



Ace of Swords

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Description: Enemies to Lovers crash together in this forbidden romance from USA Today Bestseller Nora Flite! Smart men don't sleep with their boss's daughter. It's one of the easiest rules. There are no late hours spent pouring over data or carefully gathered notes to decide if, for sure, you shouldn't grab hold of that forbidden woman. That you shouldn't ache to kiss her. To make her scream your name. I'm a smart man. So why didn't I follow the rules?

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Chapter One

Smart men don't sleep with their boss's daughter.

It's one of those easy, clean facts that you don't doubt. You don't question it. There are no late hours spent pouring over data or carefully gathered notes to decide if, for sure, you shouldn't bury your dick in that girl.

And I hate to brag, but I'm a smart man.

Which was why this problem was particularly infuriating.

“Rolland?”

I flicked my eyes back to Marcus. Had he caught me eyeballing Tatiana where she was sitting on the patio furniture across the yard, her perfect legs crossed so her knees could prop up the book she was reading? No—Marcus was too busy yawning into his half-empty Grande Frappuccino from Starbucks. He was an okay accountant, but a shit body guard. Lucky me.

“I was saying,” I began again, flipping through the papers in my lap. “That you need to tell Sergio he’s wasting too much money on drivers. He’s got five on payroll, but he only uses three in the same day.”

“Wasting money?” Marcus snorted. “Yeah, I’ll go tell the billionaire top-dog that he’s wasting cash.”

“He is,” I insisted. I scanned the yard around us, noting the line of men in white, tucked-in shirts as they arranged tables under the avocado trees. “Speaking of, what’s he burning his bank accounts down for now?”

Marcus followed my eyes. “Ah. Tatiana’s graduation party is tonight.”

Graduation party. From her final year at college. I’m not proud of my attraction to the girl, but she’s not a damn kid. I know for a fact that she’s twenty-two, and while that’s still six years younger than me, it’s not so bad. The bad part is she’s the daughter of one of the most powerful men this side of the Pacific. I reminded myself coldly.

“How much is he spending on this?” I asked.

“Couple thousand.” Marcus shrugged, then he looked directly at Tatiana. “She’s his precious little doll. Don’t bother trying to talk him out of spending a single dime on her pretty head.”

Using the excuse to stare at her again, I nodded. “If he’s already spent the money, no point in forcing the issue.” Tatiana reached up to tuck a piece of her long, thick dark hair behind her ear. The motion was absent-minded—it made me swallow. Especially when she followed it up by licking her thumb and turning the page of her book. I couldn’t read the cover from here but desperately wanted to know what had her so engrossed. Maybe if it was something terrible, I could get myself to start disliking her. That would be much better for my livelihood.

Tatiana adjusted herself on the lawn chair. Her reflective sunglasses and wide-brimmed straw hat reminded me of Old Hollywood. I had a soft spot for Silver Screen classics, and she was channeling Audrey Hepburn something fierce.

As I watched, her chin moved. Did she notice me?

The tip of her tongue traced her upper lip. It sent a tight, pleasurable rush through my belly. Then she crossed her ankles, allowing her long, bare legs to extend further from her draped-open shawl. Navy-blue shorts peeked beneath. If she stood, they'd cover most of her thighs, but right now they were tugging into her crevice and when she pointed her toes the material slid right into her—

“She’s smoking-hot, huh?”

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I jumped, gaping at Marcus and his sharp grin. “What?”

“Tatiana.” He motioned with his coffee cup. “It’s no wonder Sergio made her live at home all these years. He’s too paranoid to trust the boys in her class from trying something. He wouldn’t hesitate to knee-cap the bloke who dared to flirt with her.”

I didn’t need that mental image. “Let’s get back to the numbers.”

“Sure, sure.” He took a long drink from his cup, then sighed. “Guarantee she’s a virgin.”

My whole body tensed. Jesus Christ. “Would Sergio break your knee-caps for that comment, or just your fingers?”

The color faded from his face. “Alright, jeez. There’s better ways to keep me on track than making me feel sick, Rolland.” He ruffled through his notebook, scribbling something. “There, I put down Talk about drivers.”

I bit back a satisfied smile. “Perfect.”

“Makes sense why Sergio keeps you close. You’re like some kinda robot, nothing distracts you.”

Weeks ago, I would have agreed. I cared about perfection and a job well done. Nothing entered my mind but work...

Until Sergio invited me to his estate for a black-tie party.

I'd known he had a daughter. I'd seen her childhood, multi-colored brace-wearing photos all over his office. Nothing about Tatiana caught my attention.

I had no idea how much that would change.

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Chapter Two

Two weeks earlier

For a black-tie event, there were a lot of vibrant colors in the room. Not only on the walls, or along the over-packed tables of over-priced cheese and shrimp, but on the bodies of the guests. Gucci purses, Michael Kors, Chanel—I knew them all by sight.

I had to. One of the first things I noticed when running Sergio's expense reports was how much the man wasted on clothing. Not just for himself, but for his clients. He was obsessed with gifting luxury brands, like he was searching for an excuse to blow his hard-earned cash.

My eyes darted from guest to guest, keeping a running tally in my head. Two-thousand... fifteen-thousand... I made it to forty-grand before I finished walking through the entry-way of the mansion. Sergio's hand clamped down on me, halting me in my tracks. "You made it!" he laughed, glancing me over quickly. "You look good enough. This the nicest thing you own? I know a guy downtown that works with custom fabric from Italy, remind me to buy you a new suit at our next meeting."

I brushed the knot of my coal-black tie. "Please don't."

His laugh was strong; it drew polite smiles from everyone in earshot. "Come on, Rolland. Let me show you around. This is the first time you've been in here, huh?"

Not quite. But I wasn't keen to correct him. "I'd love a tour."

“Sure, sure.” His finger jabbed my broad chest. “Don’t use this as a chance to scold me later for where my money ends up. You’re not here to work tonight, you’re here to have fun, so turn that brain of yours off.”

Instantly I remembered another time someone wanted me to turn my brain off.

It was my fifth birthday party and I’d been obsessed with magic. No matter how hard my parents tried to sign me up for soccer or take me out to the playground, my weekends were spent with my magic set, practicing the same card tricks and hidden coin illusions again and again. So naturally for my party, my parents hired a magician, assuming I’d be delighted by an up-close and private show. And I was amused as I watched the magician work, because I recognized every trick he did and could replicate it myself. I was studying the fluidity of his act and taking mental notes so I could improve my own. I was having a great time, laughing and watching with my schoolmates, until his final act.

No matter how much I’d begged my parents, they’d refused to buy me a dove. My five-year-old brain knew that to be a real magician, I needed a bunny or a dove to step up my act. Bunnies seemed like they required too much care, so I had my heart set on a dove. And here it was, right in front of me for the first time, a magician about to do the dove pan trick.

He showed the audience his shiny brass pan, demonstrating that it was empty inside. The pan looked like a typical dish I’d find in my mother’s kitchen. He filled the pan with a clear liquid and then dramatically cracked an egg inside it. With a flourish, he lit the pan on fire and quickly slammed the lid on top to extinguish the flame. My friends were squealing, but I was laser focused, watching for the slightest sleight of hand or movement from within his jacket.

He commanded the audience of five-year-olds to repeat the magic words, “Happy Birthday, Rolland,” (a weak connotation in my opinion), and then he lifted the lid to

reveal a single gray dove inside. The other children erupted in applause as he took his bow, and my mother's voice rang out "Cake time!"

But I couldn't move, I couldn't join the other children who were hovering over my birthday cake and waiting to belt out Happy Birthday to me. My mother begged me to just believe, to stop thinking so much and come enjoy my party. But my mind was in chaos. I had a buzzy feeling in my head that wouldn't go away.

Where had that dove come from? It didn't add up for me.

I went over every step of that trick, tried to find some explanation for how that dove appeared. I didn't believe in magic. I believed in processes and logic, and I wanted to understand. I ignored my parents' pleas and examined that brass pan until the magician finally promised to teach me the trick after I blew out my candles. And he did teach me the trick—the secret is in the lid.

I've never been able to turn my brain off. Not once.

My lips tightened. "I can't."

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Sergio squinted at me. We were nearly eye to eye—I was only an inch taller than the massive man. I wondered if I'd look like him when I was in my fifties, too. Like a guy who'd body-built his whole life while never cutting back on an extra slice of pizza at each meal. "Rolland, listen to me closely. I like you. I like your mind even better. I'm not keeping you on the clock, so if you want to juggle numbers, I can't stop you. But I don't want to hear any of it this evening."

The subtle rumble of his threat made my heart jump. It was easy to forget the rumors about Sergio Montalla. His company was legit as legit could be, but men like him—with a long history and longer friendships—were dangerous.

"I understand," I said.

"Good."

We continued walking with the tension hanging between us. It remained like cloying smoke through the foyer, the massive game room, the chaotic kitchen, and finally, the grand ballroom. I counted up the ice sculptures—fifty, really?—then the towers of macarons shaped like rainbow colored Christmas trees. He really expected me to ignore how much this party cost?

"Sergio!" a gritty voice shouted. I turned to spot a smooth-headed man waving across the room.

"That's Wes," my boss explained in my ear. He swung his arm back in a polite gesture. "I need to talk to him. Keep up appearances and all that." He gave me a quick jab in the ribs. "You have fun, that's an order."

I managed a tight smile. “I don’t remember anything in my contract that says you can order me around.”

Sergio’s lips curled higher, but there was no humor lightening his hard tone. “Not everything has to be written down. Some things are just assumed by wise men, Rolland.”

Standing straighter, I watched him head towards Wes and the others. He really wants me to relax. Fine. There was enough alcohol and food at this party to lose an hour in. It wasn’t like I hated parties—I just preferred quieter settings. Noise messed with my head, and I loathed anytime my wits weren’t razor-sharp.

Distractions never helped anyone.

“Excuse me,” a warm, flowing voice said at my elbow. “I don’t think you belong here.”

Blinking, I stared down at the woman, making sure she was speaking to me. Her almond-eyes glistened under a heavy roof of lashes. There was no question that those gorgeous eyes were focused on me. “I was invited,” I said, “Of course I belong.”

“Oh no.” She clicked her tongue—I caught myself staring at how pink it was against her plum lipstick. “I can spot an outcast a mile away. The guys who come to these events have one thing in common.”

“And what’s that?”

Her smile lit up my heart. “They drink. A lot. And your hand is empty, so...”

Caught off guard—and loving it—I cupped the back of my neck. “Fair enough.”

“Did no one come around and offer you something?” she asked, scanning the room with her hands on her luscious hips. “I’ll wave someone down.”

“No, no. I just—” “Don’t drink much, I almost said. Should have said. Why didn’t I?”
“Don’t go to any trouble. The staff here are working themselves to the bone.”

She lifted her eyebrows dubiously. “You think Sergio doesn’t pay them enough for that?”

“He pays everyone too much,” I corrected her with a chuckle.

Something flashed in her eyes, so slippery I couldn’t make sense of it. “That’s a good thing,” she said.

“Good for them. Not good for Sergio.”

Her mouth went tight. “Who are you?”

Shit. I was being too loose with my tongue. This girl could be someone who’d run to Sergio and claim I was bad-talking him. “Rolland. I work for him, I’m in charge of keeping him from bleeding his coffers dry. And you’re...”

Five slim, pink-glossy tipped fingers extended my way. “Nobody you should care about.”

I shook her hand. Her soft as hell fucking hand. “But you do have a name.”

“Of course. A very nice one.”

“Which is?”

Her smile grew so wide I could count her porcelain-white teeth. “Call me your excuse for getting a drink and avoiding more boring conversations. Let’s get some air out back.”

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The abrupt way she avoided my question while also snatching my wrist, tugging me across the reflective floor, should have bothered me. But there was something in the air. Some strange part of me that found her chaos... attractive.

Letting her take me through the crowd, I watched how her long hair flowed over her naked back. The dress she had on hugged every inch of her body. It kept me quiet so that I didn't speak again until we were stepping out into the beautifully lit garden under a sea of stars. "Tell me your name. I told you mine."

She glanced back at me. "No one forced you."

"I have to call you something."

"Fine. Call me 'That Fun Girl.'" She spun, releasing me. We'd wandered deeper into the back garden—a quiet spot, the murmur of the party far away. "That's all I want to be right now. It's enough."

I nodded thoughtfully. If she didn't want me to push this, fine. Maybe being the Fun Girl was enough for both of us.

Her attention strayed to my face. Then she ran her eyes down to my feet and back again, lingering on my shoulders where they pushed into my suit-jacket. "You said you work with Sergio and his money, but you look like a body guard."

"How do you mean?"

Fun Girl—or FG, as I began to think of her—laid her palm flat on my chest. As she

stroked my tie, I inhaled sharply. “The muscles, mostly.”

Jesus. My heart was thudding, she could definitely feel it. “I work out in my condo every morning.”

Her cute nose crinkled from laughter. “Every single morning?”

“Of course.”

“And do you use an almond face scrub, too?”

I blinked. “Excuse me?”

“Nothing, sorry, it was a dumb American Psycho reference.” Her nails raced over my tie, leaving my skin beneath tingling. “I admire your dedication to exercise. I wish I had a drive like that.”

“If you’re saying you don’t have to work out to stay so gorgeous, I’ll admit that makes me jealous.”

She bit her bottom lip. “You think I’m gorgeous?”

“You must hear that all the time.”

“Hardly.” She backed away, glancing out at the garden around us. “People don’t have the balls to tell me what they really think.”

I adored the crass way she spoke. It was nothing like the saccharine women I was surrounded by day in and day out at the office. But if you’d asked me if I liked that sort of rude language, I’d have denied it.

Maybe it was different because it was coming from a pair of shiny plump lips.

“Well,” I said, reaching out to take her hands. Her fingers twitched like a caught bird. “I’ll be brutally honest. You’re the most beautiful woman I’ve ever spoken to, and it’s killing me that you won’t tell me your real name.”

Twisting towards me, she glanced at our hands, then squeezed them. “If the mystery went away, you’d stop being so open with me.”

She smelled like plums and cloves. Like a midnight moment when you’re straddling the past and the future, and you aren’t sure if you should have regrets or hope.

Her lips grazed mine, forcing me to stay in the present. To feel nothing but bliss. All of my coiled up tension from entering Sergio’s home and seeing his wasteful spending evaporated in the touch of this strange woman.

He told me to have fun, I reminded myself as I buried my hands in her hair. That was enough to justify forgetting that this was so unlike me. I was a planner, a plotter, a fan of precision. This garden affair was the opposite of my whole world.

“You kiss so good,” she whispered against my mouth. Curling my arms around her body, I kissed her harder, pressing my tongue on her soft warmth. She gripped my wrist and guided my palm to her left breast, forcing me to fondle her.

Whatever resistance I had crumbled away. My thumb brushed her firm nipple through the silky surface of her black dress. She hissed, hot air going down my throat, fueling me like I was a steam engine.

“Please,” she moaned. “I want... I want...”

“What do you want?” I demanded.

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Her voice broke. “To not feel so trapped.”

I startled. “What—” FG didn’t let me finish; she kissed me harder than ever, driving us to the ground. Her weight made the cool garden grass stab into my spine. She slid down my body, then struggled with my belt. I hurried to help her, no longer caring if we got caught by someone wandering the garden.

She rubbed her cheek up and down my cock through my pants. I grit my teeth, moaning at the delicious pressure. For several minutes she toyed with me—nuzzling my shaft, tracing her nails down my thighs. When she finally pulled my pants down enough to reveal my boxers, I was dizzy. I thought I’d come before she touched my skin.

“Oh,” she gasped as she guided my cock into the air. Her palm was warm but my taut skin was hotter. I looked down my body to see her eyeing my thick cock like she was mesmerized. I knew I was big, but was I that impressive?

Her eyes met mine. She was blushing, but there was an eagerness sparkling in her stare. Tucking her hair over her shoulder and out of the way, she kissed the head of my cock. “Fuck,” I growled. “That’s amazing.”

Her chest filled with air, pushing her cleavage upwards. She nuzzled the tip of my prick over the skin of her breasts, thrilling me. It was nothing compared to what came next.

The edge of her tongue slid across the underside of my dick. Impatient, she dove forward, circling me with her mouth and taking me in halfway. Saliva dripped down

to my balls—she was slathering me up. Her hair fell forwards, partially hiding the view. I reached down, meaning to brush it away, but something primal took control. I gripped her soft hair, using it to guide her mouth until her lips wrapped solidly around my dick.

Hot tingles awoke in my cells, expanding until my heart was buzzing. I'd always thought of myself as a patient man, but I couldn't resist thrusting into her throat. She coughed, but she kept working to get the last inches of me past her gag reflex.

"I'm damn close, I'm going to come any second," I whispered.

She moaned around my cock, her tongue grinding on the sensitive cleft underneath. When she started to cup my sack, handling me so gently, so experimentally, I was done for.

Arching my hips, I thrust towards the night sky. She made a wet, choking sound, but she didn't stop sucking me off. Not even when my cock swelled bigger than ever. My climax obliterated the world around me; I saw nothing but flashes of color that matched the stars. Distantly, I felt my come pouring into her mouth. She swallowed every drop.

She gasped for air after she pulled away. Looking down, I saw her crouched between my thighs. Her hair was damp in places where it had touched her wet chin. Quickly she wiped at her face, erasing the evidence of how she'd given me a messy blow job. I watched with fascination as she smirked. "That was... something else," she chuckled.

"That's what I should be saying." I sat up, reaching for her. Before I could capture her for another kiss, a voice rang out nearby. The party. I'd forgotten all about it.

She looked around, then climbed to her feet. "Let's get back," she said, dusting dirt

from her knees. “People will notice we’re gone if they haven’t already.”

Fuck. Sergio. “You’re right,” I agreed. But I wanted to stay. I wanted to make her come like she’d done for me, and I wanted to kiss her until she told me her real name. She couldn’t remain my Fun Girl forever. Not after what we’d done.

Together we walked through the darkened gardens. The house rose up—we’d been much closer than I’d considered. Had anyone heard us out there in the hedges? As we climbed the back steps, weaving through the crowd that sipped their endless champagne, I spotted Sergio.

“Oh, there you are!” he said, looking my way as I approached.

I started to dig for an excuse for why I’d vanished during the party. This whole affair was so unlike anything I’d ever done. But Sergio wasn’t looking at me. He was staring just beyond, at my Fun Girl. “Tatiana, you sweet thing.” He leaned in to kiss her cheek. “Meet Rolland, my best financial adviser on the books.”

Her beautiful eyes locked on mine, reflecting our wicked secret about what we’d been doing minutes ago in the garden. “I already met him, Daddy.”

Daddy.

And I knew I was properly screwed.

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Chapter Three

Present Day

“I can see it in your eyes,” Sergio said. “You don’t approve.”

He’d caught me just before I could slip off the property minutes after Marcus had. What’s the point in lying? I wondered. “You’re right,” I sighed. “Thousands blown on flowers and cupcakes and tables for a graduation is excessive.”

“Nothing that has to do with my Tatiana is excessive.”

My pulse quickened hearing her name. “Marcus told me the money is gone. I’m not going to hassle you for refunds. At least she’s only graduating from college once.” What is she doing next? The thought bit me out of the blue. Will she move or continue to live under her dad’s shadow? What she’d said, about feeling like she was trapped, I couldn’t get it out of my head.

If she wasn’t staying in this mansion, I could see her much easier.

No, idiot. You can’t risk seeing her ever again.

My boss considered me, his fingers massaging his chin. “I hate your sour disapproval. Did you have fun at my last party?”

Heat boiled up my neck. “Yes.” More than he knew.

“Then return here tonight. If you have a good time at my daughter’s graduation party, it’ll soothe some of my spending guilt away.”

“Sir—”

He waved his arm to shut me up. “And, I’ll let you have more control.”

“How do you mean?”

“My money. I’ll open my books fully to you. We’ll expand your responsibility to more of the businesses.”

“Won’t that upset Marcus?” He’d been in control of most of Sergio’s accounts for years.

“Marcus?” he snorted. “Between us, the man’s been slacking in his duties. I could use more eyes, more discerning minds.”

Stunned by his offer, I gathered myself up. “Thank you. Your trust means everything to me.”

He clapped a heavy hand on my shoulder. “I’d hate to ever lose that trust.”

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Across the way, sitting up on her lawn chair, Tatiana had slid her glasses up the crown of her scalp. She was watching me with curious eyes. Shame made the acid in my empty stomach bubble. “The same goes for me, Sir.”

“Good. Then I’ll see you later tonight. Party starts at five, wear something well-ironed and expensive.” He strolled back into the mansion, leaving me alone on the grass. But not for long. Like she was waiting for the chance, Tatiana hopped off her chair and came my way.

She glowed in the sunlight. A beautiful vision from a dream. It was too bad that she brought so much danger with her. As she got close, I narrowed my eyes, wondering if I could excuse myself in a way that wouldn’t cause too much drama.

Her long legs crossed at the ankle when she stopped walking. Her grace was obvious even when she held still. “You’re mad at me,” she said.

“Of course I’m mad.” Or I wanted to be. It was a struggle to sound it with her standing so damn close. “You didn’t tell me you were Sergio’s daughter.”

“If I had, would you have said no to the BJ?” she teased.

I squared off with her with my shoulders hunched. “Keep your voice down.”

Tatiana’s smile widened. “You’re worried my father will learn what we did. Relax, that was weeks ago. I haven’t told anyone, and I don’t plan to. I’m good at keeping secrets,” she said softly. Her body leaned my way; I smelled her intoxicating perfume. “In case you want me to keep some more.”

My cock flexed in my boxers. “What happened between us can never happen again.”

The disappointment in her face mirrored my own. I was quicker to hide my feelings than she was, though. Or maybe she wanted me to see how let down she was to know I had no intention of being alone with her again. “Was I that bad?” she whispered.

My mouth fell open. “What?”

“That was my first time doing that.” Her eyes were downcast. “If that’s why—”

“Jesus,” I said, ruffling my hair in exasperation. She really is a virgin. The reality of that had my dick getting hard. “Tatiana, it’s not that.”

“Then it was good?”

I wanted to tell her it was fucking amazing, but I bit my tongue. “I’m not stupid enough to think that your father wouldn’t kill me if he learned about what we did. It’s not happening again, ever. Is that clear?”

“You’re so strict. I love it.” She placed her nails on the crook of my arm, sending hot electricity through my shirt, into my skin, and down to my lower belly. Tatiana was no taller than my chin but she exuded a confidence that said she expected me to crumble.

Gripping her wrist, I forced her hand down between us. The book that was wedged between her elbow and ribs plummeted to the ground, landing with a thud. Intrigue turned her rich eyes into pure inky black. “I’m not playing,” I snapped.

She tugged at me—I let her go. “Yes, you are.” Her smile was gone. Her confidence was not. “Everyone is playing games in my father’s world. You’re no different, no matter what you think.”

“Fighting to keep your father’s respect so I don’t lose my job or worse isn’t the same as what you’re trying to make me do.”

“And what am I trying to make you do?” she purred.

The way she rolled her tongue reminded me of how well she’d licked my cock. Ignoring the agonizing rush of desire, I crouched and picked up her book. “What’s this?” I asked, glancing at the elegantly engraved leather cover.

Tatiana hesitated before answering. “Have you ever had a tarot reading?”

I barked a quick laugh, burying my hands in my jacket pockets. “I’d never bother.”

“Why?” she asked, her eyes challenging me.

“Because it’s pointless fluff. Meaningless.”

“You don’t believe in it.”

“Not at all.”

“Then what do you believe in?” she asked.

I lifted my shoulders to my ears. “Facts. Math. Good, intelligent decision making.”

She arched her eyebrows. “Mhm. You definitely believe in smart decisions, Mr. Got-a-secret-BJ-from-his-boss’s-daughter.”

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My neck tensed. "I have work to get to."

"I'll see you tonight," she said with a wink.

"Why do you think I'd show up for your party?" I asked. There was no way she overheard her father and I talking.

"Because I believe in facts, too," she said. "And factually, you can't stay away from me."

I itched to tell her she was wrong.

But I couldn't.

I arrived at the party exactly on time, not a minute before or after. I'd slipped into a pale-gray suit and jacket combo with a navy-blue tie. Distantly, I knew it would bring out my eyes, make me more attractive to...

To Tatiana.

I had to get her out of my head.

One hour, I decided. One hour to be seen by the boss, ooh and ahh over the appetizers, and nurse a single cocktail before I could split.

The party was packed and I calculated my odds of finding myself one-on-one with Tatiana again very low. I could do this with minimum damage or temptation if I just stuck to my plan. It was foolproof. It was not, however, Tatiana in a plunging neckline proof.

I sidled up to the bar scanning the room for a familiar face. If I could find someone from the office to stick to for the next hour, we could talk third quarter financials and I could escape merely wishing the lady of the hour congratulations rather than fucking her beautiful face.

When I graduated from college, I didn't attend a single graduation party. Come to think of it, I could probably count the number of college parties I attended on one hand. I'd planned to graduate in three years and start working as soon as possible. And I did it, of course. But even with my limited experience, this party seemed unusually subdued for college seniors.

Looking around, I saw as many parents of grads as grads themselves. And something was missing. It was like the guest list was a random selection of the senior class rather than a close-knit group of friends. Even though my goal for the evening was avoiding her, I had to wonder where Tatiana was hiding.

"What'll you have, sir?" the bartender asked.

"I'll take a whiskey neat, thanks."

As I was waiting for my drink, I struck gold: Dianne from HR walked up. I usually avoided Dianne at the office. She's the type of colleague who lives for after work drinks and group birthday cards, but tonight I could make an exception. For me, work is work, and my personal life is just that—personal. But with temptation lurking just around the corner, I'd need to get personal with Dianne to save my professional life.

“Dianne! It’s great to see you!” I said.

By the look on her face, she was surprised by my attention, but like the good little office den mother she was, smiled warmly at me as the bartender presented my drink.

“Rolland, I didn’t think you liked to... fraternize.”

“Some invitations are impossible to turn down.” I let her interpret that however she wanted.

“Look at this place,” she said, gesturing with a sweep of her hand to the elaborately decorated ballroom. “Tatiana is the jewel in her father’s crown. His devotion to that girl is amazing. He spares no expense for his princess. Have you tried the Kobe sliders the waiters are carting around? I swear I’ve had half a dozen.”

I led Dianne to a small cocktail table as we chatted about the staffs’ new babies and the latest happy hour menu at Little Pete’s across from the office. As Dianne was typing on her cell phone, sending me an article that I should read before our next “Safety in the Workplace” presentation, I saw her.

Tatiana.

She looked like she’d been plucked from an old film noir movie—from another time and place, where the atmosphere was heavy with sex and danger. In that ballroom with guests dressed to the nines, she stood out; a red silk robe, belted at the waist, clinging to her ass like some magnetic force.

Her hair, darker than I remembered it, cascaded down her shoulders in gentle waves. It veiled her face except for her magic little mouth, her ruby painted lips. I couldn’t take my eyes off those lips, or stop my mind from wandering back to the night when her mouth was on me.

Dianne excused herself just in time for me to adjust myself under the table. I'd also need to adjust my plan. I wouldn't last another thirty minutes at this party now that I saw my Fun Girl. I couldn't take my eyes off of Tatiana and the way her body moved underneath the loosely draped silk. I watched her as she made a circuit around the room, greeting groups of people—classmates, by the looks of them.

They exchanged hellos and spoke briefly. I didn't detect the slightest bit of warmth or familiarity between any of them. No bursts of laughter, just flat conversations, as if they were talking about the weather. I couldn't find a hint of the seductress I'd met the other night.

Maybe Tatiana's college years were spent similarly to mine, focused on grades and building a stellar resume for graduation, but I could hardly believe it was by choice. When I started college, I'd zeroed in on a plan, and no kegger or karaoke night was going to distract me. But Tatiana, gorgeous spontaneous blowjob-in-the-garden Tatiana, she didn't seem like the type who'd voluntarily give up her social life.

I spotted Sergio across the room. It looked like he was mixing business with pleasure, holding court over a few older men. Marcus was easy to recognize, the others took me half a second. Investors from our last meeting. As his accountant, this pleased me; he'd certainly spent a fortune on this party, so a small return on the investment made me happy. But I wondered how much of this evening was for Tatiana, and how much was for her father's business interests.

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Marcus spotted me where I stood. He made a face, like a silent, sympathetic way to say he didn't want to be here either. He wasn't going to be able to slip over to talk to me so I could politely kill more time.

This is my chance to leave. The Montalla family dynamics weren't any of my business. I'd done my duty; I'd shown up, ate, and even smiled. I didn't need to be here any longer. It was time for me to split before this evening took a turn for the—

“Rolland.”

My name had never sounded so good. “Tatiana,” I said, standing to greet her. “This is a fantastic party. Congratulations on your graduation. You must be relieved. Your hard work has paid off.”

She looked at my extended hand and the side of her mouth quirked up. She slowly shook her head, as if in admonishment, and asked, “Why so shy?”

She leaned in to allow me to kiss her cheek. What could I do? I had no choice but to oblige. I could smell her shampoo, feel the tickle of her soft hair against my face. She reached up and placed her hand on my collar, her fingertips ever so slightly brushing my skin. It was only a second, that physical contact, but I felt her in every cell of my body. I could feel her heat, her pent up energy. To everyone else at the party it must have looked like a simple hello, but I knew what this was. It was a promise, it was an invitation for more.

“Let's sit together,” she said as we pulled apart. Before I could explain that I was just about to leave, she was seated and gesturing to a passing waiter, requesting two

glasses of champagne.

This felt like a trap. But how much trouble could I get in in the middle of a crowded ballroom? It may have been a deviation in my plan, but I was in control. Her little games wouldn't win out over my resolution.

The waiter returned quickly with two glasses of bubbly, and Tatiana raised her glass. "What should we toast to, Rolland?"

"It seems fitting at your graduation party to toast to new experiences and future endeavors. Cheers. Congratulations Tatiana."

"Yes. To new endeavors. Cheers," she said.

We clinked glasses and sipped.

It was feeling perfectly normal, like maybe the other day was just a blip, an errant data point in my otherwise predictable life. If Tatiana could move on from the other night, certainly I could too.

"So tell me," I said, trying not to gaze down her cruelly inviting cleavage, "What are your plans now that you're a graduate?"

I was so fucking naïve. Her answer shouldn't have shocked me.

She leaned over close to me and whispered, "I don't know, exactly. Maybe giving you a taste of me? I was thinking you might want to return the favor sometime."

I choked on my champagne. It wasn't just shock at her bold words that had me sputtering like an idiot. It was excitement, too. Those words, taste me, knocked the wind right out of my lungs. All I could think of was how that red silk felt on her skin,

what she was wearing—or not wearing—underneath, and what it would be like the first time the tip of my tongue slid along her crease.

“I meant career plans,” I hissed, trying to steer her back to appropriate public topics. “Will you continue to live here, or do you want independence?”

She picked up her glass and threw back her head in an uproarious laugh. Despite my annoyance, I had the urge to nip at her long, beautiful neck.

“I suppose if I lived somewhere else, getting another go with you would be easier on your nerves.”

Was she determined to keep poking at me? “I have a good thing going with your father, I can’t risk throwing it all away if he finds out what happened between us. I’d also prefer to keep all my bones intact.”

Suddenly Tatiana’s expression changed. She put her friendly hostess mask back on. I looked over my shoulder and saw a girl her own age approaching us. “Abigail,” Tatiana said warmly, although I could detect tension in her poise. “It’s so nice of you to come tonight.”

Abigail’s smile never reached her eyes. She wore a high-necked blouse and pencil skirt, her hair tied up in a severe bun. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to realize these two weren’t friends. “Of course, I wouldn’t have missed it. It’s been a fun party but I have to go now. As you know, I’m flying out to Cape Town in the morning with Professor Hicks. It’s too bad you won’t be joining the team, but I guess you have your hands full with parties and such.”

I could see Tatiana gritting her teeth. “I do have a million things lined up. Good luck in South Africa. Perhaps our paths will cross again. Goodbye, Abigail.” Tatiana’s face remained a mask of composure as the other girl walked off. I could detect anger

bubbling beneath the surface. There was more to this encounter than it seemed.

“What was that all about?” I asked, although I regretted it immediately. I didn’t need to know anything else about Tatiana Montalla. I wanted to say my goodbyes, get in my car, and probably jerk off the minute I closed my apartment door.

“Just a classmate,” Tatiana said breezily, but her expression had shifted. She looked hurt... younger than she had before. “Abigail and some other students from my program are spending the summer in Cape Town. It wasn’t...feasible...that I go along.”

Tatiana was sexy, infuriating, and dangerous. She was not, however, a good liar. And with that obvious lie, I saw her vulnerable side for the first time. It was raw. Enticing. The last nail in my coffin.

After a few minutes of silence, she eyed me over the rim of her drink. “Follow me.”

I didn't give it a second thought.

Chapter Four

Tatiana's room resembled a suite at the Four Seasons more than the room of a college girl.

Her bed was made up with half a dozen pillows and an expensive looking down comforter. A small settee was under the large bay window, with a small coffee table in front of it. Tatiana was on that settee, her foot on the table in front of her, unbuckling the three-inch fuck-me-heels she'd been wearing all night. Her red silk robe had parted and gave me a glimpse of her creamy bare legs, almost all the way up to her inner thigh.

Fuck me.

"Didn't you want to stick around and say goodbye to your friends?" I asked Tatiana casually, trying to ignore the fact that I was in her fucking bedroom rather than in my car driving home.

"I didn't really care about anyone down there. I just gave the event planner the senior class roster and she invited everyone. This party wasn't really for me; it was for my father. He likes to mark special occasions by spending a shit ton of money. I'm sure you've noticed. Nobody's going to miss me."

"What did you study in college?" I asked as I pretended to look over her bookshelf. Anything to distract me from Tatiana and my growing hard-on.

"Eh, this and that, it's boring. What did you study in college?"

“Finance,” I said, fiddling with the binding of a book. “Specifically financial planning for business owners with diversified holdings and investments. I like the challenge of anticipating risks from a varied portfolio. Working for your dad has really kept me on my toes.”

“Well, it’s good to find your passion,” she said. “Sit down, Rolland. You’re making me nervous hovering like that. I won’t bite.”

The room was cloaked in silence. She was right; I couldn’t keep standing there. Why had I come upstairs with her? It wasn’t just to be polite, it was because she intrigued me.

Despite my better judgment, I wanted her.

I sat down with some space between us, limiting the temptation to touch her and to kiss her, but Tatiana had other things in mind. She stretched out her legs, landing her bare feet in my lap. “Did you bring me a graduation gift, Rolland?”

Her question took me by surprise, and I was embarrassed, because I hadn’t even thought to bring her a present. I ran a hand through my hair sheepishly. “I’m really sorry. I guess I’m not in the habit of attending parties. It didn’t occur to me to bring you a gift. What would you have wanted?”

“I can’t think of a single thing I need except for you to rub my feet. They’re killing me. Would you, please?”

I’d been sitting with my hands fisted at my sides, trying not to touch her at all. But this girl was so blunt in her attempt to win me over. Instead of arguing, I took her foot into my hand and started kneading her arch. I was learning it was as hard to say no to Tatiana as it was to her father. The Montallas had a gift for getting what they wanted.

I rubbed gently up to the ball of her heel, relieving the tension between her toes. Tatiana sighed. Then I made a fatal mistake: I turned my head and looked at her.

She'd thrown her head back against the arm of the settee. Her robe was gaping open at the neck, and it gave me a glimpse of her round breast, a perfect handful. Her hair fell back, and for the first time that evening she looked relaxed, at peace. Her eyes were closed and her red lips were parted just a bit, a soft moan escaping her lips. She was like a delicious feast laid out just for me.

"That feels amazing, Rolland. Don't stop," she said. And then she shifted. At first I wasn't sure if it was deliberate when her foot made contact with my dick. I snapped my attention away from her and toward the door again, hoping against hope that I could keep myself under control.

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Her foot stayed pressed against me, until she stirred, just slightly. It wouldn't have been perceivable to anyone else, but she was definitely making small strokes over my pants. I tried to ignore it, tried to convince myself it was unintentional and only in my horny imagination, but my cock disagreed and my peripheral vision went hazy. As I grew harder, she became bolder, running her foot to the top of my cock and drawing a circle around the head with her toe.

I let her go on for longer than I should have. I could feel my balls tightening, anticipating release, and I found it hard to hold still, desperately wanting to thrust up, to hold her still and rub myself against her until I came. It had to stop. We couldn't take this further because I knew if she gave me the slightest opportunity, I would be all over, bending her over the arm of the settee, kissing and licking that beautiful neck, and burying my dick inside of her in an instant.

Her father is in the house.

In a desperate move I jumped up, trying to think of how to keep my dick in my pants. There—by her bed was the leather bound tarot book I'd seen her with earlier. "Tell me about this," I said, snatching it up.

She put her feet together on the floor and smirked at me. "You want to talk about tarot now, Rolland?"

"Yes," I countered, way too enthusiastically.

"Okay, bring it over. I'll give you a crash course. I've got my deck of cards, too. I'll do a reading for you. What do you say?"

I'd say that sounds better than someone walking in on you giving me a foot-job,I thought. "Sounds like a plan."

We sat on the floor in front of the coffee table. Tatiana had me shuffle the cards a few times, and cut them into three piles. She had a look of concentration on her face as she explained that I was cleansing the cards, since she hadn't picked them up in a while. I nodded in agreement, pretending that I was interested, but I was honestly just relieved to have some distance between us.

"I'm going to do a single card reading. You might think that's pretty simple, like I couldn't get much insight from a single card, but each card has layers of meaning and depends on your own experiences."

I shrugged. "I don't know how one card varies from multiple ones."

She lifted her eyebrows. "I can see you're not impressed, Rolland. That's okay. My dad thinks this is a total waste of time, too. Play along with me... unless you'd rather playwithme..." she trailed off and leaned over, rubbing her hand up my leg.

I gently moved her hand off my leg. "Flip the card. Let me see what the future holds."

She sighed dramatically, then revealed a card. It was a simple illustration; on the left side was a hand emerging from a cloud. It clutched a double-edged sword carrying a golden crown surrounded by wreathes. The bottom of the card was a lifeless, mountainous landscape.

"The Ace of Swords," she explained. "What's the first thing that comes to mind when you see this card?"

"I see the crown and I think about your dad. My boss. And that sword, I imagine him wielding it against some of my favorite body parts if he caught me upstairs in this

room with you.”

“Wow. You’re a natural,” she deadpanned, titling her head toward me and feigning a serious expression. A strand of hair fell across her face, and my hands itched to tuck it behind her ear. “How about I tell you what I see?”

She really was kind of charming. I nodded.

“The suit of swords represents the mind and intellect. The sharp blade of the sword represents the power of your intellect. The mountains below, that’s the barren emotional life of an intellectual guy like you. But the ace is interesting.” She tapped it a few times. “Aces indicate a moment of breakthrough is in your future. The Ace of Swords encourages you to find truth, clarity. The sword has the ability to cut through deception. This card represents new possibilities, a breakthrough in the way you see a particular situation, or maybe a shift in perception.”

I stared at the card as she spoke. Despite my aversion to games of this nature, I was trying to make sense of her reading, trying to find something to say that wouldn’t make her feel foolish or dismissed.

“What card would best represent you?” I asked. Maybe this would be a way to learn something about her. She’d been so guarded.

“Easy,” she said without hesitation. “The Eight of Wands. It represents action, travel and change.” She looked through the deck for the card. When she found it, she held it out for me to take. It had eight wands flying through the air, with small buds on their ends. Snaking through the background was a river.

“That sounds like the perfect card for a recent college graduate,” I said.

“You’d think,” she said quietly, “but whenever I pull this card for myself it’s upside

down. And the reversal of this card is stagnation, oppression, frustration.”

She was looking straight at me when she spoke, and the expression I’d noticed earlier when she was talking to Abigail was back. She was suddenly a lost and insecure girl. The vixen in the red silk robe vanished like a ghost. So when she reached out to take the card back, I took her hand. Maybe it was the champagne, or the tarot’s suggestion about shifting perceptions, or maybe it was just her beautiful eyes, but I wanted to touch her. I wanted to know her.

“Why would you feel like that? Look around, you have everything,” I whispered.

“I don’t have anything,” she said, raising her voice, tugging her hand from mine. “None of this is mine. This all belongs to my father. I belong to my father. You hear how he talks about me. How everyone does. ‘The jewel in his crown.’ I’ve lived here my entire life. Everything I’ve done has been with his permission. And I was good girl; I listened. I lived at home through college because it made him feel better. But I worked my ass off, I graduated, I found something I love and still...here I am. Stuck. All ambition, no power.”

“What do you love, Tatiana?” I probed.

“Sub-Saharan drought,” she replied.

I hadn’t been expecting that.

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“I don’t mean Ilovedroughts, but that’s what I’m passionate about and what I studied. I was an environmental science major with a focus on water management. That snake downstairs, Abigail, remember her?” Tatiana jumped up, pacing across her bedroom floor, her red silk robe gathered in one hand so she wouldn’t trip over it. “She’s on a flight tomorrow to South Africa to work on a water project for a year with my mentor, Professor Hicks. You know who should have been on that plane, Rolland?” she asked. “Me!” she practically yelled, not giving me a second to respond. “I should be in Cape Town evaluating sites for borehole wells and surveying farms for better water management. I want to make a difference in this world, work hard to improve people’s lives. Instead, I’m here in this gilded cage, the only thing I have to look forward to is a mani-pedi appointment in the morning. There’s nothing I can do. Nothing!”

She was wild. She was raw. She was no less beautiful.

It made sense now, her aggressive sexual nature, the seductive and dangerous games that she played. She was bubbling over with desires, straining against her bonds, grabbing any single way she could to have control.

I wasn’t sure what I was going to do as I stood and walked toward her. My mind was a jumble of thoughts looking at her, standing in front of a bedroom window, her skirt gathered in her hand, her hair out of control and her eyes wild. I was acting on a deep instinct without any conscious thought of what I would do when I reached her.

“There’s always something to do, some plan to work out, Tatiana,” I said, touching her shoulder.

She looked up at me, her face coming back to some composure and calm, and she reached up to cradle my cheek. Smiling sadly she said, “This is who I am. Tatiana Montalla. This here, everything around me, it’s really the only way. I have to learn to live with it. There’s nothing else for me.”

Her eyes were resigned. I’d lived my own life with total freedom. Every move I’d made, each decision was carefully calculated. I bristled, imagining living under someone else’s rules, losing the freedom to make my own choices and follow my path.

I raised my hand to hers on my cheek, turning her palm toward me. Being here in her bedroom was foolish. Touching her intimately was insane. It went against every logical thought in my mind.

And I did it anyway.

Chapter Five

Her palm was warm and smooth. Beneath my fingers I could feel the pulse in her wrist. I raised her hand to my lips and laid a single kiss on its palm. I didn't break eye contact with her, hoping to silently communicate that this game of cat and mouse was over.

I wanted her to know that she'd caught me, but I wasn't ready to let her be in charge.

Our bodies were inches apart. Backing her into a corner killed the last of the distance. The anticipation of touching her, any part of her, had my body buzzing with electricity.

I dropped her hand and smoothed her hair away from her face, sweeping it over her shoulder, exposing her alabaster neck. I leaned in and inhaled her scented skin; lavender with a hint of something spicy. I grazed my lips against her neck, caressing her slow and gently.

She moved her head back to give me better access. "Rolland," she whimpered. I nuzzled my way up to her ear, ghosting my lips over it. I stroked the side of her face with feather light touches up her jawline, burying my fingers in her hair. I tugged her head back further, and turned my face to her so we were nose to nose. Tracing my finger over her plump lips, I watched her reactions, eager to experience them.

Her eyes went fuzzy. Desperate. Good—it was her turn to be teased. I allowed my hand to travel down to the exposed skin between her breasts, then I pulled apart her robe to finally have a proper look. She was wearing a black lace bra that barely

covered her tits. I hooked my pinky under the lace and exposed her nipple. Caressing her breast I made a slow circle around her pert nipple, watching it harden with my attention.

Every few passes, I let my finger graze the tip directly, and felt her jump, her chest beginning to heave with craving. I licked my thumb and rubbed the pad over her nipple, causing her to bite her lower lip and let out a small whimper. As much as my body was telling me to pounce, turning her on like that, keeping her wanting, was too much fun to give up.

I could have played with her tit all night, but then Tatiana took a small step to the side and the bottom of her robe spread, exposing a bare leg. I skated my hand down the cool silk robe, stroking her thigh. With my forehead against hers, just a hairsbreadth between our lips, I luxuriated in her wicked desire.

There was a spark of excitement in her eyes. I know when a woman wants to be kissed. It was written all over her face, but I wasn't ready, not yet. I wanted to draw out this moment, watch her lose herself in the sensation of my breath on her skin and my fingers memorizing every angle of her body. I could feel the goose bumps rising under my fingers where I touched her.

Without thinking, my fingers traveled higher, slipping around to her inner thigh. Her breath was coming faster. I realized it was matching my own. Who was in control here? The answer was soon clear as Tatiana reached down to my hand and moved it up until it was resting against her panties. Heat emanated from her pussy; the lace was damp. I had to suppress the moan that had been building in my chest.

When she removed her hand from mine, I didn't retreat. I softly ran a finger over her cleft, imagining how the friction would send shock-waves through her. My vision was blurring in this suspended moment; staring in her eyes, her mouth so close to mine, my finger so close to really feeling her.

“Touch me,” she begged. At those words, her tongue brushed across my lips. When I didn’t flinch, she went further. She placed her lips against mine, not kissing, just tracing my lips with her pink tongue.

She reached her hand between us and rested it against my zipper. I was rock hard and the pressure had me instantly thrusting into her hand. Any self-control I had flew out the window. I dipped my finger under her panties and traced her wet seam, coating my finger in her juices. She let out a hiss when I made contact.

My head was swimming with too many sensations, too many competing desires. I longed to have her hot hand on my cock, pumping it while I watched her face, a mask of desire. But my most urgent need was to watch her come. She was dripping wet and my finger slid easily over her swollen clit, finding a rhythm that had her panting in my arms.

“Faster,” she said, as she moved her hips in time with my finger. I made small circles over clit, hardly applying any pressure at all, hoping to tease an orgasm out of her and watch it explode across her face. I kept dipping my finger back inside her, so turned on by how wet she was, by how wet I made her.

Her mouth was against me, her fingers were digging into my scalp, holding on for dear life as she enjoyed the ride. I knew she was close, and I kept rubbing in a tight figure eight over her clit. I knew I was bringing her closer.

She started jerking, her movements becoming unpredictable,; her orgasm was inevitable. Just then, we heard the door slam behind us. We pulled apart quickly and I found myself stalking across the room, not knowing where I was even heading. Tatiana was pulling her robe together, tightening the belt and running to the door to see who’d interrupted us.

“What the fuck?” she said to me as she opened the door, but when she came back in

she just shook her head. “I didn’t see anyone in the hallway. Maybe it was just the wind?”

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“Or maybe it was one of at least a dozen people who absolutely should not see me fingering my boss’s daughter,” I said through clenched teeth. I was fucking angry. Not at Tatiana, but at myself. What the hell was I doing letting my dick make decisions for me? Just days ago my life was under control, motoring along as planned and on schedule.

I had a great job where I was climbing the corporate ladder. I didn’t have any problem avoiding unnecessary complications. I had two worlds: work and my personal life. So what if my personal life didn’t have much actual life in it? There was time for that. Later.

I sat on Tatiana’s bed and held my head in my hands. “Christ,” I snarled.

“Relax. It’s not like I’m a child,” Tatiana said, that teasing note in her voice again. She walked across the room and sat down next to me, leaning her mouth close to my ear. “And it’s not like I’m going to tell my father how talented you are with your hands and how wet you make me.” She started sliding her hand up my knee.

I jumped off the bed. This evening was over. It had to be. “Tatiana, this can’t happen. You of all people should understand the power your father has over me. I can’t risk my job, everything I’ve worked for, even if I—“

“Even if you what, Rolland? Want me? Because I know you want me. I know you do. And you wanted me, before you knew I was Sergio Montalla’s daughter, you saw me. This doesn’t need to be hard. Please, let me have this. Let me have this one thing.”

She was pleading with me, and she was breaking my heart. She was desperate for

something of her own, and at this juncture in her life, she thought I could be it, the key to her freedom. I'd desperately wanted to make her come before, see her break apart in a million pieces, but I wanted to give her an escape, too. And now here she was, begging me for it, and I wanted to say yes. I wanted to finish what we started and see where it could lead.

She must have seen my resolve cracking because she walked across the room to me. Her cheeks were still flushed from before, and she started fingering the collar of my jacket. Her red silk robe was driving me wild. I couldn't stop imagining how it would fall into a puddle at her feet with just a pull on the belt and soft nudge at the shoulder.

Most decisions for me were black and white. I could weigh the pros and cons, risks and rewards, and come to the right solution for any problem. But standing so close to Tatiana, remembering how slippery she felt under my finger and how responsive she was to my touch, I couldn't think past my most basic and primal urges.

"Just a kiss, Rolland," she said. It was barely words, more like breathing. "Let's just start with a kiss and see where it leads."

I was hypnotized. I wanted this to be easy like she said it could be, so when her chin tilted up to me, and her mouth was so close to mine, I claimed her. I laid my lips against hers, firmly this time. I let her tongue sink into my mouth, tasting champagne and strawberries and so many erotic promises.

Her fingers twined through my hair; we were moving backwards, until her knees hit the bed and she sat down. She looked up at me with innocent eyes. I was so close. So close to taking that next step. To pushing her back on the bed and spreading her legs to taste her. Making her scream my name.

When she reached for my belt, I grabbed her wrist. It was all suddenly clear. "Tatiana, stop. I'm not what you think I am. You look at me and you think you see

freedom, but you're wrong. I'm tied to your father just as much as you are. I'm completely dependent on him. I've been working for years to get where I am in his company, to have him depend on me like he does. I amnotgoing to walk away from that. He won't let me walk away, especially with his little girl. If you want freedom, if you want to break away from your father, you need to find some way to do that without me."

I didn't wait for a response from her because I knew she'd convince me to stay.

And I knew I couldn't.

I turned away from her quickly because I couldn't bear to see the disappointment on her face. This whole night had been a confusing mess, and if my professional life survived unscathed, it would be a small miracle.

I walked out of her room and to my car as fast as I could.

Chapter Six

It had been a few days since the graduation party, and so far there didn't seem to be any blow-back from my indiscretion. I'd talked to Sergio several times since, and he hadn't even mentioned Tatiana's name to me.

I was on edge though, waiting for the other shoe to drop. I imagined my colleagues talking about me in the break room. So when Dianne asked me out to drinks at Little Pete's one evening, I said yes. It caught her by surprise; me too. But I needed to test the waters and allay my concerns that Tatiana and I were the latest gossip.

On Wednesday night, when I'd typically be working out, I was seated at a large table of colleagues and listening to their conversations. The air reeked of stale beer. The jukebox played one terrible song after another. It was definitely not how I wanted to be spending my evening.

I'd almost convinced myself that this excursion was useless and I should head home, when RJ Dalton, a supreme douchebag from the marketing department, caught my attention. "I'm not saying I wouldn't hit that, dude," he said loudly. "Jesus, that dress Tatiana wore at her party? It was fucking perfect." My ears burned as I tuned in. I hated the idea of anyone looking at Tatiana like I did. "It's just not worth the risk. Montalla would have my nuts in a vise if I even glanced in her direction."

"It wouldn't be worth your time either," a man who could be RJ's twin said. "That chick is so stuck up. Can you imagine how high maintenance she would be?"

"I heard Mr. Montalla basically paid for her to get that degree," a blonde woman—I

recognized her from the front desk of the office—said. “You know rich girls like that. They never have to lift a finger or work a day in their lives.”

I grit my molars. The Tatiana in their imaginations didn’t match the Tatiana I knew. I could feel myself growing defensive for her, wanting to explain to them all about her interest in water management and how hard she’d worked through college. But what did it matter to me what a bunch of office sad sacks thought about her? I didn’t care about them, and I certainly didn’t, shouldn’t, care about Tatiana.

I started to sweat and my hands were twitching with the urge to knock out RJ. It was time to go. There hadn’t been the smallest hint that anyone at this table suspected anything happened between Tatiana and me. If someone did see us, it wasn’t any of these yahoos.

The paranoid voice in my head had quieted down, but it was replaced with another that whispered tender thoughts of Tatiana. And tender thoughts about Tatiana always led to very impure thoughts about Tatiana. I checked my watch, deciding I could make it the gym and work off some of this tension before it got too late.

The cool air outside the bar was a welcome sensation on my skin. Without the jukebox’s assault on my ears, I could really think. It had been days since I kissed Tatiana, since someone may have seen us together. There was no indication anyone I know saw us. If someone had seen us, what would the motivation be to spill? And if they were motivated to tell our secret, wouldn’t they have done it already?

Carefully considering each of those facts, I put the matter to rest. What happened the other night, it happened. I couldn’t turn back time. Our paths had no reason to cross again anytime soon. It was time for me to move on with my life. My predictable, well planned life.

Had it always felt so hollow?

Driving over to Lakeside Plaza the next morning, I wasn't exactly sure what I was doing. Sergio's phone call had woke me before my alarm even went off. I was annoyed my schedule for the day had been disrupted. There was no arguing with the boss, though, especially since he seemed on the brink of offering me full access to the books at work. I knew I could work more efficiently without Marcus as a go-between.

Sergio said he had a special assignment for me. The details were vague but since I was going over to a shopping mall, I assumed I'd be looking at some commercial property he was considering buying. With that in mind, I was mentally going over the checklist of questions I'd have for the realtor before reporting back to Sergio.

I arrived at Lakeside Plaza exactly on time. I grabbed a black coffee while I waited at the main entrance, exactly as Sergio had directed me. It was ten minutes past my appointment time. With whom I was meeting, I still didn't know. I was getting antsy from the uncertainty and feeling like I was wasting my time.

Just as I pulled out my phone to text Sergio, a sleek, black Maybach pulled up to the valet. The driver, decked out in black brimmed hat and white driving gloves, opened the back passenger's door. A gorgeous bare leg extending out of the car caught my eye; I swallowed in anticipation to see the beautiful woman attached to it.

My eyes traveled up that body, taking in the tight denim skirt, the loose fitting flannel shirt knotted just above her navel, unbuttoned at the top revealing just a peak of cleavage, all the way up to... Tatiana Montalla's infuriating smirk.

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This was not what I had anticipated. Was Sergio setting me up somehow? Was it a trap? Why would Sergio arrange for me to meet Tatiana, of all people?

“Tatiana,” I said as I walked toward her, “I wasn’t expecting you.”

“Trust me. I didn’t have a choice in this. It seems you and I are both my dad’s subordinates and subject to his whims.”

Her skirt swished toward the bakery where I’d bought my coffee. It clung to the perfect swell of her ass, a temptation I wasn’t handling as well as I hoped I would. I had to keep my dick in my pants and my eyes above her shoulders.

Following her, I waited as she ordered a cappuccino. She was relaxed and didn’t have the air of confusion that I most certainly did. But she wasn’t looking at me. We were standing inches apart and she wouldn’t even acknowledge me. I stood silently by while she added two sugars and a sprinkle of cinnamon to her cappuccino. Then she strode out of the bakery, leaving me behind.

Did I chase after her because of that tight denim skirt and the scent of lavender that wafted behind her? No. I chased after her because I needed my job and to keep her father happy. The sooner I understood my task, the sooner I could complete it and get back to my desk, to the comforting and predictable spreadsheets I didn’t want to spread wide and fuck.

Still not glancing at me, she ascended an escalator deeper into the mall. Where was she going, what was all of this? “Tatiana. Tatiana!” I called as I took the escalator steps two by two, trying to reach her. When we got to the top she continued walking,

as if she didn't hear me. "Hey, hold on now!" I raised my voice as I grabbed her shoulder. Rule number one already broken.

She looked at my hand for an instant and then slouched away from me, causing it to fall, but she didn't run, she stayed and looked me in the eye. "What do you want?" she asked.

"What do I want? Your dad's left me in the dark. I have no idea what we're doing."

"My dad is taking your advice," she said, pursing her lips. "He says his days of hemorrhaging money are over. You're here to babysit me, to make sure I don't spend too much money. Isn't that perfect?" she asked sarcastically.

I was at a loss for words. Sergio had taken my advice? I should have been ecstatic. This was like some monkey paw curse, though. "He expects me to curtail your shopping?"

"He sure does." She rolled her eyes, then pointed over at a department store. "Either follow me, or don't, but I've got clothes to buy, budget limit or not."

Still reeling from the situation, I walked with her.

"So what have you been up to since the last time I saw you?" Tatiana's voice carried over the dressing room door in Barneys. It was the first time she'd spoken to me in the past hour that I'd been sitting here in the VIP dressing suite. Apparently when your last name is Montalla, you get special treatment at Barneys and a special attendant named Amy.

I was perched on a stool in the suite outside her dressing room, an untouched glass of

champagne by my side, scrolling through market reports on my phone and wondering how much work was piling up on my desk while I was away. Amy came in from time to time to bring new clothes and take the rejects away. So far, Tatiana had chosen about a dozen things to buy, and I had carefully noted each price tag, keeping a running tally to keep her under Sergio's budget.

"Just the usual. Work. Gym. The unexpected trip to Barneys," I laughed.

"You don't have much of a personal life, do you?" she asked.

I didn't like where this conversation was heading and I was going to cut it off before it even got off the ground. "Let's not blur the boundaries here, Tatiana." I walked closer to the stall door so I could speak more quietly. "I really enjoyed the other night. But this...this thing between us, it can't happen. You know it. So please, let's just buy a few things and get on with our day."

She opened the door wearing a tight red gingham dress that stopped just below her knees. "Rolland, get over yourself. I may be a young but I'm not a child. For your information, I've moved on. In fact, I'm shopping for a weekend away at the beach with my cousin. I expect I'll meet lots of guys who are closer to my own age and a lot less...stuffy than you," she said. Then she turned around, the dress was unzipped to her white lace panties, her dark hair falling down her bare back. "Now zip me up," she said haughtily.

Zip the dress and then we can leave, I told myself. But my fingers were shaking as I took the tab in my hand. I had to move her hair to the side, and I tried so hard not to notice how silky it was. Tatiana trembled as I zipped the dress, my finger inadvertently skirting over her soft skin.

"What do you think?" she asked, stepping back into the dressing room and turning to the three-way mirror. She smoothed her hands over her body, scrunching up her nose

as she studied herself. She reached over to a bench and picked up a straw hat. I couldn't help but observe how perfectly the dress hugged her ass, and I balled my hands so I wouldn't reach out and touch her.

"It's fine," I said curtly.

"It's fine," she mimicked back. "Thanks a lot, Coco Chanel."

"Fashion advice is above my pay grade, Tatiana," I said, stepping into the dressing room. She was determined not to make this easy. "I'm here to keep you within budget. If you tell me how much it is, I'll tell you what I think. I've kept a running account on my phone and—"

"Get out. I have one more thing to try on." She took both hands and placed them on my shoulders, turning me around and shoving me out of the dressing room.

I hated this feeling. This situation had too many variables. Tatiana was exasperating. She was sexy. I wanted to bend her over my knee and spank her. I wanted to kiss her.

Downing my ignored glass of champagne seemed like the safest bet at the moment. After I drained that glass, I poured myself another. The workday was a total wash, there was no use pretending otherwise. Even though this was a bullshit assignment, at least I'd earn Sergio's gratitude by keeping Tatiana under budget. And if I could get through an afternoon with just a door separating me from naked Tatiana without losing my mind, well, that was a major accomplishment.

I heard a whistle come from the dressing room.

"Are you whistling at yourself?" I called over the door. "How many glasses of champagne have you had?"

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“I’ve just found the pièce de résistance of this shopping trip,” she called breezily to me.

“Fantastic, then let’s wrap it up and get out of here. Give me your credit card while you’re at it and I’ll find Amy. Maybe I can salvage a few hours at the office.”

Her black AmEx card came sailing over the door and landed by my foot, followed by the price tag that fluttered down beside it.

Chantel Dressing Gown, Amethyst. \$3,885.00

“Are you out of your mind!” I shouted. “No dress is worth that price.”

I was so close to extricating myself from this nightmare. I was minutes away from getting into my car, reporting back to Sergio that the trip had been successful, and having kept my dick safely in my pants the entire time. I didn’t want a fight, I just wanted her to go with the fucking plan, act like an adult for a change. Be just a littlereasonable for once.

“It’s not a dress, it’s nightwear. Like a bathrobe. I’ve been looking for something like this foragesand Ihaveto have it. So suck it up, I’m getting it,” she said like a little brat.

“Then some of this other shit has to go back,” I growled, pulling up the list I’d been keeping on my phone. “I’ll read you my spreadsheet and you tell me what you can live without. We’ll start subtracting until we get within Sergio’s budget. Let’s start with Gucci Tortoiseshell Sunglasses. That’ll free up about \$600. Agree?”

“No,” she said bluntly.

“How about the Brent Black straw hat for,” I couldn’t believe I was reading this correctly, “\$900?”

“No.”

I was close to my breaking point. It was like she was trying to make this difficult for me. Hold it together, Rolland, I told myself. I had the AmEx card now and I was in charge. I could wait her out. She had to come out of the dressing room eventually.

But then she did something I hadn’t been expecting.

She threw the door open.

Holy fucking shit, how had I gone my entire life not knowing what a Chantel Dressing Gown was and that it is absolutely worth every penny? My eyes immediately zeroed in on her ass. The gown was a sheer deep purple floral lace, and I could see Tatiana’s white lace thong through it. Raising my eyes to the mirrors, I saw the front of the gown. She wasn’t wearing a bra and the flower print of the lace concealed her nipples. A sash cinched the waist, and the robe parted giving a clear view of her legs. She was practically naked in front of me, and no scenario I’d anticipated included coming face to face with her like this.

Amy’s voice rang into the suite. “Can I help you out with anything else, Ms. Montalla?”

Tatiana’s eyes locked on mine. “I’ll just need a few more minutes to finish up,” she called out. “I think I have everything I need.”

When I heard Amy’s heels click away, I focused back on the beautiful woman in front

of me. How was she so calm? “Listen,” I hissed, training my eyes on hers and trying to block out the infinite reflections of her body flooding me from the mirrors, “you’re not walking out of here with this garment. I’m going to go outside, pay for everything else, and you’ll meet me at the register without this ridiculous getup.”

A storm of emotions ran across her face. Gathering the hem of the gown, she seemed to grow several inches taller before my eyes. “You’re not my father and I’m not your little girl, Rolland,” she sneered at me. “If you want it off, you’ll have to do it yourself.”

Shit. Why was that so tempting?

She studied me with hot anger making her eyes glow. “Trying to weigh the pros and cons, Rolland? You don’t need to make a new spreadsheet because I’ll tell you what’s going to happen. You’re going to turn around and go pay for everything, including this, and you’ll find some way to explain it my father.”

Who did she think she was to order me around? To act so unreasonably, so haphazardly with my life. It was time for me to take control. “Take it off,” I gritted through my teeth.

She was dead calm. “I told you, if you want it off, you’ll have to do it yourself.”

I was livid. There was a rhythmic whooshing in my ears and my blood was spiked with adrenaline. I reached out and roughly tugged at the sash, causing the robe to open wide, exposing her. I closed the distance between us with a single step, pushing her against the mirror mounted on the wall.

We stood there silently for what seemed like an eternity, both of us breathing heavily from anger or excitement, I wasn’t sure. I didn’t have a next move planned out. I couldn’t think of a single action to get myself out of this situation. Or if I even

wanted to.

I kissed her roughly, pressing her against the mirror. My action broke down the wall between us; Tatiana moaned, collapsing into me. Her tongue slid into my mouth and she started clawing at my jacket, sliding it off my shoulders. There was urgency in our every move; I didn't want to risk thinking. I just wanted her.

I nibbled down her neck, across her clavicle, until I reached her breast. Grabbing her flesh, I covered her flushed nipple with my mouth, swirling around the hardening bud and feeling her slump against me, her knees buckling. I squeezed her breasts together and sucked on her other nipple, encouraged by the sounds she was making, a low moan I could feel vibrating in her chest.

She grabbed a fistful of my hair and drew my head back up, covering my mouth with another kiss. Her hand meandered down my chest, tweaking my nipple and stopping at my belt. The sound of the zipper opening and the feeling of her hand over my boxers had my cock throbbing. She traced her fingernails up and down my shaft a few times. Every nerve in my body was on fire and I was holding my breath.

"This is what you really want, isn't it?" she whispered in my ear. She was rubbing her hand firmly against me now, still over my boxers. Each time she stroked up, she avoided the head and stroked back down. I was trying to match her strokes, desperate for her to touch my skin and the most sensitive tip.

"Tell me what you want," she said. "Answer me."

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I was lost in a flood of sensation. I knew what I wanted. Why couldn't I just say it? I was uncomfortably hard, the head of my cock straining against the elastic waist of my boxers. The answer to her question was easy: I wanted her to jerk me off until I came all over her hand.

"Under my boxers. Touch me," I finally said.

When her cool skin touched my cock, I jumped. I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Fuuuck. Faster," I ordered her, all composure forgotten.

She stroked up and ran a finger over the head, wet with drops of precum. She swiped her finger up and down the cleft a few times before she started pumping with a steady rhythm. I knew it wouldn't be long before I exploded.

My head was resting against her shoulder, absentmindedly kissing, licking and biting her. When she reached lower and grabbed my balls, I sucked on her skin so hard I was sure I would leave a mark.

Her strokes got faster and shorter, concentrated entirely on the top of my cock, swirling her thumb along the underside. Heat was spiraling through me and my balls were tight and begging for relief. I crushed my mouth against hers as the early waves of my orgasm went through me, groaning into her mouth as the first burst of come spurt onto her hand.

She wrapped her fist tightly around me, and I kept pumping, shooting two more streams of sperm. I was breathing heavily. I'd forgotten where we were until I heard

the door to the suite open. I pulled away from Tatiana quickly.

“Are you ready for me to ring you up, Ms. Montalla?” Amy called.

“Yes,” Tatiana replied breezily. “We’ll take everything on the rack out there.”

“And the lingerie? Should I put that on the bill?”

Tatiana laughed. “Oh yeah, I’ll be taking this home with me. Add it on.”

I searched her face to see what was so funny, and she pointed to her hip. I’d come all over the \$3,885.00 Chantel Dressing Gown. Shit. I guess it was in the budget after all.

Chapter Seven

We were standing outside Barneys in silence. We hadn't said a word to each other since the dressing room. Amy was waiting at the valet station with us, seven large bags in her hands. The course of this day took an unexpected turn, but I was surprised to realize I felt happy, my mind felt at rest.

My car pulled up and I suddenly realized I couldn't just hop in and drive away. I had to say something, but what? Thanks for the handjob; don't tell your dad, please.

As the valet handed me my keys, Tatiana broke the silence. "You can put the bags in the trunk, Amy. Thank you," she said as she climbed into my car. What was she doing? I hesitated, then handed the valet his tip and slid behind the wheel.

I started driving without a destination in mind. My mind was racing through every scenario, every possible outcome of this situation, and what action could mitigate the potential damage from fooling around with my boss's daughter and spending an extra 3k at Barneys. But I was also inundated with memories; the feeling of Tatiana's hand on me, of my hands on her. There was an intense instinct to have more of that.

I gripped the steering wheel, trying to focus on the undeniable facts. Tatiana and me just didn't add up. Multiple people saw us leave together. Amy probably heard us in the dressing room. Was I already doomed, the sword dangling over my head by a thin string?

"Hey Mario Andretti, would you mind slowing down?" Tatiana said, breaking my train of thought. She reached over and rested a gentle hand on my leg. I'd been going

eighty in a forty-five mile per hour zone. “Would you say something to me? You’re making me feel...self-conscious. I thought you wanted that. Did I misread your feelings?”

My feelings. There it was again. It was easy to make decisions based on incontrovertible facts. Numbers made sense to me. But I had never been comfortable in the territory of emotions. They were complicated and uncertain.

“You didn’t misread, Tatiana,” I began, carefully considering every word. “You have no reason to feel self-conscious or awkward or anything. Let’s just not rush into anything without thinking this through. This isn’t simple.”

She stroked her hand up my thigh and my breath hitched. She leaned over toward my seat and in a steady and sure voice said, “I’m going to make this simple for you. I want you. I know you want me. We’re going to drive to your place now and finish what you started. Those are the facts, Rolland. Do you accept those facts?”

It took me a split second to deliberate.

“Let’s go,” I said.

The midday sun filtered through the white curtains of my bedroom, casting a soft glow over Tatiana’s face. I couldn’t remember the last woman that I’d had up here. My social life had taken a backseat to my career in the past few years.

My bedroom looked the way it did every day; king-sized bed neatly made against the wall, two nightstands with matching lamps, sleek mid-century dresser uncluttered except for my vide-poche, and a leather armchair. It was the typical scene except for Tatiana standing at the floor-to-ceiling window, staring out at the view of the city,

playing with a strand of her hair. She didn't seem nervous, but the bravado and confidence from earlier had disappeared. I watched her for a while, enjoying the sight.

I walked up to her and handed her a glass of water I'd brought from the kitchen. She smiled and took it, sipping. We stood there at the window, Tatiana looking into the distance and me staring at Tatiana. Her eyes were narrowed in concentration, and her lips were slightly parted, as if she were about to say something. Everything about her electrified and interested me.

I reached out and took the glass from her hands, placing it on the windowsill. She kept her eyes forward, continuing to gaze out over the view. I stood behind her and pulled her hair aside, dipping down to smell her skin, to run my lips over that sweet spot on her neck that made her purr. My other hand found the knot of her flannel shirt, and after a couple of tries, it came loose, giving me access to her soft stomach.

Just an hour before I'd been coming in her hand in the dressing room at Barneys, so why did this moment now, touching her stomach and nuzzling her feel more intimate? We may not have known each other very well, but in a physical sense we weren't strangers.

It occurred to me I'd never taken anybody's virginity before. I was in awe as I came to grips with how I'd be her first. My cock spreading her open would be the only one she'd ever known. There should have been more pressure, but this... was what I lived for. Moments where I could puzzle out the results I wanted.

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To take apart the magician's toys until I found the dove.

She's my dove. My prize.

I slid her shirt off her shoulder. My lips made a pattern across her skin, each tender press of my mouth a precise inch from the last. A deep, crimson bruise marked her glossy skin—I'd been right, I had left a mark when I came before. That memory sent a rush of blood to my dick, but I was determined to take this slow. Every move, every decision I made was going to be for Tatiana's pleasure.

I tossed her shirt onto the chair in the corner of my room. She wore a simple white bra underneath; not the type of bra you'd choose if you were planning on seducing someone. Before I unhooked her bra, I leaned into her ear and whispered, "Are you okay?"

She nodded in reply. All of her coy smugness had evaporated, like she was weighed down by the reality of what we were finally doing. The flush across her upper-chest betrayed her excitement. As still as she was being, she wasn't calm.

With her bra gone, I took her breasts in my hands, softly massaging them, warming her up for more. Her nipples reacted under my hands, the areolas pebbling and the peaks beginning to stand at attention.

She'd stepped back into me and now her body was flush against mine. I reached over to the windowsill and plucked an ice cube from the glass. I trailed it down her neck, licking the droplets of water as I went. I slid the ice under her breast, tracing its swell, watching the tiny bumps rise on her wet skin. Her nipples turned a darker shade of

pink by the time the ice had all melted.

“You're so beautiful,” I murmured.

Tatiana bit her bottom lip, blushing furiously. “So you've said.”

“I mean it.” I turned her face to mine, laying the softest kiss on her mouth, lightly pushing my tongue between her lips. Searching her eyes intensely, I tried to read her the way she'd read the tarot cards so many nights ago. “You're amazing. Every part of you more gorgeous than the last.”

Her breath sucked in before she kissed me—pure sensuality oozed from her every pore. She reached for the buttons on my shirt and opened them, one by one, sliding it off my body. “Fuck,” I groaned, eager for her to strip me completely.

She traced the lines of my pecs, drug her fingernails up over my sternum, then caressed the swath of skin just above my pants, somewhat dipping below the waistband. This drew both of our attentions to my erection. I loved that she wanted to touch my body the way I wanted to touch hers.

Gripping her skirt, I tugged the stiff denim down her hips until it crumpled around her feet. Now she was naked except for a pair of scant panties. Her heavy scent drowned my senses, made my eyes flutter, my cock flex. Growling, I spun her around and walked her backwards until her knees hit my bed.

I was determined to take this slow, but I needed to see more of her, explore her. A gentle push was all it took to lay her flat on my mattress. If she was beautiful before, she was a piece of art, now. Tatiana sprawled out with her hair in waves around her head. The smoldering energy in her eyes drew me to her, made me aware of her parted lips, her heaving breasts, her shifting hips and long legs. Her navel was a perfect indent that I knew I had to kiss.

Propping my hands onto the bed, I hovered over her. I stole a single kiss before sliding down, our skin hovering an inch apart, our bodies never grazing. I stopped at the flat plane of her stomach, just above her mound covered in white lace. Heat emanated from her panties.

The sweet and sexy scent of her pussy tickled my nose and urged me on. I crooked a finger under her panties and she lifted her hips to allow me to peel them down over her thighs. When I got down to her ankles and took them off completely, I started the return trip, kissing over her smooth calves until I reached her hips. My hand led the way, applying light pressure between her thighs, hoping she would open her legs and show me her beautiful pussy. She drew up her leg, bending it at the knee, revealing her shaved mound and her cleft already glistening with arousal. I inhaled deeply, savoring the moment, though I was dying to stick my tongue inside her.

For the first time I had the freedom to explore her. We were really alone, without party guests stirring in the background or busy shop attendants interrupting us. And though I was still certain this was a terrible idea, I'd realized it was inevitable. I had to have Tatiana, no matter the cost.

My patience was greater than hers. I felt her fingers tangling in my hair, giving me a firm nudge towards her cunt. I rubbed my lips up and down her labia, softly announcing my presence. I dusted her pussy with feather light kisses. Tatiana whimpered while I licked her crease, never touching her clit. I made this pass several times until her clitoris was so swollen it looked painful. She had the perfect pussy, and it eagerly responded to my every touch.

The flavor of her juices was intoxicating. I was dizzy from what we were doing; drunk on her. "Rolland, please," she sobbed. "More. I need more, I'm going crazy." Her hips lifted off the bed. Patiently, I inserted a single finger inside her. Tatiana was slippery and burning hot; I went in to the knuckle quickly. "Ah! Oh my god, oh my god."

She bore down on my hand and the rest of my finger slid into her tight, virgin pussy. Was I the first thing ever to touch her here? Any control I had evaporated; as I withdrew my finger, and thrust it in again, I flattened my tongue over her clit. I spread her open with two fingers and dove in, lapping her dripping hole, then her ass, even though that last part made her startle. But I needed to eat every part of her, it was compulsive.

With my mouth suckling her throbbing clit, I pumped my finger inside her. Her nails were digging into my scalp, and her knee dropped to the side. She was so damn tight. I had to take my time before I could fuck her.

I licked her engorged nub in tight circles, bringing her to the edge of orgasm and then backing off again. She was moaning like she was in heat. The power of controlling her orgasm was keeping my cock perpetually solid; it pulsed against my inner thigh.

I introduced a second finger, pumping slowly, stretching her out and getting her ready for me. My tongue massaged her clit in random motions, keeping her guessing. I could tell she was getting frustrated by the way she kept grabbing my hair and shifting her hips, so I hooked my fingers inside her, up toward her belly button, reaching the spot that I knew would drive her wild.

I started stroking the bumpy ridge there, and she bolted up, supporting herself on her elbows. Looking up at her, I saw her face contort, the flush from her chest had crept up to her face and her eyes were shut tightly. I couldn't wait any longer to watch her come, so I started a steady rhythm with my tongue on her clit, stroking in and out of her pussy, my fingers thoroughly drenched with her arousal.

“Don’t stop, don’t stop,” she whimpered, her hand holding my head firmly between her legs. And I didn’t stop. My eyes cast upward and locked on her face; I was going to sear this moment into my brain.

The orgasm crashed through her, washing over her body from her thrashing head down to her flexing toes. Her tits thrust forward and her nipples were darker than I'd ever seen them. Liquid lust flowed over my tongue as her pussy contracted around my fingers. She shuddered and collapsed back on the bed with a sigh. I gave her a few more small licks across her clit, until she jerked, too sensitive for contact.

I crawled up the bed and lay by her side, tracing a finger across her chest. "That was the hottest thing I've ever seen," I said seriously, smoothing some damp hair away from her forehead.

She offered a shy smile. "I can tell." Her eyes flicked to my tented pants. Before I replied she leaned in, kissing me, tasting herself on my tongue. We kissed like that for a while, lazily and slow. I wasn't sure what would happen next; she looked so sated. I was convincing myself that it had been enough to make her come so hard, to watch her lose herself to me, and that if it didn't go further, that was okay. But then I felt her hand reaching for my cock and I realized that was all bullshit.

I wanted to be balls deep in this girl.

She shimmied down my body, stopping at my hip. In a mere moment she'd yanked my pants and boxers to my knees. Her nails scraped through my pubic hair, then dragged down to my balls. She rolled them between her fingers a few times before she licked me; a single, teasing stroke across the underside of my dick. She licked me again, like a fucking lollipop, and I was grabbing at the blanket beneath me, trying to stop myself from thrusting into her mouth.

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Just then, she took my cock-head in her mouth, swirling her tongue around it languidly and humming. I couldn't hold myself back anymore. I juttied my hips up, pushing myself a few more inches into her mouth, and she didn't object. She started sucking me off in a slow rhythm, grasping the base with one hand and squeezing my balls with the other. Her tongue was a fucking miracle, and on every upstroke she hit the sensitive underside of my shaft, sending electricity crackling through my veins. I was getting so close.

“Not yet,” I grunted. “Not like this.” I reached down and grabbed her under her arms, twisting her body upwards until she got the hint. My muscles she so admired corded tight—I'd positioned her pussy right over my face. What a fucking view.

I dipped my tongue inside her again; the vibration of her moan traveled through my mouth, my throat, and down into my dick, making me even harder. She was bobbing up and down now, and I could feel the tip hitting the back of her throat. I felt a fresh burst of moisture on my face. She was getting close again, and suddenly she sat up, releasing my cock from her lips with a wet pop. Bracing herself with her hands on my thighs, she rode my face like a champ.

Her body started quaking, and she was saying, again and again, “Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.” Keeping my tongue plastered against her clit while she ground against me, my taste-buds tingled, sensing the change in her temperature. Tatiana's body was wracked with tension—this orgasm was sharper than the first, over faster. I squeezed the globes of her ass, rocking her a few more times until she collapsed off of me and onto the bed.

I moved up her body, positioning my hips between her legs. I took my cock in my hand and rubbed it up and down her seam, coating myself in her juices. Resting my

forehead against hers I asked, “Are you seriously a virgin?”

She smirked at me. “Use your big fat brain. What do you think?”

I think her daddy kept a tight leash on her. For a good reason. This girl... this woman, was incredible. Anyone would fall head over heels trying to get her in the sack. Swallowing, I slid my swollen cock-head across her hungry cunt again. “And you're sure you want me to be the first to do this with you?”

Tatiana stared for a long minute. Winding her arms around my neck, she nuzzled my cheek. “I feel like if I say yes, you'll still wonder. Instead I'll scream it. With every single stroke.” She arched upwards, pressing her pussy into me until I growled. “Then maybe you'll actually believe me.”

I drew myself up on my knees and reached across the bed to my nightstand drawer. Taking out a condom, I sheathed myself in one smooth motion. But I wasn't ready to screw her yet.

One after the other, I sucked on her tits, taking her nipples between my teeth and gently tugging. She was making small sounds in her throat that drove me insane. “Fuck me, Rolland. I'm ready,” she promised.

I took in a big breath, nudging my cock at her opening. I eased in, just the tip, and gave her a few short pumps. It was torture not to bury myself to the hilt. Patience, patience, I thought as I strained. I wanted to check in with her but I could barely speak; every ounce of my energy was being used on keeping control.

The pressure of her virgin walls wasn't something I could describe. Being there was an experience... a dream. A one time act neither of us would get to repeat. Tatiana looked right at me, her chest flaring. “Keep going,” she demanded.

“It doesn't hurt?” I asked.

When she shook her head, I grit my teeth and sank in another inch. My cock was being strangled—I was delirious with the need to let the come explode from my balls. They were drawn up tight and heavy against the base of my dick.

I hoisted her leg up a bit to give me a better angle, fascinated by watching my prick slide deeper into her. I almost went blind with the feeling. Every nerve in my body seemed to concentrate in my dick. There was no way I could go further without hurting her, and I was only halfway in.

“Deeper Rolland. I won't break,” she encouraged me. I pulled out almost entirely to the tip and then eased in again slowly, each stroke giving her more, stretching her further until she was shivering. Holding myself perfectly still above her, I searched her eyes for some clue she was ready for all of my girth.

When her hips started moving beneath me, I broke. I grabbed her by the rib-cage and sank in to my hilt. Tatiana gasped, her breasts arching for the ceiling. I threw my head back and shouted with bliss. This was it, we were fully joined. One pump, two—I fucked her like she was a real woman, not a fragile porcelain doll. “Yes,” she sobbed. “Yes, yes, yes!”

I rolled her over so she was on top of me. She braced herself with her hands on my chest, looking down to where we were joined. After a beat, she settled herself completely on top of me. It was the most erotic thing I'd ever seen; my dick disappearing into her virgin pussy.

She rocked back and forth, lifting her hips up and bringing them back down in a slow rhythm. I let her lead for as long as I could. The ache in my balls was excruciating. I reached out to pet her clit, anything to distract me from the violent urge I felt to thrust up into her, pound her until I came inside her. I immediately felt that familiar

quivering. She was so reactive.

I was at the point of no return, and I knew she was too. With her head thrown back, she milked me through another climax. Heat swam in my lower belly as I tensed, my orgasm on the cusp. Her shoulders buckled forward and only then did I allow myself to come, harder than I ever had before. I brought her down on top of me, crashing into her mouth with a violent kiss, swallowing the moan that was on her lips.

We remained like that for what seemed like forever, neither of us speaking or moving. Eventually I had to get up to throw away the condom, and I gently moved her to the side and scurried to the bathroom. I caught my reflection in the mirror above the sink. Sweat stained my brow, my hair was tangled in damp waves. She'd left tiny half-moon nail marks all over my skin.

I loved it... but then uncertainty bubbled up, like something raw and dangerous dug free from the center of the Earth. This was a mixture of contradictory feelings. I knew I'd made a mistake. But for once?

I didn't fucking care.

Chapter Eight

The next morning I had one task on my mind. I couldn't resolve my feelings for Tatiana quickly, but I could definitely use some creative math to hide the fact we'd gone over budget at Barneys.

I didn't have the heart to tell Tatiana to return her overpriced dressing gown, and even if she would agree to, there was the small matter of the come stain on it. I knew Tatiana got the VIP treatment at Barneys, but I didn't think they'd be that accommodating, even for a Montalla.

I couldn't let Sergio know we'd gone over budget. For one thing, I didn't want him on Tatiana's case. More importantly, I wanted Sergio to trust me; trust me with his finances and also with his daughter. If he knew that I'd allowed Tatiana to spend so much, he may have the inkling that something was up between the two of us. And that couldn't happen.

Quickly making a pot of coffee for Tatiana to wake up to, I snatched my keys, jumped into my car, and drove to the office. If she needed anything, she'd text me. Part of me expected her to get dressed and scramble home the second she remembered where she was.

Or would she be waiting for me when I got back?

Half-dressed, newly ruined pussy waiting for another round, and we—no. I had to fix one mess first before I got caught up in another.

Walking into my office was the favorite part of my day. As soon as I saw my neatly organized desk, everything in its place where I'd left it the day before, I was flooded with a familiar peaceful feeling. I was good at what I did. That gave me confidence, which I needed right now.

I opened my laptop and pulled up Sergio's account. With a few clicks of the mouse, I retrieved the Amex statement. Tatiana's card was under the same account as her father's. I scanned the recent charges. For all of Sergio's talk about tightening his purse strings, it was clear he was full of hot air. The Barneys purchase didn't stand out in the list of charges. In fact, there was a recent charge from Brooks Brothers that exceeded Tatiana's. The old man was obsessed with luxury goods. The gold encrusted apple didn't fall far from the tree.

As long as Sergio doesn't directly ask me about the shopping trip, he won't notice the overspending. Fuck, had I been so worried over nothing? No, she really did waste too much money. Normally that would strike me as terrible. Somehow, when I remembered Tatiana wearing that gown, her breasts displayed for me... it was a struggle to get mad.

Comforted that, for now, both I and Tatiana were off the hook, I decided to do some real work. It was the only way to soothe my guilt towards Sergio. I cracked open the files that Marcus had left on my desk. It had taken him days to get me these, and I'd been frustrated with the delay. Sergio was giving me more responsibly, and today, I was going to familiarize myself with the Montalla Shipping Division, his flagship company.

Sergio's corporation had started with a single truck. He told the story frequently and with pride. In his youth he was a truck driver, making the same route every week, delivering heavy machinery throughout the state. But when Tatiana was just three years old, tragedy struck when her mother died from a sudden heart attack.

He knew he couldn't continue driving as a single father, so he used the insurance money from his wife's policy and bought his own, then paid for a driver. Through persistence and hard work, he undercut the competition and earned trust, securing a few lucrative long haul routes and building his business steadily with a team of drivers.

His determination to provide for Tatiana urged him on. She may not have had her mother anymore, but he would give her the world. Smart financial advisers, instinct and luck had made him one of the wealthiest men in the state in just fifteen years.

I started reviewing the last few quarterly reports, feeling calm as the numbers floated pleasantly in front of my eyes. Everything seemed in order, but I always liked to look at data from several perspectives, so I opened my laptop to graph the expenses and profits to see if I could find any room for improvement. I was in my zone. X axis. Y axis. Inputting numbers and watching them come to life on my computer screen. After yesterday's storm of unpredictable emotions and events, this activity calmed me. I found myself humming, thoroughly enjoying my work.

But then I saw something that bothered me. Little kinks every few months in the expense curve. Had I inputted the numbers incorrectly? My skin started itching unpleasantly looking at the anomalies and not understanding where I'd made a mistake. The numbers weren't making sense.

I scrapped my model and started again, paying closer attention to my work. After the fourth rendering of the graph, each one displaying the same discrepancy, I was certain I hadn't made an error.

I took the elevator upstairs to the filing room. It was an enormous labyrinth of cabinets, lit by overhead fluorescent lights. I was surprised when I first joined the company that so much of Sergio's records were exclusively on paper. I'd taken to the habit of digitizing every record I worked with as I went along, and it irked me that the

rest of the employees weren't doing the same. The system was senseless and outdated.

It took me half an hour to find the cabinets marked Montalla Shipping Div., and another half an hour to pull all the records I'd need to make sense of the numbers I'd read downstairs. I loaded them into a box and went back to my office, eager to lose this gut feeling of paranoia.

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I worked straight until the setting sun was streaming through my office windows, casting an orange glow across the piles of papers in front of me. It took three more trips up to the filing room, but I'd finally gotten to the bottom of this puzzle.

Montalla Shipping Division was siphoning money.

To where, by whom, I couldn't be sure, but I had discovered deep in the records a dummy vendor who was being paid monthly for services or goods that were nonexistent. I'd discovered the same fraud in two other Montalla companies, the frozen food division and the Chinese import division. Each of the dummy vendors' names was almost identical to a real vendors' name, so it made sense the deceit could go undetected.

I knew Sergio's early business bordered on the unsavory, that was a given in the trucking industry, especially when you're first starting out, but nothing about him suggested to me that he was a dishonest businessman. I knew he paid his taxes. In fact, he hired a new CPA at my advice because I felt his other one was taking too many deductions that could raise red flags.

I'd never heard from any vendors or contractors that they weren't paid on time or that they hadn't been treated with the utmost professional respect. Everything I knew about him as a businessman didn't jive with this fraud.

His personal life... well that was a different story.

He was an extravagant man, I knew that, obsessed with his wealth and maintaining it. His daughter's future meant everything to him. The fear of leaving her

without any parent plagued him, and made him plan meticulously for her financial future.

But it also wasn't a well-guarded secret that Sergio had women. There were a string of hotel charges on that AmEx account that didn't come as a surprise to me. He'd never publicly stepped out with someone on his arm since Tatiana's mother died, but he wasn't a monk.

I was getting that buzzy feeling again—my clothes seemed too tight. I needed more information but I didn't know where to turn. I wouldn't confront Sergio with my suspicions, I didn't have enough information to be confident he was involved. I had to play this carefully, collect more data before I came to a conclusion. But how? As I was rubbing the bridge of my nose and surveying the mess of files I'd need to return upstairs, my phone buzzed. Tatiana. Maybe that was my answer.

Picking up, I put the device to my ear. It was icy cold on my hot skin. "Hey, Tatiana. I was just thinking about you."

"Convenient. Thanks for the coffee this morning."

I glanced at the time. Fuck, was it that late already? "It was the least I could offer. I'm no five star hotel." Hotels. Ugh. Now I was back to thinking about Sergio's shady activities.

Tatiana chuckled sweetly. Her voice was so soothing, I needed to drink it up in big gulps. "Speaking of, I haven't eaten yet. There's a great Greek restaurant in the Hilton near your place," she purred. Was she still at my apartment? "Meet me, Rolland? We can talk and relax a bit."

"I'll be there in ten," I said.

I wasn't going to be able to relax.

But I did need to talk.

I was waiting outside the restaurant when Tatiana walked up. I guess my mind had been so occupied thinking about Sergio's business dealing, that I'd forgotten the effect Tatiana had on me. Instantly my senses were flooded. I remembered every noise, every movement, every inch of her skin that I'd licked and explored in my bed the other day.

She stood in front of me in a yellow jumpsuit, but she may as well have been naked. I was momentarily paralyzed with the memories, and caught between two worlds: wanting information about her father and wanting to skip dinner all together and feast on her.

"Rolland?" Tatiana asked with a bewildered grin. "Should we go in?"

"Yeah, sure," I stuttered, coming back to myself. "Right this way."

I opened the door for her and we headed inside.

The hostess took one look at Tatiana, then sat us in a corner booth by the fireplace. "The most romantic seat of the house!" she announced. After we ordered drinks, we fell into an awkward silence. I was searching my mind for an icebreaker, anything to say, when Tatiana spoke first. "Do you make coffee for every girl you take home?"

I furrowed my eyebrows. "Just my boss's daughter."

"Your boss's daughter? Really, Rolland?"

“What do you mean? You are my boss’s daughter.”

“Well I don’t look at you and think my father’s employee,” she said. Then she leaned closer and whispered, “I look at you and think you’re the man that left this mark on my shoulder when you came all over my hand the other day.”

Her smile was sly and seductive. Sure enough, just to the side of her yellow jumpsuit’s strap, was a quarter sized purple bruise from where I’d latched on when my orgasm overwhelmed me. The memory had me shifting in my seat.

“I liked that, by the way,” she continued. “That’s why I called you tonight. To tell you I had fun, and... to thank you. I’ll never forget it, Rolland. In fact, I haven’t stopped thinking about it.”

Her hand rested on my kneecap, her skin was glowing from the firelight. This was a romantic booth. When the hostess brought our drinks and I watched Tatiana take a sip of wine, it occurred to me like a bolt of lightning—Tatiana and I were on a date! How could I have been so obtuse?

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Tatiana, now that I looked at her closely, was dressed for a night out. Thin hoop earrings, her hair was freshly blown out, not a strand out of place, and that jumpsuit she was wearing, with those sexy heels, that was an outfit that she planned carefully.

My suspicions about Sergio were just another chaotic addition to an already messy situation. My feelings for Tatiana couldn't be resolved easily; not until I figured out what the hell was going on with the Montalla's finances. So despite her hand on my knee and the way her cleavage peeked out the top of her jumpsuit, I was going to tackle problem number one head on.

"Do you think your father is capable of breaking the law, Tatiana?" I asked flatly.

"What?" she said, her mouth hanging open. Her hand stopped stroking my knee and I instantly missed it.

"I've noticed some irregularities in the books, and I'm trying to make sense of it all. Obviously I don't want to accuse your father of anything without knowing all the facts, so I thought I'd run it by you. I mean, I feel like we have a connection. We can talk like this, right?"

She was looking at me like I was a stranger.

"I'm such an idiot," she said.

"You're not," I assured her.

"Were you getting close to me to try and get at my father?"

“No, god, no! I just need you to clear up a few things for me. Like when your dad first started the Chinese Import division of—”

“Stop!” she said, loudly enough that some guests looked over. She raised her hand in front of me. Her cheeks were turning red, but not the way they turned red when we'd been in my bed. “I don't know anything about my father's business dealings. In case you hadn't noticed, I don't work there and I don't have an interest in his companies at all. But Rolland,” she said, seeming to calm down a bit, “if my father were guilty of some crime, and I can't even begin to imagine what you suspect him of, why would I rat him out to you? He's my father.”

“The law is the law, Tatiana. If your father is—” I lowered my voice to a whisper, “hiding money, my ass could be on the line. And it's wrong. Tell me if you think it's impossible. I could do some more digging, maybe expose that someone he trusts has defrauded him. I need to know.”

A single tear trailed down her cheek. It stunned me to see it appear. Holy hell, was I being that terrible? I reached out to take her hand, hoping she was upset by the revelation that her father could be a crook, and not angry at me. As soon as my hand touched hers she jumped back, sliding quickly out of the booth and heading for the door. What was happening?

I threw a twenty on the table to cover the drinks, then followed Tatiana down the block to the parking lot. I found her by her car, digging through her purse, searching for her keys.

“Tatiana, don't run away like this. Let's go back,” I suggested, touching her cool shoulder and gently turning her to me.

“Back off, Rolland,” she shouted, jabbing a finger so close to my face I felt the air fly past my nose. “I'm a person, not some spreadsheet filled with numbers and statistics

that you can play with and figure out to your satisfaction. You can't fuck me one day and then use me to nail my father the next. And you certainly can't accuse my father of being a criminal over cocktails and then think we can exchange our life stories over appetizers. Really, how can someone as smart as you be so fucking stupid?" She practically spit those last words in my face. She was seething.

Tatiana opened the car door and slid behind the wheel. As she was twisting the key in the ignition, she paused, giving me a feeling of hope. Maybe she'd had a change of heart? "My father's not guilty of anything, Rolland. You're on the wrong track. He worked hard to build his company, pushed by grief for my mother and love for me. Now get your hand off my car and forget you even know me." She slammed the door closed, almost taking my hand off in the process, then she reversed the car and sped down the street, leaving me in the parking lot.

I'd royally screwed this up, that I knew. But where did I go wrong? I never thought Tatiana would be so defensive about her father. All indications had been that she loathed the guy. All I'd heard from her was resentment, and watching her shopping the other day, it was obvious every one of those purchases was a giant "fuck you" to the man.

There had to be a bigger picture that I was missing, and I hated missing anything. Maybe Tatiana was right, maybe I looked at the world too simplistically, expecting everything to add up, everything to be either black or white.

Did I retreat to my orderly columns of numbers and data because I was incapable of handling feelings? How was it possible that one minute I was ogling the hickey I'd left on Tatiana's shoulder, getting turned on from her hand on my knee, and the very next minute I'd decided interrogating her about her father's business was better than enjoying her presence over drinks?

It didn't feel wrong in that moment, but looking back, I realized I'd made a big

mistake.

I wouldn't be able to rest until I'd worked this out. I needed to make this right; not for my career, but to protect any chance I had of being close to Tatiana again.

There was only one person who could help me.

Chapter Nine

The cleaning crew was milling around the office when I arrived, but aside from them, everyone had gone home. I was glad for that. I didn't need anyone else knowing about my suspicions other than Marcus.

I'd called him soon after Tatiana screeched out of the parking lot. He agreed to meet me at the office. If anyone knew about Sergio's businesses, it was him. He'd been Sergio's right hand man since the early days and knew things inside and out. He had no formal education, but Sergio was loyal to him and treated him like a son. He managed the books for Sergio's initial businesses, while I took on the new ventures.

Our styles were very different, and if I was being honest, Marcus really wasn't up to the task. That's why I was so enthusiastic when Sergio promised to give me more responsibility. I really thought I could take the operation to the next level. But now I wasn't sure if I had any future at this company.

I started laying out the files I'd retrieved earlier in the day, preparing to show Marcus the relevant data blips that were so alarming. He strode in and immediately sat in the chair across from my desk, putting up his feet. I was galled by his informality, and frankly I wasn't used to having anyone else in my office, but I tamped down those feelings in the interest of efficiency. "Marcus, thanks for coming so quickly."

"I couldn't sit around knowing there was a problem," he said. "Bring me up on the details."

Quickly I explained to him the inconsistencies I'd found. I showed him the dummy

vendor names, pointing out that LD Petrol was a real vendor while LDPetroleum was just a front. I couldn't trace where that money had gone, but it wasn't being used to fuel Sergio's trucks. I went down the list of other fake vendors I'd found, searching Marcus's face to make sure he understood the nature of the con. He was grim.

"Marcus, you know the man better than I do. I haven't picked up any signals that he's not an ethical businessman, but I'm realizing lately that I may not be picking up every signal that comes my way." Tatiana. "You've been by his side for years. I know he trusts you and you, him. What do you think? Is it possible he's behind this?"

He was quiet for a long time. It was making me uncomfortable. Had I made a mistake laying out my hunch to Marcus? Would he act like Tatiana, out of loyalty? Or could he be objective and help me crack this puzzle?

Marcus took his feet off my desk and sat forward, resting his elbows on his knees and holding his head in his hands. He started to laugh bitterly. "Man, I hate to say it, but absolutely. Ever since the old days Sergio hasn't been afraid to cut corners to turn a profit or outbid a competitor. Can I see him squirreling away money illegally, in secret? Of course I can."

Relief rushed through me. I wasn't imagining things. I hadn't falsely accused Sergio to Tatiana.

I was right.

"But I have to say, Rolland, I never imagined a dick move from you like this. I mean, where's your loyalty?" His words didn't match his demeanor. He was speaking to me calmly but he was clearly accusing me of something.

"Dick move? How? We're responsible for the information we provide to the CPA. If the IRS—"

Marcus cut me off mid-sentence. “I understand going after some sweet ass, believe me, I see what you see. Tatiana is fine. But you’re really planning to betray Sergio just so you can be with her? There are other fish in the sea, Rolland.” On the surface it sounded like friendly advice, but his tone was threatening. And what did he know about Tatiana and me?

I swallowed the uneasy knot stuck in my throat. “You’re mistaken, Marcus. You clearly have the wrong impression.”

“I got a pretty good impression at Tatiana’s graduation party. Your hand up her dress and her tits hanging out. I don’t think I misinterpreted that, Rolland. Seems pretty black and white to me.”

The slamming door that night. Someone did see us.

Sweat pooled down my spine. “What happened with Tatiana has nothing to do with this. It’s two completely separate things,” I started to explain. “Sergio—”

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“What would he think if he knew you were fucking his daughter?”

My stomach dropped out.

Marcus sighed as he said, “I think you’d be thrown out on your ass so fast you wouldn’t know what hit you. That’s if you’re lucky. Might lose a few bones, first. You wouldn’t want that, would you?”

“Are you suggesting you’re going to tell him? Are you trying to blackmail me or something?” I couldn’t understand his angle.

He spread his hands and shrugged. “Rolland, buddy, we’re on the same side. It’s Sergio who’s the problem. He’s putting us at professional risk and he’s standing in the way of you being with Tatiana. Hell, he’s standing in the way of Tatiana doing anything. I was in the house when she begged her father to let her go to South Africa. I’d never heard Sergio raise his voice like that before. It was quite a scene.”

Marcus had gone from menacing to logical. He was right; Sergio was the variable in every problem. His shenanigans with the books put my career in jeopardy. His overprotective nature made Tatiana unhappy. His disapproval kept me apart from a woman I desired.

“So many problems solved if you just pick up the phone,” Marcus said. “Call the IRS. Call the press. All you need to do is tip that first domino and I guarantee it’ll lead to Sergio in a prison cell. He doesn’t deserve your protection.”

It was a bombardment of information, and I was having trouble making sense out of

it. When Marcus walked into my office, I had hoped he could straighten this all out by explaining it was an innocent accounting mistake. I'd never expected him to turn on Sergio like this, and to use Tatiana to help bring him down.

I remembered the hurt on her face when I asked if her father could be involved in illegal dealings. She was adamant he wasn't. If Marcus was right, I needed to call the authorities. So why was I second guessing myself suddenly?

I needed to look at the books again. If I was going to disrupt Tatiana's life with this accusation, I had to be completely positive it was true. I settled behind my desk and started pulling up the spreadsheets I'd created earlier, opening the graphs showing the expenditures and profits. I was looking for a clue, anything to convince me that Sergio was innocent and Tatiana was right. What was I missing?

"What are you doing, Rolland? You said it, he created these phony companies and siphoned the money overseas. I see what you see. You're right! Call the feds and get on with it." Marcus was getting agitated as he spoke. I didn't respond to him. I kept clicking on my computer, pulling up invoices and trying to find some pattern. Marcus was pacing around now, muttering under his breath, "Just call the fucking police, already." He was irritating and distracting.

Finally I looked up from my laptop and said, "Why don't you call the fucking police if you're so sure? And while I'm at it, how did this happen under your nose for years without you realizing? You're the one who receives these invoices. I understand the names were intentionally similar to escape detection, but how couldn't you realize you were getting hit with them twice as often as you should be?"

He was the one who paid the double invoices. These were all Marcus's accounts.

It was Marcus who wanted to keep these files hidden upstairs.

All at once, the buzzy feeling in my skull vanished. I gaped at Marcus. “It’s not Sergio. It’s you.”

Marcus snatched me by my collar, wrenching me over the desk—I gripped his wrists, fighting back. “Listen smart guy, it’s Sergio. Got it? Stop looking at your files! If you want to keep your reputation and your kneecaps intact, you’ll pick up the phone and call the IRS. If you don’t, I’m going to tell Sergio all about how you had your hands up his virgin daughter’s dress the other night. He won’t take kindly to that. Do not FUCK with me, Rolland!”

Again, I remembered Tatiana’s face. The emotion in her voice when she was defending her father. Sergio wasn’t just some variable in this problem. He was a person and people couldn’t be managed. They weren’t predictable, either. Weeks ago I couldn’t have predicted I’d be fucking my boss’s daughter.

If I could surprise myself, anyone could surprise me.

“No,” I said plainly. “I’m not going along with your plan. There’s too much at risk. People’s lives and emotions. I’m calling Sergio.”

He released me and backed up. “You don’t know what you’re doing.” His face darkened drastically. “You won’t even act in your own best fucking interests, you’re leaving me no choice. One phone call and she’s in the back of a van with a sack over her head. This is bigger than you think. I won’t hesitate to use Tatiana against you.”

The blood was pounding in my ears. My hands were hot and fisted with rage. I should have called Tatiana. Warned Sergio. Picked up the phone to notify the police. Those were reasonable things to do. But all reason had left me when I imagined Tatiana in danger.

Marcus hurried out of my office with me at his heels. He glanced at me, trying to get

into the elevator. The sight of the phone in his hands... the vision of Tatiana trussed up in the back of a van going who knew where for who knew what, snapped the last of my control. I sprinted at full speed, taking him out at the knees.

We were wrestling in a mass of limbs; I was fighting for purchase, trying to raise myself high enough to throw a punch. Marcus's landed across my jaw first, stunning me. I spotted his phone blinking on the floor. I didn't know if he'd given an order to kidnap Tatiana, but I needed to alert her quickly. The thought gave me a shot of adrenaline; I swung hard, connecting with Marcus's nose.

A torrent of blood sprayed across my sweatshirt. As he grabbed for his face, I swung again, knocking him backwards. Just then I felt arms around me. I looked and saw the terrified night shift cleaner surrounded by three security guards, one of whom crouched down to Marcus.

"The two of you better come with me," the lead officer shouted. I didn't argue, I let him half-drag me while I pulled out my phone with my other hand. Quickly I texted Tatiana. The guard yelled at me to stop, but I ignored him. The only thing that mattered was doing everything I could to keep her safe.

Tell your father to come to the office.

Trust me.

And don't answer your door for anybody.

I'd made it almost thirty years without ending up in the back of a police car.

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But here I was, outside my office, looking across the parking lot illuminated with flashing red lights. Marcus was in the back of another car parked nearby. Sergio was leaning into the backseat, having an intense conversation with him. I could see them both from where I waited.

Life really was unpredictable. That damn Ace of Swords tarot card popped into my head. What had Tatiana said? To expect a “shift in perception?” I couldn't stop a laugh from bubbling up. I wanted to tell her she was right. Everything had shifted. I didn't care about what Marcus was telling Sergio. I didn't worry if I'd have an office to return to the next morning.

Everything seemed secondary to Tatiana's safety, and I knew she was safe. She'd texted back that she ended up at a movie after our disastrous “date,” and security had already called her father and he was on his way.

Sergio was walking over to me now, and although my perspective had shifted, I was still wary. He looked angrier than I'd ever seen him. “Care to explain to me why I'm here tonight, and not at home in bed watching the evening news?” he asked. “Marcus told me quite a few things already.”

“Sergio, some of what Marcus said may be true, and some may not. I promise you I'm being truthful with you. I found discrepancies in your books; from the new accounts you had me look at. Someone had created phony vendors and they were siphoning money out of the company.” I grimaced. “I thought it was you. Before I confronted you, I wanted Marcus's opinion, but then I realized he was the one ripping you off. And then he threatened me and he threatened Tatiana.” The memory of that made my blood boil. “You probably trust him more than me because you've

know him for ages. And in a minute you're going to trust me even less." I took a deep breath, bracing for his fury, his fists, his disgust.

"Why am I about to trust you less, Rolland?" he whispered. Sergio stared at me, silent and brooding, but I didn't have another option. There was just one path.

"Because I'm falling in love with your daughter. With Tatiana. And I'm going to tell her the next time I see her in person."

Sergio looked at me with the same expression that Tatiana had earlier in the evening. Like I was an alien. "Why are you telling me this now?"

"I'll admit, this isn't an ideal situation," I started. Sergio laughed sourly, but I continued. "I couldn't continue seeing Tatiana while lying to you, and I can't stop seeing Tatiana. And I realize you may want to break my legs... but you'll never break my desire to be with your daughter."

Sergio walked a few paces away. He ran a hand over his face, clearly exasperated. After a few minutes, he approached the security officer. They spoke with their heads together. With interest, I saw the officer approach the police car with Marcus in it. Then it drove off. To take him home? To the hospital? To jail? I didn't know. This situation was unfolding before me and I couldn't predict where it was heading.

Sergio returned, his expression grave. What he said next left me speechless. "I trust you, Rolland." He motioned at the cop. "Unlock this bastard's handcuffs." I bent forward and my hands were free. I rubbed at my wrists vigorously to get the blood flowing. "Walk with me, Rolland," Sergio said, leading me towards his car parked across the lot. Maybe this was the part where he broke my kneecaps.

"You really trust me?" I asked.

“Marcus threw you under the bus. He told me he’d discovered you’d been siphoning off the money to run away with my daughter. It sounded like total bullshit. I expected to come over here and listen to you deny everything. But then you admitted it. Who would be dumb enough to admit to that they were...” he trailed off, a pained expression crossed his face, “with my little girl.”

I was glad he hadn’t completed that thought. It was enough that he trusted me, trusted my account of events; I didn’t need him to be comfortable about Tatiana and me. Yet.

He jingled his keys, no longer looking at me. “I’ll see you here early tomorrow morning. We have a shitload of things to go through, a whole mess to figure out, and I expect we’ll need to involve the cops. I’ll need you on your A game,” he said, sliding in the driver's seat.

Standing tall, I nodded sharply. “I’ll be here.”

“I know you will.” He paused a second, finally looking up at me. “You really care about Tatiana?”

“Yes,” I said instantly.

“And this whole time, even though you thought I’d break your legs, you were seeing her?”

My heartbeat quickened anxiously. “Yes.”

Sergio crinkled his forehead, chuckling dryly. “Then I guess you can turn off your brain sometimes.” He revved the engine, shutting the door with the window down. “Good luck. She’s as stubborn as I am.”

He was right.

But it was part of what I loved about her.

Chapter Ten

I always adored flying.

Ever since I was a little boy and took my first plane ride with my parents to visit my granddad across the country. Taking a peek in the cockpit, seeing all the gauges and controls, the cool pilots who knew how to use those instruments, quickly calculating the data to keep a five hundred ton machine flying through the air, was thrilling.

Now, as an adult and VP of Montalla Industries, I was enjoying the finer aspects of flying, specifically flying business class, internationally. The service and luxury were almost enough to stop me from thinking about the operations behind the cockpit door. And Wi-Fi on board allowed me to shoot off some emails for work. I couldn't ask for anything more.

My travel companion disagreed. "Rolland, we're flying 35,000 miles above the earth and you're still typing away on that stupid computer. Could you relax already?" she said as she snapped my laptop closed.

Beautiful Tatiana looked down disapprovingly at me. That little scowl just made her cuter, but I didn't dare say that to her. "If I work now, I'll have more time to play when we land," I said. I reached up to her neck and brought her mouth down to mine, kissing her and tasting her cherry lip gloss.

She settled into her seat, picking up a glass of champagne and nibbling on the charcuterie platter she'd ordered. Suddenly she gathered the cashmere throw over her lap and let out a little squeal. "Who am I kidding, it's not like I'm relaxed at all,

either!” she yelled, and I laughed and kissed her again to quiet her down. “I mean, five months ago my father threatened to disown me if I flew to South Africa, and here we are, business class to Cape Town, with his blessing!”

It hadn’t been easy convincing Sergio to allow Tatiana to take this trip. When she'd received an email from her professor telling her a team member in Cape Town had dropped out and her expertise was needed, I knew I had to try. It took a lot of cajoling to get Sergio to agree.

When I'd uncovered Marcus’s deception, we'd then discovered a host of undesirable characters had been connected to the Montalla Industries for years. Sergio was badly shaken, and his increased distrust made him even more protective of Tatiana. She’d been taking it easy on her father, considering all that had happened to his business recently. Sergio considered Marcus to be family, and his betrayal nearly broke him.

But I could tell Tatiana was getting antsy, and it was only a matter of time before she started acting out from frustration. The timing was perfect for Tatiana to spread her wings, to show Sergio that she was an adult and could take care of herself. It was best for both of them.

I laid out my argument to Sergio several times. I even made a handy flowchart, and I think that’s what finally got him on board. When he finally agreed, it was with one caveat: I had to tag along and make sure nothing happened to his little girl.

How could I say no?

So I was flying to South Africa with Tatiana, and she was right, my emails could wait. I tucked my laptop away and turned to her, brushing back her hair so I could see her megawatt smile as she looked out the window at the darkened sky. “What are you most looking forward to once we land?” I asked. I couldn’t get enough of this beautiful woman, and her excitement for this trip was contagious.

“It’ll take me a while to get up to speed with the rest of the team, but once I’m caught up, I’m really looking forward to being part of something. I want to get my hands dirty in the field, have a goal for once and be part of a solution that will make a difference in people’s lives. I can barely stand it.” She was practically squealing again, but I didn’t have the heart to quiet her. It was a thrill to see her so happy.

“Unfortunately I think it’ll be a couple of days before I meet up with Professor Hicks and the team,” she said, her mood suddenly more subdued.

“Why’s that?” I asked.

“Jet lag, Rolland,” she replied, turning her body to me and stroking my cheek. She continued in a whisper, “I’m the worst. I’ll need to spend at least twenty-four hours in bed. Probably naked. Would you keep me company?”

I swallowed hard, recognizing that look in her eyes. I lifted the wide armrest between us, scooting a little closer. “That sounds terribly boring, Tatiana,” I played along. “Hours like that in bed, with nothing to do.”

“I’ll bet we could find things to do,” she whispered, hot breath on my face. I was suddenly aware of her beautiful long legs poking out beneath the cashmere throw over her lap. I glanced down her shirt, spied the swell of her breasts rising and falling faster. I ached to touch Tatiana’s skin, and I didn’t know if I could wait until we got to our hotel in Cape Town.

Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:19 am

Her knee pressed against mine and I spread the blanket over both our laps, moved closer still, and slipped my hand underneath. Her skirt was already hiked up a bit, exposing the tops of her thighs. I rested my hand on her silky-smooth knee. She shifted, anxious for more of what I had to offer.

I loved these moments. The longer I held Tatiana in anticipation, the more intense the first touch always was. With a whimper, she lifted her ass upwards, forcing my hand to graze her cotton panties; they were already soaked. I slipped my hand underneath the elastic band, stroking her mound.

“God, yes,” she panted.

Dragging my finger down her labia, not venturing inside just yet, I watched her watching me, trying to command me with her eyes alone to touch her right there, right where I knew she wanted my fingers so badly. But I had my own timetable, and this flight to South Africa had hours left. I was going to take my time.

“I think the first thing I’ll do when I get you in the hotel room is rip off this shirt,” I said, leaning close to her face so we couldn’t be heard. “I want to feel your nipples in my mouth. I want to suck on your tits until you’re screaming, right on the edge of climax. Does that sound good to you?”

She barely managed a nod. I cupped her more forcefully, and drug my middle finger up and down her crease, coating it in her slickness. My cock throbbed, and I wished the blanket were bigger because I was dying to touch myself. She kept her gaze forward, trying to maintain a neutral face, but I knew all her tells. Her lips were parted, her tongue rested gently against the back of her top teeth, and she gripped the

armrest by the window.

I brought my finger back up, finally swiping at her engorged clit, caressing one side, and then the other. "I think I also want to taste this," I said, inserting my finger into her tight pussy. "I want to get down on my knees and devour you, sling your leg over my shoulder and eat you out until you can barely stand." My finger was back to making slow loops around her clit, and she was starting to wriggle, chafing at my leisurely pace. I stilled her by putting two fingers inside her, and just then a flight attendant passed, bringing a drink to the passenger behind us. I kept my fingers buried in her pussy while the two behind us spoke. Tatiana was grinding her hips, trying to ride my fingers.

After a minute, the flight attendant left, and I withdrew my fingers from her pussy and started another slow circle around her clit. Around and around I went, applying pressure evenly, until I passed a spot that made her gasp. I felt the tension in her body wind up tighter. I returned to that magic spot and worked it.

I put my mouth right up to her ear. "You make me so damn hard, Tatiana. And I can't handle your beauty when you come." She gawked at me. My fingers worked quickly over her greedy pussy.

She lifted her heel and pressed it against the bulkhead in front of us. This allowed her hips to lift just an inch; I corkscrewed two fingers to the knuckle inside her cunt until her toes curled. Her pussy was squeezing around me, and in the silence of the cabin, you could hear her heavy breathing. The bulkhead in front of us creaked.

"Come for me, Fun Girl," I urged, caressing slippery clit, stroking faster inside her. She suddenly pushed back on the headrest, biting into the blanket to muffle the sound of the orgasm that jolted her in her seat. Her face contorted with the pleasure and I felt my heartbeat pounding in my cock, my balls begging for release.

The air around us was scented with sex. Her thigh muscles tensed around my hand,

and then I felt them relax. I stroked her walls softly, enjoying the aftershocks of her orgasm. When I withdrew my hand from under the blanket, I passed it discreetly under my nose and across my lips. Tatiana leaned over and kissed me deeply, running her fingers through my hair before tucking the blanket around her and resting her head on my shoulder. “You're so perfect,” she yawned.

I watched her until she was sound asleep. Before I'd met her, I was only seeing half the picture.

When she drew that Ace of Swords card, I thought she was silly. Why would I need a change in perspective? My intellect had gotten me far in life. I thought feelings and instinct would only complicate things.

I was partly right, those things did lead to complications. But since broadening my horizons, experiencing the world in a new way, I'd gained so much.

I had Tatiana. I couldn't imagine needing anything more.

Smart men may not sleep with their boss's daughter...

But smart men also don't ignore love when it finds them.