

LUNCHTIME CHRONICLES

Issue 31

Dark
and
tantalizing.

NAKED SUSHI

Kenya Wright

NAKED

SUSHI

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Naked Sushi

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Welcome to Messy Mandy Presents

The Lunchtime Chronicles Season 4



[Lunchtime Chronicles](#) was launched by Author Siera London. These erotic romance novellas are presented like magazine issue. They have lunchtime themes, and are released by a different group of authors each season.

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**I LOVE YOU LIKE A
CANNIBAL LOVES
HUMAN FLESH**

PROLOGUE

FOOTMAN

Reo

he moon glowed as we pulled up to the party in the Jaguar.

T Eighty acres of red rose gardens surrounded the towering castle.

Hordes of glamorous people left expensive cars and strolled toward the castle's marbled steps. Women dazzled in flowing gowns and diamond jewelry. Meanwhile, power radiated off the men.

I gazed out the window. "This is too magnificent a place to kill someone in."

Ali perused the castle. "Yet, it isn't a bad place to kill anyone in either."

I turned and smiled at my longtime assistant.

Ali and I were an odd pair. We met in Dubai. He worked for the wrong side. I almost killed him. He was 5'9. I towered over him at 6'2. I spent a lot of time in the gym. Ali preferred to eat cake and read books in my condo library. It was a mystery how he remained slim.

Ali opened the door. "It's time, sir."

I stepped out, smoothed down the front of my tux, and made sure the red string around my wrist was tucked securely under my sleeve. "I didn't know New York City had castles."

Ali admired it. "I'm not sure if one would still consider this New York City. This island is sixty miles up the Hudson River."

My guards gathered around me and kept their guns close.

I looked at Ali. "What do we know?"

"A rich architect built the castle for his secret male lover in the earlier part of the 20th century." Ali pointed to the front. "When the architect's wife learned of this, she sent her brothers to storm the property and kick the lover out. A year later, the wife died under mysterious circumstances."

I frowned. "I don't care about the property. I want to know about Footman."

"Oh! Sorry, sir. With this mission, I enjoyed the research more than usual." Ali cleared his throat. "Our men discovered Footman in the white room. They have their eyes on him."

"What's in the white room?" I walked toward the castle.

He followed. "Beautiful women dancing around a massive orgy."

"And is he participating in the orgy?"

"No, sir. Footman is stalking a dancer."

"What type of shoes is she wearing?"

"Diamond encrusted. Her toes are painted red."

"Highly manicured and well-kept?"

"Yes, sir. He's been throwing money at her all night."

"Footman has lost control. Instead of hiding, he's out and about." I smirked. "Does he not know the Dragon put a million dollar bounty on his head?"

"I believe he thinks the Dragon's reach is only in Japan."

"Then, we'll have to educate him." I stopped at the top of the stairs.

Two uniformed men opened the castle's double doors.

On the inside, ivory columns and crystal chandeliers sparkled. A full orchestra played in the foyer. There were massive rooms on both sides where masked guests enjoyed themselves.

Entering, I gazed up. Nude women hung from the ceiling, twisting and tangling their limbs together. Black masks covered their faces.

We moved forward.

I leaned Ali's way. "Who's hosting this party?"

"Blake Meade. He only invites the world's elite. The tickets start at twenty thousand dollars each."

"An elite sex party requires privacy. That's why most of the guests are masked?"

"Correct, sir."

"Was it difficult for us to get an invite?"

"No, sir. With one mention of the Dragon, Mr. Meade granted us immediate access."

"Good. Then, Meade knows his place."

I worked for Kenji Soto who was the head of the Japanese Mafia—the Yakuza—an organized network drenched in ancient traditions. Many also knew him as the Dragon. Smart people had a healthy fear of him.

But then there were people like Footman—evil, dark men who incited horror. This was when Kenji had me step in. They called me, the Dragon's Roar.

We climbed the swirling staircase and entered the second level.

The desire for blood burned in me. I pressed the side of my coat where my knives and guns remained in their holster. "Does Meade know why we want Footman?"

"No, sir."

“Good. I want to catch Footman by surprise. His last victim’s feet will be fully rotted by now. He’ll be itching for another pair.”

Footman was born Archer Lee. He was half Japanese, half American. I’d given him the nickname, Footman, due to his deadly foot fetish.

Long ago, Archer’s mother stole money from the Yakuza.

The Dragon’s father ruled at this time. He ordered his men to bring her head and heart to him. There had to be an example made.

They broke into her home and chopped her up like steak. At only six, Archer cried and watched from the corner. When they finished, the killers felt bad and left Archer his mother’s feet. The rest they took to the Dragon’s father.

No one knows how long Archer held onto those feet. But, it was long enough to build a demonic desire for them.

For the rest of Archer’s childhood, he grew up in an orphanage. Each year a child was found dead with their feet missing.

When he became an adult, he killed more. Always, he left footless bodies in the street, terrorizing Tokyo. Women feared for their lives.

So, the Dragon put me on the case.

It took me a few months, but I realized an important clue. All the victims went to the same spa for a pedicure and had the same nail artist. He was a man known for placing glittery rainbows on toes.

Footman.

The hunt continued. We tried to grab him at the spa. He fled. We discovered his apartment. Rotting feet filled his closets.

I also found a metal box filled with polaroids, displaying cut-off body parts with the victims’ names written in blue, red,

and yellow. Further investigation showed that there were three different handwritings. None belonged to Archer. It appeared he had pen pals.

Last week, Archer escaped Japan by stealing a business man's yacht and identity. That was how he received an invitation to Meade's party.

And now Footman is searching for pretty feet.

Ali took out his phone and checked the screen. "They said he's trying to take the woman in the back for a private dance."

"Tell them to keep a close eye on him." I picked up my pace. "I won't have any more victims."

Ali typed into his phone.

It took us five minutes to get to the white room. Ali opened the door. A lavender glow filled my vision. Moans sounded from the distance.

We rounded the corner.

Okay.

A sea of naked men and women greeted my eyes. Most kept their masks on, but their costumes and gowns had been scattered across the floor. Sex flooded the space. Their bodies shone wet and slick. Ankles rose in the air. Toes pointed to the ceiling. Mouths spread open and made the lushest sounds. Breasts bounced and fat bottoms jiggled.

Everywhere I turned was sex. Every sound I heard was ecstasy.

My cock jerked in my pants. In the end, I was a man after all.

I turned my head and spotted two men playing with the same woman's pussy. One rubbed her clit with his fingers. The other toyed with her nipples. And she wriggled in pleasure.

My ego told me I could have done better than the both of them.

Time to concentrate on the mission.

I searched for Footman in the crowd.

Instead, a dancer captured my gaze. Instantly mesmerized me.

What a lovely surprise.

The whole room was themed in white, yet she dripped in crimson red. Rubies hugged her voluptuous breasts. A feathered skirt flowed around her waist and brought out the richness of her brown skin. Her diamond shoes shimmered with each turn. She danced around the stage resembling a graceful swan.

Surely, she intended to cast spells. And that was what occurred. An awestruck thrill shot through my chest. I felt my blood carrying hot lust to my heart along with the oxygen and nutrients my body required, shifting my primal needs to more than food and breathing.

Basically, I really wanted to fuck her.

Her beauty disarmed me.

I returned my gaze up to her breasts. They bounced with her movement. My cock stiffened.

The mission left my mind.

Entranced, I watched her for several seconds, holding my breath.

And her gaze landed on me. Even among the sea of humping bodies. Even among the men surrounding the stage and drooling over her.

She looked my way and opened her mouth as if overcome by a blush.

My cock liked that.

Ali gestured in her direction. "This is the dancer that's caught Footman's attention."

No. Not her.

I checked the space next to her.

There, Footman sat, gawking at her feet.

Instantly, I yearned to be her chivalrous knight, protect her from the villain, and be his deadly nightmare—the dark storm that swallows him up.

Ali leaned my way. “What do you want us to do, sir?”

I kept my attention on Archer. “Grab and carry him off without startling her or disrupting the orgy.”

Ali left with my men.

I returned to her. Still swirling her hips, the dancer’s gaze followed my people. Her eyes told me she knew something was up.

You’re a smart one. On guard and perceptive.

None of the other dancers appeared attentive. They were too focused on the money falling to the ground.

I smiled.

I will taste her when the mission is done.

1

The Handsome Stranger

Layla

his handsome man walked in and towered over everyone. Full lips and tanned skin. Short midnight hair and a seducing grin. His face suggested Asian descent. And he had the sort of cheekbones that made me want to kiss them. Stick my tongue out and lick them. Pull my panties down and rub my pussy on his jaw until I orgasmed all over his face.

Damn.

No man had ever triggered such filthy thoughts.

The way the other guys surrounded him, suggested they were his guards. He was some sort of boss.

And he watched as he walked forward, exuding cold, deadly confidence.

It was hard to keep dancing.

He looked like he was thinking about taking my gown off. Like his mouth wanted to spin and turn with me. Like his cock craved to twirl all night.

Too bad he's a guest here. Completely off limits.

He stopped in front of the stage and sat down in an empty seat.

I continued to dance and do my best to not make a show of ogling him.

It was odd to care about one man among an ocean of them. Men always flirted. Usually, I ignored the guests. But tonight was a weird evening.

For example, I had this creepy guy in the corner, begging me to go off with him. I'd explained several times that I wasn't a prostitute and there were plenty of them strolling around the castle, willing to please.

Still, he hadn't let up.

"Yes!" The creepy guy slung twenty dollar bills at my feet. "Come over here, please. I just want to say one more thing."

What now?

Stifling my annoyance, I turned away from the mysterious man and plastered a fake smile on my face. The music shifted to a more upbeat tune. I spun around and moved over to Mr. Creepy.

"Yes. There you go." He wagged bills in the air. "Come over and talk to me for a little bit."

Mr. Creepy peeled off a twenty and held it out as if I was going to jump on my knees to get it.

Sweetie, I don't need it that bad.

My boss, Blake Meade, paid me well.

I'd been a ballet dancer long ago, performing on many stages. A fractured tibia ended my career. I couldn't walk without a limp for years. It took time to dance again.

The only problem was that now I was in my mid-thirties and ballet was a young girls game. All theater doors shut when they saw me approach.

When Mr. Meade found me, he offered me a high-paying position. He'd been a fan from before the injury and needed a dancer in the high-roller rooms where almost anything happened. There, I was not only expected to dance, but I was

supposed to keep my eye out for any suspicious behavior. If I thought there was anything odd happening, I was to tell the nearest guard.

“Please.” Mr. Creepy waved me over. “Just a little talk. Surely, you’re tired and need a rest.”

I lowered and sat down. Meanwhile, other dancers swayed and turned all over the stage.

Mr. Creepy placed the twenty on the ground next to me. “Do your feet hurt? I would love to massage them.”

“They’re fine. I’m used to dancing in heels.”

“Can I take off your shoes?”

I quirked my brows. “Why?”

“Your feet are so beautiful.” He moved his gaze to them. “Such a lovely color of red on your toes. I won’t even need to paint them later.”

I leaned away. “Paint them later? What?”

He extended his hands. “Do you mind, if I help you out of your shoes?”

“I’m not taking them off.” I began to rise. “Have a nice evening.”

“Wait!” Mr. Creepy rushed his hands into his suit pocket and pulled out tons of bills. “I have more money.”

“I’m sorry, but I have to go over—”

“Not yet.” He grabbed my arm and brought me back down to a sitting position.

“Excuse me.” I tried to yank my arm back.

The grip tightened. “Come outside to the garden with me. I’ll give you a thousand dollars just to touch your feet. Just one touch and that’s it. I like your—”

A deep voice boomed over the music. “Let her go!”

Mr. Creepy and I looked up.

The handsome stranger stood next to us. His guards circled around us with their guns out and pointed at his head. Several members of the party's security team appeared seconds later.

Meanwhile, the orgy continued.

Mr. Creepy's lips quivered in fear. "Reo, h-how did you get all the way over here?"

Reo. So that's the handsome stranger's name.

Danger blazed in Reo's eyes. "Let go of her arm."

Mr. Creepy released it. I scooted away, but didn't rise. Two guys grabbed him—one by each arm. The guns stayed trained on him. Mr. Meade's security displayed confused and baffled expressions.

This triggered a small amount of chaos. Some of the dancers shrieked and rushed off the stage. Most of the orgy continued their sexual enjoyment. Other masked couples rushed off.

What the hell?

Reo's men led Mr. Creepy away.

The DJ shifted to low tempo music as if wanting to calm the commotion. I was thankful for that. My heart boomed in my ears. In shock, I remained sitting, needing to get my bearings.

Reo remained at the stage with his gaze on me. "Are you okay?"

"Yes." I swallowed. "Thank you for helping."

"My pleasure."

"However, security would have gotten him. That could have been dangerous for you."

"Mr. Meade's guards aren't qualified to deal with someone like him. It was better that my people stepped in."

I quirked my brows. "Still, thank you."

"What's your name?"

“I don’t give out my name here.”

The line of his jaw twitched as if he was displeased with the response. “Then, where would you tell me your name?”

I gave him a soft smile. “A park. A nice café. Anywhere else, but an orgy.”

He placed his hand in his jacket, pulled out a black card, and held it in front of me. “I won’t be in New York for long, but I have a proposition for you.”

I didn’t take the card. “I don’t date anyone from these parties.”

He kept the card in front of me. “What if I hire you for a job?”

“What would the job deal with?”

“Sushi.” He slipped his gaze up and down my body.

“You want me to eat sushi?”

“No. I want to eat sushi... off of you.”

I widened my eyes. “Sorry, but that’s a no.”

“You never asked about the price.”

“I only dance, and when I do, it’s for Mr. Meade’s events.” I rose and brushed off my feathered skirt. “Have a good night.”

Licking his lips, he tucked the card back in his jacket. “We’ll discuss this again.”

We won’t.

I headed away, turning my back to him. Seconds later, instinct told me to glance over my shoulder. When I did, I spotted Reo watching me with predatory hunger in his eyes. And for a dangerous second, I yearned for him to eat me up.

2

The To-do List

Reo

he next morning, I left the bedroom of our rented mansion.

T Ali had rented it for the month before we arrived. It had ten bedrooms and ten bathrooms. A full staff came with it, ready to pamper and serve.

However, the size of the estate wasn't what was most important. I needed a property with a proper torture chamber and a good drainage system. This one had a windowless chamber, built underground. The thick walls were constructed so that screams couldn't penetrate them.

My phone rang.

I pulled it out, checked the screen, and then answered. "We have him."

Amusement laced the Dragon's dark voice. "That was quick. Is Footman dead?"

"No." Uneasiness set over me. "I want time with him."

His disappointed silence filled the line.

Still holding the phone to my ear, I met Ali at the end of the hallway.

The Dragon spoke, "How long?"

"I would like a week with Footman."

“No more than three days.”

Ali guided me to a set of stairs that led to the mansion’s basement.

I spoke, “Kenji, if I can get the names and addresses of his serial killer buddies, it will resolve future problems.”

“A Dragon’s roar always remains close to the beast.”

I smiled. “Surely, the creature can be silent for seven days.”

No humor sounded in his voice. “No more than three.”

“Then, I’ll be quick.”

“And don’t get killed.” He hung up.

Ali and I got to the bottom of the steps.

Way too excited, Ali opened the metal door in front of us. “I hope you love this as much as I do.”

“I doubt I will.” Entering, I scanned the walls and stopped at the lit candles in the corner. “There’s no electricity down here?”

“There is, but I thought the candles would induce horror and despair during the torture.”

“Footman’s twisted mind is too strong to be shaken by candles.”

Disappointment covered Ali’s face. “You want me to get rid of the candles?”

“Keep them. I like the ambience.” I walked over to the trapdoor on the floor in the corner and tapped my foot on it. “What does this go to?”

Excitement beamed on Ali’s face once more as he rushed over to it. “It would be more fun to show you, instead of tell you.”

I sighed. “Then, have your fun, Ali.”

A wide smile spread across his face. He lowered and twisted a triangular steel knob. A click sounded. The trap door

slowly lifted. A horrific scent filled the air.

Many people have died here.

I leaned over to get a better look. Rippling murky water greeted my eyes. Something moved in its depth.

In pure happiness, Ali moved his hands around as he explained, “This house has secret passages, underground tunnels, and trap doors.”

“Who owns this place?”

“The island’s affluent Catholic church.”

“Why would a church need a torture chamber and secret tunnels?”

“I wondered that myself, sir. I’ve not had the proper time to research the matter further.”

“And you won’t while we’re here. I need you to work on a side project for me.”

Ali gave me a sly smile. “The woman in red.”

“You’re perceptive as always.”

“I already have two men watching her. They’ll have her address and phone number soon.”

“Don’t forget dress size and favorite color.”

“Anything else?”

I consider my last conversation with her. “Find out if she goes to a specific park a lot?”

Ali held a tickled expression, probably wondering what I would do with the information.

“Also, discover her favorite cafes or restaurants.”

“I’ll get Jerry on it since he loves food.”

“Excellent choice. And of course have a conversation with Blake Meade. He should have more information on her.”

“I’ll call him after this.”

Still looking into the trapdoor, I spotted small black animals swimming in the water. “What’s in there?”

“South American fish-eating rats. The owner bought them and put them in the waters. There’s a bunch of them burrowed under here.”

“And I assume they’re very hungry.”

“Extremely.”

I sniffed the air. “It seems the last body that’s been in here was about a month ago.”

Ali inhaled too. “At least.”

“Interesting. I’ll throw Footman in there after we’re done getting answers.”

Ali shut the trap door. “Will he be alive or not?”

“It depends on how cooperative he is.”

Ali stood. “Do you approve of the room, sir?”

“Impressive work as usual.” I placed my hands in my pockets. “Bring Archer in.”

“My pleasure.” Grinning, Ali left.

Candles glowed around me as I waited. While my head should have been on the mission, it was somewhere else.

She was so lovely. So enticing.

The dancer twirled around in my mind. Those red feathers tickled my psyche.

I wished she’d given me her name. Then, I would know what to moan when I stroked myself this evening.

My cock stiffened at the thought. A hum of hunger overtook me. I didn’t have sex as much as most. My occupation didn’t allow for a lot of playing around. My head always needed to be alert as I solved the Dragon’s most difficult puzzles.

But when I did stumble upon a breathtaking creature like the dancer, I took some time out of my mission to give her proper attention.

She'll be in my bed soon.

Unfortunately, I had less than three days to do it.

Kenji can be the biggest cockblocker.

Scuffling sounded along with the clanking of chains.

I turned around.

Ali guided everyone into the room. Four men dragged and shoved Footman forward. He had handcuffs on his wrists and shackles on his ankles. Chains were attached to them and held by each man. When they came close, they shoved him to the ground. He fell to his knees in front of me. Each man locked his chain to a hook on the floor. Then, they left.

I spoke in Japanese. “*Good morning?*”

Footman raised his view. A menacing glare greeted me. He responded in English, “Why do the Yakuza carry such a nasty odor?”

“I have several questions for you.”

“I won’t give you answers.” Archer spat at the floor.

I switched to English. “You’ll give me the answers I need and more. First, we’ll start with your *special friends*.”

His eyes glittered with madness.

“I would love to learn about your buddies, especially the ones that share the interests you do.” I stepped closer to him. “Do you know what I’m talking about?”

He spat at my leg. It landed on my pants. Scowling, I kicked him in the face, landing the sharp point of my shoe into his jaw. He crashed to the ground and groaned in pain. His chains rattled.

Ali came over and wiped the spit off my pant leg.

“I see you’ll try to make this as difficult as possible.” I gazed at Archer. “Are you knowledgeable about Buddhism, Archer?”

He dragged himself up and spit out blood in front of me. “*Eat shit!*”

“I’ll take that as a yes.” I held my hands behind me. “I’m sure you’ve learned about the narrations of *Ashokavadana*?”

The Footman scanned the place, probably searching for a way to escape.

I continued, “Prior to King Ashoka’s conversion to Buddhism, he was a fierce and sadistic ruler.”

Ali stood next to me. “They called him Ashoka the Fierce.”

I nodded. “And he built a palatial torture chamber known as Ashoka’s Hell.”

The Footman stared down at the handcuffs and shook them. Perhaps, he hoped they would crumble from the movement.

“Ashoka asked his official executioner to design an elaborate torture chamber disguised as a beautiful and enticing palace.”

The Footman sneered at me. “*I would rather you show me your feet.*”

“Later, I may stomp your head with them.” I smiled. “Regardless, this torture chamber was adorned with all kinds of decorations. It had exclusive baths decorated with flowers and fruit trees.”

The Footman quirked his wicked brows. “*I’ll never tell you anything.*”

My smile deepened. “Beneath the palace’s beauty there were all of these torture chambers with the most sadistic and cruel instruments.”

Ali grinned. “There were even furnaces that made molten metal to slowly drip onto King Ashoka’s victims.”

I chuckled at Ali's enjoyment. "All of this was inspired by the five tortures of Buddhist hell. It was so terrifying, many thought King Ashoka had actually visited hell himself to perfect the design."

The Footman looked at his shackled ankles. "*Why would I care about any of this?*"

"Because I too have been inspired by hell."

The Footman snapped his view to me.

"Are you hungry?"

He remained quiet.

"Do let me know when you are." I grinned. "Wait until you see what's on the menu. It will knock you off your feet."

Ali chuckled.

"Fuck you!"

I turned around and headed out. Ali kept his pace next to me. One of my men opened the torture room. We left and headed up the stairs.

Ali led the way. "I often wondered why Ashoka truly converted to Buddhism."

"It was because the Buddhist monk, Samudra, entered the torture palace. The King's men tortured the monk in all ways, but none of it worked. Instead, the monk began to perform miracles." I checked my wrist, making sure the red string was still on and undisturbed. "Ashoka witnessed those miracles within the torture chamber and converted."

Ali opened the door leading to the mansion's main level. "But what miracle do you think changed Ashoka? Which one really made him believe?"

Laughing, I stepped through the doorway. "It wasn't the miracles that changed him. It was the fear that there was an energy moving in his world that was beyond his kingly knowledge."

“Ah! I see.”

“All smart rulers fear God.”

Ali took out a folded sheet of paper and handed it to me.

I grabbed it. “The dancer?”

“Yes, sir. Her name is Layla Brown. Both parents are deceased. She has some distant aunts and cousins living in the Bronx, NY and throughout Louisiana. She lives in a small apartment on the outskirts of the island. Mr. Meade pays for it.”

A twinge of jealousy hit me. “Does she have a romantic relationship with Meade?”

“Our people asked around. There’s no indication of anything going on between them. Her phone bill shows that she has casual friendships with two dancers that work at Meade’s parties. Other than that, she remains to herself.”

“Anything else?”

“Something odd. Her sister is in her apartment.”

“What makes that odd?”

“I believe the sister is her captor.”

I stopped walking and looked at him. “Expound.”

“Layla has her sister locked in the extra bedroom. She’s bound to the bed with rope.”

“Interesting.” I headed off. “And Layla’s dress size and favorite color?”

“Her measurements are on the paper and I’m sure you can guess the color.”

I smirked. “Red.”

“Yes, sir.”

3

A Run to Remember

Layla

I didn't get much sleep last night. Reo's handsome face danced in my mind.

At one point when I finally fell asleep, I imagined myself naked and on the stage that I'd danced on. There, Reo held these super long chopsticks. One by one, he picked sushi off of my naked body and ate it.

I woke up so wet I had to touch myself for relief, imagining Reo shoving his cock inside of me.

It's a new day. Time to get that handsome stranger out of my mind.

The sun shined bright and bathed the abandoned theme park in an eerie light.

I unlocked the gate with my key, entered, and secured it back. I walked past the mud caked carnival booths to warm up my legs and arms for my afternoon jog. A cool breeze blew by. The ground was soft, yet riddled with tree roots and vibrant green foliage.

Nice weather. This is going to be a great run.

Whimsy World had been open for twenty years before shutting down. This place sparked warm memories. The few

times my parents were sober they brought my sister and me here.

The owner's goal was to entertain the island's families. Gentrification came, raising prices. These new families owned private helicopters, jets, and yachts. When they wanted to be entertained, they traveled to it.

In the past three years, the park's attendance never picked up enough to sustain the park.

Now Mother Nature had reclaimed it. A wild sea of vegetation swept over Whimsy World, transforming the place into an apocalyptic landscape filled with ruins of fun. Weeds sprouted and trees twisted along decaying, rusting rides. Graffiti was everywhere.

I stretched by the clown bumper ride.

Weeds and vines grew out of the massive clown's gaping mouth. Birds built nests on his yellow and blue polka dot hat.

Currently, the park's owner Jonas was selling the remaining equipment and rides in the hopes of getting out of debt. Unfortunately, no one wanted to buy any of it.

I'd learned all of this last year due to Jonas discovering my sister, Tina, passed out in the bottom car of his vine-covered Ferris wheel. Her drug of choice was methamphetamine.

She must've been searching for the comfort of our parents—the memory of love.

When Jonas found her, dried vomit coated the bottom of her face and shirt. Jonas was unable to wake her up. Thankfully, she had the necklace I'd given her. It was a chain with a silver card on it—similar to military dog tags. On the card was my name and phone number.

After dialing 9-1-1, Jonas called me.

By the time I arrived, my sister was already taken to the hospital. I called the unit. The hospital gave her Naloxone to treat her overdose. When she became conscious, she started vomiting.

Jonas tried to cheer me up as he walked me to my car, explaining the history of the park and telling me I was always welcome to hang out there.

For some odd reason, I took him up on the offer. He gave me a key that same day. I'd been jogging in the abandoned park ever since.

While most may find the park depressing, it reminded me of my youth—the playful moments of life. The age when I sought out heart-pumping thrills.

And with each season, magic radiated from this abandoned world. Summer covered the park in mushrooms and dropped berries. Autumn coated the area in fallen leaves. Winter covered the space in white snow and froze the rides into haunting ice sculptures.

Now it was Spring. Birds chirped. Insects buzzed, and frogs croaked along the trunks of fallen trees. Wild flowers sprouted everywhere, drenching the park in an aromatic bouquet.

I walked toward my starting point.

Three baby squirrels played along the front of the old wooden coaster named Ripping Thunder. The long ride stretched 6000 feet and surrounded all of the park.

I liked to start at the coaster's beginning and run to the end. That gave me a nice two miles and allowed me to see all of the park. If my knees didn't creak too much and my hips didn't ache, I repeated the run.

Here we go.

I plugged my headphones in my ears and turned on my favorite podcast, Drunk Sistas.

Steen's high-pitched voice filled my ears. "Alright ladies. We are here to have a blast!"

"Yes, ma'am!" Alice laughed. "And I've been drinking all afternoon, so let's go. My ass may pass out before we finish recording."

Bending over, I stretched my legs.

“Oh, Alice! We don’t have time for your mess today.” Steena chuckled. “But we do have time for another person that puts the capital M in messy.”

I rose and did a quick stretch of my arms.

Alice chimed in, “Oh, I’ve been excited about this person all week.”

Let’s see what these old bones are going to let me do today.

I broke out into a light jog.

My feet hit the ground at a steady rhythm.

Steena clapped, “Let’s introduce our guest, Gossip Columnist Messy Mandy.”

This interview should be fun.

I steadied my breathing as I maintained a nice speed.

“Thank you, ladies!” Messy Mandy’s voice came on. “I am over here drinking too!”

Steena giggled. “What are you drinking over there, Messy?”

“First of all, please don’t call me Messy. I need you to say both words.”

Steena cleared her throat. “I apologize. What are you drinking over there, Messy Mandy?”

“Thank you, honey. I am over here sipping on something my boo made up. It’s called a Cowboy Margarita.”

“Girl, that sounds amazing,” Steena said. “What’s in it?”

“Three parts Jose Cuervo. Three parts frozen limeade. Two parts beer. A splash of orange juice with a jalapeno on top.”

“Spicy and sweet,” Steena proclaimed.

Alice yelled. “I like the sound of that.”

“It’s delicious.”

Increasing my jog to a full out run, I made a note to try that drink myself.

Alice burped. “And who is your boo, Messy Mandy?”

Mandy’s cheery voice shifted. “Oh, honey. Please mind your business. I didn’t ask you for your man’s name. Don’t be asking me for mine.”

“Alrighty then.” Steena clapped again. “Messy Mandy has not come here to play with us today.” Steena took a loud sip of her drink. “So, through my research I saw that you have a twin right?”

Messy Mandy sucked her teeth. “You are all up in my personal business today.”

Laughing, I almost stumbled over a broken branch. I averted it and pushed forward, heading to my favorite spot—the carousel. Already, I could make it out in the distance.

Jonas had spent months refurbishing the ride. Sometimes I would pass him as he painted a horse or retouched the sparkling gems at the top.

The carousel featured hand-carved animals. Gold chariot seats were mounted on the circular platform. Gold leaf accents decorated the line of mirrors at the top.

Steena’s voice went serious. “This is an interview. We must ask some questions.”

“Not about my man or sister. Those are two people I will cut somebody over.”

Alice let out a nervous laugh. “Don’t cut us now!”

“Please don’t,” Steena added.

Suddenly, I stopped listening as the carousel’s view appeared clearer in front of me.

What is this?

I slowed my run.

Who are these people around the carousel?

I sniffed the area and caught the savory aroma of roasted meat. Instantly, my stomach grumbled. I'd had a protein shake thirty minutes ago, but with that smell in the air, my body surely wanted something more appetizing.

Did Jonas rent the place out?

Four people carried silver trays to a table near the carousel. They were all dressed in white.

Being super nosy, I slowed more and took in the scene.

The men in white were decorating a long table with roses, candles, and covered silver platters of food. On the other side of them, a ten-person orchestra tuned their instruments. I spotted violins, violas, and a cello. A woman tested her flute out by a man tapping a triangle.

Is this a wedding or something?

Further off, I saw what looked to be black-suited guards, standing in a military position—arms stiff to the side and facing forward.

And then I spotted the handsome stranger from last night—Reo.

Shock jolted me.

What the hell? This can't be a coincidence.

Dressed in a designer black suit, Reo stood by the carousel's white horse and directed men. A crimson red rose was in his breast pocket.

Another man was on Reo's right, holding a clipboard and checking things off with a pen.

What is going on?

Dumbstruck, I shifted to walking. Once I came close to the carousel, I pulled out my headphones and stopped the podcast. At this point, Messy Mandy was cursing out both of the Drunk Sistas' hosts. I would have to rewind it later.

Reo looked my way. A wicked smile spread across his chiseled face, sending heat stirring through me.

His silky voice came next. “Good afternoon, Layla. Can I persuade you to have lunch with me?”

I parted my lips, but nothing came out.

“Of course. You can still finish your run.” He left the carousel, walked over, and stopped in front of me. “I can wait as long as necessary. I’ve made sure that the food will still be warm when you return.”

I held out my hands. “How?”

He leaned his head to the side. “How what?”

“How did you figure out my name or that I ran here? How did you even get access to this place?”

His cologne swirled around me. It was an interesting scent—masculine with earthy tones. Being so close, I took in more of his features. I had to admit that Reo was even more gorgeous in the daylight.

The wicked smile deepened. “You look impressed.”

“No. This expression means that I’m creeped out.”

“Yet, you should be impressed.”

I crossed my arms over my chest. “Why?”

“I’m so intrigued with you I exhausted a lot of resources to find you.”

I scanned the area. A small table was on the right with two chairs. A bouquet of white roses stood in the center. Two members of the orchestra spotted me. They gestured to the others and then everyone began to play. A soft melody that rose in the air.

“When’s the last time you’ve been spoiled, Layla?”

I turned back to him.

“Can you even remember the last romantic gesture?”

I frowned.

“Give me a chance.” He gestured around him. “You’re safe. It’s daytime and in public.”

Skepticism covered my face.

“Sure. This place is abandoned and these people work for me, but find solace in the fact that if I wanted to take you,” His gaze slipped from my head down to my toes. “I could have had you long ago.”

I stepped back.

“I hope that statement didn’t scare you.” His face turned serious. “I deal in hard truths. Honesty is always the best policy for me. So, I promise to always be honest with you.”

“Then, what’s your end goal with this lunch?”

“To romance you.”

“Why?”

“I’ve already told you my proposition.”

I touched my chest. “Eating sushi off me?”

“Correct.” He said it like it was the most normal concept to behold. “I would be honored if you let me do so.”

“And you would want sex too?”

“I would, but I’m also fine with you only being my naked sushi model. Beggars can never be choosy.” Reo held out his hand as if beckoning me to take it. “For now, I only ask you to have lunch with me.”

“I don’t even know your name.”

“Reo Bando.”

“And...you’re from?”

“I was born in Bangkok. Now I live in Tokyo.” He gave me a sweet smile. “Any other questions?”

“If I say no to lunch?”

The wicked smile returned. “But, you don’t want to say no.”

The orchestra’s song rose and danced with his words. The effect stirred my soul. The men in white gathered behind Reo, waiting for his next order.

Reo studied me.

Under his sexy gaze, I felt wild and free.

He’s right. I don’t want to say no.

He raised his eyebrows. “Should we eat?”

I pushed away my worries. “Yes. I’ll have lunch with you.”

4

A Romantic Picnic

Reo

Across the immaculately decorated table, the server poured
A Layla a glass of champagne.

She watched the other server place a plate of lobster tail and roasted potatoes in front of her and disappear. Another one appeared with a silver bowl of white sauce. He filled the ladle with it and lathered the sauce over the tail.

She smiled. “Thank you.”

The server bowed and rushed off.

I didn’t touch my own plate. All I could do was watch her in utter amusement.

She picked up her fork, took a piece of the tail, and then tried it. She closed her eyes. A soft groan left her.

The sound drummed through me. My cock was already awake with her near. Now it awaited more of those groans.

I licked my lips. “Do you like it?”

She opened her eyes. “I do.”

“Any regrets so far?”

“No.” She looked around and chuckled.

I quirked my brows. “What’s so funny?”

“This was not the plan for my day.”

I picked up my champagne, took a sip, and savored the smooth liquid. “What was your plan?”

“I have a peanut butter-banana sandwich in the car. It’s in my little refrigerated lunch bag and has an apple and water bottle next to it.” She tried a small potato. Another murmur of enjoyment left her.

She’s so vocal in her pleasure. It’s going to be amazing fucking her.

My cock jerked in my pants. “You were going to eat it in the car?”

“I brought an extra sandwich for Jonas. Sometimes I bump into him and we’ll have lunch together.”

My jaw twitched.

I made a note to have someone watch this Jonas. While he didn’t seem like her type—balding, a huge belly, and not big on showers—I wouldn’t allow any competition.

It had taken Jonas too long to agree to my surprising Layla in his park. Even the big check hadn’t convinced him. Jonas was protective of her. Therefore, Ali had to explain the situation to Jonas. I was not a man that accepted no. And Jonas was not the sort of man that could say no to me. After that, Jonas took the check.

Layla hit me with a seducing gaze. “What brought you to New York?”

“Your employer’s party gained the attention of an unsavory character.”

“The man that kept wanting to play with my feet?”

“That’s him.” A bit of anger hit me. Of course it wasn’t directed at her. I just knew Archer’s intentions for Layla and her feet. The very idea of her being in danger shoved me on edge. “Why do you work with Mr. Meade?”

She looked caught off by the answer. “Well...he’s helping me with something.”

“What?”

She raised her eyebrows. “It’s private.”

“What if I could help you too?”

“I don’t think you can.” She looked uneasy as she focused on her plate, moving potatoes around with her fork. “It deals with my sister.”

“I would never judge you or your family for any reason.”

Although, I do want to know why you have her tied up.

Layla put the fork down and picked up her champagne. “My sister, Tina has been addicted to drugs for many years. Our parents were the same way.”

Hmmm. Now I’m understanding. Are you trying to detox her?

I studied her. “I too had a similar problem with a sibling.”

Layla opened her mouth in shock. “Did it destroy your family?”

“It did. And made me grow up much faster than I wanted.”

“I understand that too well.” Sipping her champagne, she gazed at the carousel. “There’s a lot of times I wished I could have played like other kids. But many times I had to watch over my sister while my parents were out doing God knows what.”

“And then she grows up and falls to drugs herself.”

“It makes me so mad.” Layla drank more of her champagne. This time taking a gulp.

“Because she witnessed what your parents went through and should know better?”

“And...” She shook her head. “You know what? Never mind. I’m sorry. This is not the best conversation for this elegant setting. We should talk about—”

“You. That’s why we’re here.”

She blinked.

“What’s the other reason you’re mad?”

Layla took another sip of champagne. “I’m mad because I watched over Tina all my life, making sure she had the best chance at winning. I even filled out her college applications for her and paid for four years of college with my ballet money.”

“I bet you had quite a career in ballet.”

“I did, but...unfortunately, I would send her the money to pay for college. And I never saved any for myself.”

That enraged me. I didn’t like that she had given so much of herself away.

She looked back at the carousel. “And then her senior year, I went to her college to visit. Tina kept ignoring my emails asking about her graduation. When I went, I discovered that she’d never gone to college at all.”

“She simply took the money.”

“And partied with it.” Layla finished the champagne.

“And you still take care of her?”

She set the empty glass on the table. “Currently, I don’t know what I’m doing. I’m trying to save her, but...I don’t think she wants to be saved.”

So you have her tied up.

I rubbed my chin. “And where does Mr. Meade’s help come in?”

“There’s a luxurious and secluded rehab center in upstate New York. It’s specially designed for those who need extra attention. They have private rooms, a chef, psychologist, and even a massage therapist. The staff-to-guest ratio is 1:1.”

“I’m sure this comes with a big bill.”

“Half a million for six months.”

“Mr. Meade is going to foot the entire bill?”

She nodded. “As long as I finish my five year contract.”

“When does that end?”

“Next spring.”

I want you out of those parties long before that.

Another waiter appeared and poured her more champagne.

She smiled. “Thank you.”

The waiter bowed.

I loved how sweet she was to the staff. I’d had so many people serving me for so long that I’d forgotten how to be grateful in their presence.

She glanced at my plate. “You’re not hungry?”

Not for food, Layla.

Visions of my tongue on her pussy hit me. That forced me to finish my champagne just in case I let those images spill out of my mouth.

Concentrate on the mission.

I set the champagne down. “And if I paid the bill for this high-end clinic?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know you enough to—”

“You need to know me to get money?”

“Of course.”

I grinned. “Then, let me tell you more about me.”

“Sounds good.” She sampled more of her lobster. “But, I still won’t take your money.”

I chuckled. “You’re a very hard woman to spoil.”

“I just don’t trust gifts that come by too easy.”

“And you’re not used to people caring for you.”

She blinked.

“So, let’s talk about me.” I folded my fingers on the table. “My father was a wealthy businessman from Tokyo. Very prominent in the community. Lots of connections. Beautiful wife with a high position in society and three kids that rode to private school in a limo.”

She watched me with interest.

“He had several businesses in Bangkok, Thailand. Due to that, he went back and forth a lot. There in Bangkok is where he met my mother. She was a maid for a high-end hotel.”

Layla quirked her brows.

“My mother became his Thai mistress. His fun little secret. He let her have kids. I am the oldest of four boys. He bought us a decent house in Bangkok. Nothing too special. Still, she had to keep her hotel job.”

“Were you close to him?”

“He barely gave us any attention.” I finished my champagne. “My mother grew sick. My father didn’t help with the medical bills. In fact he stopped visiting her.”

Layla looked pissed.

“My mother passed, a week before my eleventh birthday.”

Layla touched my hand. “I’m so sorry.”

“My aunt sent word to Tokyo about my mother’s death. My father had people come get my brothers and me.”

“So, you ended up living with your father and his other family?”

“I did, but we did so as the family’s servants.” I set the empty glass down. “We were never to mention the fact that he was our father. We were expected to clean and earn our place. His other children never knew.”

“And his wife?”

“I suspected his wife did. She took a lot of her anger out on us.”

“That’s horrible.”

“Being a servant in a Tokyo mansion is better than being a motherless street child in Bangkok. I kept gratitude. My brothers didn’t. They were still young and hurt from losing our mother. Many sought drugs in their teen years.”

“You never tried drugs?”

“My addiction has always been books. I enjoy the thrill of a good story. The bite of a perfect page. In my father’s library, I discovered Sherlock Holmes and decided to be him.”

“And did you?”

“I did.”

A waiter appeared and poured more champagne in my glass.

She grinned. “And how did you become Sherlock Holmes?”

“I became an obsessive life learner. Through my search for answers to all questions, I became friends with powerful people. Now I help many make logic out of illogical things.”

“And you enjoy your job?”

“It has its perks.”

“Like what?”

“Meeting a gorgeous woman.”

“And do you meet women a lot?”

“Not ones so beautiful as you. Not ones that are as intriguing as you either.”

She blushed. “Did your father and his family ever accept you in your adult years?”

“To do so would have caused a scandal. He died still pretending to only be my employer.”

“How did he die?”

I smirked. “A dragon ate him.”

“Why?”

“I assume the dragon was hungry, but many argue that he didn’t appreciate my father’s treatment of me during my childhood.”

“I like this dragon.”

“Me too.” I nodded. “Growing up as a mixed child in Japan is not the easiest. The slight differences in my features attracted attention. There was lots of casual racism and many had an automatic sense that I was inferior. When I made powerful connections that mistreatment ended.”

“I understand a little of how you must have felt, being a black woman in America.”

“With that, I have no doubt.”

“And your brothers and their addictions?”

“They’re aggravating and constantly getting into trouble. I’ve bailed them out more times than I can remember. And even carted one away to rehab. My baby brother.”

Her eyes brightened. “Did rehab work?”

“It didn’t.”

She frowned. “How is he now?”

“I don’t know. I cut him out of my life years ago.”

She widened her eyes.

“And it was difficult.” I gave her a sad smile. “It broke my heart and darkened my soul. I’m not sure if I will ever get over that.”

“I’m so sorry.” She reached her hand over and placed it over mine. It was soft and warm.

I loved her touch and yearned for more. “Thank you. You’re so sweet. It’s been a long time since I’ve met someone so loving and compassionate.”

“I try.”

“What you do for your sister is amazing. The dedication. The love. But...” I took her hand and tenderly squeezed it. “You must find your limit.”

She didn’t move her hand. “This rehab center is my last resort. If it doesn’t work, then I’m...done.”

“Let me pay for the bill.” I slipped my thumb along her palm. “The money Mr. Meade gives you, should go to your retirement. You need to look out for yourself.”

She moved her hand away. “And why would you do that?”

“Well, there’s my proposition from earlier.”

She chuckled. “Eating sushi off me?”

“Why is that so funny to you?”

“I’ve never been asked something like this before.”

“It’s because you haven’t met any warriors before.”

“Hmmm.” She tossed me a sweet smile. “Perhaps, you’re right.”

“In Japanese culture, the practice of *Nyotaimori* goes back to the early 1600s. Therefore, eating sushi off a naked woman’s body is a respected tradition.”

She considered that. “So, why did people do... *Nyotaimori*?”

Stunned, I smiled at her. “Very good pronunciation.”

“Thank you.”

“Have you been to Japan?”

“No, but I’ve always wanted to go.”

“Then, I’ll take you.”

She blinked.

“To answer your question, *Nyotaimori* became huge during Japan’s Edo period. Then, the country was split into multiple states. In each one, samurai defended their regions. At times, there was war.”

She leaned forward thoroughly fascinated.

“When the samurai returned from battles, they’d celebrate their victory in geisha houses that hosted *Nyotaimoris*.”

“So, this was a special victory gesture for the winners?”

“And it was full of honor.”

“What about now? Does the practice still exist?”

“Definitely. Yet, in these modern times the Yakuza are more known for their body sushi parties.”

She glanced at some of my armed guards further away.
“And you’re... Yakuza?”

“I’m an investigator for them.”

“What sort of an investigator?”

“A Sherlock Holmes sort of investigator.”

She laughed.

“It’s true. Sherlock would be thoroughly impressed with me.”

She laughed again.

I loved her laughter so much. It excited me more than her rich brown skin or that beautiful face. It sounded so good I wanted to always have her laughing around me. In my shadowy world, something so simple had to be guarded. Instantly, I wondered how I could keep her around.

She noticed me watching her with desire and blushed.
“So...tell me more about *Nyotaimori*.”

“One would think it’s all about sex.” I waved the notion away. “But, it is about the visual poetry of it all. The art. The heightened erotic nature. There’s this lush union of food and sensuality.”

“You make it sound so elegant.”

“In many ways it is. What could be more elegant than feasting high-end sushi off a living, beautiful woman?” Desire

rose within me. “Especially one so gorgeous as you.”

“Thank you.”

I targeted her with a heated gaze. “I want to give you the \$500,000.”

“Reo.”

I loved my name on her tongue. “I will pay for your sister’s rehab. Mr. Meade pays for your retirement. That’s the deal.”

“I’ve never done anything like this before.”

“Which makes it even better.”

“But...”

I tilted forward, desperate for her to say yes. “Tell me so I can make it possible.”

“I don’t have sex for money.”

“I won’t pay you for sex, but trust me, Layla. You’ll beg for it.”

She parted her lips in shock.

“As I said, I’m always honest. No sex is expected. If you want, I can have this all put in contract with those terms clearly stated. No sex. Just sushi and my chopsticks.”

She bit her lip.

Silence hit the table for a minute.

And then she let out a soft sigh. “What about...the food? Wouldn’t there be a safety concern or something.”

I held back my wicked grin. I yearned for her naked body to serve as my plate. The last thing I was worried about was food safety.

“Reo?”

I pushed back the dirty thoughts playing in my mind. “The sushi is placed on leaves to prevent direct contact between the food and skin.”

“So, parts of my body will be covered?”

Unfortunately.

I nodded.

“What parts?”

“Your nipples.” My cock stiffened. “And other enchanting places.”

She considered that for a silent minute. “O-kay. I’ll do it.”

I curved my lips into the biggest smile of my life. “Excellent. I’ll have my assistant bring you the contract tonight. My driver will pick you up tomorrow evening.”

“Tomorrow?”

“I am a samurai. And tomorrow I will win a battle.” I held my hand out, needing to touch her. “Tomorrow evening?”

She shook my hand. “Tomorrow evening.”

Sister. Sister.

Layla

Reo and I ate dessert—cheesecake covered in strawberries and whipped cream. It was one of my favorite dishes. The **R** orchestra played upbeat songs. Reo spent the rest of the time making me laugh with cute riddles. The whole time we sipped champagne and I loved every minute of the impromptu date.

When we finished, he took my hand and walked me to my car. There was a moment where I thought he was about to lean in and kiss me. If I was being honest with myself, I yearned for his lips. But he remained a perfect gentleman.

What a crazy afternoon.

By the time I pulled in front of my apartment, my mind danced on a romantic high. I did my best to calm myself. Never did he offer anything more than the naked sushi proposal and perhaps sex. I wasn't sure I would even have sex with him. However, I couldn't deny that I didn't mind the idea.

With Mr. Meade's parties and my sister's battle with addiction, I hadn't dated in years. Reo's display of romance today was just what I needed.

I parked my car and returned my mind back to the actual proposal.

\$500,000 to eat sushi off my body.

It was an ungodly amount, yet one that wouldn't make a truly rich man stumble.

When Blake offered to pay for my sister's rehab, I jumped on it. To save my sister from drugs, I would do almost anything. In the beginning, I wondered if Blake would try to take advantage in any way. He didn't and had been a great boss, even trying to look out for me at times.

But now Reo was proposing a new freedom. The sort that allowed me to take care of myself too.

An early retirement.

I couldn't pass that up. For once, this would deal with my future—my self-care.

But...what about if he pushes for sex?

While I knew most men would possibly try to get me naked and then take advantage, I didn't think Reo was the type. He'd been a perfect gentleman during our elegant lunch. If he was an evil bastard would he have gone to all of the trouble?

And there were other things that I considered. If he wanted to harm me, he could have kidnapped me right in the abandoned amusement park. No one would have known. Instead, he gave me the biggest romantic surprise of my life.

I left the car and walked up to my place.

I'm not going to be nervous about this. My gut says that this is a good deal.

I opened my front door and entered my place. Instantly, the bright romantic high left me. I set my purse on the coffee table and headed to my sister's bedroom.

Doom filled me.

I pulled out a new bed pan from under the kitchen sink. Next, I grabbed the bucket of cleaning supplies—ammonia, plastic gloves, sponges, and bags.

Hopefully, she didn't throw up or poop on herself today.

With Tina, I never knew what to expect.

This is going to all work out. Soon, we'll both be done with this.

After this deal with Reo, I would immediately put Tina into rehab. Then, I would finish my contract with Blake and...

I paused in front of my sister's bedroom.

Once Tina is safe in rehab, what will I do?

I was embarrassed that nothing came to my mind. Surely, I'd had dreams long ago or some goals. Yet, no thoughts came.

Dear God. I've been so busy with her...I forgot about myself.

I opened the door.

A rank odor hit me first. Tina turned her head and looked my way. Sweat covered her brown skin. Her lips were cracked. Her eyes were red at the corners. One would have thought she had just been bitten by a zombie and was in the process of changing.

Her body trembled under the rope's binding.

Why did I agree to this?

Under Tina's request, I tied her up three days ago. I'd made a threat of kicking her out of my place. A cold turkey detox had been her solution.

Unfortunately, I researched that a full detox with no medical supervision could be deadly. Withdrawal symptoms would potentially be dangerous. There was no way we could try that method.

I told Mr. Meade about our dilemma. He gave me an illegal prescription of Suboxone. It was supposed to help Tina cope with the withdrawal symptoms while she detoxed in her bedroom.

Still, I wasn't a fan of the idea at all. First, I was worried that a detox with no medical supervision could make her sicker. Second, the rope felt barbaric.

But drugs had destroyed both of our lives. At some point, I was willing to try anything to stop watching her kill herself.

"How do you feel? Do you need water?" I went to the bed, set the cleaning supplies down, and grabbed the pitcher of water next to the nightstand.

"No water." Her words came out slowly. "You don't need a new bed pan either. I'm dehydrated."

I poured water into the glass anyway. "Water will help. Maybe, even a few sips at a time could—"

"I don't want water." Tina sneered.

Sighing, I put the glass and pitcher down. "Are you hungry? You've barely eaten anything."

"Mom says I don't need to eat."

I paused. "What do you mean?"

"She came to me with huge, pretty wings."

"Okay." I grabbed a towel off the dresser and wiped her face. "Remember we read that hallucinations could be a result of the detox?"

"This wasn't that. Mom was here with Jesus. They healed me."

I dabbed at her forehead. "Good. I'm glad Jesus stopped by. I've surely prayed to him enough about this."

With wild eyes, she grinned at me. "I'm going to be okay."

"You will." My hands shook as I finished wiping up the rest of the sweat.

"But...Jesus was upset with you, Lay. He doesn't like this."

"Tina, this was your idea."

“Yeah, but I’m in so much pain. Jesus, wants you to untie me.”

I moved the towel away. “Is that what he told you?”

“I’m healed, Lay.”

“I don’t understand. Do you want me to let you go?”

“I’m in pain. My stomach hurts. My body too. It’s because of what you’re doing to me.”

I held out my hands. “What? You told me to—”

“It’s not right.” Tears welled up in her eyes. “Mom doesn’t like it either.”

Guilt filled me. “Tina, you said that I had to tie you up and no matter what you say I should never untie you.”

“Why would I say that?” She looked at the ceiling. Her bottom lip quivered. “These ropes hurt. Even...”

“What?”

“Even if I did tell you to do this, you didn’t have to hurt me so bad.” Tears fell from her eyes. “You’ve always been that way.”

I can’t do this anymore. I’m losing my mind.

“Tina, you’re delirious. Don’t say that.” I dropped to my knees and grabbed the knife under the bed. “But, I’ll let you go. I never thought this was a good idea.”

“You wanted this. Always. You push and push and push me to do this and that. I’m just me, Lay. I’m Tina.”

“I know you are. I love you—”

“You don’t love me. You hate me. All my life...” Her body trembled. “You’ve never been there for me.”

Bullshit. This is the detox talking.

I let out a long breath and cut the rope’s bindings. There was no use arguing my point with an addict, even a detoxing one. If I did, I would be just as big of a fool as her.

When the ropes lightened and fell away, she slowly rose. “Jesus is happy now.”

“I don’t know about that.”

She only had a long sweaty t-shirt on. She scratched her arms and then rubbed her eyes as if they were super itchy. Although I’d wiped her forehead, more sweat came.

“Take that shirt off, Tina. We need to wash it. You also must put on some pants.”

“I need to go to the bathroom.”

“A shower would be good too.” I rose from the floor. “Do you need help?”

“No.” She rolled off the bed and almost fell to the floor.

I caught her small frame before she crashed. “Let me help. It’s been a while since you walked or moved your—”

“Get off me!”

I backed away and raised my hands in the air. “Calm down.”

Stumbling and limping forward, she scratched her arms some more. “I can do it.”

I gazed at the bed. The bed pan was empty. Still a large wet stain drenched the mattress. It must’ve all been sweat.

As Tina relearned how to walk, I went to her dresser for a new set of clothes. “Head to the bathroom and take a shower.”

“Okay, Lay.” She limped forward.

“Don’t lock the door. I’ll put clothes and towels in there while you’re showering.”

“Okay.” She stumbled out of there and shut the door behind her.

Why the hell did you just close me in this stank ass room?

I searched for clean panties and a bra.

Why did I tie her up? She's crazy and I'm right there with her. Who really is the person on drugs?

Figuring that she may need socks too, I went to the top drawer and grabbed a fresh pair. That was when I heard the front door slam.

What?

I paused for another sound. Nothing came.

No.

I dropped the clothes on the floor, spun around, and rushed to the door.

Please, God. No!

I hurried with opening the door and raced to wear I'd left my purse.

Fuck!!

It was gone. The sound of a car starting came next.

"Tina!" I raced off. My legs burned from the exertion. I had the front door open in seconds, right in time to see Tina speed off with my car.

"Tina!" Like a wild woman, I rushed off. "Damn it!"

My body shook from anger.

A red car parked in the back of the lot, started and sped off after the car.

A man's voice sounded behind me. "We can stop her for you."

"Ah!" I jumped and turned around. "Who the hell are you?"

A brown skinned man stood in front me, wearing a designer suit. His hair was parted in the middle. Haunting hazel eyes watched me.

Another man stood next to him and held a briefcase. Acne and scars decorated the right side of his face.

The one with the hazel eyes spoke. "I'm sorry to startle you, Layla. My name is Ali. I work for Reo."

"O-kay."

"I happened to be here to bring you your contract and I noticed that you have a small problem." Ali gestured to where my sister sped off. "Would you like us to intervene? That was my people in the red car that rushed after her."

I just want this day to stop being crazy.

I gathered myself. "Y-yes. But how would you do that?"

"We have our ways." Ali pulled out his phone. "We can have your car back to you soon."

"She has my purse too."

"That will also be recovered." He typed into his phone. "Would you like her brought back too?"

"No." Sadness washed over me. "I...I can't do this anymore."

Ali nodded and typed some more.

"I mean..."

Ali stopped typing and looked at me.

"Well, I don't know. Is there a way to make sure she is safe? You know what. Never mind."

"We can keep guards watching her. She would never know."

"But...is that a part of your job? I'm not trying to get you in trouble with Reo."

"His expressed instructions were to protect you and your sister. All needs that you require are only a request away." Ali typed some more, put his phone up, pulled out a card, and handed it to me. "Call me anytime."

I took it. "Thank you."

Ali gestured at the man next to him and then my apartment.
“And now for the contract, gifts, and servants.”

“Gifts and servants?”

“Yes.” He pointed behind me.

A white van pulled up. Two guys held huge boxes in their arms and walked toward my apartment. Next, two women left the vehicle, wearing simple white dresses.

“The gifts are romantic gestures—expensive chocolates and exotic flowers. Your servants are only here to meet you today so you won’t be uncomfortable when they wash you.”

“Hold on.” I held up my hand. “I don’t need anyone to wash me.”

“All will be explained so that you are comfortable with the process.”

I stared at him in disbelief.

“Shall we discuss this?”

I sighed. “I guess so.”

6

A Special Feast

Reo

ressed, I tightened my grip on the phone. “And did you find
Pher sister?”

Nervousness laced Ali’s words. “Yes, sir. She’s in an alley right now. Our men took the purse and keys from her. She was too out of it to notice. Do you want us to grab her too?”

With all that she’s put Layla through, she should rot in the alley.

“Take her to the rehab I just paid for her.” I gritted my teeth. “She’ll wake up there. Hopefully, that will help.”

“Additionally, I don’t know how much was in Layla’s purse, but there’s no money in it now.”

“Put a few thousand dollars in the wallet. Have no one mention it to Layla. She’s a proud woman and may try not to take it.”

“Yes, sir.” Ali cleared his throat. “We may have another problem.”

“What?”

“Coincidentally, I was there during this emergency. However, I didn’t disclose that our people are watching her.”

“Maintain the silence on that. She’s not used to me yet. My guards surrounding her may make her uneasy.”

“Okay, sir. I just wanted to be careful with this matter.”

I eyed him. “Why?”

“You seem to like her.”

“Unfortunately, I think this will be more than a situation of *like*.”

“Why unfortunately?”

“I doubt Layla will return with me to Tokyo.”

“Interesting. You never want to bring a woman home.”

“I have a new next task for you.”

“Yes, sir?”

“Figure out a way to get Layla to Tokyo. Perhaps, commission Mr. Meade to throw his parties there. Regardless, I haven’t even sampled her yet, but I know that I will be aggravated if she’s not in Japan upon my return.”

“I’ll talk to Mr. Meade after we hang up.”

“Make it a face-to-face meeting with a lot of cash in a briefcase.” I hung up and put the phone in my pocket.

Annoyance ruffled me.

I touched the red string on my wrists, needing the small comfort it brought.

Damn trouble-making siblings.

Still touching the string, I headed downstairs to the torture chamber.

My four men followed.

I shouldn’t talk to Layla now, not while I’m in the zone to hurt someone, but...

My mind worried about what Layla must’ve been through. We’d just had an enjoyable afternoon and then she had to

return home to toxic chaos.

Fucking family.

For some connections, love hurts. For some people, love coincided with pain. Even worse, our most intimate relationships—family and friends—could inflict the most damage.

And in this moment, I hurt for Layla. My heart broke for her and all she was going through, because I'd dealt with this myself.

I let go of the string and stopped in the center of the staircase. My guards paused behind me. I pulled out my phone and dialed her number.

Layla's voice came on. "Hello?"

"I heard what happened."

A nervous chuckle left her. "I was going to ask how you even got my number, but I shouldn't be surprised when it comes to you."

"You shouldn't. When I want something that badly, I'll exhaust all resources at my disposal to have it." I knew she was blushing from my truth.

"Thank you for your men. They helped me out with my sister. It's embarrassing that it happened."

"Don't be embarrassed."

"Thank you for understanding."

"And how do you feel about your sister?"

She let out a long breath. "I hate to say it, but..."

"You'll have to let her go?"

"I'm scared to do so." Her voice cracked a little. "What if...what if she's hurt? What if my cutting ties causes her demise? What if...what if I never see her again?"

"Those are all logical questions based in fear. You're right to wonder." I gestured for my men to go on without me. They

hurried down the stairs. I leaned against the wall. “However, when it comes to an addict or even a toxic person draining your soul and breaking your heart, you must slice away at the binds.”

“You say that with complete confidence.”

“It’s because I love myself. Do you love yourself, Layla?”

Her voice cracked again. “Yes, but maybe...I need to love myself more.”

“You do, and cutting a toxic person away is the first major step in loving yourself.”

Silence hit the line.

“Do you believe in God, Layla?”

“I do.”

“Then, you know that God has his own plan for all of us. And you know that you are not God.”

“I’m not.”

“Cut her off. I can have my people change the locks this evening.”

She sighed again. “Okay. I can do that.”

“I have two men watching your sister now. I’ll still pay for her rehab, after tomorrow night. They’ll take her themselves.”

“Reo, you don’t have to do this—”

“I do. This is fast, but I’m finding that...I want to be there for you. I want to stop your pain. Let me. It makes me feel better.”

“Reo, I don’t know how I can thank you.”

A wicked smile spread across my face. Lusty images of her naked and being stuffed with my cock played out in my mind.

Don’t worry, Layla. I’m sure I’ll think of something.

Her nervous chuckle hit the line.

Feeling satisfied with the conversation, I headed down the stairs. “Did you like your gifts and servants?”

“I’m not used to any of this. The whole idea of you eating off me has me nervous.”

“You’ll be fine. In fact, I believe you’ll love every second of it.” I made it to the lowest level. “I must go for now, but I can’t wait to see you tomorrow.”

“Me either, Reo. And thanks for the hundredth time.”

“You’re welcome. Goodbye.” I headed to the torture chamber.

A guard opened the door.

Archer sat on the ground. We hadn’t given him any food. His skin looked gray. His body appeared slack. One guard held the chain to his cuffed hands. Two guards gripped the chains for his shackled foot.

Another guard placed a chair in front of Archer.

I turned to the guard that was starting the grill in the corner. “Is it hot?”

“Yes, sir.”

I sat down in the empty chair.

Archer laughed. “What are you going to do—burn me? I’ve dealt with worse.”

“Burn you?” I crossed my legs. “If only it was that easy.”

“I won’t tell you anything about my friends.”

“Why not? Aren’t you proud of them?”

Archer spat my way. The little blob fell two feet in front of me.

“That’s not much spit. You’re getting dehydrated.” I smiled at him. “Are you hungry?”

“Just kill me already! I’m ready to see my mother.”

“You’ll see her soon enough.”

The door opened. Two more men arrived. One held a box of sharp tools. The other was there to help the rest hold Archer down.

I eased back in my chair. “We’re going to play a little game.”

The men put Archer on his back. A guard grabbed one foot and held it out. Another hurried to the foot and raised a butcher knife in the air.

Archer gazed at them frantically. “What’s he doing?!”

I gestured to the one holding the butcher knife. “Let’s start with the big toe. He may prefer it. That one has the most meat.”

Trying to struggle out of their hold, Archer stared at me wildly. “What do you mean by that? W-what—?”

“I want your friends’ names, addresses, victim burial grounds, and any other information you know.”

“Never!”

I smiled at the guard with the butcher knife. “Go ahead.”

Archer fought and did his best to get away, but it was no use. There were too many men, and he was chained. With a boom, my guard chopped his big toe off. Blood spilled from the wound. Archer screamed in pain.

I tapped my finger to the beat of his screaming. “We’re all big and bad until people start cutting.”

Tears left Archer’s eyes. He choked and then coughed. His leg shook.

The guard picked the bloody toe up, walked over to the grill, and handed it to the other man. There, that guard placed the toe on a metal stick and began grilling it.

The whole time Archer’s groans of pain filled the room. Still, he watched what they were doing, utterly confused.

When he quieted, I studied Archer. “What type of sauce do you like with your barbecue?”

Fear filled Archer’s eyes. “I-I only know their nicknames a-and a few things like where they hunt—”

“You’ll need more to satisfy me.”

The scent of roasted meat rose in the air.

I winked at Archer. “That toe smells good. Doesn’t it?”

Archer’s stomach growled, and then he screamed as if horrified at his body’s natural reaction to smelling food. “I-I can think of some names—”

“You will, but I don’t want to be rude. We should let you eat first.”

The big toe crackled on the grill.

Archer’s stomach growled again. Tears left his eyes. “Please, no! Please!”

“Is *please* one of their names?”

“I won’t do it!” He shook his head over and over. “You can’t make me eat it!”

A loud laugh left me.

Archer stopped making any noise and watched me.

I glanced at my guard. “Did you hear that? He thinks I can’t make him eat it.”

The guard smiled.

“O-okay.” Archer shook his head. “I have names, but just first ones—”

“Get a fork for Archer.”

“No! No! I can...I can probably think of the last names.”

“You will, after you eat.” I pointed at the guard by the grill. “Let’s serve him the appetizer.”

“No! No!”

7

Nervous

Layla

wore a simple outfit—jeans, sandals, and a white shirt.

I During the contract signing, Ali explained that I would be dressed by my maids at Reo's residence.

This experience represented nothing I'd ever remotely participated in.

Yet, I trusted Reo. He'd romanced me yesterday. When my sister did her best to ruin my day, his men stepped in to save everything. Last night, my purse, keys, and car were back at my apartment before I lay my head down to sleep.

And even more, I counted two thousand dollars in my wallet. I'd only had a hundred dollars in cash.

I'd called Reo, attempting to give it back. He wouldn't hear of it. Then, he talked to me, telling me more riddles and making me laugh. We ended the call an hour later.

I barely slept. Nervousness hit me.

When I woke up, I was stressed. I read a book to calm me down and then I ran at Whimsy World. I returned to shower and grab a small bite.

Reo's driver picked me up next.

And now twenty minutes later, we pulled up to a magnificent mansion. All stone and tall glass windows, it was nestled among a huge garden. A massive fountain of marbled angels stood in the front and spilled out crystal blue water from vases.

My two servants—Sara and Yui—waited by the fountain with warm smiles.

The driver parked, left the car, and opened my door.

I stepped out.

Sara and Yui said hello and then rushed me into the mansion.

A butler held the door open. “Are you hungry, Ms. Brown?”

“I’m not. Thank you.” So nervous, I doubted I could keep any food in my stomach.

The butler half-bowed and left.

The maids and I climbed a winding staircase. When we arrived on the third level, they guided me down a long hallway. Then, we entered a big spacious bedroom, full of shoes, gowns, and jewelry.

Yui spoke, “Mr. Bando spent a lot of time in here last night, searching for the perfect items to dress you in.”

I scanned the place. “And what did he settle on?”

Sara pointed to the other side of the room.

I gasped. “This looks like something a woman would go to a ball in.”

They went to the huge black and silver garment and carried it over together. It resembled a kimono, but was more extravagant.

Sara stroked the silk. “This is a *jūnihitoe*.”

Walking to it, I drank in the elegant detail of the bird stitched on the side.

“This was the formal court dress noble women wore at the Japanese Imperial Court.” Yui opened the front and displayed several layers of silk robes. The outer robes were cut larger and thinner to reveal the garments underneath. A silver belt was tied around it and made of cordlike fabric.

“Gorgeous.” I walked around it and noticed several feet of long train behind it. I could tell that the sides of the *jūnihitoe* would hug my hips and waist. While the rest would fan out behind me.

“We will have to hold the back for you as you walk forward.” Sara got to my side. “We’ve also been instructed not to have you wear anything underneath. No bra or panties.”

Tension filled my shoulders.

Yui pointed to the bathroom. “We are ready to begin.”

Minutes later, they had me in a large porcelain tub that was sunken into the ground. The water smelled of lavender. While they bathed me, they filled me with champagne and chocolate. Sara poured the floral-scented water over my body. Yui massaged my shoulders.

I could get used to this.

When the bath was over, they both dried me. Sara massaged oil into my skin, making the brown color shiny and bright. Yui brushed my hair into a neat bun and placed two long sticks in my hair. She told me they were *kanzashi*. At the tip of the sticks were silver birds perched on top with tiny emeralds eyes.

Next, Sara put emerald earrings in my ear. They dangled down to my shoulders.

Finally, they both placed the *jūnihitoe* on me.

Yui lowered to the ground. “And now your shoes.”

I lifted one leg as she put these special wooden sandals on my feet. They resembled thick flip-flops and had a flat wooden base elevated with two long prongs under it. I would be raised

high above the ground. A fabric thong went between my toes to keep the sandal on.

I gazed down at my feet.

Will I be able to walk in these?

I proved that I could seconds later as I adjusted my balance and took a few steps.

Both maids held the train behind me.

Sara asked, "Are they comfortable?"

"Surprisingly, they are. I'm just shocked I can walk in them just fine."

Yui bowed. "Are you ready, Ms. Brown?"

I looked into the mirror, shocked at the image reflected back at me. I appeared like an Afro-Japanese fusion of fashion and elegance. I gathered my words. "Yes...I'm ready."

No turning back now.

They held the train behind me. I took careful steps forward, still getting used to the high wooden flip flops.

When we walked in the hall, I thought we would be going downstairs. Instead, we continued forward and stepped on an elevator.

The doors closed.

We rose.

My heart boomed in my ears.

When it stopped, the elevator opened.

A cool breeze greeted me.

I stepped onto the mansion's massive roof.

Wow.

There were ten trees on the roof, standing in black pots. Five were on one side and another five were on the other.

Sparkling white lights hung from the branches. They flanked the long path.

A long black table was at the end of the path. It was low for an American one. Barely three feet above the ground. From where I stood, I could see there were cherry blossoms painted on the edges.

Facing us, Reo sat on the floor and at the center of the table. He held two long silver chopsticks in his hand. Hunger covered his face.

Oh my God. I'm really doing this.

On his right was a silver cart full of banana leaves.

My servants gently set the train down and positioned it around me.

Yui spoke, "We stop here."

"Thank you for your help."

They bowed and left.

I turned back to Reo and heard the elevator doors close behind me.

Definitely, no turning back now.

My heart pounded in my chest.

Swallowing, I headed down the path that felt as long as a fashion runway.

8

Nyotaimori

Reo

ayla strolled toward me.

L And all I could do was put down the chopsticks and rise from the floor. Part of it was out of respect. The other side was that I was in a daze.

She had all my senses engaged with her. My ears loved the click clack of her *geta* sandals. My eyes dazzled from the vision. I rubbed my hands together, yearning to touch her. And even from several feet away a breeze brought her fragrance to me. My mouth drooled with the need to taste her.

And she walked towards me. Her hips swayed back and forth. Her cleavage was exposed and tantalizing. The *jūnihitoe* danced around her.

Layla stopped on the other side of the table and gave me a sexy smile. “Thank you.”

I had to find my breath. “I should be thanking you.”

“This is all so beautiful.”

“Nowhere near as enchanting as you.”

She blushed.

I walked around the table, yearning to be in her space.

Once in front of Layla, I drank in her image, loving the poetic way the material encased her body.

“I knew you would be gorgeous, but I had no idea.” I raised my hands to her shoulders.

She kept her gaze on me.

“Stunning.” I slid my fingers along her shoulders, loving the outline. I walked over to her side and took in her silhouette. “So enchanting.”

I slid my hands down her arm and then brushed the tips against her palm. “Breathtaking.”

“This *jūnihitoe* truly is.”

“Perfect pronunciation, but...” I returned to the front and faced her. “*You* are the breathtaking part.”

“You’re so sweet, Reo.”

“And you smell delightful.” I extended my hands out and touched her front, right at the belt. She didn’t move, but her gaze fell down to my hands as I began to undo her belt. “How was your day?”

She cleared her throat. “Peaceful, in some ways.”

“Did you see your sister?”

“No, but Ali called and told me that people are following her around as she gets high. I’ve...”

I stopped unraveling the belt.

“I’ve stopped worrying about her.”

“Good. I want your focus on this moment.” I undid the cord. The belt slipped away and fell to the floor.

The front of the *jūnihitoe* opened inch by inch, displaying some of her bare flesh, but not all. I could see the curve of her breast but not her nipples.

My gaze traveled down the expanse of her chest. I caught sight of her small belly button. My cock jumped in my pants. A ravenous heat overtook me.

Impatient, I pushed the *jūnihitoe* all the way open.

A soft gasp left her lips. And I yearned to hear what other sounds she could make.

“Are you nervous?” I studied the heated expression on her face. There was a need in those eyes. Her full lips were parted. She didn’t look scared. She appeared turned on and curious.

“I’m...excited.”

“With the things on my mind, you should be.” I slipped the *jūnihitoe* off her shoulders. It fell down her arms and then collapsed to the floor.

And still our gazes remained locked on each other.

“Are you ready?”

“That depends, Samurai,” she whispered, “Did you win your battle today?”

“I did.” I looked at her body taking in every inch. Every angle. Every curve. Every softness. She was a masterpiece from her face to her toes from the delicious width of her waist to the small pouch of her pussy.

She was a goddess.

You’re coming to Tokyo with me.

I put my gaze back on her face. “I only have one more thing to accomplish before leaving New York.”

“What?”

“I have to put a small fire out.”

I’d gotten the names, addresses, and even hunting grounds of Archer’s friends. I should have killed him right then. But the Dragon had eyes within my team. If I ended Archer and remained in New York, they would know it was due to Layla.

This would intrigue the Dragon too much. Super cautious, he would have people monitor her.

For now, I’ll hide my newly growing obsession.

“So...” A sad expression hit her face. “You’ll be leaving soon?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Oh.” She looked away.

I touched her chin and brought her view to me. “That doesn’t mean we stop seeing each other. You have a passport. I have a plane. This is simply a discussion on schedules.”

She gave me an odd look. “How did you know I have a passport?”

“I know a lot of things, Ms. Brown.” I stepped back and perused her gorgeous nude frame. “Lie down on the table.”

She lifted her eyebrows but said nothing.

I extended my hand. She grabbed it. I slowly guided her over.

Slowly, she climbed onto the table, lowered, and laid down. Her back pressed against the surface of the table. Her legs were straight. She looked up at the starry night sky.

My erection weighed down my pants. “When are you coming to Tokyo?”

She smiled. “I’ll have to think about it.”

“Come tomorrow evening.”

She chuckled. “Reo, I have work this week.”

“I could talk to Mr. Meade for you.”

“That’s unnecessary.”

We’ll see what’s necessary.

I walked over to the silver cart, picked up four large banana leaves, and brought them over to the table. Deliberately, I placed the banana leaves on the places I yearned to lick the most—her stiff nipples and lush pussy.

A soft sigh left her with each contact of the leaves.

She’s so responsive. I can’t wait to fuck her.

I lowered to the floor and marveled at the image before me. She lay there, looking so exotic and seductive. I drank in the sight. Her silky brown skin. Those taut thighs. Curvy hips. Full breasts.

God sculpted this beauty. Every part of her enticed me. I would do anything to taste her. Pay any amount. Be her life servant, protecting and taking care of her.

All for just one taste.

Like magic, I swore, the red string warmed around my wrist.

That told me all I needed to know.

Noise came from behind me. Like a good girl Layla didn't turn her head, she kept her gaze on the sky. Next, servers appeared, bringing out the platters for this evening.

I ignored them and kept my focus on her. "I should eat this way every night."

"Having a beautiful woman serve as your plate?"

"No, Layla. Having *you* serve me in every way."

She bit her lip.

I folded my fingers and placed them on the table close to her. "Back to your coming to Tokyo. I would love for you to stay for a few months."

She smirked at the moon. "Reo, I never said I was coming at all."

"Oh, you'll be coming." Carnal desire slipped between my words.

A heated blush hit her face.

"When was the last time you were pleased?"

A sweet chuckle left her.

I raised my eyebrows. "That long?"

"Yes, Reo. That long."

“Oh, my. We must solve that problem.”

She turned her view to me. A lusty heat filled her gaze.
“Maybe.”

I groaned. Desire scorched my core. It was a voracious wildfire blazing a route to my hard cock. I needed to fuck her. And this wasn't a typical craving. It was a volcanic burning need. It was an addicting longing.

She watched me with intrigue.

“You know exactly what's on my mind. Don't you?”

Her voice lowered to a soft moan. “Tell me.”

“Due to your sexy body on display, I instantly want to take out my cock and wet the tip with your lips.”

She widened her eyes.

Luckily, my chef brought out the silver tray of sushi.

Years ago, I'd found him in a little stall in Hakodate Morning Market. Since then, I'd had him trained at top culinary schools. He always traveled with me.

Tonight's sushi would be top notch, representing some of my favorites—pink salmon and foie gras, bluefin tuna covered in sea urchin, and lobster dotted with caviar.

Unfortunately, my mind was no longer on food.

Layla. Layla.

My cock grew painfully hard in my pants.

One by one, the chef used silver chopsticks to place the rolls on the banana leaves covering her breasts.

Layla closed her eyes.

Next, he placed sushi on her bare stomach.

She parted her lips.

Fuck.

She was covered in my favorite sushi. All of my delights. There was this erotic bridging of sensuality and food. This passionate harmony.

The chef placed lobster sushi on her thick thighs. Next, he set the caviar rolls on the leaves covering her pussy.

I studied her with utter fascination. “How does it feel?”

“Each one feels odd and different. Plus...”

I leaned forward. “Yes?”

“There is this sort of wicked fun sensation that I’m having with the whole experience.”

My cock jerked in my pants. “I love how comfortable you are with your body.”

“Trust me. This isn’t my usual behavior. It’s because... you’re comfortable to be around. I...”

“Yes?”

“I trust you.”

“Hmmm.”

She opened her eyes and looked at me. “That was a devilish sound.”

“Because there’s nothing angelic on my mind.”

She smirked.

“You like that. Don’t you?”

“I do.” She inhaled the air. “Everything smells so good.”

“Do you want me to feed you?”

“No.” She gazed at me full of wickedness. “I’m too excited to watch you eat off of me.”

Pre-cum spilled from the tip of my cock. Never had I experienced something like that before. At my age, I was well beyond the spilling-on-myself stage, but here she was having my body react in unusual ways.

I shifted my cock in my pants.

The chef and servants left.

I lifted my chopsticks. Instead of grabbing the sushi over one of the banana leaves I placed the tip on her knee and then slowly slipped it up her thigh.

A soft sigh left her lips. It was low and very subtle as if she tried to keep it down, but I caught it and yearned for more.

“This is unusual.” I slipped the chopsticks further up her thigh and then had the tips linger two inches near her pussy. “Usually, I’m ravenous at this point, stuffing my mouth with rolls and enjoying the view.”

“How many times have you done this?”

“After seeing you...” I slipped the tip of the chopstick closer to her pussy. “I don’t remember.”

She grinned. “You do.”

I showed her the truth in my eyes. “Layla, I don’t. Currently, I can’t even think about anything else, but your body on this table and my need to make you moan.”

She parted her mouth again.

I gently moved the chopsticks away from her thigh and then turned my attention to the rolls on the leaves covering her breasts. There, I took one. Her body moved a little bit as if she enjoyed the subtle feeling of having the roll lifted.

I ate it, enjoying the salmon and foie gras. However, none of it was as satisfying as I knew her body would be. I swallowed.

“I want you.” I picked another roll from the leaves on her breasts.

Again, she moved a tiny bit and sighed.

“I thought I could take my time with this. Weeks. Perhaps months. At this point, I would wait for years. But...I won’t deny the fact that I must have you tonight.”

“It would be too fast.” Desire coated her words.

“Fast? No. I would take my time.”

“Reo, you know what I mean.”

I took a roll from her stomach. Stirring, she tried to grip the surface of the table as if the chopsticks were turning her on.

I hit her with an intense gaze. “I want to taste your pussy.”

This time she parted her lips more. Instead of putting the roll in my mouth, I slipped it down her exposed skin. Suddenly, I needed the food to touch her—to capture her true essence.

I wanted to gather her up. I wanted to eat her. I wanted to taste her. Even if it was just because the food had touched her.

There were so many places on her that I longed to suck and fuck. I had no idea what I would do first. Her breasts had my attention, but so did her pussy. Plus, her ass made me crazy.

When I sampled that sushi I swore it tasted better than the others. Addicted, I began to only eat the rolls that had direct contact with her skin.

She squirmed a little.

I took one from her thigh.

She moaned.

I ate and swallowed it. “Is your pussy wet?”

She gazed at me in shock.

“Is it?”

“Yes.”

I slipped the chopsticks along the side of her body. My cock pushed against my pants. It was ready to come out and serve.

I gazed down at her. “Can I taste your pussy?”

Her chest rose and fell as if she’d just stopped running.

I licked my lips. “You’re thinking about it.”

“I am.”

“It would feel so good, Layla. Trust me.”

“And what about all of this sushi on me?”

“I’ve lost my appetite. All I can think about is sex now. I need your pussy in my mouth. I want to lick your clit and fuck you with my tongue.”

Another moan left her.

“Hmmm. I’ll give you time to say yes.”

She had a nervous grin. “Only yes?”

Slowly, I moved the banana leaves away from her breasts. Sushi and the leaves fell down the side of her and crashed to the table. It was almost unbearable to think I could wait—to try and resist.

Her breathing quickened.

“Do you want to say no?”

She shook her head.

“Then, what do you want, Layla?”

“Your mouth all over me.”

Desire hummed down to my cock.

Instead of responding, I bent over and picked up one of the sushi rolls on her stomach with my mouth sucking it in and then kissing her skin. The warm, savory fish went down with ease. Once again, I swore it tasted better due to being on her.

I licked at the space where the roll had been, loving the contact of my tongue on her skin.

Groaning, she arched up.

I leaned over and saw that some of the sauce from the roll had dripped down to her belly button. I dipped my tongue there and lapped the sauce, enjoying her soft flesh under me.

She moaned, “Reo.”

And that was all I needed to ravish her more.

9

The Red String

Reo

lifted her off the table and carried her away.

I Surely, the chef and staff expected us to remain for dessert. It would have to be served in my bedroom later. For now, I had to satisfy my need to taste her.

I rushed forward.

She chuckled, holding onto me. “Where are you taking me?”

“My master bathroom. With what I want to do to you, we’ll need more privacy.”

Minutes later, I had her in my shower. It took no time to get naked. I was so fucking ready to be inside of her. Next, I turned on the water, grabbed body wash, and a cloth.

She tried to wash some of the sauce off.

“No.” I moved her hands away and soaped her body. “That’s my job.”

She watched me smear lavender bubbles along her skin. Her gaze lingered below my waist, focusing on my rock hard cock.

Hot lust saturated my core.

The pitter patter of the shower drummed a rhythmic beat throughout the space. Steam rose around our legs. Hot water streamed down our nude soapy bodies. Sauce and bits of food left her frame and disappeared down into the drain.

I placed my hands on her waist and pulled her to me. “You’re so fucking beautiful.”

She started to speak.

I stole the words with a kiss. My mouth exploded in delight. Her tongue was just as skilled as mine—just as hungry. With our lips connected, I could feel the red threads of destiny winding around our wet bodies.

My cock swelled. My breathing labored. My arousal collided with the excitement of finally having tasted her.

Soft groans left her. She wrapped her arms around my waist as I feasted on her mouth some more.

God yes.

My erection pressed against her stomach. The minute she touched me, greed took over and all I craved was to devour every bit of her.

This moment would remain with me always. Nothing could compare to this.

Her kisses were soft and seductive, erotically delicious and soul-shattering all at the same time. Our heavy breathing mingled with the shower’s tempo.

She slipped her hands in my hair.

A groan escaped me. Every place her fingers touched delivered sensual jolts through me.

I slipped my hands down to her soft ass and squeezed it. “I’m taking you with me.”

She giggled in between kisses.

“I am, Layla. You’re going to be in Tokyo with me soon.”

“Reo.” Breathless, her eyelids flickered with desire. “I don’t know.”

“But I do.” Capturing her mouth, I lifted her up and took her to the shower’s wall.

Gasping, she wrapped her legs around my waist.

“I won’t leave without you.” I had her against the wall and caressed her breast with one hand. In this position, she was silky, wet, and all mine to fuck in any way I desired. With one hand, I played with her nipple. With the other, I toyed with her pussy. “Do you understand?”

“Reo...”

“I won’t leave you alone.”

Her words came out nervous. “I don’t want you too.”

“Oh, Layla. Those words are the sweetest sound my ears have ever heard.” Grunting, I tasted her skin, leaving a trail of kisses down her neck. I cupped her round breasts and lapped at the stiff tips of her nipples. “You taste even better than I imagined.”

She let her head fall back. Her breasts pushed closer to my face.

I seized her nipple between my teeth and flicked my tongue at the tip. She trembled in my hold. I let the nipple go and sucked instead.

She moaned.

I can’t hold myself back anymore.

Positioning her just right, I spread her moist folds and drove my cock deep inside her. I should have taken my time, but I couldn’t contain myself. Her pussy hugged my cock.

“Reo!” Layla moaned and gripped me harder. “Oh, Reo.”

Those moans fueled my lust.

Gritting my teeth, I pumped hard into her perfect, creamy pussy.

She shuddered. “So good!”

“Hmmm.” I slid my thick cock in and out of her lush, warm pussy, loving every wet inch. “Look at me.”

Our eyes locked.

I slowed my tempo, rocking my cock into her. “I’m going to make this pussy mine.”

She gave me no protest. Lust drowned those pupils. Her lips were parted in silent moan. Thrusting in her more, I widened her thighs to make sure I was going as deep as possible.

Her breasts jiggled. The rest of her body moved out of control as she humped and rubbed her clit on me.

“Yes, Layla.” Still holding her up against the wall, I slowly slipped my cock out, inserted it a little into her pussy and rubbed against her g-spot.

She raised her hips and cried out in pleasure. “Oh!”

“Are you going to moan all night for me?”

“Yes!”

“And what about all morning?”

“Yes!”

“And will you moan for me in Tokyo?”

Her eyes widened as she moaned back, “Yes.”

“Hmmm.” I increased my rhythm. My cock vibrated in ecstasy, telling me I was close to climaxing. “You feel so good. So perfect. I could fuck you forever.”

“Oh!”

I fucked her hard. Her breasts bobbed. Her body rocked back and forth.

Hypnotized in the moment, I looked down and watched my cock disappear into that wet pussy. “Oh, Layla. You’re mine.”

She took my cock.

“Tell me you’re mine.” I gave her merciless strokes. “Say it.”

“I’m yours.”

“And I’m all yours.” I knew those to be true words, even though I’d just met her, just tasted her. I could feel myself binding to her and becoming a union that I never experienced before.

More steam rose around us, thickening in gusts. The shower’s drumming continued. And we fell into each other. I sank as deep as humanly possible. We discovered this perfect, sensual rhythm. This rocking and rubbing. This stroking and fucking.

“God yes!” I shifted to bouncing her on my cock.

“Oh.”

I slammed into her. My arms and legs burned from the exertion. I ignored the ache in my knees.

“Reo!” She trembled as she orgasmed. Her creamy arousal poured down my length. “Reo!”

I groaned.

“Don’t stop!”

I gritted my teeth and pumped for all I was worth. “Never.”

“Oh!”

“Yes, Layla. Come for me.”

“Oh!”

“Just like that.”

“Reo!” She sparked my own orgasm to the surface. Those moans ignited it. I tried to pull back and wait for her to finish, but I couldn’t.

“Fuck, Layla!” Wild with lusty insanity, I thrust. The mushroomed tip of my cock swelled and then burst, exploding hot cum into her. “Mine!”

I slammed into her. “All mine!”

We orgasmed together, merging into one body—one soul. Tied and bound together. Never divided. Never-ending. I’d meant every word. I would never let her go.

It took time for us both to recuperate from the sex.

When our breathing steadied and my heart did too, I dragged my cock out of her, not really wanting to leave, but promising myself I would be back soon.

I turned off the shower and carried her into my bedroom. Her eyelids drooped like she would be falling asleep soon.

I placed her wet body on my bed. “Are you tired?”

“I shouldn’t be, but I am.”

I collapsed on the bed with her. “Why shouldn’t you be?”

“Because you did all the work.”

Chuckling, I grabbed blankets and wrapped our bodies in it, cocooning us in warmth.

“What’s so funny?” She turned around and faced me.

I embraced her. “You inspired every thrust.”

She licked her lips. “It was so good.”

“It will be even better in Tokyo.”

She grinned. “Because sex is better in Japan?”

“Because I’ll have more time to pleasure you there.”

“Why?”

“When this mission is done, my employer won’t need my services for a while.” I traced my finger along her lips.

“Then, stay here for a few days.”

“He likes me to remain close to him, and there is someone’s special friends I should visit there.”

“Mr. Meade is the same way. He would want me close.”

“Are you suggesting that you’ll have an excuse to not come back with me?”

“I may not be able to—”

“You will. Mr. Meade will assure you of it.”

She blinked.

“All you have to do is pack your bags. I’ll handle everything. Transportation, lodging, food, and shopping.”

“I’ll think about it.”

“You’ll do more than think about it.” I kissed her.

She shuddered.

I pulled back and gazed at her. “Just say yes.”

She bit her lip.

My commanding voice shifted to a hungry beg. “Layla... please.”

She widened her eyes. “Okay.”

“Yes?”

“I can’t believe I’m going to do this.”

“I can.” I ran my fingers through her hair. “You’ll be safe and pampered. You’ll see that you won’t have any regrets.”

She looked at my wrist. “I wanted to ask you something yesterday, but I forgot.”

“What’s that?”

She touched the red string tied around my wrist. “What does this mean?”

Smiling, I rolled to my back. “There is a Japanese legend called the Tale of the Red Strings.”

She moved in closer to me and lay her head on my chest. “I’ve never heard of this.”

“According to the legend, every human has a red string stemming from their heart. The string travels past the chest,

down the arm, and it leaves the pinky finger.”

“And what does the string do?”

“It connects to another person’s heart.”

She lifted her head and watched me. “Like soulmates or twin flames?”

“Yes. The string connects the two humans that are fated to be together. No matter how far away from each other. No matter what race, class, or age.” I ran my fingers through her moist hair. “I’ve always loved the idea of that. And thus...I’ve always searched for the person who is on the other end of my red string. To not forget, I keep a red string around my wrist.”

“That’s so beautiful.”

“You’re the first woman to ever ask about it.”

“It intrigued me.”

“Or you know that you’re on the other end of my string.”

“I don’t.”

“But I do. I swore it warmed a little tonight.”

She smiled. “That didn’t happen.”

“It’s true. Besides, the legend proclaims that nothing happens by accident. The strings can tangle and be stretched, but the bond never breaks.”

She lay back on my chest. “That’s more romantic than soulmates.”

“Why?”

“I love that the connection is always there.”

“Me too.”

Silence took over as we cuddled within the warm blanket.

Soon, soft snores left Layla.

This is probably the most peaceful sleep she’s gotten since her sister ran off.

Slowly falling asleep myself, I relished in the softness of her body.

This is perfect.

Unfortunately, my phone rang on the nightstand.

Damn it.

I'd left it there earlier this evening when I went out to greet Layla on the roof.

The phone rang again.

Sighing, I moved my arm and did my best not to wake Layla.

What the hell is wrong?

I picked up the phone and answered, "Before speaking, ask yourself, if this truly is an emergency."

Ali's voice sounded nervous. "It is, sir."

I shut my eyes. "Go ahead."

"Footman escaped."

Terror hit me. I opened my eyes. "How?"

"The shackles and handcuffs are still on the floor and attached to chains. The trap door is up. I don't know—"

"He must've dislocated his thumbs and ankles. When did you notice his disappearance?"

"Five minutes ago."

"I'm coming." I gently rolled Layla over and slid out of bed.

"Okay, sir."

"Get several guards up here to watch Layla. He wouldn't have left the property yet. It would take time for him to recover from the dislocation. He'll be limping and wet."

10

Pretty Feet

Layla

Reo's heavy breathing woke me.

R Then, he tickled my toe.

Keeping my eyes closed, I giggled and yanked my foot away.

He tickled it again.

Yawning, I moved my foot to the side. "Are you going to let me sleep?"

A dark, scratchy voice sounded. "Where's the fun in that?"

That's. Not. Reo.

I snapped my eyes open and looked at my feet.

Terror rose in me.

The man from Mr. Meade's party was crouched on the floor.

"Have you ever swam with rats? It's refreshing." Water dripped down his bruised face. He wore a delirious smile. His nose was an inch from my toe. He inhaled. "You really have pretty feet."

Fast, I sat up in bed and scooted back. My body shook in fear. I'd just woken up and was trying to regain complete

consciousness. I was naked, scared, and confused. “How did you get in here?”

He gestured to the large painting across the wall that was opened. “There’s a tunnel that’s connected—”

“I-I don’t know what you want, but—”

“Your feet are much prettier than mine.” He raised his foot in the air.

All five of his toes on the foot were chopped off. He flashed me a horrid grin. Black gunk coated his gums and teeth.

Screams burned from my throat.

I pushed off of the bed.

He jumped up and screamed too.

I edged back.

Then, he laughed. “Have you ever tasted your own flesh?”

I rushed and grabbed the lamp. The plug was still in the wall. I yanked it away. “Get back!”

He bared his nasty teeth.

Banging came from the door.

I looked that way.

A dresser had been pushed in front of it. Men were shoving and trying to get inside the room.

The man charged for me.

No.

I slung the lamp at him. The glass crashed into his raised arm. I seized that moment and leapt on the bed, racing over it. Right as I began to jump off, he caught my foot. I crashed to the floor. My chest ached. I screamed and kicked.

“Shut up, bitch!” He tightened his grip on my ankle and dragged me to him.

I dug my fingers into the carpet, but it was no use. I couldn't get a grip. He yanked me to him. My skin burned from the drag.

"You should have given me that private dance." He flipped me around. "I'm here because of you."

I kicked and fought.

He slapped me.

I didn't let that stop my battle.

He jumped on top of me. His breath was putrid. Dark spit dripped from the corners of his mouth. "I may never get to hurt him, but at least I will have time to hurt you."

I scratched at his face.

Laughing, he held my hands down. "I'm going to carve you up so good that you'll be his nightmare. He may kill himself after the sight."

"Let me go!"

It barely affected him. "Scream all you want. He'll never be able to save you."

Reo's voice sounded in the room. "I will."

Dripping wet, Reo stood by the opened painting and pulled the trigger. A boom came. The bullet zipped by, slicing through the side of the man's head. Blood sprayed on my shoulder and face. His hold loosened. His body fell back.

The scream lodged in my throat.

My mouth hung open.

My body froze.

"Layla, are you okay?" Reo's voice sounded distant and far away.

I think he picked me up.

"Layla, talk to me."

Fear seized me.

“Layla?”

Another voice sounded. “Is she okay, sir?”

“Yes, but she’s in shock. Get the plane ready.”

Epilogue

Fated

Layla

One year later.

olding the black velvet box, I gazed at Reo. “What’s this?”

H “You’ll only know when you open it.” He stepped in front of me and touched the curls outlining my face. “I love how you have your hair this evening. It’s magnificent.”

“Thank you.” I swallowed. “I’m nervous.”

“You shouldn’t be.”

“I want to give a good first impression. You’ve talked about the Dragon—”

“Call him, Kenji. His wife doesn’t like the nickname.”

“Why not?”

“She doesn’t like to be reminded of the fact that she’s married to a beast.”

“I can understand that.” I studied him.

While Reo dressed in a designer suit and had the most gentlemanly of manners, he was a killer. I’d learned that when he saved me.

I learned a lot from living with him in Tokyo this year. There was no denying the power that he wielded in this city. When he walked the streets, people crossed it. Most feared even giving him full eye contact.

And because he'd announced his protection and love for me, no one dared to disrespect me. In fact, most treated me like a queen.

Reo touched my chin and brought my view to him. "What's on your mind?"

"I'm thinking about how much my life has changed."

"For the good?"

"Yes."

He kissed me and nodded towards the box in my hand. "Open it."

Smiling, I lifted the velvet top off the box. A ruby bracelet greeted me. The fine gems boasted a pure, vibrant red.

"I thought this would be better than a red string."

I looked at him. "You're always spoiling me."

"This bracelet isn't about spoiling." He lifted my hand and kissed my empty ring finger. "Do you understand what will be coming next?"

"We're taking our time."

"Maybe." He placed the ruby bracelet on my wrist and then kissed the ring finger again. "Or maybe we're just delaying the inevitable."

"It's good to take our time."

"We already know we're fated. You will be my wife."

My heart warmed. "And you will be my husband."

"And there will be kids."

"Reo."

“Just three or four. We can’t have an only child. There must be siblings.”

“We’re taking our time.”

“Maybe.” He gently put my hand down and wrapped his arms around my waist. “Speaking of siblings. How’s Tina?”

“Her writing poetry is helping. When she called today, that was all she talked about.”

“Art heals. And if this ends up being her passion, then it may keep her sober.”

“I hope so. I’m nervous about her leaving rehab in a few months.”

“I believe in Tina. I’ve watched her progress. She’ll be fine. Plus, I’ll have my men monitoring her.”

Someone knocked.

Ali entered our bedroom. “They’re here.”

“He’s early.” Reo frowned. “How’s his mood?”

“Still, pissed.”

I raised my eyebrows. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing big.”

Ali grinned. “It’s just a little mosquito buzzing.”

Reo kissed my cheek and took my hand. “One that will be dead with a simple swat of the hand.”

I glared at him. “Are you being careful?”

“As always, my love.” Reo led me away. “But for now, let’s focus on this dinner.”

My nerves flared.

“Kenji is suspicious of new people, yet he knows how protective I am of you. Therefore, he’s allowed you time to heal and get used to our life.”

Ali raised a finger. “And now it’s time for the Dragon’s perusal.”

Tension built in my chest.

Reo frowned at Ali. “Don’t worry. He’ll be on his best behavior.”

I calmed down. “Okay.”

Reo tenderly squeezed my hand. “You’ll be fine.”

Ali opened the door for us. “I’ve checked out the décor and singers. Already, I’m impressed. Surely, you’ll impress them both, Layla. You have a knack for party planning.”

“I’ve worked at enough of them. Hopefully, he likes it.”

“In the end, it doesn’t matter.” Reo stopped me in the hallway and targeted me with an intense gaze. “You’re mine. My love. My life. And one day, my wife. I don’t need anyone’s approval.”

My eyes watered.

“I love you, Layla.”

“I love you too.”

Ali clapped. “And I love you both.”

Reo sighed and led me forward. “Let’s get this dinner over with. I very much want to mess up those curls afterwards.”

~Excerpt~

Lunchtime Chronicles Season 4:

Spice Cake

Coming: November 3, 2021



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Summary:

Renata:

My sweet personality is one of my best attributes. At least, that's what I thought until my friends staged an intervention on my behalf and demanded I attend racial sensitivity training. *What?* The suggestion filled me with special, individually wrapped curse words for each of them...until I met Rook.

Rook:

My caring and unselfish ways were often complimented. I assumed the praise was genuine, until my best friend of thirty years called me a "privileged prick" and suggested a therapist for my racial sensitivity issues. *What issues?* I was prepared to tell him what he could do with his suggestion...until I met Renata.

1

Renata

The accusatory glances my girls kept aiming in my direction, and the lack of shit-talking among our group was an alarming sign that something was off. We usually let our hair down and acted a damn fool when we got together after our work-week ended.

Where were the drinks? Why was Paula Parrish, Leslie Lawrence, and Dyana Douglas eyeballing my ass like the devil was standing at my back, preparing to snatch my soul?

Paula's wide brown eyes meshed perfectly with her lips, so plush and sultry she was often asked if she had paid for them. All Leslie had to do was bat her exceptionally long lashes over her sparkling light brown eyes to have her wishes granted. Dyana had smiling with her chocolate brown eyes down to a science, but it was her real smile that had the power to make hearts melt.

Unfortunately, in this moment, none of those attributes were displayed on their beautiful faces. A casual lean to my left and a quick glance over my shoulder revealed that the coast was clear. The view through Leslie's wide bay windows wasn't of Lucifer's fiery underworld, so what was their problem?

"Why the hell are y'all staring at me like I just popped hot on a piss test before a big promotion?"

We had all met our freshmen year at Sinclair State University in Florida and twenty years later, we were still as

thick as thieves. However, my attention strayed back to the question at hand.

“Renata. It’s time,” Diana started, her tone rigid enough to prickle my nerves.

“Yep,” Paula agreed. A hint of an unspoken declaration peeked from the depths of her squinting gaze.

“This is way past due,” Leslie added, her tight-lipped expression oozing a mix of pity and concern. Her golden cheeks had flushed, showing off a deep blushing pink, so the news must have been catastrophic.

“What?” The word dragged over my heavy tongue. “Y’all better not be setting me up with some loser. I’m not going. I’m dating myself until the Good Lord sends me my man,” I preached, raising a hand and silently mouthing, “*Hallelujah!*”

“You can hallelujah all you want. This has nothing to do with a man and everything to do with us finally giving you the intervention you desperately need,” Paula blurted, settling her eyes on mine.

Paula, a photographer, was six-foot with an umber complexion and statuesque build. Her words finally landed like a donkey kick to my brain, causing me to jerk back in offense.

“Intervention?”

My sharp gaze landed on each of them, my face contorted into a deep frown. “What the hell’s wrong with y’all? I’m not abusing drugs or alcohol.”

Leslie flashed me a dismissive side-eye. She and I were co-owners of a small finance company that specialized in small business loans.

“An intervention is not always about substance abuse. We believe you need a dose of racial sensitivity education.”

I scoffed. “What the—”

“Don’t even try to act surprised. We’ve had this discussion on several occasions,” Dyana cut me off, aiming a freshly manicured finger at me.

She was a hair stylist who owned three salons around the city. Her clientele were rich and could afford the top of the line products and grade-A stylists she employed. She kept my natural shoulder-length 4B hair healthy and styled to perfection.

Leslie pursed her lips, cutting accusatory eyes at me. “The way you speak over our Caucasian employees in meetings, undermining their ideas even when they are good ones. Or the nonverbal responses you give when they say good morning. The snide comments you make in general is enough to raise concern.”

Witnessing my behavior first hand, she had been apparently reporting it back to Paula and Dyana. *Snitching ass*. My eyes slid closed on a deep inhale and I released it in one long breath. Their eyes were on me, judging me. Once I reigned in all of the curse words I considered releasing, I pinned each of them with a hard glare.

“Look, just because I don’t kiss white people’s ass, it doesn’t mean I’m a racist. I have the freedom to be friends with whoever the hell I want.”

“No one said you were a racist. However, we do believe your mind-set is prejudice and you know there is a difference. Every time you reference a Caucasian person, you manage to make it sound as offensive as when we are referred to as ‘you people.’ You told Tim he smelled like wet-dog within earshot of other employees. If you weren’t the CEO, you would have probably been reported to HR,” Leslie tattled, flashing me a disapproving side eye.

“Every time a non-black man approaches to ask you out, you treat him like he’s broken some unspoken law and needs to go to jail. So, yes, your ass needs this intervention,” Paula stated, chastising me.

I didn't have any grounds to argue a case for myself. There were times when even I caught myself before I said something insensitive. Three sets of daring eyes met mine, waiting for me to speak out against their little stinky intervention. What were they going to do anyway? Talk me into a better state of mind?

"I've gotten you into a facility here in Chicago called, Revelations," Dyana said, restarting the conversation.

Revelations?

"I called in a few favors to get you in. It's super exclusive and has an impressive success rate at helping people cope with issues like phobias and prejudices by incorporating real world scenarios and interactions."

"What type of real world scenarios? I'm not going someplace and have some crazy ass..." I squashed the callous remark on my tongue, one that would prove that what they were saying about me was true.

"I'm not going to go someplace and be put in a situation that could land me in jail, or worse, killed," I said, shaking my head vigorously. "What about just getting me a few sessions with a shrink?" My pleading gaze landed on each of their unflinching ones.

They knew me well enough to know that I was making the offer to combat their assault against my behavior. Unbeknownst to them, I had considered seeing a shrink, but had foolheartedly convinced myself that it was something developed for Caucasian people.

Damn, there I went *again* being insensitive with my opinions. I never considered how bad my situation was until my girls started calling me out on my behavior. And the older I got, the worse off I seemed to be getting.

"Okay, I won't argue." *For now*. "If you truly believe this place can help me, I'll give it a shot. But, the moment they insist I do something I don't like or agree with, I'm out of there."

I leveled each with a hard stare, pausing to make sure they understood that I was not about to be a mental Guinea pig. Besides, *I'm a grown ass woman. I do what I want.*

“Sounds fair enough,” Paula answered for the group.

“Now that that’s out of the way, where the hell are the drinks?”

The drinks started to flow but based on the conspiring looks my friends were exchanging, they had already made plans to combat the future protests I would launch to ruin their plans for my redemption.

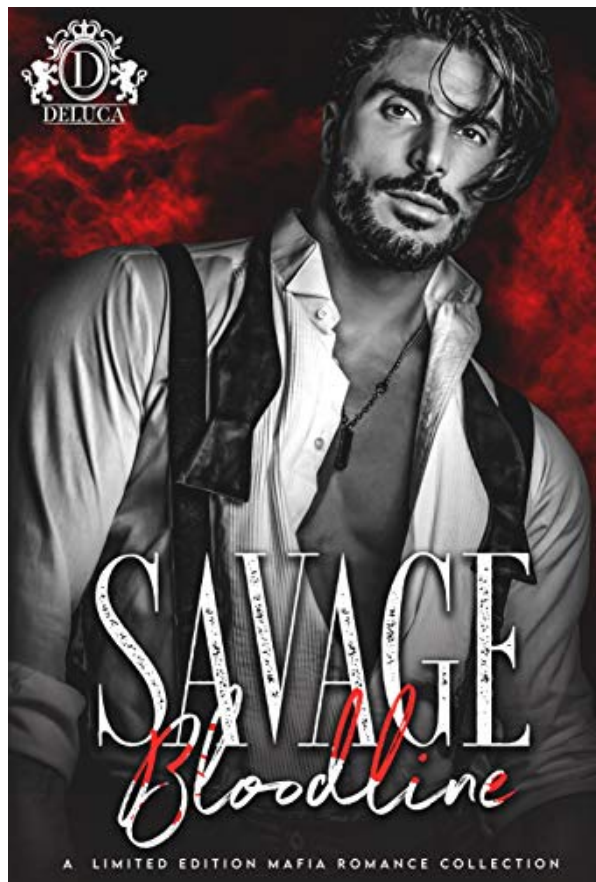
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body to a savage?



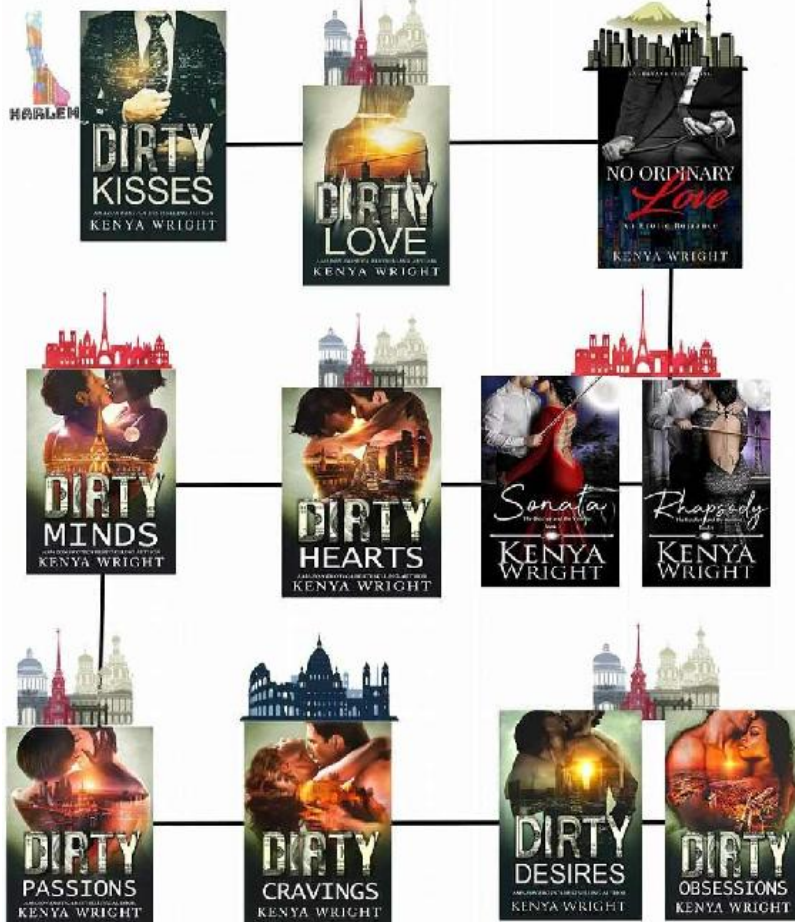
The men of the DeLuca family are proof that the bigger the alpha, the harder they fall... in love.

Immerse yourself in this dangerously seductive collection that includes:

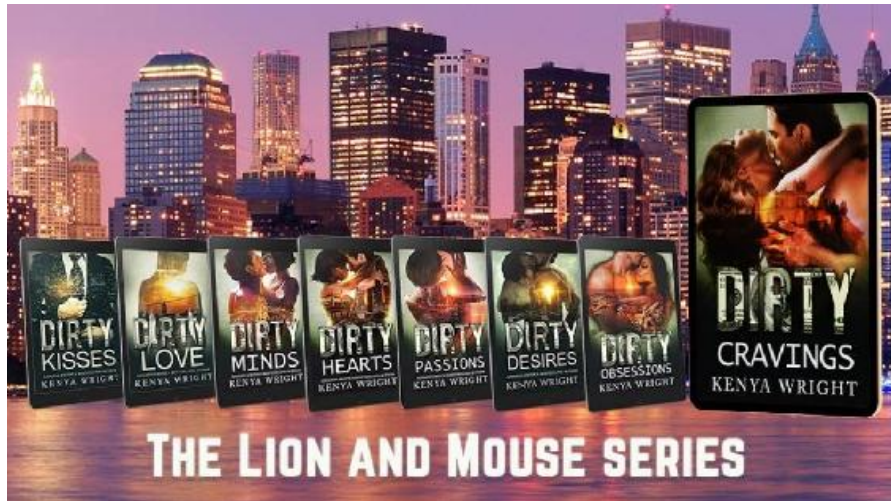
*Second-chance. *Friends to lovers. *Enemies to lovers.
*Billionaire.

*BWWM. *Arranged Marriage AND MORE!

KW MAFIA WORLD



SERIES ORDER



[Dirty Kisses](#) (Kazimir & Emily 1)

[Dirty Love](#) (Kazimir & Emily 2)

[Dirty Hearts](#) (Kazimir & Emily 3)

[Dirty Minds](#) (Kazimir & Emily 4)

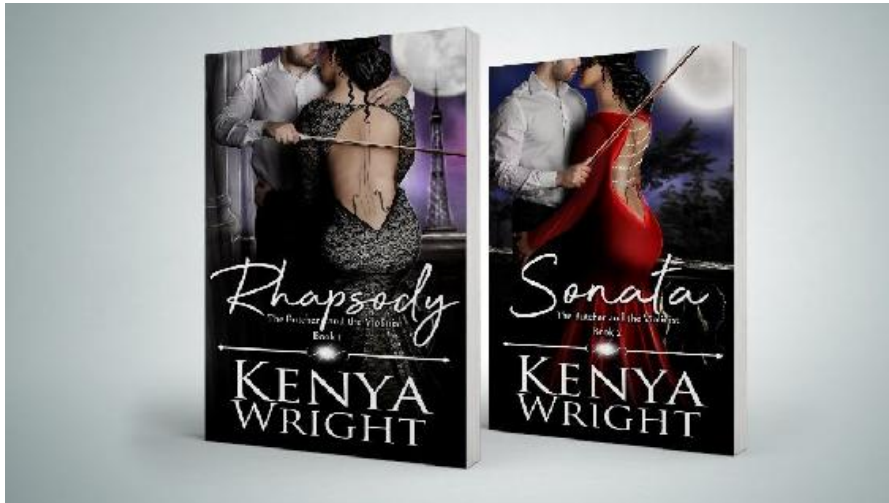
[Dirty Passions](#) (Kazimir & Emily 5)

[Dirty Cravings](#) (Kazimir & Emily 6)

[Dirty Desires](#) (Misha & Ava 1)

Dirty Obsessions (Misha & Ava 2)

FRENCH MAFIA



[Rhapsody](#) (Jean-Pierre & Eden 1)

[Sonata](#) (Jean-Pierre & Eden 2)