was surprised to see an old model. I would be surprised if the phone actually had any social media apps. It seemed like the universe was giving me a sign to carry on with my scam. It was also no wonder she wasn’t aware that Ethan was married.

I had several questions, but they had to wait.

“Yeah,” I replied as I handed her my phone.

She dialed her number and returned the phone to me. Her face lit up like she had just gotten asked out by her crush. Technically, that’s why she was excited. I felt a little terrible about it. But I figured, that with time, she’d get attached to me and wouldn’t care about the difference anymore.

“I’ll see you around Dr. Sullivan,” she said as she confirmed my number.

“Please there are three Dr. Sullivans,” I said. “Call me Ethan.”

Chapter Two

What the Heart Wants

*N*atasha

I was born lucky. Many women have dreamed of being born into a family that wouldn't let them lack anything. It was a special kind of gift. My birth was also a gift. With my parents married for over ten years without a child, my birth was something they rejoiced over.

I inherited my mother's golden hair, and my green eyes were a gift from grandfather. From the moment I was born, I was pampered. Treated like a special being. Nothing wrong with it. I didn't mind at all.

I was loved, and everything my parents made me do was in the best of my interests. Or so they said. For instance, enrolling me to learn ballet was to help me learn how to balance. No matter how much I wasn't interested in it...but I had to do it. With my toes suffering from pirouettes and so on.

Horseback riding was a way for me to be bold and daring, giving me a taste of adventure when I had a phobia of horses. I even fell off once and almost got trampled. I never went horse riding after that.

I was made to learn the piano when I wanted to learn the violin. I was taught how to eat a balanced meal. Even when my cousins told tales of fast food and ice cream, along with junk food that made my mouth water from just imagining it.

The kind of school I went to...and the kind of clubs I was to join...everything had been offered to me on a gold platter. I didn't hate it. Like my parents had mentioned, it made me into a woman who had built herself according to a standard that many people envied. But I still felt empty. I wasn't able to do what I wanted, and it seemed like I was the only one who was bothered about it.

“You should be grateful that you have parents like that,” Lawrence said.

I was only fifteen then. We had grown up together. It was my parents' idea of helping me form alliances with people of the same social standing. Lawrence Williams, who was two years older than me, had a big-brother kind of role in my life. He was a good friend. But maybe because he was handpicked by my parents to be my playmate, he had the same mindset.

“Aren’t your parents like mine as well?” I asked.

“And do you ever see me complain?” he retorted as he flipped the pages of the book he held.

He visited me, and we spent time together in the family study. Under the watchful gaze of my head maid, of course. My chastity was no joke to my parents.

“It’s just that, isn’t there anything you want to do? Something you really desire?” I asked as I flipped through the pages, completely focused on him.

He paused his reading and lifted his eyes, settling them on me for a few seconds; and in a way, it made me somewhat comfortable.

He looked away and continued his reading. “I always have what I desire. It’s only a matter of time.”

An odd one, that Lawrence. But he was the closest thing to a friend I had had from my childhood all the way through high school. When I was done with high school, I wanted to study anything related to the arts or social sciences, but my parents decided that I must study medicine.

It was the only time I was able to bargain with them. They'd let me study whatever I wanted as long as it was medicine. I took my time and researched the field that would best suit me. Because of my skin and how much my parents had invested in my beauty, I picked up an interest in beautification. Dermatology was the only course that seemed to align with what I enjoyed doing.

I enjoyed learning the course but, Lawrence had moved on to study financial accounting. I was left on my own in medical college. With none of my cousins around, and no one my parents had handpicked for me to associate with, I was left on my own.

I didn't know how to associate with the common folk. My parents had always told me that people who were in the lower classes would only be friends with me because of my wealth; it shamed me to say that I actually believed them. And the wealthy ones were too arrogant for my liking. So, I decided to go at it solo, only partnering with people when it came to projects and assignments.

Even without my parents, my life was still being dictated for me. It was exhausting, and depressing. Naturally, people tended to avoid me because they thought it was what I wanted. The rumors around were that I was a stuck up rich girl who thought the rest of them weren't worth her time. Sigh.

Then I met him. I was in the garden, a little outside rest area the college had installed for us to relax. While I read the notes I had compiled for the day, I noticed someone walking around like he was lost. It was distracting so I put my book down and focused on him.

He walked back and forth, before eventually giving up and taking a seat next to me without asking. He let out a sigh and ran his fingers through his messy hair. For some odd reason, it made me feel all tingly on the inside. I used to have crushes, so I understood what was going on with me. I just stared at him, but he seemed completely oblivious to the human being sitting next to him. He finally turned to look at me. I looked away immediately completely burying my face in my book.

Why did you do that?

The smell of the pages told me that the book was too close to my face. I could still feel his gaze, specifically on my hair.

“Emilia?” he called gently.

“Huh?” I pulled away from the book and turned to look at him.

His gaze seemed furious at first, but they softened as he noticed my eyes, “My mistake. I apologize.”

“Oh, it’s okay,” I said.

He smiled and looked at the sky, almost like he was questioning life. He seemed familiar.

“What’s your name?” he asked without looking at me.

“Aren’t you supposed to introduce yourself before asking another person’s name?” I asked.

He chuckled, “Rosemary Etiquette School?”

That was the place my parents had enrolled me to learn proper etiquette.

“Yeah, you attended?” I asked, my interest piqued.

“Not really, I wasn’t that interested,” he said with a yawn.

“Too stifling. Who cares about the kind of spoon you’d use for soup? I don’t even like soup, except...”

“Gumbo?” My eyes sparkled.

“Yes,” he turned to look at me. “Gumbo.”

His gaze made me giddy, so I looked away, grinning to myself.

“Can I know your name? Or are you okay with Gumbo?” he asked.

“Natasha, please not gumbo,” I said as I shook my head negatively.

“I’m Ethan,” he said.

I had heard the name before. Comes from a very rich family if not richer than mine. He had an intelligent older brother named Benjamin Sullivan. People loved Ethan. In a way, we were from the same kind of family, and yet...

“Ethan! There’s a party this weekend, should we have someone pick you up?” a student asked, one of the common folk.

You think people of higher castes would mingle with lower classes?

“Sure thing, but no overnight drinking. We’re doctors, remember?” Ethan replied, flashing a big grin.

“Says you, bet you’d be drunk before the rest of us,” the student replied as they turned to leave. “Six pm.”

“I’ll be there,” Ethan said then turned to me. “Would you want to attend?”

“But they’re common folk. Won’t they expect us to pay for their drinks or something?” I asked.

“Wow, looks like you attended the extra classes at the etiquette school,” he laughed as he got to his feet. “This is school. You need to associate with a lot of different people to know how they think. When you become a professional, you won’t be attending to higher classes of patients alone. Most times, it’s the lower classes that become sick. How would you know how to attend to them when you discriminate against them?”

“I never thought about it like that,” I admitted. I felt ashamed and muttered, “I’m sorry.”

“For that, you have to come. And you pay for our tabs,” he said.

“Are you serious?” I raised a brow.

“Six pm,” was his reply as he turned to leave. Then he stopped to add, “Do you know which direction Dr Jones’s office is?”

“That way,” I said and pointed in the right direction.

He was lost. How could anyone get lost? We were in the second semester, and it was amazing how he still didn't know the place.

The party had some people from my department present as well. Getting to know them made me realize how much I had missed out on not socializing properly.

“You know, I thought you were a prissy brat, but I apologize,” Daniel, one of my course mates, said.

He wasn't the only one with that remark. Everyone else thought I saw myself as better than the rest of them. In reality, I did. That night, I watched Ethan accidentally break cups and wine bottles, without fazing anyone. Even the bar owners seemed used to the whole thing.

That wasn't all that drew me to him. It was like he was a social magnet, the way he carried himself so elegantly; and yet, despite his clumsiness, everyone seemed to like him. My parents didn't want me to suffer the consequences of failing. And to be honest, I had yet to experience failure.

Ethan didn't seem like a failure, but his clumsy nature was enough. He was actively trying to change himself. I wasn't

really doing anything. I just accepted what was given to me while secretly envying everyone around me that seemed to be living freely.

“Are you having fun?” Ethan asked as he handed me a glass.

“I haven’t drunk anything,” I replied. “Not too sure if I’m ready for my first alcohol.”

“You don’t have to force yourself,” he said.

“Thank you.” I accepted his offer anyway.

I took a sip of the liquid; it wasn’t as bad as Mother had made it out to be. I could feel his gaze, particularly on my hair. My golden hair has earned me a lot of stares growing up, so I thought I was used to it. But his was different. It felt like he was reminded of something.

I twirled a few strands with my index finger and looked at him. “You really seem to like my hair.”

“It just reminds me of someone,” he said.

“Oh, hopefully someone good?” I asked with a nervous chuckle.

His eyes sunk as he looked away from me and focused on the party. "I guess so."

He was a nice person and something had definitely happened to him. We exchanged numbers and kept in touch even after medical school was over. Each time we spoke, I became even more fond of him. I thought about him after almost every time. I found it difficult to date, so besides my first kiss with a random guy in high school, and the one time I gave in and went out with Daniel from med school, my relationship skills were at zero.

I felt Ethan would be a perfect match. Imagine my shock when he reached out to me after all these years for a date, and it turned out he just wanted me to meet with his older brother. It was heart wrenching, and I didn't completely blame him. It felt like he was distant. Every time he met me in person, my hair seemed to ward him off. Whoever I reminded him of must have really done a number on him.

My parents let me to work wherever I wanted, so I chose to become a traveling doctor, volunteering my time at whatever location that needed me. I was never alone, though. I had to go around with Rachel Hanks, a bodyguard my parents had hired. She often kept her distance but was someone I could talk about my problems with.

"Maybe you aren't aggressive enough?" Rachel asked.

I had returned home after telling her about the date with the oldest Sullivan brother. I still felt bummed out about it.

“Aggressive enough?” I raised a brow.

“First of all, information,” she said and pointed at my phone. “No one uses a Blackberry anymore. You need to get on proper social media.”

“I just don’t have the strength for that,” I sighed in response. “Texting feels better.”

“Message, messenger, and the like, and you choose to use SMS? Who’s your favorite artist? Mozart?” she asked and scoffed.

“Beethoven, thank you very much.” I frowned in response.

“Haha. Guess who’s lonely? You,” she pointed out.

“Too low,” I sighed and jumped into bed.

I watched her pour a cup of tea. She was thirty years old, two years older than me just like Lawrence. Three years ago, her brunette hair was longer, stopping right below her shoulders; but she cut it to stop at her nape. It looked perfect, though.

Someone like her seemed to have had her fair share of romance and heartbreaks. She was still single, and I assumed that was a choice. From what I gathered, she was still active in other security duties and not limited to just being my bodyguard.

For the first time in a while, I didn't mind the fact that my parents had assigned someone else to be a kind of partner to me. This time paying them.

“What did you mean by aggressive ?” I asked.

She took a sip of her tea. “I'm sure you're already aware of this, but Ethan Sullivan is a playboy.”

“Knew that since medical school,” I replied as I kicked the sheets.

It was a little frustrating seeing him frolic with the other girls, especially when he didn't seem to look at me with the eyes he gave to the others.

“Well that means he has a lot of women vying for his attention. You can be sure that all of them may have the same idea as you - to be his one and only,” she explained. “So you can't be approaching him with the mindset of someone you

have a crush on. You have to go in with the same amount of fire as those girls if not more. In my opinion, that is.”

“You may be right,” I said.

“Well, now that you know where his hospital is in Richmond, you can just visit whenever you want,” she suggested. “I heard he was doing a traveling nurse program. See if it’s still ongoing.”

“I didn’t even know he was doing something like that,” I admitted.

“How would you? You’re not even on social media,” she said and rolled her eyes.

“That’s why I have you don’t I?” I wiggled my brows at her, and she sucked her teeth before continuing to sip her tea. “Someone’s coming.”

There was a knock on my door; Mother came in to my room without waiting for my response.

“How are you doing?” she asked with her usual loving smile.

“Very well,” I replied as I hugged my pillow.

“Good evening, ma’am,” Rachel greeted as she got up to leave.

“Thank you for your service, Rachel. And good evening to you too,” Mom replied.

Rachel smiled at her, before leaving the room excusing the both of us.

“Your father and I have made some arrangements; we know where you can go next for your medical practice,” she said.

“Without my input?” I raised a brow.

“We aren’t sending you to anywhere dangerous,” she said. “A friend that works at the UN says they need volunteers. We thought it would be good to have you work there and increase your roster of achievements.”

“Right,” I sighed. “Thank you.”

“Don’t sound like that, you know that your father and I...”

“Want what’s best for me. I know,” I said.

She let out a sigh and sat by my side, gently stroking my hair.
“It will all be worth it in the end.”

“It better be,” I pouted.

“That’s my princess,” she cooed. “I’ll get the maids ready to have you gone by the weekend.”

I sat upright. “By *this* weekend?”

“Yeah.”

“Wait, how long will I be gone?” I asked.

“Just a year or so,” she replied. “Could be less.”

“I can’t be gone for a year. I just got ruin—” I stopped talking.

“You just got what?” she asked.

“It’s nothing, never mind,” I replied, “but after this, I think it’s high time you all start letting me live for myself.”

“I have no arguments there,” she said, but the look in her eyes seemed to lie. I had no choice but to take her word for it.

“Fine, don’t go back on your word,” I insisted.

“I’ll talk to your father,” she digressed.

I could take that as well. As she left me alone to my thoughts, I couldn’t help thinking about what would happen with my relationship with Ethan. I wanted to apply Rachel’s advice and go aggressive, but the plan had to wait.

With Rachel accompanying me, we were sent to remote locations in Africa, Caribbean Islands, and even Asia. With limited access to internet or modern facilities, we were cut off from the rest of the world. But I remained optimistic. If Ethan heard about all that I achieved when I visited Richmond, maybe he’d finally look at me properly.

A year passed, and after being awarded for my efforts. I decided to pay Ethan a visit. He wasn’t in Richmond, but with some poking around, we were told that he was in Glen Allen for a family visit. We scoured the area. Finally, I found him at Crump Park trying to get things out of his car.

He seemed different. His hair was neatly arranged compared to the mess I knew; he had a calm look on his face, and he was

leaner and more muscular. Maybe because I hadn't seen him in a while, he seemed ten times more handsome.

Remember what Rachel said. Be more aggressive.

"I heard you were in Glen Allen, so I came here to find you," I explained. I ran to embrace him.

His appearance wasn't the only thing that had changed. Even his scent was different. There was something oddly enchanting about it. Mixed with his sweat and smoke, something else was there that caused me to ache for him. I had heard that smell was enough to make some women go feral. I didn't think it was so true.

Aggressive...I have to be more aggressive.

I was unable to contain myself, and the first thing I did was to kiss him, giving in to my desires and consuming his lips. I finally broke away; and his eyes, mixed with surprise, had also changed. He was finally looking at me, with a desire that said he wanted me. As we exchanged numbers, I knew it was going to be the start of a beautiful romance. Maybe it was time that I finally got something I wanted without playing along with someone else's dictates.

Chapter Three

One-Sided Reunion

Natasha

His lips against mine. That sweet smell he gave off...

“Haha... yes, Ethan...” I whispered his name as my fingers greeted my pussy.

I couldn't get it off my mind. My right hand gently rubbed my pussy, while I kissed my left index and middle finger. I tried to recall the sensation of his lips against mine. The squelching sounds my privates made at my fingers touch were enough to keep me turned on. My breathing intensified, and my fingers went faster.

“Ethan...Ethan...”

It was my temporal relief. I had done it several times, but this time was different. I had smelled him, kissed him, even hugged him. It felt completely new. I wondered how it would feel if he handled it himself. I had taken a good look at his hands several times. Those big hands - often nicknamed

“machine-like” - gently pressing me down and attacking my pussy violently was all I could think about.

“More...” I demanded from myself.

My index and middle fingers were already rubbing as fast as they could, but I added my ring finger, massaging even faster. I stopped kissing my left hand fingers and started to squeeze my breasts. I licked my fingers and pinched my nipples with them, recreating the image of having his mouth on them.

“Just like that...ah...” I whimpered. I pinched them harder as they went stiff.

I slid my middle finger into myself, and my pussy walls tightened around it immediately.

“Fuck...” I groaned.

I started to move my finger, faster and faster, stirring myself up.

“More...Ethan,” I pleaded.

I wanted him...those muscles...holding me. The way he spoke kindly to others, maybe hearing him call me a good girl for hanging in there - anything would do. I added an extra finger.

“Jeez...”

My body started to respond properly. Tightening and even shaking... I was approaching a climax. I was laying naked. I normally slept in just my panties anyway. They were at my knees, and I started to feel bad for the maids who have to clean

the bedsheets. Rachel walked in as I was approaching the end, but I wasn't about to stop.

"Just...a little more... haha..." I went faster, biting my lower lip as she closed the door and took a seat.

I finally climaxed, soaking the sheets.

"Fuck..." I groaned as I stared at my fingers, drenched with my wetness.

"You really needed that?" Rachel asked.

I nodded.

"What exactly happened at that park? You didn't even tell me if you found him," she asked.

"Nothing happened," I assured her.

I know I shared everything with her, but I wanted to keep the moment to myself.

"Fine. Keep it to yourself," she sighed. "By the way you do realise that you're late, right?"

"For what?"

"Work. You're working at the Sullivan hospital remember?" she reminded me.

"Oh..."

That's right, I was supposed to start work. I decided to apply at Ethan's hospital. Unfortunately, he wasn't hiring, but I was recommended to work at Dr. Ian Sullivan's hospital. He was the younger twin. I had heard about him in medical school but

had never met him. The rumors about him were that he was a loner and rather cold, the complete opposite of Ethan.

Ethan had mentioned him as well but said he was someone who seemed to enjoy his own company more than with others. I couldn't understand why someone would choose to be alone. I was alone but at least I had the desire to form bonds with others. I was bummed out when I heard that I was going to work at his hospital. I wanted to be with Ethan.

"Your disappointment is visible," Rachel said as she stood at the bedside, her eyes scanned my body. "Along with other things that are currently visible."

"Will you be joining me at the hospital?" I asked.

"Actually, no. You're on your own from now on," she replied. "Your parents' orders. Something about letting you do as you want."

"But you'll be nearby?"

"Yeah, but it won't be to bodyguard you," she explained. "You better get that man."

"But I'm not even going to be close to him," I sighed, took off my panties completely and got out of the bed to stretch.

"Says who? You're going to be working for his younger brother. You could use that to your advantage," she indicated.

I got started on my jumping jacks, then proceeded to squats. "How?"

“Well, you could find out more about Ethan from him and even get him on your side to let you have your way with his brother. It’s better than touching yourself in the morning,” she replied.

I lay on my back and started crunches. “I didn’t think about that.”

“It is easier to think about how he would take you and have his way with your body while touching yourself,” she said, “you shameless slut princess.”

“Oh, hush. Don’t tell me that your days of service have rendered you unable to feel love or sexual desire,” I retorted.

“Yeah, I don’t feel any of those things,” she smirked.

“Bleh...” I stuck my tongue out at her.

“Bleh...” she mocked back.

I liked Rachel. Knowing I won’t have her around anymore was a little heartbreaking. My parents were finally letting me do things on my own. Of course, there was going to be a catch. My prayer was that it was something I could easily handle on my own.

I was in Richmond and had rented a one-bedroom apartment to myself. No maids to help me cook. But luckily I wasn’t so spoiled that I didn’t know how to prepare my own meals. It was part of the mandatory skills I had had to learn. At a certain point in my life, Mother made me to assist the maids with housecleaning. A bit odd. It was almost like they were preparing me for wifhood.

After having my bath, breakfast and exchanging temporary goodbyes with Rachel, I made my way to my new working environment.

“I wonder if Ethan would visit his brother’s hospital though,” I said to myself.

Ian

Mondays. Too many people, it’s the start of the working week. For me and other doctors, it was just another day at the office. No weekends, no start of the new week. It was just another day of blood, medicine, sweat, sighs of victory or defeat, the anticipation of another successful surgery or operation, and the weight of failure that crushes you as you deliver the bad news to the patients’ loved ones.

But this Monday was different.

“Good morning, sir,” Isaac greeted me. He was my forty-five years old personal assistant in charge of Human Resources.

“I still feel uncomfortable with someone older than me addressing me with sir,” I sighed.

“Force of habit. Deal with it,” he said as he took a seat.

I was researching new practice methods for a client coming in for implants. I had no idea why humans would want to change their appearances to suit others, but I didn’t blame them. Maybe I chose this line of medicine because I secretly wanted

to change myself into an image that everyone was comfortable with.

“We have a new staff coming in,” he announced.

“We needed a new staff?” I raised a brow.

“A recommendation from your brother’s hospital,” he replied.

“She seemed to have applied there but got sent here because they didn’t have any openings.”

“A leftover, huh?”

It was one of the perks of being a popular hospital. Many doctors worked with either of us. If they couldn’t get into one of our hospitals, as long as they seemed competent, we’d send them to the next available brother’s hospital. Mine just so happened to be needing an extra hand. With summer around the corner and people looking to cheat and get a summer bod or fix an error from last summer, we needed the manpower.

“Not just any leftovers,” he said. “She’s a traveling doctor with quite a list of achievements. While she majors in dermatology, she’s been able to work with other high profile hospitals and just recently returned from a volunteering mission with the UN.”

“Impressive,” I had to admit, although I was still glued to my research. “Does she plan to become a permanent staff?”

“I don’t know yet. She isn’t sure either,” he replied.

“I can’t handle someone that isn’t sure yet,” I said.

“She seems like the model type though. Extremely beautiful,” he added.

I finally looked at him. His eyes were focused on me. The glasses resting on his nose seemed to be slipping off.

“Aren’t you HR? Comments like that are supposed to be prohibited,” I reminded him.

“I know. And for me to make the comment, you should know how serious I am,” he said with a smile.

“Let me see,” I opened my hand still sceptical of his comment as he handed over the file.

“I knew you’d be interested,” he said.

“I’m not. Don’t make it weird.” I rolled my eyes and read the CV.

Natasha James. The name struck an impression. My eyes immediately turned to the photo attached, and I recognized her immediately. The golden hair that put other blondes to shame. Those emerald eyes far more precious than the original gems. And those lips that had stolen mine a week ago.

I swallowed hard. “Have we hired her?”

“No, just needed your....”

“Accept her,” I cut him off.

“That fast? What happened to not hiring someone who wasn’t sure yet?” he asked.

“That was then, this is now,” I replied. “Get her to start as soon as Monday.”

“Done, sir,” he said. Still unsure of what had come over me, he stretched his hand to take the paper.

“I’ll hold on to this,” I said. “I assume you already have a copy?”

“Yes I do,” he replied. “Is everything okay?”

“Everything is perfect.”

Monday had finally arrived. My heart pounded, anticipating seeing her again. I brought out my phone and checked her number. I hadn’t received a text from her, nor a call. At first, I was worried that she was going to text Ethan’s real number, but I would know because Ethan would have told me about the kiss accusation.

I was still safe.

From what I could gather, she had attended the same school I did. It was going to be a problem if she found out that I had swapped identities with Ethan. Lucky for me, he usually shared all he did during the week. I could keep up the lie, using the things he would tell me. Hopefully, it would be enough.

My phone started to ring. Ethan...I started to panic. Maybe he had actually spoken to her. I should have made sure that she deleted his number after saving mine.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Oh, hey, the family and I just landed in the Maldives,” Ethan replied. “I’ve already spoken to Ben, but thank you for volunteering to watch over my place for the month.”

“It’s no problem,” I said, “Is that all?”

“Hmm? Expecting anything else?” he asked.

Yes.

“No, just wanted to make sure you didn’t forget anything in Richmond or Glen,” I replied.

“Nah, we triple checked. Besides, Stacy handled all the packing,” he added.

“Isn’t that supposed to be your job?”

“Maybe you haven’t dated for so long that you’ve actually forgotten this is the twenty-first century. There’s no role for things like that anymore.”

“Yeah, right,” I scoffed. “Enjoy your trip...and extend my greetings to your wife and son.”

“I will. Take care little bro,” he said before hanging up.

“Take care,” I whispered as I stared at the caller ID.

This was wrong, but I had no choice. Maybe if she saw me, she’d change her expectation of both of us and stick to my image. Perhaps there was really no need.

I was nervous, and it was a strange feeling. I had walked into emergency rooms or operation theaters without as much as breaking a sweat, except if the room became too hot. I had given speeches at conferences, met with diplomats from different countries, and never once had I felt nervous. But the

very idea of her coming to my hospital had me breaking out in a cold sweat.

I paced back and forth in my office. She was due to arrive in thirty minutes, so I planned to confess and tell her the truth, hoping we could start over.

“Hey, Natasha. I’m Ian Sullivan. Remember when you kissed my brother, Ethan? That was actually me,” I said to the wall.

What am I doing? I groaned and sunk into my chair. Would she be interested in me? Or do I finally give in and change into an image she’d love. There came a knock on the door, followed by a familiar voice.

“Good morning, Dr. Sullivan. I’m Dr. Natasha James.”

Shit, she was early. “Come in,” I said.

As the door opened, I was greeted by a sight accompanied with a breath of fresh air. As she stepped into my office, I saw that she had dressed in a sophisticated yet alluring ensemble - a tailored charcoal gray pantsuit that accentuated her slight curves. The blazer fitting snugly but not too tight. Beneath it, a silk emerald blouse peeked out, its color complementing her striking emerald eyes. The blouse had a tasteful V-neck, offering a subtle hint of sexual allure without being too revealing.

Her golden hair fell gracefully around her shoulders in loose waves, framing her face elegantly. She had completed the look with a pair of sleek black high-heeled pumps that added a touch of sensuality to her overall appearance while

maintaining a professional edge. A delicate gold necklace with a single emerald pendant graced her neck, drawing attention to her neckline without overwhelming the ensemble.

Gorgeous.

If not for the self-control I had taken years to develop, I'm sure my mouth would have made contact with the floor. Still... she was here. She was really here and not a figment of my imagination. She looked at me; her eyes seemed to recognize me. I noticed the look of surprise and uncertainty in her eyes.

Does she recognize me?

"Hi," I greeted.

She shook her head negatively, dismissing whatever thought she had and offered me a smile, "Good morning, sir."

"You can have a seat." I motioned to the empty chair opposite me. "You're very early."

"A lady or gentleman always arrives thirty minutes early for an official matter," she replied.

"Rosemary Etiquette School?" I raised a brow.

She raised a brow in return, slightly amused. "Yes. I see you and Ethan attended it."

This was something she must have discussed with him in medical school.

"I was her favorite student," I said with pride.

"So was I," she said. "Although Ethan and I found it stifling.

I forgot about that. If I had known she had found it stiffling, I wouldn't have fumbled it.

"I see," I said, hoping to end the conversation there. "It's a pleasure to meet you in person Dr. James."

"Just Natasha is fine, Dr. Sullivan."

"Ian is fine. There are three Dr. Sullivans."

It was the second time I had to introduce myself, but to her it would be the first. We talked about her role in my hospital; and although she mentioned that she intended to work at Ethan's, she didn't mind working for me. I didn't like being the second option, but I understood her situation. She just wanted to spend more time next to the man she was in love with.

The man she kissed.

Not Ian Sullivan.

But Ethan.

As I listened to her speak, I couldn't help noticing that what I felt the moment I saw her still hadn't left.

"It's a wonderful place," she uttered as I showed her around.

"I'm glad you like it," I said.

"I must admit, I had no idea you were so involved in plastic surgery. If I had known, I might have just applied here from the get-go," she admitted. "With the kind of tech and medical access you have, it's like a dermatologist's dream."

I was proud as she examined my facilities and praised each part she viewed. I could tell she wasn't saying the words of praise to make me feel good. She genuinely meant it.

"We are expecting a lot of patients. Do you have any experience with plastic surgery?" I asked.

"A little. I'm not perfect, but I'm sure I can handle assisting," she replied.

"I'll look forward to having you on my team then," I said.

"I look forward to it as well," she responded. "Can I get to work immediately?"

"Of course, just meet Isaac and he'd show you to your office," I replied. "I'll walk you there."

I had already shown her where Isaac's office was so she'd have no problem finding it by herself. But I needed to spend some time with her.

"Ian, there's an emergency case," one of the nurses announced, completely ruining my plan.

"Another time Dr. James," I said to Natasha.

"Please, I said just Natasha's fine," she said. "Thank you for your help. I can take it from here."

"Alright, stay safe," I said as I watched her walk away.

"Natasha..."

She stopped and turned. "Yes?"

It was me. I was the one you kissed.

"Thank you for joining," I said.

She nodded and gave a warm smile. “Thank you for having me.”

It was no good. There was no way I could tell her. Besides, just like the rest, she had no interest in me.

Natasha

As I returned home, I threw myself onto the bed. I placed my hand on my chest to calm my beating heart. It seemed to be going out of control.

“What the hell happened today?” I asked. “That wasn’t even Ethan...why was I bothered?”

The moment I laid eyes on Ian, it felt like we had already met. Everything from the way he looked at me, including the air around him...it felt so familiar.

My heart started to pound. It wasn’t right. He was as soft spoken as the rumors said he was. Compared to Ethan, he was calmer and seemed a little too perfect. He took great pride in his work and seemed relieved whenever I complimented him. And for some reason, his gentle smile pleased me.

It was wrong. Something was very, very wrong. I brought out my phone and checked Ethan’s new number. I took in a deep breath and thought about the right words to say. I was feeling confused. I still longed for the man I had met in med school, the man I had kissed in Glen Allen. So, why did his brother have such a strange yet relaxing feel to him?

I hadn't texted Ethan in a while. I had felt nervous after the kiss.

"No need to overthink it," I sighed and typed the basics when it came to starting a text conversation. "Hey!"

I put the phone down. Maybe Rachel was right. I needed to upgrade my way of life soon. Ethan was a busy man, so I assumed that he wouldn't even see the text.

Ping! The notification caught my attention. I picked up the phone. He replied with a simple, "Hey". Relief washed over me. I gradually forgot about the budding feelings for my new boss and focused on Ethan. I struggled over what to text next.

"How are you doing?"

"Pretty good...and you?"

"I finished work not long ago."

"That reminds me, I heard you applied at my hospital. We had no vacancy so I transferred you to my brother's. Hope you didn't mind?"

"No, I don't mind. It's a very nice place. I would like it here, however. I would have loved to work with you."

Rachel had told me to go on the offensive and get aggressive. That was my measly attempt.

I would have loved that too. Maybe even continued where we left off at the park, he texted.

My cheeks turned red as a tomato. He still remembered.

"I thought you'd forgotten about that!"

“I doubt there’s any man who’d forget being kissed by a beautiful girl. I just didn’t know how to bring it up.”

Beautiful girl? Right, this was the Ethan I was in love with.

“I’m honored” was my sincerest reply.

“Are you free tomorrow? We can meet and hangout if you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind. Ian told me I can start the day after tomorrow.”

“Then tomorrow it is,” he said.

“Wait what should I wear?”

“Wear something you can walk around in.”

“Thank you, I look forward to it.”

“So do I. Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

I actually did it. I had secured a date. It was a relief. After just a few moments, I could have sworn that I had fallen in love with Ian.

Chapter Four

The Tugging of the Heart

I^{an}

I did it. I actually asked a woman out on a date, and she genuinely agreed. Well, technically, she didn't agree to go with *me*. She was only interested in Ethan. It sucked and honestly didn't feel like a win to me, but I decided to play along. If I could make my Ian self more likeable than my Ethan self, she could easily choose me over...well, me.

It was the stupidest idea that I had ever come up with; it sounded like something Ethan would do. Maybe just by thinking about acting like him, I would become like him. I had impersonated my brother multiple times as he had done me. But it had been a while. Marriage changes people, and I was sure that there was some sort of improvement. If I remembered correctly, after Stacy had left, he took steps to make sure to his clumsiness.

But Natasha didn't know that. All she was used to was the Ethan from medical school, up to the moment he had asked her to have a date with Ben. Easy-peasy. I chose to visit Byrd Park with the hopes that it would remind her of her first kiss with... *Ethan*. Something to lighten the mood and let the conversation flow.

Why exactly am I putting this much thought into this, when I can just easily meet her and tell her who I really am?

I couldn't answer it. Well, I actually could. But I didn't like the way the answer felt - like I was an embarrassment. I just hoped that my impression was enough to fool her.

Byrd Park was the designated location. I waited patiently for her to arrive. I was dressed in jeans and a black long-sleeve dress shirt. I had thrown some shades on and unbuttoned the first three buttons of my shirt. I had seen Ethan dress like this once, so it was a good attempt to imitate him. I messed up my hair a little bit too. I had practiced my style of speaking - everything I was sure would make me sound like him.

“There he is,” her voice reached my ears.

I turned around and found her. She approached, dressed in blue jeans that showed off her shape and a long black sleeve shirt that clung to her body, with a v-cut at the neck. Her face radiated pure excitement. I knew she wasn't making that face because of me, but it felt good to be on the receiving end.

“You look absolutely beautiful,” I said with honesty. “Did you take a look into my wardrobe or something?”

She let out a hearty chuckle and took a step closer; she was directly under my face, a smirk gracing her face.

“I was about to ask the same question,” she said. “You look very good yourself, Ethan.”

Hearing her call my brother's name stung a little but I proceeded with the plan.

“How is work going?” I asked.

“I didn't really work properly at your brother's,” she replied. “But I'm sure it would be nice. Saw a lot of celebrities there.”

“Well, excuse me for not having any celebrities,” I pouted.

“Whaaat?” She raised a brow as she gently punched my shoulder. “You don't need to sound like that. I'm sure your

place would have been nice to work at as well.”

“Thank you,” I said with a smug look, then motioned towards the entrance of the park. “Shall we?” she commanded

I showed her around the park, and we even played some games. I made some *careless* mistakes, just to keep up with the Ethan appearance, and she bought it. Like accidentally forgetting to bring the blanket for our lunch. She had brought one just in case.

“You know after all these years, one would expect that you had finally matured, but you’re still the same in the clumsy department,” she said, but the smile on her face didn’t seem to mind it at all.

“Maybe I need to get more classes on carefulness or something,” I sighed.

“Or maybe get a little note?” she suggested. “Don’t worry, I’ll get one for you tomorrow. After work.”

“Why thank you,” I said and laid out the sandwiches and homemade juice I had prepared. “I hand squeezed the orange juice. I don’t know if you like the original.”

“How many oranges?” she asked.

“Twelve big juicy ones,” I replied, “and I added the pulp into it as well.”

“I didn’t know you could cook,” she said.

Wait, Ethan can’t cook.

“Is making a sandwich really considered cooking?” I started to panic. “If yes, then I must be a five star chef. Mind giving me a Yelp review?”

“I don’t mind, Gordon Ramsay,” she teased as she took a bite out of the meal. Her face melted in pleasure. I was proud of myself as she ate what I had made. “This is really good, Ethan.”

“It’s the one thing I’m good at,” I said.

She placed her hand on my cheek. “Ethan, there are a lot of things I’m good at. You don’t have to worry about not being good at the ones you suck at. You taught me that.”

I did, huh?

“You’re right,” I sighed. “Thank you.”

She let go of my face and stared at me. “Can I do something with you?”

“As long as it doesn’t involve my chastity,” I replied.

She laughed. “What chastity?”

“I still maintain it, you know?”

Unfortunately, I was answering as Ian not Ethan.

“Fine, it had nothing to do with your fragile chastity.” She rolled her eyes as she put down her sandwich. “Could you uncross your legs and spread them?”

I raised a questioning brow.

“It’s not like that; it’s something else, I promise,” she assured me.

I spread my legs as she said it. Sounds embarrassing to admit. She crawled over and sat between my legs, resting her back against my chest and her head directly under my chin. My heart started to pound. Acting purely on instinct, my hands circled her waist, and my nose went straight for her hair. She felt so soft, and her hair smelled like lavender. I wanted her.

“Ethan... I can feel your bulge,” she whispered.

“Shit...”

“No, it’s okay,” she said softly as she adjusted herself. “It’s kind of a compliment. And I want to confirm it either way.”

“I see,” I said. I tried to think other thoughts until my member calmed down.

She continued eating her meal...and I watched.

“Natasha?” I called.

“Yeah?”

“Why exactly are you in love with me? Did you mean what you said or was it a spur of the moment?” I asked. “You know what I’m like. I’m sure you’ve heard.”

“Well, I know you’re a playboy and all and you probably have a lot of women vying for your attention. But from the moment you showed me how to start desiring things for myself, I started to admire you,” she explained. “You taught me it was okay to be myself, and still make a difference.”

She paused and placed her hand on my stomach. “I guess that’s what started the love process. Besides. If I wanted you, all I need to do is be more aggressive than the other women in your life. I’ll have you to myself that way.”

She wasn’t talking about me.

She was talking about Ethan.

Was it this easy for him?

Remember that you have women who desire you. And yet the moment I’m myself, I seem to repel them. How is that fair?

“I see,” I said.

“It’s okay. I know you aren’t in love with me yet,” she said. “We can take it as slowly as you want. I’m in Richmond for a long time, anyway.”

“Thank you for understanding,” I said. “I’ll respond to your feelings properly. I just need to sort mine out.”

“I’ve waited all these years,” she said. “What’s a few more days?”

“Days? You might be a little too overconfident there,” I pointed out.

She looked up at me. Her emerald eyes seem to scan my face and the smile on her face, gave a smug look.

“I think I’m already halfway through you already,” she said with pride.

“I have no arguments there,” I said; she looked away, focusing on her meal.

As we remained in that position, staring at the other persons present, I wondered how long I was going to keep this charade up.

“Ethan? Can we...keep meeting?” she asked.

“How frequently?”

“If it’s no bother or problem, I would love to see you after work,” she replied.

“No problem,” I agreed without thinking about it too deeply.

She snuggled up against me and murmured, “Thank you.”

And the days began.

Natasha

Maybe it was the years that I had been absent from his life physically, but Ethan had changed. His manner of speaking and even his carelessness didn't seem so careless anymore. He felt like a completely different person and yet the same person. There was an air of maturity around him that I admired.

The weird thing was, even with the slight changes, I was still drawn to him. Maybe it was because I felt his bulge as I sat between his legs, or the fact that he admitted that I was halfway getting through to him. I was feeling confident about myself. I wanted to report my progress to Rachel, but I decided to keep it to myself and sort out my feelings.

The next day at work, it happened again. Whenever I arrived, I was to report to Ian for assigned tasks. I stepped into his office; he was dressed in his navy blue scrubs. His eyes were focused on the book in his hands. He had a serious expression on his face, and the way his hair was arranged gave him a majestic feel. It felt like I had walked into a prince's private study time.

His right cheek rested on his fist while the other hand handled his book. He looked over to me, and a smile formed. My chest tightened, and I had to exhale deeply. It was happening again. This weird pounding for him, and it seemed to grow stronger.

“Good morning Natasha,” he greeted.

His voice sounded similar to Ethan’s; it had an extra effect on me.

“G...good morning,” I greeted, forcing my eyes to look away.

“Your scrubs are here.” He pointed at the table; there was a set of black scrubs in plastic wrapping.

“Thank you,” I said as I accepted it.

“Get changed and come back for instructions,” he instructed.

“You can use my bathroom.”

He was indeed different from Ian. While Ethan had warmth while he spoke, Ian seemed to have a cold air that just made me obey. It was strange how I enjoyed the sensation. As I walked to his bathroom, I could feel his gaze on my back, even down to my behind. He was just staring, and I felt conflicted. I even paused...it was like I wanted him to stare a little longer.

And he did.

“Is there a problem, Natasha?” he asked, startling me.

“Huh? N-no, nothing at all,” I replied and quickly went into the bathroom.

“What the hell?” I asked myself as I placed my hand on my chest, my heart was beating wildly.

It wasn't right.

I love Ethan. I barely have any idea the kind of man that Ian is. I'm not supposed to be feeling like this.

With my inner turmoil, I started to take off my clothes. There was a mirror in the bathroom. I stared at my black bra and pulled it down. My nipples were already stiff.

“Just from his stare? What are you, a pervert?” I asked myself.

I stared down at my panties and started to panic. I placed my hand into them, and I could feel my wetness. I stared at my fingers in horror.

What the actual fuck?

I made a mental note to check in with the hospital gynecologist. I changed into the scrubs and came out; he was focusing on his book again.

I walked over to the front of his desk almost sheepishly, “I’m done changing.”

It was weird. It felt like I needed his approval.

He raised his eyes and focused on me, “Turn.”

I swallowed and did as he said. I turned slowly; I could feel him scanning my body. My waist, stomach, thighs, butt, even my bust were taken hostage. Was this okay? Wasn’t this some sort of sexual harassment? I didn’t mind it all.

“I knew black would look good against your skin and hair,” he said as I completed my 360. “It makes the eyes shine. You’re quite the catch.”

“Thank you,” I said.

What’s this? Why are you happy that he praised you?

“Alright.” He got to his feet, and ordered, “Walk with me.”

I followed behind him, and he led me to a patient - young woman with a bad skin reaction.

I made my diagnosis and applied some medication, then gave her a prescription for the pharmacy. It was a simple job.

“You’ll be working on jobs like this,” Ian said. “I look forward to seeing all you’ll accomplish with your time here.”

“Thank you, Ian,” I replied.

As he left me, I let out a sigh of relief. Something was definitely wrong. I brought out my phone and texted Ethan.

Are we still on for today? I texted.

I’ll be rounding up by six pm, he replied. You?

“Did Isaac tell you what time you’ll be closing?” Ian asked, startling me, causing me to hide the phone. “Is something wrong?”

“No, uh, nothing at all,” I replied. “Isaac said early. But didn’t say how early.”

“If there are no emergency cases that you can help with, then you can leave by six,” he said.

“Alright, thank you,” I retorted.

He seemed like he wanted to say something else but gave up on it and walked away. I returned my attention to the phone, *How does seven sound?*

No problem here. Looking forward to it.

Me too.

My heart beat still pounded the same way after talking to Ethan. I don't know what was going on with me when I had made contact with Ian, with my body reacting like that. But it was good to know that Ethan still had that effect on me.

I spent the day attending to new patients in the hospital. It felt better because I got to relate to them as new staff. I also assisted the other doctors with whatever they needed at the moment. Who knew that spending extra time learning about other fields would actually come in handy as my parents had predicted. Maybe it wasn't so bad having your life dictated for you. At the end of the day, I signed out, but I went to Ian to tell

him I was done for the day. I honestly didn't have to, but for some odd reason, I went anyway.

I knocked on his door before letting myself in, he seemed like he was about to leave too.

"You're done?" he asked.

"Yes, actually," I replied as he stepped aside, allowing me to come in.

"How was your first day?" he asked as he leaned against the door.

"It was refreshing. I thought I would have problems handling patients, but I was assigned to new ones," I replied. "It was a fun experience. And the other doctors were a big help in getting me to adjust properly. I should thank them later on."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," he said as his eyes shifted to my hair. "You came here to change? You have your own office you know?"

I stared down at the scrubs. "I'm sorry, I don't even know why I came here in the first place."

I tried to make my way past him, but he stopped me by holding my hand and pulling me in front of him.

“You’re already here; is there any need to leave?” he asked.

That scent.

I don’t know why I did but I leaned in close and took a little sniff. My body was stirred. It was this same scent I had perceived when I first met Ethan in Glen Allen. Minus the smoke, that is.

“Do you normally do this?” he asked with an amused look on his face.

“What? No,” I replied as I snapped out of it. “I’m sorry.”

“I didn’t actually mind but I think we should settle it,” he suggested.

“What?”

“Isn’t that fair?” he asked as he took a few strands of my hair and brought it to his nose. “You smell me, I smell you.”

“I didn’t smell your hair, though,” I blurted out.

“You’re right,” he said as he held my hips and pulled me close.

I placed my hand against his chest to offer a little distance between us. His nose lowered on my neck, and I could feel his breath against my skin. The heat from his nostrils heated me up. My fingers gripped his clothes, almost wrinkling them, but neither of us cared.

“You smell so good,” he said. “Although there’s a little sweat...but I find it appealing as well.”

He let me go, but I was still clinging to his clothes.

“You can let me go now,” he said with a chuckle.

“Y-yeah. I’m sorry,” I apologized and let him go.

“Go get changed,” he instructed. “The cleaners will lock the door once you’re done.”

“You don’t have any valuables in the office?” I asked.

“Most of the patients records that require privacy are all on my phone. So no problems there,” he replied.

“Quite the cautious one,” I remarked.

“It doesn’t hurt to be a little bit careful,” he said as he opened the door. “See you tomorrow, Natasha.”

“Alright, tomorrow...Ian,” I replied, and he closed the door behind him.

I touched my neck where he had inhaled, then shuddered. It was still strange. Why would he give in that easily? Most of the rumors, even what I heard in the hospital, seemed to paint him as the kind of man who wasn’t even interested in women.

So why...never mind. I made a mental note to start changing in my own office.

I went home and changed into a dinner dress. I decided not to go overboard. Ethan had mentioned dinner at a restaurant close by - a four star venue, but he claimed the meals there deserved five. While I dressed, I couldn’t help thinking about Ian. As I brushed my hair, it felt like his hands were still holding mine. It felt like he was still holding my hips too. And my neck still burned.

I couldn’t see Ethan like this. My mind completely taken by another man - his brother even. The sound of my doorbell

broke my thoughts. I quickly put on my earrings and went to answer the door. Ethan stood there in a tux, without a tie. His messy sexy hair stood out properly tonight, and he had a look like he was out for hunting and I was the main prize for dinner. In that moment, I forgot about Ian.

“Can I hug you?” I asked.

“For being early? Sure,” he said as he opened his arms.

I hugged him and took in the scent. It had been replaced with a mild citrus scent - yet another manly fragrance that earned him a nod of approval.

“You look and smell wonderful by the way,” he said as he embraced me even tighter.

It wasn't as possessive as how Ian held me, but I loved it.

“Thank you so much,” I said as I broke the embrace. “Let me get my purse.”

I retreated into the house and got my things.

“Shall we go?”

“Indeed we shall,” he replied and motioned to the sports car.
“Your chariot awaits.”

“Such a wonderful steed,” I said.

“The Lamborghini loves to call itself a bull,” he said with pride.

“A wonderful bull then,” I smiled.

Dinner was delightful. I understood what he meant by the place needing five stars just for the meals alone. Well, not just the meal. Even the service was better than most restaurants I had been to, with all my travels around the world.

“You can tell this is well aged wine,” he said as he poured himself a glass and lifted it to his nose. “I think wine tasting was the only party I paid attention to in the Etiquette school.”

“Rosemary offered that? I thought kids weren’t allowed to drink alcohol?” I asked.

“There was an adult program. My brothers and I had to attend,” he replied.

“I didn’t know that,” I admitted.

He poured me a glass, “Then again you don’t need a class to enjoy wine. You can hold your own, can’t you.”

“I’m still a lightweight,” I confessed.

“I’ll watch over you don’t worry,” he assured me.

“Just like you used to,” I said with a smile.

“Yeah, just like I used to,” he said with a smile equal to mine.
“Cheers.”

“Cheers.”

Our glasses clinked and we took a sip. Our eyes didn’t leave each other as we drank until we put down our glasses. I continued my meal but he didn’t eat. I looked up at him; his was face resting on his left palm; he was staring at me. I covered my mouth because I still had steak in it. “What? Am I eating weirdly?”

That would be next to impossible, because I had impeccable manners. I even got a certificate for it at Rosemary’s.

“No, I’m feeling a little jealous about my younger brother,” he said. “He gets to see you every day.”

I suddenly remembered Ian. My hips seemed to clench, if that’s even possible, as I recalled Ian’s possessive grip.

“Well I get to see you every day too,” I muttered.

“But that’s only if both of us do not have emergencies,” he sighed. “How was your first day at work?”

“It was nice. I met new people, and Ian’s staff are quite the help,” I replied. “Ian even let me close early too. Maybe because I’m just a temporary staff.”

“Well that works out for me then,” he said and resumed his meal. “I’ll make sure to handle all cases quickly.”

“Please put some care into how fast you handle cases,” I advised.

“Sure thing, ma’am,” he assured me.

It was a pleasant evening. I didn’t have much to drink, but it felt like I was walking on air. We took a walk around and even visited a jewelry shop. He bought me a gold necklace with an emerald stone. First time I received a gift from someone who

wasn't a family member. I even let him put it on me...and it looked gorgeous.

"It was a fun evening," he quipped.

As he dropped me off at my apartment, he walked me to my door.

"Do you give your numerous girlfriends necklaces like this?" I teased.

"I can't deny that, but I'll have you know that for a year now, I've cut down my playboy behavior," he said. "You're the only one I'm actually...well, seeing now."

"I see," I grinned.

He motioned for me to come closer, and I did.

He held my chin and kissed my forehead. "Thank you for joining me."

I touched the spot he kissed and I felt like a little girl all over again.

“You’re welcome,” I said with the biggest grin my face would allow.

“Good night, Natasha,” he said.

“Good night, Ethan,” I replied.

As he left, I closed the door behind me. In one day, two brothers had left me under their control.

Just how long was I going to last?

Chapter Five

A Heart Torn in Two

Ian

Three days had passed. As expected, after work hours, she met with Ethan. But during work hours, she was with me. It felt exhausting and, honestly, I was getting frustrating having to switch. But it wasn't my fault; she was also giving me mixed signals. The plan was to make her fall in love completely with true version of myself; instead, it felt like the attention she was giving to Ethan and me was the same.

Was it her fault, though? Maybe by instinct, she was in love with both versions of me, because they were both...me. Or maybe it was her way of trying to use me, to get to *Ethan*. Just like the way the rest of them did. How long will I continue to be used? Then again, I was also using her in a way. She was oblivious to my scheme...and yet there I was, using her and faulting her.

“Good morning, Ian,” she greeted as she let herself into my office.

This day, she wore a dress that hugged her properly, stopping above her knees. She held her scrubs in her hands.

“Can I use your bathroom again?” she asked.

“Sure thing,” I replied.

She had turned my bathroom into her changing room. I wasn’t interested in stopping her or calling her out.

“You really don’t want to use your own office?” I asked as she made her way to my bathroom.

“Yours just feels better,” she sighed.

“I’ll be taking rent out of your salary,” I said.

“I’m getting paid?” She raised a brow.

“Rich girl doesn’t want extra money?” I raised a brow in return.

“Well, true. I don’t mind some extra money,” she said. “Thank you, kind boss of mine.”

She went into the bathroom but didn’t close the door. A trap? I didn’t dare find out. I heard the zipper going down, followed by the rustling of clothing. It was easy picturing her getting naked. I couldn’t stop the thought. Was she deliberately trying to get a rise out of me?

“You didn’t close the door,” I said as she stepped out.

“Is that so? I didn’t even notice,” she replied.

Feigning ignorance.

“That’s going to be a problem, though,” I said as I got up and walked to her. “What if someone saw you changing?”

I don’t know why. But whenever I was Ian, she always seemed to have this panicking expression, accompanied with a brave front. It was an expression I enjoyed seeing.

“Would you be interested in seeing me changing?” she asked coyly.

“Is that an invitation?” I asked in a growl, and she shuddered.

“I was just kidding,” she said while laughing; she playfully pushed me away. “God, you’re easy to tease.”

She wasn’t kidding.

I accepted the attempt to make me retreat. There was something strange going on with her. It looked like I wasn’t the only one with the issue of absorbing the stress of handling both Ethan and Ian.

Maybe it was time I told her the truth.

Natasha

“Natasha? Natasha? My goodness, Natasha!” David called to my attention.

“Hmm? What?” I blinked twice. I realized that I was still in my office.

Well, it wasn’t technically mine. I shared the same office with David Stuart, a very skilled nutritionist. Almost everyone in the hospital was geared toward taking care of the human body’s physical appearance.

David was in his late thirties, quite the chatterbox when excited, and hyper focused when it came to nutrition - or anything related to his job. As one of the oldest staff here, he had information on almost everyone. He was kind and a good company when I was less busy. It seemed like he had been trying to get my attention without me responding properly.

“You okay?” he asked. “You’ve been out of it, lately.”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized. “My mind was occupied.”

“Is it Dr. Sullivan?” he asked.

“What? How?”

“I mean you always go there to change,” he replied. “Is there by any chance you know what treatments he uses? Cause there’s no way a skin that fine exists without any kind of nutritional or skincare help.”

“Nothing out of the ordinary,” I replied. “His bathroom has top brand shampoo and all that. Could see a lot of hair stuff.”

“You go to change because you want to use the products?” he asked.

“No not really,” I replied.

“Well, it’s none of my business then,” he insisted.

“You were calling for my attention?” I asked.

“Yeah, I just remembered that as you left yesterday, a patient of yours came to thank you and brought another potential patient,” he narrated. “You’re really doing a good job. I told them your working hours. So they’d be here soon.”

“Okay, thank you,” I said with a smile.

It was nice to know that patients were comfortable enough to even recommend me to others. But that wasn’t what was on my mind. I was still stuck on what happened this morning. I had left the door open on purpose. I expected that he’d take a look or something. I don’t know why I did it, but anytime I was around Ian, I found myself doing questionable things. As for when I was with Ethan, I found myself wanting to do the same things but mostly in tame ways.

Anytime I undressed, I could feel him watching. I was basking in his gaze. Like every morning, I wanted him to praise my outfit or how my scrubs looked like when I was done changing - by just looking at me.

“What do you think about Ian?” I asked.

“Hmm? The boss?” he asked. “He can be a little mysterious and keeps to himself, but I think that’s a bit of a charm. Almost makes you want to see him make a different expression.”

Yeah, that sounds about right.

It felt like that was my intention. To make him show a new kind of expression.

“Why do you ask?” he wondered.

“No reason,” I replied.

“You have a crush on him?” he asked.

“Not likely. I haven’t spoken to him properly,” I replied. “I just wanted to know.”

“Oh that makes sense,” he said. “Well, do let me know if any feelings start to blossom between you two.”

“So you can have something to gossip about? No chance in hell.” I rolled my eyes.

“Easy. I don’t spill easily,” he assured me.

“I’ll take my chances,” I said.

My phone buzzed. A text from Ethan. I hadn’t even read it and a smile was already forming.

How does a trip to the circus sound? he asked.

Aren’t circus acts basically promoting animal cruelty? I asked.

Don’t worry. We’ll invite PETA too, he replied.

I burst into laughter and quickly covered my mouth not to disturb my colleague.

You’re something else, I replied. *Where are we really going.*

There’s someone setting up a mini Observatory around here. We can go watch the stars. If possible, find one to name after you, he replied.

That was actually sweet. It made me grin.

Aren’t all the stars named already, I asked.

There are over a billion stars. Who has the free time to name everything, he asked in return.

Fair point, Ethan Armstrong, I teased.

See you tonight, Natasha Aldrin, he countered.

I felt bad. Ethan was putting this much effort into letting my feelings reach him properly, but here I was, still getting swayed by his colder younger brother.

I needed to tell him.

Ian

I needed to tell her. Easier said than done. As I read through her texts with *Ethan*, I couldn't help but feel jealous. Maybe I should have just been acting like Ethan all this time. But I couldn't keep doing this to her. She was torn between two people who were the same person. As work came to an end, she made her way to my office to get changed. She was getting ready to see Ethan. I needed to put a stop to it.

“Natasha? Anywhere you'll be going to after this? I asked.

“I’ll be going to an observatory with a friend,” she replied, honestly.

I thought she’d lie.

“You want to come?” she asked.

“No, that’ll be fine,” I replied.

“You sure?” she asked as she walked over to my side of the table. “You seem like there’s something bothering you.”

“It’s nothing,” I said.

She placed her hand on my cheek. I closed my eyes, basking in how warm it was. As I opened them, I met her emerald orbs. She also seemed like there was something on her mind. She let go of my face and took a step back.

Could it be... she also wants to stop? But with who?

*Me or **Ethan**.* I needed to be the first to explain everything.

“There’s something I have to tell you,” we both said at the same time, startling the other.

“I’ll go first,” I said and she nodded.

“Natasha, I...”

The door opened and Isaac rushed in. “Sir, an incoming emergency””

The panic on his face told me it was something serious.

“What is it” I asked as I got up.

“Microsurgical. The patient lost his hand in a horrific work accident,” he replied. “He’s a minute away, and the accident occurred around ten minutes ago. There’s still a chance to reattach it.”

“I haven’t done microsurgery in so long” I admitted then turned to Natasha. “Any experience, Natasha?”

“A little, but I’m a fast learner. I’ll be able to help,” she said as she dropped her clothes on my table. “Where are we operating?”

“Downstairs,” Isaac replied.

“Let’s go,” I commanded.

Walking into the sterile operating room, I was filled with a mix of anticipation and a slight case of nerves.

“We’ve mentioned this before, but I hardly get nervous. The only reason I was nervous was because Natasha was with me and watching keenly. Our patient, Mr. Anderson, lay unconscious on the operating table, his right hand barely hanging on after a harrowing accident at a construction site. Taking a deep breath, I reminded myself of my extensive training in microsurgery. Natasha, stood by my side, her eyes wide with curiosity.

“Natasha,” I began, trying to maintain a composed demeanor. “Today, you’ll witness one of the most intricate surgical procedures – microsurgical replantation of a hand. It’s a challenging but immensely rewarding task, and I’ll guide you through every step.”

As I prepared for the surgery, I mentally reviewed the intricate process. Our first task was to assess the extent of Mr. Anderson’s injury. His severed hand rested in an icebox nearby, awaiting our delicate touch. With precision, we began reconnecting the major arteries and veins, using sutures finer than a human hair. I carefully explained each move to Natasha as we progressed.

Time seemed to both drag and sprint by as we meticulously repaired the damaged blood vessels. The operating room was silent except for the gentle hum of the equipment. The pressure was immense; one misstep, and this intricate procedure could falter.

Gradually, I noticed Natash's hands growing steadier, her movements becoming more precise. She wasn't joking when she said she was a quick learner, and her focus was unwavering. It was evident that she possessed the potential to become an exceptional microsurgeon if she hadn't already decided to be a dermatologist.

After what felt like hours, we moved on to reconnecting the nerves, arguably the most intricate part of the procedure. Nerves, like fragile threads of communication, needed precise alignment to restore sensation and function to the hand.

Under the microscope, I guided Natash's hands as she carefully sutured the minuscule nerve endings together. As we placed the final stitches, a sense of relief washed over me. The hand, once severed, was now reattached, a testament to the power of microsurgery. The room filled with a subdued cheer from the surgical team as we successfully completed the challenging task.

Natasha was relieved as well and she gave me a look that expressed how proud of herself she was.

“You did good,” I said. “Maybe you shouldn’t have studied dermatology and just focused on microsurgery. In fact, you were exceptional.”

“My parents made sure that I was a jack of all trades when it came to medicine,” she revealed. “Every month involved me learning a crash course in any medical field that I would need to get stronger in””

“You have very good parents,” I said softly.

“I know right,” she chuckled. “I’ll go get changed in your office.”

“No problem,” I replied.

As she left, I gave her fifteen minutes before going to change too. My phone buzzed. It was a text from her.

Sorry, Ethan, I got involved with an emergency case, can we reschedule? she asked.

It was almost one am, kinda late to tell him now. But considering how much of a rush we were in, it was understandable.

No problem, I replied.

She didn't reply. I tucked my phone into my pocket and walked into my office. She was covered with my towel and checking her phone. She turned, a look of surprise on her face, big enough to match the one on my face.

"I'm sorry, I decided to take a shower and forgot my clothes on your desk," she explained.

"It's.. fine," I said as I took in her sight.

The lights were on, and I could smell the use of my hair products. The towel stopped at her upper thighs. If she were to turn around and bend over, then her behind would be completely visible. She seemed nervous...I didn't even know if I was supposed to leave.

"I'll come back later," I said as I turned to go.

"Uh no, you can use the bathroom, I'll change out here," she suggested. "Maybe lock the door so no one comes in while I'm half naked."

"Yeah, that makes sense," I admitted as I locked the door. I walked over to her. "I might need the towel. Are you wearing anything underneath?"

It was just an attempt to tease her.

“I actually am,” she said as she took of the towel and handed it over to me.

She was wearing a crimson red bra and panties.

Why are you letting down your guard? What if I took advantage of you?

I held her arm; she shook a little but didn't resist me. Her eyes seemed to want what was about to happen. I leaned in close and her breathing got shaky. But she didn't resist...nor did she move.

There was not a single attempt to stop me.

I kissed her. It was a brief kiss, nothing much. Just brushing our lips together for merely a second and retreating. Her eyes were closed, and her lips slightly parted. When she opened her eyes, she seemed to ask me why I had done that. In her eyes, I was no more than a stranger, and the brother to the man she was in love with.

Who else was to blame for that misunderstanding, but me?

“Natasha...I.. “

My words were cut short as she kissed me back, exhaling deeply. Her hands wrapped around my neck, pulling me deeper than our kiss was in Glen Allen. I didn't resist nor stop what was happening. I held her waist and lifted her, dropping her gently on my table as I continued to kiss her back.

Her tongue slid into my mouth, and I kissed her back deeply. I pushed her down and her legs locked around me. Her fingers pulled roughly against my hair. I left her lips and kissed her neck, causing her to groan. My left hand rubbed gently along her thighs. I returned my attention to her mouth, kissing her again. My hand made contact with her bra strap; that was enough to make her stop.

“Wait.. no... no no no no,” she shook her head negatively as she gently pushed me away, “What am I doing?”

“Natasha, I...”

There was no need to say anything. She didn't seem in the mood to listen. I had messed up.

“I'll go shower,” I said.

“I'll finish changing,” she said without looking at me.

“Right...” I dragged myself to the bathroom.

As the water made contact with my body, I couldn't help thinking about her body. *Ethan* hadn't crossed the line. But she gave in... did it mean she cheated on me? Did I just win against myself? Or did I make her lose?

Natasha

Fuck.

Fuck!

Fuck!!

What were you thinking, Natasha Emilia James!

As he went into the bathroom, I started to hurriedly put on my clothes, an attempt to leave before he came out.

Why did he kiss me? Why did I let down my guard? What happened to trying to be with Ethan?

I felt torn. I didn't understand it. I hardly spoke with Ian besides matters that concerned work. But whenever I looked at

him, it felt like I knew him. When he found me trying to change, a part of me wanted him to leave, but the other part that was easily swayed asked him to stay.

It was a foolish decision, and yet it felt so right. When he held my arm, I could tell he was giving me a chance to stop him, to yell or something. But I didn't...I wished my excuse was that I was too scared to move. That would be a lie, because I was too excited to move.

When he kissed me, it felt good if not better than what I had in Glen Allen. I didn't mind when he pushed me down. When he touched me - even when I pulled on his hair. Everything was perfect. As I hurriedly put on my dress, I made haste to leave his office. If he came out and met me, then try to make another move. I knew I wasn't going to stop him.

Chapter Six

The Daughter's Turmoil

Natasha

When I returned home, it was almost two am. My heart was at war with itself. Betrayal and relief hung on my shoulders. I checked my phone for any messages.

Ethan had texted, *Are you still at the hospital?*

I got home a few minutes ago. I'm a little exhausted.

No problem. Sleep tight and maybe we can reschedule the observatory visit to another time.

I'd like that.

I wanted to talk to him a little longer but the guilt wasn't letting me type. I wanted to tell him. But did I have to tell

him?

I mean, we aren't officially a couple yet, right?

I hated myself for letting that kind of thought occupy my mind.

I took off my dress and got ready to dive into bed. One last look at the mirror, and I noticed a bite mark on my collar bone. He had given me a hickey. Why would he mark me? I touched it, and the sensation of being bitten aggressively by him reawakened. My body started to feel hot again.

I lay on my bed and placed my body pillow on top of me. The pillow didn't have enough mass or weight to remind me how I felt, but it was enough to help me fantasize about what happened. I pressed the pillow down against my panties and started to move it.

"Ian, you idiot.. why did you..." I started to complain as the movements started feeling good.

"Mmm..." I moaned gently as the movement gradually intensified.

I could picture him again. His mouth, his body, the way he still gave me room to resist and my ignorance to escape.

Why did he kiss me?

He reminded me so much of his brother that it even tricked my body into desiring him. Tricking my heart was just a bonus. As for him, he had no reason. I didn't even know much about him and all he knew was what he noticed about my job.

It sucked. It sucked a whole lot. My fingers already got to my panties and gently greeted my pussy. I rubbed gently and waited for the sensation to get harder. Ian...how is it possible to want two people at the same time?

My phone started to ring, freeing me from my predicament. I checked the caller ID, and it was Mom. Awfully late for a call, but whatever.

“Good morning, Mom,” I greeted.

“Good morning,” she replied with a yawn. “You seem slightly out of breath but energetic.”

“Yeah, I just started working out again,” I replied. “Got back home a few minutes ago. Emergency case at the hospital. Kept me late.”

“You enjoying your hospital work experience?” she asked.

She never asks if I'm enjoying what I'm doing. Something's up.

Don't get me wrong, my parents compliment my achievements *after* I'm done achieving them. But never have they found out if I'm actually enjoying it.

I guess it's time that I pay back for letting me do whatever I want.

"I'm enjoying it," I replied.

The image of Ian crushing me with his body weight flashed across my mind.

"I'm enjoying it a lot," I confessed.

"That's great, princess," she remarked, "but can you take an excuse and fly in to Maryland today?"

"Hmm? Why? What's happening?"

"It's nothing serious. We just wanted to tell you something...in person," she replied.

She was lying. She knew whatever it was that they were up to, I wasn't going to like it. But who was I to oppose? Besides, I didn't want to face Ian that morning either.

"I'll be there," I said.

"We'll be waiting," she said. "Sleep well."

"You too, Mom," I replied before hanging up.

I texted Isaac and explained to him on my need to travel immediately for a family emergency. He gave me the permission to leave. I didn't have Ian's number; I just assumed that Isaac would reach out to him. I told Ethan though and he wished me safe travels.

I still couldn't sleep until around four am.

Ian

"Good morning, sir," Isaac greeted me.

"Good morning," I replied.

I wasn't in the mood to correct him about him addressing me as sir.

“Congratulations on the operation yesterday. Mr Anderson has been recovering steadily. There's nothing wrong with his vitals,” he reported. “You've really outdone yourself this time.”

“It's not just me. I had all of you by my side,” I said.

“All of us? It was predominantly just you and Dr. James,” he reminded me. “That reminds me, she texted me this morning asking for an emergency leave. I approved it without consulting you.”

“No it's alright,” I said.

*Ethan, looks like the observatory visit will really have to wait.
My family summons me.*

I re-read the text.

“Is everything okay sir?” he asked. “You seem very out of it.”

“No it's nothing,” I replied. “I wasn't able to sleep properly last night. I didn't even leave my office.”

“Oh, I see,” he said and adjusted his glasses. “Shall I move all your appointments, the ones that aren’t emergencies so you can have some time to yourself.”

“No,” I said. “In fact, make sure I’m very occupied today.”

“What’s gotten into you?” he asked with a worried expression.

“I wish I knew,” I sighed as I laid my head on the desk.

I actually knew, but what was the point in admitting it? I was torn, thinking about how I was going to face her at the next morning. Maybe her departure would give me some time to think about my decision to deceive her. Still, I couldn’t stop thinking about it. My body still got hard as I remembered how she felt under me.

I had no idea she could be so small and fragile at the same time. Her lips and tongue still felt like they were in my mouth. I could still hear her moans, and whimpers. They haunted my ears and stirred my desire for her. I wondered if she really hated it.

Why did she stop? Because we were crossing the line? Or her loyalty to false Ethan. Maybe I would find out, once she returned.

Natasha

Maryland. Home. I had spent a lot of time traveling around the world; each time I came back home, it felt like a lot of things had changed or become brand new.

“Hey, princess,” Rachel’s familiar voice reached my ears.

She was standing beside my father’s Rolls Royce, along with my father’s driver.

“You look great, Harold,” I said to the driver.

“Welcome back, princess,” he said with a warm smile.

Because of how my parents treated me, everyone who worked for my family called me princess. I got tired of fighting or resisting it and just let them do whatever they wanted.

“You look wonderful. Richmond treated you well,” Rachel complimented me.

“I didn’t even see you once,” I frowned. “I thought you said you were going to be nearby?”

“I was nearby in the Maldives,” she replied as she opened the door for me to get in. “Now let’s hurry up and see why your father has summoned you.”

“My father? I thought my mother wanted this?” I asked.

“You’re very wrong, my friend,” she replied. “Seems serious.”

“Very,” I said.

It made me uneasy but then again my parents were never the types to make me do anything that wasn’t going to benefit me in one way or the other. At the same time, I was still worried.

“You okay? How did the Ethan hunt go?” she asked. “Any progress?”

“He says he hasn’t had his posse of women around for almost a year,” I replied. “I literally have no competition.”

“That’s a good thing right?”

“Absolutely.”

“Did you respond as aggressively as I taught you?” she asked.

“Yes, and every day after work, we’ve been going out. Parks, restaurants, you name it,” I answered beaming with pride. “Last night, I had an emergency case so Dr. Sullivan and I had to handle it, so I couldn’t go to the observatory with Ethan.”

“You’re really making a lot of progress,” she said with surprise. “How is working with the dark brooding twin like?”

I recalled the image of a certain brooding twin overpowering my body and giving into my desires as he devoured my body.

“It’s nothing special. But he is very talented,” I replied. “Watched him reattach a hand back to the arm.”

“That’s fucking awesome,” she said. “Why don’t you go for him instead?”

“Nah, I’m already making progress with Ethan. So there’s no need,” I offered.

I couldn’t tell her that I was already torn between two brothers because I feel an equal level of attraction between them.

“What do you think my father wants Harold?” I asked.

“I have absolutely no idea,” he replied.

“I thought men told their drivers everything?” I sighed.

“That would be our barbers, princess,” he replied.

“Right,” I chuckled.

The mansion looked like it needed some renovations - new coat of paint or something like that. I get that it had belonged to my grandparents and all, and Dad didn't want to alter the memory of whatever they left behind, but still...If I ever inherited it, the five bedroom mansion along with the living quarters for the staff was getting a new look.

As I stepped into the house, I was greeted by the staff who were busy cleaning or putting things in order. They only did things like this if they were expecting an important guest. I guess it has something to do with me being called back.

“Natasha, you're back,” Father announced with a relieved expression.

“Good morning, Father,” I greeted as he walked toward me with open arms.

I accepted his embrace, and he squeezed me a little too tight. There was something odd about it.

Even the way he looked at me.

“Want to tell me what’s up?” I asked. “Getting summoned by you means another mission I can’t technically say no to, isn’t it?”

“You don’t have to worry about that. You just got back and to be honest, we didn’t even talk about how your UN volunteering went,” he brushed it aside. “Have you had breakfast yet?”

“No, not yet,” I replied. “I expected a full course meal when I arrived.”

“And that you shall receive,” he said. “Go change. If you’re comfortable with what you’re wearing then that’s alright.”

I stared at my jeans and t-shirt and gave an approving nod. “I’m pretty comfortable.”

“Alright then, let’s have breakfast.”

Everything seemed normal. The staff didn’t seem to have any problems. Nor did they know anything. But my parents were

definitely hiding something, and I was getting sick of trying to figure out what it was. I didn't have to wait too long.

“Sir, Lawrence Williams has arrived,” Harold announced.

“Lawrence?” My eyes blinked rapidly.

I hadn't seen him in a while, only occasionally when I was in any country he had business in, and that was even two years prior. He walked into the dining room, dressed in some chinos, along with some shades and a plain shirt to match. He seemed taller than I remembered, but not as tall as my Ethan. I raced over to him and embraced him.

“Nice to see you too, princess,” he greeted as he embraced me in return.

It felt good to see an old friend again after so many years.

“How's the heir to William's Accounting firm, doing these days?” I asked as I pinched his cheeks.

“I'm not a kid anymore, you know that right?” he reminded me but didn't make any attempt to pull my hands away from his face.

He may be older, but at a point in life, I started to enjoy getting a kick out of teasing him. He didn't mind. He enjoyed it.

"I know. Your height doesn't mean you've grown beyond my attempts to tease you, big brother," I said.

"Ah...stop calling me big brother." His shoulders dropped.

It was the only thing I could see him as other than as a childhood friend. I was used to it. And he was too.

"I'm glad to see you two still get along," Mother said.

"Aunty James, you're still looking as beautiful as ever," Lawrence said as he made his way to Mother.

"Enough with the flattery." Mother rolled her eyes playfully but still accepted his embrace.

"Mr. James, thank you for having me over," Lawrence said as he exchanged handshakes with my father.

"You don't have to thank me. With all your family has done for us, it's only fair that we have you over," Dad replied.

"Do I smell cookies?" Lawrence asked.

“Yes. Natasha made some as she came back,” Mother said.

“I guess I’ll have her treat me to some then,” he said as he turned to look at me, seeking approval.

“You better not eat all of them,” I sighed as I made my way to the kitchen. “Come.”

“Yes, princess,” he said as he followed behind me.

From the corner of my eyes, I noticed the worried look on Mother’s and Father’s faces. They were smiling, but it just seemed like it was on the surface.

Strange.

I got into the kitchen and opened the jar. Pouring the contents into a tray.

“How have you been, Lawrence?” I asked.

“Well, I was in New Zealand just the other day,” he replied.

“Set up another branch in my father’s name.”

“Shouldn’t it be in your name?” I asked as I handed the tray over to him.

“You know how parents are. Leaving behind a legacy and whatnot,” he said as he wiggled his fingers, trying to select the cookie that would be his first victim.

“Lawrence, they all taste the same, just pick one for God’s sake,” I groaned.

“Don’t rush me.” He frowned and finally settled on one.

I selected another and returned the tray to the counter. I was proud of the cookies I had made.

When I returned to Richmond, I planned to bake some for Ethan...and maybe Ian to fix whatever weird patch that would come up between us.

“They’re delicious,” he said as he took another one. “You’d truly make a wonder wife.”

“Of course, I would,” I said smugly.

“Indeed,” he agreed and his voice was in a low growl.

For some odd reason, it unsettled me. It came to my attention at that moment that there were no staff in the kitchen. Strange because there was always at least one person there. Most especially when we had a guest and lunch time neared.

I thought nothing of it.

“What else have you been up to?” I asked.

“I was in a magazine. Picked up modeling,” he replied. “My aunt talked me into it.”

“Sarah always said you were her favorite,” I sighed.

“Meh. Did you know I was listed as one of the most eligible bachelors?” he asked.

“You’re finally ready to settle down?” I asked trying to hold back my laughter.

“Not yet, not really, but soon,” he replied, then he stretched his hand and grabbed a few strands of my hair as he pulled himself closer to me.

I took some steps back, until my back came in contact with the tabletop.

I swallowed and called out, “Lawrence?”

“Sorry, I forget how beautiful you get every time I run into you,” he said softly. “You’ve grown...a lot.”

“We both have,” I chuckled nervously as I placed my hand on his chest and pushed him back gently. “You also got bigger too. I can easily guess why they wanted to name you most eligible bachelor.”

“You should see the trolls they placed as eligible spinsters, almost made me barf,” he said as he gagged. “For a prince like me, it’s only fitting if my spinster was...a princess. Don’t you think? Especially one I’ve known for so many years.”

He was scaring me. I didn’t like the way he worded it.

“Always with the jokes,” I sighed and pushed him away putting some distance between us. “I know some very good looking women. If it’s a doctor you want with parents that spoiled her rotten, I know a few.”

“Come on, Natasha, you know my type: blonde hair and green eyes,” he said as he walked up behind me and held my waist from behind. “And a body modeled after a goddess. What’s your skincare routine? Some dermatologist secret common folk like me are restricted from ever finding out about?”

“I think my parents are going to be waiting for us,” I announced. I removed his hands from my waist. “You can have the rest of the cookies.”

“I thought you said I shouldn’t eat them all?” he asked but had already started scarfing them down.

“You seem to want them badly,” I offered.

“I rather have the baker, though,” he said with a smile as he bit into the cookie.

“Funny,” I replied with a forced smile. “I’ll tell the maids to get lunch started.”

As I returned to the dining area, Mother and Father seemed to be in a serious conversation.

“You took a while,” Mom said. “Was everything okay in there?”

“Everything’s fine,” I said with a forced smile. “I’ll head to my room and freshen up before lunch starts. Lawrence seems to be joining us too.”

“I might not eat a lot,” Lawrence said as he came out of the kitchen with the cookie tray in hand. “Have you had any of

this? Your daughter is exceptionally talented. Can't believe it's the same girl I grew up with."

I can't believe this is the same guy I grew up with either.

"We have something to discuss once lunch is ready," Father said to me.

"I'll be ready," I said as I made my way to my room.

In the solitude of my room, I realized something was definitely wrong. I didn't want it to be what I feared.

During lunch, we had duck à l'orange. My favorite. It felt like I was a prisoner being allowed to eat any food of her choice before being sentenced to death. I didn't like the feeling at all. We ate in silence, save for the occasional complimenting of the meal and asking to pass the sauce or so on and so forth.

"So you had something you wanted us to discuss?" I asked, breaking the silence.

Mother exchanged glances with my father; they looked over at Lawrence who seemed more interested in devouring the duck. At least his appetite and greed hadn't changed a bit.

“Sweetheart, there comes a time when a woman will want to settle down and start a family of her own,” Father started to say.

“Oh, marriage talk, thank God,” I let out a sigh of relief.

“You’re relieved?” Mom looked surprised.

“I am actually. I’ve been thinking of settling down too,” I replied. “I was worried you wanted to send me off to some far off place or re-enrol me in Rosemary’s Etiquette School’s Adult program.”

“They have an adult program?” Lawrence asked. “God, I hated that place.”

“Me too,” I sighed. “At least I know what spoon to use for dinner.”

“Well if you’re ready to settle down...” Father tried to steer the conversation back on track.

“I’m not ready as in immediately. But go on,” I corrected as I tried to cut the flesh of my bird.

I wouldn't want them taking my eagerness too seriously and make me rush my plans with Ethan. Not when I still had Ian problems.

“That’s understandable. It’s not an urgent matter, but we thought it’s something you should be aware of,” he continued. “About whom you’d be married to?”

“You got me a suitor?” I raised a brow, controlling my voice trying not to sound pissed off.

“Yeah, but we had to settle with someone you’d be comfortable with,” Mother replied.

“Is that right?” I put down my fork. “You mind telling me who my knight in shining armor is?”

“That would be me, Sir Lawrence Williams, your ladyship,” Lawrence said as he gave an exaggerated bow.

“Oh, my dear sir. You are far too gracious.” I played along and offered him my hand.

He kissed it. “Thank you, princess.”

I thought it was just a joke and even laughed along. But I noticed none of them were laughing.

Lawrence himself, seemed please.

“You’re serious?” I asked my father, and he nodded. I turned my attempt to my other parent. “You’re not joking?”

Mother shook her head negatively. “No, we’re not. Lawrence is your suitor.”

“I mean, if you think about it, makes perfect sense,” Lawrence said as he let go of my hand and continued his meal. “You’re a goddess, and I can be likened to a god. Both from respectable family with long ties. We grew up practically together. I know you like the back of my hand. That is, if you’ve not changed.”

“That doesn’t even...why do you keep doing this?!” I slammed my hand on the table, frightening my mother and startling my father.

“Ah shit, the wine,” Lawrence complained as the glass he had poured for himself spilled onto the table.

“Why don’t you two consult me about these kind of things? Why must you make decisions for me? Me, an adult? What the hell!” My voice got louder as I rose to my feet.

“Tone, princess,” Lawrence warned as he poured himself a glass. “You have the right to be angry, but remember you’re

talking to your parents. Lady Rosemary would probably have a discount for you if you were to return, so let's not make her any richer, shall we?"

I sat down.

"Sweetie, we aren't saying you have to get married to him immediately," Mother said.

"That's not even the problem, Lawrence is like a brother to me," I announced.

"Brother-zoned," Lawrence held his chest. "But last I checked you were the only one who decided that I was like a brother. I, on the other hand, have always seen you like a woman."

I frowned.

"Cool your mittens," he chuckled. "Like your mother said, we don't have to rush it. I just need us to meet at several times. If you don't find me suitable, then I back out. Simple."

When he gave that suggestion, I noticed Father visibly sweating. Something else was going on.

"Fine then," I agreed. "Try to sway my heart."

“There you go,” he smiled. “Now, pass me the sauce. The duck feels a little dry.”

I passed the sauce and continued my meal.

Again.

Even after they decided that I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. They still went behind my back and organised something as absurd as making Lawrence my suitor. I hated this. I had no other choice but to get ready to steel my heart against Lawrence and all his attempts. It shouldn't be hard to do.

My phone buzzed. It was a text from Ethan.

You doing okay? he asked.

I want to see you. When I get back, I replied.

My heart was already taken by two people already.

Chapter Seven

Kiss Me, Not Him

Ian

My throbbing dick was at the mercy of my hands. I stroked it gently, as I remembered her. I wondered how that mouth would feel on other parts of my body. Thanks for the lights in my office that day, I took a good look at her features.

Her breasts spilled out slightly. Her stomach had faint signs of abs that she had developed over time. Her hips were perfect. It was a shame I couldn't see what was behind her, but the rest was enough to fuel my imagination. Her body under my control made my member twitch in excitement. I continued my stroking, a little gentler this time. The softness of her body, under the influence of mine. Her moans, her whispers, her whimpers...if only she called my name. Just once, this process would have been a lot easier to imagine and achieve.

“Ha...” I threw my head back in pleasure as I remembered her hands pulling on my hair, while her tongue sought sanctuary in my mouth.

My bulge pressed down against her privates when she locked legs around me. It wasn't direct contact, but the heat I felt was enough to keep my member hard. I continued to stroke, imagining she was the one taking charge of my pleasure.

“Natasha...” I called her name softly; and in response, I got those gleaming green eyes to answer me.

I wondered what kind of face she would make. Would that defiant look remain on her face? Or something similar to what I was making? Pleasure completely taking over her face? I couldn't hold the thought as my climax took over.

“Ha... ha...” My breathing intensified as my stomach tightened.

I gave in to the release. Letting my juices soak my hands and dick.

“What am I? Some kind of teenager?” I asked myself as I forced myself out of the bed and straight to the sink to wash away my sins.

The hospital felt empty when I got there.

I had missed her. She didn't talk a lot with Ethan, besides the request to see him once she got back. I needed to apologize. But if I did, what next? Would I also tell her about Ethan? There should be no need to make her find three reasons or more to hate me. She was due to return two days after her trip to Maryland. So, I waited patiently for her return. Things were definitely going to change. For one, I knew she was not going to be changing in my office anymore.

Well, it would reduce the number of times that I leered at her. I would miss that. There was still something I wasn't able to understand: why was it very easy for me to talk to her as Ethan and not as myself? I sat down and went through the messages had I sent, using my fake persona. It didn't even seem that hard to do. I could just do the same thing.

“It will be weird,” I sighed. “That isn't me in the slightest. Just an image of what we both have of Ethan. Besides if I had known, I would have told her from the beginning. Then again it wouldn't have worked because she only started working here because she wanted to work with Ethan in the first place. If her crush was married, there was not going to be a need to work for him, and she wouldn't have met me as a staff.”

Don't you hate it when you present an argument to yourself and lose that argument against yourself? I gave up and decided to face her. The moment she came to the office and made any complaint, I would just apologize and start over again. Then maybe I'd tell her about the Ethan she was in love with.

There was a knock on my door and it opened. A certain blonde haired lady took a peak. Her emerald eyes glittered.

"Good morning, Ian," she greeted with a warm smile.

"Good- good morning, Natasha," I replied.

"Can I use your bathroom?" she asked as she let herself in.

I noticed the scrubs still in her hand. I didn't understand what was going on.

"Yeah you can," I replied. "You doing okay?"

"Yeah," she replied and fumbled through her bag, handing me some wrapped cookies. "I made them as payment for letting me use your bathroom."

"Thank you," I said as I accepted the treat. "I'm sorry for what I did."

“Don’t apologize. We’re adults. Things like that tend to happen,” she said as she placed her bag on the table and made her way to the bathroom. “Let me know what you think about the cookies.”

She was going to act like nothing happened. I don’t know why I was relieved and upset at the same time.

During our break, I found her sitting outside. I made a garden area for patients to sit and relax in. Served as a good place for people to talk too.

“Is the seat taken?” I asked as I pointed next to her.

“No, help yourself,” she said as she moved aside. She had a carton of Greek yogurt in hand along with the cookies she made.

Purely coincidental, but I was also with her cookies.

“You didn’t get any drinks to go with that?” she asked.

“Didn’t think about it,” I replied as I sat next to her.

I opened the wrapping and took a bite of the cookie. The deep chocolate flavor got me instantly.

“You really made these yourself?” I asked.

“Yes I did,” she replied. “You like them?”

“How many things do you know how to do exactly?” I asked as I stared at the cookie.

“Well, I can play the piano, ride a horse, cook, bake, and I know how to mix drinks. I’m a certified woman of high ethical standards. In medicine, I basically have a knowledge of every field that concerns the five senses and gynecology,” she replied.

“Natasha of all trades, master of baking?” I raised a brow as I took another bite, causing my vision to dim as I relished the taste.

“Not quite,” she said as she chuckled softly. “My parents made sure I was grounded in almost everything.”

“How did you end up making friends?” I asked.

“They selected friends for me,” she replied.

“That actually sucks.”

“Well in a way, everything they did, turned out to be for my own good,” she defended.

“Doesn’t give them an excuse to dictate your entire life for you,” I said as I took another bite, “Even if things turned out okay, that was only because you decided to hang in there and be strong. What if you broke in the process? Or what if one day, you’d finally snap and let them have it? That’s not turning out for your own good then. You were just lucky.”

I stopped talking. I had completely forgotten why people generally tended to avoid me. My harshness and brutality. Here I was thinking that I was going to be able to start all over again with her, but there I was talking ill about parents she took pride in.

I needed to apologize. “I...”

“You understand...” she said softly, surprising me as I turned to look at her.

Her eyes seemed glad.

“Pardon?” I raise a brow and she hugged me.

“God, they were so wrong about you,” she whispered.

“Who?”

“Never mind that,” she said as she let me go, “But you were completely right about the family situation. While I’m grateful that everything they made me do worked out for me; in the end, it was purely me due to my own and completely none of theirs.”

She paused and handed me the yogurt. I accepted it, still confused on why she took my words to heart rather than taking offense just the way the others did.

“You don’t know how many times I’ve wanted to yell at them for deciding each and every part of my life. Recently I gave in and finally yelled at them. But that was just it,” she continued. “I’m grateful for everything they did, but it didn’t have to come at the cost of my everything.”

“I’m actually surprised you didn’t get offended by what I said,” I said, still a bit surprised.

“Is that why you’re always alone?” she asked.

“Well people would rather be with my brother who’s carefree and energetic and understands how the social circles work,” I

replied, “than with someone who is too honest or harsh...or too cold.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“For believing false rumors about you,” she explained.

“So what do you think about me now?” I asked.

“A man who has been misunderstood but doesn’t take the right steps to correct the notions of himself that exist,” she said.

“Wow,” I chuckled as I took a sip of the yoghurt she gave me.

“When you put it that way, makes it feel like I’m the reason no one is approaching me.”

“We can be the source of our misfortune,” she said. “Takes guts to overcome. You look like you have the guts.”

I was the source of my own misfortune. My lack of confidence was what pushed me to take the identity of my brother just to be with the woman I wanted. I hadn’t heard of a more pathetic ordeal. I took another sip of the yogurt, but I could still feel her gaze. I turned and we locked eyes.

“You really have beautiful eyes,” I complimented her.

“Thank you,” she said as she pushed her hair behind her ear. “I don’t know if this sounds crazy or not. But it’s feels like you and I have met before.”

“We have? Definitely not med school,” I said.

“It’s just a hunch,” she said and looked away. She was talking about Ethan.

“Thank you for the company,” she said as she got to her feet. “I’ll go see if any of my patients are here.”

“Glad to see you’re enjoying yourself,” I muttered.

“Well, this is the only place I decided to work at without my parents decision,” she explained as she looked around us.

“I thought you wanted to work at Ethan’s?” I smirked.

“I got to reattach a hand. I think I’m pretty satisfied,” she replied with a smile. “Besides, this place is beauty focused. A paradise for a dermatologist like me.”

“What would you have done if your parents didn’t make you study medicine?” I asked.

“I... haven’t told anyone before,” she replied, then leaned in.
“Don’t laugh.”

“I swear.”

She looked at her left, and her right, then leaned in to whisper,
“I wanted to be an actress.”

“Really? Hollywood would have torn itself apart trying to get you to work for them,” I said.

“You’re just saying that,” she laughed.

“I mean think about it. If you’re able to put this much effort into achieving something like this, just because it’s something your parents wanted, imagine how much you’d achieve if it was something you genuinely wanted to do,” I explained.
“Besides, your beauty alone would make me buy each movie or series you’d star in.”

I could see her cheeks turn a slight shade of red, an expression she hadn’t even shown Ethan.

“Thank you...Ian,” she said as she hugged herself. “Feels good to know someone thinks one of my old dreams are still valid.”

“It’s never too late,” I said. “You could always switch.”

“I think I’ve gotten attached to medicine to a point it isn’t a problem,” she said. “But thank you still.”

“Take it as thanks for the cookies and yoghurt,” I said with a smile.

She smiled back and turned to leave. As I watched her walk away, I felt at peace.

I left the office earlier to get ready for my, Ethan’s, date with her after work hours. I didn’t put much thought into my outfit. I looked presentable. As for my hair, I got it wet and tussled it with my hands to get the image of a messy yet sexy mane. As I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt like I was slowly becoming a different version of myself - one I never knew.

I was losing my sense of identity and only used this face because it was the available one that made me able to talk to her properly. But wasn’t that just an illusion I fed myself? Earlier that day, she and I had talked extensively. She was even comfortable with telling me her struggles. Plus, she wasn’t offended when I spoke my mind to her. She didn’t even seem to mind what had happened the last time in my office.

Maybe, she wanted to end things with Ethan? I dismissed the thoughts and tried to focus on my date.

I picked her up from the hospital. I knew I had already seen the outfit she wore but this was Ethan's first time to see it.

"Do you show up to work looking all beautiful like that?" I asked as I held the door open for her.

"Of course," she said as she whipped her hair before getting into the vehicle.

I smiled and closed the door.

"How was work today?" she asked as I started the vehicle.

"Swimmingly as usual," I replied and started to drive, "What about you?"

"It was a fulfilling day," she said. "Your brother taught me a lesson."

"Should I be worried?" I asked.

“What? No,” she replied. “He just said what had been on my mind.”

“Understandable. He does that sometimes. People would take offence, so if he offended you...”

“That’s the thing, I wasn’t even offended,” she replied. “He’s a good guy.”

My hands tightened on the steering wheel. I’m him.

“So where’s the observatory? I already have a name in mind for my star,” she said. “How does Nathan sound?”

“Nathan?”

“It’s a little cringe and corny, but it’s a play on both our names.”

“Oh, I get it now,” I chuckled. “For a talented person as yourself, you suck at naming things.”

“Oh hush,” she sucked her teeth and focused outside the window. “Ethan, can I hold your hand while you drive?”

“Sure,” I agreed and opened my palm.

She held it. Her hands were so small and soft. If I tightened my grip around her hand, I was sure I would have broken her hand. It felt nice.

“Your hands are definitely too big,” she said without looking.

“Maybe your hands are just too small,” I said.

“No they’re perfectly sized,” she argued.

“Whatever you say your majesty,” I gave in.

For the rest of the ride, I held her hand, and she did, mine only letting go when it was time to change or shift gears.

Best ride ever.

When we got to the mini observatory, she was visibly excited to be there.

“The telescopes are over there,” the guide said as he pointed us to the direction.

We observed the stars in the night sky, along with the other heavenly bodies.

“I can see Venus,” she announced and focused through the lens.

“That’s the moon,” I pointed out.

“Oh,” she sounded disappointed then turned the telescope in another direction. “But still this is amazing.”

“You really like stars?” I asked.

“Not exactly, I just realised I have never been to any kind of observatory, mini or macro,” she replied. “Also I don’t have a smartphone to keep me up to speed.”

“It’s still weird that you use an old model phone,” I muttered.

“I’m going to get one soon,” she said while still focusing through the lens. “I need a way to take photos of you or something.”

I placed my hand in my pocket and pulled out my phone. As she was immersed in her work, I took a photo of her.

“Something like this?” I asked.

She looked up and at the phone, a smile formed on her face. “Something like that. You can keep the photo. Think about me when you sleep.”

“Well, I don’t need a photo to do that,” I said aloud.

It was meant to be an internal thought but I let it slip. She blushed.

Did I just score a point for Ethan?

“I.. I see,” she said with a flustered expression and continued her stargazing. “Ah, a shooting star. Quick make a wish.”

I looked up and saw the flicker of light that slid across the sky. I wasn’t the kind of man who believed in wishes but in a silent whisper, I placed my hope in the star. “I want her to want the real me. And maybe I’ll be brave enough to face her directly.”

“What did you wish for?” she asked.

“I asked for more patients in my hospital,” I replied.

“Did you just ask for more people to fall sick or get involved in perils, just so you can have people to treat?” she asked.

“I didn’t think too deeply about it,” I said as I rubbed the back of my head. “What about you? What did you wish for?”

“It’s a secret,” she whispered. “Now let’s get those milky way shaved ice.”

She held my arm and led me to the stands. We played some games, trivia, and I got her some shaved ice. I had rented a private room that had a simulated view of the night sky on the ceiling, along with other things in the cosmos. There were bean bags we could lounge in. Moving them close to each other, we lay on our backs and watched the stars. This was the furthest I had gone with any woman in the past five years.

“It’s peaceful,” she remarked.

“I know, right?” I asked. “I can stay like this all day.”

“Are you falling for me yet, Ethan?” she asked.

“Might be a little too late to ask that,” I replied.

“Nice,” she said. “Can I...kiss you?”

I remembered when I kissed her. But her actions then and now were completely different. She was softer now. I turned to look at her. Her emerald eyes darkened, yet still manage to shine under the influence of the artificial stars.

“It’s okay if you say no,” she said softly.

“I’m not going to say no,” I said.

Unlike the last time, she took the lead this time, getting on my beanie bag and lying on me. Her small yet curvy frame graced my body. Her hair spilled onto my face. She held her hair up to stop them from touching my face. Then she came closer, her eyes closed and her lips slightly parted as she kissed my lips gently. Just like it had been, it was brief; she pulled away to see if I was okay with it. I swallowed and stared at her. Taking it as a sign of approval, she continued. She kissed me again, her hands taking my head.

She paused. “Touch me...Ethan.”

Another thing she didn’t do with Ian. Call my name. I touched her hips, and went lower to her ass, squeezing it gently. My fingers sunk into her like she was made out of Japanese milk bread.

“Yes...” she groaned as she lowered her head and kissed me back.

Our heads turned as we continued to consume each other’s lips.

“Ethan...Ethan...” she called repeatedly as she kissed my neck and bit me.

Her hands went under my shirts and touched my stomach. I slid my hand into her skirt and squeezed her ass directly, even with the protection of her panties. She licked my neck before returning for my lip. I stuck my tongue out and she accepted it. Sucking gently.

“Mmm...” Her moans of satisfaction got to me.

The timer started to ring. We had exhausted the time we were meant to use the room.

“That was... refreshing,” she remarked.

“I could rent a longer time,” I offered.

“We both have lives to save tomorrow,” she reminded me.

“And I need my beauty sleep along with my skincare routine.”

“Fair enough,” I sighed and kissed her one last time.

I dropped her off at the apartment and drove home. It was official. She wanted Ethan more than she wanted Ian. That night was a definite loss for me.

My phone buzzed. It was a text from her.

Come back.

Chapter Eight

With the Older Twin

Natasha

I felt conflicted. It has been medically proven that twins - although they may look alike - have no shared DNA. I don't mean in a sibling way but in other areas like not having matching thumbprints and the like. They may look alike, but one would be at least shorter, leaner or something. There's always a difference.

As a dermatologist and a doctor in general, I had attended to triplets or twins, so I was aware of what I was talking about. One of the twins could have a particular pattern of speech, while the other would be completely different.

They may not even like the same things. If they were lucky to have parents who didn't force them to wear the same things, most of them would have a sense of identity, making them easily identifiable by people outside their family. That was

supposed to be the case. Even in a marriage, it was easy to tell the true partner from the other. I had heard there was a woman who could easily tell which twin was her husband; just by looking at her husband, her heart would pound. But looking at his twin, she would feel nothing.

That was supposed to be the case. But why couldn't I tell them apart? Why was my heart tricking me? As I kissed Ethan, all I could remember was my kiss with Ian in his office. Even the way he held me. It was like how Ian would have held me if I didn't stop him the last time.

I called Ethan's name repeatedly to make the thoughts of his brother disappear completely. And they didn't...I needed a proper brainwashing. Don't get me wrong: the kiss, the holding, the loving was enough to get me turned on. Even as he offered to pay for extra time, I wanted him to do so. I held on to my last cell of restraint to not get him to pay for it. But as I got home, my body started to demand for him again.

The silliest of ideas came to mind. If I got him to make out with me again, then maybe I'd finally stop thinking about Ian. Sure he was a nice guy. He was talented and told me the words I thought no one would ever tell me. He was misunderstood by me and even supported dreams that I had long given up.

My heart came to Richmond for Ethan: I didn't come here for Ian. I couldn't risk my budding relationship with Ethan for

anything. I had asked him to come back, so I changed into my night gown. A little green transparent item. With no bra, just my panties. All we were going to do was kiss. I want to at least give him something to touch or play with while our mouths exchanged pleasantries.

There was a knock on my door. I opened it, and he was there.

“You asked me to come back. If it’s killing a roach I...” He stopped talking as he looked at me, “What are you...”

I pulled him inside and closed the door behind him. I pushed him against the door and started to kiss him aggressively.

“Nat...wait...”

“Ethan, I’m sorry but just do this...” I pleaded as I placed his arm between my legs and against my panties, “Please...”

He heard my plea and kissed me back. He held my hips and lifted my gown. He started to grope my ass. I guess he was that type. He spread the cheeks open, and I started to feel a little naughty.

My tongue was taken captive in his mouth as he started to suck gently on it.

I closed my eyes and gave into the pleasure. My hands started to explore his body; soon enough, they had taken off his shirt. I kissed his body. With his broad chest and well defined abs, I realized that he took his workouts seriously. My hands went lower and I touched his bulge. The hardness present got me shaking a little.

“Where’s your room?” he asked.

I held his hand and led him to it. He helped me out of my gown and embraced me again. Holding me tightly, he uttered, “You feel so right.”

His whisper of praise delighted me. He kissed my neck and went lower capturing my breast in his mouth. My nipples stiffened in response as he started to suck gently. I bit my lower lip to suppress my moans. He started to suck harder and harder. As he switched to my other nipple, his hands kept my freshly sucked tits company, pinching me and squeezing as well.

I thought I was going to stop at just kisses?

He kissed my neck and returned to my mouth. We kissed deeply, and I was losing my breath.

His hand started to greet my panties, gently rubbing against my privates through the fabric.

His finger started to stroke my clit, and with the aid of the fabric brushing against me, I was feeling extra hot.

“Ethan...wait...” I said as I held the hand in question.

The plan was to push his hand away and just focus on kissing. But I didn't. He paused to see what I intended to do but didn't completely pull his hand away. When he noticed that my attempt to push him away was just a bluff, he continued to touch me, gently rubbing my privates. He even moved my panties aside and touched me directly. I closed my eyes and let him do what he wanted. His fingers were bigger than mine, and he gently rubbed me in a circular motion. I was even moving my hips in a motion to match his movements.

“Haha...” I started to pant heavily. He kissed my forehead to help me feel at ease.

I could tell that I was soaking his fingers properly as he started to move faster, filling the air with the sounds of my wet pussy.

“You hear it, don't you?” he asked.

“I do....” I replied weakly.

“Can you handle three?” he asked and without even waiting for my response, he added the third finger, pressing and

rubbing against me gently.

I wrapped my hands around his neck and steadied myself as he started to rub even faster than before.

“Fuck!” I groaned as I started to dig my fingers into his shoulders. “Hold on, hold on...”

I actually meant it this time and he listened, letting me go.

“It won’t be fair if...I was the only one feeling good,” I said as I tried to catch my breath.

I got on my knees and kissed his bulge over the pants he wore, before helping him out of them.

His length was even more frightening in person, and his girth. I started to wonder if I had packed any lube to help with it. He was magnificently hung, although he was half erect. I held him gently in my hand, and my first instinct was to sniff him. Because, you have to smell your food before you eat.

As I inhaled deeply, his dick got harder, until he became fully erect. I didn’t put the entire thing in my mouth. I kissed the sides first, licking them too before turning my attention to the tip. He placed the length in my mouth and he tasted good.

I wonder if Ian would also taste like this?

I blinked twice wondering where the question came from. I closed my eyes and focused on sucking. His tip was under my mercy.

“That’s very... sensitive,” Ethan warned as I sucked heavily while his breathing also increased to match my pace.

He held my head to slow me down and possibly get me to calm down. Did I listen? No.

“Easy Natasha,” he warned.

“Nuh uh,” I shook my head negatively and continued to stubbornly suck his tip off.

He held my head and forcefully shoved the rest of his length into my mouth. It filled me to the brim, and he knocked at my throat. He moved his hips gently, rutting in my mouth but not hard enough to choke me, or cause me to gag.

I felt better than I thought I would. I pulled my head backward, freeing his dick and switching to just using my hands. His throbbing member in my hand warned me that he was approaching a climax. I took half of him in my mouth and stroked his remaining half. I went as fast as I could until he

released. His hot thick fluid trickled down my throat, and I swallowed as much as I could.

“Gawd...” I pulled him out and forcefully swallowed whatever was left in my mouth.

He was still hard.

“You tired already?” he asked. “What’s that about having lives to save tomorrow?”

Tomorrow...hospital...Ian.

No, it wasn’t enough.

“I can’t let you go home like this, now can I?” I asked. I stroked his dick, and he looked at me with a look that seemed to say, *Your words...not mine.*

“But my mouth has had enough,” I sighed.

“Your hands will do,” he said.

“When it comes to intercourse, women have three orifices,” I reminded him as I wiped him dry of his seed with my gown he had taken off earlier.

I got to my feet and pushed him on the bed. He stared at me with anticipation as I straddled him. Bringing his erect dick against my panties, I moved it aside and let his tip kiss my slit. He let out a deep growl as I continued to tease him. Not putting him inside me, just rubbing gently.

“Put it in,” he ordered.

“What’s the magic word?” I smirked as I continued to use him to pleasure myself.

“Please Natasha,” he pleaded.

“Perfect,” I growled as I started to move.

Fitting his dick in me wasn’t as easy as I thought it would be. Well, I didn’t think it would be easy, but I didn’t expect it to be that hard, either.

“Need help?” he asked; although my eyes were closed, it was easy to picture the smug look he had on his face.

I nodded quickly and he held my hips, gradually pulling me down properly. I could tell he lifted his hips to help me out. I gasped as the rest of his length made it into me. He pushed my walls aside and they wasted no time to tighten around him.

“So tight...” he groaned as he still helped me to get settled.

I waited for my insides to get used to him. It was strange because I could feel him pulsing deep and it was turning me on, generating enough natural lube to keep the both of us going. I leaned forward and took his lips. He accepted and kissed me back. I leaned back and he lowered his legs. Using them as support, I started to move my hips in a circular motion.

He looked at me with eyes that said, *You're doing great.*

I kept up the pace, moving as fast as my body would let me, until he sat upright and held me down. He pushed me down, and I wrapped my legs around his waist. Then he started to move. He went deeper and faster than I had when I was on top.

“Natasha, you sweet little princess,” he whispered as he moved.

“Yes...”

“Who’s a good girl?”

“Me.”

“You can take me, can’t you?”

“Yes...”

He seemed to get bigger each time I answered. His rhythm intensified, and I found myself screaming in pleasure.

“Shhh... good girls don’t yell,” he reminded me. “Rosemary Etiquette School.”

To think he’d use something I grew up with and turn it dirty. I was enjoying this. He pulled out and made me hug my pillow. I embraced it a little too tightly and bit into the pillow as he returned his dick inside me. He moved faster and faster. His body slamming against my ass while punishing my pussy wasn’t something I pictured would ever happen, even with all my perverted fantasies.

I was getting close. He started to bite into my neck, causing sparks in my body, and setting me on fire.

“Ethan... Ethan... I’m getting...” I tried to warn him. I attempted to escape from under him, clawing my way out.

He pinned my hands down. “Not yet, princess, hang in there.”

“I can’t...”

“Sure you can,” he insisted. “You can do anything.”

I managed to hang in there and nodded in response.

“There you go,” he said with pride.

He kissed my shoulders and started to move again. He got down from the bed and lifted me. He pinned me to the wall, aggressively taking my pussy as his own. My mouth was silenced with his mouth. The kissing, the fucking...there was only so much my mind could take.

I couldn't hang in there anymore and just let myself go. My orgasm took over, drenching him and the floor. He lowered me to the floor as he stroked his dick violently. I accepted him in my mouth, as the only way to calm him down as I was unable to finish him off properly with my lower mouth.

As he released, I let him paint my face.

“Good girl,” he praised as he stroked my hair.

In the bathroom, he helped wash me clean. It had been years since I had been bathed by anyone, much less a man. As I

returned the favor and washed him. I don't know why, but I had several questions about his body. It felt like there was a detail missing, but I couldn't quite remember what it was.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"No, it's just..." I shook my head and continued to clean him. "For a very long time, I had imagined or dreamed of something like this happening. I'm glad it did. I know it might not be anything special to you, but..."

"Don't say that," he said as he lifted my chin to look at him.

I knew his eyes were brown, but were they always this light in color? Maybe it was the lights playing tricks on me.

"I can easily guess why your thoughts are that this isn't special to you because of my history, but I assure you that you are special," he avowed.

Again, I knew it was Ethan with me. But maybe, because of the water that made his hair lie smoothly backward, it felt like it was Ian talking to me. The brutal honesty in his eyes too. For some odd reason, it made his words have extra effect. Even when we met in med school, Ethan's words didn't echo as deeply.

“Natasha,” he called. “I want you to know that you are very special, and there’s nothing that will change that.”

“I hope so too,” I smiled.

It’s Ethan. Not Ian.

“You’re special to me...Ethan,” I said.

I said his name to remind me of my main focus or concern. As we settled down to sleep, I noticed my phone was beeping. A text. Lawrence had texted. He was in Richmond and wanted to meet. The last thing I wanted was to see me at the hospital, with Ian and ruin anything.

Wait.. shouldn't I be more worried about him ruining things with Ethan? Ethan's practically sleeping in my bed.

“Is something wrong?” Ethan asked. “You look stressed.”

“A family member is coming to see me. I’m wondering if it’s possible to ask Isaac for another break. I don’t know how Ian will react considering I just got back,” I explained.

“You can go, I’ll talk to him,” he said.

“He’ll listen?”

“I’m his older brother, he always listens. Just make it up to him,” he said.

“Make it up to him?” I raised a brow.

“I, uh...”

“Did he tell you about the cookies?” I furrowed my brows.

“Yes he did,” he laughed. “I was wondering when I was going to get mine.”

That’s right, I forgot to give him some. Strange...

“I’ll make some for you, sometime,” I promised.

“Did he mention anything else?” I asked as I put my phone down and lay down, facing him.

“Are you sure you want me to tell you? It’s kind of a sibling thing,” he said.

“Come on... make an exception for me,” I pleaded.

“Fine....” he sighed. “He talked about how intelligent you were. He also mentioned something about you being a good actress if you wanted to. Told me that your colleagues and patients have been leaving good reviews about you too...”

I don't know why, but as he mentioned everything Ian had said about me, it felt like I was listening to Ian himself telling me everything about me that he found fascinating.

My mischievous smile.

How I showed up to work looking more beautiful than the last.

The way I carried myself.

My eagerness to learn.

How I craved being alone sometimes.

The fact I should open a bakery, or a confectionery store.

Everything Ethan said didn't sound like things Ian had told him. It felt like I was hearing it directly from Ian himself. As Ethan spoke about them, he seemed excited to mention everything he had learned about me. I don't know...I was still picturing Ian talking. I'll blame it on how relaxed his hair looked and how cold yet warm his voice was. It seemed as he

relaxed after the shower, he had slipped into an image of his younger brother.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d say he was in love with you,” he concluded with a smile that didn’t seem to be troubled by the fact that his younger brother could be a potential rival in the chase for my heart.

I placed my hand in his cheek and took a good look at him.

“Ethan?” I called.

“Yes? Did I talk too much?” he asked.

“No, you said enough,” I replied. “Shows how interested you are to even ask your brother about me.”

“Yeah,” he smiled.

“Thank you.” The grin formed easily.

My eyes started to close, as sleep crawled in. He held me close to himself. As I drifted off into sleep, I swear I could hear him say, “Just a little more.”

I woke up and Ethan wasn't there. It was almost Nine am, so he left early. Left me a note too, thanking me for last night and looking forward to more dates. I smiled at the letter.

I wanted to make you breakfast too, but noticing how tired you were,

it's easy to know you'd wake up late.

I've spoken to Ian, you don't have to come to work today.

Be sure to rest up and have a great day.

He wanted to make me breakfast too, but I guess he didn't want to interrupt my beauty sleep. Everyone seemed to do that. Even back home, they'd let me sleep in. Well, except Rachel. I wanted to get ready to go to work, but I remembered I was supposed to meet with Lawrence. I called the man.

"Good morning princess," he greeted me cheerfully. "Trust you had a splendid night."

An image of Ethan standing over me with his cum decorating my face flashed across my mind.

"Yes, I did. You?" I asked as I placed the phone on loudspeaker and got started on my crunches.

“I could hardly sleep, thinking about our date today that is,” he replied. “I’m sure you were thinking about it too.”

“No, I wasn’t,” I replied.

“Is that groaning I hear? Don’t tell me my voice is enough to get you going?” he asked.

“Don’t be disgusting,” I said as I squeezed my face in disgust.

I concluded my crunches and got to my squats.

“Fine, fine,” he sighed. “I’ll come to your place by twelve. Then we’ll have lunch. Talk and all that.”

“Why exactly am I doing this again?” I asked as I got into a plank.

“You promised your parents you’d give me a chance,” he reminded me. “Not that I really need any chance. Come on you’ve known me for years. You know I’ve always desired you.”

“Lawrence don’t say it like that. You’re tainting the good memories I had with you,” I warned as I moved into the cobra position, stretching my abdomen. Wouldn’t want any love handles.

“You always knew though. Didn’t you? That’s why you tried to force the image of the brother figure on me,” he continued.

“I won’t deny that,” I sighed as I got up.

I found my panties and night gown from the previous night, washed and folded. I smiled. Ethan must have woken up early and handled them himself. Someone clumsy as he was, I half expected he’d ruin them, but they looked fine. The thought that he held my panties that had been soiled last night seemed to excite me.

My left hand touched my privates as I brought the washed panties to my nose. I remembered how he took care to bathe me last night. He had also helped wash my privates too - very dangerous play that could have easily gotten me on fire. I have my tiredness to thank for that.

I started to rub myself...

“Natasha? Natasha!” Lawrence’s annoying voice shattered my concentration.

“What?!” I yelled.

“Why are you yelling at me?” he asked. “Anyway, make sure you’re dressed to impress. Unlike you I’m very active on social media. If the press takes pictures of us, I want us to look good. Then after lunch, we can go to your house, watch a movie or something. Or maybe my hotel.”

“Just lunch, Lawrence,” I said and hung up.

I let out a sigh and lay on the bed. Bringing my washed panties to my nose, I got back to what I was doing.

As he promised, he was at my door at noon sharp. He was dressed in a black Armani suit with a white dress shirt, and a tie. He looked like he was on his way to receive an award or something.

“You’re underdressed,” he remarked.

I took a look at the sleeveless dress I wore that stopped at my knees, adorned with a bit of jewelry. It gave me a princess feel, and I felt comfortable.

“Lawrence, it’s noon. We’ll be going for lunch, and it’s fucking hot out there; if anything, I’m overdressed,” I replied.

“God you look so sexy when you’re angry,” he said as he made a dirty look.

“What the hell happened to you exactly?” I asked in disbelief.

“Just like you, I grew up,” he said and offered me his hand. “I brought my phantom. Remember the one I got you for your birthday?”

“That was you?” I asked as I accepted his hand. “The card said it came from Uncle Williams.”

“Princess, you’ll soon learn that whatever my father wills your family, is also my will,” he said.

It felt like there was a hidden meaning behind those words but I didn’t bother. On our way to the restaurant of his choice, we drove past the four star one Ethan had taken me to.

“Can we go to that one?” I asked.

“A four star restaurant?” he scoffed. “Don’t tell me spending a year in those remote areas have also made you poor mentally.”

I frowned at him, “I would not be spoken to like that ever again.”

“Relax. You get so feisty these days,” he sighed as he adjusted his tie. He reached for my hand, “Listen, you’re a goddess, and I need to make sure you only eat at the best. Okay? Remember, I’m trying to sway your heart here. I can’t afford to do anything less.”

“Right,” I said as I pulled my hand away. “I forgot about that.”

“You’ll thank me later,” he said with a smile.

We arrived at his choice, a fancy restaurant I’ve heard about before. Before we got in, Lawrence wanted to have a word with his driver so I waited for him.

“Oh, I recognize you,” a young man said.

I recognized him too; it was the guide from the mini observatory.

“You’re the guide to the stars,” I teased.

“Ah, that’s a good one,” he laughed and offered his hand. “I’m Tim Daniels, the owner of the project.”

“Dr. Natasha James,” I said as I accepted his hand. “I really enjoyed your observatory.”

“Thank you. It’s only a small project, and it wouldn’t have been possible without sponsorship from star loving citizens in Richmond,” he said. “It was just a project by myself and some of my colleagues at the college I study.”

“Oh you’re still in college? That’s impressive,” I said. “It’s amazing people were able to support you.”

“Well you have to thank Dr. Ian Sullivan for that. You were with him that day right?” he asked.

“No, that was Ethan,” I explained.

“Really? I can never tell those two apart,” he sighed.

Me neither.

“So what’s the next project?” I asked. “It’s a shame it was a one-off event.”

“Well, I’m....”

“Alright I’m done, let’s head in,” Lawrence announced as he walked up to us and uttered, “Who’s this?”

“Lawrence, this is Tim Daniels. He organised a project I attended yesterday. A mini observatory, I’ve never been to one before,” I explained.

“A mini? You don’t have an official one?” Lawrence asked.

“Well it was just a project by me and some other college student. We can go bigger with time,” Tim replied.

“Oh he’s seeking a grant. I don’t know about giving money to college students, princess,” Lawrence sighed. “Might end up using them to pay off student loans.”

“Lawrence!” I frowned.

“What?” he shrieked.

“You can visit during our next program,” Tim said, completely ignoring Lawrence’s rude comment.

Tim brought out his card and handed it to me. “You can follow our socials here or reach out to me through any of the twins.”

“Thank you. I look forward to it,” Lawrence said as he took the card from Tim.

“Right. See you around, Mr. Williams, Dr. James,” Tim said before leaving.

“I’m sorry about this, see you soon, Tim,” I said and waved goodbye.

“Did I ever mention my surname?” Lawrence asked as he thought about it.

“What exactly is your problem, Lawrence? That was rude and uncalled for.” I frowned.

“Don’t wrinkle your skin, princess,” he said as he reached for my face, but I slapped his hand away. “Getting angry over common folk.” Then he murmured, “I told your parents letting you travel around the world would taint you.”

“He wasn’t seeking your help nor mine,” I said, trying my best to keep my voice down. “Now would you kindly give me his card or I go home immediately.”

“Fine, here,” he handed me the card. “You really are odd lately.”

Odd? Me? Was Lawrence always like this? Cruel and mean?

I accepted the card and joined him in the restaurant. The meals were subpar to what Ethan had treated me to. The conversations were dry too, unless you found Lawrence's boastings to be entertaining. At the end of the date, I was exhausted.

"It's a shame, I wanted to see you work at the hospital," he said with a sigh as he dropped me off at my house.

"Do not, visit me at the hospital," I warned. "Call me before any visit, or text, just like you did. Nothing else. I'm only agreeing to this because my parents asked me to. No other reason."

"Fine, let's go have dinner inside then," he said as he attempted to follow me into the house, but I stopped him and got behind the door.

"Good night, Lawrence," I muttered before closing the door.

"Meanie," I could hear him say.

I can't believe the kind of mess my parents had gotten me into.

Chapter Nine

Something Wrong

I^{an}

I took in a deep breath and knocked on the door.

“I’ll get it!” Her sweet voice reached the door before she could.

“Don’t run!” her mother warned.

“You’re a nurse, you can easily handle it,” her father said.

I could hear the rushing of her feet and the door opened.

“Uncle Ian!” Chloe greeted as she jumped repeatedly for me to lift her.

I carried her as she wished.

“God, you’re turning seven this year, I can’t keep lifting you,” I sighed.

“Of course you can. Uncle Ethan said he would too,” she said.

This kid was just seven and she already knew how to emotionally blackmail people. Her father had every right to worry when he talked about how intelligent she was.

“Oh look who’s here,” Olivia said as she waved from the kitchen.

“Good evening Olivia, where’s the giant?” I asked.

“That’s big brother giant to you,” Ben said as he played with Sophia his second daughter.

The baby spotted me and started to giggle.

“Great, he stole another one,” Ben said with exaggerated sigh.

If there’s one thing good about me, children seemed to like me.

“Uncle Ian, I aced my math test,” Chloe announced. “And Sophia can stand on her own now.”

“You did? And she can?” I asked.

“See for yourself,” Chloe said as she struggled to get down from my hand, but I refused to drop her, “Let me go.”

“Only if you promise not to run,” I warned.

“I promise,” she said with an impish smile.

“Good,” I put her down.

“Ah, I crossed my fingers,” she said as she showed me her fingers, before speeding off.

“Be careful Chloe,” Olivia warned.

“Ah, just let her run. When she falls, she’ll be more careful next time, worked for Ian,” Ben said.

“Didn’t work for Ethan though,” I reminded him.

There was a thud, followed by, “I’m okay!”

“For God’s sake woman, be careful!” Ben yelled. “Are you hurt?”

“No!” she replied. “I’m looking for my math scores.”

Sophia seemed eager to show me she could stand too, trying to get out of her father’s grip.

“Fine, fine I’ll let you go.” Ben gave up and put her on the ground.

She crawled to the nearest chair and held herself up. Then she started to bounce as I watched her.

Technically she wasn’t standing on her own, but it was an achievement her sister and her were proud of.

“Isn’t she nine months old?” I asked.

“Weaned herself at seven months,” Olivia reported.

“I stopped asking questions about how fast kids grow after Chloe,” Ben added. “Her teachers are asking me to move her to the next class.”

“Your complaining, but mom says you were the same,” I said.
“I just pray none of your daughters inherits your height.”

“Amen,” they chorused.

They seemed worn out but I could tell that the both of them were proud of their children.

“Uncle Ian, here it is,” Chloe said as she showed me her paper.

“An A+? Didn’t fail a single question,” I remarked as I read through the questions and answers. “Would you want to go to another class?”

“That won’t be fair to my friends,” she said.

“Boy, I can’t wait for you to get into high school,” I chuckled.

“What brings you here?” Ben asked.

“Day off,” I replied as I sat next to Sophia and lifted her on my laps. I motioned for Chloe to come, “What would you like as a reward?”

“Ice cream,” she replied. “Chocolate.”

Sophia started to babble almost like she was making a demand too.

“I’ll have strawberry.” Ben placed his own order.

“None of you are having ice-cream,” Olivia said. “Ben you just recovered from a cold. And Chloe you have a loose tooth. Sophia you’re too young. But I’ll have a banana flavored one.”

“Nice try, didn’t you mention a diet?” Ben asked.

“Tch.” Olivia sucked her teeth in defeat as she retreated to the kitchen.

Watching them made me a little envious. My siblings had all started families of their own and then there was me, still unable to start mine. Playing with an innocent girl’s emotions. Sophia started pulling on my hair. Because I was lost in thought, I didn’t even notice when she stood up to start attacking my hair. I tried to pull her away from my hair and she stared at me in surprise.

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Ben warned.

Sophia yelled and started attacking my face trying to chew my cheek.

“Baby attack,” Chloe giggled.

“Alright let the young man go,” Olivia said as she pulled Sophia away; she still seemed intent on eating me.

Not going to lie that was the cutest thing I had ever seen.

“Chloe go have your bath and get ready for dinner,” Olivia said.

“Alright, Mom,” Chloe agreed and got out of the chair, ready to have dinner.

“So what have you been up to?” Ben asked. “Heard you reattached an arm.”

“News travels fast,” I said.

“It’s good news,” he said. “Although I think everyone still wants to know how he was careless enough to get his hand severed. A case like that would require a keen level of concentration.”

“I had to recall various instances in my head,” I admitted. I remembered how tense I was during the operation.

“I’m willing to bet that Ethan wouldn’t have been fazed,” he said. “It’s ironic that difficult cases that would make any

doctor fear or panic, he'd be able to handle it. Like when he treated Olivia while I panicked.”

As Ben recalled the memory, he touched his own head.

“It’s unfair how the most careless one has the highest success rates,” I said.

It was common practice. While Ethan seemed to envy both of us, Ben and I found it a little humiliating. I had watched Ethan reattach severed limbs to the point where I once saw him yawning. Ben and I had saved lives, yes. Ben’s transplants saved lives, my surgery transformed lives, but it felt like Ethan decided that some people weren’t meant to die as long as he handled their lives.

The man with machine-like hands. Well, it was relaxing to know that he was a total idiot. Then again, it was very easy for him to get any woman he desired, even the one I wanted.

“That reminds me, and I know it’s none of my concern but when are you planning to settle down?” Ben asked.

“Mom put you up to this?”

“In a way, yes,” he admitted. “But call it brotherly worry. I know you don’t seem to care but you actually worry about

having a family of your own. We left you out, didn't we, little brother?"

"You did nothing," I said, "If you think about it, I'm only lonely because I chose to hide and assume the worst."

A lesson I've learned all too late.

"You don't know anyone that can excite you a little? You could always try the staff approach, worked for me and Ethan," he suggested.

"You don't have to worry about that," I said. "I'll find a way."

"If you say so," he said, signaling the end of the topic.

We knew better than to cross the line once one of us didn't want to talk anymore.

"Sorry to intrude, gentlemen. Just want you all to know that dinner will take a while, so just get the ice cream," Olivia said.

"Need help?" Ben asked.

"Chloe wants to help, so I'm good," she replied. "But we need more fruit."

“You guys don’t do candy?” I asked.

“We do actually, but we’re in a fruit phase,” Ben explained.

“Let’s go. You brought your car?”

“Uber,” I replied.

Ben drove us to the nearest supermarket, and we got started on shopping. I needed some more protein to aid my workouts. I don’t do shakes, so eggs and fish were all I needed...with some fruit.

“Are we forgetting anything?” Ben asked.

“Just the ice cream,” I said.

We selected some of the ice cream and I even got some vanilla for myself. Ben realized that he didn’t get bananas as part of the fruit he selected, so he went back to get them.

“Ethan?” a familiar voice called.

I turned and saw Natasha. It was my first time seeing her dress so informally. Sweatpants and a t-shirt, covered with a hoodie.

“Natasha,” I couldn’t help getting into character as we were no longer in the office.

It’s like my body had automatically realized that if we weren’t in the office, then I was Ethan.

“You look good,” I said as I took another look at her outfit. “Giving me the princess who ran away from home vibe.”

“I wish that was the case,” she sighed and walked toward me.

Her eyes scanned my face. “I’ve been thinking, did your eyes always look this light in color?” she asked.

“My eyes? I don’t really know,” I replied.

“They’re pretty,” she said with a smile.

“Thank you,” I smiled genuinely happy about the compliment although it wasn’t really meant for me. “But yours beat mine any day or time.”

“As they should,” she said with a proud look on her face.

“What brings you here?” I asked.

She looked left and right, then slowly lifted her shirt, showing off her stomach. “Workouts. Needed protein.”

“You work out?”

“Parent’s orders. Once again, another thing I didn’t mind they made me do,” she said as she lowered her shirt. “Keeps the body in shape and easy to handle during *fun times*.”

I remembered how easy it was for me to hold her down and her waist. I smirked at the memory and judging by how she smiled in return, I could tell that I wasn’t the only one thinking about that night.

“What brings you here?” she asked in return.

“Well, I...”

“I got the bananas. Hopefully the ice cream is still frozen,” Ben said as he approached us.

I completely forgot about that.

“Oh, hello. Dr. Natasha James, right?” he greeted.

“Hello Ben,” she greeted warmly. “Feels a little awkward. Seeing both my blind date and date sponsor at the same place.”

Crap.

“You followed your dream and chased after the woman you wanted?” she asked.

“I even got the woman,” Ben said with pride. “Are you chasing after the man you wanted?”

“Well, things are looking good, right, Ethan?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I smiled.

“I best be on my way,” she said and added, “It was a pleasure meeting you again. Ethan, and Ben. I wouldn’t want to disturb a brotherly outing. Tomorrow night, Ethan?”

“Tomorrow night,” I said.

She smirked and started to leave. Maybe due to the sweatpants, or maybe she wasn’t wearing any underwear, but her ass jiggled more than usual. Now came the big problem.

“What did she mean by Ethan?” Ben asked.

“Maybe it’s one of those things were the girls would mistake me for him,” I replied, playing the ignorance is bliss card. “Let’s get going.”

“That’s not enough excuse,” he said. “Ethan isn’t in the country. He dropped womanising since the Stacy incident. And Natasha doesn’t sound like she’s aware that he’s married. What are you doing Ian?”

“I don’t need a lecture,” I said as I walked away.

He held my arm and forcefully turned me around to face him.

“The ice cream would melt,” I reminded him.

“I have a deep freezer at home,” he said. “What exactly are you doing, Ian?”

“It’s not that serious. I have everything under control.”

“What control? She thinks you’re Ethan. Did you think about what would happen if Ethan returned and she ran into him with his wife?” he asked.

“You wouldn’t understand,” I said as I looked away.

“What’s there not to understand?” he mused. “Judging from the way you look at her, you’re actually very interested in her. So what’s the problem then? Why not just approach her as Ian? Why steal Ethan?”

“Because she doesn’t love Ian. She loves Ethan,” I answered almost raising my voice. “What would he or even you understand about that? It’s always easy for any of you to get a woman into your bed without having to pay her.”

“Tone, brother,” he warned.

“You have absolutely no idea, what it’s like to live under the shadow of two giants,” I continued. “You have no idea how hard I’ve had to struggle. People actually think I enjoy being alone when I just can’t talk easily like Ethan can. They think I’m rude because I can’t be easily kind like you. You have no idea how many women have approached and looked at me with disappointment just knowing that I’m Ian Sullivan.”

He didn’t say anything but he still seemed upset.

“You think this is easy for me? I know it’s wrong, but I know I’m never going to be the one she wants,” I said softly. “But in

the end, if this is the only way for me to get closer to her, why am I not allowed to take it?"

He was quiet and the anger in his eyes settled as he sighed, "Did you actually try to be yourself and she rejected you?"

I recalled when I spoke to her in the garden. When we kissed and even when she insisted that Ethan told her everything that Ian knew. Could I really say that she rejected me?

"You can do whatever you want," he said as he walked past me. "But will the reality of things be easy for her to bear once you tell her who you really are?"

The question he asked was one I was scared to answer.

Ben

"Where's uncle Ian?" Chloe asked as I returned home with the items we bought.

"Something came up," I replied.

I didn't leave him at the supermarket: he specifically asked me to drop him off at home. Twins. He was right when he said I wouldn't understand. When the twins were born, I was glad to

have two younger brothers at once, but as they grew older, I realized that not all twins shared a very good alliance. Ethan envied Ian. It felt like whatever Ian did radiated maturity.

To Ethan, Ian and I were the lucky ones. I was Dad's favorite, and Ian was an adult at the age of ten. He would often look down on him because of his clumsiness. Ian envied the both of us. No matter how he tried to act mature, he would always be our baby brother. I knew how everyone outside the family treated him. So much burden and so many expectations that weren't even necessary. Sure he liked his quiet time to aid his studies, people naturally avoided him for the simple wish to be alone.

It made no sense and wasn't fair. I knew that a lot of people preferred Ethan. I had also heard the fabricated rumors. True he could be brutally honest, but that was his own way of communicating. At times, it would cause sparks between him and Ethan. Whether as kids, teenagers or young adults, both of them always seemed to find an excuse to fight. My knuckles still hurt from having to separate them by force. And maybe it was just the spirit of being the last born, Ian would always be the one to stir up trouble.

Maybe he had finally reached his limit.

I'll never forget when he got ready for prom and didn't go because the girl he had asked out thought he was Ethan. Being

treated like an unwanted sloppy second will gradually eat at your sanity to the point where there would be little left behind.

I felt bad for him. I knew how much Natasha had shown interest in Ethan the first time we met. Chances are that when she met Ian, he fell in love, but then again she automatically assumed that he was Ethan, leaving him with no choice. Normally, I would intervene, but this time I decided not to say anything. This might just be a lesson that Ian would have to learn on his own.

“Is everything okay?” Olivia asked.

“It’s just twin problems,” I replied.

Chapter Ten

With the Younger Twin

Ian

You can do whatever you want, he said as he walked past me. But will the reality of things be easy for her to bear once you tell her who you really are?

Ben's words resonated with the guilt in my heart. He was right. There was absolutely no doubt about it. But it was still frustrating to admit or agree. He wouldn't get it. He wasn't a playboy like Ethan, but I knew about the long line of women that wanted him before Selina's death, after her death, and even after his marriage to Olivia.

Not to talk about Ethan who even swore marriage off, claiming that no one would truly love him for himself. Then there was me, the sloppy second twin. They wouldn't understand why I had to do this. Even Natasha herself was more interested in Ethan than she was in me. I wasn't the one

fooling her. I was fooling myself. Claiming an identity that wasn't mine just to experience what life with her would be like. Then again, she deserved to know the truth. This was no way fair to her.

Your special to me, Ethan.

Those words she said were never meant for me. They would never be meant for me. There was no way she would ever look at me with those eyes and say anything like that. I started to feel awful, because the words she had shared were meant for the one she truly loved. That was nothing but a false image I had built, preying on the only thing that wasn't dictated by her parents.

I had called them terrible. But who was I to say I was any different? I needed to clear my head. Luckily, it was my day off. So I had all the time in the world to take my mind off things. I took a drive down to Byrd Park. Our first date....I mean her first date with Ethan.

“Look who’s here,” a voice announced.

I turned around and found her. She was wearing a white t-shirt, with some shades to shield her eyes and a high waist trouser. Her gaze shifted to my hair. I could tell that was the only way she was able to differentiate between the both of us.

Did you actually try to be yourself and she rejected you?

Ben's voice continued to haunt me. Maybe I should actually give it a try.

"Good day to you too, Dr. James," I greeted.

She let out a sigh of relief, "I thought we agreed to address each other by name, Ian?"

"Did we?" I asked as I returned my gaze to the lake.

"Yes, I'm sure we did," she insisted as she stood by my side.

"The sun isn't that harsh, why the shades?" I asked.

"Well," she took them off and her emerald eyes seemed to glow. "Reduces the staring."

"Give us the opportunity to be bewitched," I said.

"You find me bewitching, Ian?" she asked.

"Who wouldn't?" I retorted. "You're enchanting. Drop medicine and go into modeling."

She chuckled softly. “You really are different than what they say.”

“Never judge a book by its cover,” I said.

“Then this cover needs to smile a little more,” she said as she stood in front of me and held my cheeks, forcing me to smile. “Maybe if you do that, you’ll be more approachable.”

“Smiling hurts my facial muscles,” I said.

“That’s because you’re too used to frowning,” she pouted and started to play with my cheeks. “Smile for me.”

“Fine,” I sighed as she let go of my cheeks.

I smiled and she looked surprised. I didn’t blame her; whenever I smiled, I looked like him.

“Your eyes...have they been this color?” she asked.

I believe she’d asked the question before.

“My eyes? I’m not sure,” I replied.

“I see,” she said as her shoulders dropped.

For a moment, she touched her chest like she was trying to calm herself.

That's new.

“Is everything alright?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she replied. “I ran into your brothers last night. You guys really get along.”

“Siblings are usually like that,” I said.

I tried not to remember anything that happened last night, Especially my conversation with Ben.

“I can’t relate. No siblings. Single child privilege,” she said as she puffed her chest proudly.

“That explains the parents spoiling you rotten,” I said. I poked right below her clavicle, causing her puffed out chest to deflate.

“I’m not spoiled,” she pouted.

“Sure you’re not.” I walked past her.

“Of course, I’m not,” she insisted. “You know back home, everyone addresses me as princess. If I was spoiled, I would insist that you call me that.”

“It actually doesn’t sound bad,” I admitted, then turned to face her. I grabbed her right hand and kissed it, then looked up at her. “I’m always at your service, my princess.”

I noticed the color that spread to her cheeks as she looked around if anyone saw but didn’t make any attempt to pull her hand away. I let go of her hand. “Then again, boasting about being called princess doesn’t help your defense, claiming not to be spoiled rotten.”

She wasn’t listening, her eyes were still focused on THE hand I had kissed.

“Did I infect your hand?” I asked.

“What? No, no,” she shook her head and hid the hand behind her. “I tried to stop everyone from calling me that, but no one listened.”

“With looks like yours, it would be difficult to stop,” I said.

“Enough with the flattery.” She rolled her eyes and looked at me, a grin forming.

What is this feeling?

It was peaceful and my heart was excited too. She didn't seem distracted either. It was like when she was talking to my Ethan persona. Her attention was solely on me. True that other girls gave me peace when I talked to them, but this was the first time one was completely engaged with me. The only problem was that she gave the same level of energy with my Ethan persona.

"Why are you here though?" she asked as she stood by my side.

I noticed her gaze focused on the area that she and *Ethan* had spent their first date.

"I wanted to clear my head," I replied. "You?"

"Same thing," she uttered.

"I see."

We were quiet. It wasn't awkward but one of us needed to say something. I wanted to ask her to spend time with me...just as Ian. No personas, just me.

“Are you going to be busy after this?” I asked.

“No not really,” she replied. “Have any plans for us?”

“There’s a mini carnival holding at the park in an hour or so. Would you like to check it out?” I asked.

I didn’t plan for this. I just noticed the flyer and her coming here was coincidental but why waste the opportunity. If she didn’t want to go, I could always ask her as Ethan. No, I’m not supposed to rely on that. I’m supposed to be myself with her.

“Sure, why not?” She shrugged and announced, “I need the proper break too.”

“You’re sure?”

“Hmm?”

“This isn’t a prank or a trick to get my feelings up and then you give up halfway?” I asked sincerely.

She laughed and placed her hand on my cheek, “Who hurt you, Ian?”

“I…”

“I’m going to the mini carnival with you,” she replied. “No questions no doubts. Just me you and the sound of you crying after you lose all the game we’d play.”

“What makes you think you’d win?”

“Princess privileges,” she smirked.

“Right,” I smirked in return.

It was this easy.

The carnival started, and we took a look around. We had a simple contest to see who’d get the most wins in any festival games. I wish this was one of those situations that you’d deliberately lose so the other person would look good. Neither of us were good at any of the games.

The ball toss.

Shooting games.

Ring toss.

Nothing.

“Are you serious?” I couldn’t help laughing as I took a piece of the cotton candy I had bought for both of us.

“It’s not funny!” she insisted as she frowned, “I can understand you not winning anything, but how did I lose? I’m very good at archery.”

“You are?”

“Yeah, one time I shot at the target and hit the instructor who was standing at my left,” she replied with pride.

“What the hell?” I chuckled. “You have terrible aim. How did you pass Rosemary’s embroidery classes?”

“A woman who knows how to embroider and design her life with precision,” she replied in a voice mimicking the fifty-year-old woman who had invested her time to make all of us proper adults, “What about you, how did you pass the stitching classes?”

“A man must not rely on his woman to handle his torn clothing. She is your partner not your maid,” I mimicked back. “You can’t convince me that woman wasn’t a feminist.”

“She was actually,” she replied. “But I wish she taught us useful things like how to win stuffed bears by throwing rings or balls.”

“I know a better skill to acquire those things without throwing anything,” I said with a sneaky smile.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” she ask and grinned.

“On three,” I said, “One, two, three.”

“Stealing.”

“Debit cards.”

“Stealing?” I raised a brow.

“What? I distract them with my beauty, and you take the merchandise,” she explained. “What do you mean debit card?”

“We use the old fashioned way, and buy the stand?” I asked as I showed her my black card.

“And yet I’m the spoiled one.” She rolled her eyes and shoved her cotton candy on my face, causing it to stick.

“Why you little...” I growled and she squealed, running away from me.

I chased after and caught her but we tripped and fell. I quickly turned her to let her fall on me; I'd take the damage. So, I fell on my back and she fell on my body. She was still shaking from the laughter and I was too.

“Thanks for taking the fall,” she said to me. “I'm sure Rosemary would be proud of you.”

“I still have her number. I could call her,” I said.

She smiled. We remained in that position, her eyes scanned my face and her gaze softened.

She leaned in close and kissed me softly, then pulled back

“We...we better get up,” I suggested.

“Yeah,” she agreed and got up, helping me to my feet.

We continued exploring the carnival. I thought the kids would make things awkward, but she asked me to hold her hand so we wouldn't get separated. I wanted to remind her that we could easily call each other; but as I noticed that they weren't a lot of people at the venue, I realized she just needed a convenient excuse to hold my hand.

“You know, Ethan told me everything you say about me,” she said.

“Oh?”

“Why don’t you tell them to me directly?” she asked.

“It would be a bother, wouldn’t it?” I countered.

“Who decided that? There were a lot of nice things,” she replied. “It would be better to hear it directly from the horse’s mouth than through a third party.”

“I see,” I said. “Maybe, I’ll tell you more then.”

“I’d.. I’d like that,” she agreed.

The air became cooler.

“That reminds me,” she said, “didn’t the forecast say it was going to rain?”

“We better leave before it happens,” I offered. “Where do you stay?”

“Would it be weird if I asked to know where you stay?” she asked.

“No, we can even exchange protein recipes,” I suggested.

“Ethan told you I work out?” she asked.

Crap...I forgot she told Ethan not me.

“No, it kind of shows...”

“You’re saying I look like a she-hulk?”

“No not that...I meant...”

She burst into laughter. “I know what you meant, Ian. You really are fun to tease.”

“Don’t scare me like that,” I sighed.

“So, are you going to lead me to your abode?” she asked.

“Why not?”

If I had known that I would ever have a woman over at my place that wasn't my niece or my mother, I would have put more thought into the kind of house I purchased. It was a small, yet luxurious two bedroom apartment. I didn't buy a lot of cars. Just around three. There was a pool, but I rarely used it.

"It's surprising," she said as I tried to open the door. "Then again, it suits you."

"Thank you," I said with a relieved sigh.

I opened the door and led her in. The lights came on automatically.

"Let me guess, you have a room dedicated to books," she said.

"You're correct actually," I said.

A similarity between Ethan and me.

"I'd love to see that some time," she said as she looked around the living room.

She was pleased with what she saw.

She sat on the couch and let out a sigh. "Today was fun."

"I agree," I replied as I walked over to her.

She sprawled on the couch. As she stretched, her stomach showed.

"Looking awfully tempting there," I said.

"Really?"

"Really."

"But luckily you can resist right?" she asked with a smirk that told me she wanted to hear the opposite reply.

"Unfortunately no," I said as I leaned down. "But you can stop me."

"So if I say stop, you'd stop?" she asked.

"If."

I covered her mouth. I wasn't Ethan. This was Ian, the cold brooding twin. The slight panic on her face accompanied with the curiosity that seemed to want to know where this would

lead made something in me spark. She stared at my hand and back at my face.

I lowered myself and kissed her forehead. "It's a different story if I don't let you say it."

I held the hem of her shirt and slowly pulled it over head.

"I could resist," she warned.

"Hands behind your back," I said as I took off my belt.

She looked at me with defiance in her emerald eyes.

"Now, princess," I repeated.

She bit her lower lip and did as she was told. Using my belt, I tied her hands behind her back.

She tried to free herself but gave up immediately. The smirk on her face told me that she was ready for whatever I was going to do to her. I pulled on her jeans, leaving her in her underwear.

"You didn't take off my bra," she reminded me.

“I’ll leave it there,” I said as I picked up her shirt and tied it around her eyes.

Her vision was taken, she was stripped to her underwear, and her hands were bound. I had always wanted to do this.

Natasha

Humans are fascinating creatures. Take away one of the sensory organs and the rest of them kick into high gear. I didn’t plan to follow Ian home. But that aching feeling anytime I saw him kept getting stronger. Spending time together that day only helped to intensify my desire for him. When I looked into his eyes, it felt like Ethan was staring back. And when he smiled, I saw Ethan again.

If he didn’t restrict my eyes, I could have seen for myself if he was the one I sought. But that would have to wait. My body was on high alert, but I couldn’t see a thing. He wasn’t moving either. My legs were spread open, but my panties acted as a shield.

Still...where was he?

“Ian?” I called. “You better not be recording this...”

“I’m not scum,” he whispered in my right ear; it startled me, causing me to yelp. My body was still on alert.

“Is my princess scared of the dark?” he asked in my left.

I couldn’t smell him, so he was probably speaking from my back. Goosebumps started to spread. I was scared yet excited - defenseless and completely at his mercy. Not a situation I thought I would ever be in. His tongue made contact with my left ear and it tickled. I wanted to move my head away, but he held my head in place. His tongue lined the outermost part of my lobe before getting to my insides.

The sensation was too much and because of the state I was in, it turned me on even more.

“More?” he whispered.

“Yes,” I replied. I managed to swallow the saliva that had pooled in my mouth.

He disappeared again. This part always gets me. I didn’t know where he was going to attack next. Maybe my other ear and was only giving me some time to recover from the previous attack. I waited...a minute passed. I felt his tongue on my left thigh, and his fingers caressing my right gently, going upward. I shuddered as I waited for him to get to my privates.

“Mmm...” I moaned; it still felt good.

He got closer.. closer... my inner thighs. Then he stopped. The agony of waiting was annoying me, even my pussy seemed to drip with anger.

“Ian...come....”

My words were cut short as he kissed me, startling me. He stopped the kiss and started to lick my lips; it was frustrating. My hands tied behind my back didn't let me hold his face forcefully. That wasn't all; I forced my head forward to capture his mouth as he licked my lips, but his hand circled my neck and held me in place. Ethan would have been gentle and given me what I wanted. But Ian didn't care.

Did he want me to beg? Who makes a princess beg?

“Ian, please...let me kiss you.” I gave in as I still struggled to kiss him.

“Patience,” he said. “What was that about not being a spoiled princess?”

“I'm not spoiled,” I insisted. “Fine, take off the belt and let me kiss you properly.”

“That sounds like spoiled to me...” he said. I could visualize him smirking. “How about a deal? If you manage to hold back your voice, I’ll give you what you want.”

“Easy,” I scoffed.

“Good girl,” he praised.

He held my waist and pulled me out a little. He sat by my side and his hand started to toy with my panties.

This feels, oddly familiar.

His fingers...maybe it was a twin thing but they felt exactly like Ethan’s did. Then he started to move faster. I bit my lip.

“Ah, biting your lips don’t count,” he said as he stopped touching me.

“Fine...”

“Let’s go again,” he offered and continued.

It felt good. Very good. I struggled to keep a straight face.

Just a few more seconds.

He quickly moved my panties aside and touched my pussy directly, while biting my neck at the same time. It came as a shock. I let a moan slip out, right before the timer even rang.

“So close,” he said wickedly.

“That’s not fair!” I whined as I tried to catch my breath. “You cheated.”

“All I told you to do was be silent; it wasn’t my fault you failed,” he explained, then got up. “Time for your punishment.”

I heard the sound of his zipper, and my heart started to pound. As if purely by instinct, my mouth opened eager to receive his length. He kissed me.

Aaaaasaaargh!

The fact I couldn’t see was making the whole thing worse. When I expected one thing, I got another in return. Despite my internal complaints. I didn’t hate it one bit. As his tongue invaded the privacy of my mouth, I let my mind sink in response. It felt better than when I was with Ethan. He stopped

the kiss, and I was left gasping for air. He held my panties and pulled them down, leaving my privates laying bare.

“Spread your legs for me, your highness,” he commanded.

Humiliating...the fact that I easily obeyed and spread my legs for him made me die inside.

“Why are you grinning?” he asked. “I honestly expected a frown.”

Me smiling?

He wasn't lying...everything he did only helped in exciting me. His fingers greeted my pussy. I was already soaked. He didn't have to move his fingers fast enough to make my wetness audible.

“Fuck...” I groaned as he continued his relentless attack.

I let him have his way with me until he stopped.

What next?

I felt his mouth against my pussy.

“Wait, it’s dirty,” I warned.

“Nothing about you is,” he said and continued his eating.

No one had ever eaten me out. I always thought my first would be Ethan. But there he was, eating me out like I was the best thing he had ever tasted. He started to focus on my clit. He sucked gently at first and gradually increased his pace, stirring me up completely.

“Haha...” I started to breath harder and tried to close my legs, but he held my legs open easily.

“Mmm...” he groaned into my pussy; it reverbed deeply in my body, resonating within me.

He spread me open with two of his fingers and started to flick his tongue furiously against my opening.

“Ian, please... it’s too much... stop...” I pleaded.

He listened and stopped. “I promised I would stop if you asked me to,” he reminded me. “Shall I take off the blindfold?”

“No...”

“Good,” he said and held my head up.

I could smell him...well, *him*. I opened my mouth and this time. I got what I was expecting. His hot thick dick sliding into my mouth and gently moving to soothe me. I started to move my head, almost like I was in a trance. He didn't move his hips or force it down my throat; he let me go at it on my own pace. I moved at the pace that made me comfortable. Faster and faster.

“Such a good girl,” he praised as he gently caressed my hair.

He pulled out and made me lay on my back.

“Are your hands okay?” he asked.

“They're okay,” I replied.

“Good,” he said as he forced my legs upwards to touch my shoulders.

I couldn't see the kind of face he was making, but I hoped it was a good one. He used his dick to slap against my pussy, pressing his length against my clit and gently rubbing against it. When he felt, I had gotten enough, he slid into me.

Ian

It was amazing. She didn't even try to resist. I was rougher than Ethan, and I expected her to show some form of resistance, but she remained submissive. Her body was laid bare to suit my advances. Lucky for me, her bra had a front hook. I unclasped it, freeing her breasts. Those beautiful rosy tips that suited her skin rose in protest against being exposed so easily. I didn't care, and their owners didn't care either.

I was already halfway inside her, and her warm wetness greeted me. It felt like she was sucking me in, without me even moving. She was a stubborn princess alright; even she wanted to admit it and I loved it. A part of me was glad that I unleashed this side of me as my true self and not Ethan. In fact, I had a feeling that she wouldn't have agreed to it if I were Ethan. I was grateful to my elder brother; His advice actually came through.

I moved the rest of myself into her as I placed her legs on my own shoulders, leaning toward her to give her mouth the kiss she so dearly desired. As we kissed, I started to move. Each part of her insides seemed to want to keep me in. Tightening and refusing to let me go.

I agreed to her offer. I forced my way and started to move.

“My God, Ian... so good...mmm.” Her pleading whimpers urged me to continue.

Hearing her call my name was something I didn't know would sound so good. Her hands were probably getting tired from her lying on them and my weight combined with hers crushing her. I switched her to the scissors position, connecting her hips and moving faster as she lay on her side.

Because of how fast we moved, a part of her blindfold started to slip, and I got to see her eyes again. Her green eyes had given in to the pleasure. I wasn't even sure if she was aware that part of her sight has been restored. If she did, she didn't care. I was hitting her deepest parts and she stopped moving... her mouth remained slightly apart, with a mixture pain and pleasure.

“You look so beautiful, princess Natasha,” I praised amid my ragged breathing. “I'm getting close.”

“In... inside... do it inside...” she pleaded. “I'll take care of it...please...don't...stop.”

The idea of getting her pregnant was something I would be totally for. I moved as fast as my hips could let me, and she managed to take me. I moved until I finally got my release, sending all of my essence into her. As I did, she finally relaxed

and even let out a sigh of relief. I pulled out and watched her spill some of my contents.

“You know...I didn't tie you tightly, right?” I asked.

“I know...” she replied and forced her hand and the belt loosened, freeing herself, she stretched her hands towards me, “Can you hold me?”

“Alright,” I agreed and embraced her.

She had slept with me...twice. But she didn't know that.

Natasha

Was this right? What was this peace I felt with him?

Chapter Eleven

Twin Problems

Natasha

I woke up in a bed I didn't recognize. The room was painted gray - a depressing room color choice - but it made it easy to guess where I was. I was dressed in his pyjamas. I don't remember getting dressed, but he must have helped me out because I can be quite the heavy sleeper if care was not taken.

I lay back and stretched properly to get those morning tremors in. After that was done, I got out of bed and by natural instinct started my crunches and squats. I may not remember a lot about what happened, but I do remember him making dinner - feeding me some fruit while we were both naked. There were jokes about Garden of Eden here and there.

It was a fun night. Different from Ethan.

Ethan.

Oh my God, Ethan.

Was this okay?

I checked my phone and there were no new texts from him. I didn't know if I should text him. But it wouldn't hurt to check on him.

Good morning, I texted.

As soon as it delivered, I heard a chime from another phone. Ian's. I looked at the phone and slowly approached it. For some reason, it made me uneasy. As I got closer, there were sounds of footsteps. I turned and found Ethan in the room holding two cups of coffee.

"Ethan?" I called, almost in shock as I looked for a way to explain myself.

Hey, your younger brother, for some odd reason, manages to get my heart going at the same time and at almost the same frequency. Except last night when Ian's frequency seemed to be higher.

Don't hate me. I still...love...you?

“Wrong twin,” he said with a pained smile.

“Oh I’m so sorry, I thought...”

“You tell us apart with our hair don’t you?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I sighed, “You two almost seem like the same person.”

Once again as I stared at Ian; there were striking similarities between him and Ethan. But as for Ethan, there was something important about his body that I was missing. It annoyed me that I couldn’t figure out exactly what it was.

“We get that a lot,” he said with a calmer smile this time; then he handed me the cup. “Coffee? Might help wake you up properly.”

“Thank you,” I said as I accepted the coffee.

I stared at his phone. “You seem to have a text.”

He turned to look at it, “Who texts in this day and age? My internet connection is off, so it might just be an app notifying me of something.”

“Oh...” I said with a sigh of relief.

The two of them were so similar that sometimes it felt like I was talking to the same person.

Which reminds me: ever since I got back and started seeing Ethan again, there was no single sign of his clumsiness.. The maturity...wait....the familiarity with how Ian touched me. Sure Ethan was gentle and Ian was savage, but still, everything else - his length, the smell, his voice - everything sounded so similar.

Wait a minute...last year when he asked me to go on a date with Ben, did his voice also sound so light. Didn't he have a playful yet thick voice? Did it change within the year? Why all these questions...

“Is everything alright, Natasha?” Ian asked snapping me out of the funk I was in.

“Hmm? Yeah, everything is fine,” I replied. “I guess my mind is just so full right now.”

“Is it my fault? I'm sorry about last night, I kinda forced it on you,” he apologized.

“Don't even apologize,” I insisted. “That was the best night ever.”

“Are you serious?” he asked with an amused smile on his face.

“It was different, dangerous, frustrating, don’t do it again,” I replied.

“Right, I won’t,” he said with a smirk.

He’d definitely do it again if I let my guard down. To be honest, I had the urge to let down my guard again.

“Thank you for yesterday,” he said. “It was nice to have someone to hang out with outside that isn’t a family member.”

“You don’t have friends?” I asked.

“You don’t seem like the kind of person who has any either,” he said.

“I actually do. Just one, her name’s Rachel,” I replied.

“Lucky,” he sighed. “With the impression people have of me, it’s kind of hard to actually find someone that would be comfortable enough with me to do things like go to carnivals or share cookies.”

His shoulders dropped as he stirred his coffee with a sad smile attached to his face. In a way, I understood his pain.

“I remember in med school because of how my parents raised me that I tended to look down on people who weren’t in my class,” I said. “It was okay at first, but with time, everyone started to avoid me. I was fine at first, but I met Ethan and everyone from different walks of life just seemed to gravitate towards him. Before I knew it, I wanted to be like him...or switch positions. I started to...”

“Envy him,” he completed my statement.

I wanted to say admire, but envy?

“You seem confused, so I’ll explain,” he said. “You grew up with a golden spoon and so did he. The similarities are there, but in a way, he was allowed to do what he wanted and you weren’t. At first you admired it, but with time...”

“I got jealous,” I confessed.

He wasn’t wrong. I forced the image of being in love with Ethan for so long that I didn’t even realise that I wasn’t really in love with him. I just envied him. Then why did my heart pound when I met him in Glen Allen?

If I wasn't in love with him, why did I start to long for him?

He was the same person in med school.

The same person I kissed.

The same person I made love with.

Right?

Is it possible to envy the person I was in love with? What about Ian? Just thinking about him, rather than the envy or admiration I felt when I looked at Ethan, I sensed a kindred spirit. The same spirit I sensed when I was also with Ethan. Is that even possible?

“Don't think too much about it, you don't want to cause wrinkles,” he warned. “That reminds me, what are you going to do about your routine?”

“I don't think I need that right now,” I sighed and rested my head on his shoulder.

He was right. I was overthinking the whole thing.

“What’s for breakfast? Ask the maid to make me some toast or something,” I demanded.

“Didn’t you say something about not being spoiled?” he asked.

“I’m not spoiled,” I insisted, “I thought as a billionaire, you would have a maid or two to help with meals.”

“No maids here,” he shrugged.

“What about a butler? Or a private chef from France?” I asked.

“You forget I’m a doctor who’s rarely at home,” he reminded me. “They won’t even see me to actually cook in the first place.”

“What? How do you eat in the first place?” I asked.

“I make my own food,” he said with pride. “Join me in the kitchen and I’ll make you breakfast.”

“Finally some real princess treatment,” I sighed as I dropped the cup and laid on the bed. “I won’t be joining you but be sure to get my freshly squeezed orange juice ready.”

As soon as I was done placing my order, I received a spank on my ass.

“Ouch! What was that for?” I frowned.

“Sorry, Mother would do it whenever any of us acted spoiled,” he said as he turned to leave. “Now get up from the bed, or I’ll be forced to find out if you have a gagging fetish.”

“I’m up, I’m up.” I got out of bed and followed after him.

Breakfast was rice folded in fried egg, along with tomato sauce.

“Are you an anime fan?” I asked, “One piece and the rest?”

“Maybe. Why’d you ask?”

“It’s a traditional Japanese breakfast,” I replied. “And the only Americans who might be that invested in making this are probably anime fans.”

“You sound like one yourself,” he said with a smile.

“Only as a teenager,” I sighed. “This path of medicine has cost me a lot.”

“I understand,” he sighed as he started plating.

“Why did you need me in the kitchen?” I asked. “I didn’t even do anything.”

“This is my first time having company while I cook,” he replied. “Having you here gives me confidence.”

“Oh...”

His honesty was so refreshing.

As we ate, the meal was so good.

“Will anyone notice that we arrived at the same time?” I asked as I helped to wash the dishes.

“I wouldn’t want you coming to work, with the same underwear from yesterday,” he smirked. “I’ll drop you at your place. I have a special patient coming in this morning, so I might not wait for you.”

“Understandable,” I said. “Ian?”

“Yeah?”

“This was the best breakfast I ever had,” I announced.

“Thank you,” he said. I swear he was blushing with smiles.

I know Ethan and I weren't a couple or anything, but it still felt like I was cheating on him. I

needed to sort this out as soon as possible.

Ian

Ben was right. Maybe if I had just tried as myself, there wouldn't have been any need to frame Ethan. After dropping off Natasha, I headed straight to the hospital for my nine o'clock appointment. The patient was a bit of a headache, and none of my doctors wanted to attend to him anytime he came around. As the only one in the building who wasn't easily fazed by anything, I was stuck being his personal doctor. I was late...just by a minute, but if he was there already, then I wasn't going to hear the end of it.

I went into the hospital.

“He's here,” Isaac said.

The old man looked exhausted.

“How long?” I asked.

“Just ten minutes,” he replied. “Most of the staff have left the floor to get busy with other things. Just say the word and we’ll get the ban, sir.”

“He’s hot stuff in magazines and all that. Plus his father is a good man...in a way,” I replied. “I don’t want anything that will make my brand suffer because of some spoilt rich brat.”

I know I called Natasha spoiled the previous day, but she didn’t come close to the demon that was my patient. As I arrived at my office, he was already seated in the waiting area.

I forced a smile. “Mr. Lawrence Williams.”

“Ah, if it isn’t my favorite doctor,” he said as he got up. “You’re late. Any longer and I would have had to resort to having these lower staff take care of me. But I’m glad you’re here. The wealthy should take care of the wealthy.”

I was worth seven billion, and he was worth only around roughly eight hundred million. I didn’t feel like I was taking care of a fellow wealthy person. What else can I do but smile and give medical advice?

“Right this way, Mr. Williams,” I said and motioned to my office.

Lawrence like many of my patients was a faker. His chin wasn't as perfect as the magazines claimed he was. I had modeled it that way; he could go online and claim to have exercised his jaw, using a special technique that had been lost to man.

Even his nose was corrected.

His abs? Shock.

His skin? Special equipment.

His teeth? Rearranged.

His lips?

Come on. I wouldn't be surprised if he had previously gotten another doctor to work on his penis. I couldn't wait for the day when he would come with an emergency that would let me legally cut off his dick.

“So what would it be today?” I asked.

“I just want a regular checkup,” he replied. “I have another shoot tomorrow, and I just want to make sure everything is in order.”

“Anything else?”

“I don’t know. Do you know how to model my face into something no woman can resist?” he asked.

“I would have modelled your face after mine, but I already have a twin, and I don’t want my mother to wonder when she gave birth to triples,” I replied.

“Nice one,” he laughed. “I have a wedding to prepare for.”

Who would be crazy enough to let their daughter marry this madman?

“But the girl in question is being stubborn,” he sighed.

Ah, that makes more sense.

“Maybe something that is akin to godlike would suffice,” he continued.

“Unfortunately that might be beyond my capabilities,” I said.

Also I don't want to get involved in anything that would make an innocent girl become your slave through the guise of marriage.

“But what do they call you again? The man of many faces?” he asked. “I’ve seen what you’ve done for artists, models, even politician’s wives speak so highly of your hands.”

“All of them are exaggerated rumors,” I corrected him.

“If you say so,” he sighed and gave up.

“Shall we get started on your medical examination?” I asked.

“Yes, please.”

And the horror of examining the body of a narcissistic person who keeps complimenting every part of the body you examine began.

Natasha

I felt different. Rumors were that good sex would always do wonders to your skin were definitely true. Twice. First time

with Ethan, I woke up with a glow. Now with Ian, and I was bursting with energy.

I tied my hair in a ponytail and wore simple dress. As I arrived at the hospital, I wanted to get changed in Ian's office as usual, but as I got to the door, Lawrence stepped out with Ian. Williams looked pleased with himself, and Ian looked like he had had enough patients for one day. I thought I told him not to visit my hospital.

"Oh, Dr. James you're here," Ian said with a sigh. "This is Mr. Lawrence Williams. Lawrence, this is Dr. Natasha James; she's an outstanding dermatologist."

"Pleasure to meet you, Dr. James," Lawrence said with a smirk.

I'm glad you chose to play dumb because I'm in no kind of mood to explain anything to Ian.

"The pleasure is all mine, Mr. Williams," I said.

"Dermatologist you say," he said with a smile. "I need to get ready for a shoot tomorrow; if you don't mind, can I talk you about a skincare routine?"

I looked at Ian and he shook his head negatively.

I let out a sigh with, “Only a few minutes.”

Ian rolled his eyes and retreated into his office.

“Right this way,” I said and led him to my office.

Luckily for me, David wasn't in the office. One less person to explain things to.

“So *this* is where you worked?” he asked as I closed the door.

“Didn't I tell you not to visit my hospital?” I reproached him.

“Call or text first; it's that simple.”

“Listen toots, the world revolves around the sun, not you,” he said. “I actually came here for my routine checkup to get ready for the photoshoot mentioned earlier. I honestly thought you were in the other Sullivan's hospital. Then again, you're a dermatologist, so it makes sense that you'd be in a hospital that focuses mostly on plastic surgery.”

“Wait, do you come here to get...body jobs?” I asked, trying my best not to crack a smile.

“Laugh all you want, but gods need to be perfect,” he said with pride: then he reached for my hand. “Unfortunately, not

all of us are blessed to have skin as fair as...”

He stopped speaking as he looked at my wrist. “What is this on your wrist?”

I looked down and noticed the bruise I had gotten from last night.

“New workout routine for practicing throwing punches,” I said and pulled my hand away. “Also, none of your business.”

“I don’t really see why you need to be working out or learning brute things like punching and the likes,” he sighed as he bought my excuse. “You are a goddess. You’re not supposed to be doing strenuous things. Luckily, as my wife, you wouldn’t have to do anything.”

“I’m not your wife, Lawrence. You still haven’t managed to sway me yet,” I said.

“Oh right, I actually forgot I was supposed to do that,” he sighed, “but sooner or later, I’ll try to be a little more *convincing*.”

The way he said it, made me shiver.

“Till next time, my princess,” he said as he walked past me.
“Text me that skincare routine. I was actually serious about that.”

“It’s just turmeric mixed with honey. Slab on your skin and sleep,” I advised.

Hopefully, the ants eat you alive.

“Thank you so much. I’m glad you’re finally warming up to me,” he said with a relieved look.

“What are friends for?” I said with the warmest tone I could mimic.

He kissed my cheek and muttered, “Good girl.”

As he left the office, I checked my bag for my wipes and started to furiously clean the spot he had kissed. I felt disgusting. Even the way he called me his princess icked me out. Only Ian was allowed to call me his princess. I returned to Ian’s office and locked the door behind me. He sat at his desk reviewing the notes he had taken.

“You look like you aged down,” he remarked.

Normally, I'd go into his bathroom and change, but I decided to change in his presence. He didn't say anything, but I could feel his gaze watching me undress and change into my scrubs. I walked over to him after I was done.

"Can I ask you for a favor?" I asked.

"Sure?"

"Kiss me here," I said as I pointed at the spot, Lawrence had defiled. "When you do it, can you call me the same thing you called me last night?"

"Okay," he said.

He leaned in and gave me a kiss on the spot, then whispered, "Good girl."

I felt better.

"Did something happen?" he asked.

"Oh, you didn't give me a morning kiss this morning," I replied.

Starting to think it runs in the family, because Ethan left without giving me a kiss either.

“Oh,” he said then smirked as he motioned for me to come closer. I obeyed, and he held my chin, kissing my lips gently. It was only for a few seconds, but it seemed to last for an hour. As he pulled away, he kissed my nose and my forehead.

“Good morning, my princess,” he said softly.

As I said, he was the only one allowed to call me that.

Ian

Just within twenty-four hours, I had seen a new side of Natasha. She didn't show any of this to Ethan. And maybe this was just me overthinking things, but I felt like she was starting to catch on to my scheme. Maybe it was time I really told her. Any longer and she might come to completely hating me.

Chapter Twelve

The Prince Meets a Princess

Lawrence

I will never forget the day I first met her. *I had everything I wanted, and my future was already laid out for me. Anything I desired was delivered to me. Some people called me spoiled, but it was just the ramblings of people unlucky to be born into the lower classes.*

Jealousy truly makes a man ungrateful and foolish not to know their own place in the grand scheme of life. It could get boring. My role was simple. Be a good boy and get ready to one day take over my father's company once he no longer existed on this planet. That's if the old man eventually agrees to die.

He loved me all the same. My mother did too.

Despite how busy he was, he always made time to look out for me or spend time with me. I did have a pretty good father in my life - a life where I had everything, it was only a matter of time until I realized that there were things that I still didn't have access to.

For instance, friends. I wanted them. But most of my peers were below me in wealth, and I knew nothing good would come from being friends with those beneath me. I wouldn't want leeches disguised as humans.

I remember one time when one of our maids came to the house with her child because her sister wasn't around to watch the boy. His filth touched some of my toys and I had them burned almost immediately.

Give it to him? You give paupers an inch, and they'd automatically take a mile. What about my peers at my family's wealth level? They were fine but were very boring. I couldn't walk around with people uglier than me. A flock of swans should always be consisting of swans. Geese aren't allowed.

Then one day, I met her. Mr. Anderson James was a friend of my father's and a man who invested in the real estate business. He came with his daughter, and my word. I was only ten years old, but even I knew that I wasn't looking at an ordinary girl.

Her blonde hair casually greeted her shoulders. Those green eyes looked so unreal that it was majestic. Her beautiful skin that seemed to mock the efforts that models had to put in to achieve a modicum of beauty.

At seven, dressed in the prettiest floral dress, Natasha James resembled a doll. A fragile one that could break. She made eye contact with me and smiled. I was only a kid, but I knew that there was something special about her.

Then we became teenagers. The effects of puberty opened my eyes. I realized what my younger self seemed lost about. With the development of her secondary feminine traits, Natasha seemed to be moving toward achieving perfection.

Her beauty put most of her classmates to shame. Her parents refused her desire to attend school pageants, and to be honest she wasn't interested. I wouldn't say that I wanted her to participate either. I would feel bad for the swine that would have to compete with her.

Still....I began to desire her. We grew up as friends, a demand I had made to my father. I understood that her family was lower than mine in terms of wealth, but...a goddess like that, born to a baron's family?

It was only fitting that she was meant to be with a prince like me. Then she became a woman, excelling in everything she laid her hands to learn. The more she grew, the greater my lust for her. I would see her in a bikini when we would swim together...so much skin exposed was enough of a treat to last me a lifetime. I couldn't help but wonder how she would look without any clothing.

Countless images about her still crawl through my mind. I wanted her. As she showed no interest in any other males, it was only natural that I became her fiancé. That beside the other main reason why she had to marry me.

She didn't take the news well, but she didn't completely turn down the idea, which was enough for me. I was sure to make her heart melt. But I hadn't taken into account the presence of competition.

I knew my flaws. Unlike Natasha, I wasn't born with perfect skin or gorgeous eyes. As much as I desired her, there was only so much I could achieve with average looks. So, I fixed it with the best plastic surgeon in town, Dr. Ian Sullivan. I was glad that I didn't have to meet his twin brother, Ethan.

I disliked Ethan.

While I waited for Natasha to become fully ripe for the taking, I spent my time seeking women I could release all my sexual frustration on. But, every woman I chose seemed to be after one person, Ethan Sullivan, that reckless playboy of a doctor.

Wherever he walked past, people just naturally swooned; he could draw people to him effortlessly. I wouldn't have been bothered if it were him. His brothers were no different. Each were revered as gods in their fields. The only exception was Ian; for some odd reason, people seemed to avoid him like the plague. But that didn't mean he was a threat.

I was in Richmond for the shoot I had prepared for, but...

"Is everything alright?" Jacqueline, my make-up artist asked, as she applied the blush. "You seem to have more wrinkles than usual."

"Nothing important," I replied.

"Are you sure? Could it be that princess you are so fond of?" she asked as she took a step back to admire my face.

“Who else would make my mind waver?” I said with an exasperated sigh.

“She’s not coming?”

“Oh, she will,” I replied and looked away. “She will.”

The second time I said that was to assure myself. Natasha had changed. The way she had decided we’d go to that four star restaurant or how she defended the college beggar wasn’t normal. We were both taught not to mingle with people below us in class.

What might have made her change her views? That was not all. When I saw her approach Ian’s office with her scrubs in hand, I didn’t think much of it at first. But it was also odd. Was she there to report something? Or was she there to change in his office?

The look of disgust in her eyes even when she smiled in the office was also new. There was no way she should look at me like. I was the man who would later become her husband after all.

And then her wrists...they had been tied. Her neck...there was a slight bruise. I thought I was seeing things and used the guise of trying to kiss her cheek to get a good look at it. Sure enough it was a real kiss mark.

She was seeing someone else. It was practically impossible. Natasha had never shown interest in any man since high school. To ease my worries, I had gotten someone to watch over her.

“Are you sure you want to do this today?” Jacqueline asked, disrupting my thoughts. “I’m actually done with the make-up, and I don’t want to start all over again.”

“Forgive me, my dear,” I said as I got to my feet.

I held her cheek with my left hand and she closed her eyes, melting into my hands - just the way every woman who sees me is supposed to do.

“It’s alright, I’m just worried about you,” she said softly.

Such a pathetic adorable creature. I kissed her lips gently and watched her lick her them afterward.

“Thank you for worrying, but I’ll be fine,” I assured her. My hands went lower and squeezed her ass. She lacked a lot of what Natasha had but her blonde hair and grey eyes were fascinating enough for me to replace her mentally.

“After the shoot, will you be too busy to spend some time with me?” she asked.

“I need to release anyway, so yes,” I said.

She smiled and nodded softly, a tool to satisfy my urges, as all women should be...until I have Natasha to myself.

After my photoshoot, I retreated to my hotel accompanied by Jacqueline. As we got into the room, I started to undress.

“Oh, I thought we would like watch TV or something first, you know...” she said nervously.

“Jacqueline, we’re both adults...no need to act like a couple of teenagers who need to hide their intentions,” I sighed and kissed her cheek. “Undress now.”

She bit her lips seductively and muttered, “As you wish.”

She walked toward the bed and got ready. Wearing a blood-red dress that stopped at her knees, she started to slowly undress. I was already in my underwear, so I poured myself a shot of whiskey, occasionally watching my meal get ready. As she bared herself, I motioned for her to come closer. I inspected

her carefully. Her grey eyes had been covered with green contacts matching those of my fiancée. Her blonde hair wasn't naturally beautiful like Natasha's. But it would have to do.

She held my hand and gently pulled me to the bed. I followed, amused by her eagerness. I held her chin and lifted her face. Not as beautiful as my goddess, but she wasn't bad to look at. I visualized the person I wanted to see and kissed her. Her lips tasted like chocolate and were very soft. A single kiss wasn't going to cut it; so I kissed her again and again.

"Mmm..." she groaned gently as I let her tongue into my mouth.

I sucked gently on her tongue for a few seconds before letting her go. She kissed my neck, my chest and stomach, then gradually went lower and lower until she made contact with my underwear. She pulled it down and started to get to work on my glorious member.

Her mouth was skilful, and her tongue could easily wrap around my length. I watched her suck me off, eyes closing, only opening to gaze at me in awe. I couldn't help but wonder if Natasha would have the same look in her eyes while she feasted on me.

Is she even experienced in things like this?

No sooner had I asked myself that question than I remembered the bruise on her hands and her eyes of disgust as she stared at me. I was suddenly irritated. I held Jacqueline's head and forced the rest of my length into her mouth. I watched as she panicked, gripping my sides for mercy. I revelled in seeing her struggle, before pulling out to let her breathe. The anger in her eyes wasn't missed. I knew it would be better if it were Natasha looking at me.

“What's wrong? Giving up already?” I asked with a smirk.

She didn't say anything as she held my dick and started rubbing it gently, putting the tip into her mouth, circling it with her tongue.

“That's it...” I sighed softly as I stroked her hair. “Such a good girl.”

My phone's ringtone distracted us. No one ever called me around this time unless there was a pretty good reason. She let me go as I went to answer the phone. I recognized the number; putting it up to my ear, I greeted, “Good evening. Do you have news for me?”

“I've found the person she's been involved with,” he reported.

“So Natasha actually has a lover?” I asked softly, trying my best not to let the anger sink into my voice.

I was suspicious of the mark on her wrists and how she had been behaving weirdly, so I hired someone to monitor her. Nothing too serious. I wasn't expecting *this* news though.

“It would seem so,” he replied. “But the problem is the person she's involved with.”

“Who could it be that would arouse her interest?” I asked as I turned to look at Jacqueline.

She raised a brow, and I motioned for her to get on the bed. She obeyed, lying on her back and waiting for me to return.

“Spread,” I whispered.

She spread her legs and I ran my fingers over her pussy entrance while she moaned gently.

“It's that Sullivan doctor,” he reported. “The older twin.”

My fingers stopped. “What did you just say?”

“She's with the twin, the older one,” he repeated.

“You can’t be sure.”

“I heard her call his name, Ethan,” he replied. “And he had the traditional messy hair.”

“That’s nearly impossible,” I said. “Ethan is happily married and currently in the Maldives. He dropped the playboy act almost two years. Heard his wife has a hospital in Glen Allen. So there’s no way he’d be the one you’re looking at. If anything, it could be...”

And then it hit me.

“Is everything okay?” he asked. “You stopped talking.”

“No, everything is perfect,” I replied with a smirk. “Everything is in peak condition. Keep an eye on the two of them and let me know if anything happens or changes. I’ll wire the money for your time.”

“Alright sir,” he said before hanging up.

“Is everything okay?” Jacqueline asked. “Your expression...is quite unsettling.”

“It’s nothing. I just came to the realization that the universe will always hand deliver whatever I want or desire, and there’s nothing I can do to actually stop it,” I replied as I knelt between her legs and kissed her pussy.

“I love it when you talk like that,” she said with a purr that satisfied me.

It wasn’t hard to figure out what was going on. Ian Sullivan was stealing his older brother’s identity. If Natasha was connected to social media, she would have found out about this a long time ago. But Ian was taking advantage of her ignorance to enjoy what rightfully belonged to me.

I could have just told her what was going on, but I needed whatever it was between them to act as a catalyst between me and bonding with Natasha. Besides if I did, where’s the fun in that?

I needed this to crash and burn, without my hands involved.

Chapter Thirteen

The Prodigal Son Returns

Natasha

“Do I really have to do this?” I asked as I watched Lawrence wander around my living room.

“It’s not odd for a fiancé to visit his fiancée,” he said and stopped walking. “Wait, are you the fiancé and I am the fiancée?”

“It doesn’t matter since we’re nothing,” I said as I made my way to the chair and settled down.

“Not with that attitude you’re not,” he said with a sigh and took a seat next to me.

He had shown up out of the blue. It was around four in the evening. It was after a half-day at work for me. I had planned

to spend the rest of my evening with Ethan like I did each day. But Ethan was occupied, and Ian was handling a case that only he could. I figured I could at least sleep or read a book or something. But Lawrence's presence in my house was frustrating. I couldn't exactly send him away, because I had promised to give him a chance. His advances were not working, however. I was torn between two people.

"Why the long face?" Lawrence asked as he took a few strands of my hair and wrapped them around his finger. His eyes were filled with lust.

"I just can't wait for you to leave," I said as I held his hand and freed my hair. "Do you need anything to eat?"

He was smiling, but as I took his hands off me, a vein popped out at the side of his head. Not my concern, but his hands on even a strand of my hair made me uncomfortable.

"That reminds me...I've been craving your cookies for a long time," he said as he leaned forward.

"Lawrence, respect my personal space," I said softly. "I know this might be your attempt to woo me, but it's just making me uncomfortable."

“When we were kids, you didn’t seem to mind the distance, or need personal space,” he reminded me.

“I was a kid, and at one point a teenager. We both had hormones going wild. So, of course, I wouldn’t have minded you next to me,” I said. “Plus you adjusted into your role as a big brother. I didn’t even think too much about it.”

“I should have just pursued you aggressively when you hit puberty,” he said softly. I don’t know if it was his intention for me to hear this, but he had just earned himself another reason for me to be leary of him.

“Did you say something?” I asked.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” He shrugged and leaned back into the chair, smiling at the ceiling. “Could it be that the reason you aren’t interested in me might be that you are already involved with someone?”

He stared at me sideways. The discomfort I felt increased. If Lawrence found out about what I was doing with the Sullivan brothers, he’d definitely do something that would cause problems between them. I could only play the ignorance card.

“What are you on about?” I asked.

As I got up from the chair to make my way to the kitchen, I felt his arms circle my waist and his breath on my neck. He pulled me closer, and I could feel his bulge pressing against me.

“I don’t know what is going on with you, but I want you to know that I’ll always be waiting,” he said softly as he pressed himself against me even harder.

I pushed him off, demanding, “Get out.”

“Relax, it was a joke,” he said as he turned to leave, “but I did mean the *I’ll always be waiting* part.”

He left me alone, not without giving me a proud smirk before closing the door behind him. I felt so weird. I didn’t know if I should scream or something.

Did he know?

“This might just be my imagination but you’re not really focused today,” I said to Ethan.

This was yesterday. We went out for only ice-cream, and I noticed that he had been looking around a lot.

“I don’t know, but I think someone’s watching us,” he said as he turned to focus on me. “Or maybe they’re just mesmerized by your beauty and are currently wishing I’ll drop dead so they can talk to you.”

“Or maybe they’re just surprized that the great Ethan Sullivan is hanging out with a woman they have never seen before,” I said with a smirk. “That reminds me, won’t this be a problem?”

“Not sure,” he replied. “But it hasn’t caused a stir online yet. Not that you would know if it eventually does cause a stir with that out of date phone of yours.”

“I’m not out of date. I just don’t want to be influenced by the toxicity of modern media,” I said while pouting.

“God, you’re a handful,” he said with a sigh and resumed his watchful gaze, looking around.

I joined in his watch and looked around to see if I could find anything. Nothing out of the ordinary, but I did start to feel like we were being watched. I didn’t mind it and at the same time, I did. Could it be that Lawrence was watching me? If he was, then why didn’t he say anything? Maybe he doesn’t know and is bluffing.

My phone buzzed, a text from Ian, “Now that I think about it. Maybe I would have made you stay behind and have you work with me on this case. I need company.”

I smiled but it hurt at the same time. It’s not possible to be in love with two people at the same time. This wasn’t a fantasy, nor was it one of those romance novels. At first it started like Ian was reminding me of Ethan. But ever since that night Ethan told me about what Ian thought about me, I had started seeing more of Ian in Ethan. Ian has become nicer too, and my body started unconsciously remembering being blindfolded and tied, completely at mercy.

Even when I spent the other night with Ethan for ice cream, it felt like he was completely a different person from when we first met and he asked me to be a date for his older brother.

Our kiss in Glen Allen, I still felt excited about it. And when Ian told me that maybe I wasn’t in love with Ethan and only admired him. I genuinely felt he was right.

I was becoming more attached to Ian. He was so supportive. A little distant, but kind whenever he spoke. He was dedicated to his work. the same thing could be said about Ethan. Maybe it was the twin effect, but he had become as mature as his younger brother.

“But at the same time, maybe it’s time I actually stopped all this,” I said to myself as I re-read the text from Ian.

It wasn’t fair to both of them.

“Right, dinner,” I sighed as I got ready to leave for the supermarket to buy ingredients to fix myself dinner.

Ethan

The Maldives had been an amazing experience. I resisted every urge to remain there. But there was an event coming up in France soon, and I thought it would be a good idea to return home. My wife, Stacy, and my son, Jason, seemed to want to return home as soon as possible. And so we did. I didn’t tell my brothers, though. I returned in the evening and planned to just show up at their offices the following day. You know, surprize them.

“Honey, where are the souvenirs?” I asked as I looked through my luggage.

My nieces would definitely need a gift from me.

“You forgot them,” Stacy reminded me. “Luckily, I checked one last time before we left. And found them on the bed.” She

sighed as she showed me the toys I had bought for the girls,
“You’ll never change will you?”

“I’ll try my best,” I promised as I held her hips and pulled her to myself. “I don’t think I even have to change considering you’re the only woman who truly loves me this way.”

“Of course, I am, you adorable butterfingers,” she said as she kissed my neck.

“That’s a little arousing,” I said with a smirk before kissing her cheek, turning her head to face me, then kissing her lips.

She kissed me back and wrapped her arms around my neck, pulling me in for more. Jason’s cry reached us causing us to stop. Well, he wasn’t really crying. The little one had crawled to my feet and was demanding that I carry him. I chuckled to myself, lifted my son, and took a good look at him, before kissing his cheek, resulting in a squeal of laughter escaping his lips.

“You know, when he grins, he looks so much like you,” she said as she pinched his cheek playfully. He stretched toward her, determined to be held by her.

“No, stay with Daddy,” she said as she bopped his nose. He quietly obeyed and embraced me just as his mother had done

earlier.

“He’s weirdly obedient, unlike someone I know,” I teased.

“When have I never been obedient?” she asked with a smirk.
“We have to go out to get dinner items. Once again, since we had to follow your plan of surprize, your chef has no idea we’re back.”

“There’s still food in the house. We can make something,” I suggested.

“I need some ice cream, Ethan,” she said with a sigh, shaking her head negatively like she had said something. I was too dumb to comprehend it.

“Oh, in that case I want yogurt,” I said, then I lifted Jason.
“Would you want some yogurt or ice cream?”

He babbled something, but I don’t speak baby, so...

“Ice cream it is,” I said as I lowered him.

As we got ready to leave, I couldn’t help realising how far I had come. In medical school, I had gotten my heart broken. I had walked down a path, very sure that I was never going to be a father or anything of the sort. But I had achieved it in the

end. It wasn't much of an achievement, but it was mine to claim.

At the supermarket we finished up with our selections.

"You got strawberry yogurt? I'll have some of that when we get home," Stacy said as she took the yogurt carton and placed it in the shopping basket.

"You could always buy yours," I suggested.

"Nope, yours will taste better and be enough for the three of us," she explained.

"Nice try," I smirked, "but I'll allow it."

"Of course you would," she mocked and got on her toes to kiss me.

PDA was gradually becoming our thing. No one seemed to mind, and we weren't doing anything beyond kissing.

"What...what are you doing Ethan?" a familiar voice asked.

As I turned to look at her, the flash of golden hair almost reminded me of my first time falling completely for someone and getting used. Luckily, it wasn't who I thought it was. But it was a familiar face; one I hadn't seen in a year.

"Natasha is that you?" I asked.

"What do you mean, '*Is that you*'?" she asked with a frown.

"What's going on, do you know her?" Stacy asked.

A year might have passed, but the Gabrielle issue was still fresh in her mind. Luckily for me, I hadn't done anything with Natasha. I couldn't. Her hair reminded me of Emilia, so I was kind of distant a little from her in med school.

"Natasha, is everything alright?" I asked.

"Your eyes...why are your eyes like that?" she asked as she took a step closer.

Her green eyes showed horror. I wasn't fazed. Something must have happened, and it involved me in one way or the other. I hadn't seen her in a year, so I couldn't figure out what I had done.

“My eyes? They’ve always been like this,” I replied as I pointed at them.

She stood in front of me, scanning my face like she was looking for something.

“Oh, my God...” she said softly. “Are you Ethan?”

“The one and only,” I said with a shrug. “We went to pool parties in medical school.”

“Pool parties...” she repeated and her eyes widened. “Can I see the side of your stomach?”

Oh, now I know what’s going on.

“Excuse me?” Stacy frowned.

“It’s alright, sweetie,” I assured her as I lifted my shirt and showed her the tattoo of a scalpel on my side.

“Oh, my God,” she said as she planted her hand against her forehead, almost staggering.

“Should I call him?” I asked.

“No...no it’s fine,” she replied, then turned to Stacy.
“You’re...”

“His wife,” Stacy replied, still a little sceptical of the woman who had asked to look at my bare stomach.

“I’m so sorry for all this,” Natasha apologized and noticed Jason who had been trying to wave at her. She smiled and remarked, “You have a beautiful son.”

“Thank you, he takes after me,” I said with a proud smile, an attempt to make the situation less tense than it already was.
“You really don’t want me to talk to him?”

“I’ll be fine,” she said. “I’ll be leaving now. Thank you.”

“Alright then. I’m really sorry about this,” I apologized.

“It’s fine,” she said. “I’ll be leaving now.”

She turned around, walking away slowly, contemplating what to do next. How could he be so stupid?

“What was that all about?” Stacy asked.

“I assure you that I have nothing to do with this. At least not directly,” I defended. “It seems that my little brother has been using my identity to talk to that girl.”

“What? Ian? Is that even possible? I thought he doesn’t even like women?” The barrage of questions sounded similar to the ones I had heard both in high school and med school.

“Believe it or not, my younger brother desires women,” I replied. “But almost ninety percent of the time, the women he desires do not desire him in return - but someone else.”

“In other words, you...” she said as she looked away. “As much as I would like to feel bad for him. There is only one visible victim here.”

“No argument there.”

It still felt unreal. Ian found it distasteful to act like me most times when I would ask him to help me with meetings and such. But going out of his way to act like me for a woman? Could it be that my brother had finally reached the point of desperation?

“I just hope he figures this one out,” Stacy said with a sigh. “He might not know the true power of an angry woman.”

True.

Chapter Fourteen

The False Twin

Ian

“I’m thinking of making some dinner. Would you mind coming to my place tonight?”

It was the text I got from Natasha. As much as seeing this text would have made me excited on previous occasions, this was the only time I wasn’t as excited as I’d normally be. And the reason was simple. She wasn’t talking to me, but the persona I had created of the man she truly loved: Ethan, my older brother. I was getting exhausted, frustrated, and jealous of something that technically didn’t even exist. And even if it did exist, it was just me in a different form. I needed it to stop.

“I need to stop,” I said to myself as I examined myself in the mirror.

My hair was wet, so all I needed to do was ruffle it, and I'd look like my brother. Sound a little carefree too. It wasn't that hard. Anytime I visualized going as Ethan, I would remember the times with me as myself.

It was when she slept over at my house, and I would wake up finding her in my bed. When I made her breakfast, she watched and criticized me. I'd watch her change into her scrubs as she stopped using the bathroom. She started becoming more focused on hearing me talk or even joining me at the rest garden areas in my hospital without saying a word while I observed my patients going about their day.

I was slowly falling deeper and deeper in love with her as Ian. It wasn't fair. What I was doing was nothing less than identity theft.

"But she's also involved with both you and the fake persona you created," a voice whispered in my subconscious. "Are you truly the only one at fault here? She's technically cheating."

"What?" I blinked twice.

I was trying to figure out where the strange voice came from. It was a voice I hadn't heard in a while, but I shook it off. The question or argument the voice proposed wasn't so wrong. But her eyes seemed to tell a different story. The way she looked at

both personas were almost alike. And recently, it seemed like she was looking harder at Ian than Ethan.

It all happened after she had asked *Ethan* what I thought about her...and the carnival...

What...

What have I done?

I wiped my face in frustration.

She loved me.

Both of me.

Maybe just me and not my persona.

It was time to stop lying to both of us. If she found out who I was, we were just going to laugh about it and proceed with our lives. It wasn't going to be that bad.

"I know... but what is this bad feeling?" I asked myself as I felt chills run down my spine.

I arrived at her house as Ethan. The plan was to tell her as someone she loved; that way there wasn't going to be much of a damage. I was nervous, knees weak, and arms heavy. I had no sweater on, so I shivered, nervous and uneasy.

I knocked on the door. There was no response. I pressed on the door bell...nothing.

My phone chimed, a text from her, *the door isn't closed. Just come in.*

Strange.

I was on alert and made my way inside. I found her in the living room, seated on the couch and hugging her knees. As she lifted her head, her green eyes seemed to stab me severally.

“Is everything okay?” I asked.

“Was it that easy for you?” she asked. “Very easy?”

I started to think it was a very strange question. Had she encountered one of Ethan's former lovers? Or did she run into that Gabrielle person?

“What happened?” I asked. “Did you meet someone?”

“I did,” she said, her tone filled with so much disdain that I felt like I was filthy.

“Mind sharing?”

She remained quiet. The vein on the side of her forehead ruined her pretty face and unsettled me.

“You don’t...”

“Who are you?” she asked cutting me off.

The moment she asked the question, my blood froze.

She knows...how? Who told her? The person who seemed to be monitoring us?

“What are you asking? I’m...”

“Stop... don’t... don’t you fucking lie,” she said softly, but it sounded like she had just screamed her heart out.

“Natasha...”

“Who...are...you?” she asked again. Repeating each word as a final means of escape from me.

If I didn't confess, she wasn't going to trust me again. This wasn't how I planned to let her find out. I touched my hair and ran my hand through it, smoothing my hair back.

I cleared my throat, adjusting back to my voice. “I'm Ian...Ian Sullivan.”

I was ashamed. She stared at me in disbelief shaking her head negatively.

“I'm just a fool,” she said. “I knew something was off...how could I have been blind?”

“Natasha...”

“Why did you do that to me?” she asked. “Why lie? You knew my feelings...you...I told you...you...”

The words couldn't leave her lips as she struggled to maintain her composure.

“I...”

The words didn't come out. What was I going to say? How was I going to defend myself?

"I was just a dumb, sheltered princess that you could easily trick into whatever weird thing you did was?" she asked.

"That was never my intention," I defended.

"Then what was your intention?!" She was yelling now, her body shaking, and she was on her feet.

I love you. I loved you at first sight. But I was jealous of my brother and the fact that you were in love with him. I stole his identity because I wanted to get close to you. As if I could tell her all that. It would sound like poppycock. Wait...why was I the one taking the blame?

"I met with Ethan, the real one. I realized what seemed so off," she continued. "His eyes, the way he speaks - it was just like medical school. He looked at me like he had already put up a barrier, shutting me out and protecting himself. I found it strange, that you...your Ethan didn't seem distant. I thought it was just my being assertive that finally worked out for me, only to find out that I couldn't be more wrong. I was just a piece for someone who didn't know what he wanted."

“Don’t say that,” I said. “Why am I taking the blame for this anyway? I’m not the one who kissed you out of the blue in Glen Allen that day. I’m not the one who forced you to...”

“Don’t even try to run away from this or pin this on my head,” she warned. “You were meant to at least tell me I had the wrong person I could have given up a long time ago.”

“Easy for you to say,” I said.

“Excuse me,” she muttered.

Stop Ian.

“You make it look like I was the only one at fault, but I wasn’t the one who was technically cheating on the person you were in love with,” I continued.

Stop...what are you saying?

“What are you saying?” She asked the same question that was in my head.

“I’m saying if you were really interested in the persona I created, then why were you interested in my real identity?” I asked.

“You’re right,” she said as she looked at her feet. “I was stupid and at fault, but...”

When she lifted her face, I realized the horror of what I had just done. The tears she had fought desperately to hold back, had started to fall without restraint.

“Do you know,” she said as she sniffled and wiped her nose against her wrist, “that it’s not possible to be in love with two people at the same time?”

I didn’t answer. I didn’t know if I was allowed to answer. My words had brought her to ruin. I feared opening my mouth again, but I just kept silent, hoping things would get better.

“I thought I was crazy. How did I love Ethan? You even made me realize what I felt for him...the first time, was envy and admiration,” she continued. “I found it strange...when I kissed *him* in Glen Allen, my heart pounded in a way I didn’t even think was possible. Then I saw you...just looking into your eyes, and the pounding was there again.”

I swallowed hard. This was definitely not my day.

“You...when *Ethan* told me everything you said and thought about me,” she continued. The tears seemed to have stopped but she hugged herself, a little shaky from the emotional

turmoil. “My confusion grew. When we kissed, it only got worse. I didn’t know what I felt anymore. I wanted to hear your voice, I wanted to go back to that carnival. I wanted to accidentally trip and kiss you. But I kept wondering, why did my heart not sway with Ethan? Why did it remain the same? And now I think I know the answer...”

“Natasha, I’m sorry,” I apologized.

I didn’t want her to say the words she was about to say.

“I was in love with the same person,” she said with a forced laughter. “Can you imagine that? I was actually in love with both versions of you.”

I squeezed my hands into a fist.

“Natasha, I’m sorry. I was...”

“And while I struggled with my feelings,” she interrupted. “You saw the opportunity to continue the facade you kept up. Laughing at me.”

“I never...”

“Came here, and when I exposed you, you faulted me for cheating, when we aren’t even anything official?” she croaked.

“When I asked to take it slow, tell me did you buy time on purpose by agreeing? So you could take your time to play with me and my emotions. Were you trying to teach me something? Making a decision for me, just like my parents did, and at the end of it, you’d take off your mask and tell me that everything... was for my own good?”

“No, that’s not it at all,” I insisted.

“Get out, Ian,” she said softly.

“Natasha...” I called out and approached her, but she slapped me.

“GET OUT!!” she screamed before covering her own mouth and staring at her hand, completely horrified that she had let her emotions take over.

She stared at my face where she had struck it. she wanted to reach for it, but she held her hand back and looked away. “Just leave. And don’t say a word.”

“I...”

“Not...a word.”

I nodded and turned around, dragging myself out of the house, forcing myself not to look back. My cheek hurt thanks to the slap. But both my cheeks felt wet. I touched my cheeks .I was crying.

Natasha

Disbelief. When I met the true Ethan, it was complete disbelief. When I made eye contact with him, I didn't feel the way I usually felt, and it scared me. His eyes also looked very different and they held nothing for me.

The woman by his side, and the baby I would notice didn't trigger any form of reaction, either.

I assumed if I ever encountered any of his lovers, they'd cause a scene and I'd get jealous. But the fact I felt nothing, scared me.

The scalpel tattoo by his side was the important detail that was missing on my Ethan's body. When I got home, I realized that I had spent the last month being used.

"You make it look like I was the only one at fault, but I wasn't the one who was technically cheating on the person you were in love with," he said.

The words he said still hurt. Before he came to my house, I had already cried my heart out and wiped away the tears. My emotions ranging between anger and sadness. I didn't mean to hit him, but at the same time, I did. Why he did such a thing to me, I'll never understand it. Did he have to do it? What would he have lost if he just gave a simple.

I'm sorry. My brother is married now and I'm his twin brother, but we can make it work.

I know how I think. I would have been sold immediately. At first, I might not really like him at first, but I am a hundred percent sure that if I spent one day with Ian, with everything I had seen, I would have fallen in love with him, all over again.

He did have a point. If I were so torn, I could have just easily chosen one and gotten on with my life. What if I chose Ethan? This was also his fault and...

My cheeks felt wet. I touched the sides of my face. I was crying again. I brought out my phone and read through my messages with *Ethan*. Was I really being used? It didn't matter. It was over.

Chapter Fifteen

Resignation to One's Fate

Natasha

I saw his face. His hand gently pushed the hair away from my face. His gentle smile put me at peace. His thumb rubbed my cheek, and I giggled.

“Who are you?” the words escaped my lips.

I didn't want to ask. I knew if I asked, everything would end. But this was the new reality of things.

“I'm...”

He couldn't finish his words. My brain automatically shut him out...he started to disappear; much to my dismay.

I opened my eyes and tried to recognize the room I was in. The bed was bigger than usual... wait, this was the original usual. I was back in Maryland. After what happened with Ian, I couldn't take it anymore and had left Richmond. I also stopped working at his hospital. I didn't need anything that would remind me of him. That would be my excuse, but I had yet to delete any of his texts. I also saw him in my dreams as well.

As I woke up, I remembered how he had made breakfast once. Everything was just reminding me of him and my mistake. I needed something stronger. A bigger distraction. Something that wouldn't let me remember him and finally let me move on with my life.

"Your mother wasn't kidding when she said you look devoid of life," Rachel said as she entered my room and made her way to my bed.

She sat on the bed and reached for my head, slowly petting me.

"You left me out of touch with a lot of things you were up to in Richmond," she said. "I just assumed you were fine. But it would seem I was wrong. Do you want to tell me what happened?"

Rachel was the closest thing to a best friend I had. I had wanted to tell her about what was going on, but I knew what she would say. *“Why would you even do something as stupid as that?”*

I had kept it a secret from her, but not anymore.

“I followed your advice. I was aggressive and got involved sexually and romantically with Dr. Ethan Sullivan,” I explained.

“Wow, you did it. And here I thought you’d give up and try to focus on Lawrence or something. You’ve grown, princess,” she said with a smile.

“Yeah... I guess I have grown,” I replied nervously.

“What happened?” she asked. “Did everything not go well?”

“It was wonderful. The sex, the loving, the quality time spent together. I even went to a four-star restaurant and a mini observatory,” I replied with a soft chuckle. It was one of the most beautiful things I have ever experienced.”

“I don’t understand if you enjoyed it that much then why are you here?” she asked, a bit concerned.

‘I did enjoy it, but it turns out that the person I thought I was in love with wasn’t any other than his younger brother Ian Sullivan,’ I remarked.

“Come again?”

“It was his younger brother posing as Ethan,” I repeated.

“And you didn’t notice? Why would he even do such a thing?”

“To answer the first question, no I didn’t notice. As for the second, I have absolutely no idea,” I replied. “I ran into the real Ethan. He is married with a wife and kids. I guess this would have been something I’d been aware of if I had just listened to everyone and got a normal smartphone and stayed on social media.”

“It still doesn’t make sense. The Ian’s part that is,” she insisted. “Why go out of his way to act like his older brother? Do you think he did it just to make sure you don’t take the news badly?”

“If that’s the case, then why was he involved with me as his normal self?” I asked.

“What?”

“While he was acting like Ethan, I found myself drawn to both the false character he had created, and his original self,” I explained. “I was confused. It’s impossible to be in love with two different people but there I was, doing it so effortlessly that I wondered if I was really sick in the head.”

I paused took in a deep breath and continued, “I knew there were things off about *Ethan*. How he acted so mature, that his clumsiness seemed forced or almost non-existent. But I brainwashed myself into thinking he had matured within the span of a year. Then I got the rude awakening. And guess what Ian did?”

“What?”

“He accused me of cheating,” I replied while trying not to laugh. “Me cheating with the same person. He wasn’t wrong, though. But blaming me for a relationship that was yet to have a label, while I thought it was two different persons! He intentionally acted as different people and let the whole thing unfold while I could do nothing in response.”

“That was...I have no words,” she said as she shook her head negatively. “Are you over him?”

I remembered the dreams and the pain that still tugged at my heart for hitting him. I felt bad for not explaining to him. I

remembered his conversation in the garden and how everyone seemed to prefer Ethan over him. How sad his eyes looked, and the way he lit up when I showed that I was interested in him.

I started to ask myself, *could it be that, he only did all this, just because he wanted me but felt I wouldn't be interested in his true self?*

My head hurt from thinking about it. Not like thinking was going to do me any good.

“Judging by the silence, I’ll assume that’s a no,” Rachel said, interrupting my thoughts.

“You might be right. I haven’t let go of him,” I agreed, “but I don’t want to see him again, that’s for certain.”

“Understandable, so you want to forget everything about him,” she said.

“You’re actually right,” I said. “I just don’t know what to do to help me forget.”

There was a knock on my door. “Come in,” I said.

The door opened and one of the maids came in. “Mr Lawrence Williams is here to see you.”

“He’s back in Maryland?” I cried.

“What do you know? A distraction.” Rachel shrugged.

“Lawrence? I must really be desperate.” I sighed then turned my attention to the maid. “I’ll be out shortly.”

She nodded and left. I got out of the bed and head straight for the bathroom.

“Natasha,” Rachel called as I was about to enter.

“Yes?”

“Don’t force yourself to do anything you don’t want to do,” she advised. “You just recovered and I know you’re trying to heal from that. But as a doctor, you know that self-medication isn’t a good idea all the time.”

“That’s for people who aren’t doctors,” I said.

“Well, just saying,” she shrugged and got up to leave. “I’ll keep your guest occupied, until you’re out.”

“Thank you, for the advice and the offer to keep him company,” I said .

Rachel may have just been a bodyguard, but she was the most reliable friend I had. Maybe I should have told her about the issues when they first came along; it would have made everything easier.

After my bath, I changed into a white sundress with floral patterns to feel comfortable. No heavy jewelry and no makeup. I wasn't in the mood to go anywhere, but if the idea popped into Lawrence's head, I wanted to make sure to look presentable. I went downstairs and found him drinking tea with Rachel. She looked fed up, and I started to feel bad letting her keep him company while I got ready.

“There she is,” Rachel said as she noticed me. “Lovely having tea with you, Mr. Williams.”

“Please, just call me Lawrence,” he insisted, before turning his eyes to me. “It's unfair how many women would have to put in a lot of effort to achieve your level of beauty, and you have it down effortlessly.”

“Really? My skincare routine would make any model or actress’s knees wobble and drop,” I noted.

“And yet, you make it look easy. I know you’ve followed the path of medicine, but it wouldn’t be so bad to actually try your hand in modelling,” he suggested. “Like the brother of that doctor you work for in Richmond. Dr. Ethan Sullivan. I’ve seen him in a few magazines.”

Mentioning Ethan and Ian, felt like exposing my heart to pins.

“Mmm...yeah, I’ll probably consider it,” I said as he got up and walked toward me.

“You don’t look alright, may I touch your face?” he asked.

Strange.

The new Lawrence wouldn’t act like that. Was I being tricked again.

“Why the look of disbelief? Do you think I’m the kind of person who’d just touch your face without asking?”

“Yes...yes, you are. At least the way you are now,” I replied honestly.

“I think I deserve that,” he chuckled. “No funny business...let me just squish your face like old times.”

My eyes deviated and focused on Rachel. She shrugged. It was like she told me to go ahead considering I wanted to forget about a certain twin that had split my heart into two different portions of his personas.

“Okay,” I agreed.

He touched my face. There was nothing really special about it. When both forms of Ian would touch me, even when I would visualize it, my face would heat up just from a single brush of his fingers. Lawrence had softer hands, true, a little weird because his hands didn't used to be that way. Maybe this is just me, but I felt that Lawrence had spent too much time modifying his body.

“Were you crying?” he asked as he lifted my chin and made me look into his eyes.

“No, I was just awake all night,” I said.

“Don't need to lie to me,” he sighed. “You'll never have to go through whatever it is you went through ever again.”

“Yeah sure,” I muttered.

“Now, shall we go somewhere fun?” he asked with a gentle smile.

I don't know why, but he seemed to be putting me off in a way that unsettled me.

We went to the movies. I ignored his hand holding mine and said nothing when he touched my thighs too. He intertwined his fingers with mine as his driver drove us to another fancy restaurant; but I wasn't properly dressed and they had a strict dress code. It didn't stop him from going to another one and making a toast to my eyes.

I was tired. It wasn't working. There was a park, a new one, and he decided to make it a last location. We sat on the benches, and I looked at the stars. I remembered the observatory and Ethan,,Ian. We didn't get to name any stars, or did we? I couldn't remember, I was just lost in the moment and how happy he made me.

“You mind telling me, what exactly I'm doing wrong?” Lawrence asked.

I turned to look at him and his eyes weren't focused on me but at the sky as well.

“In what regard?” I asked. “As a person or as the fact that my family has decided that I must marry you for some reason I don't understand yet.”

“You've always had a smart mouth,” he chuckled. “Part of the many reasons I love you.”

“I'm not sure you love me though,” I said.

“You don't know the lengths I'm willing to go to have you. If that's not love, then what is?” he asked with a smile so cold, my blood froze.

On any other circumstances, what he said would sound romantic. But instead, he had successfully frightened me like it was child's play.

“I have spent years of my life...” He said as he took my left hand and kissed the back of my palm gently, “working to be a perfect man. Because you deserve nothing less than perfect. It's for your own good that I solely exist. A woman who is able to do anything for the first time, a woman whose beauty puts a lot of women to shame - a goddess. What delusional

form of thinking would I have that a mere man like me could acquire you with how normal I was?”

He gently went up my arm, his eyes closed. I noticed his nose flare as he inhaled with each inch he took. He was sniffing me?

“From the moment I saw you as a child, I desired you. As a friend of course, but puberty came along, and I realized just how much of a woman you were going to become,” he continued his rambling.

His left hand held my hips and pulled me to himself. He had finally gotten to my neck; my breathing became erratic, panicking from everything he was doing. I looked around and only noticed how empty the park was. At first I didn't pay attention to it because it was a new park and many people would have been sceptical of coming to the place at night. But I realized that Lawrence had rented it.

For this moment? I wasn't so sure.

“You were getting better and better. I have your parents to thank for that. You never complained; you obeyed and become even more perfect,” he spoke against my neck. I shuddered because it tickled and that was just it: there was no other emotion.

I started to regret my choice of outfit, wishing I had put more thought into what I wore before leaving the house. But at least my thighs were safe. He just seemed content with breathing on my neck and caressing my waist.

I could bear it.

“You didn’t seem interested in any man, until recently,” he said.

“What?” I asked.

“Don’t act dumb. Even I know what kind of sex play would involve both of your wrists being bruised,” he said with an exasperated sigh. “You don’t also expect me to think you were all of a sudden interested in four-star restaurants run by lower class citizens. Someone was clearly influencing you...”

He started to push me down, and I struggled to get him off me. He continued, “Corrupting you. Taking my perfect goddess and making her do unspeakable things like associating with the lower castes. I’m only okay with you treating the sick, because that is the sign of the goddess’s benevolence. She doesn’t necessarily have to leave her throne in the skies and mingle with those on the floor.”

“Why do you keep calling me a goddess?” I asked as he had successfully made me to lay down on the bench.

He pinned both my hands above my head and took a good look at me. I made sure my face remained passive although I was panicking on the inside.

“Because that’s what you are?” he affirmed with a look of disbelief, like he expected me to know that already.

He had this grandiose view of me being a perfect being...and he wouldn’t be the first person to do so. My parents also saw me that way, my staff and even at a point, Rachel herself thought I was perfect.

I wasn’t.

I worked extremely hard at everything I did just to make sure I fit into the image they had created of me. It was frustrating and draining. I almost wanted to give up each time. But only one person couldn’t see that.

Ian saw me as someone who was trying too hard. He treated me like a normal woman. A woman who wanted to be held, cuddled, and not an unachievable item - a woman who was strong, intelligent and yet still wanted to learn. Even at the

carnival, he didn't act like I would win all the prizes and wasn't disappointed when I lost.

Even when I tripped and fell, he let me fall, saving me too. I wasn't a goddess, I wasn't a princess, I was just Natasha; a normal woman. He recognized my talents and didn't make me overwork myself. With my skill in medicine, I could have easily performed anything I wanted to do in his hospital, but he made sure I focused on my strength. If my parents or Lawrence were in his shoes, I was sure that I would have had to perform all the tough surgeries without a single complaint.

I wasn't a goddess. I wasn't a princess. I was just Natasha, a girl who just happened to be born with golden hair and green eyes. A girl that someone wanted so badly that he'd fake a whole different persona just to have me.

And...

No, I wasn't supposed to forgive him.

"Why?" Lawrence asked.

"What?" I blinked twice as I noticed the anger in his eyes.

"I have you pinned down. I've touched you, I've poured out everything I know, feel and desire you, and you don't even

notice my presence?” He went on to ask, “Who are you even thinking about? Why isn’t it me?”

“I... I’m not thinking about anyone. In fact, I don’t want to think about anyone. I want to forget. Can you help me?” I asked.

It was shameful. I was ashamed of what I had demanded. I didn’t want to come to terms with the fact that I had made a huge blunder concerning Ian, by letting him get away.

“Are you sure?” he asked as his gaze softened, a small smile tugging at his lips. He gradually let go of my hands, but I kept them above my head.

The pounding of fear had left, and I was left with nothing.

“Yes.”

He leaned in and kissed my neck. And then my ears and then...he stopped as he was about to kiss my lips.

“Don’t insult me,” he said with a frown. “Stop me now.”

“Won’t this be enough proof that I have no interest in you as a life partner? Or it might be just enough to help you spark something,” I stated.

He thought about my words, and I could see the conflict in his eyes. Ian never had that conflict. He would have taken me in the desire to return the favor.

“Lawrence...”

“Fine,” he said.

He kissed me and let out a groan of satisfaction. I had no feeling. The taste of red wine from our dinner earlier made its way into my mouth and made me uncomfortable. He stopped the kiss and leaned back, away from my body. His fingers touched his lips; he seemed to have entered a state of ecstasy.

“I kissed her...” he said softly. “Far better than anything I have tasted.”

“You’re welcome,” I said as I sat upright, smoothing my wrinkled dress.

“You felt nothing,” he said.

“Was it that obvious?” I asked.

“I don’t know what had gotten into you, but I assure you...” he started to say as he got to his feet. “You and Ian are never

getting back with each other. You are left with me and no one else. That is a fact and you can do nothing about it.”

He had a point, and it wasn't something I wanted to hear.

Chapter Sixteen

The True Twin (Part One)

Ian

This might be a little obvious if one is familiar with my relationship with my brothers. Ethan and I didn't get along, and at the same time we did. I was jealous of my older brother and have heard many say he is jealous of me as well.

Sometimes, I would look for an opportunity to make him suffer or just poke fun at him. But this didn't always work as my brother would return with fire. Then there was Ben who was more than ready to pummel the both of us if we refused to get along. It was always for the minor things we would quarrel about. Rarely had it been for situations that involved our identity as twins.

Just like how I had taken Ethan's place in situations that would demand his presence, my older brother would waste no time in

taking my place if it were for my own good, and I was unable to be present. That is how it usually was, and nothing more.

This was the first time I had taken his full identity. Ben hadn't told him anything, and he was yet to tell me anything, either. Natasha had told me she encountered him, but he was yet to call or tell me anything...it could have ranged from he didn't care to didn't want to tell me.

Then I got the text. He was back and the family was holding some kind of reunion party. Well, it was Dad's memorial after all; we'd normally celebrate it together. It turned out to be one of the worst nights of my life.

I arrived at Mom's place; it wasn't as gloomy as the previous years had been. Probably because the family had almost doubled in size.

"Uncle Ian!!" Chloe announced as she raced for me. "I made the cranberry sauce."

I picked up my niece and noticed she had put on a few more pounds. "I can't keep lifting you forever."

Deja vu.

“Uncle Ethan was here but he forgot something,” she reported.

“Tell him something new,” Ben said as he walked into the living room, with Jason in his arms. “Glad to see you made it.”

I recalled that night and everything he said. Things had turned out exactly as he warned.

Judging by the lack of concern on his face, Ethan hadn't told him what happened either.

“How's Sophie?” I asked.

“With her grandmother in the kitchen, along with the ladies,” he replied and handed Jason over to me.

My nephew was the silent one compared to the rest of his cousins, a trait Stacy had said he'd inherited from his grandfather on her side.

“How are you doing Jason?” I asked.

The little boy only touched my face, before continuing to suck on his fingers. My face was now wet.

“You brought anything?” Ben asked. “I brought wine.”

“Cakes and puddings,” I replied. “Ethan?”

“Souvenirs from his trip, which he forgot,” he replied with a sigh. “Speaking of, about that situation, did you resolve it? Ethan is back, and it might cause some problems.”

“You don’t have to worry about that,” I replied.

I still had her resignation letter in my pocket, a reminder of my failure and inability to keep her by my side. Jason started crying.

“Dinner is almost ready.” Stacy came out quickly. “Hi, Ian.”

“Good evening, Stacy,” I returned her greeting as I handed her son to her.

She looked like she wanted to say something but shook her head negatively and smiled. “Would you two mind helping set the table? Let me feed Jason. Ethan forgot the bottles too.”

“No problem,” Ben and I responded in unison.

We headed straight for the dinner table and got the cutlery out. It was a long dining table with a lot of seats. When we were younger, we wondered why Dad had gotten a table this big

when there were only five of us. He mentioned that he wanted it to seat his entire family. Now I understood.

“The baby is officially here,” Mom announced as she came to inspect the dining.

“Evening Ian,” Olivia greeted as she came out with one of the meals. “Ben sweetie, the turkey.”

“Is this Thanksgiving?” I asked my mother.

“No, but we’re giving thanks for his life and our new family,” Mom replied and kissed my cheek. “Go help your brother get things plated.”

I smiled and obeyed. We had finished setting the dinner table and bringing out the meals when Ethan returned.

“Traffic, and I don’t know what other reason to excuse my lateness,” Ethan said, a sorry attempt for an apology making everyone present to let out a sigh.

He made eye contact with me. “Ian.”

“Ethan,” I replied.

He nodded and took his seat next to Stacy.

“Now that we’re all here, let’s get started,” Mom pronounced.

Dinner was going well, until Mom popped the question. She didn’t mean any harm. Considering the progress of things it was an expected question.

“Considering the order of how things have been going in terms of marriage, Ian, I believe this might be your year?” Mom asked.

I didn’t miss the look Ethan gave me. Ben wasn’t interested.

“It might not be possible after all,” I said and continued my meal.

“Not when you’re using my identity that is,” Ethan said it.

“Here we go,” Ben sighed.

“Now? Ethan?” Stacy asked.

“What’s going on?” Olivia was lost.

Luckily, the kids had left for bed earlier, so it was just the adults. I wiped my mouth with a napkin and poured myself a glass of wine.

“I believe I should apologize about that,” I said.

“What is going on?” Mom asked.

“Ian, over here, posed to be me to get a woman. I met said woman, and it almost caused a scene,” Ethan replied.

“What? Why?” Mom asked me.

“It’s not my fault that people mistake me for him. I had no choice,” I replied, hoping the conversation would end there.

“Maybe if you fixed your attitude and that sense of superiority, people would prefer you more,” Ethan remarked.

“Ethan,” Mom warned.

“At least I’m not the irresponsible one who went around with different women,” I shot back.

“Ian,” Mom frowned.

“At least I know how to talk to people,” Ethan uttered and put down his fork.

“At least I’m careful enough not to have anything that would ruin an engagement,” I said.

He punched the table and stood upright. “Shut your hell hole up, little brother.”

“Or what big brother?” I asked as I got up.

“Both of you stop it,” Mom warned. “Ben?”

“I’m not doing anything,” Ben defended himself.

“Outside,” Ethan said.

“Ethan stop,” Stacy pleaded.

“After you,” I said as I unbuttoned the first three buttons of my shirt.

“Will you two stop!” Mom yelled.

“Leave them alone,” Ben said.

“Ben...” Olivia called out to him.

“They’re grown men,” he said. “Let them sort this out between themselves.”

Ethan rolled up his sleeves and made his way outside the house. I followed behind him.

“These kids,” I could hear Mom’s frustrated groan.

Outside we got ready to spar. The women and Ben had come outside to watch.

“You know, come to think of it, I have a lot of things to be pissed off with you,” he said as he got ready. “First of all is how you try to look at me like I’m some kind of idiot.”

“You make it too easy,” I said with a mocking smile.

He smiled too, and then he moved. It was so fast that I didn’t see it coming. The right hook almost made me stagger. I turned and went after him, landing him a punch across the face. But he took it easily and returned it with multiple jabs across my face, stomach, and chest, sending me to my knees.

“Jesus Christ, Ethan!” Stacy yelled.

“Come on little brother,” he said. “Don’t tell me you’re so pathetic that stealing identities is all you can do to get a woman? Maybe I should teach you a thing or two after this. Your acting skills must be top notch if you were able to fool Natasha that easily.”

I rushed him with a grapple and tackled him to the floor.

“Don’t tell me anything about getting women!” I yelled, as I punched him. “What do you know?! Women flock to you. No matter how clumsy you are. No matter how foul your mouth is. No matter how easy you make everything look. Despite both of us looking exactly alike, do you know what kind of disappointed eyes they give me when they find out I’m not you?”

With each statement I made, I made an attack on his face. He was able to block them off.

“You have absolutely no idea, how hard being me is,” I said before trying to land another punch, which he caught easily.

“I have no idea?” he asked as he grabbed my throat and squeezed tightly.

Ben had always separated us, so I had absolutely no idea what my older brother was capable of - if he actually fought me like he meant it. He easily lifted himself and pushed me down.

“Mom loves you,” he said as he landed a fist. “The professors call you the smartest of the three of us combined.” He landed another fist. “You have shown me severally what I could have been if I wasn’t so careless. Every day I lose an item, I forget to do things. The women you think I have all let me know that they wouldn’t be with me because of how clumsy I am. It was hard being me when the one person who truly loved me came to me with genuine intent, and I tossed her away.” He landed another blow.

He had my neck in a choke hold; it was hard to clock his fists while trying to gasp for air.

“You really think that woman at one point didn’t really care about the real you?” he asked.

“Let him breathe,” Ben said, and Ethan softened his grip on my neck.

“I don’t know why you did what you did, but I want you to know that there was absolutely no reason you should have done it,” Ethan said. “The woman didn’t even look like she

was in love with me. She looked as lost and confused as you are right now.”

He let go of me and stood up while I lay motionless on the floor.

“I know I’ve made things difficult for you,” he said. “But there are things only you can be able to do.”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized.

I meant it. I had treated him with disdain for so many years, but he had never taken it seriously. I without doubt had seen the amount of effort he had put into making his life seem perfect. And rather than trying my best to actually be myself, I chose the coward’s path and stole his own identity, without properly thinking about it.

“I’m sorry too,” he said and stretched his hand toward me. “Now let’s go have those desserts you brought.”

“I don’t think I can eat with the bleeding in my mouth,” I said as I accepted his hand, and he helped me up.

“You’ll be fine,” he shrugged, and we made our way back where Ben and the rest were waiting.

“You two got it out of your system?” he asked.

“Yeah..” we replied.

“Good,” he said before punching the both of us at the same time, “That’s for making Mom worry.”

“Ah, you broke my nose,” Ethan whined.

“Serves you right...why did you go picking a fight in the first place.” Stacy frowned as she inspected his face.

“Ow, that actually hurts the way you’re touching my face,” he complained.

“Just shut up and let me see,” she instructed, and I watched him smile.

It was the first time, I saw any woman look at my brother like that. I had seen eyes like that too. Moments when Natasha looked at me.

“Let me see your face,” Mom said as she held my jaw and made me face her. “Both of you can be idiots at the oddest times.”

“I’m sorry, Mom,” I apologized.

“Hush, you,” she demanded and frowned. “But your brother is right. It’s time you actually accepted yourself for who you are. You’re a sweet young man, and I’m sure whoever the lady was, false persona or not, she didn’t make a mistake in choosing you.”

“Thank you,” I said. I wanted to smile, but the adrenaline had worn off ,so I was left with nothing but excruciating pain on my face, stomach, and other parts of my body.

Not the kind of awakening I wanted, but the one I needed. Maybe it wasn’t the worst night of my life.

Life wasn’t so easy without Natasha’s presence. At the hospital, she and I didn’t work together a lot, but we did see more of each other during breaks in the garden and sometimes the cafeteria.

“Is everything okay sir?” one of the nurses asked.

“Hmm? Tabitha right?” I asked.

“Yes, sir,” she replied. “Can I sit next to you?”

It was the garden. I just wanted to watch the patients, but I didn't mind the company.

"Sure," I replied and scooted away so she could sit.

"I usually sit here with the model doctor sometimes," she informed me.

"Model doctor?"

"That's what some of the nurses call her. You know Dr. James?" You sat with her a lot," she said.

"You watched us?" I asked. "You could have easily joined in."

"Not with the way she used to look at you. It felt like I was watching a romance story unfold. I actually thought you two were an item," she said.

Tabitha was a relatively new nurse here with just a year's worth of experience with us. People have said good things about her, patients and staff alike. She didn't gossip but knew a lot.

A funny person, and she was really taking that title with her statement.

“Romance? An item?” I chuckled softly. “You don’t say. What made you think that? From what I could tell, Natasha already had someone she was interested in.”

“Really?” She tilted her head to the side. “She normally asked us what we thought of you. And when she’d watch you work or you two would walk into the cafeteria; it felt like we were looking at a couple. But maybe it’s just my imagination speaking.”

“You might be right about that,” I suggested.

“I heard she resigned...any reason?” she asked. “Did she have a problem with any of the staff? She seemed to like all of us.”

She left because your boss was a huge asshole.

“She was a temporary staff, so there was a chance that she’d leave at any time,” I explained.

“You must miss her,” she said.

“That I do, Tabitha,” I replied as I continued to take in the scenery.

What I would have given to be able to sit like this with her again.

Chapter Seventeen

A Trip to France

Ian

“You want me to what?” I asked.

A month has passed since the fight and I had lost Natasha, but Ethan had asked me to do something for him as a way to pay back.

“I want you to go to the romance capital of the world and impersonate me for a conference,” he explained.

“And why would I do that?” I questioned.

“Because that’s what twin brothers do, and you’re kind of a pro at it,” he smirked.

“Want a second go? I trained in basic jiu-jitsu.” I balled a fist and showed it to him.

“Remember how the last one went? MMA technique shit right there,” he said. “But I didn’t say it to spite you. A lot of my patients have been wanting to see me ever since I got back. I would have love to go but my hands are tied.”

Stacy was in his office. She didn’t say anything and just focused on the papers in her hands.

“Yeah, I don’t still get why I have to impersonate you,” I said. “I could just go and represent you.”

“Oh come on, you know the drill when it comes to things like this, you have to pretend to be me, and I will pretend to be you,” he reminded me. “it’s always so fun.”

“I don’t want to...”

“Please?” he pleaded, “Just this last time?”

“Jeez, fine but don’t look at me like that.” I agreed to his bizarre request while squeezing my face in displeasure over his puppy dog face.

“You don’t have to look so displeased by my cuteness,” he frowned. “At least Stacy thinks it looks cute.”

“No. I do not think it does. Not even in the slightest,” she replied without looking.

His shoulders dropped and he cleared his throat. “Well, she’s only saying that because you’re here, if it was just the both of us she would have been looking forward to see me do it again.”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” the both of us said simultaneously.

I turned and smirked at her and she nodded with one in return.

“Alright, are you giving a speech?” I asked.

“No not really. It’s just one of those boring conferences. I can’t be seen falling asleep,” he explained.

“The audacity....” I frowned but knew better than to get upset about it.

“You might also want to get ready, because the event is in two days’ time,” he said.

“Two days. How long have you known about this meet and that you’d be unable to attend?” I asked.

“Two weeks, why?” he asked.

I facepalmed and turned around to leave.

“Thank you so much, little bro,” he said as I closed the door behind me.

Ethan was never going to change. I’m surprised that he didn’t ask Ben. Ben went for the one in London. Maybe he was considerate to Ben as he wanted to bond properly with his family. And maybe Ethan just wanted to be closer to his family in this period. I couldn’t help thinking that he was plotting something. Whatever it was, I was going to find out in France.

Ethan

“Why didn’t you tell him the *true* reason you wanted him to go there?” Stacy asked, a few minutes after Ian had left.

“Where’s the fun in spoiling the show?” I asked. “I actually meant the part about the fact I would fall asleep during the conference.”

The moment I thought about the conference, a yawn came.

“You see?” I asked.

“Whatever,” she sighed. “I feel like he deserves to know. A little heads up would be fine.”

“It’s Ian we’re talking about. Right about now, he’d already be considering the fact that I was up to something,” I assured her.

“Well, you might be right about that,” she said. “Sometimes I realize that I don’t really understand you siblings properly.”

“Well, I don’t understand us either,” I said.

Indeed, I was up to something, but it wasn’t going to be anything that would actually hurt my younger brother. I guess it was my way of setting things right.

Ian

Paris. Even before getting to the hotel, I had witnessed close to twenty couples kiss each other in public. I always thought those kinds of tropes only existed in the pages of a corny romance novel or in a scene in a romantic comedy. But this was Paris, the romance capital of the world. Who decided

that? The French, authors, or whatever, I had no idea. But they were indeed living up to their reputation.

I settled down.

The conference wasn't going to be a one day thing. Although the event wasn't meant to start till the following day, there was going to be a mini- networking session. The conference was for people who had achieved a lot this season. I heard there was going to be an award presentation to outstanding people in each field.

Normally they'd tell the recipients ahead of time. As Ethan didn't tell me anything there were two possibilities: he had forgotten he was going to get an award or he wasn't getting an award. I prayed to the stars above that the latter was the case, because I wasn't in the mood to give a speech. Anyway, I needed to go for the networking session. I wanted to have a basic idea of how people who knew Ethan would act around him, so I could reciprocate accordingly.

As I stepped out of my hotel, room I noticed a flash of blonde hair. My heart skipped a beat as I noticed a woman a few meters away from me with her back turned to me and the golden hair right below her neck. I didn't need to see the face.

It wasn't her.

“I thought you’d have gotten over her by now,” I said to myself with a sigh.

I wouldn’t have been able to forget about her no matter how hard I tried. She still haunted my memories, and it didn’t help that I went through the texts sent between me and the false persona. I relived the moments we shared, again and again. It felt like I was doing more harm than good to myself.

Time and time again, I found myself compiling texts or making the attempt to call her, only to stop myself halfway. It wasn’t one of the best states I had ever been in.

Lovesickness: a word and disease I never thought I would one day associate myself with and be unable to cure. Well, besides some true medical diseases. I left the hotel and head down to the event. The location was in another hotel’s event hall. The place was grand, a little too big for an event that was only expecting fifty to sixty guests. As expected, I knew little to no one here, but...

“Dr. Ethan Sullivan. It’s a pleasure to meet you in person.”

“Dr. Sullivan, I’ve heard so much about you.”

“Ethan Sullivan, so good to finally meet you.”

Luckily for me, most of the people who knew Ethan had never met him in person. It was a good thing because they didn't know how he acted; that reduced the level of acting I actually had to do. Most asked for advice concerning stitching and the likes. All I did was to tell them what I had observed from Ethan, along with everything else he had taught me.

We brothers often took time to learn from each other. We didn't spend all our time focusing solely on our strengths, just in case we ever encountered an emergency case that the other person had a proficiency in. Well, it was just little bits of information, but enough to keep the guests impressed and fooled.

"You sure do know a lot, Dr. Sullivan," a voice remarked.

The voice. One so familiar that I had almost forgotten about how melodic it actually was. My heart started to pound. I turned and there she was. Dressed in a beautiful black evening gown, with a slit to show off her beautiful left thigh. The emerald jewelry highlighted the beauty of her eyes.

And those lips, glossed to enhance her natural beauty. Dr. Natasha James.

"Natasha..." I called softly.

She didn't know I was going to be here. As usual, she had met Ethan. She started walking toward me and leaned to my ear.

"It's nice to see you again, Ian," she whispered.

She knew at a glance who I was. She smiled and walked away, while I remained frozen in place, unable to say anything either.

"Oh, is that Dr. James?" one of the guests asked.

"She's as gorgeous as the rumors say," another remarked.

"Did you hear? Apparently she's getting an award for her help with the UN," someone said.

"A true prodigy," another uttered.

Natasha wasn't really a prodigy. Just someone who worked extra hard to meet the expectations of everyone around her. I could tell because she was the woman I loved.

"I didn't know she was going to be here," someone said.

I watched her mingle with other guests, a glass of wine in hand. She laughed and talked to them about different topics. I couldn't hear any of the things she said. I could have moved

toward her and listened, but my guilt wasn't about to let me go anywhere near her. So, I was stuck looking at her. I didn't expect her to be there, like that person had said.

"Everyone was sent a list of the guests who were going to be here, her name was among," another person explained.

There was a list of guests. I pulled out my phone and dialed Ethan.

"Bonjour, little bro, tu est parfait?" he greeted with his horrible excuse of French.

"Did you know about this?" I asked ignoring the greeting.

"Know about what?" I asked.

"Don't play dumb. I found it weird that you insisted I come. Did you know she was going to be here?" I asked.

"Oh, that's what you mean," he replied. "Yeah, I knew Dr. James was going to be there."

"Then why didn't you tell me?" I asked.

“And risk you not going because you’d feel guilty to see her face? Hell no,” he replied. “I just wanted you to go and get it done with.”

“Then why did you want me to impersonate you?” I asked.

“I just wanted to know if she’d be able to tell us apart this time,” he replied. I could visualize him shrugging. “Did she?”

“Yes...” I replied as I recalled her whispering my name.

“There you have it,” he said. “You have something many people don’t usually have when it comes to this love situation.”

“What’s that?”

“A second chance,” he replied. “Don’t ruin it this time.”

He was still looking out for me. He may be clumsy, but he always did go out of his way to look out for Ben and me.

“Thank you, Ethan,” I said softly.

“Don’t thank me until you succeed in your mission,” he said. “Now judging by your tone and how you were quick to call

me. I assume that you've already spoken to her, but now you're too scared to move. If she talked to you first, then there's a chance that she doesn't completely hate you."

"That also means there's a chance she hates me."

"Of course, she'd hate you. You did play with her emotions, co-op style," he reminded me.

"Thanks for the advice," I said.

"Take care brother, peace,." he said before hanging up.

I returned my phone to my pocket and looked at her. She was still engaged in her conversation. She turned and made eye contact with me, a small smile formed on her lips. I waved at her nervously. She returned the wave.

Maybe she didn't hate me at all. I took in a deep breath and exhaled same, before making my way to her. Luckily for me, as I approached her, others were leaving, and she didn't move away. She waited for me to arrive.

"Hi," I said as I got close to her.

"Hi," she replied, "You lost some weight."

I wasn't eating properly for a while.

"Yeah, I was watching my weight," I replied.

"What? You were perfect the way you were," she said.

I was...perfect?

"I wouldn't say that," I said.

"Well, I did mean just body wise not in other areas," she explained.

For some reason, that hurt me. I didn't want to understand how it affected me when she didn't make the statement with any form of malice.

"How have you been?" I asked.

The moment I asked the question, her shoulders dropped, and her eyes seemed to have lost some color. Something terrible had happened to her.

"Parents?" I asked.

She looked surprised, "You could tell?"

“I remember that face when you first told me about them,” I replied. “Did they send you on exile again to another remote location?”

“I wish that was the case, but, it’s far worse this time,” she uttered softly.

“What?”

“I...”

“There she is!” a voice that had successfully annoyed me on several occasions announced.

I turned to find Lawrence making his way to us. He seemed like he was on top of the world. Maybe it was the way I saw him, but he seemed more spoiled now. Like a child that hadn’t been good all year but managed to get the gift he’s always wanted.

He paused as he noticed me. With the confusion in his eyes, I could tell he didn’t know which of the twins I was.

“I don’t believe we’ve met,” I said as I extended my hand to him. “I’m Dr. Ethan Sullivan.”

“Oh, thank goodness. I thought your brother was here to give me my usual examinations a bit too early,” he mocked with a relieved look as he shook my hand.

Something told me the relief he felt didn't stem from the fact that he was meant to go for another checkup.

“You know Dr. James?” I asked. “The last time I heard about her, she was working for my younger brother.”

“Well, Dr. James and I are childhood friends,” he explained as he walked toward her. He held her hips possessively from the side and pulled her to him.

Natasha didn't resist, nor did she look at me. She looked away at other guests, with a smile that I could easily tell was forced.

“That's very nice,” was all I could say, hoping that my anger and displeasure weren't written on my face.

“That's not all,” he continued. I noticed the dissatisfaction on her face, “She and I are a couple now. I wish your brother was here. I have him to thank for helping my beauty keep up with her status of a goddess.”

I looked at her and back to him.

A couple? Thanks to me?

Judging by the smirk on his face, he might have had an idea of what had happened between Natasha and Ian. He was hinting at that. So, thanks to me, Natasha was stuck with this idiot?

“I’ll let him know,” I said.

It was no use. There was nothing I could do, but I needed to leave there immediately.

“It was nice meeting you again, Nathasha,” I said with a pained smile.

“Nice meeting you again, Ethan,” she affirmed. “Extend my greetings to Ian.”

“I will,” I said.

“You know, if things goes well, and they will, we’d have a wedding this year,” Lawrence announced. “I’ll make sure you and Ian get a card.”

I wanted to punch him so bad.

“Thank you for the kind offer,” I said. “I’ll be seeing other guests now.”

“Alright, have fun,” he said.

I turned. As I walked away, I didn’t talk to any of the guests, making my way out. My heart and eyes wanted to have a serious conversation about the state of things.

Chapter Eighteen

Charming

Natasha

Once upon a time, in the land of Mary (Maryland), there lived a princess. This princess wasn't spoiled, although she was given everything she desired. She wasn't spoiled because she never really demanded for anything and did everything her parents requested of her.

You see, her parents didn't have children for almost ten years, and they finally got a daughter, with golden hair and green eyes. So, they decided that they would provide everything this child could desire and make sure said child would only have access to good things and the best things life had to offer.

There was a twist, however. Her parents made sure that whatever she did was according to their will. Controlling? Heavens no. Everything they planned for her always ended up

benefiting her in one way or the other, so she couldn't really complain about whatsoever they desired her to do.

But one day, they suddenly announced that they had gotten someone for her to marry. Although they made it sound like they weren't forcing her to go along with the plans, she wasn't so naive not to realize that indeed, they wanted both of them to wed. For what reason however, she had no clue and as usual did as she was told.

A month ago before the event and right after what had happened in the park, I returned home. Well, Lawrence dropped me off. It was a little scary, but at the same time, I had the feeling he wasn't going to force me into anything sexual. It wasn't because he was respecting my right as a woman but because he was a hundred percent sure that I was not going to escape.

In his eyes, I was a caged bird...the cage was as big as a forest to give me the illusion that I was free. But the reality was that he held the key to make sure I never left. He wasn't the sole wielder of the key, though. He has accomplices, two of them. Both were my own parents.

“That was terrible to watch,” Rachel said as I got into the house.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Your potential fiancé’s actions toward the end of the date,” she replied, “and the fact that you didn’t do anything.”

“But you know I need a distraction,” I reminded her of our conversation in the morning.

“That’s what I thought at first. But Lawrence McSleazy isn’t your best bet at helping you forget about what happened,” she explained. “Never before have I been so uncomfortable watching a human act so powerfully over another human. Take it from me as I’ve watched people’s skin get peeled while they’re alive.”

“Thank you for that gruesome imagery,” I frowned.

“Your imagery was worse,” she said.

“You followed us,” I tried to change the topic.

“I was asked to resume my duties the moment you returned to Maryland. To be honest, I wish it’s something I could mind my business about, but I don’t think this whole marriage thing is a good idea,” she said.

“Well, I don’t have to get married to him,” I said.

“Then why...”

“You’re back,” Mother said as she met us. “The both of you are.”

“I was going to turn in for the night, ma’am,” Rachel said to her.

“Thank you so much for looking after her, safe journey home,” Mom said, effectively dismissing her for the day.

“Thank you, ma’am, goodnight,” Rachel said as she walked past me, giving me a knowing glance.

“Goodnight Rachel,” I responded as she left. She replied with a grunt.

I turned my attention to Mother, “How’s Dad doing?”

“He turned in early,” she said. “Care for dinner.”

“No thank you, Lawrence made sure I was fed,” I said.

I also didn’t have any attempt thanks to what he did. But I refrained from mentioning it. I didn’t want Mother crying for

any reason whatsoever.

“That sounds okay. How are things going, between you two?” she asked. “Any development?”

“None that I can think of right now,” I replied.

“I actually thought this was going to be easier for you, considering how much you too have gone through together as kids,” she said.

“That was just an assumption. Was Dad also your childhood friend?” I asked.

“Well... yes,” she replied. “We were neighbors and attended almost every form of education together. So, it was easier dating him compared to the other people I met.”

“Oh.” I blinked twice; that was not the answer I was expecting.

“You don’t have to rush it...maybe one day it will just click in,” she advised. “You can take as long as you need.”

“Why do you say it like that?” I asked.

“Like what?”

“Dad and Lawrence sounded the same way, but the longer I stay, the longer I realize that no matter how much you guys try to make it look like I have a say in whatever happens, you find a way to make me realize that I actually don’t have a say,” I replied. “I feel like no matter how much I try, even if I don’t have a shred of feelings for him, I will end up marrying him.”

She stared at me with a blank expression, but it faded and was replaced with an exhausted look. She didn’t argue or deny what I had just said. So, it was true. I was going to marry him no matter what.

“Why would you guys get to decide something as important as this?” I asked.

“I wish you would believe me, if I said –”

“It’s for my own good?” I asked.

She looked at me in defeat and looked away.

“Why don’t you tell me what exactly is going on?” I asked.

“My only problem right now is that I have no idea why I have to do this.”

“Natasha,” she called softly and walked up to me, cradling my face in her hands. “Just trust your father and I on this.”

“Fine,” I replied and took her hands off my face. “I’ll be your scapegoat, just as I’ve always been.”

“Natasha....” she called out, but I wasn’t listening.

This was the first time I had ever walked out on my mother. It felt strange, because I’ve always been a good girl. But this was one of those moments when being a good girl wasn’t going to pay.

Lawrence had mentioned that he supposedly had fallen in love with me at first sight right from when we were kids. I couldn’t lie and mention that my feelings for him were always platonic. As kids, he was the big brother figure I craved. But when I entered puberty, something happened, and it boosted the positive image I had of him.

Lawrence was a spoiled child; there was no hiding that. He looked down on everyone, but at the same time, he was exceptionally kind to me. As a kid and teenager, it made me feel special, but at the same time, I couldn’t help feeling there was something wrong with the way he did things.

One day, we were studying as usual when I felt strange. My stomach started to hurt all of a sudden. A few minutes later, I started my first period. I was scared, but he appeared unfazed and was able to calm down while we waited for help. It was one of the sweetest things he had done for me that might have won him a point if not for the way he grinned creepily throughout the process.

As a teen, I thought he was just smiling to help me calm down. But as an adult and hearing everything he said about waiting for me all these years, I was a little disturbed. True, at one point, I had a crush on him. Who wouldn't? He was a handsome kid, intelligent and extremely confident, although I would later find out that there was a difference between someone being extremely confident and someone who was just a proud person. Then the way he looked at me changed. I just took it that he was going through puberty and was attracted to the new person he saw.

Well, we went together to prom and were King and Queen. As Mother had mentioned, we had been through a lot and had created good memories from them too. But meeting him after medical school, it felt like he was a different person entirely.

No...he wasn't a different person entirely. The only person that changed was me.

Because of my encounter with Ethan and finally being able to associate with lower class members - and even working with the maids - I learned humility among other traits. Lawrence, with no one to teach him and his lack of interest in learning gradually became rotten on the inside.

Now back to my parents. Judging from the look my mother gave me and how she begged me to make sure this worked out, there was something going on. I knew there was, but something told me that it would be something that they couldn't handle with normal means. And if my parents couldn't handle it, I would never be able to do it on my own. The only option available was simple: force myself to fall in love with Lawrence. This would mean purging myself of whatever strand of emotion I had felt toward Ian.

A difficult decision.

I woke up feeling odd. The night before, I had a dream about Ian. About our first night together.

I wanted to recreate the memory. I covered my face with one of my pillows to restrict my vision.

I touched my pussy, and it was already dewy. I remembered how his fingers felt but mine were too delicate and small to recreate the feeling.

Three fingers were enough to do the job. I started to rub, but it was nothing compared to what Ian had done to me...but it would have to do. I started to massage aggressively. I bit my lower lip as my right hand captured my breast, squeezing gently.

My nipples were already stiff, so I licked my right hand fingers and pinched them to imagine it was his mouth capturing my tips, biting down to make sure I felt good. I wondered what kind of face he made when he did all these things to me. Did he look pleased? Or did he look at me as if he saw a slut?

The mystery of what his face looked like made the entire process get better. I continued masturbating, touching myself aggressively and even at one point, feeding my own juices to myself. Was I tasty when he ate me out? Did he just put up with the taste? I still didn't have a dildo, so I couldn't recreate the essence of having him inside me. Instead, I shoved two of my fingers inside myself and started moving them.

"Ian...Ian... Ian..." I called his name repeatedly, in hopes that he would appear and take control, but he never did.

I stopped. I took the pillow off my face and sat upright.

“What exactly am I doing?” I asked myself as I stared at my fingers.

If I was going to miss him this much, then why did I act out back then? Maybe I should just call him, apologize, and start all over again. My phone chirped. No one had texted me since I got back. Could it be? Was Ian reaching out to me? I checked my phone and my excitement faded away almost immediately. It was Lawrence.

We'll be meeting a lot to get things in proper motion. Looking forward to your corporation.

You spelled cooperation wrong, I texted back, smugly

“As long as you get the message,” he responded. “Don’t keep me waiting.”

I frowned.

“I know you and Ian were involved,” Lawrence revealed.

We went for a wine tasting, organized by a mutual friend.

“What are you talking about this time?” I asked.

“No need to act dumb. Like I said the last time, I know a sex game when I see one. And it was easy to deduce who you were spending time with, because Ethan was out of the country,” he replied. “But I’m sure you didn’t know that.”

“So, if I was involved with him, why tell me? Aren’t I with you right now?” I asked.

“I just want you to remember that you need to make this relationship work. I can’t have you thinking about anyone else but me,” he warned. “We promised your parents you’d give your all. And I want all of it.”

I didn’t say anything, just took a sip of the wine.

As the weeks followed, I tried my best to see myself as the potential bride he desired, but it wasn’t working. We went on several dates, and he bought me a lot of things; but in my eyes, it didn’t feel anything more than the usual two friends hanging out with each other.

There was one difference, though. The kisses. He kissed my neck several times, and most times, he went for my lips. I remained motionless and let him do what he wanted. But with more time, he realized what I was doing and grew mad. At one

point, I woke up and found out that he had announced us as a couple to a magazine.

I didn't say anything. He was playing at a bigger game. If I denied the relationship, it was going to spell some sort of trouble for my family, so I went along with it. I only prayed that he would get tired of the whole thing eventually.

Chapter Nineteen

He Returns

Natasha

“That was a close one,” Lawrence said with a sigh.

“You’re not supposed to be in my room,” I reminded him.

“Relax, I’m not sleeping here,” he assured me.

“I need to change,” I said as I showed him my nightgown.

“So, you can just do it here. If you don’t trust me with your body, how are we going to move beyond being boyfriend and girlfriend?” he asked as he placed his jaw on his open palm, eager to see me undress.

I gave him a look of disgust, before making my way to the bathroom and changing. Normally, I’d take off the bra, but I

wasn't going to do that until he left my room.

"Why are you still here?" I asked as I came outside and found him lying comfortably on my bed.

"Do you have to be so hostile to me?" he sighed. "All I want is to keep you company. We did run into your ex's twin."

"He's not my ex," I frowned.

"That's not how the story goes," he smirked, getting a kick out of seeing me frustrated.

"And I don't care how you want it to go," I frowned.

We were in the hotel, where the conference was going to take place. People who were going to receive awards were given private suites. Lawrence had tagged along as my guest. Not because I wanted him there, but because he had insisted. I had planned bringing Rachel along, instead but here we were.

"So how did you feel, seeing Ethan?" he asked. "You were in love with him at first before Ian faked his identity, right?"

"I didn't feel anything, thank you for asking," I replied.

Maybe because the person you saw wasn't even Ethan.

"Good," he said, pleased with my response. He got up from the bed. "I have an emergency to attend to from tomorrow. You'll be fine on your own?"

"If you were going to waste my invitation, I should have brought Rachel instead," I replied.

"Aw, will someone be missing me?" he asked with an excited look on his face.

"No. I will not. One more thing and I've mentioned it before, stop announcing me as your girlfriend to people we meet," I warned.

"Now don't be like that," he sighed as he walked up to me and placed his hands on my shoulders. "You don't have to sound like that. I just don't want people thinking that you're still on the market."

"I'm not an item."

"I didn't say you were. It's just like a kind of slang modern people use now," he explained. "You have a smartphone now, so you should know these things."

I had gotten a new phone. I noticed being out of touch with social media was doing more damage than good to me.

“Just leave my room, Lawrence,” I said with a sigh as I moved his hands off my shoulders.

“No goodbye kisses?” He smirked and raised a brow.

Normally, I would agree so he’d leave me alone, but I wasn’t feeling like it anymore.

“I’ll take the silence as a no,” he sighed and turned to leave. “Make sure you don’t forget. All your attention and focus must be with me.”

Just like last time, I didn’t reply. He left the room, and I locked it behind him. I let out a sigh of relief and took off my bra.

Ian is here.

I found myself grinning.

A month had passed, and I dedicated my time to forgetting about him, but nothing happened.

When I went through the list and saw Ethan’s name, my heart skipped a beat. I wondered if I could get to meet the real Ethan

and find out how Ian was doing as I had still been unable to reach out to him.

Rachel said that since he had not reached out to me, it was a sign that he had lost interest. Her statement had me fighting off a new wave of emotions. I had to promise her not to reach out to him. But I found myself almost doing it at times.

I had prepared myself to see Ethan. When I got to the event, I had heard people talking about him. I figured that Ethan was there. But, when I saw his face and he stared at me. I knew who he was before he even softly called my name.

I was happy to see him. I was a bit disappointed that he was acting as Ethan again. But seeing that part of him still had my heart doing the cartwheels. Even after a month, I found myself battling my feelings for two sides of the same person. Then Lawrence came, and I couldn't look at Ian anymore. I was embarrassed, ashamed that I couldn't do anything. When he mentioned the plans of marriage, and mocked Ian, I wanted to be buried alive instantly.

The hurt in Ian's eyes, stabbed me. Even when he gave us his heartfelt wishes, it felt like he was telling the both of us to separate. A wish I needed to be granted. It was not enough to think about his presence. What was I meant to do now that I saw him again? Question him or bring up that topic that made both of us to go our separate paths?

The next day, I looked for him. Well, not like asking about him; I just kept my eyes open for any glimpse of him. Lawrence wasn't there to stop me, but I was distracted by the number of people who wanted to see me. After almost forty minutes of searching in vain, I went to take a seat. I assumed that he had left, maybe an emergency case like the one that had caused Lawrence to leave.

"You don't seem to have any company today," a voice remarked.

I looked up and saw Ian holding the program for today in one hand and his phone in the other. He was dressed sharply but at the same time professional, giving a sexy aura.

"That would seem to be the case," I replied. "The event asked us to come with a plus one. Won't it ruin your cover that the great social Ethan came here alone?"

"I've already answered that question. My wife wasn't able to come because she had work to do at her own hospital," he explained.

"You could have brought someone along," I insisted.

“I don’t want the burden,” he sighed. “Can I sit with you or is your boyfriend coming?”

“Don’t call him that please,” I groaned. “But yes, you can join me.”

“Thank you,” he said and took a seat next to me.

I cleared my throat and corrected my posture. I could feel his gaze. Compared to the discomfort I felt whenever Lawrence looked at me, I felt better. I wasn’t even upset with him anymore. His staring was making me feel giddy too. My arms, my neck, my ears, cheeks, thighs, then my cheeks again - that was the order in which he inspected my body.

I could feel my cheeks heat up.

“If you stare at me that hard, I might get pregnant,” I teased. They turned to look at him.

His gaze softened and a smile formed on his face as he looked away.

“Thank goodness,” he muttered.

“What? Why are you thanking goodness?” I asked.

“I thought... I thought you’d hate me. Heck, I thought, you wouldn’t even know the difference between Ethan and me,” he replied.

The sheepish grin on his face was priceless.

“Well I do hate you,” I said, and I watched his shoulders drop. “But like only thirty percent hate.”

“Thats a lot of hate,” he chuckled nervously.

“Seventy percent non-hate isn’t enough for you? You’re greedy aren’t you, Ian?” I teased.

“When you put it that way, yes I am greedy,” he replied with a proud smile on his face, then he wiggled his brows. “Would you mind raising the percentage to seventy-five percent?”

I covered my mouth as I laughed at his action.

When last did I laugh like this?

The entire month had felt emotionally draining. Lawrence talked a lot about himself, so it got boring fast. I bared with it for the entire month without being able to properly relax. But

Ian, had gotten me to relax and let down my guard within ten minutes.

“Do you know I’ve never heard you giggle?” he asked.

“What? Don’t tell me you’re disappointed,” I uttered and raised a brow.

“It sounds ladylike, and I love it,” he said.

I smiled. “Seventy-five percent.”

“Thank you,” he said with a bow and turned his attention to the stage.

It was my turn to stare. It felt familiar. I had stared at him like this in the garden, at the observatory, and even at the carnival. The relaxed smile he rarely showed anyone remained on his face. The sound of my beating heart seemed to make everything around me grow silent.

He turned to look at me. His gaze held mine and he smiled.

I didn’t look away.

I couldn’t.

I didn't want to.

"You'll get me pregnant," he reminded me what I had said earlier.

"I don't mind," I shrugged.

He held his stomach and arched a brow. I grinned.

"If he didn't reach out, then he's moved on." Rachel's words got to me.

"Your smile is gone," he said. "Did I do something?"

"Did you move on?" I asked.

"What?"

I looked away and focused on the stage, "I know it sounds hypocritical, considering that I...I'm in a relationship of sorts."

"Doesn't look like a proper relationship to me, but go on," he commanded

"Oh hush," I rolled my eyes. "You didn't reach out to me."

“Where’s Lawrence?” he asked.

“Don’t know, but he’s not in Paris,” I replied.

“If you don’t mind, can I answer why I didn’t reach out over a cup of tea?” he asked.

“Are you trying to bait me into a date?” I asked.

“You’re not going to refuse,” he said; it sounded more like an instruction than an offer.

I found it...hot.

“If you insist,” I replied and looked away.

“Thank you,” he said.

We didn’t talk after that, not about ourselves and not about what he’d discuss with me later, nothing at all. Except when he wanted to make fun of the host for mispronouncing some names and words, Ian didn’t say anything. He was nervous. I could easily tell. There’s no woman who wouldn’t be able to tell when a man was nervous.

“I missed you,” he said as the crowd cheered.

I almost didn't hear it as it got drowned out by the applause but luckily enough, I heard him perfectly. I turned to look at him, and his gaze was on the stage. I looked down and noticed his open hand asking for mine. I placed my hand, and he held closed his hand around mine.

“And the award for this year's most outstanding doctor is one a lot of us have been unable to stop talking about,” the announcer read. “She's worked with several hospitals and done a lot of work volunteering cross the world. She's none other than the beautiful Dr. Natasha James.”

I had received a lot of awards and honors, but this was one of the best moments of my life. As I got up to receive the award, I couldn't ignore the proud look Ian gave me. My parents had hardly been to any of my award presentations, so this was the first time anyone truly close to me was there for me. As I accepted the gift, I turned to give my speech.

“This wouldn't have been possible without the hospitals that allowed me to make a difference through them,” I said. “To be honest, I didn't exactly want this path of being a medical doctor. But looking at my journey so far, I'm glad that I passed through this phase. I look forward to saving more lives. Thank you, all.”

They clapped and cheered. I descended from the stage and made my way back to my seat.

“That was nice. First speech?” Ian asked.

“Well, I usually don’t have to give speeches, but this one required I did,” I explained.

“Did you notice the look of disbelief on everyone’s faces when you revealed that you didn’t want to be on this path in first place?” he asked.

“I did notice it,” I replied. “I felt it was also time I cleared that up. Along with the misconception that I’m a prodigy.”

“In a way, you actually are,” he said. “No one’s as fast as you when it comes to learning on the spot. That’s something people would normally train for years to achieve. Then again you did train years for it.”

There he went again, turning something that many would call me a goddess for into a normal feat that anyone could achieve if they put their mind to it.

“I missed you too,” I revealed.

He turned to look at me and let out a warm smile. I didn't know what he planned on telling me after the event was over, but I was more than ready to listen. I was ready to forgive him. I still remembered hitting him and the way he acted, but he didn't seem to remember being hit. The event was coming to an end...it was time to hear him out.

Chapter Twenty

Forbidden Fruit and the Desire to Eat

Ian

After the event, a lot of people wanted to speak with her. I waited for her to round up with them.

Her question from earlier still fresh on my mind.

“Finally done,” she sighed.

“I know a cafe nearby,” I said. “We can go there for tea.”

“Okay, but I need to get changed,” she said. “My hotel room is in the building.”

“I’ll wait on you,” I said.

“Or you could just come along so you don’t get to be stuck here with people you don’t know,” she advised.

“Alright then,” I agreed.

Normally one would insist on waiting downstairs but if she was inviting me to her room, who was I to refuse? We left for her suite. And I followed closely behind. When we got to her room, she seemed a bit lost about if she was to let me into the room.

“Relax, I’m not going to hurt you,” I assured her with a smirk.

“Way to make my decision a little worrisome,” she said with a sigh, then opened the door.

I followed her into the room. It was extremely luxurious and suited her. It felt like I was in a room belonging to royalty.

She looked through her traveling bag and looked at me. “Are you going to change your outfit?”

“I’ll just fold my sleeves and return my suit to my car,” I replied.

“I’ll wear a dress then. Let me see if I brought any sundresses,” she said as she looked through the box.

It felt like nothing had happened. I remembered how hurt she had looked when she confronted me back in Richmond. When I blamed her for something that was clearly my fault and my selfishness. And yet there she was, with me in her room again and her guard lowered, getting ready to join me for lunch.

“I couldn’t bring myself to reach out to you,” I confessed.

She stopped searching for the dress and turned to look at me.

“Why couldn’t you?” she asked.

“I...I was ashamed,” I replied. “After what I did to you, I didn’t know if I had the right to text you...or even call you. I assumed you were going to block me.”

She looked relieved. “So, it wasn’t because you hated me now?”

“Why would I hate you?” I asked. I stood by her side and placed my hand against her cheek, “Even after a month, I couldn’t bring myself to hate you. I replayed every moment we spent. Revisited the places that we bonded. Each time, my disappointment in myself would increase because you weren’t there next to me.”

“Ian...” she called softly as she rubbed her face against my palm, purring gently.

As she opened her eyes, the green seemed to draw me in. My heart started pounding. I wanted her. I had been away from her for a month, and she already had a boyfriend now. If anything, we were meant to start from the beginning.

Start by being friends again...

My face was moving closer to hers. I told myself I was going to stop a few inches away from her face. But it seemed she was getting closer, faster than I had expected. She was also leaning in for the kiss. I swallowed hard and went in. As our lips made contact, a form of relief washed over my body. It was for a mere second, but it seemed to have lasted a lifetime. As I pulled away, she looked at me; her eyes told me enough.

She wanted more. I kissed her again and she kissed back, embracing my neck and stroking my hair. My hands secured her waist as I gently led her to the bed. I pushed her down, and she didn't let me go. I continued to kiss her, groaning while she moaned in my mouth. I pulled back and looked at her. Her eyes were dilated and glazed with lust and a desire for more.

“Please...don't stop, I need this. I need this a lot,” she pleaded.

“Your tongue,” I demanded.

She closed her eyes and let out her tongue. I accepted her offer. Sucking on her tongue gently, accepting her whimpers. I touched her exposed thighs, and her body jerked in response.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Maybe it’s just my body finally getting touched properly,” she replied.

“What happened to you?” I couldn’t help asking.

“A lot,” she replied.

I kissed her neck, and she sighed. My fingers continued to caress her thighs. I let her enjoy my touch, and I desired more of her. She started helping me out of my shirt.

“Should we?” I asked as she took off all my buttons.

“Please?”

What kind of man would turn down a woman that said please? I took off my shirt and inner wear. I helped her out of her dress

too, leaving her in her panties. Her stomach had faint signs of abs.

“You never stopped the crunches,” I remarked as I kissed her stomach, causing her to shudder again.

I was never going to get tired of that reaction. I kissed her stomach repeatedly, my fingers rubbing along her inner thighs, watching her squirm from being touched. I couldn't stop. My fingers went higher and higher, making contact with her panties. I looked at her, almost asking for her permission, but her eyes remained closed, with her lips slightly open. I could have sworn that she was spreading her legs so I could touch her properly. I did just that. As my fingers rubbed against her private parts, through her underwear, she was already dewy and hot.

I continued my touch, and she started to move more. Her soft gasps and gentle moans called to me. I went for her lips, kissing her and effectively silencing her. She continued to moan while we kissed. I moved her panties aside, letting my fingers meet her directly. The slimy wet texture was something I had missed severely. Two of my fingers focused on rubbing her clit and alternating with her slit.

“God, I forgot how big your fingers are,” she said, panting.

“I’ll remind you,” I assured her as I added some pressure, making her pussy make squelching sounds.

I stopped using my fingers and placed my head between her legs. She assisted me by holding her legs up. I could feel her gaze. I smirked and she looked as red as a tomato. Her pubic hair was neatly trimmed, and her pussy was already dripping with excitement. I spread it open with two fingers and inspected the pink flesh now exposed.

I covered it with tongue and slowly began a sucking motion, taking her clit.

“Fuck....” she groaned and moved a little.

I continued my sucking, eating her properly. For some reason, I could tell that she had not slept with anyone, and that made me proud. I let my tongue slide into her deeply while I continued to enjoy her juices.

“Tan, that’s too much...” she warned, but there were no signs of her trying to stop me.

I pulled out my tongue and kissed her clit, before sucking on it again, furiously this time.

“Haaaaaa....” Her moans grew louder.

Her hand held my head in place trying to pull my head away, but I stubbornly remained in place and continued to suck, occasionally trapping the sensitive bud between my teeth - but not hard enough to injure her.

She was in pure bliss.

“Please...enough...that’s enough...stop,” she pleaded.

I finally let her go and took a good look at her. She had covered her face with both hands. I pulled down my pants and underwear, then joined her, lying by her side. She reached for my dick and started stroking. She went lower and placed it in her mouth.

“Fuck,” I groaned and stroked her hair gently.

Her mouth felt better than the last time I was with her. She started sucking harder and faster, then slowed down, focusing on using her tongue to make circles around my tip. As she sucked, she made eye contact to make sure I was enjoying what she was doing. Judging by the smug look in her eyes, she was convinced that she was doing a good job. She went faster and faster, stroking my dick in the process. I hadn’t even masturbated the past month so there was a lot of pent up

energy waiting to be released; and with the way she was going, I was going to have trouble holding it all in.

“Natasha...I’m going to....”

“Let it all out,” she said as she stroked me. “All of it...”

Her words made me to stop holding back. She sucked on my balls to aid the process while stroking me as hard as she could. Her mouth returned to my length as she felt my body tense up, a sign that I was almost at my limit.

Then, I let go a month’s worth of sperm into her mouth, some of it spilling out and soiling me in the process. She pulled out and stared at my dick before sucking on it again; this time she licked up the last few drops and every other one that had spilled on me.

“As you lost weight, I thought you’d be eating wrong,” she remarked. “You taste as healthy as ever.”

She continued stroking me waiting for me to get back up.

“Did you miss this?” she asked.

“More than you could have imagined,” I replied.

“Okay,” she smiled then stopped stroking as she got down from the bed taking off her bra, “Remember my first night with *Ian*? I keep trying to forget about it and it seems like I succeeded.”

She went to my pants and pulled my belt. “Would you care to remind me?”

“With pleasure,” I took the belt from her and she placed her hands behind her back. I used the belt to restrict her hands behind her back.

“A little tighter. I can take it this time,” she demanded.

The last time I made it in such a way that she could escape at any point. This time, I obeyed her wishes and made it a lot tighter. Searching her bag, I found her handkerchief and used it to blindfold her.

It was tight on her eyes but she didn’t complain either.

“Kneel,” I ordered and she obeyed.

There she was, kneeling as I demanded with her hands tied behind her back and her sight gone. It was going to be fun.

Natasha

I feel like we missed a couple of steps. I wanted to apologize and have us start as friends; but the moment he touched my face, I felt everything that Lawrence had done the last month was a nuisance and Ian's touch was cleansing my body.

I wanted him. In fact, I didn't even blame him for kissing me in the first place. He did offer to remain downstairs until I was done, but I asked him to follow me. Deep down, I wanted something like this to happen. Was I that much of an easy girl? I had my hands tied, my eyes blinded. I was kneeling. I could hear his footsteps, and it sounded like he was circling me.

I felt like a lamb, being circled by a hungry wolf, contemplating if to kill me immediately or slowly torture me to death. I was honestly fine with it, but the latter seemed like a better option. He held my hair and tugged on it hard. As I gasped, he forced his dick into my mouth, going all the way into my throat in one go, causing me to gag immediately.

"Breathe," he said.

I tried to calm down from the shock and steadied my breathing.

"Don't move," he ordered and started to move. My job was to remain motionless while he used my mouth as his personal

flesh toy.

I didn't mind the treatment at all. I made sure my teeth didn't graze him and my tongue was more involved. Although there was the urge to throw up because of how often he hit my throat, I controlled my gagging and hung in there until he was done. He pulled out allowing me to gasp for air properly, while coughing. He pulled on my hair and made me bow.

"Raise your ass," he demanded.

I lifted my ass and got ready to be fucked doggystyle. His fingers gently caressed my slit, and I moaned gently. My hips moving slightly to help him. He spanked my ass. It came as a surprise, causing me to shake.

I wanted to look at him, but thanks to my situation, I was unable to do anything.

"What was that for?" I asked, trying to recover from the painful sting on my ass.

"Didn't I tell you not to move?" he asked.

"I thought that was...AH!" My words were cut short as he spanked me again.

“Do not talk back to me,” he warned. “Is that understood?”

“Mm hmmm,” I whimpered in obedience.

“Good girl,” he praised as he rubbed the parts he had spanked gently.

It was hard not to move. I didn't recall him spanking me before. And I didn't recall muscle feeling this good just by being spanked. Is this what abstinence can cause. He spanked me again.

“Gawd!” I whimpered, but I didn't complain.

“You know as a plastic surgeon, I've always admired beautiful skin,” he said as he spanked my left ass cheek. “Your skin is so good that there's this part of me that wants to bruise it and nurse it back to health. I'm not sure if you understand.”

I didn't know if I was to answer, so I kept silent. The next spanking hurt even more.

“What's this?” he asked as he touched my pussy. He barely moved his fingers, and I could hear the wet sounds. “You actually feel good from being spanked?”

“No... it hurts, that's just from our earlier session,” I lied.

“Is that so? Let’s test that shall we?” he asked.

“Huh? How?” I asked but there was no reply.

I heard his footsteps walking away, until I couldn’t hear him anymore. There was the sound of the door opening and closing.

Did he leave me here? Just like that? What if Lawrence walked in?

Well, that wouldn’t be so bad; it might give Lawrence a reason to back off. But I felt that would affect my family negatively. I shook off the distraction and tried to realize what exactly was happening. My ass was still in the air and my face on the floor.

Surely, he hadn’t abandoned me.

“Ah!” I gasped as I felt something dry touch my pussy. “Ian?”

“Relax,” he said.

It felt like he was using a towel to dry up my pussy. But for what reason?

“Now let’s test that theory again, shall we?” he asked.

“What the– OW!” I yelled as he spanked me again.

“Shhh...you don’t want the neighbours hearing you now, do you?” he asked as he spanked me again. “Try not to get turned on.”

He continued to spank me, and I tried not to scream, or moan. I kept my voice completely under control, as my ass started to hurt. I didn’t even mind the pain.

“You need to see how red you look right now,” he said as he gently rubbed my ass and planted a kiss on each cheek. “Now let’s test it again.”

His fingers made contact with my pussy and this time; it was wetter than the last time.

“It’s official, you like being spanked,” he said. It felt like he was mocking me.

He wasn’t to blame. My body was.

“Ready for some more?” he asked as he rubbed my ass.

“Bring it,” I replied with arrogance. I was sure I could take a few more spankings.

Then I felt his dick casually making its way inside my pussy. I didn't expect to get his dick and he didn't do his usual way of starting slow. He went full throttle.

“Ow...ow...ow...” I complained.

It didn't really hurt, but my pussy walls were also surprised by the sudden invasion and struggled to adjust to his pace quickly. By the time I got used to him, he had pulled out.

“No.... No no no no no no no no,” I shook my head negatively. “Put it back. Please put it back.”

“I thought it was hurting you?” he asked in a mocking tone.

“No...no it wasn't. Please, Ian,” I begged.

I tried to free my hands to take off my blindfolds, but I forgot they were tighter than the last time we did this.

“If you want it that much,” he said. I could hear his footsteps approaching the bed until he lay across it, “Come and get it.”

I struggled to get to my feet and blindly made my way to the bed following the sound of his humming. I got on the bed and rolled a little until my body touched his. I kissed what I could: it was his stomach. I continued to search his body while using my lips as if it were a location device. The whole process was humiliating but I enjoyed it. Some princess or goddess I was. If everyone could see how he treated me and how much I enjoyed it. I wouldn't show my face in public again.

I found his dick and kissed it. "I found it," I shrieked.

"Good, now impale yourself," he instructed.

"What?"

"Did I stutter?"

I bit my lower lip in frustration and got atop him. I felt his throbbing as I rubbed my pussy against his groin. I lifted my hips and he helped me in guiding his dick to my entrance. I slowly lowered myself onto his cock. My insides were ready for him this time. But there was another problem.

"Move," he demanded.

I struggled to move. My hands were behind my back, so I couldn't even hold him to move properly. I expected he'd help

me and thrust or something.

“I don’t know how to,” I admitted.

“And they call you a prodigy. You can’t think of a way out of this?” he asked.

I tried thinking but we all know that horniness suppresses that part of the human function. I figured it out. I could just do squats. I planted my feet by his sides and started to move. It hurt, but I did this every morning to the point that I could go at least twelve before giving up and starting again. I know it sounded like I was exercising, but the position placed his dick where he could rub my spot.

“Haha...” I couldn’t stop feeling good.

“You look like a desperate slut right now, and I actually feel bad for you,” he said and held my hips. “But that’s okay, because I love you just the way you are.”

He loved me?

Maybe that was just the heat of the moment. He held me and started moving his hips. I realized that his entire length wasn’t in me this whole time.

“Oh God...fuck...yes...” I moaned as he went faster, I didn’t even have to move anymore; he was pounding my pussy like one would churn butter.

He protested against my cervix, and I feared he would have broken me right then and there. He sat upright and kissed my neck, then took my mouth captive, followed by my breasts. Nothing was safe from him anymore. He lifted me and made me lay on my back. My legs were on his shoulders and his mouth clamped down on my nipples, alternating between the both of them and sucking aggressively, turning me on even more.

“You’re getting wetter,” he said and continued to fuck the living daylights out of me.

“Faster...please break me,” I demanded.

“Didn’t I tell you not to tell me what to do?” he asked as he slapped me (not too hard) and held my jaw forcing my mouth open.

He kissed me deeply and let go of my face, then started moving even faster. His breathing that seemed calm all this time got harder and more laboured. As for me, I was on cloud nine. With his dick casually dominating my insides, I felt

pleasure even more than what I had felt the last time we were together.

I was getting close. A little more...he kept his pace...and although my eyes were blindfolded, they rolled back into my head. I gave into the climax that rocked my body violently. He pulled out and released all over my stomach and my face.

“Fuck...” he muttered, then gently caressed my pussy. I shuddered. I was still sensitive and trying to recover from the climax.

“Did I help you remember?” he asked.

“This wasn’t how I remembered it,” I answered as I tried to catch my breath.

Maybe the apologies would have to wait until later.

Chapter Twenty-One

The Date in the Romance Capital of the world

Ian

I don't know if you've ever experienced something like this, but there are times when you'd be half asleep so it feels like you're awake and dreaming at the same time. No not, lucid dreaming.

I'd forgotten the term; heck I don't know if it even has a term, but it's like this: you were exhausted the night before and by the time you try to wake up, you realized that you aren't fully awake and aren't fully asleep either. That way it feels like the dreams are overlapping with reality at the same time.

What does that have to do with anything? I was in a similar state. The previous night, I had slept with the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. Everyone sees this beautiful woman as perfect and upright. But when she was with me, she was far from perfection. So far that she desired me to humiliate and degrade her while we made love.

It was a strange dream, and when I woke up, the dream wasn't over yet. She was lying next to me, her eyes were open. Maybe it was due to the fact that I was just getting up, but her eyes startled me.

She chuckled softly, "Good morning to you, too."

I was definitely dreaming, so I wiped my face and blinked twice.

"Half asleep?" she asked and didn't disappear.

"You're real," I said.

"I understand the feeling," she sighed and snuggled against me. "I woke up startled to see you. I thought..." She touched my chest and went lower. Her hand secured my morning wood. "That last night was a fever dream. I mean I used something I would normally use as an exercise routine, for sex. I'm convinced that I may actually be a pervert."

"You don't need to tell me that twice," I said as I stroked her hair.

"Look what you did," she said while showing me her wrists; they were still bruised.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized. “In fact I have a lot of things to apologize about.”

“Go on then,” she said as she sat upright, but she didn’t look at me.

“When you kissed me in Glen Allen, I felt, new,” I revealed. “But when I realized that you meant that kiss for my brother, I was faced with two decisions, tell you the truth, or become what you desired. From previous experiences, I realized that I didn’t have a chance if the person you were in love with was my brother. That’s why I lied.”

She didn’t say anything, and she didn’t look at me.

“Whenever you’d spend time with *Ethan*, I’d get jealous of myself,” I continued. “Which is why I started becoming more assertive as myself. Then when you showed similar interest in both my persona, I started to get confused. I planned on telling you the truth and hoped that since you were technically in love with the same person, you’d accept me as your true lover.”

I took in a deep breath and exhaled. “I’m sorry for what I did. It is uncalled for and no way to get my feelings passed across. I should have faced you directly from the beginning.”

She sighed, “That was really a messed up thing to do.”

“I’m sorry,” I apologized again.

“Then again, you’re not the only one at fault here. While there were some similarities, in my eyes, both you and your persona were different persons,” she explained. “I was involved with two brothers, and yes they were the same person, but I wasn’t aware of it. All I knew was that these two people were brothers. Getting involved with both of them at the same time was the real disturbing thing that had happened.”

I had no words for that.

“I’m sorry for confusing you, and for getting your hopes up,” she continued. “I should have also considered the feelings of both of you and made a decision earlier. That way, we wouldn’t have ended up the way we did. I’m sorry Ian.”

“Apology accepted,” I acknowledged.

“And yours has been accepted as well,” she said with a smile.

At least that had been taken care of. I finally felt better after a month of battling with how I would settle things.

“You should have still reached out though,” she pouted.

“I will right now,” I said.

“Well, I’ll text you my social media handles, you can follow any of them you want,” she said as she played with her fingers.

“You’re on social media?” I blurted out.

“Don’t have to rub it in. I just want to remain connected,” she replied. “Besides, did you know there’s this account on insta that shows cute animal fails?”

I actually did thank Chloe.

“No, I didn’t know about that,” I said.

Her eyes lit up, and a smirk formed on her face, “Of course, you wouldn’t know. I’ll send you all the reels I’ve saved. You better be grateful.”

She may not act spoiled, but she did have her moments. I wanted to burst her bubble and tell her that I was already aware of such accounts. But she seemed genuinely happy.

“Do you think we can actually go back?” I asked the question that had lingered on my mind from the previous night up to the moment I apologized. “To the way we were in Richmond?”

“I don’t know...” she replied. “Things are a little complicated right now, and to be honest, I may have forgiven you, but I may or may not have feelings for the *Ethan* side of you. I might need to sort my feelings out.”

“I see,” I said softly.

“And then there’s the Prince Charming situation, but I honestly don’t want to talk about it,” she continued. “I could use... a friend.”

“I could use one of those too,” I said.

“Oh right, you don’t have any friends,” she said as she poked my cheek.

“Neither do you.” I frowned.

“Bzzz...wrong. I have Rachel, she’s my bodyguard and my friend,” she replied. “And you have...?”

“Tabitha from the hospital I guess,” I replied.

“The nurse? Hmmm?” She raised a brow suspiciously. “You seem to have been busy.”

“What? No! There’s nothing going on between us,” I assured her. “She just sits in the spot you used to sit in and we talked.”

I also didn’t add that Tabitha was convinced that Natasha and I were dating and kept asking for sneak peeks into our supposed love life.

Natasha started to laugh and pinned me down. “Of course, I know you two wouldn’t do anything. You’re clueless on how to deal with women after all.”

“Including you?”

“Especially me.”

“Is that a challenge, or a fact?” I asked as I held her hips.

“Just a statement.” She flicked my forehead causing me to wince in pain. “I would love to have my insides normal this morning.”

She got down from my body and stretched.

“Does your ass hurt?” I asked.

“Ian! There are questions, you don’t ask a woman.” She frowned as she covered her ass and frowned at me, “But, yes...yes it does hurt, you big meanie. Better get dressed for our date.”

“Our date?”

“Yes, didn’t you promise to take me to a cafe?” she asked. “Or have you forgotten?”

“Oh, that,” I replied. “We’re good to go then.”

“Alright, I’ll get ready,” she said as she made her way to the bathroom door but stopped. “I know we’re supposed to be just friends now but can you help me bathe? My wrists and other parts still hurt. And they’re all your fault, so...”

“I’ll help,” I sighed as I got out of the bed and made my way to her.

After our bath, we had breakfast and left to explore the city. There was a spot I wanted her to see.

“Is this...?” she asked as she stared at the building.

“It’s a pet cafe,” I answered her question. “We eat and drink in a different area and then see cute animals in another. Kind of like a petting zoo but just smaller animals.”

“Oh, my goodness, will they let us take photos?” she asked, her green eyes reflected a childlike excitement.

“Yes you can but you have to tag the store if you post,” I explained.

“Let’s go in,” she demanded as she tugged on my hand, trying to bring me into the store.

“Calm down,” I chuckled but let her lead me.

She went straight to the cashier. “I want to pet the animals.”

The poor woman was taken back. I covered my mouth in other not to laugh.

“What?” Natasha asked.

“No, it’s nothing,” I replied with a smile then turned to the cashier. “We’ll pay for an hour and some feeds.”

“Alright, sir,” the lady said, and I handed her my debit card. “Just show these passes to the staff and they’ll let you feed the animals.”

I took the passes and gave one of them to Natasha. We went into the area and the sounds of puppies barking could be heard. There were signs: *cats, dogs, hamsters, hedgehogs*. Just four animals.

“Which one do you want to see?” I asked.

She looked at the one hour pass. I could easily tell she was thinking that the pass only allowed for one animal per hour.

“You can see all the animals within the hour,” I explained.

“Oh, I...I knew that.” She frowned and turned her attention to the signs. “I was trying to think of which animal to see first.”

I loved moments like this when she didn’t have to show off the upright perfect daughter side of her.

“Let’s start with the cats,” she announced after a few more seconds of thinking.

When we walked into the area for cats, some people were already there, but our presence made heads turn. Well, almost everyone was looking at her. Why wouldn't they? She was the most beautiful woman in the store.

"Ian...Ian, what do I do?" she asked.

"Haven't you been to a petting zoo?" I asked.

"No, Mom and Dad didn't have the time to go and I was at music practice most of the time," she replied. "I grew up and never thought about going."

"Sometimes, I don't know if I'm supposed to be impressed with your childhood or worried about you," I said with all honesty.

"I completely understand the feeling," she said and turned her attention to the cats.

"Just show the attendant, your pass and go ahead," I said.

She did as I told her and we took a seat. I picked up one of the cats and slowly stroked it, causing it to purr. Maybe it was because of my nature, but cats liked me. Natasha on the other hand...

“Here kitty, kitty,” she tried to motion to some of the cats, but they kept their distance.

She got up and tried moving toward some of them and they ran away.

“Do they hate me?” she asked. I swear she looked like she was about to cry.

“Maybe,” I smirked.

She crossed her arms and remained seated, watching me pet the cat, her eyes literally green with envy.

“You want to try?” I asked.

She nodded but kept her frown intact. I motioned for her to come closer. She obeyed and the cat looked at her cautiously.

“Just stroke his back gently,” I advised.

She nodded and stroked him. He still didn’t seem to trust her but eventually gave up and started to purr. Her eyes lit up and she started to stroke a little faster.

“I’m touching him,” she said.

“I can see that,” I smiled.

Eventually the other cats warmed to her. We visited the other animals. I ended up paying for an extra hour because she had made friends with one of the hedgehogs. I knew we were just friends now. But was I going to be okay watching her remain like this?

The truth was that I still loved her, that much was still certain. I could easily take things easily but there was no telling when I would start to desire more. There was also something going on in her life that she didn't want me to bother about - that might have to do with her bizarre relationship with Lawrence McSleazy.

After the animal cafe, we visited a restaurant at the Eiffel Tower.

“I bet we could make it if we jumped from the top,” she said as we finished our dinner.

I had to look at the structure again and back to her. “There was a man that jumped from the structure with a parachute he made from home.”

“Oh, what happened?” she asked.

“He died,” I replied.

“Oh,” she nodded, and took my arm. “I’d still make it, though.”

“Just because you excel at a lot of things that the laws of gravity has automatically made you an absentee,” I replied.

“You don’t get it, I’ll find a way to do it,” she insisted.

“In a VR not real life please,” I sighed.

“VR? Can I get to use one?” she asked.

“You don’t...you haven’t used a VR?” I asked in utter disbelief. “You sure your parents might be the problem here?”

“I’m a doctor, we don’t have time for fun,” she replied.

“Of course, we do,” I announced and frowned. “Great now I sound like...”

“Ethan,” she completed my statement. “You have a very strange brother.”

“I wouldn’t deny that,” I said.

She chuckled softly and tightened her grip on my arm. We saw a couple kissing.

“Ian?” she called out.

“Hmm?”

“Thank you for today,” she said. “I haven’t had proper fun for a month.”

“What are friends for?” I asked.

She hummed softly.

The conference was still ongoing but we both didn’t attend. Neither of us mentioned it or reminded the other that we needed to be there. I guess we just desired our company.

Chapter Twenty-Two

The False Twin and Prince Charming

Lawrence

For the last month, Natasha had finally started warming up to me. With the way she'd look at me, or even when we would kiss, were all signs that we were finally becoming the couples that we were meant to be all this time. Fine, she wasn't giving me at least thirty percent of her affection,; but with constant practice, she was going to eventually play into my hands and fall completely and hopelessly in love with me. I wouldn't even have to do much.

Accompanying her on the trip to France was a way to take our relationship to the next level. And when you're in the romance capital of the world, there was so much you could do.

I would have joined her on the stage and helped with her speech, then taken her to the best restaurants the romance capital had to offer. I would take her to the opera house;

afterward, we'd have the best singer accompany us to my hotel room, singing while I fed her grapes and she'd do the same to me.

It was going to be the best thing ever, but my father had asked me to do something for him, regarding the company's dealings. Normally, I wouldn't mind, but as Ethan was around, I was a little worried about how Natasha would react to his presence. But she wasn't fazed by his presence, nor did she look interested. Ethan himself didn't seem to care either.

Well, I wouldn't blame the both of them.

She had eventually found out that Ethan was actually married and his younger brother was tricking her. As for Ethan, the clumsy fool that he was, wouldn't even know such a thing had happened behind his back. I had nothing to worry about. Or so I thought.

"She's not at the event," the man I had placed to watch over her, reported.

"What do you mean she's not at the event?" I asked.

"Well, last night she never left the building so it was safe to say she retired for the night," he explained. "But this morning, she left the hotel with Dr. Ethan Sullivan."

“That’s impossible,” I insisted. “He’s a married man and won’t be caught dead with another woman.”

“Maybe he’s reverted back to his old ways?” he asked. “Because as I followed them, they visited a cute animal cafe.”

“An animal what?”

“An animal cafe. I even got a coupon. The hedgehogs are very cute. I’m more of a hamster man myself as dogs and cats frighten the hell out of me. So, I…”

“I don’t care about what you did there! Where did they go next?” I yelled.

“Oh sorry, sir,” he apologized and continued, “They visited the Eiffel Tower, had dinner and walked around while linking arms. I took some photos. We could blackmail Ethan.”

“It won’t work,” I said.

“they are high quality pictures, sir.”

“It won’t work,” I repeated. “That’s no Ethan either. That’s his younger brother, Dr. Ian Sullivan.”

“Oh, I see,” he replied. “I’ll get rid of the photos then.”

“Send them all to me,” I demanded.

“As you wish,” he replied before hanging up.

He sent the photos, and all I could feel was anger. The woman in the photos wasn’t the Natasha I recognized and loved. The woman in the pictures looked at the barbarian with eyes that spelled true happiness and joy. She had never looked at me like that. She held him a lot in the pictures, but she would look uncomfortable if I even tried poking her arm. She had a playful, curious look in her eyes.

Who was this playful, curious woman? And how come I was the only one not allowed to see this side of her? Why did the failure of a twin get to see her this way? I was getting angry, and I needed to calm myself down, so I brought out some photos we took together recently. The lack of interest in her eyes only managed to infuriate me.

I called the spy to ask, “Where did they go after everything was done?”

“He dropped her at the hotel and drove back to his own hotel,” he replied.

“Do you know where the hotel is?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’ll text it to you,” he offered.

“Thank you. I’ll pay you for your service today,” I promised before hanging up.

He texted me the address. Ian was going to get a wake-up call.

I went to his hotel but wasn’t able to get his room number. The peasant at the receptionist stand, wasn’t easily swayed by my bribe. Foolish 9 to 5 workers, thinking they have anything to boast of.

“Deep breaths, Lawrence,” I said to myself. I tried to calm myself down as much as I could.

“Oh, Mr. Williams, fancy meeting you again,” a voice greeted me.

The false twin finally showed himself; he wore a friendly smile as fake as his current persona.

“Dr. Sullivan. I wasn’t able to meet you again the day before yesterday,” I said.

“I recall not seeing you at the event,” he said. “Was everything okay?”

“You know, just the usual. You know when a certain family member isn’t available, so you have to fill in his place?” I asked.

“I think I can relate to that. I have a convenient double that I call my twin brother after all,” he said with a chuckle.

He knew I was onto him.

“What are you doing here exactly, Ian?” I asked.

“I was about to ask you the same thing. The receptionist told me there was a man demanding for my room number,” he replied. “I didn’t take you to be the kind of man that was interested in another man. I might have been down, if only most of your body wasn’t fake.”

“Genetically enhanced and modified,” I corrected.

“Please, I’m your plastic surgeon, I know fake and I know genetics, and you are definitely lacking on the latter which is

why you have to rely on the former,” he said with a cocky smile.

I grabbed his collar and pulled him to myself.

“Careful, Mr. Williams, we’re both technically celebrities, so I wouldn’t want us on a tabloid,” he warned.

What’s with this guy? Was he always this rude? Arrogant and prideful?

Was this cold nature truly a part of him? Is this the kind of man, Natasha liked?

I let go of his collar. “Then watch your mouth.”

“Thank you,” he said, arranging his collar. “Now your checkup isn’t for another month. Why did you want to see me?”

“You don’t need to act dumb; you know exactly why I’m here,” I said. “Natasha, my girlfriend.”

“Why did you have to emphasize the *girlfriend* part, is that insecurity I hear?” he asked.

I swear if not for my public image, I would have punched him and watch him keel over in pain.

“I’m not insecure. I heard you two weren’t at the event yesterday, so it’s safe to assume that you were with her somewhere else,” I said.

“So, you have someone that you sent to spy on your girlfriend without her consent,” he scoffed. “And it’s Natasha we’re talking about, she praises you as her childhood friend, I wonder how she would react if she found out that you’re secretly stalking her?”

“Are you threatening me? Is this blackmail?” I asked and took a step back.

“No, I’m just asking you a question, I understand that you’re worried about her safety,” he explained as he placed a hand on my shoulder. “I mean she’s the only daughter of her parents and I bet she has her own bodyguard. You’re just doing your best to help. But taking pictures, come on.”

“How did you even know?” I asked.

“I rarely get attention from anyone so I know when someone is focused on me,” he replied with a shrug. “Now that I said it aloud, I sound like a sad person.”

“I mean you’re not wrong,” I shook my head negatively, “Wait why am I even sympathising with you? I don’t want you anywhere near Natasha or else.”

“Or else what? You’d write a bad review about my hospital? Or you won’t be my customer anymore?” He smirked and then leaned in closer, his voice cold, and menacing, “Or would you try to fight me for her sake?”

What’s this?

Fear?

Me afraid?

Of him?

“Hmmm.” His smile turned into a grin and he shrugged. “Relax, you don’t have to be worried about your relationship with her and where I fit in the picture. I’d already hurt her before. So, right now I was just friends with her.”

He walked past me, “Don’t bother me about this again. Not until I send or ask of you.”

Where does he have the gall to speak to me that way? He didn't do anything to me; yet I felt humiliated in every way possible. In his eyes I was no threat. I was not worth his fear, nor was I worth his complete attention. I didn't have to deal with him. All I needed to do was go directly to the source of the problem directly and get the message across to him.

I met Natasha at the event. She was alone, observing everyone present. If everyone meant a certain dark brown hair man, posing as his older brother, then yeah, she was doing a good job watching everyone. Ian was talking to other guests. Natasha didn't seem like she wanted to join in the conversation. She had moments where she would rather watch than take part in the happenings.

It was the perfect opportunity to show off how things were progressing to everyone present and to Ethan too, who occasionally glanced at her. I approached and wanted to kiss her, but she easily placed her hand, covering my mouth and stopping me.

“What are you doing?” she cried out and frowned.

I looked around and no one seemed to notice what had just happened, which was a good thing for me.

“Why did you stop me?” I asked as I moved my face away from her hand.

I held her hand and observed them, there was something slightly off.

“Would you stop that?” she asked as she took her hands away from mine. “What’s with you?”

“I should be asking you the same question,” I retorted, then pointed to the imposter, “That’s Ian isn’t it?”

“Yeah, so?” she asked.

I looked at her in disbelief.

“What? Ethan couldn’t be here and sent him,” she explained.

“Is there something wrong with that?”

“Didn’t you two go out together? You weren’t at the event yesterday,” I replied.

“And if we did?” She raised a brow, then realization struck.

“Are you spying on me?”

“What? No,” I replied. “It’s just common sense. If you two weren’t here....”

“Yesterday’s main topic was focused on people in the paramedics. A lot of surgeons and doctors were not here,” she said. “So, why exactly do you know that Ian and went to places. Why would you spy on me?”

“I’m not spying on you. I know how you wanted Rachel...”

“Rachel.”

“Whatever. You wanted the bodyguard to be here, so I just had someone watch over you from a distance,” I explained.

“Without telling me or asking for my consent?” she asked.

“Don’t try to change the subject, why was my girlfriend hanging out with another man?” I asked.

She didn’t seem threatened by my intimidation.

“Lawrence...” The way she called my name, I didn’t need a soothsayer to tell me she was pissed. “I never said I was your girlfriend. I thought if I have you a month, you’d be able to change or return to the teenager I grew up with, but I guess that nature has always been the way you are.”

She sighed and continued, "I have been using you to help me forget about the man I truly have interest in. But you...you haven't been of any help. You just keep finding a way to make sure I don't find you attractive. I don't know what kind of deal you made with my parents, but I want out of it. It's unfair, to you because I know you care about me - in your twisted way of course. But there's only so much the proverbial camel can take."

"What are you saying?" I asked in horror.

"Let's just stop. Whatever this is, let's stop," she insisted.

"Why? Because he's back in your life?" I asked trying to contain my anger.

"No. He's just a friend now. I can't deny the fact that he has hurt me severely before," she repeated the same thing. "But you...you're acting very strange. And I don't want it to make what's left of our friendship, any more bitter."

Lies. She was lying. People that are just friends don't look at each other the way they did. How could she say the same things he said without having to speak with him? Did they think I was some kind of a joke to have a good laugh or something?

“Fine. I’m going back to Maryland,” I said and turned to leave.

This was definitely not over.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The True Twin (Part Two)

Natasha

Cutting things off with Lawrence made me feel a lot better. Once the event in France came to an end, Ian left immediately. We resumed our back and forth texting, but there were still things that I wanted to sort out. My feelings for the technically four men that I was involved with.

Lawrence was my creepy childhood friend. Ethan Sullivan was my hero in medical school, and I still wasn't sure what my feelings for him were. It couldn't have just been admiration. I had thought about doing different things with him and I pictured various scenarios involving him.

Then there was Ethan (false) he reminded me a lot of a side of Ethan I was drawn to in medical school. Yes, he was clumsy, but there was this maturity with the way he handled things. And that was the side of Ian I fell in love with at Glen Allen.

Then Ian, the true false twin. He didn't treat me like a goddess, or princess, worshipping the ground I stepped on and didn't even expect me to be good at a lot of things. With the short time, I spent with him, I had learned a lot of things that I missed out on both as a kid and as an adult.

But he had hurt me. I hurt him in return by not being decisive, so I wanted to make sure my feelings were in order. With Lawrence out of the way, I decided to make a stop at Glen Allen.

Ethan's wife was having a special event at her hospital, and Ethan was her partner business and marital whiz, so he was going to be there for sure. My only concern was if he was going to be willing to give me a listening ear.

Glen Allen was a small community but at the same time, it felt big. Finding the hospital wasn't that hard, considering it had become a popular spot for patients from neighbouring communities.

I found a place to park and made my way into the building. A lot of staff were around attending to patients, but there didn't seem to be any sort of emergency. There was an older man talking to one of the patients; he seemed friendly and looked like he worked there.

"Good day, sir," I called out to him. "Sorry to bother you."

“It’s no problems,” he said with a smile. “How may I help you?”

“I’m looking for Dr. Ethan Sullivan. I heard he’s here today,” I explained.

“Oh, he’s my son-in-law, and currently in his wife’s office,” he replied then pointed in the direction. “Just down that way and find the door with ‘Dr. Sullivan’ written on it.”

“Thank you so much sir,” I said and followed his direction.

I found the door and knocked.

“Come in,” a woman responded.

I opened the door and let myself in. Ethan was there playing with his son, while his wife was reading throughout some patients’ files. They both turned to look at me. I half expected that they’d be upset to see me, considering what had happened the last time, but they remained calm.

“Oh, hi, Natasha,” his wife was the first to greet me. “Fancy seeing you in these parts.”

“Hola, Dr. James,” Ethan greeted and used his son’s hand to wave at me.

“Good day, pleasure to meet you both, and the fine gentleman too,” I said to them.

“Something tells me you’re here to see, *him*,” Stacy said.

“I’m sorry. It’s kind of important to me,” I said to her.

“I understand, Ethan, go see the lady,” she commanded.

“As my lady commands,” he said with a bow and handed his son to her; turning to me, he asked, “Shall we?”

According to my wishes, we went to Crump Park.

“So, we’re here,” he said and pointed at the bench. “I hope you don’t mind us sitting?”

“No, I would actually prefer it,” I said.

We took our seats and I searched for the words to say. I didn’t even know how to begin.

“You can start from medical school,” he said, almost like he was reading my mind.

“You have a general idea why I’m here, don’t you?” I asked.

“Maybe, I’m not really the brightest amongst my brothers; but thanks to my wife, I can actually pick on some social cues now,” he replied.

“She must be amazing.”

“An understatement. Sometimes I can’t even believe I’m with her. Much less having a family together,” he said, “I fear at times that I might wake up and all this was a dream.”

“That would be awful,” I said.

“Tell me about it,” he sighed.

Ethan Sullivan was called Butterfingers by many, but his clumsy fingers have saved more lives than he can count on them. And his heroism didn’t stop at the operating theater. It extended to anyone he encountered. A generic good guy.

“I had a crush on you.” I had finally said. “Ian told me that maybe I envied you and admired you and mistook it for love.

But I wanted to believe that within those range of emotions, there was a form of attraction. I did imagine doing a lot of R-rated things with you.”

“I’m flattered,” he chuckled. “This will be the first I’ve heard someone confess to me like that.”

“I know what you’re thinking that this might have happened long ago, but I want you for a second to imagine that we were in medical school again,” I said. “You helped me see people and not different social classes. You made me realize that I could have fun and be a medical doctor.”

I got to my feet and stood in front of him. “Before I knew it you were the only person I could think about. Even when you graduated, even when I traveled the world, even when you asked me to go on a blind date with your older brother. You were the only person I could think about. I swore to myself that if I ever met you again. I would tell you how I feel.”

He didn’t stop me. He knew I needed this release.

“Ethan Sullivan, I’m in love with you,” I confessed. “From the moment we met, I loved you. I love you so much.”

“Thank you. That means a lot to hear,” he said softly. “But I don’t love you. I never have. And I was never going to.”

If this was the real thing, I would have broken down and cried, but rather than being heavy, my heart finally became light.

“Was worth a shot,” I sighed and took a seat next to him.

“I was half expecting you to cry,” he said with a chuckle.

“I was too but instead I feel better,” I sighed. “So why did you refuse my heartfelt confession? I’m not your type? Am I perhaps too tall? Your adorable wife is shorter.”

“Actually, there’s nothing wrong with you,” he said. “Well, just your hair.”

“My hair? You don’t like blondes?” I asked. “We aren’t actually dumb.”

“No, there was this girl in medical school named Emily,” he replied.

“Oh I think I’ve heard of her,” I countered. “What did she do to you?”

“Let’s say she didn’t return my feelings properly,” he replied. “So, when I saw you, you kind of reminded me of her and not in the good way.”

“Oh, I see,” I said. “So, there I was obsessing over a crush that wouldn’t even see the light of day.”

“That would seem to be the case,” he said while laughing. “Second of all, that didn’t really feel like a heartfelt confession to me.”

“Was it that obvious?”

“Kinda. I could easily tell you were trying to cover your bases properly,” he replied. “You already have someone in mind, don’t ya?”

“That would be none other than your little brother,” I said.

“You know, I know what he did wasn’t right, but at the same time, this is the first time he’s ever resorted to this kind of thing,” he explained.

“Really? I thought you two would be the kind of twins to switch and date each other’s girls,” I teased.

“Well, if I switched to him, there’d be no one to date,” he smirked. “Jokes aside, Ian has had the worse luck among the siblings when it comes to love. A lot of people get involved with him thinking he’s me and when they find out, he’s left

alone. So, I meant what I said. This was the first time, he'd go as far as become me. You must be something special."

"Easy there buster, you already broke my heart, you can't be pulling smooth moves like that," I warned.

"Purely by reflex," he said as he raised both hands in defense.

"Your wife sure has her hands full with you," I sighed.

"She says the same thing, I don't get why she thinks that's the case," he sighed as well.

I stared at him while I smiled. Maybe if there was no Emilia in his life, he would have been talking about me just the way he did about his wife.

"Thank you," I said in appreciation. "Your rejection has opened my eyes."

"Just to be clear, you don't plan on visiting one day and dousing my wife in wine, do you?" he asked in a more serious tone.

"What? No! Did that happen?"

“Yes, the last time I rejected someone,” he replied.

“I was raised by Rosemary’s Etiquette School, I would never stoop to pouring a man’s wife, wine,” I promised him.

“I guess that old hag had some good students after all,” he said with a satisfied nod. “What are you going to do next?”

“I’m going to Richmond.”

Ethan

“You’re back,” Stacy said as I returned to the office.

Jason stretched his hands toward me, although his mother was still feeding him.

“Eat,” I ordered and he turned his attention back to his meal.

The boy could be quiet at times and then he’d get hungry. All hell would break loose; yet he’d never complete his meal.

“So how did it go?” she asked.

“Well, she told me that she was in love with me,” I replied.

“Odd, but go on,” she said.

“I turned her down because polygamy is forbidden in my household,” I continued.

Stacy frowned but she couldn't keep the face and burst into laughter. “How do you even come up with these things?”

“It's called creativity,” I replied.

“Whatever,” she rolled her eyes. “Did you tell her the real reason you turned her down?”

“I did,” I answered as I took my seat.

“Do I have to get a wine-proof dress?”

“Nah, you're good,” I smirked, “I made the enquiries; she's been trained not to.”

“Then all's well that ends well,” she said and focused on Jason.

It was evening. The evening rays of sunshine were cast on my wife and son almost like heaven, reminding me of my purpose here on earth. After the fight with Ian, each time I looked at

my family, I couldn't help wondering if I too would go all out to get them or make sure they remain mine.

The answer was simple.... Yes. Yes, I would. With a heartbeat.

“What?” Stacy asked. “I’ve told you, you can’t have breast milk during weekdays.”

“What? No!” I blinked in disbelief. “I was just thinking what a wonderful family I have.”

“Uh huh, sure you were,” she nodded and focused on Jason, a smile forming on her face.

Maybe, I want the one who was a handful in the marriage. I could only wish Ian and his lover, good luck.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Bring us Back

Ian

I looked through the cute animal fails she had spammed me on Instagram. I wasn't the social media type and Natasha was the type that parents would be scared of letting her view the four corners of a laptop that had access to the internet.

In a way, I found it adorable.

If she found a random video saying wrong medical things she would send it to me and complain about it. At least she had the decency not to comment her know-it-all thoughts on the videos. Other times, we'd just text with her old number and talk about our day and everything we planned to do.

Friends: that was the term we used to define our relationship. It was the same thing I had told Lawrence and he didn't believe me. I wouldn't blame him for not believing. I was

struggling to believe that she and I were just going to be friends and nothing else.

What was I to do with all the feelings I had welling inside me?

“You doing okay sir?” a voice asked.

I turned to see David. If I remember correctly, he used to share an office with Natasha.

“Yeah, I am,” I said.

“You always seem out of sorts these days and it’s a little worrisome,” he said.

“I wasn’t sure that you guys cared that much about me,” I admitted.

“Despite the fact that you make sure our wallets and pockets remain fat every week, we respect you because you always seem to have it together,” he said. “It kind of motivates the rest of us.”

I looked around and noticed some of the staff were staring at us. They seemed worried too.

“What are my symptoms?” I asked.

“Sighing. A lot. You’re standing in front of my office and stare at the door for minutes before moving along. The garden, the cafeteria. We really haven’t seen you like this before, so I’ll up and ask you, did you get your heart broken?” He went straight for it.

I looked around and the staff were acting like they weren’t interested.

“As a matter of fact, I did,” I admitted. There was no need to hide it.

Unlike me, I normally kept my emotions in check, but these days I was slipping a lot, and it wasn’t helping my mental state at all.

“Then it’s not rocket science to guess who the heart breaker was,” he said as he stared at his office door. “There was a rumor and all. But none of us actually deal with baseless rumors...being scientists and all. But we thought you two were a couple.”

“We weren’t. And she wasn’t the heartbreaker. I was the one. Made a foolish mistake,” I explained. “We still talk but I’m back to square one....make that zero.”

“And are you okay with square zero?”

“If that’s what she wants,” I replied.

“You don’t sound like the Dr. Ian Sullivan we know,” he said.

“What?”

“Where’s the man who did what he wanted, and made others do his bidding? You’re arrogant and selfish, in a good way that is. You have a sense of superiority that doesn’t intoxicate you,” he explained. “Such a man, wanting to settle for zero when there’s one available, I refuse to believe that is my boss.”

“What do you have me do?” I asked. “Find her and tell her how much I want her? That I don’t want any friendship that wouldn’t result in spending the rest of my life with her? I know I made a mistake, but this time I’m not going to take the coward’s path and I’ll face her with everything I have? Is that what you want me to do? Even if it would ruin the little progress I’ve made?”

“I don’t know how to answer all of that, I’m not a woman,” he said, then pointed behind me. “Ask her.”

I turned around and saw Natasha standing there. She waved at me nervously, her cheeks a little rosy.

How much did she hear?

“Hi, David,” she said and waved to him.

“Pleasure seeing you again Natasha,” he replied and then whispered, “Good luck, boss.”

“You’re back,” I said to her. “Aren’t you supposed to be in Maryland?”

“I didn’t go back. I was in Glen Allen,” she replied, “I went to confess my feelings to Ethan.”

“What?” I uttered in confusion.

“Is the garden occupied?” she asked with a smile.

We were in the garden and I was struggling to process the information I had just received.

“You told Ethan your feelings?” I asked again as we took our seats.

“You were right that maybe what I felt for him was admiration and envy, because he got to do what he wanted and was allowed to fail and pick himself back up,” she explained. “But I believe for my feelings to have lasted for years. It’s only explainable that I was in love with him as well.”

“I suppose that’s true,” I said. “So, what did he say?”

“Ahem.” She cleared her throat and mimicked Ethan’s voice. “*I don’t love you. I was never in love with you, and I never will.*”

Sometimes I forget that Ethan could be cruel if he wanted to. But that was too much, even for him.

“And that’s all. Lawrence and I are no longer together. Ethan never loved me, so I spent years chasing after someone who was never going to look my way,” she said.

Chasing after someone who was never going to look my way. Her words resonated with me deeply. I remembered all the people I fell in love with or wanted a future with, and how they told me they were never interested in me in the first place.

It always ended up with them having eyes for my older brother.

“Jan...”

“Natasha...”

We called each other at the same time. We both had something to say. I knew she would want to apologize for what had happened the last time and for wasting my time, considering that her feelings were never going to be returned. But just like David had advised, there was no way I was going to settle with a square zero.

“Let me go first,” I requested.

“Alright,” she affirmed.

“I’m sorry it took me this long to say, but I’m in love with you,” I confessed. “From the moment we met, I have desired you. Even with both of my personas, I love you. You, whose eyes have been able to hold my gaze without regarding the possibility of another, I love you. I know what it’s like to chase after people who have no eyes for you. But I assure you that mine do. I don’t want to be friends. You might have overheard everything I said to David, and I want you to know that there was no single lie in anything I said.”

I stopped and let her take in the words.

“I know you might feel I don’t deserve to say these things. Why couldn’t I say them earlier? And why did I choose to tell you this after the man you loved had rejected you?” I continued. “I just don’t want to hesitate, like I did the last time.”

“Tan...” she called out. “What do you mean that the man I loved rejected me?”

“What? You said you confessed to Ethan,” I reminded her. “And he turned you down brutally.”

“That was just the surface,” she said. “Remember, I said I *was* in love with him, but that has long passed. He stopped being the man I loved for almost a month plus.”

“So do you have a man you love?” I asked.

“Yes, I do,” she said, “but he doesn’t know it yet. I was going to tell him today after this.”

Well, it was to be expected. It might not have been Lawrence, but there were a lot of people who looked up to her and desired her. I was probably just one among the many. But

still...what is mine is mine. And there was no way I was going to yield her to anyone else.

“I’m sorry Natasha, I don’t know who he is, but there is no better fit for you than me,” I said with pride. “I will have you and no one else will.”

“Strange...”

“Is it really?”

“Yes, because the man I’m in love with is you,” she exclaimed. “Do you mind repeating that last line again?”

I was embarrassed.

“Ahhh...are your cheeks turning red?” She laughed and I looked away. She held my head and made me face her. “Didn’t you promise that you’d hold my gaze? Where are you looking at?”

“Stop...” I covered my face with the back of my palm. “You’re being annoying.”

“And you had the nerve to steal my love confession,” she said as she straddled me and held me by the collar. “You don’t know how to treat a princess, do you? Calling me annoying.”

“What, princess? You overgrown spoiled brat,” I mocked and frowned.

“Says the edgy grown man,” she shot back with a smirk.

“Take that back,” I insisted.

“Tell me I’m a princess and not a brat,” she demanded.

“My princess,” I said.

Judging by the surprise on her face, she didn’t expect me to actually say it.

“Don’t think you’re out of this yet—”

I cut her words short by kissing her. “You talk too much.”

“No, I don’t,” she whined.

I kissed her again and she kissed me back. There was the sound of people cheering from behind us. We stopped and noticed the staff and some of the patients we were familiar with celebrating for us.

“Oh, my God,” she burst out and buried her face in my neck.
“I forgot we were actually outside.

“Why wouldn’t you when all you think about is getting what you want. You spoiled brat,” I teased.

“Greedy twin,” she teased. “And you better not create any new personas, or I swear to God I’ll end things myself.”

“I promise,” I assured her.

She got down from me and sat by my side, resting her head on my shoulder.

“I love you, Ian,” she said softly. “I realized that I wasn’t in love with two persons at the same time. It’s impossible no matter how you think about it. I always loved you. I’m sorry for the confusion.”

“I’m sorry for starting the confusion in the first place,” I apologized.

“What are we now?” she asked.

“Definitely not friends anymore,” I replied. “I want a future with you. I’m tired of being the only single brother. I hate the idea of waking up alone with no one next to me.”

“Did you just ask for my hand in marriage?” she asked.

“No, I’ll need to propose for that,” I replied. “But that is the major goal.”

“You could have just said yes and make the whole thing easy for yourself,” she sighed.

“Whenever have I wanted things to be easy?” I asked.
“Besides we have a lot of dates to catch up on. I realized that you spent more time with my Ethan version than my Ian self.”

“Aren’t they basically the same person?” she asked.

“To me yes, to you no. I intend on fixing that,” I explained.

“Create the problem and then be the solution,” she said.
“Never change.”

I wouldn’t.

It was a first for me. The first time a woman finally had eyes for me, and they weren’t meant for my brother. I was going to protect this new reality of mine, no matter the obstacle. We remained on the bench for almost an hour; and just like before, no one came to interrupt us.

Chapter Twenty-Five

What Parents Want

Natasha

I saw no reason for it, but Ian wanted to meet with my parents.

“We really don’t have to see them,” I insisted.

“They wanted you to marry someone else, and they didn’t tell you why. I don’t think they’ll be that excited to see you get married to someone else,” he explained. “It’s only proper that they be made aware of what’s happening currently. It’s called being respectful.”

“Why do you have to be so ethical?” I sighed.

“You have Madam Rosemary to thank for that,” he said with a smile.

“Curse you and that old hag.” I spat and rolled my eyes.

He kissed my cheek and smoothed my hair. “Just let us do this properly.”

“Fine,” I sighed. “It’s not like I can refuse, considering we’re already on our way there.”

He didn’t tell me about his plan when he asked me to join him on a trip. We were on the plane when he mentioned that we were going to see my parents. He knew that I would refuse, taking the initiative not to let me in on his plan. I hadn’t yet told my parents that I had broken things off with Lawrence. That was twice the problem. I just hoped there were no third or fourth problem to worry about.

“It’s bigger than my mother’s place,” Ian remarked as he saw the manor.

“My parents say it was inherited,” I explained.

“So, you’re old money?”

“I wouldn’t say that,” I replied. “Maybe that might explain why I’m not ever allowed to do anything I want.”

“And why everything they decide is for your own good,” he added. “I don’t mind buying the place.”

“Tell me you’re joking,” I mocked.

“Hmm? Yeah, I am,” he replied with a blank expression.

I could see it in his eyes, he actually wants to do it. We got to the door and were answered by the head maid.

“Good evening, princess,” she greeted. “You have a guest?”

“Yes, are my parents’ home?” I asked as we both walked past her.

“Dining room,” she replied. “Having lunch.”

“I’ll see them,” I requested.

“Will the both of you be having lunch as well?” she asked.

“No, I’ll pass, thank you,” Ian replied.

“Neither will I, at least not yet,” I said.

“Let me know if you change your mind,” she said before disappearing to attend to her duties.

“She really called you princess,” he teased.

“It’s just a nickname,” I said and frowned.

“Oh, the princess is back,” one of the maids announced.

“Good afternoon, princess,” the others joined in.

There were only four of them including the head maid, but it felt like a lot more.

“You brought home a groom?” one of them teased.

“So handsome that he looks straight out of a billionaire romance novel,” someone else added.

“Alright, back to work the lot of you,” I said. I clapped my hands at them urging them to leave.

“So mean.” They frowned.

“She still wet the bed at fifteen by the way,” another added.

“Who said that?!” I yelled. My face turned red as a tomato thanks to the embarrassment.

They giggled and ran away.

“Stop running the lot of you! Princess, settle down!” the head maid instructed.

“Yes, ma’am,” we chorused.

Ian chuckled and then burst into peals of laughter.

“She’s lying. It was only once,” I defended, although it was a lie. I did it thrice at that age.

“I thought you said you didn’t have any siblings?” he asked.

“I don’t; those were the maids,” I explained. “The youngest would be five years older than me.”

“They love you,” he said softly. “And they dote on you. That’s basically the job description of older siblings to younger ones.”

“They do,” I had to admit.

Growing up with them made me realize what having older sisters would be like. Hell. We went to the dining area and from the looks of things, my parents had finished eating but a few moments ago.

“Sweetie, you’re back,” Mother said.

“No way, is that Dr. Ethan Sullivan?” Father asked as he saw Ian.

“Common mistake. I’m his younger brother, Ian,” Ian explained without a hint of anger. He was already used to things like this happening.

“The most successful plastic surgeon in all of Richmond?” Dad raised a brow, then whispered, “Is it true you know how to make someone look young again?”

“That is what the rumors say, and I’m sure I can live up to them,” Ian replied.

“Honey, I’m in luck,” he said to Mom. “I’ll look even better than I did in high school.”

“You look perfect the way you are.” She squeezed his cheek and grinned at him. Turning her attention to Ian, she said, “It’s an honor to have you here. My daughter mentioned that she

works at your hospital, albeit temporarily. I hope she doesn't give you any problems?"

"She is a valuable asset, and I'm still trying to convince her to come back," Ian answered.

"You flatter me," I sighed.

"I'm sure it's not flattery," Dad said. "It's my daughter he's talking about. She's always an asset wherever she goes."

"She has never let us down one bit. Truly a blessing to us both," Mother cooed.

There they go again, praising me at every chance they get. It made me happy. But with the news I came bearing, I wasn't sure they'd be so proud of me anymore. This is time for me to finally do what I want and decide if it was for my own good. Besides, they promised me that I was allowed to do what I wanted.

"Have a seat please," Dad insisted as he motioned for both of us to get seated. "Can we get you anything? Drinks?"

"Red wine?" Ian asked as he pulled out a seat for me.

“We have some,” Dad replied and motioned for our butler to get the drink.

“Thank you so much,” Ian said as he took his seat next to me.

“So how may we help you today?” Dad asked.

Ian being Ian went straight for it.

“I’ll be brief. I desire your daughter as a bride,” Ian announced with confidence.

The smile on Mom and Dad’s faces quickly faded as they exchanged glances with each other.

Dad cleared his throat and sat upright, “Could you please come again?”

“I’m in love with Natasha, your daughter, and I’ve decided to have her as my wife,” Ian confessed. “She’s beautiful, intelligent, perfect to all that see her. And, most importantly, she’s the only woman who sees my worth, and I know hers. I need her by my side. I thought I should let you know.”

I facepalmed. I was resisting the urge to start grinning like an idiot. The man I loved just blatantly told my parents that he wanted me, and he didn’t even do it in a humble way. His

approach seemed to say only one thing, *No is not an answer I choose to have.*

Mom was the first to break the silence. “I’m glad you feel that way about my daughter, honoured even, but...”

“Our daughter already has someone she’s with and plans to marry,” Dad explained.

“About that, I called things off with Lawrence,” I revealed.

It was the first time my words made my parent’s faces look pale.

“You did what?” Mom asked. “Why?”

“I told you guys that I would see if I could find him desirable enough to marry,” I reminded them, “Well, after several trials, I came to the conclusion that he isn’t going to be a good husband or son. And I’ve been in love with Ian for a while now.”

“But you can’t do that,” Dad warned. “You’re supposed to get married to Lawrence.”

“But you can’t dictate that. You can’t decide who I’m going to marry,” I shot back. “Why do I have to get married to him?”

You two have provided no valid reason.”

“Is there any need for a valid reason, other than it’s what’s good for you and this family?” Dad asked.

“If this was piano, horse riding, or even medicine, I might be tempted to agree with you, but this is marriage we’re talking about,” I replied. “This is the rest of my life. You, Mom, Lawrence, and even Ian don’t get to decide who I’m going to spend the rest of my life with - but me and me alone. No one else, just me.”

“You’re going to marry Lawrence,” Mom said.

“No. Not until you give me a valid reason,” I insisted. “Have any of you observed what he’s like these days? Relying on plastic surgery and trampling on the lives of people lesser than him? Even the maids here don’t like him, and they swoon for a guy like Ian.”

“Ouch?” Ian asked.

“Sorry sweetie, it’s just an example,” I explained.

“Well, it’s fine, I’m sure your parents have their reasons, and I think I’ve actually figured it out,” Ian replied.

“What?” Mom, Dad, and I asked in unison.

“I’ll just ask, how much do you owe the Williams?” Ian asked.

“That’s absurd, Mom and Dad wouldn’t—” I stopped speaking and turned to my parents.

They didn’t say anything, but had their heads hung in shame.

“I’m sorry,” Dad apologized.

“No way, how much?” I asked.

“Approximately a billion,” he replied.

“How the.. how did it get to that?” I blurted out.

“It was a bad business deal,” Mom replied. “The Williams cornered your father and made him give up almost everything, causing him to take more. The only thing we could use to hold them back was the manor and some other properties. Then he proposed he’d clear off the debt if you and Lawrence got married.”

“And you were going to sell me off?” I asked.

“No, not at all. That’s why we told you to take as long as you need. I needed you to stall until I found a way to resolve everything,” Dad answered. “That’s why we were a little relieved when you said you didn’t have any interest in him. But if you called off the marriage, there was no telling what he would do.”

“We’ve been to raise half the amount, but he demanded that it be paid in full,” Mom explained.

“But that’s cruel,” I frowned. “Can’t we take them to court or something?”

“The contract is solid. Believe me I’ve tried,” Dad said in a defeated tone.

“Just a billion?” Ian asked. “Does that include the properties as well?”

“Yes, why?” Dad answered.

“You have an offshore account? I’ll send you two billion,” Ian said.

“What?” I blinked.

“Is there a problem?” Ian asked.

“This is a family problem, we’ll find a way around it,” Father explained, and I nodded in agreement.

“It seems like none of you understood my statement from earlier, so I’ll repeat myself.” Ian cleared his throat. “I desire your daughter as my bride. While I don’t like the idea of her being treated like a bargaining chip, if it means going all in, then I’ll go all in. She’s going to be my family, and that makes all of you my family either way. So, yeah, this is my problem too.”

I couldn’t believe my ears.

“Oh, and I won’t be taking no for an answer,” he added.

Mom and Dad exchanged glances and Dad let out a sigh of defeat. “You know, most people call you the strangest of the Sullivan brothers. I didn’t know how true those rumors were... but thank you. We owe you.”

“I’ll accept your daughter as payment,” Ian said instantly.

“What happened to not treating me like a bargaining chip?” I frowned.

“I don’t recall saying that,” he smirked.

“Well this calls for a celebration. I can’t wait to see the look on their faces,” Dad said as the color finally returned to his face.

“Thank you,” I said softly to Ian.

“Wait till you meet my family,” he said with a grin.

I still felt a little upset at my parents no matter the excuse they were going to send me off with. What if I waited longer and things got worse? Ian came through more than I expected. For the first time in forever, I felt like a true princess.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Meet the Sullivans

Natasha

A week had passed and things had gotten better for both of us. As Ian had promised, the money my parents needed was sent to them, and their debt was cancelled. Dad told us that Lawrence's dad didn't seem to care about the contract, which easily told me that the old man wasn't behind the ruse.

I could only think of one person who was so obsessed with me that he'd be willing to go the extra mile and make sure that I was his personal property. I promised myself that the next time I saw him, a punch across the face would be due.

Prince charming aside, I got to spend proper time with Ian. I wasn't official staff in his hospital, but I came by to help out as often as I could. The patients and most of the staff missed me. I found my hands occupied by the second day I came back to the hospital.

Ian was visibly jealous of the patients and would often swing by my office to check on me, but I would be occupied. Garden time was sacred. I noticed that anytime we wanted to spend time together, most of the staff would leave.

I thought Ian was behind it, but he assured me that it was just his staff's idea. When I noticed they'd stay and watch from a distance, I realized that they were just relishing the fact that their boss was finally dating someone. It still was embarrassing to be watched like that. But Ian didn't care. I was the only one bothered about it.

The same week, there was an event at Byrd Park, similar to the one we attended where he was himself. Because it was my second time experiencing a pop up carnival, I was able to win more prizes than last time. I won a shark doll, and Ian... well, he won nothing. And no, I didn't give him my shark doll. I had won it fair and square. It was my first carnival gift, so why would I give it to him?

He didn't mind and didn't argue. He kept treating me like I was some little kid that had never seen a carnival before. But it was fun. We went paddling on the lake. I didn't know how to paddle so we spent most of the time making the boat go in circles and steering the wrong way until I gave up and let him handle everything.

Moments like this could only be regarded as a fairy tale. We retired to his house, where I made him the finest duck à l'orange. The maids and Mom taught me how to make it specifically for him. He enjoyed the meal.

“I think I finally understand why my brothers prefer to have their wives cook even when they know how to,” he said as he took another bite and his face melted in pleasure.

A wife.

“I’m glad you like it,” I said as I continued the meal, and he watched me.

He helped me clear the dishes and I joined him on the couch as we watched Botched.

“Is this how you learn things?” I asked.

“The number of things entertainment TV can teach you amazes me most of the time,” he replied. “But, yes, this is how I learn most of the time. Ha.”

“Good to know,” I said and turned my attention to the TV.

I was bored so I decided to watch him. He was focused, and I could tell he was taking mental notes as the doctors explained

the processes. He looked so handsome. I couldn't understand how no one had fallen in love with this man long ago. He stopped watching and turned his attention to me. He smiled, winked, and turned his focus back to the TV. I was all gushy just from the action.

I realized that not only was I in love with this man, but I had also developed a huge crush on him, and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

“Ian? Ian? Ian? Ian?” I called him repeatedly as I poked his chin.

He looked at me, slightly upset that I was interrupting his TV time.

“I want kisses,” I demanded.

His gaze softened, and he leaned in and obliged.

“More...” I demanded.

He kissed me again.

“More.”

And again.

“More.”

Again.

“More...”

His body was on mine as his lips took my mouth. We made out passionately. The sex was good, but there was just something about kissing that I couldn't explain. I relied on my whimpers and groans. Groans were the sign he was too soft. Whimpers, too hard. The moment of silence was perfect until I gave the sign. Hard, soft, or a perfect blend of both, I didn't care. I just wanted more of his lips. And he didn't hesitate to grant my lips' desire.

That was how the night ended: just two souls madly in love, communicating with their lips.

The Sullivans seemed to have a lot of dinners together. Ian explained that they recently had one in their father's memory. This one was just to check on how everyone was doing. We were in front of the door, and I was extremely nervous. I didn't want to embarrass him.

“Just be yourself, trust me you won’t embarrass me one bit,” he assured me. “I’m more worried about my idiot brother.”

“What if they don’t like chocolate?” I asked as I looked at the box I had bought.

“Who doesn’t like chocolate?” he sighed. “Don’t think too much about this, Natasha. They’ll love you just the way you are. Even if you’re a brat.”

“I’m not a brat, I’m a princess,” I proudly stated.

“Forgive me, your highness,” he said and bowed.

“You’re forgiven,” she said.

“Wow, and I thought we’re the weird couple,” a familiar voice said from behind us.

We turned to see Ethan and his family were behind us.

“Big brother,” Ian greeted.

“Little brother,” Ethan replied.

Jason stretched his hand toward Ian, and he accepted it. Jason saw his father and was visibly confused, so he returned for his father and got confused when he saw his uncle. The four of us burst into laughter.

“Finally good to have another lady join the family,” Stacy said to me. “The oldest wife has been demanding another addition to the ranks.”

“By oldest, does she mean Ben’s wife?” I asked Ian.

“She means my mother, who’s already waiting for us on the inside,” Ian explained as he opened the door.

The house was simple yet luxurious at the same time. A lot of antiques gave the house a certain kind of aesthetic I couldn’t quite put my finger on.

“Uncle Ian, Uncle Ethan, Aunt Stacy!” a little girl announced as she ran to her uncles and aunt.

The adults greeted her and showered her with praise before she noticed me.

“Hello, ma’am,” she greeted. “I’m Chloe.”

“Nice to meet you Chloe, I’m Natasha,” I introduced myself.

She stared at me, her mouth agape. “Your eyes are really green. Why?”

“You see when the pigment...uh.. I was born that way,” I explained.

“You can actually explain it in medical term and she’ll understand,” Stacy offered.

“One of the scariest and cutest trait she has,” a man said.

He was quite tall and broader than the other men, but he had a gentle look on his face. “Nice to meet you again, Natasha.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you too, Ben,” I said as I accepted his handshake. “I brought chocolates.”

“Oh, don’t mind if I do,” he said and took hold of it. He was the first to open it and indulge.

Ethan, Stacy and Chloe clamored to get a piece too.

“Ah, none of you are getting anything before dinner,” an older woman said as she came out accompanied by another lady carrying a baby.

“I’m the mother of the boys, Mrs Sullivan,” she introduced herself.

“I’m the giant’s wife, Olivia. This angel is Sophia. You’ve probably met my older angel, Chloe,” the other lady introduced everyone.

“It’s a pleasure to meet all of you,” I said with a bow. “I’m Dr. Natasha James.”

“Alright, Natasha, to the kitchen,” Olivia said and pointed.

I turned to Ian, and he gave me a thumbs up. Besides Rachel and some of the colleagues from work, I had never talked to any woman around my age before.

“So, what’s your story?” Olivia asked.

We were making Chinese fried rice with various sides.

“My story?” I raised a brow.

“Yeah. I already have a general idea of how yours goes, but Olivia doesn’t,” Stacy replied.

“Oh, uh, I was in love with Ethan, and I kissed him. Turned out to be Ian, but I didn’t know it and dated both his false persona and the real man,” I explained.

“You know, now that you say it out loud, it sounds a lot worse than you’d expect,” Stacy said.

“No arguments there,” Olivia and I said in tandem.

“So what about the finale, the climax? Does he know you’re pregnant?” Olivia asked.

“What?” I stammered. “I’m not pregnant.”

“Did you check?” Stacy asked.

“I’m actually on my period,” I admitted.

Which is also part of the reason I didn’t have sex with Ian during the last making out session.

“So you two haven’t had sex?” Olivia asked.

“We actually have,” I replied honestly. “But contraceptives and good old pull out method.”

“Ohhh,” they both nodded.

“You know now that I think about it, we could have simply just done that,” Stacy said to Olivia.

“But he felt so good too,” Olivia sighed.

“Wait...you two got pregnant before you married them?” I asked.

“Don’t misunderstand, I was going to be a single mom,” Olivia said.

“As for me, I knew Ethan was definitely going to marry me,” Stacy revealed.

“Wow,” I admitted. “I was more worried about embarrassing Ian or something, but you two are very lax. What made you fall in love with your husbands?”

“I was convinced that I was walking bad luck. He and Chloe disapproved of that notion,” Olivia said with a smile.

“Someone needed to keep those Butterfingers out of trouble,” Stacy replied. “What about you?”

“I found someone who saw me as me. And not as a princess or goddess,” I said as I touched my hair. “I must be the luckiest girl in the world.”

“That makes two of us,” Stacy affirmed.

“Make that three of us,” Olivia chimed in. “Now let’s make sure that the stomachs of the men that we love are satisfied.”

“All right!” I punched the air along with Stacy.

So, this was what a big family was like.

We ate our meal in silence, enjoying the pleasure of each other’s company. Every family member was as unique as the legends had said about them. Ben, the maestro of the operation theatre. He had saved a lot of lives but couldn’t save his first wife’s life. He struggled to balance work and his daughter. Olivia was a woman who had lost everyone she held dear and was convinced she had bad luck; well, thanks to her, the rice was a little burned.

They loved each other despite the bad luck.

Ethan, the man said to have machine-like hands had the highest success rates among his brothers. But was careless in reality. Stacy, a straight-laced woman blinded by getting things

the way she wants them. A perfect match for her husband who depended on her. Ian, the youngest was the man who could make anyone desirable, but no one desired him. And me, the girl everyone had desired but desired no one. A perfect match.

If I never met this family, I would have been convinced that I was the only special person in this world. It felt nice to belong in a family of special people. I could feel Ian squeeze my hand from underneath the table.

I turned to him. "Are you okay?" he whispered.

"You have a very wonderful family," I replied.

"And I'm lucky to have you as part of it," he said and kissed my hand.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Prince Charming Returns

Lawrence

“What?” I asked in disbelief. “Tell me you’re joking.”

“I said they paid their debt in full, so you don’t have to bother about getting married to their daughter anymore.” Father repeated himself. It still felt like my ears were deceiving me.

“How did they even get the money? Didn’t we say they can’t pay half?” I asked.

“They paid in full, so that part of the contract has been fulfilled, and everything they own has been returned to them,” he explained. “I even used the money to get some new properties I’ve been eyeing. I can get you some too.”

“The only property I want is the same girl for whom I brought up this entire scheme just to have her,” I reminded him. “There’s no fucking way in hell am I just going to let her go like that. I want her and I want her now!”

“You’re not a child anymore, Lawrence,” he said in an angry tone. “If it’s women you want, there are plenty of them around. Rich ones from even better money than that girl. Just settle down.”

“Of course, you won’t understand.” I frowned and stormed out of his study.

I went to my room and pulled out my collection: every picture of her I had up until she was an adult. Such beautiful, innocent, delicate skin that had aged through the years. I had been close...so close. I knew those old farts were up to something when they advised her to take as long as she wanted

All three of them were in on it. But there was no way they would have been able to cough up such a large amount of money on short notice. Someone had helped them. Someone stronger and wealthier than me. Who could possibly desire Natasha just as much, if not more than I did.

Ian Sullivan. How could I have been so stupid? His sudden reappearance in her life, the way she easily forgave him, and they became friends, cutting me off completely when they had put their plans into motion. What does he know about her? Was he there for her when she had no one to play with? Was he there when she had her first period and was scared not knowing what to do?

I had been there for her so many times. I would not be ignored or pushed away. If I wasn't going to have her, then there was no way I was going to let some arrogant quack of a doctor from Richmond get the woman of my dreams.

No way or chance in hell.

Natasha

I returned to Maryland because I wanted to see my parents and share everything that had happened so far. Rachel also needed to know.

“You're so lucky,” Rachel cooed. “To think that Lawrence McSleazy would actually do something like that.”

“But at least everything was resolved,” I sighed.

“When will my own false twin appear out of nowhere and pay a billion dollar debt for my sake?” she asked as she watched me pack my things, getting ready for my return trip to Richmond.

“Well if you actually try, I’m sure there’s a man out there waiting for you,” I said.

“Not with the scars on my body. Love is left for the flawless skin such as yours,” she maintained.

Rachel was a beautiful woman. True her service had earned her some scars or two, but there was good in her heart, and that was all that mattered.

“You sure do look down on yourself a lot,” I commented, giving up on the topic. I knew she had would never agree to the fact that she was a wonderful specimen of high quality art.

I left for the airport and texted Ian that I was getting ready to return. Apparently, he was in Maryland too, but on business.

“We’re being followed,” Rachel said, as she looked out the car window.

“Are you sure it’s not someone just going to the airport?” I asked. “There are a lot of people going our way.”

“I have no argument there,” she said and relaxed.

As we got to the airport, the car that seemed to be following us went to the arrival door, so we weren't being followed after all. The whole ordeal had gotten Rachel on high alert, although I tried letting her know that there was nothing to worry about. As we approached the entrance of the airport, Lawrence was there.

“Can I have a word with you?” he asked.

“Not now Lawrence, I have a flight to...”

“I received notification that my flight has been cancelled. Looks like I don't have a flight to catch to anymore,” I sighed.

He started walking.

“Don't follow him,” Rachel warned.

“It's a crowded place; he won't do anything that stupid,” I assured her. “Just don't stay too far from me.”

“Alright,” she agreed and followed behind me.

“So what do you want?” I asked.

“Why do you hate me so much?” he asked.

“I beg your pardon?” I blinked twice. “What in tarnation are you going on about?”

“You don’t know how to answer a simple question?” he asked, slowly raising his voice, as he approached, but I wasn’t afraid of him. “We...were going to be husband and wife. Me who has been with you since day one and you, the only perfect woman, perfectly crafted for my sake. Every stage of your life I have documented and recorded.”

“Did you just say something creepy?” I asked.

“Natasha!” Rachel called out.

I turned to find her being tazed by two men.

“Lawrence, stop, let’s be rational,” I tried to reason with him.

“There’s no need to go this far.”

“Natasha, I’m the only perfect man for you, and I don’t think you realize it,” he said, and the crazed look in his eyes finally succeeded in terrifying me.

I turned to run, but he grabbed my hand and pulled me to himself, covering my mouth so I wouldn’t scream. I bit his palm, but he didn’t even flinch; he groaned. I felt so disgusted.

“We’ll go somewhere far away, where no one would bother us,” he said as he dragged me away.

“Yeah I don’t think so,” a voice said, followed by a thud.

Lawrence let me go and turned to face his assailant. It turned out to be Ian who wasted no time in punching him in the face. The men from earlier tried to run toward us, but the other Sullivan brothers were there, beating the thugs up and restraining them.

“Why do each and every one of us had a crazy ex in their lives?” Ethan asked.

“You were the only one with the crazy ex,” Ben said. “Oh wait, Olivia had one.”

“I guess it’s a family thing,” Ian said as he stared at his knuckles. He turned his attention to me, “Did he hurt you?”

“No but Rachel...” I turned to her, but she was already getting up.

“I’ve been grazed by bullets before, so a Taser is nothing,” she said. She slowly got to her feet while grunting and wheezing a little.

I hugged Ian. “I was so...”

“Shhh...it’s okay,” he said to calm me down. I was still a bit shaken from the ordeal.

“The police are on their way,” Ben said as he put down his phone. “I’ll make sure his daddy’s money and connections won’t bring any of them out.”

“Thank you, both of you,” I said to them.

“This might not be the best time to ask this and, honestly, I was going to wait until I returned to Richmond but...” Ian placed his hand in his pocket and got on one knee. “Will you marry me? Not as an Ethan persona, but the whole Ian Sullivan package?”

“Who proposes to someone who almost got kidnapped?” I raised a brow, trying not to laugh.

“I’m just trying to make good use of the Stockholm syndrome or was it the suspension bridge effect?” he asked. “Either way, there’s no time like the present.”

“I’ll marry you,” I said. “Although I would have prefer to have done it while wearing a gown and you on a white stallion.”

“Nice try, princess, but I’ll see what I can do,” he said as he slid the ring on my finger.

“Thank you for choosing me,” he said as he kissed my hand.

“I’m pretty sure it’s the other way around,” I said as he got to his feet.

“Nah, I was correct,” he insisted before kissing me.

Who would have thought this weird story would have ended this way?

Chapter Twenty-Eight

The HEA of the Sullivans

*I*an & Natasha Sullivan

Months had passed, and my adorable wife and I had the princess-themed wedding she had always wanted. I didn't know horse drawn carriages for weddings were still a thing in places like Glen Allen. Her family was stabilized, and they didn't have to worry about debt anymore.

As for Lawrence, Ben meant it when he said he was going to make sure that Lawrence wouldn't be set free. How did he do it? No one knows. My older brother could be frightening like that and none of us could complain about it.

Rachel resigned and looked for work elsewhere. As for Natasha and me, we were about to face our biggest hurdle yet. Childbirth: a fascinating part of every married couple's life.

My brothers had prepared me, telling me not to panic as the process was completely normal. I had no idea what made it seem scary. We were going to have twins. Luckily, a boy and a girl since I didn't want a repeat of my story.

Natasha was worried. Pregnancy wasn't kind with her at all. The mood swings were terrible and scared me most of the time. The hunger cravings too. Then...her beauty. Well, I didn't care about it. But she was convinced that she was getting ugly. We were not having any more kids after the twins were born. But, she didn't hate the idea of parenthood. All through the months leading up to the birth, she had planned how the children would grow.

They needed to attend carnivals and go to mini observatories and petting zoos. It could have just been part of her pregnancy delusions speaking, but I was there for all of it. Then, the big day arrived.

"Don't let go of my hand," she demanded as she held my hand tightly.

"Honey, I swear, I'm your captive in this situation," I replied. I tried to ignore the fact that I was losing all sensation in my hand.

"Kisses," she demanded.

I gave them to her as requested. Labor had started, but she was too scared to start pushing.

“What if I do it wrong?” she asked.

“There’s no right or wrong way; they can’t stay in there any longer than you can hold them in,” Stacy warned.

Olivia was there to help along with a few other nurses.

“Aren’t you a little worried?” Olivia asked.

“I’m terrified,” I admitted; truly, I was terrified. “But her own fear cancels mine out.”

“I’m so sorry,” Natasha apologized.

“You’re going to do fine,” I assured her once more. “Don’t you want to meet our kids? You’ve already planned out so much for them. They can’t wait to meet you too.”

“Alright, let’s meet them,” she said and took in deep breaths before pushing.

It wasn’t as easy as we thought but after the first ten minutes, our son was out, and the nurses immediately got to work.

Twenty more minutes and our girl arrived; we could all finally rest.

Our son was a natural blonde. He was definitely going to be a lady killer.

I started to worry about the possibility of having an Ethan. Our daughter had my hair and a darker shade of her mother's eyes. We weren't sure if she was going to keep the eye color until she got older. But we were glad they were with us - our sweet Ryan and Danielle.

Five years later

Natasha

"Mommy!" the twins called the moment I returned from work.

They had grown up as spitting images of their father, while also having inheriting my beauty and eyes. We didn't know Ryan would later show signs of having the same color as his sister and me. But at least we outnumbered their father.

"Where's Daddy?" I asked after giving them their hello kiss.

"He got us a puppy!" Ryan screamed as he jumped up and down repeatedly.

He had obviously inherited my energy.

“And got us new storybooks on how to take care puppies,” Danielle added. Her father’s daughter.

“Can we show Jason?” they asked.

“It’s a weekday, have you both done your homework?” I asked.

“Pfft, it was easy,” Ryan said. “I did it in class.”

“Me too,” Danielle agreed.

There was another thing that unsettled me; it was how intelligent these children were. I thought it was strange with Chloe, but it might just be a Sullivan thing to give birth to naturally gifted children.

I needed to pay homage to Mrs Sullivan’s womb the next time we visited her.

“Alright let’s go see the puppy,” I said and let them lead me to their bedroom.

Ian was seated on the floor with his legs crossed, the storybook in one hand and the puppy in the other. He wore reading glasses, and it increased his hotness by hundred percent. He slowly lifted his eyes to look at me. I found myself looking away, blushing and feeling like a little girl.

“You’re back early today princess,” he said. “We missed you.”

I took in a deep breath and tried to compose myself as I turned to face him.

“I missed you guys too,” I managed to say.

I joined him along with the kids as he read to us the story. I know my parents dictated most of my life for me, but moments like this made me grateful that they made me study medicine.

Who knows the kind of man I would have probably ended up with?

Ethan & Stacy Sullivan

Stacy

The sound of glass breaking and I could only wince. I stood up and stomped to the kitchen. The culprits had not fled the crime scene. Their mouths were soiled with ice cream and there was broken china on the floor.

“Who did it?” I asked.

They both pointed at each other. I had hoped Jason wouldn't turn out to be just like his father and, well, he didn't. At least not completely, but he had his moments.

“Okay who really broke the china? Tell me the truth and you'll get more ice-cream. Jason remained pointing at his father, while his father slowly raised his hand.

“Alright let's clean this up,” I said, and they both scurried away to get the cleaning supplies.

It wasn't being a mom to two men, but I enjoyed it. After they were done cleaning, I helped Jason with his homework, only he didn't need my help since everything was correct.

“Is there something your mother ate that caused all her descendants to become intelligent or something?” I couldn't help asking as Jason ate his fruit.

“It's because I study,” Jason said softly.

Unlike his father and me, the boy rarely talked, but he was social at the same time and loved by his cousins and friends. We weren't really bothered about him getting bullied.

"There you have it, he studies," Ethan said as he read through the medical notes he had borrowed from Ben.

I touched my stomach; we were expecting another child, and I wondered if he or she would be as smart as their cousins. It would suck if they ended up being compared to their cousins.

"I don't know if it's just studying," I said.

"Babe you don't have to worry about that," Ethan assured me. "You did a good job with Jason, and you'll do a good job with his little sister."

"Brother, girls are scary," Jason said.

"Looks like trauma from the wine incident got passed down," Ethan muttered while chuckling to himself.

"Oh hush." I threw a stuffed toy at him, then turned to Jason. "Girls aren't so bad. Look at your cousins. None of them play dolls, they play sports and are full of...oh, he's scared of his cousins."

“Who wouldn’t? Where do they even get that insane amount of energy from?” Ethan asked as he flipped through the pages.

Another thing to be worried about. Ethan let out a sigh and walked over to me. He hugged me from behind and kissed my cheek.

“Don’t think too much about it,” he said to me.

“I mean, I can’t even help Jason with his homework, and I don’t know if the next boy...”

“Girl...” Ethan corrected.

“Boy...” Jason joined in.

“Or girl,” I continued. “Will turn out like her cousins. What if I’m out of the Sullivan juice?”

“There’s no such thing as a Sullivan juice. And both our kids will turn out fine,” he affirmed.

“Thank you...how do you know how to calm me down?” I asked.

“You aren’t actually worried. Your pregnancy delusions are at it again,” he reminded me and kissed my lips.

“Oh, right,” I said and let out a sigh of relief.

Pregnancy delusions or not, I was still worried about my parenting skills. But like Ethan had shown me, I wasn’t alone in this. I had him by my side and Jason, too. We were going to be the best family, clumsy or not.

Ben and Olivia Sullivan

Chloe

Mother’s Day was one of my favorite days of the year. I was already twelve, and my school was organizing a bake off in honor of our mothers. I had spent weeks perfecting my recipe, with Mother. Well, it took a lot longer to perfect because her luck always seemed to kick in at the oddest time. But I loved it.

She brought a new kind of excitement every day to our lives.

“Gooooo, Chloeeeee,” her voice could be heard from the bleachers cheering me on.

I tried to hold back the laughter as I glanced in her direction. Dad and Sophie also cheered for me but Mom made their voices pale in comparison. Her actions seemed to start a competition with the other mothers cheering for their children.

She always did things like this. Her presence was enough to get people in motion. Just the way she added motion to Dad's and my life years ago.

"Is that your mom in the stands, Sullivan?" Abby, one of my classmates who considers herself better than me, asked.

"Yes, the one and only," I replied with a smile.

"I hear she's not really your mom," she continued.

"My stepmom, really," I corrected.

Abby was upset as her taunts didn't work.

"Don't forget to taste!" Mom yelled.

I tasted the mix.

"She must love her real daughter more than you," she continued.

Normally, that would be the case. But Mom doted and scolded us equally such that it was hard to tell if she was partial or playing favorites.

“I don’t think so,” I shrugged.

I was forgetting something. I tasted it again but couldn’t tell what it was.

Think....think...

“Vanilla! Tumeric?” Mom asked.

Other mothers joined in too. It was vanilla, obviously. After the baking was over, I was slated to win first place but got disqualified because Mom had helped.

“Serves you right,” Abby said as she showed off her medal.

I wasn’t bothered. I had fourteen more at home.

“I’m so sorry, baby. You looked so confused,” Mom apologized.

“You don’t need to apologize; they already said I was the best,” I said to appease her.

“You also have fourteen medals,” Dad reminded me as he played with my hair.

“Yeah, you’re both right,” Mom said with a weak smile. “I’ll go get the drinks.”

She left us and headed for the car.

“I’ll go get her,” I said to Dad and handed him the cake.

“Thank you,” he said.

Mom knew how to carry a lot of weight on her own. Dad had talked about it a lot but she didn’t seem to listen.

“Did you hear that Sullivan girl lost?”

“Yeah, her stepmother helped her.”

“Who does she think she is? At the end of the day, she’s not even her real mother.”

Some women gossiped to themselves as they walked past me. I found Mom staring at the cooler without moving, obviously listening to what those women were saying.

“Mom?” I called.

“Oh, hey, sweetie. Thank goodness you’re here,” she replied but didn’t turn around to look at me.

I knew she was wiping away her tears.

“Mom, don’t let whatever they say get to you,” I said to her.

“They’re right. I might be trying too hard; and who knows, one day, you might come to find me frustrating too,” she preached.

“I don’t even know who my mother is, and you’ve never mistreated me, even once,” I reminded her. “You have always been my mother. And you always will, okay?”

“Okay,” she agreed as she took in a deep breath and exhaled. “You and your father are too good at things like this.”

I hugged her. “You’re also good at being a mom.”

“Huggies!” Sophie announced as she hugged us too.

“I don’t know what’s going on but I want in,” Dad said and hugged all of us.

My extended family was made up of different people, both the fantastic and the bizarre, but they were my family. And I, theirs.

The End

Chapter Twenty-Nine

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