



At Your Door

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Category: Romance, Lesbian Romance

Description: Mia Baron thrives on routine: early mornings slinging coffee, quiet nights in her tiny San Francisco apartment, and absolutely no surprises. But when a misdelivered package—and its wildly unexpected contents—throws her into the orbit of her infuriatingly charming neighbor, Mia’s carefully controlled world is turned upside down.

Enter Griffon Scott, the vibrant and annoyingly attractive new neighbor who seems hell-bent on invading Mia’s peace. Between blasting music and late-night “activities,” she’s impossible to ignore. What starts as an inconvenient clash soon gives way to a connection Mia never saw coming, one that’s equal parts frustrating and thrilling.

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CHAPTER 1

MIA

“Umm, excuse me?”

I can hear a high-pitched voice coming from behind me, but my hands are drenched from washing out one of the blenders, so I’m not in a position to talk to customers right now. But I could already hear the layered conversations coming from all directions, which only tells me one thing—it’s 6 a.m.

In San Francisco, all anyone cared about at that time was coffee. Doesn’t matter your background, your industry, or how much money’s in your bank account—coffee runs the city.

For the next few hours, we’ll all swap roles, jumping in to help extinguish each fire as soon as it sparks.

So, even though I’m supposed to be cleaning, I drop the blender in the sink, slap on my Disney smile, and turn to face a blonde woman juggling a stroller in one hand and a small Vanilla Frappé in the other.

“Hi, can I help you?” I ask.

Her light scoff as she looks me up and down doesn’t go unnoticed, “Uh...yeah. I ordered a Vanilla Frappé withnowhip, but this clearly has whipped cream, and my baby can’t have all that sugar.”

I can feel my teeth grinding as I hold back from telling her there's more sugar in that Vanilla Frappé than in a can of soda. Not to mention the caffeine they pretend isn't in it, even though it's been on the menu for years. Yet, moms like her come in here every day, proudly buying it for their kids.

"Let me fix that for you." I reach out to grab the drink and she pulls away at the last second.

"Can you actually remake the whole thing, please?" It's not really a question. I nod, forcing a semi-tight smile, and there it is—that same sick look only specific customers give me. The kind that screams, "I'm above you." It used to crush me, but now I'm practically immune.

So, I turn away and remake her sugar-loaded, caffeine-packed Vanilla Frappé, no whipped cream, still smiling. When I turned back, she looked anything but happy, seeing me handle it without a problem.

"Here ya go! Sorry about that." I can feel the wave of self-satisfaction already coming over me.

"Mhmm, thanks." And she's gone within seconds, her bright blonde hair whipping in the breeze, leaving behind a reminiscence of her overly sweet perfume.

I only get to relish in my small success for a moment, before I hear an all too familiar yelp come from across the room, and I quickly turn around to find Eleanor flat on the ground covered in milk.

"Cold foam?" I ask, knowingly.

Her eyes are closed but all she does is nod her head. I don't know how many times I've found her like this, but it's slowly becoming a habit. I bite back a giggle before

reaching my hand out to pull back up and we both stand there watching as the puddle of milk spreads across the floor.

“Don’t you dare laugh!”

“I’m not, I swear, I’m not.” But I know my face says otherwise.

“Come on and help me before Joe notices, he can’t know I fucked up my 5th batch.”

Her whispering reminds me that the shop is still packed with customers waiting in line, and panic starts to set in as I look around and realize there are only a few of us on the floor.

“Okay, go grab a new apron while I clean this up. We need to get started on those orders.” My eyes are zeroed in on the amount of empty cups—with names written on them—lined up on the counter.

El’s head whips around to see what’s caught my eye, “Oh, fuck meee!” She cries out.

I’ve been working at A Brew For You for almost four years now, and I still can’t get over how fast things go from totally fine to a complete shit show. But watching El dash to the back while I clean up this spill, I know I wouldn’t want to do this with anyone else.

We’ve been best friends our whole lives, and when it comes to making coffee, we’re the best duo. Maybe that’s why Joe’s kept us around so long—or he probably just figured he could pay two broke introverts next to nothing while still having us work full-time.

And it’s worked, for quite some time, clearly. Of course, there have been times when we both said “Fuck it, let’s quit!” But in reality, it’s the best option for me right now.

For one, my 300-square-foot apartment is in the building that sits right on top of A Brew For You, making it the shortest commute of all time.

Secondly, I couldn't imagine starting completely over at a new job. Just the thought of having to sit through an interview makes me sick.

When we were first hired, desperate for anything, our social anxieties were thrown out the window. Behind the counter is probably the only place I don't feel like I'm going to die when someone talks to me.

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Or like every word that comes out of my mouth is going to just crumble up into dust. I feel calm, and unlike others, I like the early mornings. The cold and crisp air combined with the smell of fresh coffee beans is magic in itself.

El would much prefer to sleep in, but we both know we work better together. We keep each other on track, force each other to show up, and then when we're done, we rehash all of our embarrassing moments from the day—usually over takeout, upstairs in my apartment.

Which is what I'm trying to convince El to do when it's finally time to clock out at noon. But I can already tell by the frown on her face that she will say no.

“Why not? Let's watch a movie!” I whine. I try to make the sad puppy dog eyes at her as we walk out the front door towards her baby blue Subaru.

“Ugh, I wish, but my family's in town for my nephew's birthday, and you know how my mom gets. She needs my help preparing the food and probably anything else she can think of.” Her hands are waving around in the air as she unlocks her car.

“Yikes. Well, tell Noah I said ‘Happy Birthday!’ And text me when you make it home.” I pat the hood of her car before stepping back onto the curb.

“You too!” El says jokingly. We're both laughing as we go our separate ways.

When I finally step into the small entryway of the old building, my body starts to relax as I slip into cruise control, ready to begin my end-of-the-day routine. I turn to the right and use my key to check the mailbox. Aside from a couple of coupons, it's

completely empty.

Locking it again, I glance up at the narrow spiral staircase and let out a deep sigh. The elevator's been broken since I moved in, but every day, I still glance to the left at the metal gate covering it, hoping that maybe, one day, it'll be working again.

But for now, I turn back towards the old, creaky, wooden stairs and begin my journey all the way up to the sixth floor, which, until recently, occupied only four residents.

It's probably because the elevator is broken, and you'd have to be either crazy or desperate to want to make the journey up here. I know I'm both.

My neighbor Mary, who lives across the hall, isn't crazy; she just really wanted a view of the water. My other neighbor, Alex—who travels the world half the time backpacking—lives an insane lifestyle, so I count him as crazy. But the one person I have yet to figure out is my new next-door neighbor.

I've been lucky enough to avoid her so far, but judging from the loud music and constant voices coming from her apartment these last few days, I doubt we'd get along.

She's clearly a loud, party girl who doesn't care about anyone else, and I'm the complete opposite—I like peace and quiet.

Maybe it's because I don't really have friends besides Eleanor. Sometimes I'll play Uno with Mary, but she's partially deaf in one ear and I'm still learning sign language, so our conversations are limited. Either way, I enjoy my alone time, and lately, that's been ruined. Today's no different. As I round the corner and step onto the sixth floor, I can already hear the music spilling down the hallway.

“Great.” It's all I can mutter out as I bend over with my apron and bag in hand, barely

keeping it off the ground, as I try to catch my breath.

When I finally find the strength to keep moving, my eyes lock on the apartment at the end of the hall—past mine, past Mary's, past everyone's. It's the biggest one on this floor, a two-bedroom I've had my eye on since I moved in years ago.

Unfortunately, like many of the apartments in this building, it's been vacant due to construction and plumbing issues. I don't know the specifics, but if it's anything like the maintenance needed in my place, I doubt it'll ever be available. Not that I could afford it anyway, but that doesn't stop me from dreaming.

I'm completely knocked out of my daze when I feel my body lurch forward after my foot gets caught on something. I'm barely able to catch myself with my hands before I crash into my front door.

When I finally regained my balance, I immediately looked down to find the culprit. I'm even more confused to find a medium-sized brown box sitting in front of my door.

"Huh?" I'm standing there with my eyebrows furrowed as I consider my past few purchases. My eyes suddenly go wide. Wait, is that what I think it is?!

I ordered it not too long ago, so it really shouldn't be here yet, but I know it's the only thing I've ordered in a while.

When I pick it up, I'm sure it's the one. The box isn't too heavy, but it's definitely not filled with feathers.

I can hardly contain my excitement as I unlock the door, kick it closed behind me, and hurry to my coffee table to set everything down. Fortunately, I keep a box cutter nearby. As soon as I see apartment number 444 on the shipping label, I don't hesitate

before tearing open the seal.

After seeing Eleanor eyeing it in a store, I immediately started saving up to get it for her birthday coming up. I was worried it wouldn't arrive in time, but as my hands rip open the flaps of the box and toss aside the tissue paper, I can't contain my smile when I finally pull out a...

DILDO?!?!

CHAPTER 2

MIA

“Okay, I think that's enough now.” At this point, I'm just annoyed and ready to hang up on El laughing her ass off at my misery.

Granted, I should've known this would be her reaction, but I didn't have any other choice. Once I realized what I was holding, I immediately threw it back in the box and FaceTimed her.

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“I’m sorry—” she continues to interrupt herself with laughter. “Wh-what was it supposed to be again?” I can literally see the tears in her eyes from laughing so hard.

“It was supposed to be a custom Mean Girls-themed tumbler. It was going to be perfect! It’s your favorite movie, and our worlds literally revolve around coffee. So, I got it made with your name engraved in it. I.. I just don’t even know how this could happen.

I mean, I bought it from Etsy for Christ’s sake!”

I know I’m rambling, but there’s no point in keeping it a surprise anymore.

I’m standing across the room, completely dumbfounded, holding my phone while Eleanor and I both stare at the box sitting on my couch.

“I don’t think I even want that on my couch.” My eyes are still locked on the box as Eleanor falls back into another fit of laughter.

“What did it look like? Was it brand new?” she blurts out, her giddiness finally pulling my attention from the box to the screen, where Eleanor is staring at me with raised eyebrows.

“Are you excited?!” I ask with wide eyes, unable to tell if she’s joking or not.

“I mean, it’s still a good birthday gift. Just saying.” Her eyebrows are wiggling, and I glare at her, even though I know she can only see the box. My silence says it all.

“Okay, I’m done. I promise.” El raises her other free hand as she continues, “Are you sure it came from Etsy? Because I’ve never heard of that before.”

My brows are furrowed as I make my way back over to the couch. “Of course, it’s from Etsy. You know I would’ve never ordered this—” I set the phone down on the arm of the couch before grabbing the flap of the box, “—and it was addressed to m—”

“Mia?” El breaks the silence that lasts for a beat.

I have to let out a deep breath before continuing, “It was addressed to Griffon Scott.”

Shit. Through my excitement, I must’ve just read the apartment number and skipped over everything else. When I finally pick the phone back up and flip the camera around to face her, she looks even more confused than before.

“Who the hell is Griffin Scott?” I can’t help but roll my eyes because if there’s one thing Eleanor isn’t great at, it’s picking up on context clues.

“Well, I’m just guessing, but if there’s only three other people on this floor, and the only one I haven’t met is—”

“Holy shit! That’s your new neighbor’s dildo!” she blurts out. My eyes shoot open, and my hand rushes to cover the speaker.

“SHHHHH! Fucking hell. El, you can’t just scream that.” My head whips around as if someone can see me.

She visibly winces before whispering, “Sorry, I forgot about the thin walls.”

I can do is fall back onto my couch, sitting right next to the box from hell. “At least

that means she got the address wrong.” El’s voice is hopeful, but we both know this is a disaster.

“Partially. But either way, that still means I have to return it.” I chew on my lip, already trying to figure out what to do.

“And meet her,” she adds.

The idea of meeting my new neighbor and returning her brand-new dildo at the same time crashes down on me as if things couldn’t possibly get any worse.

“Oh my God. What the hell am I supposed to do now?” I whine. Within seconds, I’m on my feet, and the pacing begins to set in.

“She probably already thinks I’m rude because I haven’t introduced myself, and now I steal her package? How the hell do I explain that?”

I can slowly feel my embarrassment turning to anger. My life has gone from zero to 100 in just a few hours. This is exactly why I like my peace and quiet. This would’ve never happened if Griffon hadn’t shown up.

I don’t know her or anything, but in my world, there are no surprises. No loud parties, no groups of friends coming and going, and definitely no random dildos showing up at my door. If this was Mary’s package, it would have probably just been a puzzle. Or if it was Alex’s, it would likely have been hiking gear. But no, it had to be her.

“Okay, calm down. Did you cut through the shipping label?” I finally pick up my phone to see El still there, waiting. I shake my head in response, unable to speak.

“Okay, perfect! Put everything back how it’s supposed to be. Use some clear tape, seal that bitch back up, and put it outside her door like you never opened it!”

I'm silent for a moment. "Shit, you're a genius El!" I can feel the gray clouds floating away as the plan begins to form.

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“Yeah, I know. And if you do it now, it will be perfect timing.” I nod, knowing she’s right. For the first time since I clocked out, I checked the time—2:09 PM.

Damn, this whole ordeal has taken three hours?

“You’re right. Thank you so much, El. I know you’re going to be super busy this weekend, so I’ll update you on Monday. And can you act like I didn’t just tell you about your birthday gift?”

She flashes a big smile before responding, “Oh, you mean my custom-made dild—”

“STOP,” I warn. I’ve had enough of that word for tonight.

“Okaaaay, okaaaay. I’ll see you Monday!” After one last smile, my screen goes black, and I’m left to think about my own thoughts.

It’s a good plan. A really good one, actually. It’sso good, that I should get up and find my packing tape and get it done. But suddenly, all the effects of work, climbing up and down six flights of stairs, and this whole mix-up finally catch up to me. All I can manage to do is move the box from the couch to the floor next to my front door.

I’m sure it’ll be fine if I do it later.

Finally, I kick off my shoes and don’t even bother to change before plopping back down onto the couch, where I knock out in minutes.

I'm jolted awake in a panic by the sound of someone screaming. My body springs up from the couch, and I grab my head to steady myself against the dizziness. But when I hear the scream again, I leap to my feet. It sounded like a woman, and she sounded like she was dying.

Immediately, my mind shoots to Mary, and I'm about to reach my front door when the words "Oh, fuck" make me freeze in my steps.

Well, that doesn't sound like Mary.

"Shit, don't stop!" The voice continues.

Okay, I can hear that loud and clear now.

My wide eyes snap to the door of my bedroom. Maybe it's because I'm still waking up, but the sound is so loud and clear that it seems to be coming from my room.

My brows furrow as I approach the door and turn the handle, not fully prepared for what might be inside.

But my fear of finding strangers getting it on in my bed quickly fades when I walk in. Even in the dark, I can see that my bed is still made from this morning, and my room is completely empty.

I feel myself relax, and just as I'm about to turn away and walk out, I hear, "Griffon, please."

Oh my God.

I don't know why I don't immediately rush out; it feels like my feet are glued to the ground. Now, the sounds of my wall shaking against my headboard begin to flood in.

This can't actually be happening. I guess I never thought much about it before since that apartment has always been vacant, but it's clear our bedrooms share a wall.

"Griffon, I'm gonna c—"

I'm out of the room, slamming the door shut behind me within seconds, and I don't stop until I reach my kitchen.

I think I've learned enough about a stranger's sex life for one day.

I never realized how dry my throat was until I finished chugging a full water bottle in record time. I should really eat something since I skipped dinner, but I don't have much of an appetite.

When I glance at the clock and see it's 6:55 PM all I register is that I've already slept for five hours and still feel exhausted. Judging by the banging sounds still coming from my bedroom, I have a feeling I won't be getting much more sleep tonight.

When I finally make it back to the couch, I turn on the TV to drown out the noise before shutting my eyes tightly. But the only thing replaying in my mind is the name Griffin.

It's more like, "Griffon, please." But it wouldn't stop, and at a certain point, I couldn't distinguish between the real sounds and what was just in my head.

Either way, I couldn't stop tossing and turning for the rest of the night. Even when the noises finally seemed to fade, I still couldn't bring myself to venture back into my room.

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When I wake up for the second time, it's to the sound of my walls vibrating. Fortunately, it isn't from the sound of someone's body evaporating. But I can't decide which is worse, because the music blasting through my apartment right now makes me want to rip my ears off.

Any other day, I would just roll my eyes and tell Eleanor about it, but after hours of tossing and turning and suffering through her live show next door, the music feels like the cherry on top.

I have officially had enough.

I know I'm losing it when I jump off the couch without putting on shoes. Still in my uniform from yesterday, I swing open my front door, tripping over everything in my path. I barely take three steps before I'm standing in front of her door.

For a split second, I rethink my plan. I know this isn't me. I'm not confrontational. As the music blares even louder, I raise my fist and start banging on her door. After a few knocks, the music cuts off, and I hear footsteps approaching. I straighten my shoulders and plant my hands on my hips.

But when the door opens, I have to gather my thoughts and control my expression as I'm greeted by a sheer white T-shirt and two very prominent points staring back at me. I quickly tilt my head up before my eyes linger too long and meet the darkest blue eyes I've ever seen. This isn't what I expected—her face is framed by the brightest orange hair, and as I finish my quick once-over, I notice plaid pajama shorts

barely peeking out from under her tee.

“Can I help you?” Her eyebrows are raised up at me, and her slight attitude as if I interrupted her morning, immediately reminds me why I’m here.

“Uh... yes, actually. I would really appreciate it if you were a little more considerate of the fact that this is an apartment building, not your house.” My snappy tone makes her eyebrows shoot up even higher, and I don’t miss how her eyes slowly scan over me, leaving me suddenly vulnerable, knowing I still smell and look like a coffee-stained mess. Still, I cross my arms over my chest and hold my ground.

“And as your next-door neighbor, I’d love it if you tried to keep your private life a little more private.” I put on a fake tight smile as I nod—hinting at what I had to suffer through last night.

A small smirk begins to grow on her face. “Ohhh, you’re Mia. They told me I would meet you at some point.”

I stare back in confusion.

“How do you know my name? Who are ‘they’? Have you met Alex and Mary?” I ask, stumbling over my words. She’s fully smiling now, clearly amused.

“You sound surprised. Of course, I’ve met them. Alex mentioned a few days ago that he was heading out for another adventure, and I knew Mary wouldn’t hear my music. But obviously, I haven’t had the chance to meet you yet, so I had no idea.”

She gives me another slow once-over, her gaze lingering before the tip of her tongue grazes her plump lips.

“Obviously,” I add.

Her brows lift at me again, and I roll my eyes, feeling my frustration rise. Of course, she's already made herself at home on the sixth floor. No one else seems bothered by her, which only makes me feel like the crazy one. But she doesn't seem to care. Her gaze drifts past me, toward my apartment, and her eyes narrow at something on the ground.

"Uh... is that my package?"

I freeze when her words finally register. My eyes nearly pop out of my skull as I turn around and see what I tripped over in my rush out of the apartment. It wasn't just a pair of shoes or some trash—it was a solid black rubber dildo

CHAPTER 3

MIA

"Well, what did you say?" El whispers, handing me the next cup. My hands move quickly to turn it, squinting at the scribbled name. Jane? Or maybe James...? The handwriting is a total mess.

"Is that a 'M' or an 'N'?" I ask in return.

"Don't change the fucking subject. What did you say?" she demands, her eyes drilling into me.

"I said no." I turn away, heading toward the sink to avoid her reaction, but her silence says it all.

"What do you mean, you said no?!"

She's whisper-yelling, not that it matters—our customers can definitely hear her. It's

almost 10:30 AM on a Monday, well past rush hour, and the shop is nearly empty. All that's left are the work-from-home types looking for a change of scenery and students needing a study spot.

For once, I wish we had a crowd so I could bury myself in work instead of replaying what is easily the most mortifying moment of my life.

“I mean, there was a fucking dildo sticking out of a box by my front door—I didn’t know what to say.” I barely notice as my hands begin to grip firmly on the edge of the sink.

“So, I said ‘no,’ grabbed everything in one go, and ran inside before slamming the door shut.”

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“Wait, so you didn’t return the toy?” Eleanor speaks up. I finally release my grip and spin around to look at her, confused.

“Did you not just hear me? Hell no! I was stuck on my door like Spider-Man for a good 10 minutes before I finally sat down,” I say, throwing my hands up in exasperation.

“Oh my God, Mia! I told you to put the damn package outside her door!” El whines.

“Yeah, well, I fell asleep! Then I completely forgot I left it by the front door. You know how I get when I feel overwhelmed—I freeze up and say anything to get out of it as quickly as possible.”

“Yeah, but Mia, this is your neighbor. I don’t know if you’re getting out of this. You stole her damn sex toy,” Eleanor explains.

“I didn’t steal anything—” My finger points defensively at El’s face. “—she put the wrong address!”

“And now you refused to give it back.” She adds. Her tight smile and wide eyes make me realize how crazy this all sounds. I should’ve just put the damn box out in the hall when I had the chance.

“Have you seen her? Has she tried to talk to you since then?” El asks, her brows furrowing with concern.

“No. Absolutely not. I stayed in all weekend trying to avoid her. I can’t even imagine

running into her after all of that.” The thought alone makes my stomach turn. I hadn’t heard anything from her apartment all weekend—no music, no screaming girls. I was starting to think she was taunting me with the silence.

This morning, I pressed my ear against my bedroom wall, trying to hear if she was home. I even looked at her apartment door ten times before finally stepping out and sprinting down the stairs for work.

“Well, then good. Maybe she’s moved on and forgotten about this whole thing, and is just trying to spare you the embarrassment too.” El’s smile is bright as she nods her head.

Maybe she’s right. She was right about putting the package outside, and I didn’t listen to her then. The stress in my face melts away along with the tension in my shoulders. Griffin does seem like the type of girl who would forget that even happened. She’s probably already ordered three more toys while I’m busy stressing over this one.

I nod in agreement, feeling the weight of the whole weekend start to lift.

“Okay, but can you please come over tonight? I really think I just need a night of corny rom-coms. Please?” I’m practically begging, and she looks like she wants to roll her eyes, but I know I’m winning her over.

“Fine. Only because of the disaster you got yourself into this weekend! Now I’ve got to use the bathroom. Cover the floor for me!” I don’t even get a chance to reply before she’s gone. Besides myself, she’s the only person I know with a bladder the size of a squirrel.

I don’t even mind, though. At this point, I’m entering my last hour of work, and the shop doesn’t have a single person in line. So, I make my way back to the dishes and start tackling the massive pile we’ve accumulated over the past few hours. I know I’ll

thank myself later when I'm done and cleaned up for the next day.

I'm only two dishes in when I hear the door open and the bell chime, reminding me to say hello.

"Welcome in! I'll be there in just one moment!" I don't hear a response, so I quickly turn off the water and dry my hands before walking over to the register.

"What can I get for you?" I ask, instinctively looking down as I reach the counter to type in my password and take the order. But the soft yet unforgettably strong voice that answers breaks me from my routine.

"Hmmm. What would you recommend?"

My head snaps away from the screen to see none other than Griffon, my next-door neighbor, standing right in front of me with the most mischievous smile I've ever seen.

CHAPTER 4

MIA

There was only one other time I felt like this—sixth grade, my first-ever presentation. My middle school was strict about projects; you couldn't pass on to the next grade without completing one. It wasn't that the assignments were difficult, but the pressure on my 10-year-old self was unbearable. I completely froze. Not a single word came out. It felt like the world was collapsing around me.

Thankfully, my partner and newly found friend, El, took over the first half, giving me time to get my shit together. We passed with flying colors.

But right now, there's no El to save me. I'm stuck, frozen like a deer in headlights.

"Cat got your tongue?" Griffon asks, her smile growing wider.

"Uhhh—" My head snaps around, searching frantically, but Eleanor is nowhere in sight. My gaze falls back on Griffon. She's wearing a sage green sweater vest over a white tee, but it's her eyes that draw me in—bright blue, sharp enough to stop me in my tracks. Still, the satisfied look on her face makes my eyes narrow.

"How do you know where I work?" I question.

Her brows lift, but she doesn't say a word. Instead, her eyes start to roam over me, and just like that, I'm pulled back to Saturday, to the moment we first met.

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Shit.

I was wearing my uniform then. The realization washes over me, and I squeeze my eyes shut, but it's too late—her laugh is already ringing in my ears.

“Yeah, I don't know if I would've cussed out someone in my work uniform, but I guess it doesn't matter if we're neighbors now, huh?” When my eyes open again, Griffon's head is tilted, one eyebrow raised.

I do another quick scan of the empty café and clear my throat before finally speaking. “Look, I'm sorry for banging on your door and yelling at you. I swear I'm not normally like that—it just kind of blew up on you.”

When I finish, I can feel her eyes on me, but mine stay glued to the countertop between us.

“I'm just teasing you, I promise. I actually came down here to apologize. I was hoping I didn't scare you off with all the—uhh... noise. I haven't seen you in a few days, so I thought I'd stop by,” Griffon explains, her hand reaching to scratch the back of her neck.

I raise my eyebrows in shock. Apologize? That's the last thing I expected to hear from her.

“Besides,” she continues, “I'm the building's new handywoman, so you'll be seeing a lot more of me.” Her smile doesn't change a bit when my eyes bulge and my mouth gapes open. There's so much to unpack here that I don't even know where to begin.

“I’m sorry. What did you just say?” I blurt out.

“Oh, I was hired to work on maintenance. That’s actually why I moved in. It was a great deal and the perfect opportunity for me to work and live in the same place.” Her smile doesn’t falter, and while I know she’s not talking fast, her words jumble together in my head. I must be going insane because there’s no way this woman—with bright orange hair, blue eyes, and strikingly loud confidence (not to mention the music)—just said she’s working maintenance in the building I live in.

She’s already headed for the exit before I can muster a response. Now I can finally see her full outfit, including the khakis that fit her perfectly. She stops before she’s out the door and looks over her shoulder. The sunlight creates natural highlights in her ginger hair as her sapphire eyes meet mine.

“Oh, and about that package!” Her finger shoots up as if she just remembered.

I can feel the color rush to my cheeks as my eyes disconnect from hers. I knew this was coming, but I would’ve never imagined it would blow up at my job. For a minute, I actually thought El was right and that she forgot all about it.

“Keep it, as a gift from me,” Griffon says, winking before walking out the door, letting the café bell’s chime sound one last time.

The air I didn’t know I was holding finally escaped from my chest when I locked my front door, closing El and me inside my apartment. Immediately, I drop everything and let my body sink into my couch. I already hear El making her way into my kitchen and probably grabbing us drinks.

I let out a loud groan just now realizing how hard my temples are pounding.

The air I didn't know I was holding finally escapes from my chest as I lock the front door, closing El and me inside my apartment. Immediately, I drop everything and let my body sink into the couch. I can already hear El making her way into my kitchen, probably grabbing us drinks.

I let out a loud groan, just now realizing how hard my temples are pounding.

"I mean, I don't really see what the issue is, Mia. Isn't it a good thing that your place finally has someone doing maintenance? Isn't your garbage disposal still broken? And doesn't your toilet still make that screeching noise every time you fl—"

I cut her off before she can continue to remind me of all the issues I've piled up.

"That's exactly why this isn't good, El! That means I'd have to see her more often!" My arms are flailing as I stand up from the couch and begin to pace.

She stares at me blankly, completely confused.

"You don't get it, El. This girl is something else. If you could've seen how she was talking to me today, it's like she's... she's—"

I can't seem to find the right word to describe Griffon, but the sound of multiple people laughing next door makes me forget what we were even talking about. Both of our heads snap to my front door when the sound of Griffon's front door opening echoes through the hallway.

In a matter of seconds, El and I make eye contact from across the room before we both begin racing each other to my front door. I should've known she would win, though.

From her position in my small kitchen, it took her less than five steps before her face

was squished flat against my door, looking out the peephole.

“She’s hot!” Eleanor exclaims, as I finally make it to the door.

“Oh my God, El. Be quiet!” I whisper back. “I wouldn’t say she’s shot.”

That makes her pull herself away from the door. “Are you insane? She looks like a fucking model—her and her friends.” She moves back to the peephole before I push in front of her.

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“Let me see.” I can hear her groan in defeat, but I don’t care.

It’s kind of blurry because of how dirty my peephole is, but even through the dust, I know Eleanor’s right.

The first girl I see is a tall brunette; her hair is so long it almost matches the length of her black mini-dress. Hooked on her arm is a shorter tan girl with a head full of curls. Whatever they’re laughing at makes them double over as they walk past my door.

I pull away for just a moment, “What did you see? Did you hear them say anything?”

“No, you pushed me away before I could, but I did hear the two girls call her Griffon,” Eleanor says.

I’m tempted to open the door just to get a peek at how she looks. I wonder if she is still in that same green vest from before. But I know I could be risking further embarrassment and I think I’ve had enough of that for a lifetime. So I back away and let the voices fade into nothing as they walk down the hallway. But my mind can’t stop roaming through all the places Griffon could be going right now.

Who are those girls she's with?

Maybe they aren’t her friends—maybe one of them is her girlfriend?

Or are they both her girlfriends?

Is that who I heard with her Friday night?

I don't even realize I've zoned out until El's fingers snap in front of my face.

"Hellooo? Earth to Mia!"

I finally turn to see El standing before my door with arms crossed over her chest.

"What? What is it?"

"Uhhh, I think you have some explaining to do, don't you think?"

I turn away and head toward the couch. "What do you mean?" I ask, trying to sound confused.

"You know what I mean! We've been hanging out all weekend, and not once did you mention how hot your neighbor is. You made it sound like she was some crazy weirdo you couldn't stand to be around."

It's quiet for a moment. "Well, I wasn't really focused on her looks when we first met. May I remind you of the situation I was in?"

El just rolls her eyes and sighs before joining me on the couch.

"We can't be losers for the rest of our lives, Mia. We're 25, I still live at home with my parents, and we've been working at the same café for four years now. Something's got to change! How can you deny what the universe is literally giving you? I mean, did you see how tall she is? Jesus, you could climb her like a damn tree—"

"Okay, enough, El! I get it. I want change too, but definitely not like this. Now can we please just drop it for tonight? I just want to forget about all of this," I interrupt.

She waves her hand in my face. “Fine, fine, I’ll drop it for now, but you're not escaping this, Mia. She literally gave you a dildo!”

“Which I will be giving back,” I say, pointing my finger at her to make it clear.

“Ugh, why?” El groans.

“El, I can’t actually have her thinking I would use that!”

She doesn’t respond, but her lips are tight. I move to turn on the TV, ending the conversation. I’m about to click on Netflix when El stops me.

Her voice breaks the silence. “But what if you did?” El asks.

“Huh?” I turn to face her again, the remote still loosely in my hand.

“I mean, what if you acted like you used it?” It’s still silent as I stare at her blankly, wide-eyed.

“Let’s be real, I don’t think she’d actually expect you to use it either, but what if she just thinks you did?”

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Eleanor looks like one of those cartoon characters when they get a crazy idea and a lightbulb pops up above their head. Instead, the light is in her eyes, and I can feel the excitement rolling off her. But I'm about 100 steps behind, trying to catch up.

"Okay, but why in the world would I do that? And who the hell do you think I am?" I ask, my neck craning forward as my eyebrows furrow in confusion.

"I mean, don't you want to change her perspective on you just a little bit? She probably thinks you're just some stuck-up bitch of a neighbor that she'll never get along with. Plus, she embarrassed you at your job, Mia. She knows she's in your head. And she definitely doesn't think you have the balls to do it," Eleanor explains.

I close my eyes tightly and pinch the bridge of my nose, trying not to take offense to any of her accusations.

"And you think mefakeusing that toy will help change her perspective?"

Her eyes are wide as she nods proudly.

I don't even know what to say anymore. I thought I was down bad, but Eleanor seems to have completely lost it. I feel like I'm the only one still stuck on the crazy idea she just proposed, and she doesn't even seem fazed by my silence.

In fact, for the rest of the night, she seems so satisfied with what she's come up with that she falls asleep halfway through the movie she picked. And I'm stuck watching zombies tear people's brains apart while I work my way through the bomb she just dropped on me.

CHAPTER 5

GRIFFON

“Okay, we have to cheers to Griffon’s new apartment!” Monica squeals while standing up, even though only three of us are at the table.

“Although I don’t approve of you moving so far away from us, I know this is an amazing opportunity for you to do what you want and live where you want. So, congratulations bitch!” Monica exclaims while raising her glass and almost spilling half of its contents in the process.

The sound of our glasses clinking and the looks on my best friends’ faces make me bite my tongue from telling Monica that she’s made the same speech three times already tonight. I know I can’t bring down her high, not when they’ve both helped me so much. So, I raise my glass of water to my mouth, smile, and take a sip.

Even though I was the one who suggested we go out to a bar, I’d already decided I wasn’t going to drink tonight. Not only is tomorrow my first day on the job, but I don’t feel like I need alcohol to celebrate. I just want to be fully present in the moment. Because I actually did it, and for the first time in almost a week, it’s finally starting to feel real—thanks to Lauren and Monica for helping me finish unpacking.

I officially received my keys last Tuesday and then completely procrastinated on the move for the rest of the week. They were already planning to drive up to celebrate, but when they showed up Monday morning, they were shocked at the sight of my disastrous apartment. Without hesitation, they started bulldozing through my boxes of nonsense just to help me organize. I promised them drinks in return for all their hard work.

“Wait, why are we having your housewarming party at a bar instead of your actual

new apartment?” Monica asks.

The past few days flashed through my mind, and I set my water down with a deep sigh. “Because of my crazy new neighbor, remember? I’m trying not to bother her any more than I already have.”

“Oh, you mean the one who had to hear you fuck all night long?” Monica teases and all I can do is roll my eyes as they burst into laughter. I know they won’t be stopping anytime soon—they’ve been laughing about it all day ever since I told them what happened with Mia.

“I already apologized and said I didn’t know she was home,” I groan, which only makes them laugh harder.

“I wouldn’t call surprising her at work and embarrassing her much of an apology,” Lauren chimes in after calming down.

“Poor girl’s probably terrified of you. You send her a sex toy, keep her up all night with your shenanigans, and then show up at her job to bother her?”

Lauren takes a sip of her drink, and Monica jumps in without missing a beat.

“Yeah, honestly, I give her props for calling you out. I’d have done the same,” she says in agreement.

“Okay, wow—you don’t even know her, and you’re already siding with her? Also, are we forgetting she’s the one who stole my package?” I throw my arms up, baffled at how this conversation flipped onto me.

“Please, that toy? You’ve got more than enough toys,” Monica retorts, scrunching up her nose.

“And are you sure you didn’t just put the wrong address? You do that a lot, you know,” Lauren says, raising an eyebrow.

I’m actually stuck for a moment. I never considered the possibility that I might’ve put the wrong address. I honestly thought she was just a crazy thief.

“You didn’t think about that, huh?” Monica asks.

They both have pursed lips as I shake my head, admitting I hadn’t.

Of course, I didn’t think about that part specifically—maybe because I was so focused on everything else.

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Since she came banging on my door that Saturday morning, all I could think about was our interaction. She seemed frazzled but exhausted, which immediately made me feel bad. She didn't seem like the type to stand up and call people out, so I'm guessing I was a really shitty neighbor that night.

But in all fairness, I had no idea she was even there. I hadn't seen her my entire first week—up until that morning. By then, I'd already had multiple conversations with Mary and even got Alex's phone number.

But all of that flew out the window when I looked past her chocolate-brown hair and big round eyes to see a package I'd been waiting for, sprawled out on her floor. Just seeing it there sent chills down my spine. The way her doe eyes turned into saucers as if she'd been caught red-handed, made my entire head spin. I couldn't even get a word in before she disappeared, leaving me with nothing but the vision of her holding the toy.

I couldn't even really be mad about the package.

Not when the image of her using it kept me up all night. And now that I know she's just next door, it's almost like I can feel her through the walls. But the silence from her was killing me. Even though I knew I was pushing it by showing up at her job, I was just returning the favor—she was the one who kept me up this time. The look on her face when she saw me was priceless.

I know she'll never use the toy, but I couldn't stop myself from bringing it up. Maybe it's the way her cheeks turn pink so fast, or maybe I hoped it would spark something in her. I don't know what it is, but the idea of her being scared of me excites me.

“I mean, honestly, Griffin, at some point, you’re going to have to settle down and not be seen as the crazy whore next door,” Monica’s stern voice snaps me back to reality.

My eyes shift between the two of them, confused. “I’m sorry, but when did this become an intervention?” I must’ve missed a lot while my mind drifted.

“It didn’t, but as your best friends, we just want to make sure you aren’t out here screwing up this opportunity,” Lauren adds. One eyebrow is raised, and I know that look all too well.

As much as I’d love to argue with them, I nod because I know they’re right. I’ve always been handy, and when I started working in maintenance, I knew I wanted to live where I worked. Then, one night, while I was up late, I found this beautiful two-bedroom apartment with an insane view of the water. It felt like the opportunity just fell out of the sky.

However, when I contacted Ben, the owner, he said the unit hadn’t been available for years due to plumbing and construction issues. It was like someone handed me this opportunity on a silver platter. After some convincing, he offered me a position where I could live in another unit of the building for ‘half-off’ and work as maintenance while fixing up the two-bedroom apartment I had my eyes set on.

To say I’m the luckiest girl alive would be an understatement. The building itself is a hidden gem that just needs some buffing to reveal its shine. And as they said, the last thing I need is to screw it up.

But even after I booked Lauren and Monica’s Uber back to the hotel they were staying at for the week, Mia was the only thing on my mind. She looked like she’d seen a ghost when I walked in, and something about that makes me want to keep pushing as if I need to see what her limits are.

To distract myself before bed, I open my phone to check the work I'll be starting tomorrow. Ben mentioned there's a long list of pending maintenance requests, so I know I've got a lot on my plate.

But when the list loads, I can't help but scoff when I see the name at the top:

Mia Baron

CHAPTER 6

MIA

When I wake up Tuesday morning, I can feel every muscle in my body aching with regret from sleeping on the couch with El. After trying to focus on the movie last night, I kept finding myself listening out for Griffon. When I finally heard her door close, I fell asleep with my knees to my chest while El sprawled out completely. I figured I had no place to complain, considering I was the one who begged her to come over in the first place.

But when I finally crack open my eyes and see the other half of the couch empty, my body instantly relaxes. I stretch out my legs until I feel my toes crack. Glancing at the bathroom, I see the light shining from under the door, telling me exactly where El went.

She's probably already getting ready for the day. It's not uncommon for her to sleep over on Monday nights. Mondays are always the worst day at the shop, and we usually come upstairs, order pizza, and put on our favorite show to cope. But we never got pizza last night—thanks to my fear of running into Griffon again—instead, we filled ourselves up with popcorn. Even after El fell asleep, I kept stress-snacking, trying to stop my mind from roaming all over the place.

Now, sitting up and looking around my living room, I have a headache. When my feet touch the floor, I can feel the popcorn I dropped last night crumbling beneath me. I groaned in disgust, but I still couldn't bring myself to get off the couch. Instead, I sink back into the cushions, trying to calm the dull pounding behind my eyes.

After a while, my head starts to drift again, and I feel myself starting to doze off when I hear a soft knock on the door. At first, I thought it was coming from my dream, so I snuggled deeper into the couch.

But then I hear it again, this time much louder.

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

"It's maintenance!"

I'm jolted awake. El must've heard it too because the sudden screeching sound of the toilet flushing rips through the apartment, and I physically wince.

Without wasting a second, I peel myself off the couch, standing so fast I have to steady myself by holding my head, trying to control the dizziness.

I'm almost at the front door when I realize I didn't have a chance to fix myself. I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the round mirror hanging on the wall beside me and almost gasp at the sight of my red-rimmed brown eyes and my dark hair twisted up like a bird's nest. But the annoyance from the persistent knocking pushes me to whip the door open before they can knock again.

I should've already registered that it would be Griffon on the other side, but I'm still left speechless when I'm met with her striking blue eyes and bright smile.

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“Hey! I tried calling you earlier to let you know I was coming by, but you didn’t answer. Would you believe you’re the first person on the list?” Griffon says, and my brows furrow in confusion.

I clear my throat, trying not to sound groggy. “I’m sorry, you have my number?”

She looks a little confused but continues. “Of course, I got it from when you inquired about the problem with your toilet.”

It’s a statement, not a question, and she raises her eyebrows as she watches the realization hit me—she’s here to fix my toilet.

I finally take in her maintenance uniform: a dark gray utility jumpsuit. She’s holding a toolkit in her other hand, and I almost want to laugh at how picturesque it all seems. She looks like she’s about to shoot a porno. Her long orange hair, usually the show’s star, is pulled back into a smooth, tight bun, accentuating her jawline and cheekbones. Her blue eyes, though, are center stage, especially with the gray jumpsuit making them pop.

I’m quiet for a moment, trying to think of something to say, but I’m overwhelmed. Of course, after all these years of spamming Ben with complaints about the issues in my apartment, he finally hires someone to help, and it just has to be a supermodel. Now, I’m supposed to let her into my place willingly?

“And you put ‘Please come as early as possible’ in the special notes, so I figured I’d get started early,” Griffon adds.

“Uh, actually, I fixed the issue with my toilet a while ago,” I finally manage to say. I avoid her eyes because I know I’m lying, but hers don’t waver.

“You mean the toilet I just heard screeching through the walls?”

My head snaps up, and my eyes widen. “You can hear that?”

Before Griffon can answer, a fully dressed Eleanor appears behind me, and I instinctively step aside.

“Of course, she can hear that. I told you it sounds like nails on a chalkboard! I have to plug my ears every time!” Eleanor exclaims.

I shut my eyes tightly. The last thing I ever wanted was for El to meet Griffon. She’s shy, but not as bad as me. Everything is just more matter-of-fact with her. After last night, I definitely don’t need her stirring things up further.

“Hey! I’m Eleanor, Mia’s best friend. You must be Griffon, right?”

Their words blur together as they introduce themselves, drowned out by my racing thoughts. What the hell am I going to do?

She cannot come in here.

This has to be crossing a line in whatever game this is.

I’m spiraling now.

“I actually have to get to work, so I’ll have to reschedule this. Thanks, though,” I blurt out, loud and short, making both of them look at me, eyebrows raised.

“Don’t be silly. I can cover your shift—” Eleanor turns to me with a mischievous smile. She knows exactly what she’s doing. “—unless you want Griffon working in your apartment alone.”

Her grin grows as my eyes widen.

I glance at Griffon, who looks like she’s holding back laughter at my obvious discomfort. The smirk on her face only makes me more annoyed.

“Is it even safe for you to work with tools after a night out?” The words fly out of my mouth before I can stop them, and I feel El’s hand hit my side. Griffon’s head jerks back, her eyebrows raised.

“I mean, because I heard your door open late last night, that’s all,” I stammer, folding my arms across my chest and clearing my throat, still avoiding eye contact.

Griffon chuckles softly, but before she can respond, El cuts in again.

“Please, don’t mind her. She’s always grumpy on Mondays.”

I turn to glare at El as Griffon laughs, but she’s not even looking at me.

“Anyway, I’ve got to get going. Nice meeting you, Griffon! See you later, Mia!”

My mouth falls open, speechless that El is actually letting this happen. She just winks at me before moving swiftly past us both.

Griffon turns in El’s direction. “You too! See you around!”

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When Griffon turns back to face me, something in her gaze feels different. The dark blue of her eyes seems to deepen, and I swear I notice her jaw tighten. Slowly, I feel my legs grow weaker as we stand there in silence, staring at each other until she finally raises an eyebrow.

Reluctantly, I step aside to let her in.

CHAPTER 7

MIA

Griffon has been in my bathroom for almost an hour now. In that time, I did absolutely nothing except clean up my popcorn mess and pace around. I can't even remember the last time I had time off from work, let alone the last time someone other than El was in my apartment. So, this feels weird for a lot of reasons.

At first, I kept getting up to check on Griffon, only to psych myself out and sit back down. But now, to distract myself, I've planted my feet in the kitchen, channeling all my energy into washing dishes.

Surprisingly, she hasn't come out or tried to talk to me, and I can't decide if I'm relieved or disappointed.

After a while, though, I had to put on headphones because the sounds coming from the bathroom were insanely distracting.

Suddenly, I could hear everything—Griffon's grunts, her tools clanging against the

pipes—it was all too much.

It felt like I was watching a movie scene when the plumber comes out of the bathroom shirtless, drenched in sweat, and prepared to say the corniest line.

“Can I fix anything else for you?”

As my mind continues to roam through fully immersive fantasies, I’m quickly snapped back to reality when I hear the sound of my bathroom door closing. Her low footsteps steadily grow closer, but for some reason, I can’t bring myself to drop the dish and turn around. It’s not that I actually think she’s going to be shirtless and covered in sweat... but the thought alone makes me freeze.

“Okay! You’re all set!” Griffon shouts as she enters the kitchen.

Her words made me drop the plate I was washing as I whipped my head around. “What do you mean, you’re all set?”

I instantly regret sounding so surprised when I see her raise an eyebrow at me.

“Usually, that means it’s fixed, done, finished. You do know women are capable of fixing things, right?” Griffon teases while setting her toolkit down.

I can finally get a good look at her now, and I’m proud to say my imagination wasn’t too far off. She’s definitely not shirtless, but a few buttons on her utility jumpsuit are undone, revealing a thin white tank underneath. It must’ve been hot in there because her sleeves were rolled up, and I could see the sweat dripping down her chest from across the room. Instead of letting my gaze follow that trail down her shirt, I shake my head and roll my eyes at her comment.

“No, I just meant the toilet’s been sounding like that for years. And you’re telling me

you just walked in there and fixed it in under an hour?”

Now, she’s wearing the same self-satisfied look she had when she first caught me off guard at work, her bright smile making it impossible to miss.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying, yes.”

When I don’t respond, she continues, “Wait, did you think I was in there doing nothing?”

My head whips around, searching for a response, but I can’t seem to land on anything.

“No, that’s not what I said! I was ju—”

“No, you didn’t. But I can tell that’s what you thought. I can tell you didn’t believe the ‘loud gay girl next door’ would actually be able to fix anything. But that’s okay.” Griffon is already picking her toolkit back up as she finishes.

I don’t even try to disagree or agree. I’m speechless. Even if that’s not what I thought, she caught me completely off guard. There’s no point in saying anything else when she’s inches from my front door.

“U-uh, th-thank you, I guess?” It seems more like a question, but I don’t know what else to say.

She doesn’t seem to care much for it, though, as she reaches for my doorknob. However, her eyes catch something, and I can’t see what it is from where I’m standing, but the look on her face tells me it isn’t good.

“Huh. How’s my gift treating you, by the way?” Her smirk grows as I immediately turn away.

Oh, fuck.

Not that damn box, again.

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I'm not giving in to this bullshit today. She's already in my home. Isn't that enough?

I clear my throat and raise my chin. "I have no idea what you're talking about, and even if I did—which, as I said before, I don't—I still wouldn't use it."

She's fully grinning now. "Righhhht, well, maybe you should some time. You seem a little... uptight."

I shouldn't give her the satisfaction, but I can't help it—my eyes widen, and my jaw drops completely. However, she doesn't wait for a response; she just walks out, letting the door close behind her.

I spent the rest of my "day off" feeling stressed. I know I shouldn't care; I really, really shouldn't. It was just a stupid comment, but fuck.

"Uptight?"

Really?

"Everything Griffon said keeps replaying in my mind. The thought of her thinking I'm just some boring, sexist, rude prude makes me want to rip my hair out."

Yes, I may be a bit boring and sort of prudish, but I'm definitely not sexist. I really don't want her to think I'm rude. Honestly, I've been called half of those things my whole life—partly by Eleanor—but something about this situation feels different.

It feels like she won whatever stupid game this was. As I proved right, I was exactly who she thought I was. She seemed so satisfied to tease me, yet unsurprised or unimpressed as if it were too easy.

Holy shit, El was right. She does think I'm just some stuck-up bitch from next door that she can mess with for entertainment.

She already knew what she was doing when she started talking to Griffon in the first place. And now, especially after they seemed to get along so well together, I know I can't tell her what Griffon just said to me without her freaking out over the fact that I didn't say anything back.

So, I sat on the couch for hours, letting my mind rake through idea after idea. It wasn't until later that day that I finally managed to get back up and try to eat something. As I start to make my way toward the kitchen, something out of the corner of my eye stops me in my tracks.

When I turn to face the same brown box that's been haunting me, the only thing I can manage is, "Fuck."

I don't know why it's taking me so long to get comfortable. It's my own bed; this should be easy for me. It's not a big deal—millions of people get off every day. So why is it so hard to just "fake" it?

After some much-needed mental encouragement (aka box wine), I pushed myself back to my bedroom and lay in bed. I brought the box back with me just in case I needed some uhh... props. But now that I'm here, this all feels stupid and silly.

Am I really about to fake an orgasm to piss off—or impress—my neighbor?

Is that even what I'm actually doing? Because at this point, I don't know if this will

annoy her or just embarrass me further.

But as soon as I hear the echo of Griffon's front door closing, I swallow back my fears. I don't know if it's the liquid encouragement, but for once, I decided to take the risk.

My eyes flutter close as I attempt to focus on the sound of her footsteps. Earlier, when she emerged from my bathroom, I couldn't shake the image of her walking up behind me, her hands gripping the sink on either side, closing me in completely. I could almost feel her chest rising and falling against my back, and the sensation of her breath on my neck felt so real that it put me in a trance.

Like now, when I hear her bedroom door open, my legs instinctively begin to spread. I'm lucky she can't see me, considering I'm wearing nothing but an oversized tee shirt. But that doesn't seem to help my brain; it feels like the wall between us is made of glass, leaving me feeling completely exposed.

It doesn't stop my back from arching at the sound of her walking around her room. This is all getting so real so fast. But I'm completely gone now. My mind has escaped my body, and it feels like every inch of my skin craves to be touched.

My hands roam over my body, but it isn't enough. Frustration builds within me as I tear off the old shirt, leaving myself completely naked.

I don't even notice I'm vocally whining until I suddenly realize the footsteps have stopped.

It's completely silent on the other side of the wall. I almost stopped myself, but the thought that she could be listening kept me going.

Before, the thought of her listening to me cum made me want to run away and hide,

but right now, I've never felt sexier.

I don't know if I've ever actually felt sexy. Of course, I've masturbated before. I'm a grown woman. But this—this is completely different. I'm used to simple—nothing crazy, nothing surprising.

This is all new to me, including the ache between my thighs. As I reach down to let my hands find my already wet heat, I can't help but let out a gasp.

I can hear Griffon's bed move under her weight as she gets into it, and my fingers immediately start working. This is the quietest she's been. Even when she's alone, I hear every creak from her bed frame as she tosses and turns.

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But now, the bed sounds solid as a rock as my hips begin to create a rhythm of their own.

“Fuck,” I whisper out.

As my fingers begin making small circles, I can feel my skin heating up by the second, and I can’t help but kick the comforter off the bed. The fabric feels like too much. But as I settle back into position, Griffon’s words flash through my mind.

“Well, maybe you should some time. You seem a little... uptight.”

I don't even think twice before reaching out, grabbing the brown box, and pulling out the most intimidating toy I’ve ever seen.

To be fair, every toy intimidates me, seeing as I don't own any of my own. But as much as I’d like it to be, right now just isn't the time for a lesson on how to use a huge dildo. It seems pretty straightforward.

Until now, I hadn’t planned on ever actually using it. I was supposed to be faking everything. But I know everything has gone to shit when I slip the tip of the toy inside of my mouth, and the first thing that comes to mind is Griffon.

The thought of her on top of me, her thighs on either side of my head, makes me force the toy down further until I hear myself gag, and my eyes begin to water. I can't stop as my other hand slips back down to touch myself.

All I can see is her blue eyes glowing through her red hair as she pushes herself

further down my throat.

I've completely forgotten about her actually being next door as I finally pull the toy out and lead it to my entrance. My eyes widen at the stretch.

"Oh, shit!" I can feel my body begin to relax as I slowly slip it further inside.

"Fuck!" I spit out. My eyes roll back as my hips continue to roll, edging me closer and closer.

The bed begins to rock from the movement, and if I didn't think she could hear before, she definitely can now. Under normal circumstances, I would be mortified, but now I'm almost bouncing on the toy. I've moved well past any embarrassment as I feel my body begin to clench.

"Fuck! I'm gonna cum!" I throw my head back as I imagine Griffon's mouth on me. Tasting me, touching me—anything. And I know this is all in my head, but when I think I hear the words "Don't stop", my body instantly breaks down.

I really want to grab the comforter and cover myself, but my limbs feel like cooked pasta, and my eyes seem to have a mind of their own as they begin to close, pulling me into one of the deepest sleep I've had in a long time.

CHAPTER 8

MIA

Looking back, I really should've known.

How could I have not heard anything?

Was I really that knocked out?

Whatever it is that people say about “good sex causing deep sleep” must be true for masturbation as well because I had never slept harder.

With closed eyes, I could feel the sheets clinging to my skin, but I didn’t care to move an inch.

Looking back, I definitely should have.

Maybe everything would’ve been different if, instead of turning over and sleeping longer, I had just opened my eyes and gotten up. Maybe if I hadn’t been so caught up in Griffon’s games, I wouldn’t have woken up two hours later than usual—panicked, naked, and scrambling to chase the sound of a waterfall pouring through my walls.

My feet are racing faster than my mind can keep up, and before I realize it, I’m slipping. In an instant, I feel my feet fly out from under me, and my body hits the floor with a loud thud.

“Ahhh!” I scream as a sharp pain shoots through my spine. I quickly roll onto my side, trying to relieve the pressure.

But just as I begin to turn, I freeze, forgetting the throbbing ache in my back. I am drawn to a puddle rapidly spreading down the hallway, heading straight for my living room.

As my brain starts to process what’s happening, I trace the trail back to its source...

The fucking bathroom.

“OH FUCK!” I yell as the realization hits me. Adrenaline surges through me, and my

body springs up to rip open the bathroom door. But I immediately regret it when I see water pouring over the sides of my toilet like a fountain.

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Fortunately, the water is crystal clear, resembling a birdbath more than a sewer. Still, my face scrunches up in disgust as I start running around, grabbing every towel in sight. I hear someone banging on my front door when I think it can't get any worse.

“MIA?!!”

KNOCKKNOCKKNOCK

“ARE YOU OKAY?!!”

Even though I'm silent, paralyzed by shock at the state of my apartment, it only takes a second for me to realize it's Griffon.

KNOCKKNOCKKNOCK

“MIA?!!! I have a key! I'm gonna come in, okay?!”

My eyes practically pop out of their sockets as I realize I'm completely nude.

“N-NO!! I'M OKAY, THANKS!” I screamed, rushed, and panicked.

My eyes are locked on the front door as I hear her pulling out her keys.

“Mia! I can hear the water through my walls! And I heard you fall! I'm coming in!” The frustration in her voice rips through the front door, and if I were in any other situation, I'd probably want to hear that on repeat. But all I can think about right now is Griffon seeing me completely naked.

I've never had better motivation to run fast in my life. As soon as I shut the door to my bedroom, I heard my front door unlocking and swinging open.

“Holy SHIT!” I hear as I tear through my closet, searching for my robe. When I finally find it, I don't waste a second slipping it on and tying the strap around my waist. I let out a tiny sigh, feeling slightly less exposed after tackling this first problem.

But when I reopen the door to my bedroom and don't see Griffon, my red flags shoot straight up. I start tiptoeing through the flooded hallway, gripping the walls to maintain my balance.

“Griffon?” I call out, not directing my voice anywhere specific since I have no idea where she is. It isn't until I try to listen for her response that I realize the sound of the water flowing has stopped.

“In here!” Griffon shouts from the bathroom.

I'm in the doorway in seconds, fully prepared to confront her. But I'm not ready for the sight of Griffon in a navy blue short-sleeve button-down, completely open, with a partially drenched white tee underneath. Her black carpenter pants end perfectly above a pair of scuffed-up white high-tops. Most importantly, I can't decide whether to focus on the thin gold necklace dangling against her chest or the trucker hat that, on anyone else, I would probably hate—but on her, it just works.

I don't have time to dwell on that because she drops whatever tool she is using and turns around. Our eyes finally meet, and I'm instantly reminded of my silk robe as her gaze scans over my appearance. I might have just checked her out, but it feels so much more intense when she does it. It's scary how fast her blue eyes darken. I'm almost grateful when she finally looks away; it feels like I can finally breathe.

She drops her head back and sighs deeply before turning back to me. “You’re not gonna wanna hear this.”

Immediately, my eyebrows shoot up. “Seeing as water was just coming out of my toilet like Niagara-fucking-Falls and you’re the one who said, and I quote, ‘You’re all set,’ I think I do want to hear it.”

Griffon lets out another deep sigh, taking off her hat to finger-comb through her long red hair. For a moment, I have to remind myself that I’m upset.

“Okay, I definitely deserved that. But it looks like the pipe itself might’ve burst. I just shut off your water so it would stop flooding your apartment.” She closes her eyes before continuing. “And I don’t know when I can get a new part in, but until then, we can’t risk letting it flood again.”

I have no idea how long I’ve been standing there in silence until Griffon says my name.

“I’m sorry, are you saying I won’t have any water?” I already know the answer, but something inside me needs to hear her say it again.

She hesitates but nods. “Yes, which I feel absolutely horrible about. But if it makes you feel any better, I could probably have it fixed within the next few days?”

Now my eyebrows are furrowed. “Make me feel better? I won’t have water for days?!”

I can see she’s deep in thought, biting her bottom lip, but that doesn’t stop me from continuing.

“What would make me feel better if you would leave me alone and stay in

yourownapartment!”

As satisfied as I feel for finally speaking up, every word seems to fly right over her head. I watch her eyes widen, and I can almost see the light bulb go off.

“That’s it!! My apartment!! You can stay with me until it’s fixed!”

CHAPTER 9

GRIFFON

Okay, maybe suggesting that Mia should stay with me wasn't one of my brightest ideas. But what other choice did I really have? I promised her everything was fixed, and now her apartment is fucking flooded.

After last night, the last thing I expected to hear through my walls was the sound of water pouring down. At first, I thought it might be rain, but I knew that was impossible—it's the middle of July. Then I figured Mia was just taking a shower, but after a while, I knew something was up.

The cherry on top, though, was the loud thud that came from her apartment, sending a vibration through my walls. That's all I needed to drop everything and bolt for Mia's place. Luckily, I was already heading out to meet Lauren and Monica, so at least I was fully dressed.

But that was the last thing on my mind as I reached her door. Honestly, I wasn't even planning to knock, but I figured I should at least say something before barging into her home. That respect flew out the window when I didn't hear any response.

As I knocked one final time, my mind raced through everything that could've happened:

Did she fall?

Did she break something?

Is she even conscious?

One question was quickly answered when I finally heard Mia's voice echoing through her apartment: "No, I'm okay, thanks!"—but I wasn't convinced. Her voice sounded shaky, almost panicked; something wasn't right. I pulled out my keys and announced I was coming in without thinking.

To say I was shocked would be an understatement. Mia's apartment was a complete wreck.

“Wreck” didn't even feel like the right word. The amount of water rushing toward me was staggering, and I froze, trying to piece it all together. As my eyes scanned for Mia, I heard her bedroom door slam shut.

Well, at least she's okay enough to run. Now, onto my second issue: the water.

I knew only one possible source existed, but I didn't want to believe it. As I carefully waded through her soaked carpet toward the bathroom, I kept thinking, “There's no way this is happening.”

But when I finally reached the doorway, my breath caught at the sight before me. It looked like the damn Trevi Fountain.

“Holy SHIT!”

Thinking fast, I reached behind the toilet to shut off the water line, but it was stuck. No matter how hard I pulled, nothing happened. My eyes darted around the room, searching for anything I could use.

Of course, now I was kicking myself for not bringing my tool kit, but honestly, Mia's safety was all I could think about.

I could already feel my shirt was completely soaked, but I ignored it and started digging under her sink. There had to be something down there. My hunch was right when my hand finally landed on a mini, hot pink wrench.

"Yes!" I muttered under my breath.

Quickly, I was back behind the toilet, using the tiny tool to grip and pull the lever to the left. Within seconds, the rush of water came to a complete stop.

I'm frozen in silence for a moment, eyes still wide as I take in the scene, still not understanding what could've happened. But as I glance at the work I did on Tuesday—still perfectly intact—I know something else must've gone wrong.

When I heard my name called from the hallway, I dropped the tool and sighed deeply before saying, "In here!" preparing myself for the hell about to break loose.

But when Mia finally comes into view, and our eyes meet, my thoughts vanish. And of course, it's the worst possible timing, but everything from last night comes flooding back to me.

Fuck. Mia.

I'd convinced myself I was imagining things when I came home last night and heard noises from my bedroom. But the moment I put my ear against the wall, I wished I hadn't.

I don't know how long I stood there, one knee up on the edge of my bed, my body practically pinned to the wall, frozen. I couldn't move—not even after I heard her. I

stood there, eyes, fists, and jaw clenched, wishing I could tear through the wall to see for myself. Whatever I was imagining at that point felt like pure torture.

Just like right now, her thin silk robe barely covers anything, leaving little to imagine but much to desire. I know I really shouldn't be doing this. I'm the last person who probably deserves to see her like this but fuck.

All I can do is drop my head back and sigh.

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For the sake of my own sanity, I almost black out when I tell her what I think happened to her toilet. Even though the blows I know I deserve, my mind is completely focused on the solutions I could offer.

But as soon as she says, “Stay in your apartment?” I know what I have to do. Mia stood before me, looking at me like I’d lost my mind. I’m not sure inviting her to stay at my place was the right thing to do.

“Are you serious right now?!” Mia half-jokes.

I don’t know how I do it, but the words start flowing out of me.

"Look, I know this is all fucked, but you don’t really have many options right now. You will be without water for at least two days, and you work right downstairs. We both know this is the best place for you to stay for now."

Mia’s quiet now, probably surprised that my reasoning actually makes sense. Her eyebrows are tight as if she wants to find something negative to say, but she can’t.

“I’ll stay on the couch, ONLY because I know Ben isn’t going to find another place for me to stay, and I sure as hell can’t afford anything else right now,” Mia finally says.

There’s no way I’m letting her sleep on my couch, but I’m too relieved she agreed to argue. I can only offer her a soft smile and nod in agreement.

CHAPTER 10

MIA

Even if you were holding me hostage for ransom, I don't think I could explain how I ended up saying yes to staying in Griffon's apartment. The words just flew out of me—I was honestly surprised with myself. But she wasn't wrong; I don't really have many other options. This is where I work and live, and if it's only for a couple of days, then what's the big deal?

I'm glad Eleanor isn't here to witness this, though. She wouldn't be able to contain herself, watching me drag my floral comforter—the same one I've had since I was 18—from my flooded apartment to Griffon's surprisingly clean living room.

Griffon has been helping me move over some daily essentials for the past few hours. I'm grateful, but we haven't exchanged more than a few words: a couple of “yeah,” “nos,” “thanks,” and nods. I could've tried to strike up a conversation, but every time I try, I'm reminded of my current situation—which, in turn, reminds me of last night.

I can't even think about what I did without wanting to die from embarrassment. I think I might just evaporate into nothingness because not only did she possibly hear me orgasm through the walls, but she definitely heard my wet, naked body crash onto the floor. Since she hasn't said anything, I'm holding onto the very slim chance she didn't hear it at all. Although, maybe she's just not mentioning it because she's the one who messed up my plumbing and now feels sorry for the poor, horny girl next door with the fucked-up pipes.

Holy shit is this karma for masturbating?!

I mean, how could this seriously happen to me?!

Do I truly have the worst luck in the world?

What's worse is that I don't even have time to grieve over my apartment's flooring or my existence. I just have to push through. Walking back into her place on my last trip, toiletries in hand, I know I can't stay quiet forever. The closest thing I've ever had to a roommate is Eleanor when she sleeps over. But that's different—she's my best friend and always has been. Griffon... well, Griffon is practically a stranger.

A stranger—I got off to.

But still a stranger, and now I have to live with her. As uncomfortable as this is, I can't spend the next few days wallowing in awkward silence. I know I need to say something. But when I return to her living room, all my stuff is gone.

My comforter, pillows, tote bag full of clothes, even my phone—all gone. Griffon's green velvet couch is completely empty as if nothing has happened.

I wish it hadn't. But as I whip my head around her perfectly curated apartment, I hear Griffon moving down the hallway.

For the second time today, I yell out, "Griffon?"

"Oh yeah! Come back here!"

I heard her, but my feet felt glued to the floor.

It shouldn't surprise me that she's handy, but from her style and living room vibe, I could already tell she has great taste. Still, damn. Her bedroom feels like stepping into one of those overpriced boho clothing boutiques. The dark botanical wallpaper gives the room a cozy dimness, and the lamps and fairy lights keep it from feeling cramped. Her huge, dark wood mid-century bed frame is gorgeous—no wonder I could hear so much from the other side. I try not to think about that as my eyes land on my comforter, now spread across her mattress.

My eyes widen.

“I just pulled out fresh sheets, I promise!” Griffon says quickly, probably already reading my mind.

“I know you said you’d take the couch, but I couldn’t let you do that. I promise you’ll have the room to yourself, and I won’t bother you. I’ll be in the living room the entire time.”

Her palms are raised in front of her, a clear defense. But my eyes drift to something just past her, and it really shouldn’t be the first thing that comes to mind, but I can’t help myself.

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“Is your TV mounted?”

Griffon’s brows furrow in amusement as she glances back at the 60-inch TV floating perfectly in the middle of her wall.

“Of course it is. Isn’t yours?”

I just stare blankly. This girl has been here for less than two weeks, and her place already looks like it came out of a home-style magazine. I don’t think I’ve met a single person in this building who’s ever mounted their TV on the wall.

My silence must be enough of an answer because she laughs and says, “Well, let’s go ahead and add that to your list of renovations.”

Quickly, I turn away as I feel color rushing to my cheeks. Instinctively, I giggle and shake my head at her comment, even though she seems completely serious.

“Uh, thank you for this. I really do appreciate it.”

“I mean, it’s the least I can do...” Griffon says, wide-eyed, and we both burst into laughter for the first time. It takes me a moment to realize it, but by the time I do, our laughs are already fading, and the awkward silence settles back in.

Avoiding eye contact, I clear my throat and speak up.

“Sooo, how did you get so ‘handy’?” I can’t help putting up air quotes, emphasizing the fact that she did a shit job in my apartment.

“Hey! I told you, it was the pipes, not me! Ben didn’t warn me how old everything was. The place couldn’t even handle the new parts I put in.”

We’re both laughing again.

“Okay, I’m sorry, I just had to ask,” I say, still smiling. “But seriously, where did you learn to do all this?” I gesture around, pointing at everything all at once.

Griffon chuckles. “Well, my dad worked in construction, and my mom was an interior designer. So, I guess you could say it’s in my blood.”

I’m actually surprised by her answer. “Wow, that’s incredible. You did an amazing job on your apartment, so that explains it.”

Griffon looks surprised, probably because—outside of my head—this is the first compliment I’ve given her.

She’s quiet for a moment as if contemplating something, but within seconds, she’s back by the doorway.

“Well, I should probably let you get settled in. I know today’s already been a lot.”

I smile softly and nod. “Thanks again.”

But before she’s fully gone, she pokes her head back in with a grin.

“Oh, by the way, I brought something from your apartment that I thought you might’ve forgotten.” My brows immediately furrow as she winks, subtly jerking her chin toward something across the room.

Confused, I turn and make my way around the bed—my eyes widening the moment I

spot it. Sitting on a side table in the corner is the same brown box where I'd stashed the recently used toy.

Before I can react, I whip my head back around, only to find the doorway completely empty.

CHAPTER 11

MIA

"You dirty little whore!"

"El?!" My eyes snap to Eleanor, who's currently double-fisting two cappuccinos with the biggest smile on her face.

"I fucking knew you'd do it—" She leans in close so only I can hear her. "—but I definitely didn't think you'd go that far."

I really should've expected this. I mean, this is El we're talking about—of course, she was going to freak out. That's why I didn't tell her until I saw her in person, but now I realize that was a mistake, too.

Because "little whore" wasn't even the first thing she called me today. At first, she didn't believe me, so I was a liar. I mean, the story does sound insane: first, I masturbate to my neighbor, then my apartment floods, and now I'm living with said neighbor, who later surprises me with my own... or, I guess, her own sex toy that I just used.

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The only thing that saved me was showing her the pictures of my flooded apartment. She couldn't contain her laughter; she nearly dropped to the ground. Meanwhile, I stood there, completely still, blank-faced, just waiting for her to finish.

This really wasn't the time or place to indulge her antics. But that's on me for dropping a bomb on her during a busy shift. Not that my disinterest ever seemed to stop her because, for the past few hours, she'd automatically break into fits of laughter whenever she turned to ask about an order.

Just like now—the small cups of cappuccino are barely filled anymore, with hot liquid spilling down the sides and onto the tiny saucers.

“Uh, excuse me?” a deep voice calls behind me.

I turn to see a tall, dark-haired customer whose eyes are fixed on the two mugs in El's hands.

It's practically second nature as I plaster a smile on my face and soften my voice. “Yes, can I help you with anything?”

“Yeah, I've been waiting over 10 minutes. Are those supposed to be mine?”

My eyes follow his gesture back to El, whose lips are tight, eyes wide.

She knows she fucked up.

But I can't face either of them right now; my eyes squeeze shut, refusing to look at

the mess in her hands.

And maybe on any other day, I'd be able to roll with the punches. But when I think about the state of my apartment, I know I don't have the energy to give this guy his two seconds of fame and let him call me out on a clear mistake. Not when I just had to sneak out of my neighbor's bedroom this morning. I've seriously had enough.

So I lie. I turn back to the customer, smiling brightly. "Nope! Not yours. I'm so sorry about the wait. I'll make sure yours is coming right up!"

I don't bother ignoring his annoyed expression or waiting for his reply. I turn around, grab the mugs from El, and, through gritted teeth, whisper, "Go make two more. Now."

On any other day, even if El were the one to mess up, she'd still refuse to remake it and tell me to fuck off. But she must notice my change in tone because she doesn't say a word, just grabs two new mugs and races over to the espresso machine.

I immediately go in the opposite direction, dumping the drinks and washing out the mugs. When I returned to the counter, Eleanor was already standing with the customer's order ready. Like a machine, she transfers it into my hands, and I'm back in front of him with a smile.

"Sorry again about that. Here are your cappuccinos."

"Uh-huh," is all I get before he turns away, heading to the outdoor patio.

As he leaves, I let out a big sigh, dropping my head back—a crisis averted. If only I could handle my life that way.

I keep my back to the door, listening to the front doorbell sound, which tells me

Eleanor's already back at the register.

What I don't expect to hear, though, is the sound of El cackling. Not giggling, not laughing—fucking cackling.

Instantly, my eyes roll. Not again. My annoyance has officially reached its peak as I whip around to see El nearly toppled over the counter.

“You know, it's really not that fucking fun—”

No. This cannot be happening again.

I hope my face doesn't show how I feel now because I think I might just burst.

What did I do to deserve this life? Why does the universe want to punish me so badly? Am I that awful of a person?

It feels like I'm watching a horror movie—or maybe a preview of my nightmares—as Eleanor, Griffon, and two other familiar, jaw-droppingly gorgeous girls laugh together.

And now they're all facing me, and instinctively, I step back.

Griffon tilts her head, a smirk growing on her face. “Hey! Mia, how's it going?”

“Uh...”

Nervously, I wipe my hands up and down my apron.

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“I swear, I wasn’t coming down here to bother you—they just wanted to check out the coffee shop downstairs,” Griffon explains.

“These are my best friends, Lauren and Monica,” Griffon says, pointing to each of them on either side of her.

“Hiii! It’s so nice to meet you, finally!” Monica says, waving.

“Yes! We both heard about your apartment and feel so bad. Please, let us apologize on Griffon’s behalf,” Lauren adds.

I should say something, but I’m too busy stifling a sigh of relief. Those two girls I saw with Griffon the other night? Just her friends.

“Hey! I’m fixing it, ya know!” Griffon exclaims, and the laughter erupts around us. I can’t help but chuckle, too. It’s nice to see someone teasing Griffon for a change instead of vice versa.

“Wait, you two should come out with us tonight! We’re thinking about going out!”

I can hear Eleanor squeal in excitement as the three of them dive into planning, but I remain completely silent.

It feels like Griffon and I are in our own world for a moment. Everything they’re saying blurs into the background; I can only catch a few words—something about making Griffon pay for all our drinks. But we’re both too distracted to care. Her eyes lock with mine, and she raises an eyebrow, licking her lips.

“Yeah, I don’t know, you guys. They might be too tired to go out. It is only Thursday,” Griffon interjects.

Eleanor protests immediately, but Griffon is only looking at me.

It’s a test, I know it.

For a moment, I’m quiet. Then suddenly, I feel that same surge of energy I felt the last time I was in this position.

Without breaking eye contact, I say, “No, let’s go out

CHAPTER 12

MIA

“Come on, Mia, there’s no point in sitting around now! You already said yes!”

Eleanor’s voice echoes through my apartment as she races down the hallway, searching for something to wear.

“Which I completely regret.”

I should be doing the same, but I settle onto my sofa instead. Luckily, only the bottom portion is still wet. Normally, I’d pace away my mistakes, but since my place is still recovering, I’m lying on my back, staring at the ceiling and silently reviewing my life.

“I don’t get it. What’s the big deal?” El finally reappears.

Her mini dress is tighter than tight, which makes sense since she’s had it since our

second year of college. It's pretty obvious we don't go out much—we have the same rotation of outfits all year long. If it isn't our work uniforms, it's loungewear 99% of the time. That one percentage is saved for nights like this when we decide to go 'crazy' and hit the town. And those nights usually end with us leaving whatever party early to come home and watch a movie.

But I'm not coming back to my place tonight. I'm heading to Griffon's, who I can hear getting ready next door. She offered to help El and I bring our stuff over so all five of us could get ready together, but I immediately refused. I'd already fallen into her trap by saying yes to going out.

I needed my space to regroup and figure out my plan because I had completely forgotten that I was supposed to stay at her place. Since we first met, my whole existence has been a hot mess, and now I'm supposed to go out, drink, and hope that nothing else happens?

Yeah, no.

My luck has already proven to be untrustworthy.

"I mean, there are multiple things wrong with this situation. Where do you want me to start? When I stole her package?"

Eleanor rolls her eyes as she tries to shove her left breast into the tiny orange dress.

"We get it, Mia. You stole her package, got off to her, and now you have to live with her—blah blah blah. Are you done yet?"

I'm speechless. She can't honestly be downplaying this situation right now, but she's looking at me like what she said meant absolutely nothing.

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“Oh, don’t look at me like I’m the crazy one. You’re the one who ma—”

“—YOU TOLD ME TO!!” I cut her off before she could finish, wincing at my voice getting loud.

“Fake it. Not actually do it—that was all you,” Eleanor finishes, her lips tight and her arms folded across her chest.

And I have nothing to say to that.

“Now, clearly, there’s more to this, don’t you think?”

My shoulders drop in defeat. I still can’t figure out what to say, but something is tugging at me from the inside.

“Don’t you want to go out tonight and see what else could happen? You never know; you could have fun!”

I chew on my bottom lip, listening to Eleanor sell this night to me like a car salesman trying to reach his quota. Maybe it’s because she’s a Libra, but she can convince me to do anything.

“And besides all that, you deserve a night out! Your damn apartment flooded—let’s get fucked up tonight!!!!”

It took us another hour and a half to get ready before we finally headed to the bar. Halfway through one of my mini panic attacks, El told me she texted Monica—which I didn't even know she had the number for—to tell them not to wait for us; we'd just meet them there.

That did take some of the pressure off, not having to consider a car ride with Griffon anymore. I don't think my brain can handle the thought of us in such close proximity with nowhere else to go. I thought her apartment was bad, but fuck, that sounds like a death wish.

I can't tell if this is any better now that we're on the way in the Uber. I'm already sweating, partly from stress and partly from how tight this halter-style jumpsuit is. Maybe it's because it's a few years old, but it's probably still my nicest outfit. It's all black, with a deep V in the front that almost reaches my belly button. Thin leather straps wrap around my waist and across the opening in the front, revealing my skin.

It's sexy—El got it for me one year to wear for New Year's Eve, and of course, this is my first time wearing it. But as she told me before we left, "Better late than never."

I can feel each strap around my waist tighten with every breath I take. My thin black heels are already killing me, and I feel like I'm skiing down the pavement.

Am I actually torturing myself for...Griffon?

I don't get the chance to think that over further when the car comes to a screeching halt.

"Here ya go, ladies! Stay safe tonight!"

Eleanor doesn't even take a second before ripping open the door and hopping out, trying to drag me with her.

I barely manage to say, “Thank you, you too!” before my body is yanked out, and I stumble to catch my balance.

“What the fuck, El?!”

“Look! I’ve always wanted to come here!”

Finally, I follow her gaze to see a brick building with a small set of stairs leading to a steel black door.

Right next to it, on the wall, hangs a hot pink LED sign that reads

:

GIRLS

GIRLS

GIRLS

My eyebrows furrow. “I don’t get it—this is where they wanted to go?”

Like most things, El just chuckles and grabs my hand before heading up the stairs. Once we reach the top, she turns back to me, winks, then turns around and knocks exactly four times.

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Before I can speak up, a tiny window that I never noticed before slides open, and a pair of brown eyes stares back at me.

“What’s the password?”

My eyes widen, and if I wasn’t scared before, I sure as hell am now.

“Wha—”

“Bunny!” El interrupts me.

Within seconds, the window closes, and I hear the locks on the door unlatching.

“Bunny? You’re joking, right?”

My red flags stand straight up, but curiosity gets the best of me as the door finally opens, and I follow El inside.

It’s loud—like really, really loud. I’m still confused for a second because it’s pitch black, and my grip on her hand tightens. Then suddenly, velvet curtains are drawn back, revealing a sea of people.

But as I take my first few steps forward, I notice it’s not just people. It’s a sea of only women.

Left and right, everywhere I turn, all I see are beautiful women dancing on top of each other, making out, and drinking.

My mind can't even register what I'm witnessing, so I lean forward and practically scream into El's ear.

"Where are we?!"

She whips around in an instant, already laughing. "You don't get it?"

All I can do is shake my head.

"It's a gay bar!" El screams.

My eyes bulge out of their sockets. "What?!"

"Monica said it was Griffon's pick! Let's go try to find them!" El yells back before continuing forward.

Immediately, I scoff and shake my head.

Of course, I'm not even surprised. She probably did this as part of her own twisted little game. She knows what will knock me off my feet; it's almost like she likes to push my limits and see me uncomfortable or scared.

If that was her goal, she's 100% winning because it feels impossible to see the end as we make our way through the crowd. There are flashing lights everywhere, and the techno music definitely isn't helping me find my sense of direction.

By the time we reach the bar, I feel like I've used every ounce of energy I had in me. My body practically drops onto a stool, and my feet silently thank me. Just as El grabs the seat next to me, her attention is directed at a striking, tall blonde woman, giving her the 'I'm interested' eyes.

She doesn't even move to sit down as she watches the woman tilt her head to motion for her to come over. I already know what El will ask when she turns back to face me. Immediately, I wave her off with a, "Go ahead, you bitch! Just text me!"

Still, I roll my eyes as El plants a kiss on my cheek before skipping away. Of course, my only friend ditched me within the first fifteen minutes.

I guess it will be up to me to find Griffon.

It doesn't take long. I turn around in my swivel chair, scanning the crowd, and my gaze drifts upwards to the packed balcony overlooking the dance floor.

First, I spot Monica dancing, and then my eyes catch Lauren, who's chilling at a private table with a group of girls, drink in hand. And dead center, standing at the railing, is Griffon, dressed in sneakers, cargo pants, and a graphic tee with ripped sleeves, exposing the minimalist tattoos that trickle down both of her arms. I probably would've found her quicker if she didn't have that damn trucker hat on. But under all of these lights, the brim of her hat casts a shadow across her face, making her look even more mysterious than usual.

I don't know how long I've been staring, leaning back with my elbows on the bar. But Griffon doesn't look like she wants to stop, either. In fact, it feels like her eyes have always been on me. The entire time I've been here, meaning she watched me walk in, watched me look confused, watched me find out this was a gay bar, watched me get lost, and watched me get ditched.

All while sitting up there with the most perfect view.

I can't really see her eyes, but I can see her smirk. She's satisfied with herself again.

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I can feel my skin getting hot, the embarrassment kicking back in. How could I have fallen into another one of her traps?

Finally, I look away, turning around in my seat, to see El and her mystery girl heading for the dance floor. All I can do is let out a deep sigh as I try to wave over the bartender. But just as I'm about to speak up, someone steps into the open space next to me.

"Can I get you a drink?" a soft voice says.

I don't realize they're talking to me until I don't hear a response, and my eyes widen when I turn to see a short-haired brunette staring right at me. I take in her delicate and soft features with a quick scan over.

"Oh, uhhh—" My eyes dart all around, trying to figure out what to say. Then, for a moment, I remember why I'm even here in the first place.

"—Sure, why not!"

Without hesitation, she smiles before turning to order us both a round of shots.

CHAPTER 13

MIA

I'm on my fourth shot with Isabella. Wait, maybe it's Stella?

I don't know, but she's been a great distraction from all that's happening in my head. We haven't said much, or really, I haven't since she hasn't stopped talking. In less than ten minutes, she told me about her cats, job, friends, etc. But not a single thing has stuck.

Maybe it's because I'm a bit distracted by the feeling of Griffon's eyes burning through me. With every giggle, every touch, every slow 'lean in,' I can't help but steal a peek, and from what I can tell, she hasn't moved an inch.

If anything, it looks like she is about to throw her body over the railing.

And for once, I'm the one satisfied. I can't help the mischievous smile that spreads across my face as if I just won the lottery.

Maybe that's why I feel bold enough to turn back to Bella and ask, "Do you want to dance?"

We're mid-conversation, so my question makes her eyes widen, and her eyebrows shoot up. But her expression quickly changes to a small smirk when I put my hand out.

"Of course!" Bella (I think) answers, hopping out of her seat. I don't waste any time leading the way to the dance floor, not sparing a glance towards Griffon, even if I already know she's watching.

My adrenaline is too high to stop and care what she thinks. All of the alcohol is slowly beginning to spread, and my body is responding fast. I can feel every tiny droplet of sweat starting to run down the sides of my face. But I pay no mind as soon as I feel small hands grab my waist.

I'm thrown off momentarily and stiffen completely, but I relax within seconds. This

isn't the time for overthinking. I'm over that; all I want to do is live in the moment and let go of my fears of being perceived.

Fuck, I want to be seen.

After closing my eyes, I lean back into her grasp, basking in her scent. She smells sweet—more like vanilla mingled with a floral note. Maybe Gardenia, to be more specific. It's almost too sweet for my taste; I must stop myself from scrunching up my nose. I shouldn't even think about her perfume—who cares if it's too sweet? She's hot, and she's into me.

I can't see her, but I can feel her short hair brushing against the side of my neck as she moves closer, her lips practically touching my ear.

“This okay?” Her hands tighten around my waist as she guides me backward until my back is pressed against her chest. Her touch is gentle, and even without seeing her, I can feel everything as her hips begin to sway back and forth.

Instead of speaking up, I simply nod and start to match her movements. Our hips move in sync as the beat envelops us both. Sweat threatens to drip down my chest as our pace quickens, and I can't tell if I'm feeling the bass from the speakers or my heart pounding. But I don't care—I finally feel free.

As our movements begin to mirror each other, my mind starts to drift away. Even with her breath on my neck, her hands on my skin, and her lips so close to my ear, I only see Griffon.

My mind replaces the feeling of her gentle touch with something more solid and rough. I can't stop myself from gasping at how quickly my body responds to just the thought of her. I hate it—I know I do—but fuck, I can't help but fall deeper into my imagination. All I see is her: her hair, her bright blue eyes, her... everything.

My head falls back, and instinctively, I crack my eyes open, disappointed to find that she isn't staring back at me. I quickly scan the balcony, but I stop moving completely when I don't immediately spot Monica or Lauren. Panic sets in as my head whips around, searching for Eleanor somewhere in the crowd. But it has only gotten more compact since we arrived.

"Is everything okay?" The soft voice behind me breaks through my mini-crisis, reminding me of my reality.

"Oh—uhh—" My eyes continue to search through the crowd for anyone at this point.

Just as I turn to respond, I feel my arm being yanked, and my body jerks to the left, leaving me speechless. My eyes widen, and I jump at the firm grasp, but I'm stuck in place as they grab my other arm, pinning my back against their chest.

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This is the point where I should probably scream.

Fight.

Try to break free.

But there's no point when I already know who it is. How could I not know when she's all I've been thinking about? It's ridiculous how quickly my eyes flutter closed as the deep, musky scent of sandalwood and patchouli overtakes my senses. She smells like her home—I know this because it was one of the first things I noticed, along with the insane décor. Her place smelled like a less migraine-inducing version of a men's department store.

“It's time to go.”

My eyes snap open at the roughness in her voice; it rings with command. She's almost unrecognizable, but when I lean back to look up, I'm quickly reminded of how tall Griffon is. My head hits her chest almost instantly. Not like how I was with—

Oh shit.

Even in Griffon's grasp, I wiggle around, trying to find Bella... or is it Stella? But she's long gone and probably moved on as soon as Griffon stepped in. Her presence is demanding, and I understand why. I should feel bad, but I can only focus on how weak my legs feel. I've never felt so vulnerable with my arms pulled back.

How long was she up there watching me before deciding enough was enough?

A shiver runs down my spine as I imagine a jealous Griffon running around, trying to find me.

“I said it’s time to go,” Griffon repeats herself slowly. I don’t even try to argue as she releases one of my arms and begins to pull me through the crowd toward the exit.

Once we make it through the door, the cool air hits my hot, sweaty skin, and I immediately break free from her grasp, as if I never wanted to be held in the first place.

“What the hell? Where’s El?”

I take a few steps back to create space between us, hoping to regain control over the situation. But Griffon has other ideas; she grabs my wrist and pulls me closer.

Finally, I can see under the brim of her hat. Her eyes are a shade darker than usual, and only one eyebrow is raised as she tilts her head.

“You weren’t really worried about El when you were just busy humping that girl’s thigh—”

My eyes bulge as I try to register what she just said. Her expression borders on mockery.

“—Uber’s already here.” Griffon’s hand raises, and my eyes follow as she points to a small car where El, Monica, and Lauren are currently stuffing themselves inside.

When I turn back to Griffon, she’s already walking to the other side of the car, and I follow silently. My cheeks are already pink from embarrassment, but as I round the car to the open door, they turn bright red when I realize the vehicle is completely full. There sits Griffon, a small smirk playing on her lips.

“Uhhh,” is all I can manage as I look around and see El in the passenger seat and a very giggly Monica perched on Lauren's lap.

“Come on, Mia, there's room!” El exclaims. I know she's drunk, but I still shoot her a glare.

“Yeah, Mia, there's room,” Griffon teases, patting her lap. Her arms move behind Lauren's headrest, completely spreading out.

“Of course,” I mutter before slipping into the car and settling on Griffon's thigh.

I purposely scoot all the way to the left until my body is pressed against the window, barely in her lap. It's uncomfortable, and my ass is killing me, but I know the drive will be over soon, so I just need to push through. There's really no point in complaining.

“You can scoot back, you know?” Griffon questions.

“Oh, I'm good!” I reply, cringing at my overly cheerful tone.

But when the driver pulls away quickly and starts speeding down the street, I almost immediately get whiplash and am knocked back into Griffon's chest.

Her hands fly down to grip my waist and steady me. “I told you to sit back.”

I should have something smart as a comeback, but I let out a deep sigh of defeat instead. After accepting, I begin to shift around to get more comfortable. Within seconds, my body freezes as I feel something big and hard poking my ass.

Instantly, my mind begins to race a mile a minute. With wide eyes, I slowly turn around to face an already smiling Griffon. Without needing to exchange words, my

unasked question is immediately answered.

Griffon is wearing a strap.

CHAPTER 14

MIA

Friday morning hit me like a ton of bricks. As I rolled over to bury myself deeper into the covers, I jolted awake when I didn't immediately feel the edge of the bed. My mind reeled with confusion at how my bed had seemingly grown in size, but as my eyes cracked open, I was quickly reminded of my reality.

I'm in Griffon's bed.

In a matter of seconds, everything flooded back like a tsunami. My eyes clenched shut as the nauseating feeling of shame spread rapidly through me.

Before I could let those thoughts fully settle, I yanked the comforter away and raced to the bathroom to shower. I wish I could say that as the water ran down my back, it washed away everything I felt, but the embarrassment seeped through my pores. My cheeks burned with remembrance as last night's interactions replayed in my mind.

There's so much to unpack here that I don't know where to begin.

What was I thinking?

First, the fact that I went out at all is already shocking. But to go to a gay club, drink, dance, and flirt?

Yeah, that was probably enough wild cards to last me a lifetime.

But what I probably could have lived without the thought of is me following Griffon out of the club like a lost puppy, after all, that I did to try and flip the script from fake flirting with a stranger to get her attention to dancing on top of someone right in her view. She still won at the end of the night; I never once fought back when she grabbed my arm and dragged me along. Instead, I was silent; the air around us felt thick, and no word could make it through, even if I tried.

I don't even think I can mentally break down what happened in the car ride home without my cheeks turning crimson and my skin feeling like it's on fire. I have so many questions that I don't know if I even want answers. I almost wish I had drunk more because the way I can play it in my head like a movie makes me double over in the shower as my stomach turns with regret.

I regret that I even went out last night because now that I've felt... her, it's all I can think about. Even in the shower, my legs are wobbly, and I remember the look on her face when I turned around.

The smirk on her face told me she wanted me to find it.

She wanted to see how I would react.

But I didn't say a single word and was completely stuck. With every inch I moved, it moved with me. Griffon noticed, too; her hand was still on my waist the rest of the car ride home. And again, I didn't fight it; the feeling of her fingers slowly caressing me left me breathless as the sound of my heartbeat throbbing flooded my ears. And when we finally returned home, I couldn't escape her faster.

As I begin to get dressed for work, my mind is completely elsewhere. It feels like I'm in a complete daze; all I can see is Griffon.

Fuck, I need to get the hell out of here before I burst into flames.

For the first time in a long time, the thought of grinding coffee beans has me rushing around like a maniac. I was already planning on avoiding her as much as possible, but now I feel like I'd rather just stay in my own waterless apartment. It'd be for the best; I must let this whole thing go. I don't know what I got myself into, but I can't shake how my skin ignites and electrifies when Griffon is around.

Every interaction I've had with her, she's either put me on the spot or left me speechless, and I hate it.

It's uncomfortable, feeling like you are fully on display.

Surprisingly, though, I haven't heard her all morning, so I'm counting on her already being at work. Hopefully, that work is actually in my apartment.

As I leave her bedroom and through the hallway, my body instantly relaxes when I peek around the corner and notice the living room is completely empty. Quickly, I check the kitchen, and when I see it's the same, my head falls back in relief.

The last thing I needed was to face her right now, not when I had the idea of her wearing a strap-on floating around in my head.

But now that I'm alone and have a few extra minutes, I set my bag down on the kitchen counter and find a glass to get some water. I finally feel like I can take a deep breath.

But I should've known that was too good to be true because as soon as I sat down on a stool, I heard the sound of keys jingling by the front door. My body instantly stiffens as my eyes rake over the kitchen before landing on a stack of mail. Within seconds, my body lurches across the counter for the newspaper sitting on top, and I

don't think twice before opening it up and flipping to a random page.

I don't turn around when I finally hear the front door open and close. Instead, I yell a short and sweet “Hey! Good morning!” and bury myself deeper into the paper.

But there's no response, not even a little bit of movement. At first, I think she isn't actually there until I finally hear her slow footsteps heading in my direction, and my grip on the black-and-white paper tightens. My palms are already sweaty, and I can feel it starting to rip in my hands.

The energy shift is intimidating, and immediately, I begin to ramble.

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“Did you know a new restaurant is opening in New York? It’s woman-owned!” My voice is shaky; I’m not trying to cover it up now.

Her footsteps come to a halt, and for a moment, I want to give in and turn around. But I know my thread is dwindling fast.

“Mia.” It’s not a question; the huskiness in her tone confirms that.

“Did you know she was actually a prep cook first?” My voice is choked.

When I don't get a response, my heart rate quickens. I know I should turn around, but I think that might be my breaking point.

I can feel it.

“Mia. Turn. Around.” Griffon speaks with authority.

Instantly, I respond, but as I grip the counter's edge to turn myself around, my senses are overtaken.

My eyes go nowhere else but to Griffon’s; they're dark like last night. This time, though, she’s studying my face, completely pinning me in place.

The smell of her is addicting.

While her touch and voice are all that I crave.

Shit.

But her taste...

It all happens so fast; a sense of urgency rips through me, and I become powerless to my own thoughts. My hands springforward, grabbing onto the front of Griffon's jumpsuit before pulling her down and devouring her mouth in one breath.

CHAPTER 15

GRIFFON

My hands find Mia's waist as if I already have a map of her body. Her kiss is urgent and exploratory. Instinctively, I step forward, trying to take control of the situation.

But with how she's gripping me, I can tell Mia is hungry, and right now, I'm ready to give her anything she wants. So I drop my hands from her waist and grip the counter on either side of her, giving her free rein to take whatever her body is telling her it needs. And by the way, she moans in compliance, I wonder if she's ever been with anyone who has let her take control.

She's strong; her arms wrap around the back of my neck as her tongue forces my lips to part. As I slip inside and a whimper escapes between her lips, I can't help myself—I let go of the counter, reach down, and grab a handful of her ass before picking her up in one smooth motion. Mia's legs immediately wrapped around my waist as I set her down on the edge of the countertop.

We're still lost in each other's mouths; this kiss is not soft and sweet. It's demanding, rough, and passionate. When I finally pull away, my lips practically burn with desire, and the sound that escapes Mia's lips makes me regret ever stopping. But my hands find her thighs, and reluctantly, I force myself to push back to give us some space.

Both of our chests are heaving, and the only sound is our heavy breathing in the air surrounding us. I can already see the shine on Mia's face, telling me she feels the same way I do.

The tip of my tongue barely grazes my lips before I finally speak up, "You gotta tell me what you want, Mia."

MIA

I'm not expecting Griffon to speak. I'm out of breath, sweaty, and confused, feeling like I just got pulled away from an intense dream.

I wish it were because the reality of the situation is finally hitting me. My eyes go wide as I realize what the hell I just did. I'm at a loss for words, completely shocked by my own lack of self-control.

I can't even meet her gaze as mine scatter all over the place, searching for a way out.

"Mia?" Griffon's voice is low and deep.

My head snaps up to face hers, and now that we're finally at eye level, it all feels overwhelming. I can hear my heart thumping in my ears, and the only thing that seems to be in focus is Griffon.

"Mia, speak up." This time, her voice is dry and hoarse.

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Immediately, my eyebrows furrow at how dark her tone is. But when I look back into her eyes, I can tell she's almost completely checked out. It's like a dark cloud has taken over, and now she's just waiting for me to give her the go-ahead.

But I'm still silent. My eyes scan over her entire build; her hands are squeezed tightly into fists like she's struggling to fight back something. Meanwhile, my thighs press together, the throbbing between them slowly becoming something I can't ignore.

"Just say it, Mia," Griffon continues.

My eyes squeeze shut at the sound of her telling me what to do. I should give in; I should just let go. It's becoming clear that I need more.

But I'm stubborn. Even though I'm practically foaming at the mouth for her, my ego is too big to give in and say anything. So, instead, I sit there in silence, avoiding her gaze.

I need to get out of here now.

Just as I grab onto the countertop to try and get myself down, Griffon's hands grip my thighs, pushing me back down.

"Wha—"

"Your thighs are literally trembling, Mia. Just fucking say it." Griffon's blunt voice cuts me off as she steps into the space between my legs.

“I don’t have anything to say.”

Her brows raise amusingly. “Oh really? You don’t have anything to say?” She says it slowly, almost mockingly.

Her hands start to rub up and down the sides of my thighs, and instinctively, I arch my back. She looks down at my legs and begins to chuckle softly.

Quickly, I stiffen and sit up straight. “Nope, nothing at all,” I manage to say through shallow breaths, sounding completely unsure of myself.

“Don’t back down now, Mia. We both know you’re stronger than that.” One of Griffon’s hands finds the arch of my back, sending a shiver through my spine.

But I still catch the sarcasm in her voice, and now I’m even more confused.

“What?”

Griffon’s eyes rise from my legs and slowly travel up the rest of my body until they finally meet my gaze. From this position, I can see her smirk.

“Do you actually think I forgot about you waiting up until I got home so that I could listen to you fuck yourself through the walls?”

You could hear a pin drop with how quiet it was, and the only thing I could feel was the emptiness in my chest as my heart began to drop.

This cannot actually be happening right now.

Before I can fully react, Griffon peels my body off of the counter, forcing my legs to wrap around her waist, and I let out a quick gasp.

“I think it's finally time we play a little. Don't you? ”

CHAPTER 16

MIA

The multitude of emotions that flew through me in just a matter of seconds was scary. But I was too startled by her suggestion to offer any objection. My skin feels like it will fall off at any moment, and I don't know if it's from embarrassment or desire.

Griffon's eyes never leave my body—scanning me critically as if she could see straight through my clothes. Quickly making me forget she's carrying me through the hallway.

Just the idea of her eagerness excited me. My heartbeat was hammering in my ears when we reached her bedroom door. But the last thing I expected was for her to release my back and pull my arms away from her neck. Instantly, my back thudded against the wooden door, which creaked under the pressure of my weight. Yet, my legs tightened around her waist as she placed her hands on either side of my head, forcing me to look directly into her eyes.

“Last chance, Mia. I don't have much left to back out after we go past this door.” Griffon's jaw is tight as she searches my eyes for a sign of what I'm thinking.

Her words barely registered in my dizzied state. I was still in shock from being called out just a moment ago, but now that shock was tangled with a different surge of emotions.

Taking a deep breath, I glanced up at the ceiling, a tingling sensation settling in the pit of my stomach. My mind raced to process the whirlwind of events, trying to make sense of what was happening. My skin yearned for touch, and a persistent ache

between my legs refused to be ignored. It pounded like a drum, echoing throughout me.

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Griffon's gaze narrowed, her eyes locking onto mine before trailing down to the source of the thumping inside me as if she could feel it too.

I clear my throat, attempting to draw her gaze back to my face. But when her eyes return to mine, I hesitate, unable to fully grasp what I'm actually about to say.

"O-Okay," I croak out.

"Okay, what?" Griffon responds quickly, tilting her head and raising an eyebrow.

A few seconds pass before I finally manage to say, "Okay, I need you." My voice shakes and cracks.

I catch a flash of Griffon's dark smile before she pulls me back into her arms, yanks the door open, and uses my back to slam it shut again.

I barely register what's happening until she slips her hand around the back of my neck, grabbing a fistful of my hair and pressing my lips into hers.

Everything feels like a blur, but her mouth covers mine hungrily, quickly asserting her dominance. I don't even try to fight it. She's too compelling. She knows exactly what I need, and I can't help but moan in acceptance.

Her hands are rough from all the work she does, and when they slip up the hem of my shirt to grab my waist, I nearly groan at the strength of her grip. She doesn't let up; the hardness of her lips sends waves of ecstasy throughout my body, and I physically shiver in her grasp.

When she breaks away, a whine escapes my lips, and I toss my head back in frustration. But my hips have a mind of their own, rolling against her stomach with every movement. My eyes shut tight, and my mouth drops open at the sudden surge of friction.

“Shit. Mia, what the fuck?”

Griffon’s low, husky tone makes me crack my eyes open.

But she’s not looking back at me; she’s too focused on watching my hips roll. After a few moments of admiring the view, she finally matches my movement, gripping my waist tighter.

I can't help it when the words, “Oh fuck!” break out of me, but I quickly clamp my mouth shut out of embarrassment.

“No, don’t do that. Don’t ever do that.” Griffon's voice is commanding, her tone serious.

My lips stay pressed together as my heart races between us.

“Fuck, Mia, I’ve been waiting this long to see you like this, and you think I don’t want to hear you?”

Quickly, Griffon's hands slide up my shirt, moving straight to my breasts. She doesn’t bother with my bra; instead, she uses one hand to pull it all the way up until both my shirt and bra are rolled up tightly and pinned against my neck. My naked breasts fall down with gravity.

I have no time to react when her free hand grabs my nipple in one motion and twists it without breaking eye contact.

“Ahhhh fuck!” I yelp out as my back arches, pushing me further into her.

“I want to hear every sound out of your fucking mouth,” Griffon says through gritted teeth.

She doesn't let go. Instead, she tugs even harder until I'm no longer pinned against the door.

“Shit!” I manage to gasp as she moves us away from the door, not stopping until we reach the edge of the bed. Before I know it, my body is thrown into a pile of pillows. When I finally push myself up onto my forearms, I find Griffon looking at me like I just crawled onto her dinner plate, and she's ready to feast.

“You have no idea how badly I've wanted to see you like this.”

She begins circling the bed, eyes still zeroed in on me.

“Take off your clothes.” She says dryly.

I'm frozen—stuck completely in time, just watching how Griffon's fists tighten with impatience.

“Now, Mia.” She's short and firm this time, and I can't get up and onto my knees any faster.

As I toss and turn on the bed, struggling to rip my jeans off, I don't even try to look graceful. I can hear Griffon rummaging around in the corner, completely ignoring me.

When I finally lay back, naked, I didn't expect to see Griffon standing in front of me with her jumpsuit completely unzipped. My eyes should fixed on her small but full

breasts staring back at me, but all I can focus on is the solid black strap-on that fits perfectly onto her waist.

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I take in a quick, sharp breath, completely caught off guard. Griffon's eyes are already on mine as I look up, reading me thoughtfully.

“I’ve been waiting to fuck you with that toy since the day I heard you use it.”

My eyebrows furrow in confusion as I glance back down and sudden realization hits me, as my eyes widen in astonishment.

There’s absolutely no way.

“It has an attachment on the back, so it can be worn like this.”

Holy shit, Griffon is wearing the toy I played with.

“I thought it was pretty fitting, don't you?” Griffon teases as she lifts one knee onto the bed.

I’m still speechless, focused only on her movements as she crawls on top of me. I see only her red hair, which creates a curtain around my face.

“I need you, Mia,” Griffon whispers into my ears delicately as she starts to kiss the crevice of my neck.

“Please.” It’s all I’m able to croak out, and even then, my voice cracks.

One of her arms slips under my back, and before I know it, she flips us, leaving me straddling her stomach.

My breath catches in my lungs as I look down to see Griffon staring back at me, amusement dancing in her eyes. I tilt my head in confusion, but she only smiles, her arms lifting to rest behind her head.

With a calm and relaxed voice, she simply says, "Ride."

It takes me a moment for her words to register. I finally gather the strength to push myself onto my knees when they do. I raise my hips and reach behind me, feeling for the tip of the toy and gently guiding it toward my wet heat.

When I look back down, Griffon simply nods her head, encouraging me to continue. Her magnetism is so potent that I lean back, letting the tip barely slip inside.

"Oh, fuck!"

My head is knocked back as I begin to sit down further, letting it fill me up almost completely.

"Shit," Griffon bites out before grabbing onto my hips and guiding me up and down.

She is slow at first. She doesn't push me to go any faster, but when my hip movements begin to quicken, she immediately matches my energy by thrusting upward.

"Fuck. Griffon!"

Our pace quickens and my skin dampens with sweat as my hair clings to my back. Griffon is unfazed as she pulls me in closer until my chest is against hers.

I whimper, and the feeling of our sensitive nipples brushing against each other. I don't know how long I am bouncing for, but I take my time to explore. I could feel every

ounce of pleasure building up inside of me, quickly filling the pit in my stomach.

“Just cum, Mia.” Griffon’s deep voice torments me.

“I want you to cum, too.” The whininess in my voice drags out.

Griffon doesn't respond; instead, she grabs one of my hands and guides it down between us until I can feel beneath the base of the toy.

“Can you feel that?”

Just then, I feel something buzzing beneath my hand. I quickly nod while looking into her eyes.

“It vibrates, so trust me—I’m already there.”

With that, she starts pumping into me harder than before, silencing every sound that escapes my lips.

“Fuck! Oh, my g—” I can’t finish my own sentence as my breath catches in my throat while a wave of pleasure ripples through me, causing me to drop down onto her chest as my legs begin to tremble.

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:22 pm

My chest heaves, and all I can hear is a high-pitched ringing echoing in my ears. The last thing I feel is Griffon's arms wrapping around me, holding me tightly as we both sink deeper into the dark abyss.

CHAPTER 17

MIA

I take my time waking up the next morning.

The sheets are warm from the sunlight beaming through the window to the left of me. I can't see it because I refuse to open my eyes just yet, but it happens every morning at Griffon's apartment. It's one of my favorite things about her bedroom. She has a corner spot, so she gets double the windows. This also means double the sunlight, and in the past few days that I've been here, I know I haven't taken the time to truly appreciate it.

But today is different, and I knew it the moment I turned over and didn't feel my body immediately tense at the drastic idea of my life completely falling apart.

On the contrary, I couldn't feel a single bone in my body, and I probably would've believed you if you told me Griffon's bed was actually a cloud because it felt like I was levitating.

This morning, I take my time. I let the sun beat across my skin, slowly warming my limbs as everything from last night starts to trickle back in. I don't panic or freak out when the details come into focus. Instead, my lungs fill up with air, and I let out the

deepest sigh of satisfaction.

But when I stretch my hand across the bed and feel the space next to me is cold and empty, I reluctantly crack my eyes open to try to take in my surroundings.

Instantly, I'm disappointed when I don't see a sleeping Griffon lying next to me. My gaze lowers in confusion when my eyes catch a small folded-up piece of paper sitting in her replacement.

I can already feel the anticipation growing inside me as I unfold the small white square, and my eyes start moving faster than I could read.

Don't be pissed,

But I thought I should finally grab coffee for the girl who's always busy making everyone else's. I'll be back soon, don't move.

x Griffon

I don't realize I'm smiling until I finally put the note down, and my body drops back onto the bed in disbelief. But I can't stop myself from letting my arms spread out as I begin to make snow angels.

This is actually unreal.

When my arms and legs spread out for the third time, I jump from the feeling of my phone buzzing from somewhere underneath me. I almost want to ignore it, but the thought of Griffon trying to call me crosses my mind, and of course, I'm up in seconds searching through the covers to try and find it.

I squeeze my eyes shut and wince when I hear something loud crash against the

hardwood floors. Quickly, I rush over to the other side of the bed to see my phone lying screen-side down.

My breath catches as I reach down to pick it up, and I'm beyond relieved when I flip it over to see it is still in perfect condition. But when I click on the home screen to check my messages, my brows furrow in confusion when I first see an email from maintenance. When I click on the notification, I can feel all the color drain from my cheeks as the words begin to collect in my brain.

For a moment, I sit back, completely baffled. A storm brews inside of me, and I know I'm out of it when I don't hear the front or bedroom door open.

I'm broken out of my daze when Griffon's voice cuts through my inner chaos.

"Hey! You're up!" she beams.

When I don't immediately respond, she finally comes into view carrying what looks like two matcha lattes, but I'm too busy staring back at her, completely appalled to even care.

"Is everything okay?" Griffon asks with furrowed brows, laced with concern. All I can manage is a scoff in response. A brief moment passes.

"When were you going to tell me you already fixed my toilet?"

CHAPTER 18

MIA

Dear Resident,

As a valued tenant, we would love to hear your opinions on the recent work/repair to your unit that was completed on September 22nd at 11:50 a.m. We would be grateful if you could take the time to fill out the survey attached below.

Thank you again!

Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 2:22 pm

“Let me see.” Eleanor's soft voice breaks through the shield that has kept me stagnant for the past few hours. I don't even try to fight when she snatches my phone from my hands.

A few silent moments pass, and I glance up to see El's sharp eyes still assessing my screen.

“What a joke, huh?” I chuckle at my question, but it comes out dry and forced.

“I mean, that was almost three days ago!” My voice hardened ruthlessly, and I began pacing around my “newly” fixed apartment like many times before. Now that I'm out of my daze, I've already started to ramble. Curses fell from my mouth as I seethed with humiliation. The weight of my steps change from the feeling of rage beginning to surge through me.

“I could've been perfectly fine in my own apartment. She let me suffer for no reason.” My arms flail around as I make my way back to Eleanor's side, just in time for her head to snap up in my direction.

“You were suffering?” El's eyebrows shoot up as a small smirk begins to grow on her face.

My cold eyes narrowed at her. “This really isn't the time for jokes. She used me, El.”

Within seconds, Eleanor's smile drops and is quickly replaced with a look of defeat. She immediately pulls me into her side tightly.

“Okay, you're right. I'm sorry, I shouldn't be joking around.” Her agreement makes me break away from her grasp, and I'm back to pacing. Half of what I'm saying could be considered gibberish, but it didn't matter. My mind was too busy making up scenarios on how this happened.

Maybe she and her friends had a bet to see if she could get the shy prude next door into her bed.

She probably thought I'd be an easy fuck if I were just in her place

Or she thought that she could use me just as entertainment.

Fuck, this all really was just a game.

“I mean, is this not fucking insane? How selfish could she really be?” I bark out.

Even though I'm in my own world, I can detect Eleanor's cautious silence from a mile away. In one swift turn, I'm facing a tight-lipped, anxious-looking El.

“What?” There was already an edge to my voice.

“Oh, nothing.” El's contemptuous tone strikes something within me.

“Don't do that shit El, what is it?”

She sighs with exasperation.

“I mean, I just don't buy it.” Her voice is loud and abrupt, and immediately, I'm silenced. Her shoulders drop, and so does the facade she's held back this entire time.

After a few moments of staring blankly at each other, I clear my throat and speak up.

“Don't buy what?”

“I don't buy any of this, Mia—” Her hands begin waving around in my face. “—You're going to tell me you didn't enjoy being there one bit this week?”

She doesn't let me answer as she continues, “This is the most adventurous, fun, and confident I've ever seen you. Do you think I actually believe you when you say you were ‘suffering’?” She asks matter-of-factly.

The air quotes and roll of her eyes make my jaw drop in disbelief.

“Because from the looks of it, the only thing you're suffering from is a case of good di—”

“Okay, enough!” I cut her off before she could finish.

I don't think I can take much more. Granted, I did run out on Griffon's place mid-argument. So, yes, my hair might still be fucked up, and my outfit may look a little haphazard, but I didn't have time to really think about that when I told her to come over.

“Okay, okay. I promise I'm done teasing.” Her hands raise in defense.

“But seriously, Mia, why would Griffon set you up in her bedroom and stay in her own living room for three days just to sleep with you? Have you seen her do that with anyone she's brought over?” Eleanor's face was strong and determined as if she knew exactly what she needed to say.

The silence tension from the silence that followed was so thick you could cut it with a knife.

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Quickly, I turned away, making no response, as I fought against the tears I refused to let fall.

I wavered, trying to comprehend what I was hearing. Suddenly, all of my anger from before turned into confusion as I wandered restlessly around the room. But this time, I kept my mouth welded shut as my mind tried to register the abrupt change in my conflicting emotions.

CHAPTER 19

GRIFFON

“Okay, I know it sounds bad.” The painful silence made me stop gnawing at my bottom lip as fear began to knot inside of me.

“Sounds?” Monica's tone is filled with sarcasm.

“Okay, maybe it's worse than bad.” I quickly add.

“Griffon, that’s awful,” Lauren says, her tone blunt and unwavering. Her brows knit together tightly, and the heavy silence between them is suffocating. The weight of it all presses down on me until panic forces me to my feet.

“Okay, maybe I should’ve told her beforehand, but technically I didn't lie, her toilet really was fucked.” It sounds like I’m trying to convince myself more than anything.

“Okay, but you fixed it days ago. You do see how that's fucked up, right?”

Silence spreads between us. The question was a stab in the heart.

I attempt to recover as if it doesn't affect me: "To be fair, I didn't mean for this to drag on; I just—" But I'm stuck.

The words were right there. I couldn't spit it out. Just like this morning when Mia couldn't stop screaming at me, I didn't know what to say. I should've just explained myself or at least offered her some type of peace of mind. But no, I froze up.

I never freeze up. I'm pretty good at knowing what I want and knowing how to get it. Talking is one of those things that just came easy to me, but now isn't that time. Instead of giving Mia any answers I stood there like a criminal that was just caught red-handed.

I had no excuse. I let her call me every name in the book without a word of protest. I knew I deserved it—honestly, I probably deserved worse.

So, I stood there, letting her scream until her voice gave out. Even then, I didn't move, rooted in place in my bedroom, listening as she slammed the front door behind her.

With Monica and Lauren here, I'm not sure they're any better than Mia right now. The thought of Mia being hurt like that breaks something deep inside me.

"You just what, Griffon?" Lauren's eyebrows shoot up, her face as hard as her voice. They obviously are not here to feel sorry for me—understandably so.

"I don't know!" My voice cracks, and the words come out in a rush.

"No, I think you do know. You're just too scared to admit it." Monica's sharp tone makes Lauren and I whip our heads toward her, her words cutting through the tension

like a slap.

“Monica!” Lauren elbows her like many times before, but Monica stands— completely unaffected.

“What? Griffon needs to stand the fuck up, and I’m not about to let her drown herself away in whatever self-pity bullshit this is.”

“Look, what I think Monica is trying to say—” Lauren’s eyes linger on Monica as she continues.

“—Is that we love you, and you know we’ll support you no matter what. But come on, Griffon. You didn’t do all of this for no reason. Don’t you think she deserves to know why?”

My mind was working overtime as it anxiously searched for the meaning behind their words. But my subconscious already understood everything. My feet began to move on their own as I pulled away from my living room and headed straight for my front door.

“You’re right.” The determination in my voice sends me straight into tunnel vision until an arm stops me from moving further. Quickly, I turn to my right to find a wide-eyed Lauren holding me back.

“Wha—”

“—Not right now, you doofus! She just found out you’ve been lying to her this whole time. Give her some space.”

I can hear them both try to swallow their giggles, but I’m too focused to care about being embarrassed at my eagerness. After a few moments, reluctantly, I let go of my

front door knob as my mind begins to create a mixture of hope and fear.

CHAPTER 20

MIA

I haven't spoken to Griffon in what feels like weeks, but in reality, it has only been two days. But the dead silence coming from her apartment is concerning. If it was any other situation, I probably would've done a wellness check, but instead, I've settled for pinning my ear against our shared walls to try and listen for any movement.

Yes, she might've hurt me, but I still can't refrain from wanting to know if she's okay.

She hasn't tried contacting me, and it's not that I thought she would. Truthfully, I expected to hear another girl through my walls already. Maybe even two. But she's probably just sleeping over at their place to avoid me. However, thinking of her with anyone else makes me want to hurl.

I know it's true; it's just who she is. She got what she wanted from me, and now it's time to move on.

If it's that simple, then why do I catch myself continuously fighting the urge to turn around at work every day? No matter how hard I scrub the counters or how many dishes I wash, I can't rinse away the ache in my chest.

Because as much as I want to forget her, I hold my breath every time that bell above the door rings. Just for a second. It's almost like I'm setting myself up to be disappointed. What once caused me so much embarrassment, I all of a sudden craved. But now I'm not the same behind the counter. For once, I was completely out of it. I was messing up order after order until, finally, I was told just to go wash the dishes.

But I didn't complain either; I actually felt relieved to finally be able to let the tears slip down my cheeks.

And as if she could feel my own despair, El never left my side. Even during rush hour, she basically said "fuck you" to half of our customers just to comfort me. I don't even know how time has passed; it felt like I was repeatedly washing the same dish. My eyes searched for answers for hours, and blood pounded at my temples.

Why can't I let that ginger whore go?

Why am I so concerned for her well-being when all she did was use me?

Why am I pulling my hair out over a girl I met less than two weeks ago?

And why do I deserve the silent treatment?

I'm frustrated when I clock out and make it back up to my apartment. Damn near, pissed.

I'd spent hours scrubbing dishes, trying to distract myself while drowning in questions about why Griffon hadn't tried to talk to me. None of the reasons I came up with made any sense. I know I should let it go, but I can't—not even after Eleanor pointed out that Griffon wouldn't have been sleeping in her living room without a good reason. So why wouldn't she want to explain herself?

I'm tired of listening to these unanswered questions float around in my brain when she's next door to me. She should be the one freaking out, not me.

I don't even sit down as I throw my bag onto the couch and head for my kitchen counter. I shouldn't, and I know I shouldn't.

But I'm seething with anger and confusion. And as my eyes set their gaze back onto my front door, I don't hesitate before charging for it like a bull.

When I rip it open, I immediately stumble back when I just about crash into the devil herself, completely folded in half with a brown box in hand. But when she looks up, she looks nothing like her usual cocky self. The tear stains on her cheeks look like they've never dried, and her eyes are rimmed scarlet red as their blue has never seemed brighter.

"Oh shit!" Her body jerks into an upward position, and for the first time ever, I think I'm witnessing Griffon act... awkward. Her eyes are wavering everywhere as her hands begin to fidget, I know this look all too well.

Is Griffon nervous?

"—Uhh, I was trying to time this right, and I heard your door close. So, I thought it would be a good time to um—"

"To what?" My voice's sternness startles me, but her eyes finally meet mine.

"I've never done this before—" I can hear the uneasiness in her tone, but I refrain from cutting her off.

"I've never done any of this before, from sleeping on my couch for days to trying to confess my feelings for you. This is all new to me. I'm so sorry I couldn't speak up and tell you what happened like you deserved to hear. But, if I'm honest with you, I didn't know what I was doing. When I finally got you to start talking to me, I never wanted it to stop. I know that's selfish, but I wanted you all to myself."

I don't realize I'm holding my breath until Griffon stops speaking. I'm too focused on her eyes being wide and filled with hope.

“And I still do.”

I finally let the air escape my lungs as I catapulted my body onto hers. She doesn't falter or hesitate before wrapping me in her arms and engulfing me whole.

“Mia, I'm so sorr—”

I swallow her words with my lips because I don't think I could have lasted another second without doing so. I know she feels the same as she crashes on me, hungry and passionate. But quickly, she adjusts our speed until we are slow and harmonious. And just as I become wrapped in her silken cocoon of euphoria, she breaks away from my lips.

“What—” I begin to protest, but Griffon quickly cuts me off.

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“You're package!” Griffon's bright voice makes me smile, but my brows furrow in confusion as she lowers me slowly until my feet rest softly on my hardwood floors.

“Huh?”

I don't even realize what she's doing until she reaches back down to pick up a smallish brown box.

“I didn't order anyth—“

My thoughts cut me off, and my wide eyes quickly snapped up at an already cheesing Griffon.

But by the time it all clicks for me, all I can do is yelp and giggle as Griffon swoops me back into her arms before finally kicking my door shut.

The last thing I hear is Griffon's soft but deep voice whispering against my ear,

“Consider this a special delivery.”

EPILOGUE

MIA

8 MONTHS LATER

The feeling of delicate, warm lips trailing up my legs is what pulls me from my haze

of sleep. No matter how long it's been, I don't think I'll ever stop getting butterflies from her touch. That might be why I lay there with my eyes closed longer than needed.

Not wanting to ruin the feeling of her gentle eagerness trying to wake me up. Each kiss leaves a burning sensation under my skin, and it's getting harder and harder to act like I don't feel it.

But, like most times, I can only hold out for so long before giving in. Griffon knows that though—this is just her part of the fun. She always has to play some type of game with me.

As the softness of her body melts into mine, her lips drag slowly against my stomach, and instinctively, a gasp escapes from her lips as my back begins to arch. Giving in, I quickly look down to finally meet her deep blue eyes, perfectly framed with copper ringlets that curl against her forehead. She looked more ethereal than ever, and I couldn't refrain from reaching both hands down and sinking my nails into the nape of her neck.

“Fuck!” Griffon growls out as I pull her face closer to mine.

Her powerful and well-sculpted body moved with ease. And even while lying down, she completely towers over me. There was something about how Griffon's strength never lessened her femininity. Yes, she was rough, and the palms of her hands definitely reflected her choice of work. But still, her kisses were soft, and her touch felt like my body was coated in honey. It's one of the many reasons I think I turn into mush under her gaze.

As our faces become inches apart, she gains back control and flips us over, leaving me straddling her chest.

“Woah!” My arms swing around, attempting to gain balance and adjust to the sun's blaring heat.

“—Not even a good morning or anything?” I peer down to see the biggest grin on her face, and I immediately match it.

“First day in our new apartment, and you want me to say ‘good morning’ to you?”

Her eyebrows shoot up as her tongue just barely slips between her lips, and I have to throw my head back to stop myself from groaning.

I cannot believe this is my life right now, but when I glance over to the wall of windows that are to the right of me, I almost gasp at the view of the water.

Ever since Griffon surprised me with the keys to my dream apartment, nothing has truly seemed real. But last night, after months of her renovating and designing our new space, we officially moved in.

I like to think fate brought us together, knowing we both had the same hopes and dreams of getting this apartment.

But nothing could have prepared me for what Griffon described as the perfect blend of the two of us. Our cozy but modern-style apartment had a complete open floor plan. There were no tight hallways to fall down in or tiny bathrooms to flood.

Instead, windows lined the walls, starting from the living room and wrapping all the way around to the other side of our bedroom, making the place feel spacious with how much light pours in.

My favorite, though, was the kitchen. With hand-painted olive green cabinets and gold fixtures, it looked like any lesbian's dream. But the real kicker was the custom-

built coffee bar that Griffon made for me. I mean, everything in this place she built was really just for me. I don't realize I'm smiling until Griffon's raspy voice interrupts my thoughts.

“You done daydreaming up there, so I can fuck you?” She's loud and abrupt, and I immediately chuckle.

“Babe—!” my hands playfully slap her chest, “—I have to get to work.” Her hands start to caress my hips, and it's almost like everything I just said went in one ear and out the other. But it's not like I'm stopping to complain as she begins to apply more pressure. Slowly pushing me down until I'm forced to grind against her.

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My movements quicken on my own, though, and Griffon has to loosen her grip so I can move faster.

“Shit!” I spit out in between breaths.

Just as Griffon raises her hips to create more friction, the sound of faint knocking breaks through my cloud of lust.

“W-Wait! What was that?” But Griffon doesn’t stop. Her hands tighten as she moves my body for me.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

It’s louder now, and quickly, I grab her wrists to try and slow her down. But she doesn’t, and when I look down, she smirks at me, knowing I’m already on the edge.

“Come on, Mia! I’m not going to be late because of you and your sex escapades!”

El’s voice echoes through the front door to our bedroom, so I know she’s screaming. But I can’t focus on anything else right now as the air in my lungs runs short, and I find myself toppled over, shaking.

“Trust me, she’s coming!” Griffon yells back sarcastically, and I don’t stop the fit of laughter that rips through me.