



Broken Doll

Author: *Alexx Andria*

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Description: They didn't recruit me. They reprogrammed me.

One moment I was living a lie. The next, I was locked inside a covert facility where they don't train agents—they manufacture them.

Seduction. Manipulation. Infiltration.

Everything about me has been engineered to dismantle a target without firing a single shot.

They call us Dolls.

Disposable. Deadly. Beautiful distractions.

My first mission? Get close to a billionaire with secrets worth killing for. But the deeper I go, the more I realize—I'm not just a weapon.

I'm a liability. And liabilities don't survive long in the Dollhouse.

Now I have a choice: follow orders and lose myself forever...

Or break the game before it breaks me.

BROKEN DOLL is the first high-octane novella in the DIRTY DOLL OPS series. Think: Killing Eve meets Cinemax after dark—erotic espionage with bite.

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The last time I got dragged out of a sex club, I came. This time, I might die.

My stiletto snaps like a wishbone as the human refrigerator yanks me backward through Malvagio's fire exit, his grip so tight I'll be wearing his fingerprints as jewelry tomorrow. If there is a tomorrow.

And no one moves a muscle or bats an eye at the spectacle of a woman getting pulled from the club because this place specializes in dangerous, kinky shit for people who need extremes to get off.

No joke, Malvagio is one of those places that embodies the Fight Club motto, if you know what I mean. You have to be invited to get in and you don't fuck up by losing your invitation because you'll never get another.

But hot damn, once you're in, it's a smorgasbord of kink from every angle. Like to gag on a cock while a masked person shoves a carrot in your ass and then pulls it out and makes you eat it? Sure, no problem. Want to get your pussy licked while simultaneously gagging on a meat missile big enough to choke a horse? Line up, baby.

BDSM, role play, water sports —you name it, it's on the menu. Except kid and animal stuff. That's where the owners draw the line. Anything else? Freefall into debauchery, sweetheart.

But therein lies the rub...no one's gonna help me because they probably think I'm into whatever's about to happen. Some might say, this is a problem of my own making. And to them, I'd say, touche.

His face flashes in the neon—granite-hard and emotion-free, the kind that screams government payroll—before my head cracks against brick. The alley wall exfoliates my bare shoulders, shredding my three-thousand-dollar dress that had already done its job getting me into VIP rooms and between Derek's sheets.

Holy fuck, since when did government goons start snatching civvies from sex clubs? And for what? This is some fucked-up shit and I want no part of it.

I kick out with my good heel, aiming for his crotch. Amateur move. He slams me back, forearm crushing my windpipe with surgical precision. The kind of pressure that says he's done this to people who matter a helluva lot more than me.

"Ms. James," he says, voice like bourbon poured over broken glass. "We can do this quietly or we can do this loudly. Your choice, but the outcome remains the same."

He knows my name. Not "Dollface" or "Candy" or whatever bullshit alias I fed club patrons between martinis and blow. My actual, driver's-license name that belongs to a woman who has to pay her taxes and wear a seatbelt.

Well, fuck.

My pulse jackhammers against his forearm. I taste copper—blood, fear, or that shitty lipstick I stole from Sephora, whoknows. The alley reeks of piss and Dior Sauvage, the universal scent of men with something to prove and money to waste.

"Super original dialogue, Agent Asshole. Did you practice that in the bathroom mirror for your audition reel?" I spit the words through teeth clenched tight enough to crack. Smart mouthing men who could kill me has always been my favorite form of foreplay.

He shakes me hard. "Watch your mouth, little girl."

“Ohhh, misogyny, the icing on the cake. Where's Derek?” I rasp against the forearm. My perverted wingman, partner-in-crime is nowhere that I can see and I've seen enough movies to know that that's a bad sign.

My captor flicks his gaze toward the street. "Mr. Klein is... preoccupied."

The metallic click of a car door echoes off the bricks, and suddenly we're not alone. A second man—taller, slimmer, moving like a shadow—approaches. He carries something. Someone.

Derek's limp body dangles between them like a drunk prom date, his favorite Armani tie—the blue one I teased him about paying too much for—gagging his mouth. Blood trails from his nose to his chin in rivulets that look black in the alley's dim light. His eyes roll back, finding mine, wide with terror and confusion.

Derek and I have been through some shit—club bouncers with wandering hands, a jealous husband who tracked us to Chateau Marmont, that weird cult thing in Palm Springs—but nothing like this.

Never this.

He's the only person who knows the real me, not the sanitized version I show Isaac or the hypersexual caricature I perform at Malvagio. I guess you could call him my friend but I never really thought that deep about it. All I know is that it's all sorts of fucked up that whatever is happening isn't anything either of us asked for.

One minute we're having a blast —Derek's getting sucked off by a chesty blonde and I'm taking it from behind by a guy with the biggest cock I've ever had —like I said, good times, and the next, we're getting dragged out the back door like international criminals with plans to off the president in our emails.

"What the fuck did you do to him?" My voice doesn't sound like mine—more scared girl than smartass. I hate it. "If you hurt him—" That's when panic hits. Not for me—I've always figured I'd go out in some spectacular, newsworthy fashion—but for Derek.

Then I see it. A gap between Granite Face and the wall. Just wide enough for someone my size.

I slam my elbow into his solar plexus—a dirty club trick I learned from a bouncer who liked me on my knees—and twist out of his grip. My remaining heel hits pavement and I'm running, blood rushing in my ears, adrenaline making me faster than I've been since high school track.

Three steps. Four. Freedom's breath on my skin.

Then pain explodes across my back as I'm tackled from behind, palms skidding across dirty concrete like cheap sandpaper. My teeth clack together, the taste of blood flooding my mouth as Granite Face flips me over.

"That was stupid," he says, pressing something cold and metallic against my throat. Not a gun. Worse. A syringe, its needle pricking my jugular just enough to send shockwaves of terror through my body. One push and whatever cocktail they have for me goes straight to my brain.

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His weight crushes my chest, knees pinning my arms. "Next time you try something like that, this goes in your eye. Understand?"

I nod, the needle's point scratching my skin with each tiny movement. So much for action hero moments. All I got was bloody palms and another man on top of me who isn't asking permission.

"Choice time, Ms. James," he says, easing the pressure on my throat just enough that I can suck in air that tastes like bad decisions. "The easy way or the messy way?"

A flash of clarity cuts through my thoughts like a straight razor. These aren't your garden-variety psychos or Derek's coked-up poker buddies with boundary issues. These are professionals. Military-grade. Black-ops precise. And they want something specific from me.

But what? I can promise you...I've never dabbled in anything remotely this serious before so why me?

If they wanted me dead, I'd already be cooling in a dumpster with my tongue stapled to my chest as a warning to others.

Fuck it, if I'm gonna die, might as well go out with a bang.

I smile, all teeth and no warmth. "You had me at 'messy,' but I'll take door number one."

Their grip shifts but doesn't loosen as they drag me toward an SUV so black it's like a

hole cut in the night. The kind of vehicle that screams "nobody will hear your screams." My broken heel skitters against dirty concrete like a dying insect.

"What about my friend?" I jerk my chin toward Derek, whose once-perfectly-styled hair now resembles a post-hurricane nest. "What are you going to do with him?"

The granite-faced man doesn't even blink. "Mr. Klein is no longer your concern."

They fold me into the vehicle like origami, the leather seats ice-cold against my thighs—the kind of cold that reaches for your bones. I catch one last glimpse of Derek, Mr. Three-Hundred-Dollar Haircut and Daddy's Credit Card, slumped against filthy bricks before a hood drops over my head. It smells like bleach and other people's final moments.

The SUV growls to life. I count the turns—left, right, straight for seven minutes, right again. Something I saw in a movie but seems legit useful right about now.

Through the hood, I catch fragments of conversation.

"Package secured. En route to primary location."

Not a kidnapping then. An extraction. Like I'm a fucking wisdom tooth. The distinction matters.

Wouldn't it be wild if I was some deadly spy cell waiting to be activated? Except my memory's been wiped and replaced with some bullshit story so I could melt into the benign, boring life of an upper middle-class housewife without drawing attention to myself.

That's no less plausible than the reality that I'd just been dragged out of a club by some unknown faction, being driven to God knows where.

I catalog my life's fuckups for potential reasons this is happening: No cartel connections. No corporate espionage worth this level of response. I've always been careful to be the collector of secrets, not the creator.

You don't survive in the Hollywood cesspool without learning which skeletons stay buried and which ones make useful leverage. Funny thing, when people get naked, you'd be surprised how quick they are to spill their deepest, darkest secrets. It must be the illusion of vulnerability that gets people singing like a canary.

Except me, I could be buck ass naked and I ain't spilling shit about my personal life.

And before you get it twisted —just because I live in L.A. doesn't mean I'm trying to find fame or some stupid shit like that. Actors are assholes, getting off on their own ego.

No thanks.

Also, a lot of them like to think they're kinky but they're not. Pillow princesses, the lot of them, acting like they're doing you a favor while their getting their dick sucked.

My husband, Isaac, doesn't have enemies—doesn't have enough personality to make any. The accounting firm where he crunches celebrity tax returns isn't exactly on terrorist watchlists.

Unless—

The thought slams into a wall when I feel the needle in my neck. Not a doctor's polite prick but a prison-yard stab. My muscles turn to warm pudding. Reality slides sideways.

Voices float above me like I'm at the bottom of a swimming pool filled with bourbon.

"She still conscious?"

"For now. Two minutes till drop."

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"Why's she so special?"

"Above my pay grade but the order came straight from Killion's mouth so I'm not going to question it."

Killion. The name hooks into my dissolving brain like a fish barb.

As consciousness bleeds out, I think about Isaac. He'll come home to an empty house tonight. He'll notice I'm gone sometime tomorrow, probably, but that's the shitty part about hiding things about your life—people don't notice when you stop showing up.

I lie a lot to my husband. Girls' trips that are really just fuck parties; guys numbers hidden behind the facade of a fast-food restaurant; a burner phone for the really nasty shit that I'm into.

I'm a lot of things to a lot of people but one thing I can't claim is faithful wife.

Is this my karma? Seems kinda excessive even by L.A.'s standards but whatevs. If this is how I go out, so be it. It was fun while it lasted.

My last coherent thought: The last time I felt this light-headed, Isaac had proposed on a Malibu balcony. I'd said yes because it seemed easier than saying no and because his father's connections implied Isaac would make good money for me to spend.

Some choices aren't really choices at all. But darling, the ones that are? Those are the ones that'll kill you.

When I was a kid, my momma used to say if anyone ever tried to steal me, they'd bring me right back within the hour because I was such a pain in the ass they couldn't handle me. "Like returning a rabid raccoon to the wild," she'd drawl, cigarette dangling from her lips, bourbon in hand.

Well, Momma... I'm about to find out if you were right.

As darkness crashes over me like a rogue wave, a strange calm settles in my bones. Whatever these government types want from me, they're about to discover I'm not just another easy mark.

I'm Landry fucking James. I've swallowed bigger threats before breakfast.

They underestimated the wrong woman.

Now I'm about to be their worst fucking mistake.

I wake up on an old cot with a thin mattress, the kind you see in movies involving human trafficking. My mouth tastes like a gnome popped a squat and shit on my tongue.

My head is spinning, a consequence of the knock-out drug they jammed in my neck, which, by the way, still hurts. I work my jaw, wincing as pain ricochets through my bones. "I want to talk to the manager," I warble, my voice ragged and hoarse. "Hello? The service here sucks. Zero stars. I'm gonna leave a helluva a scathing Yelp review."

Metal walls. A single overhead light buzzing faintly. No windows, no furniture except for the shitty prison bed. Not exactly the Hilton.

I exhale, slow.

I've been in some bad situations before. Fucked my way into more trouble than I can count. But this?

This is new.

I cross my arms, shifting my weight. My outfit—so perfect for the club, for playing—feels absurd here, all leather and lace in a room that looks like a goddamn meat locker.

I don't know how long I wait. Could be five minutes, could be an hour. Time feels slippery in this place, stretched thin and brittle.

Then the door opens.

And he walks in.

He doesn't belong here.

Not in the way the others do. Not like the man who dragged me out of the club or the one who dumped Derek in an alleyway with no interest in his safety.

This guy? He looks like he should be anywhere else—an office, a boardroom, maybe sitting across from my husband at some networking event, drinking overpriced scotch and pretending to give a fuck about stocks.

His suit is impeccable. Not a wrinkle, not a single thread out of place. His tie is straight, his watch gleams, and his face—handsome in a forgettable, almost corporate way—is calm. Measured.

He doesn't leer. Doesn't smile. Just tilts his head slightly as he looks me over, like he's assessing whether or not I'm worth his time.

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"Ms. James," he says, his voice smooth, pleasant. "I appreciate you agreeing to this meeting."

"What time is it?" I asked, bypassing the fake pleasantries. I'm not about to pretend I wasn't plucked from the street and stuffed into a van like a Christmas turkey stolen from the yard. "Where the fuck am I?"

The man's lips twitch, the ghost of a smile. "Fair enough." He paused to look at his watch, answering, "It's 7 a.m. and where you are, is someplace safe for our negotiations."

7 a.m.? Holy fuck, I'd just slept away hours of my life thanks to the little cocktail jabbed into my neck. "Negotiations? The fuck you talking about. I'm not negotiating shit with you unless it involves an Uber, an apology, and a fat wad of cash in my pocket for my trouble."

He leans casually against the hard steel wall. "I'd like to offer you a job."

I blink.

A laugh claws its way up my throat, sharp and bitter. "A job?"

"Yes."

"Does it come with benefits? Health insurance? A 401K?"

Another faint smile. "The compensation is generous."

I stare at him, searching for the catch. "And what exactly is the job? Because I'm guessing it's not in customer service."

He finally meets my eyes. Holds them. "You're correct."

I wait, but he doesn't elaborate.

I exhale sharply, shifting my stance. "Look, Suit, I don't know what kind of operation you're running here, but if you dragged me out of my club for a fucking recruitment meeting, you're gonna have to do better than cryptic one-liners and a smug smile like you're offering me a golden goose."

This time, the smile does reach his eyes. "I like you."

I roll mine. "Great. We besties now? You gonna braid my hair?"

He ignores that. "We've been watching you for some time, Ms. James. You have... a particular skill set. One we believe would be valuable to us."

I fold my arms. "And who exactly is 'us'?"

"That's not important right now."

I let out a slow, disbelieving laugh. "So let me get this straight. You abduct me, lock me in a glorified freezer with nothing more than a prison bed, and now you're giving me themystery box treatment? No name, no details, just a vague-ass offer?"

His expression doesn't change. "You enjoy danger."

I go still.

"You seek it out," he continues, his voice steady, dissecting. "You take risks others wouldn't. You put yourself in situations where control is an illusion, where the wrong move could end badly. And yet—you always land on your feet. From what I can tell, you're a cat with nine lives. And that's useful to me."

I don't say anything.

Because fuck. He's right.

He pushes off the wall, squaring his shoulders as he fixes his stare on me. "What I'm offering is simple. A way to use that talent. A way to turn those impulses into something more."

"And what kind of job would that be?" I ask with suspicion.

A pause. Then, with the same calm precision, he says?—

"You'd be using your body, Ms. James. The way you already do. But instead of chasing meaningless pleasure—you'll be chasing intel."

A chill snakes down my spine.

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He watches me, unreadable. "Sex is power. A tool. One that can open doors, loosen tongues, break down defenses. You've already proven you know how to use it."

I swallow. My pulse hammers against my ribs.

"You'd be trained, of course," he continues. "Taught how to read people. How to extract information without them ever realizing. How to control a room with a look, a word, a touch."

I lick my lips, my mouth dry. A forbidden tingle starts at the base of my spine. The allure of such an offer is hard to shut down.

"And in return?" I ask, boldly lifting my chin.

His smile is slow. Icy.

"In return, you'll be given more money than you know what to do with." A pause. "And a life that will never, ever be boring again."

The room feels smaller. The cold biting deeper.

"But you also can't tell anyone what you're doing."

I rub my arms, but it doesn't help. It's not just the temperature. It's the walls pressing in, the silence wrapping around me like a weighted shroud. Like the moment before a freefall—the second your stomach drops, but your feet haven't left the edge yet.

"What if...it slips?" I ask.

He doesn't answer, just stares. The answer is pretty plain — if I spill the beans, he'll spill my blood.

Talk about high stakes for keeping your mouth shut.

It's absurd. Unbelievable. Insane.

"And how exactly am I supposed to pull this off without anyone noticing? Obviously, you know I'm married. Don't you think my husband will notice if I'm off being a secret sex spy?"

"Let's be honest, Landry...you're a shitty wife. I doubt he'll notice but I think you've gotten pretty good at telling a lie. However, if it would be easier, we could arrange for your husband to have an accident, freeing you up entirely."

I stared. Such a casual offer of murder. I should be horrified. But I'm not. If anything, I'm thrilled at the power. Who the fuck are these people?

But I don't want to be responsible for Isaac's death. I cast a bored look the man's way. "Don't be dramatic. I can handle Isaac. I was just curious as to what you would say."

He inclined his head. "Good."

A job offer wrapped in steel walls and veiled threats. A career change that comes with blood money and no way out.

"So, am I supposed to just take your word for this job offer or do I get something in writing? A girl's gotta protect herself."

"Of course," he said, pulling a folded piece of paper from his interior jacket pocket. He hands me the paper. It's a short and simple contract with space for my signature.

Then, with perfect timing, the door scrapes open again.

And I'm introduced to the devil himself.

He doesn't look like Satan. No horns, no pitchfork, no sulfur stench. But the way the air changes when he walks in—like every molecule suddenly stands at attention—tells me everything I need to know.

This is the man they were talking about in the car. Killion.

The first thing I notice is that he's older than Suit Guy—late forties maybe—with silver-flecked stubble and eyes so cold they could freeze vodka.

The second thing I notice is how he carries himself. Not like a soldier, not like a spy, but like a man who's seen the darkest corners of the world and decided to make himself at home there.

"This her?" His voice is unexpected. Smooth, with a slight accent I can't place. European, maybe.

Suit Guy nods. "Landry James. As discussed."

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Killion circles me like I'm livestock at auction. No leering, no appreciation—just clinical assessment. I hate how it makes me feel. Like I'm nothing. Like I'm everything.

"You think you're special, don't you?" His words slice through the air.

I curl my lip, defiant. "I think I'm in a fucking black site talking to Men in Black rejects. Does that count as special?"

He doesn't smile. Doesn't react at all. Just keeps circling. "Nine months. We've been watching you for nine months. Do you know what we saw?"

My heart skips. Nine months? Jesus.

"I'm guessing not my sparkling personality."

"We saw a woman with no boundaries. No morals. No loyalty except to her own pleasure."

I should feel insulted. But there's something in the way he says it—like these are qualifications, not criticisms.

"Most people would call that an unapologetic slut." I shrug, feigning indifference.

Now he stops. Looks directly at me. "Most people are small-minded and unimaginative. I call it potential."

Something shifts inside me. Heat pools low in my belly, not from arousal but from a darker, more primitive emotion. Recognition.

"So what? You're gonna train me to be some kind of honey trap? Fuck state secrets out of diplomats?" My voice drips with sarcasm, but there's a tremor underneath. That actually sounds like a good time.

He doesn't rise to the bait. "More or less."

The simplicity of his answer knocks the wind out of me.

"The men you're used to—they're soft. Weak. Predictable." Killion's eyes drill into mine. "The men I'll send you after—they're monsters wearing custom suits. Men who traffic girls barely half your age. Men who plot wars over breakfast. Men who hold the kind of power that turns everything it touches to ash."

My throat tightens. The room suddenly feels ten degrees colder.

"Your job will be to make them want you. Need you. Trust you. And when they do—" He makes a small gesture, like plucking something invisible from the air. "You take what we need."

I swallow hard. "And if I say no?"

For the first time, Killion's expression changes. A smile so fleeting it's almost a hallucination crosses his face. "We both know it's too late for that."

Yes, I did know that but I want him to say it. Like he said, I crave bad things.

He steps closer. Close enough that I can smell him—expensive cologne over something earthier, more primal.

“It would be a tragedy to waste all of that potential.” His voice drops lower. “You’re a weapon waiting to be honed. All you need is the right training and you’ll be a force to reckon with.”

Something electric passes between us. Not attraction—something more dangerous. The recognition of kindred darkness.

“And how do you propose to do that?” I ask.

“That’s the fun part. I’ll break you,” he continues matter-of-factly. “Strip away everything soft, everything useless. And rebuild you into something lethal.”

I want to look away. Can't. Because, I’m kinda into it. Like something about the taboo danger is doing it for me.

"You'll hate me. You'll fear me." He tilts his head slightly. "And at some point, you'll realize I've given you the only thing you've ever truly wanted."

"Which is what?" My voice comes out as a whisper.

"Purpose."

The word hangs in the air, simple and devastating.

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I just split my life in two. Forever after this moment will be “before” and “after” I signed on the dotted line.

Wasn't this what I really wanted every time I tested the boundaries, seeking the ultimate thrill with risky situations?

Let's be real—I'm the poster child for this kind of clandestine recruitment. If anyone was made for this kind of lifestyle, it was me.

But that's the problem, isn't it?

I think about Isaac. And I feel nothing.

Not even fear for what this means. Not even loyalty. Just the dull certainty that I could walk away, right now, and go back to that life untouched, unchanged—and it would kill me.

Maybe not today. Maybe not tomorrow. But eventually, the slow, creeping death of mediocrity would sink its teeth in, and I'd wake up one day old and brittle, choking on regret.

God save me but I need this.

The danger. The unknown. The adrenaline humming beneath my skin, electric and sharp.

And yet?—

The room is silent, but it hums with something heavier than sound.

A trap disguised as an opportunity. A contract disguised as a life sentence.

My pulse is loud in my ears, a steady, insistent drum. I glance at the contract in my hand again. Like it's waiting for me. Like it knows I'll sign.

I wet my lips. Swallow. My throat is too dry.

This is fucking crazy.

I should walk out of this frozen steel box and pretend none of this happened. I should go home, slip back into my dull, easy life, let Isaac's oblivious arms wrap around me, let my body mold back into the shape of the woman I was before tonight.

Maybe I'll pump out a kid. Or get a dog. Slip into the monotony of a suburban life bleached and sanitized of anything resembling fun, excitement, and spontaneity.

I should.

But I won't.

Because that woman? She's already gone.

She disappeared somewhere between the moment I was thrown into that SUV and the moment I realized I liked the feel of the door locking behind me.

Somewhere between the whispered threats in the dark and the offer that doesn't sound like a threat at all.

I want this.

Not just the money, the power, the thrill. The transformation. The idea that I can be something—someone—other than the bored wife, the woman who settled, the reckless slut chasing cheap highs in dimly lit clubs.

A new purpose. A new life. A new way to burn the world down.

But still.

Still, there's a tiny, fraying thread inside me—something fragile, something weak, something whispering.

You can't take this back. You can't undo this. You can't unmake yourself once you start.

My fingers twitch.

I flex them. Curl them. Try to steady my pulse, but my heart is a fucking riot in my chest, pounding against my ribs like it wants out.

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I take one last breath.

Deep. Slow.

Then, as if he read my thoughts, Suit Guy produces a pen and hands it to me.

It's cold. Smooth. Heavy in my grip. The weight of a choice I can never unchoose.

I hold the contract against the steel wall, put the tip to the page, hover over the signature line—Landry James, in neat, unbroken print.

My fingers tighten.

One more second. One last hesitation. One last chance to drop the pen, walk away, let my old life swallow me whole.

Then I sign.

The ink dries fast.

Just like that, I disappear.

I return the pen and the contract, my pulse finally slowing to something steadier.

I lift my chin. Meet Killion's eyes—not Suit Guy's—because I already know who's really in charge here. And then, voice even, I ask?—

"When do we start?"

Killion's smile is all teeth and no mercy.

"We already have."

He turns to leave, but pauses at the door. "Get some rest, Ms. James. Tomorrow, the real pain begins."

"What about Isaac?" I ask quickly.

"You'll be provided your cell. You'll tell him you're going to be gone for a few weeks—an impromptu girls trip that you can't miss. Make it believable. This is your first test."

And somehow, I know he's not exaggerating. That what's coming will test every limit I've ever pushed, break every boundary I've ever crossed.

"Easy-peasy," I shoot back but as the door slams shut behind him, locking me once more in this steel coffin, I feel something I haven't felt in years.

Alive.

Truly, viciously, terrifyingly alive.

I lie back on the prison cot, staring at the ceiling, a smile playing at the corners of my lips.

Landry James is dead.

Long live whatever the fuck I'm about to become.

I shouldn't be nervous.

I don't get nervous.

Nerves are for people who give a shit, who second-guess, who flinch. I've spent years training that out of myself—every hesitation, every flicker of doubt, burned away in private rooms and tangled sheets. And yet?—

When I woke up, the club clothes were gone—vanished like they never existed. Instead, there was a sad little pile of prison-chic waiting for me: gray sweatpants, a white tank that looked three sizes too small, and tennis shoes so aggressively plain they screamed government-issue.

Someone had undressed me while I slept. Stripped me bare and redressed me like a fucking doll. I should've felt violated, but all I could think was: amateur move. If you want to break a woman who's been naked in front of half of Los Angeles, you'll need more than a peek at her tits.

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Besides, I love showing off my tits. I'll flash the motherfucking Pope on a Sunday just to cause a riot.

That's who I am.

So, my response to whoever got the privilege of seeing me naked? You're-fucking-welcome.

Next to the pathetic excuse for a wardrobe sat a tray of food that made airplane meals look like Michelin star cuisine. A hunk of bread that could double as a doorstep. Cheese so hard it could chip a tooth. And water in a plastic cup—not even the decency of a bottle.

Kill Bill vibes for sure. That scene where Uma's character trains with Pai Mei, surviving on rice and suffering while she learns to punch through wood? Yeah, that. Except I doubted Killian had any ancient wisdom to impart, just fresh ways to hurt.

I stretched, feeling yesterday's bruises bloom beneath my skin, little purple flowers marking where fingers had dug too deep. My mouth still tasted like chemical aftermath, tongue thick and unwilling.

"Breakfast of champions," I muttered, tearing off a piece of bread that fought back. I chewed slowly, deliberately, staring directly at where I was certain a camera was hidden. Let them watch. Let them see I wouldn't beg for a fucking croissant.

If this was Killian's idea of breaking me, he'd seriously underestimated my tolerance for bullshit. I'd lived on vodka and spite for three days in Ibiza. I'd survived my

mother's cooking for sixteen years. This? This was amateur hour.

I pulled on the clothes, skin crawling as the rough fabric scraped against places used to silk and lace. The sweats hung low on my hips, but the tank clung like a second skin, my nipples visible through the thin cotton. Another power play. Make me feel exposed, vulnerable.

Two could play that game.

I stretched again, arms above my head, arching my back like a cat, letting whoever was watching get their money's worth. Then I smiled—all teeth, no warmth—and flipped off the empty room.

"Try harder, Killion," I said to the walls. "I've had hangovers more intimidating than this."

The door stayed shut. The silence stretched. And somewhere in that steel box, as I forced down another bite of that miserable excuse for food, I felt it—that twisted, sick little thrill that whispered: Bring it on.

About an hour later, the door opened, and a stone-faced cold fish of a woman gestured for me to follow. I wanted to quip, "I don't come when I'm fingered," but I could already tell, this woman doesn't have a sense of humor, so I fall in line, if only because my curiosity is stronger than my good sense.

She took me to another door, opened it and pushed me through. "Rude," I mutter, only to find Killion and another female sitting behind a metal desk bolted to the floor.

His clothes are simple—dark slacks, black boots polished to a dull sheen, a fitted long-sleeve shirt clinging to a body built for precision, for violence.

Muscle ripples beneath the fabric, not bulky but honed, every inch carved for a purpose I don't want to name yet.

But it's not his size that spikes my pulse, thudding hard against my throat. It's the way he looks at me.

Not like a man looks at a woman—hungry, horny, amused. Not like a mark, a prize, or even a challenge. Like a problem he's already solved.

A blueprint he's memorized, every flaw and fracture laid bare before I've even opened my mouth. Like he knows what I'll do before I do it, and he's already three steps ahead, waiting for me to catch up.

I fucking hate that. Hate being predictable, hate the idea that he's got me pinned before I've even swung.

My brain's bouncing—did I miss something? A tell? A slip?—and it pisses me off, that itch I can't scratch, that sense of being seen when I'm the one who's supposed to see first.

So, I do what I do best. I play.

I let my stance go loose, hips swaying just enough, like I don't feel the temperature drop ten degrees in his shadow. Like I'm not standing in front of a man who could probably snap my neck with two fingers and not break a sweat.

I smile, slow and lazy, shifting my weight onto one hip—a deliberate fuck-you to his locked-down, stone-faced intensity. “So,” I drawl, voice dripping like honey over gravel, “are we doing this or what?”

Nothing. Not a blink, not a twitch, just that eerie, perfect stillness. His eyes don't

waver—blue pools, bottomless, boring into me—and the silence stretches, heavy, suffocating.

My brain's already jumping—say something else, push harder, crack him—but then he moves.

A single, precise tilt of his head, barely perceptible, like I'm an ant under a magnifying glass and he's deciding whether to burn me.

And when he speaks, his voice cuts like a blade against my skin—low, measured, cold as steel. “If you think you can play me, you'll find that you don't even know the rules of this game. Now, listen closely. I don't repeat myself.”

The words drop between us, sharp and final, a guillotine slicing through the air. My brow lifts, more reflex than thought as I straightened. “All right, so what's the game we're playing then?”

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“The game where you do what I say, when I say, and you never question a goddamn word that comes out of my mouth” he says, not explaining, commanding. Each syllable lands like a hammer on glass. “You learn what I teach. You fuck up, I fix it. You disobey, I make sure you don’t do it again.” His eyes don’t leave mine, don’t soften—there’s no room for negotiation, no hint of give. “And if you prove a bad investment...I won’t waste time scrapping the project and starting new.”

A chill slides down my spine, hot and cold at once, prickling my skin, pooling low in my gut. I know this kind of man. I’ve fucked them—ridden them, broken them, left them panting.

The ones who own a room without trying, who don’t threaten because they don’t need to. Because they know they’ll win, every time, no question.

But this one? For the first time in a long fucking time, I’m not sure I’m the most dangerous thing breathing here. That realization stings, sharp and bitter, and I hate it—hate him, hate this room, hate the way my pulse won’t settle.

I tilt my chin up, lips curling, voice edged with a dare. “Meaning?”

Killion doesn’t hesitate. “You die —and there won’t be enough of your DNA in one place to identify you.”

The way he says it—calm, effortless, like stating the weather—sends a dark, dangerous thrill curling through me, twisting in my belly.

Well, that about sums it up. No room for misunderstanding this motherfucker.

I smile wider, slow and deliberate, running my tongue along the inside of my teeth, tasting the challenge. “We’ll see about that.”

This time, he reacts. It’s subtle—a faint tension in his jaw, a flicker in those cold eyes, a shift in his stance like a coiled spring tightening. It’s not much, but it’s there, and that? That’s a win. A crack in the armor, a thread I can pull.

Then he turns, nods toward a side door—steel, unmarked, ominous. “Let’s begin.”

And just like that, I’m not Landry James anymore. Not the wife, the cheater, the thrill-chaser. I’m a tool, a weapon, a thing to be shaped—or shattered.

The room beyond is a concrete box—gray, bare, lit by a single overhead bulb that buzzes faintly, casting stark shadows. The air’s colder here, damp, smelling of rust and old sweat.

Killion doesn’t sit. He stands, arms crossed, filling the space like a storm cloud. “Sit,” he says, and I do—because I’m playing along, not because I’m scared. The chair’s cold, biting through my pants, and the metal creaks under me, sharp against the silence.

The woman shifts in her chair, finally looking up from her clipboard to study me with clinical precision. Her eyes are slate-gray, dead as winter, scanning me like I’m merchandise at auction—assessing muscle tone, posture, the way I carry tension in my shoulders.

She doesn’t speak, just rises with mechanical efficiency and circles me, pen tapping against her thigh. When she reaches behind me, I flinch—just barely, a microtwitch—and her mouth curves, not quite a smile but something darker. She scribbles a note, the scratch of her pen like nails on my spine. “Reactive,” she murmurs to Killion, not to me, like I’m a lab rat they’re discussing. “Good reflexes.

Heightened awareness."

She reaches out without warning, fingers pressing into my bicep, then my shoulder, then the soft hollow beneath my jaw where my pulse hammers traitorously. "Decent physical foundation," she concludes, returning to her chair. "But too much attitude. We'll need to strip that away first."

I swat at her with a glare. "Don't fucking touch me," I growl but she simply ignored me and shared a look with Killion as if to say, See? What a hot mess before she returned to her seat to scribble more notes.

"Training starts now," he says, voice flat. "You're here to learn. To obey. To execute. No questions, no improvising, no fucking around. You're not a person anymore—you're an asset. My asset." He steps closer, looming, and the air feels thinner, harder to breathe. "You'll be taught to fight—hand-to-hand, knives, guns. You'll learn to lie, to steal, to kill if I tell you to. You'll do it clean, fast, and without blinking."

My brain's buzzing—fight? Kill? What the fuck?—but I keep my face blank, my hands steady on my thighs. "Yeah, I get it, let's start already," I said, testing the water.

His eyes narrow, a mean glint in his eyes even as he chuckled. "I'll beat that smart-ass out of you, Landry James. By the time I'm through with you, you'll move when I say, sleep when I say, fuck when I say—and thank me for the privilege. Every breath you take is mine now."

The woman looks up, pen pausing, her gaze clinical, like she's sizing up a slab of meat. "Discipline's non-negotiable," she says, voice clipped, accent sharp—Eastern European, maybe. "You're taught once. You fail, you're corrected. You disobey a direct order?" She sets the pen down, deliberate, the sound a soft clack that echoes.

“First time, you’re restrained—hands, feet, whatever it takes—until you learn. Second time, we take a finger. Third time, you’re done. No mess, no burial. Just gone.”

“You really should put that on the brochure —it’s a real selling point,” I quip, refusing to be intimidated.

Killion straightens, arms dropping to his sides. “You’re not special. You’re not irreplaceable. You’re here because you fit—reckless, smart, no ties. But step out of line, and you’re ash. No warnings, no second chances past what she said. I don’t waste time on fuckups.”

My throat tightens, but I force a IDGAF grin, leaning back in the chair, crossing my legs slow and deliberate. “Sounds like a party.”

He doesn’t smile. “Stand.”

I do, the metal table legs scraping the concrete, the sound grating in the dead air. He steps around the table, close now, towering without effort. “First lesson: pain.” Before I can blink, his hand snaps out, gripping my wrist, twisting it behind my back in a single, fluid move. Pain flares—sharp, white-hot—shooting up my arm, locking my shoulder. I gasp, instinct kicking in, thrashing against him, but he’s a wall, unmovable.

“Fight it,” he says, voice calm, “and it gets worse.” He twists harder, and I bite my lip, tasting blood, refusing to cry out. “This is control. You don’t have it—I do. You’ll learn to take it, to use it, or you’ll break under it.” He releases me, sudden and sharp, and I stumble, catching myself on the table, breath ragged.

The woman scribbles something, not looking up. “Resilient,” she mutters. “Good.”

Killion steps back, eyes cold. “Everything from this point forward will be hell, but if you survive, you might be worth the price of your training. Don’t fucking disappoint me, Landry.”

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My arm throbs, my chest burns, and my brain's a mess—run, fight, scream—but I straighten, meet his gaze, and grin through the tears. “Bring it.”

He nods, once, like he expected nothing less. “We will.”

Day blurs into night. Night bleeds back into day. Time's a meaningless smear in this concrete hellhole—no windows, no clocks, just four steel walls boxing me in, fluorescent lights buzzing like hornets, burning white-hot holes in my vision.

My world's shrunk to this: the ache in my bones, the sting of sweat in my eyes, and Killion—a ruthless shadow glued to my every move, breathing down my neck every second I'm awake.

His presence is a weight, a constant press, like gravity's doubled and I'm the only one feeling it.

Training isn't about strength or speed—not the way I thought it'd be. Sure, we spar—hand-to-hand until my knuckles bleed, knives flashing fast enough to nick skin, guns I dismantle and reassemble blindfolded until my fingers cramp.

But that's just the warmup, the easy shit.

The real grind's deeper, a blade twisting into parts of me I didn't know could bleed. It's about turning sex—my playground, my escape—into a weapon, cold and precise as a loaded barrel.

Killion circles me now, his boots thudding against the concrete floor, a slow, steady

drumbeat that syncs with my pulse. Sweat trickles between my shoulder blades, pooling in the small of my back, my tank top plastered to my skin like a second, sodden hide.

Every muscle screams—legs shaking, arms trembling—but I hold position: hands braced on the frigid steel wall, back arched, ass out. Vulnerable. Exposed. Exactly how he wants me, every inch on display, every nerve raw and twitching.

The air's damp, heavy with my own breath, the faint tang of metal, and something sharper—his control, thick as smoke.

“Control isn't always about dominance,” he says, voice a low murmur, calm as a flatline. “It's about knowing exactly what they want. Exactly how to use it against them.” His hand skims my hip, fingers brushing the bare skin above my waistband, and heat blooms under his touch—sharp, unwanted, slicing through the room's chill. “Sex is your weapon, Landry. Your body's the distraction. But the real goal?” His voice dips, a silken rasp against my ear, close enough I feel the heat of his breath. “Is control.”

“Sounds manipulative,” I shoot back, words breathy despite my effort to play it cool. My brain's already spinning—control, yeah, I get it, I've fucked guys into begging—but there's a hook here, a challenge I can't resist.

“It is.” He pulls back, hand dropping, and the sudden absence floods me with cold air, prickling my skin. The overnight transformation from club vixen to government asset left gaps in my game. Turns out, what works on tech bros with daddy issues doesn't scratch the surface with Killion. “Again,” he says, voice flat as week-old champagne.

I reset my stance, sweat dripping between my shoulder blades. Three hours in, and I've tried every trick in my arsenal. The hair flip that made billionaires stutter. The deliberate brush of skin that had celebrities begging. The low, breathy laugh that

emptied wallets across Los Angeles.

Nothing. Not a fucking flicker.

I catch his eye as I arch my back, letting my tank ride up to expose the strip of skin above my waistband. A move that's scored me penthouse keys and black cards. "Is this what you like?" I purr, voice dripping honey and sex. "You can touch, you know. I don't bite... unless you're into that."

Killion's expression doesn't change—granite face, dead eyes. Clinical as a coroner. "Juvenile," he says, the word slicing through the air between us. "That might work on frat boys and C-suite alcoholics, but professionals will see right through it."

My cheeks burn, humiliation crawling up my spine like fire ants. "Then what exactly do you want?" I snap, patience fraying.

"I want you to think." He steps closer, not touching me but invading my space until the air feels thin. "Stop performing and start observing. Who am I? What drives me? What weaknesses have you identified?"

I stare at him, searching for something—anything—I can exploit. The usual tells are absent. No wedding ring. No nervous tics. No hungry eyes tracking my curves. He's a fucking black hole where desire should be.

"You don't have any," I mutter, frustration boiling over. "You're not human."

Something shifts in his eyes—not quite amusement, but close. "Wrong. Everyone has weaknesses. Even me. But you're not looking past the surface." He circles me, predator-slow. "You're used to men wanting to fuck you. That's easy. Child's play. But what about the ones who want something else?"

"Like what?"

"Power. Validation. To feel special. Understood." His voice drops lower. "To be seen."

The realization hits like a slap. I've been playing this all wrong. Killion doesn't want my body—he wants my mind. My full attention. The one thing I've never truly given anyone.

I straighten, letting the fake seduction drop away. Meet his gaze directly, really looking at him for the first time. "Show me," I say, no purr, no artifice. Just focus.

Something like approval flickers across his face. "Now we're getting somewhere."

I grit my teeth, jaw tight, and reset—muscles howling as I shift back into position, ass out, spine curved, hands splayed on the wall. He circles again, a shark scenting blood, his boots a relentless echo.

He's overwhelming—six feet of hard muscle, deep blue eyes that don't blink, a presence that sucks the oxygen out of the room. I hate it. Hate how he looms, how he sees everything.

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So I push, testing the water. “Who am I targeting?” I ask, twisting my head just enough to catch his gaze, fishing for something—anger, amusement, a crack I can pry open.

Nothing. His eyes are stone—flat, unreadable, a wall I can’t climb. “It doesn’t matter,” he snaps, voice cutting sharp. “All targets are the same at their core. Vulnerable to desire, susceptible to ego. Your job’s to exploit that—strip them down ‘til they’re raw, desperate, then take what you’re sent to acquire.”

His hand grazes my hip again, sliding lower, tracing the swell of my ass, and heat pools low in my belly—fuck, it’s involuntary, a traitor’s response.

His touch isn’t lust—it’s clinical, a scalpel dissecting me, peeling back layers to see what twitches underneath.

My skin tingles, adrenaline spiking, and I hate how it pulls at me, how my body doesn’t care that he’s a machine, not a man.

“Make me trust you,” he says, voice dark, steady. “Make me want you. Use what you’ve got—words, touch, vulnerability. Hook me, you win.”

I breathe deep, chest tight, shoving down the nerves clawing up my throat. “How’ll I know when I have?”

A barely perceptible smile flickers—barely there, gone fast. “When you’re setting the pace. Watch.”

Before I can blink, he's on me—chest slamming against my back, hips pinning me to the wall, trapping me in a cage of muscle and heat. His breath ghosts my neck, hot and slow, and every nerve jolts awake, a live wire sparking under my skin. “Right now, I control everything,” he murmurs, lips brushing my ear, voice rough as gravel. “Your breath. Your pulse. Your fear.”

My pulse hammers, heat flooding between my thighs, and I clench my teeth, fighting the shiver. He's right—I'm caught, pinned, my body screaming yes while my brain scrambles for a foothold. “Shift the balance,” he says, mouth grazing my earlobe, a taunt wrapped in command. “Flip it.”

I get it. I soften, melting into him, hips shifting back, pressing against him—heat, need, a tease of surrender. I tilt my head, baring my throat, lips parting just enough, an invitation dripping with silk. His breath hitches—faint, a whisper of a slip—but I catch it, a trophy I tuck away.

“Good,” he murmurs, low and grudging. “Now take control.”

I spin fast, catching him off-guard, slipping free and shoving him back until he's the one against the wall. My fingers twist into his shirt, yanking him close, lips hovering over his—close enough our breath tangles, hot and sharp. “Is this what you want?” I whisper, voice a breathy promise, eyes locked on his, daring him to break.

His jaw tightens, muscles flexing under my grip—a ripple of tension, a crack I can exploit. “Yes,” he says, voice strained, low. “Good. That's how it's done.”

Victory slams through me, a hot, wild rush—addictive, electric. I've got him, I think, a sick grin tugging my lips. “Now pull away,” he says, voice steady. “Make me chase.”

I slip free, leaving him leaning into nothing, his balance off for a split second before

that cool mask snaps back. It's brief, but it's enough—enough to wake the predator in me, licking its lips, hungry for more. I like this. Too much.

“Good,” he says, voice low, approving. “You’re learning.” Then it sharpens, a blade unsheathed. “But never lose sight of the objective. Sex isn’t pleasure—it’s a tool. Use it, discard it, move on. Distractions get you killed.”

A pang twists through me—sharp, quick, buried fast. I don’t want to feel that, don’t want to think about it. So I shift gears, probing again. “Who are you, Killion? What’s your deal—wife? Kids? Some sad little backstory that made you this?” My voice is light, teasing, but my eyes are sharp, searching for a flinch, a flicker.

Nothing. He steps back, arms crossing, face blank as steel. “Irrelevant.”

“Come on,” I press, leaning in, hips swaying, voice dropping to a purr. “Give me something. You’ve got me pinned here—literally. Least you can do is tell me who’s pulling my strings.”

“Stop fishing,” he says, voice flat, final. “You don’t need to know me. You need to obey me.”

I laugh, sharp and jagged, but it’s forced. “Obey’s a big word. What if I don’t? What if I want to know who I’m bleeding for?”

His eyes narrow, cold and unblinking. “You bleed for the job. That’s it. Push me again, and you’ll regret it.”

The threat’s quiet, but it lands heavy, a stone sinking in my gut. My brain’s racing—push harder? Back off?—but that sickpart of me, the part that thrives on winning, on cracking the uncrackable, lights up.

I step closer, chest brushing his, voice a velvet taunt. “Regret’s a strong word. What’s the worst you’d do—spank me? Lock me up? I’ve had worse from better.”

He doesn’t flinch. Doesn’t smirk. Just grabs my wrist, wrenching it behind me in a flash—pain searing up my arm, sharp and white-hot.

I gasp, instinct kicking in, but he’s iron, immovable. “You don’t get it,” he says, voice low, steady, a machine grinding gears. “I don’t play. I don’t bend. You’re a tool—my tool—and tools don’t talk back.” He releases me, shoving me back a step, and I stumble, catching myself, breath ragged.

I glare, rubbing my wrist, but he’s already turning away, shutting me out. “Again,” he says, nodding at the wall. “Position.”

I reset, trembling, not from fear but from the thrill—the challenge. He’s a wall, a hard-bodied, soulless killing machine, and nothing I say, no tease, no push, cracks him.

My usual tricks—smiles, hips, whispered promises—slide off him like water on steel. My brain’s a mess—why won’t he budge? What’s he made of?—and it hits me, cold and clear: I’m not the puppet master here.

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For the first time, I'm the one being strung along, and I've got a fuck-ton to learn.

The training drags on—hours of drills, scenarios, his voice a relentless drone of orders and corrections. He doesn't touch me again, but his eyes never leave me—tracking every shiver, every twitch, stripping me bare in ways I can't fight.

My body's raw, muscles screaming, skin slick with sweat, lungs burning, but beneath it, there's a fire—restless, hungry, sick with the need to win him over, even as he proves I can't.

Finally, when my legs buckle and I think I'll collapse, he steps back, nodding once, curt and cold. "Enough."

I slump against the wall, sweat soaking my hair, dripping into my eyes, chest heaving. My body's a wreck—nerves frayed, every inch throbbing—but there's a buzz under it, hot and twisted, a satisfaction I don't want to name.

"You're ready," he says, voice neutral, eyes assessing.

I shove damp hair off my forehead, glaring through the haze. "For what?"

"For the field." He holds my gaze, unyielding. "Real targets. Real stakes."

"You still haven't told me who I'm working for," I snap, voice rough, pushing one last time.

"You're working for me," he says, steel in every word. "That's all you need."

I straighten, legs shaking but spine stiff, and try one more jab. “And if I want out?”

His expression hardens, eyes narrowing to slits. “You don’t.”

The words sink deep, heavy as lead, locking into place. He turns, strides to the door, pausing just once to glance back, eyes dark and cold. “You did well tonight. Rest. Tomorrow, you level up.”

The door slams, a metallic clang that rings in my skull, leaving me alone with the echoes of his voice and the hum of the lights. What happens tomorrow? My heart kicks, a wild thud against my ribs, and it’s not fear—not even close. It’s excitement, sharp and sick, a drug I can’t quit.

The mess hall—if you could call it that—is underground like everything else in this concrete maze. Institutional lighting buzzes overhead, casting everyone in a sickly pallor that makes the food look even more unappetizing.

I’m at a corner table, picking at mystery meat and what might generously be called potatoes, when I notice her.

She enters silently, a ghost in tactical black, moving with liquid grace. Early thirties, maybe. Asian, with a sleek bob that frames cheekbones sharp enough to cut glass. But it’s her eyes that catch me—flat obsidian pools that scan the room with mechanical precision. Cataloging exits, threats, weaknesses.

"That's Yumiko," a voice says beside me.

I turn to find a man sliding onto the bench across from me. Tall, lean, with the kind of face that would be handsome if it wasn't so hollow. His smile doesn't reach his eyes, which are a startling blue against his dark skin. "Viper-Six asset. Been in the field five years."

"And you are?" I ask, keeping my voice neutral.

"Halloran. Extraction specialist." He pushes his tray aside, leaning in. "You're the new one. Killion's pet project."

I bristle at 'pet project,' but keep my face blank. "Word travels fast."

"In places like this? It's currency." He nods toward Yumiko, who's now sitting alone, back to the wall. "She's what success looks like, if you're wondering. Three confirmed kills. Seventeen major extractions. Fluent in six languages."

My eyes drift back to her. She eats with mechanical precision, no pleasure, no waste. A perfect machine.

"And the failures?" I ask, the question slipping out before I can stop it.

Halloran's smile turns grim. "You don't see them. They don't come back."

As if sensing our attention, Yumiko looks up. Our eyes meet across the room, and something passes between us—recognition, maybe. A shared understanding of what we are. What we're becoming.

She nods, almost imperceptibly, before returning to her meal.

"She was like you once," Halloran says, voice dropping lower. "Civilian. Had a life. Now she's..." He trails off, but I hear the unspoken words: Not human anymore.

"How many of us are there?" I ask.

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"Assets? Dozens. But the ones like you—the specialized ones?" He shrugs. "Few enough to count on one hand. Most don't make it through Killion's training."

Before I can press further, the door opens again. A man enters, older than the rest, moving with a limp he tries to hide. His face is a roadmap of scars, one eye milky white and dead. The room temperature drops ten degrees.

"Nikolai," Halloran whispers, tension radiating from him like heat. "Former Spectre-Three. Field accident in Sydney left him... compromised. Now he trains the hand-to-hand combat program."

"He looks like a polar bear chewed him up and spit him back out," I quip.

"You better learn real quick not to judge a book by its cover around here," Halloran warns. "Best way to get your ass handed to you."

I don't buy it. I shrug. "We'll see."

Nikolai's good eye sweeps the room, landing on me. Something hungry flashes in his gaze, predatory and cold. "Fresh meat," he says, voice carrying despite its softness.

My skin crawls, but I hold his stare, refusing to look away first. This is how it works here—show weakness, and you're prey.

After what feels like eternity, he smirks and moves on, selecting a table far from the others.

"Word of advice?" Halloran says, standing to leave. "When Killion's done with you, pray they assign you to Yumiko's team." He glances at Nikolai. "Some fates are worse than washing out."

As he walks away, I watch Yumiko again. The perfect weapon. The finished product. Is that my future? That empty precision, that mechanical grace?

Part of me recoils at the thought.

But another part—the part that's always craved purpose, always hungered for the edge—whispers: You could be better.

I finish my meal in silence, feeling eyes on me from all corners. Measuring. Assessing.

Judging whether I'll survive.

The steel door's clang still rattles my skull as Killion turns, his boots hitting the concrete with that slow, deliberate thud that's burrowed into my brain like a tick.

"Follow," he says, not looking back, voice flat and cold as a knife's edge. No hesitation, no glance to see if I'm trailing—he knows I'll fall in line, and that certainty burns, a splinter under my nail I can't pry out. I hate how he's got me clocked, a mutt he doesn't even need to whistle for.

I peel off the wall, legs shaking like jelly, every muscle shrieking from hours of training—bent into impossible angles, wrists twisted, his voice a relentless hammer pounding my skull.

Sweat's dried into a crusty film on my skin, tank top clinging like a soaked rag, ripe with salt and musk. My hair's a greasy tangle plastered to my neck, strands sticking to

my cheeks, and I can feel the grime—dirt from the floor, sweat-slick filth—coating me like a second skin.

I'm a mess, raw and frayed, a live wire buzzing with exhaustion and that hot, restless itch I can't kill. I follow anyway, dragging myself after him, refusing to admit how my entire body felt like it'd been put through a meat grinder.

The hallway's a claustrophobic chute—endless white walls, fluorescents humming overhead like a swarm of pissed-off flies, casting a glare that stabs my eyes. The air's cold, biting, laced with antiseptic and a faint metallic whiff—rust, maybe blood—and my brain's already bouncing, too fast, too loud.

Where's he dragging me? Another room to break me? A hole to dump me in? I keep my face blank, lips clamped, swallowing the questions. Asking's a waste—he'd just shut me down, that uncrackable bastard, and I'm too tired to spar with a brick wall.

We turn a corner, and he stops at a door—steel, unmarked, a twin to every other in this labyrinth. He swipes a keycard, the lock chirping a shrill beep that grates my raw nerves and shoves it open. "Inside," he says, stepping aside, his bulk filling the frame like a goddamn bouncer.

I brush past him, close enough to catch the heat rolling off him—gun oil, sweat, that sharp mint sting on his breath cutting through the damp—and step into the room. It's not what I expected.

No more prison cot, no more steel toilet without a seat. This place has actual furniture—a real bed with sheets that look too clean to be true, a dresser, even a fucking window, though the glass is frosted, a tease of light without the view.

"Your quarters," Killion says, voice clipped, like he's reading off a manual. "For now."

I turn, scanning the space, looking for the catch. There's always a catch. Cameras in the corners? Microphones? A two-way mirror? Or maybe just a door that locks from the outside, a prettier cage but a cage all the same.

"What's this, a promotion?" I drawl, arms crossing over my chest, ignoring how they tremble. "Or are we playing house now?"

He doesn't bite. Just stands there, unreadable, a mountain of muscle and control. "You've earned it."

Something sparks in my gut—pride? Christ, how pathetic is that? Hungry for scraps from a man who'd snap my neck without blinking. I hate it. Hate him. Hate the little glow warming my chest at his almost-praise. I swallow it down, bitter as bile.

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"Generous," I sneer, kicking off my shoes, making a show of it—casual, unbothered. "Does it come with room service? Cause I could kill for a medium-rare steak and a bottle of anything above 80 proof."

His gaze narrows, just a fraction, but it's there—a flicker of something in that granite face. Annoyance? Amusement? I can't tell, and it drives me fucking insane, this wall between us, the way he sees through me while I'm still tripping on my feet.

"Bathroom's through there," he says, ignoring the bait. "Shower. Sleep. Clean clothes in the dresser." He steps back, hand on the door. "Oh, and Landry?"

I raise an eyebrow, waiting.

"Tomorrow, you meet Sienna." His voice shifts, a new edge creeping in. "Don't fuck it up."

The door shuts before I can ask who the fuck Sienna is, the lock clicking with quiet finality. I stand there, alone, the silence pressing in from all sides, thick enough to choke on.

My first instinct's to trash the place—flip the mattress, smash the lamp, leave my mark on these sterile walls. It's what I'd do at home when Isaac pissed me off, when the walls closed in too tight, and I needed an escape hatch. But I'm too fucking tired, bones hollow, muscles screaming from Killion's torture session.

Instead, I stagger to the bathroom, flipping the switch. The light's too bright, shocking after the dim glow of the bedroom, and I wince, slamming my eyes shut. When I open

them, I catch my reflection in the mirror and freeze.

Holy shit.

I barely recognize myself. My face is thinner, cheekbones sharp enough to cut glass, dark circles like bruises under my eyes. My hair's a rat's nest, tangled in knots, and my skin's pale, almost translucent, except for the flush of exertion staining my cheeks. I look wrecked. Feral. Like something that's been caged too long, starved into submission.

But my eyes—those are different. Harder, brighter, with a glint that wasn't there before. The eyes of a predator, not prey. When did that happen?

I strip, dropping the sweat-stiff clothes to the floor, and step into the shower. The water hits hot—scalding—and I don't adjust it, letting it burn, scrubbing until my skin's raw and pink, washing away the grime, the sweat, the lingering ghost of Killion's hands on my body. Steam billows, thick and choking, fogging the glass until I'm just a blurry silhouette, a smudge of color against white tile.

My mind drifts, water drumming against my skull, and I catch myself wondering about Sienna. Another handler? Why someone new? Was she the female version of Killion, all hard angles and zero sense of humor? Was she hot? The thought sends a sick thrill zipping through me, a rush I'm ashamed to crave.

When did this become the plan for my life?

Back in that club—Malvagio, with its red lights and pounding bass, Derek's laugh cutting through the haze, hands on my hips, lips on my neck—that was the plan. Chaos on my terms. A life where I controlled the damage, chose the wreckage, picked the battlefield.

Fuck, Malvagio seems like a lifetime ago. A fever dream of neon and sin.

Last time I was there—what, three weeks ago? Four?—I'd worn that black dress with the back cut so low you could see the dimples above my ass. The one Isaac thought I'd donated because "it wasn't appropriate for a dinner with his boss." Poor, clueless Isaac, who'd thought I was at a girls' weekend in Palm Springs while I was letting a stranger with a tongue piercing eat me out in the VIP lounge.

I can still feel it if I close my eyes—the bass thumping through the floor, vibrating up my legs, mixing with tequila and adrenaline in my veins. The press of bodies, slick with sweat and desire, everyone wanting something, everyone willing to pay for it one way or another.

Derek had been with that redhead—what was her name? Candi? Brandi? Something with an 'i' where a 'y' should be—while I'd found myself pinned against the wall by some tech bro with hungry eyes and clever fingers. He'd whispered filth in my ear, promises of what he'd do to me, how he'd make me beg, and I'd smiled, letting him think he was in control.

That was the game—let them think they're winning while you walk away with everything. The rush of power when their eyes glazed over, when they'd offer up anything—secrets, cash, keys to their penthouse—just for another taste. For the chance to possess something they never could.

I remember leaving the main floor, following Tech Bro to a private room where the music dulled to a distant heartbeat. His hands shaking as he closed the door, as he tried to act like he wasn't scared of what he'd unleashed. I'd pushed him onto the leather couch, straddled him, watched his eyes widen as I took what I wanted.

"Tell me something nobody knows about you," I'd whispered, nipping at his ear, and like they all did, he spilled—some bullshit about insider trading, about the wife who

didn't understand him, about how he'd never felt this alive.

I'd let him think he was special. Let him think he'd found something real in that darkened room with its sticky floors and mirrored ceiling. And when I was done, when I'd used him up and wrung him dry, I'd walked away without a backward glance, his number already forgotten, his secrets filed away with all the others—useless currency in a game I played just to feel something.

Here's the thing, I love secrets. There's something about holding onto information that doesn't belong to me that curls my toes.

God, I'd been so fucking bored. So desperate for a thrill that I'd risk everything—my marriage, my safety, my future—just to feel that spike of adrenaline when a stranger's hands closed around my throat, when the line between pleasure and danger blurred to nothing.

And now? Now I'm here, in this sterile box, with a man who could kill me with his bare hands, who sees through every mask I've ever worn, and I'm still chasing that same high. Still hungry for the edge, for the fall, for the moment when control slips and chaos reigns.

But this? This is something else. A chain I can't see, a leash I hadn't felt tightening until it was too late.

And the worst part? I don't hate it. Not completely.

I shut off the water, skin stinging from the heat, and lean against the tile. Isaac floats into my mind like unwanted sediment in expensive vodka.

Isaac. Fucking Isaac with his accounting degree and his perfectly ironed shirts. The man I promised forever to while mentally calculating how many shopping sprees his

family connections would buy me.

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Sue me, I like nice things —and nice things are expensive.

I remember our third date, some overpriced French place where he kept mispronouncing the wine. He'd reached across the table, his fingers brushing mine, eyes earnest as a golden retriever. "I think I'm falling for you," he'd said, and I'd smiled, letting him see exactly what he wanted to see. Not the real me—Christ, he'd run screaming—but the carefully curated version. Landry Lite™. All the looks, none of the danger.

I'd been twenty-six, flat broke after my latest reinvention, and exhausted from the endless hustle of staying afloat in L.A. without a trust fund. Isaac was... safe. Boring as beige wallpaper, but safe. A human security blanket with an 800 credit score and a five-year plan that included a mortgage and 2.5 sticky children I had zero intention of pushing out.

The crazy part? I almost convinced myself I wanted it. The Sunday brunches. The dinner parties with his tedious colleagues. The mind-numbing routine of missionary sex every Tuesday and Friday because that's when his schedule allowed for "intimacy time." His words, not mine. Who the fuck schedules sex like a dental cleaning?

One time I brought home the girthiest butt plug I could find just to watch the blood drain from Isaac's face when I suggested we have a little fun. I'm pretty sure his asshole puckered so tight a beam of light couldn't penetrate that chocolate starfish.

He never saw the real me. Not once. Not when I faked orgasms with Oscar-worthy conviction. Not when I slipped out at 2 a.m. to meet strangers in hotel bars. Not even when I came home with bruises I couldn't explain—he'd just assume I'd been "clumsy

again," his concerned expression never quite connecting the dots.

That's why I married him. Because he couldn't see me. Wouldn't see me. And there's no safer place to hide than in plain sight beside someone with carefully calibrated blind spots.

The worst nights weren't the fights—we rarely had those. The worst were the quiet moments when he'd look at me with such fucking tenderness I wanted to scream. Like the night he found me on the balcony at 3 a.m., shaking from a nightmare I couldn't shake. An explosion, excruciating pain, total chaos erupting all around me like the devil himself was running a training exercise.

He'd wrapped a blanket around my shoulders, kissed my temple, and whispered, "Whatever it is, we'll get through it together."

Together. As if we'd ever been in the same reality. In that moment, I'd been overwhelmed by the insane urge to punch him in the throat.

God, I was such a bitch.

I scratch at a scab on my hip—souvenir from Killion slamming me into a training mat—and laugh into the steamy air.

The truth? A part of me had wanted Isaac to wake up and leave me. Call me names that I deserved and kick me out of that cozy nest of security so I could feel alive again.

The more fucked-up truth? Being kidnapped, imprisoned, and brutalized by Killion feels more honest than five years of marriage to Isaac ever did. At least here, the cage has visible bars. The pain comes with purpose. The rules, however savage, are crystal clear.

With Isaac, I suffocated in beige comfort, dying by degrees in Egyptian cotton sheets and Sunday farmers' markets, my soul calcifying under the crushing weight of normalcy. Every day was just another brick in a mausoleum I built myself, entombed in a life that looked perfect on Instagram but felt like slow-motion suicide.

No wonder I spent three nights a week letting strangers bruise me in club bathrooms. Pain was the only thing that felt real anymore.

I wrap the towel around me, pressing my forehead against the foggy mirror. Maybe Isaac was the first man I truly betrayed. Not with my body—that was just flesh, meaningless as currency—but by making him believe in someone who never existed. By letting him build a life with my ghost.

"Sorry, Isaac," I whisper to no one, not sorry at all. "Some women aren't meant to be wives."

I turn away from the mirror, from thoughts of the man who never knew me, and focus on tomorrow. On Sienna. On becoming whatever lethal thing Killion sees in me.

Isaac was the past—safe harbor in a life I was drowning in. This steel cage, these brutal handlers, this dangerous new existence?

This is the fucking oxygen I've been gasping for all along.

I check the dresser, and sure enough, there are clothes—simple, practical, nothing like the flashy shit I'd wear to the club, but not prison-issue either. I pull on a plain black tank, loose pants that sit low on my hips, and crawl into bed, the sheets cool against my clean skin.

The ceiling's blank, white, offering nothing to focus on as I stare up, waiting for sleep to claim me. My body's wrecked, but my brain's still wired, spinning like a hamster

wheel—Killion's voice echoing, his hands, his eyes burning into me, breaking me down piece by piece just to see what I'm made of.

And Sienna. Whoever the fuck that is.

My eyes drift shut, the exhaustion finally dragging me under, and my last coherent thought is this: I'm in too deep to swim back now. Whatever comes next—whoever Sienna is, whatever hell Killion's got lined up—I'm all in. Not because I don't have a choice, but because the sick, twisted part of me wants to see how it ends.

God help me, I want to break him back.

Killion woke me by slamming my door against the wall hard enough to wake the dead. I bolted upright, heart jackhammering against my ribs, disoriented and raw.

"Get up." His voice sliced through the fog of sleep like a blade. "Time to meet your new trainer."

I blinked, clawing my way back to consciousness, my muscles still shrieking from yesterday's torture session. Killion stood in the doorway—a mountain of hard angles and cold eyes—wearing the same black-on-black ensemble, like a fucking cartoon villain with a limited wardrobe.

"You know, a gentle knock would've sufficed." I stretched, wincing as my shoulders protested, every fiber screaming. "Or maybe a 'good morning, sunshine' to ease the transition."

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He didn't even blink. Just stared, unimpressed, waiting for me to fall in line like a well-trained dog. "Three minutes. Down the hall."

"Eat glass," I mutter as I drag myself from the warmth of my bed.

Then he was gone, boots echoing against concrete. I dragged a hand through my tangled hair, mouth tasting like death warmed over, and stumbled to the sink. The mirror showed the damage—eyes bloodshot, skin pale except for bruises blooming purple where Killion's fingers had dug in, hair a rat's nest. I looked like warmed over dog shit but felt oddly alive, that sick thrill still buzzing under my skin.

Three minutes to transform from roadkill to government asset. Challenge accepted.

I threw water on my face, dragged a brush through my hair, and pulled on the clean clothes from the dresser—black leggings, fitted tank, combat boots. Basic bitch spy-wear, but at least it wasn't a prison jumpsuit. Small fucking victories.

Killion was waiting in a room I hadn't seen before—larger than my cell, with actual furniture. A metal table, chairs, and what looked like training mats covering half the floor. The air smelled different too—less antiseptic, more human. Coffee, maybe, and something else I couldn't place.

"Sienna?" I arch a brow, fishing again, but he's already moving, brushing past me to the door, his shoulder grazing mine—hard muscle, cold control. Before I can push, the door swings open, and she steps in—Sienna, I'm guessing.

She's shorter than me, lean and wiry, all sharp edges and coiled menace. Springy

curls crop tight to her skull, framing a face that's more bone than flesh—high cheekbones, a jaw like a razor, pale blue eyes that cut like glass. She's in black—tight leggings, a fitted jacket, boots laced to her calves—moving silent as a shadow, a predator's grace in every step. A thin scar slashes her left eyebrow, white and jagged, a mark she wears like a medal.

She stops beside Killion, hands loose but primed, and I feel her sizing me up—the rumpled tank, the shadow of exhaustion under my eyes, the defiance I wear like armor.

"Landry," Killion says, nodding at me like I'm a tool on a rack. "This is Sienna. She'll be handling your specialized training." He pauses, eyes flicking between us. "I have other matters to attend to. She'll take it from here."

And just like that, he's gone—the door slamming with a finality that echoes in my bones. I'm left with Sienna and the sudden weight of "specialized training" hanging in the air like a guillotine.

She circles me slowly, those ice-chip eyes taking in every detail, from my tangled hair to my clenched fists. "Killion tells me you've been performing adequately in physical training," she says, voice low and raspy, like she smokes two packs a day. "But you're nowhere near field-ready and we're on a deadline."

I meet her stare, unflinching. "Define 'field-ready.'"

Her lips quirk, not quite a smile. "That's why I'm here." She stops in front of me, close enough I can smell her—gunmetal and something spicy, expensive. "My job is to make sure you can handle any situation, any target."

"I've fucked my way through half of LA's elite," I shoot back, arms crossing. "I think I can handle a horny mark without your help."

Sienna's laugh is sharp, more scalpel than sound. "You think this is about fucking? That's amateur hour." She leans in, voice dropping to a murmur. "This is about control. About becoming whatever they need, whoever they want—man, woman, doesn't matter. Your job is to be the perfect fantasy, the ultimate weapon."

My stomach tightens, the implication sinking in. "Wait—women too? I'm not?—"

"Gay?" She finishes, eyebrow arching. "Your sexuality is irrelevant. You'll be whatever the situation calls for." Her voice hardens, all business. "Men are easy—predictable, driven by ego and base desire. Women are harder to fool. More intuitive, more cautious. You need to know the difference."

I step back, that reckless defiance flaring. "I don't swing that way."

Sienna moves faster than I can track, her hand snaking out to grab my wrist, twisting until I'm forced to my knees, pain shooting up my arm. She leans down, her face inches from mine, those blue eyes glacial.

"Listen carefully, because I won't repeat myself," she hisses, breath hot against my cheek. "Your preferences don't matter. Your comfort doesn't matter. All that matters is the mission." She releases me, stepping back as I rub my wrist, glaring up at her. "Your body is a weapon, your sexuality a tool. Get used to it."

I climb to my feet, skin burning where she'd gripped me, pride stinging worse. "Fine," I spit, shoulders squaring. "Teach me."

Something shifts in her eyes—approval, maybe, or just cold calculation. "We'll start with the basics," she says, moving to the table, pulling out files, photos, graphs that look like fucking science experiments. "Men respond to visual cues, direct approaches. Women require finesse, connection. Both require reading body language, spotting tells, exploiting weaknesses."

"Sounds like a blast," I mutter, but I follow her to the table, that sick curiosity already taking hold. This is fucked up, twisted—but isn't that exactly what I signed up for? The ultimate game, the ultimate thrill?

Sienna tosses the folder aside. "Theory's a waste of time. You need practical experience."

She moves toward me, fluid and dangerous, like mercury encased in skin. Her hand cups my face, thumb brushing my bottom lip, and I freeze—not from fear but from the sheer unexpectedness of it.

"Women are about power," she murmurs, voice dropping an octave. "Not taking it—sharing it. That's what men never understand."

Her fingers trace my jawline, featherlight, sending electricity skittering under my skin. This isn't seduction, not exactly—it's a demonstration, clinical and precise, but my body doesn't know the difference. Heat blooms in my core, a traitorous response I can't control.

"Goddamnit," I breathe, trying to step back, but she's already anticipated the move, her other hand sliding to the small of my back, holding me in place.

"You're fighting it," she observes, those laser-blue eyes scanning my face. "That's your first mistake. Resistance creates tension. Tension creates tells." Her fingers drift lower, tracing the pulse point at my throat. "Let it happen. Observe it. Control it."

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My heart hammers against my ribs, a drumbeat of confusion and unwanted arousal. This is a mind fuck—a power play designed to throw me off balance—but knowing doesn't stop the rush of heat between my thighs.

"Watch what I'm doing," Sienna instructs, voice steady even as her fingers work their magic. "I'm not rushing. Not grabbing. Every touch builds on the last, creates anticipation." Her hand slides beneath my tank, palm flat against my stomach, and I suck in a breath. "Feel that? The way your body responds? That's what you're learning to harness."

I should be disgusted. Should be fighting. But fuck, she's good—every touch precisely calibrated, every brush of skin against skin deliberate. My brain's a tornado of conflicting signals—this is wrong, this is training, this is hot, this is fucked up—but my body's made its choice.

"Most men go straight for the obvious," she says, fingers skimming the underside of my breast, just light enough to make my nipples harden against the thin cotton. "They rush. Fumble. Focus on the destination instead of the journey." She leans closer, breath ghosting my ear. "Women understand that power lies in patience."

Her thigh slips between mine, applying just enough pressure to make my hips buck involuntarily. A soft sound escapes me—half gasp, half moan—and heat floods my cheeks. This is humiliating. This is intoxicating.

"Stop fighting it," she commands, voice hardening. "You think a target's going to let someone who's obviously conflicted get close? Learn to sync your mind and body. Make them believe you want them more than oxygen."

Her hand slips beneath the waistband of my leggings, and I grab her wrist, a last-ditch effort at control. "I get it," I rasp, voice unsteady. "Demonstration over."

Sienna's laugh is low and dangerous. "No, you don't get it. Not yet." She breaks my grip effortlessly, her strength surprising. "This isn't about your pleasure. It's about control. About making them need you so badly they'll give up anything—secrets, codes, their soul—just to have you."

Her fingers slide lower, finding me embarrassingly wet, and a smile curves her lips—knowing, victorious. "See? Your body's already on board. Now your mind needs to catch up."

She works me with expert precision, every stroke calculated, every circle of her thumb a masterclass in control. My legs tremble, breath coming in ragged gasps, and she watches my face with scientific detachment, cataloging every reaction.

"Pay attention," she instructs, voice steady even as her fingers drive me higher. "Watch what I'm doing. The pace. The pressure. The way I'm reading your responses." She curls her fingers just so, and a moan tears from my throat. "That's it. That's what you're looking for—the moment they break. When they're so lost in sensation they'd tell you anything."

I'm close—so close—my body coiled tight as a spring, every nerve ending screaming for release. And then she stops, fingers withdrawing, leaving me on the edge, desperate and panting.

"What the fuck?" I gasp, legs barely supporting me.

Sienna steps back, wiping her fingers on her pants with clinical detachment. "That's lesson one," she says, voice cool. "Control isn't just about giving pleasure—it's about withholding it. About keeping them desperate, needy, willing to do anything for

relief."

I stare at her, face flushed, body still thrumming with unspent energy. "You sadistic bitch."

A smile flickers across her face—the first real one I've seen. "Now you're getting it." She moves back to the table, gathering the files. "Men are easy. Their arousal is obvious, their release predictable. Women require skill, patience, attention to detail." She glances back at me, those ice-chip eyes calculating. "Which makes them more valuable targets. More dangerous ones, too."

I straighten, adjusting my clothes, trying to recover some dignity even as my body screams for completion. "So what, every lesson ends with me half-naked and desperate?"

"Only until you learn to separate desire from duty," she replies, tossing me the file. "Study these. Tomorrow we test your skills—on a real subject."

My stomach drops. "You're not serious."

"Dead serious," she says, heading for the door. "Oh, and Landry?" She pauses, hand on the knob. "Don't finish yourself off. The frustration will help you focus tomorrow."

The door closes behind her with a soft click, leaving me alone with a throbbing ache between my thighs and a new understanding of what "specialized training" really means.

I slump into a chair, legs still trembling, brain a mess of conflicting emotions. This is a whole new level of fucked up—being trained not just to fight, not just to deceive, but to weaponize pleasure itself. To become the ultimate fantasy, regardless of my

own desires.

Part of me is screaming to run. To find a way out of this steel box, away from Killion's cold control and Sienna's dangerous lessons. But the other part—the dark, twisted part that's always chased the next thrill, the next rush—that part's already hungry for more.

For all my bravado about fucking my way through LA, I've always been the one in control. The one who decided who, when, how far. Now the tables have turned, and I'm the one being played—and fucked if I don't respect the skill behind it.

I flip open the file, trying to focus on the charts and graphs, but all I can see is Sienna's face—those calculating eyes, that knowing smile. All I can feel is the ghost of her touch, the promise of pleasure withheld.

Tomorrow, she'll test me. Push me further. Break me down to build me into whatever the hell they need me to be.

And God help me, I'm going to excel. I'm going to master every trick, every technique, every mind game they throw at me. Not because I believe in their cause—fuck no—but because I refuse to be anything less than the best at whatever game I'm playing.

Even if the game is turning myself into the perfect weapon.

Even if the price is pieces of my soul.

I close the file, decision made. Tomorrow, I'll show Sienna—and Killion—exactly what I'm capable of. I'll become the student that surpasses the master, the weapon that can't be controlled.

Source Creation Date: July 2, 2025, 9:09 am

Game on, motherfuckers. Game fucking on.

Morning comes like a sledgehammer to the skull—a sharp knock on my door that sends my heart hammering against my ribs before I remember where I am. Not home. Not the club. But this black ops prison I've been calling home for weeks.

If I was a better person, I'd spend at least a heartbeat worrying about my clueless husband but honestly, how can one person be so damn gullible? A part of me enjoys the idea of Isaac suffering an unknown sense of dread because he has no fucking clue where his wife is.

I suppose it's probably a good thing Isaac has all of the mental sharpness of a dull spoon because otherwise, he'd be pushing up daisies in an unmarked field for asking too many questions.

I drag myself up, body is sore — muscles screaming in places I didn't know could hurt but at least I'm not bruised anymore. Killion toned down the ass-kicking in prep for this assignment. Can't bruise the fruit, you know what I mean.

I step into the shower, the water scalding. I stand under the spray until my skin turns angry red, like I'm trying to wash off more than just sweat. The burn hurts so good. There's definitely something wrong with me but, no surprise there. Who in their right mind would be willing to sign on the dotted line for this gig if they didn't have a screw loose?

And, all my screws are loose, baby.

When I step out, there's a file waiting on my bed. Wasn't there before. Which means someone slipped in while I was naked, vulnerable, water drowning out any sound of intrusion. A little power play to remind me: I'm never alone, never safe.

Message received, you creepy fucks.

The file's thick—manila folder stuffed with papers, photos, a flash drive taped to a thin, sleek laptop. No note, no explanation, but I don't need one. This is my first assignment. My first mark.

I flip it open and there he is: Victor Reese. Mid-50s, salt-and-pepper hair styled just so, the kind of face that screams "I have fuck-you money and everyone knows it." Three-piece suits worth more than most cars, a Rolex that probably costs as much as Isaac's annual salary. Corporate raider, venture capitalist, collector of companies and, apparently, young women with daddy issues and fake tits.

"Hello, Victor," I murmur, tracing his jawline with my fingertip. "Aren't you just a walking midlife crisis with a platinum card."

The intel is staggering—everything from his preferred whiskey (Macallan 25, because of fucking course) to how he likes his steak (rare, bloody enough to still moo) to which escort services he frequents (high-end, discreet, specializing in Eastern European blondes with gymnast bodies).

They know his morning routine (up at 5 AM, workout with a trainer who looks like a Nazi propaganda poster come to life), his bank accounts (seven, three offshore), even his medical history (Viagra prescription renewed monthly, minor heart condition he keeps private).

As I read, something clicks in my brain—dropping into place like a dislocated joint snapping back. I've always had a good memory—freakishly good, according to

Derek, who once watched me recite an entire conversation from three months prior, word for fucking word, when some asshole tried to deny propositioning me at a club opening.

But this is different. This is methodical. I'm not just remembering—I'm cataloging, cross-referencing, building a mental database of Victor Reese that I can access at will. His weaknesses, his pressure points, the soft underbelly beneath all that expensive armor.

Each detail is a weapon I'm loading into my arsenal. The name of his first wife (Elizabeth, who left after he fucked her best friend). The boarding school his son attends (Choate, where Victor rarely visits despite promises). The guilt he masks with donations to children's charities (three million last year, all very public, all very tax-deductible).

I flip through surveillance photos—Victor stepping out of black town cars, Victor at charity galas with models half his age, Victor at his office overlooking Central Park, barking into a phone while his assistant (female, pretty, clearly fucking him) hovers nearby.

It's intimate, invasive, knowing so much about someone who doesn't know you exist. Electricity hums under my skin as I absorb his life, his secrets, his vulnerabilities. This is better than sex—this knowledge, this power. I've spent years using my body to manipulate men, but this? This is next-level mindfucking.

"Huh," I whisper to the empty room, a smile creeping across my lips. "I might actually be good at this."

The flash drive contains more—financial statements, emails, recordings of phone calls. One video clip shows him berating a waiter for bringing the wrong vintage of some obscure wine, his face contorted with entitlement and rage. What a fucking

prince.

Hours pass as I consume Victor Reese, piece by piece, until he feels like someone I've known for years. I could walk up to him in a crowded room and tell him his childhood dog's name was Rusty, that he still has a scar on his left knee from a boating accident at 17, that he secretly fears his son resents him (he does, and with good reason).

I'm so deep in Victor's life that when my door opens again, I nearly jump out of my skin. It's Sienna—black-clad, severe, her face a perfect blank canvas that gives away nothing.

"You've reviewed the file," she says. Not a question.

I nod, stretching my stiff neck. "Mr. Reese seems like a real charmer. Let me guess—he kicks puppies for fun and fires people on Christmas Eve?"

Sienna doesn't smile. Doesn't even blink. "Your extraction objective is clear?"

I flip back to page one, where a single paragraph is highlighted in yellow:

TARGET: Access code to Reese's private server containing offshore account information and client list for Nexus Holdings.

"Get the code. Simple enough," I say, closing the file. "So what am I supposed to be doing? Seduction? Blackmail? Good old-fashioned breaking and entering?"

"Seduction is the cleanest approach," Sienna says, voice flat as day-old champagne. "Reese keeps the code on his person—changes it weekly, memorizes it, never writes it down. The only time he uses it is after he's been drinking and needs to check his accounts."

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I raise an eyebrow. "So I fuck it out of him?"

"Yes." She steps further into the room, her movements precise, economical. Nothing wasted. "He'll be at the Meridian Hotel tomorrow night. Charity gala for some children's foundation—his pet cause. You'll be there as a plus-one for one of our assets. Make contact. Charm him. Take him upstairs."

"And then?"

"And then you get the code. Whatever it takes." She looks at me, really looks, her eyes like ice chips boring into mine. "But remember—you're not there to get off with him. You're there to get information. Keep your head clear."

I pout. "All work and no play? Where's the fun in that?"

"This isn't about having fun, Landry. Orgasms release endorphins and momentarily relax the mind. You're no good to us dead. Stay sharp, stay focused and live long enough to get paid. Got it?"

"Jesus, I got it Fraulein Fun-killer, calm down," I grumble. "Is that all?"

Something flickers across Sienna's face—disapproval? Amusement? Impossible to tell with her.

"This isn't the club, Landry," she says, my name like a knife between her teeth. "This isn't some random hookup you can walk away from. This is your job now. Do it well, or you won't come back."

The threat hangs in the air between us, heavy and sharp. I swallow, nodding once. "Fuck the code out of him, don't get caught. What's next?"

"Now that your mental game is prepared, time to transform you into Reese's wet dream. Let's go."

Six hours later, I'm in a corporate salon—a gleaming sanctuary of brushed steel and spotless mirrors that makes Rodeo Drive salons look like backwater truck stops. This isn't about becoming pretty. This is about becoming lethal. Every inch of me is being weaponized for the male gaze.

They don't ask me what I want—they tell me what I need. And I let them.

Because this isn't about taste. This is about strategy.

Stylists, makeup artists, wardrobe techs. Nobody introduces themselves. Names don't matter here. Only function.

I sit where I'm told, spine straight, palms flat against my thighs like I'm waiting for execution or rebirth.

They don't speak much, and neither do I. But I watch. I watch everything.

The lipstick options laid out in rows like weapons. The way the lead stylist squints at Victor Reese's profile photo on the monitor before nodding at shade #42—deep, rich crimson with a blue base. Power red. Sex red. The color of calculated temptation.

She doesn't explain her choice, but I get it. I saw the same photo—his mistress in a dress the exact hue, his ex-wife's anniversary lipstick a match. Details. This place runs on them.

The makeup goes on in layers—smoky eyes sharp enough to slice, contour so precise it carves new bone structure into my face. Lashes like black silk fans. Brows arched to look mildly intrigued, mildly cruel.

I watch it happen. How each brushstroke rewrites the woman I was.

They choose a brunette wig—not the platinum bombshell I wore for fun, not the warm golden tones of his past wives. No, this is deliberate. Rich espresso waves, luxurious and sleek. Sexy, but not obvious. Dangerous, but elegant. I realize, with a strange jolt, it mirrors the hair of the escort he booked twice last year under an alias. I remember it from the file.

They're not building a fantasy. They're reconstructing his idealthreat—the woman who excites him because she could ruin him.

And I'm not giving directions. I'm learning whytheychoose what they do.

Because this isn't a makeover. This is combat prep. And I'm the fucking payload.

The dress is emerald silk. Not the clingy, cheap club kind. This fabric floats when I walk, shimmers when I shift. It moves like money. Someone references a Monet painting in his office—I remember it from the dossier—and I realize they're playing to his subconscious. I'm not just beautiful. I'm tailored. I'mtriggeringhim.

Sienna slips in behind me as they adjust the pendant—an emerald teardrop on a delicate chain—and murmurs, “His mother wore one just like it.” I nod, throat dry. I'd seen the same family photo.

The final touch is scent. Not something floral and flirty. This is base note seduction—amber, musk, smoke, and something sharp beneath it, like heat rising off steel.

“Nothing that lingers on sheets,” one of them says. “We want her to disappear like smoke on the wind.”

I file it all away. Every tactic. Every choice. They’re turning me into a weapon. And the wild thing?

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It's working.

When they're done, I rise slowly, heels like stilts beneath me. I expect to wobble. I don't. My body knows how to move now—fluid, poised, engineered for allure.

I step toward the mirror. The woman staring back is not some bored housewife in a cardigan wondering if her husband will ever learn where her clit is. No. She's a designer drug—crafted in silence, dosed in precision, engineered to make men forget everything except how good it feels to fall.

And tonight, Victor Reese is going to overdose.

I turn to Sienna, expecting final notes, a last checklist.

But instead, she gestures toward the adjoining suite. "One more lesson."

A man and woman are already inside. Strangers, both devastatingly attractive in that curated, cinematic way—like they were picked from a catalog based on Victor's known preferences. The woman is sultry and dark-eyed, body lush but toned. The man is lean and sharp, a silver fox with the kind of controlled energy that screams predator.

They don't speak. Don't need to.

Sienna's voice is low as she steps beside me. "Victor doesn't just want sex. He wants control disguised as surrender. He wants to think he's broken you, even as you make him feel like a god."

The man touches the woman's jaw, tipping her face up. His fingers are gentle, but possessive—just a hair shy of rough. Her lips part. No hesitation.

He slides two fingers into her mouth. Slow. Deep. She moans around them, eyes fluttering shut as she sucks, her throat working like it's instinct. Wet sounds fill the room—slick, obscene, rhythmic. His fingers glide in and out, coated in spit that strings between her lips when he pulls back.

“He likes noise,” Sienna murmurs. “Wants to hear the slick slide of wet flesh, hear the breath hitch. He doesn't trust silence. Thinks it means boredom —and he's secretly terrified of being judged.”

The man drags his fingers down the woman's throat, over her breasts, until she's arching for him like she's begging—though she never says a word. He cups her pussy through the thin silk of her panties and rubs slow, watching her writhe. Her moans are soft, but constant, like a song she can't stop humming.

I can feel it building in me. The heat. The tight, hollow ache between my thighs. But I don't move. Don't look away. I focus harder.

“He favors oral first,” Sienna adds, voice clinical now. “He likes to be teased. Light licks, shallow suction. Don't deep throat him right away—it's too eager. He wants you desperate, not in control.”

The woman sinks to her knees.

Her tongue flicks out, tracing the underside of the man's cock, which is already heavy and flushed. She circles the tip, slow and languid, her spit catching the light as it glistens across the shaft. When she finally takes him in, it's inch by inch—savoring, not serving.

The sound is filthy. Wet and deliberate.

The man groans, a rough, hungry sound. He fists her hair, not tight, but guiding. She hums around him, eyes wet, mascara beginning to smear. It's not just performance. She's in it. She's feeling it. And I watch her hips shift, subtly grinding against nothing, chasing friction she's not allowed to have yet.

It's perfect.

"This is the choreography," Sienna says. "Every move. Every sound. Victor doesn't want real sex. He wants the idea of it. Fantasy draped in obedience with just enough defiance to make him feel like he earned it."

I swallow, pulse hammering in my throat. My panties are soaked. My hands clench at my sides. I want to touch myself, to lean into the arousal winding tighter by the second. But I don't.

Not because I'm not dying for it.

But because I'm learning.

And every flick of the woman's tongue, every grunt from the man's throat, every moan and sigh and tremble?—

It's all data.

This is a language. A code. And I'm memorizing every fucking syllable.

"Your job," Sienna says, "is to make him think you were built to fuck him. That you were made for his mouth, his hands, his cock. You'll match his pace, mirror his rhythm. You'll moan when he wants it, whimper when he needs it. And just when he

thinks he's broken you..."

Her smile is razor-thin.

"You'll break him."

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The man stiffens. The woman chokes slightly, then swallows him deep. He groans and jerks, hips flexing as he cums in her mouth. She stays still, obedient, eyes closed, throat working. Then she pulls back, licking her lips clean. Poised. Composed.

It's not sex. It's strategy.

The room falls quiet again, thick with the scent of arousal and something darker.

I can barely breathe, but my mind is crystalline. Focused. Razor sharp.

"I'm ready," I say.

Sienna raises a brow. "You're turned on."

I nod. "Exactly. And he will be too."

Because I'm not going to fuck Victor Reese.

I'm going to ruin him.

It's go time.

Except Killion changed the plan—last minute, of course.

I was supposed to meet Victor at the glitzy fundraiser, but Killion said there were too many eyes.

Now? I'm ambushing him at the hotel bar.

Victor's a creature of habit. He always stops for a hit of liquid courage before slipping on his philanthropist mask.

The nerves are locked down beneath the armor of high-end lingerie, smoky eyes, and the kind of perfume that makes men think about sinning twice.

My mission? Get close to Victor Reese. Make him talk. Make him give. Then disappear before the illusion shatters.

I've got the protocol burned into my brain like a cattle brand. I know what to say, what to wear, how to breathe. But there's still that ragged edge inside me, that wild chaos that no amount of Killion's training can tame. Good. I need it. It's the only thing keeping me from becoming a complete fucking robot.

The bar's a velvet abyss—low lighting dripping from crystal chandeliers, casting flickering shadows across mahogany walls polished to a deep, sinful gleam. Bottles of high-end liquor line the black marble bar, their amber and gold glinting like loot under soft spotlights. A slow, seductive jazz hum curls through the air—saxophone moaning low, weaving through the clink of glasses and the murmur of hushed deals.

Isaac wouldn't last five minutes in a place like this. He'd be fumbling with his wallet, sweating through his JCPenney suit, ordering a fucking Budweiser. Poor bastard believes I'm at an extended girls' trip. If only he knew his wife was being deployed like a nuclear warhead in Louboutins.

It's a millionaire's sandbox, where corruption slips between crisp linen napkins and the creases of tailored suits like it's currency. The air's thick with it—money, sharp and heady, mingling with expensive cologne, old-world whiskey, and that baked-in tang of greed and lust, as if the walls have drunk every dirty whisper traded here. I

can practically taste the testosterone and privilege, metallic on my tongue like blood-tinted champagne.

I step inside like I fucking own it. Because tonight, I do.

My heels—black stilettos, sharp as switchblades—strike the marble floor, each click a deliberate pulse, confident, the beat of a woman who's never questioned her pull. The dress clings like a second skin, emerald green and sleek, hugging every curve, dipping low to bare the tops of my tits, slit high to flash thigh with every step—a weapon stitched to kill.

The brunette wig's pinned into a tight chignon, a few strands loose, brushing my neck like a tease. Blue contacts sharpen my gaze, icy and untouchable, cutting through the haze. Every inch of me's been crafted for Victor Reese—a seduction algorithm executed to perfection—and my skin buzzes, adrenaline licking my veins. I'm dangerous tonight, a loaded gun with the safety off.

I scan the room, cataloging exits, security cameras, potential problems. Killion would be proud. Or he'd find seventeen ways I've already fucked up. Either way, his voice is in my head now, a constant drill sergeant barking orders: Watch your surroundings. Control your breathing. Remember your cover.

God, I hate how good his training feels. Like slipping into a second skin that fits better than my own.

He's watching me.

Corner booth, half-swallowed by shadow, a neat glass of whiskey in hand—Macallan 25, I'd bet my ass on it—the ice melting slow, a sheen of condensation slicking the crystal. Mid-forties, but he wears his wealth like a crown, arrogance rolling off him in waves—the casual sprawl of his legs, the tilt of his wrist flashing a gold Rolex.

His suit's navy, cut to a razor's edge, hugging broad shoulders and a lean frame. Dark hair slicked back, jaw sharp and clean-shaven, green eyes glinting predatory in the dim light, tracking me like a wolf sizing up a meal.

In another life, I'd have ignored him completely. Too smug. Too calculated. Too much like he practices his smile in the mirror while jerking off. But tonight, he's the mission.

And if there's one thing I'm learning in this fucked-up new career of mine, it's that the mission trumps everything—including my gag reflex.

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I let my lips curve, a slow, knowing smirk—half tease, half dare—and saunter straight for him, hips swaying just enough to snag every eye in the room. The booth's leather groans as I slide in uninvited, crossing my legs so the slit flashes a sliver of thigh—smooth, pale, a hook he can't dodge.

"Victor Reese," I purr, voice low and smoky, dripping with sin as I settle close, letting my perfume—vanilla, amber, a dark bite—hit him. "Hope I'm not crashing your little solo party."

Look at me, acting like his name's a spell I just discovered, not something I've been reciting while staring at his photo for days. If he only knew I could draw a map of every mole on his body from memory.

He tilts his glass, studying me over the rim, those green eyes flickering with amusement—and something hotter, hungrier—before taking a slow sip. The whiskey slides down his throat, his Adam's apple bobbing, and he sets the glass down with a soft clink, fingers lingering on the crystal.

"I don't believe we've met," he says, voice smooth as velvet, edged with a cocky lilt that says he's used to women tripping over themselves to climb his dick.

"Oh, we haven't." I extend my hand, palm down, regal as a queen waiting for worship. The emerald ring—borrowed from whatever black-budget closet Sienna raided—catches the light, a flash of green that matches my dress. Another calculated detail. Another hook.

He takes it—his grip warm, firm, a little too tight—and his fingers skim my knuckles,

slow and deliberate, testing me, trying to throw me off. I've played this game since I was old enough to bat my lashes—I let my nails graze his skin as I pull back, a whisper of friction that says I could linger, if you're worth it.

He exhales—soft, a hiss through his teeth—and I clock it, a chink in his smug armor. My pulse kicks, a thrill sparking low in my gut. It's almost disappointing how easy this is. Men like Victor think they're apex predators, but really they're just walking hard-ons with platinum cards.

"Then tell me," he leans in, elbows on the table, voice dropping to a husky murmur that's all bedroom and boardroom, "who's gracing my bed tonight?"

I smile, lashes dipping just enough to reel him in—Killion's training snapping into place, muscle memory I didn't have six weeks ago. "You can call me Lydia," I say, voice silk-wrapped gravel, letting the crass edge peek through.

Lydia. Not Landry. The switchover feels like slipping into a warm bath—too easy, too comfortable. Should that worry me? Probably. Does it? Not as much as it fucking should.

His lips quirk—he knows it's fake, doesn't give a shit—and he leans back, swirling his whiskey, watching the amber churn like he's got all the time in the world. "You came straight to me," he muses, voice low, smug. "Most women circle, play hard to get, wait for me to call the shots."

I arch a brow, letting my foot nudge his under the table—a brush, a spark, old-school bold. "And I have a feeling most women bore you," I say, crude slipping through the polish, and his eyes flash, intrigue hooking deep, his smirk widening like I've just handed him a prize. "I'm the kind of woman who likes to get straight to the point."

He studies me, gaze dropping to my chest, my legs, then back to my lips, lingering

like he's already picturing them wrapped around him. The air between us thickens, charged with something dark and hungry. The scent of his cologne—something expensive, sandalwood and citrus—mingles with the whiskey on his breath.

My stomach twists—not with disgust, but with a sick thrill. The game's always been the high for me, and this? This is the ultimate game. The stakes higher, the rush sharper.

"And what do you do, Lydia?" He asks, setting the game in motion, voice caressing my fake name like it's a secret he's keeping.

I lean forward, slow and deliberate, letting him catch my scent, see the shadow between my tits. "I make men like you..." I pause, licking my lips, slow and filthy, "very, very happy."

Christ, could this script be any more on the nose? It's like fucking Cinemax After Dark dialogue, but he's eating it up with a goddamn spoon. Note to self: Men with money are just as easy as men without it—they just have fancier packaging.

My voice drops to a whisper—crude, velvet-drenched—and his pupils blow wide, breath hitching, a bulge twitching under that pricey suit. He's snared, caught in my web, and I let the silence stretch, let him stew in it, the tease of me just out of reach.

"You're bold," he says, voice rougher now, leaning in, his knee brushing mine—a test, a claim. "I like that. Most girls play coy, think it's cute. You—you're different."

"Different's my middle name," I shoot back, smirking, letting my fingers trail the edge of his glass, brushing his hand—a tease from training, a taunt from me. "You strike me as a guy who gets what he wants. Am I right?"

The ice in his glass clinks as I brush against it, the sound sharp in the low murmur of

the bar. Somewhere behind us, a woman laughs—too loud, too bright—and the band shifts to something slower, darker, the bass thrumming through the floor like a heartbeat.

He chuckles, low and dark, sipping his whiskey, eyes never leaving mine. The liquor catches the light, glowing amber against his lips. "You could say that."

I chuckle, the sound low and throaty. "Must be nice to be the king." My tone's light, flirty, but there's a bite—and his grin widens, eating it up.

Men like him never get the joke—they think they're in on it, when really they're the punchline.

It really shouldn't be this easy. But that's the thing about power—the more you have, the more blind spots you collect.

A trickle of sweat slides down my spine, caught by the silk of my dress. The air around us feels thick, charged, the noise of the bar fading to a distant hum.

"Tell me," he prompts, voice a low murmur that straddles boardroom command and bedroom promise, "what is it you're really after, sweetheart?"

I smile, lashes dipping just enough to reel him in. "I'm not complicated. I like good drinks, expensive things, and men who don't waste my time pretending they're looking for something they're not."

Look at me, playing the high-class escort like I've done this my whole life. Killian would be proud. Or he'd find seventeen reasons I'm about to get myself killed. Either way, I'm in it now, drowning in this role, and fuck if it doesn't feel good to be someone else for a night.

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That earns a smirk—he's charmed by the bluntness, turned on by the lack of pretense. A muscle in his jaw twitches, and I know I've got him. He slides closer, the heat of his thigh pressing against mine through the thin silk of my dress.

"Direct. I like that. Saves us both time," he says, signaling for another drink with a flick of his fingers. The bartender notices immediately, nodding with practiced deference. "I'm supposed to be somewhere tonight but you're making it hard for me to leave. Did you do that on purpose?"

The jazz changes, something with a mournful trumpet that sounds like sex and regret had a baby. The lights seem to dim, cocoon us in our little corner of sin. His cologne wraps around me—expensive, masculine, with an undercurrent of something sharper, chemical.

I laugh, soft and dismissive, letting my fingers trail the rim of his glass. The crystal is cool against my skin, slick with condensation. "What can I say? When I see something delicious, I want a taste."

His gaze rakes me up and down as he murmurs, "Same."

He watches me for a beat—long enough that I wonder if I pushed too hard, then he nods, slowly, eyes glittering in the low light like a predator's.

"Paid company with personality," he muses. "That's a rare find."

If only you knew, silly boy. I'm a government-issued honeytrap with daddy issues and a license to mindfuck. But tonight, I'm whatever fantasy you need me to be.

I feign a pout, letting my bottom lip jut out just enough to draw his gaze. "Don't tell me you're the type who just wants a warm body and silence."

"No," he admits, voice dropping an octave, rough around the edges. "I like a little bite. Something to chase. But only if I know it won't bite back."

There it is—his fear, his need for control wrapped in bravado. He wants to feel like the one in power, even when he's being seduced. Especially then. The air between us is electric now, charged with something dark and hungry that has nothing to do with attraction and everything to do with power.

I press my knee into his beneath the table, lean in like I'm letting him in on a secret. My perfume—that custom blend designed to hook into his lizard brain—surrounds us both now. "Then let's not pretend. You tell me what you want, and I'll be exactly that. No more, no less."

His breath catches, jaw tight, pupils darkening. A vein pulses in his neck, blue beneath expensive skin. "And if I want you on your knees blowing me in the executive washroom?"

"Then I hope you lock the door unless you prefer an audience."

Fuck me, this is almost too easy. Like taking candy from a baby, if the baby was a horny millionaire with a God complex.

He laughs, the sound low and dangerous, teeth flashing white in the dim light. The fresh drink arrives—amber liquid in cut crystal, delivered by a server who keeps his eyes carefully averted. He takes a sip, eyes locked on mine over the rim. "You're good," he says, voice lower now, intimate as a secret. "Too good."

I shrug, letting the smile linger on my lips. The heavy weight of the pendant around my neck—another calculated detail, another hook—rests against my skin, cool and

solid. "Just good at what I do."

"You a regular?" he asks, eyeing me again, gaze sharper now, more calculating. "Or new talent?"

The question hangs between us, weighted with suspicion. My pulse kicks up, but I keep my face smooth, my smile easy. This moment—this is what Killion drilled into me. The pivot point where everything could shatter or lock into place.

"Let's just say I'm very exclusive." I dip my fingers into his glass, swirl the ice, bring one to my lips, suck it slow. The whiskey burns, smoky and rich, coating my tongue. His breath audibly hitches, the sound almost lost in the murmur of the bar.

He leans in, close enough that I can count the flecks of gold in his green eyes, see the fine lines at their corners that no amount of expensive skincare can erase. "Well, I'm very good at spotting when something's...off."

There it is. The flicker of suspicion. The moment where the mask could slip, where the whole game could unravel. My heart pounds against my ribs, but I don't let it show. Instead, I lean into the danger, into the razor's edge of discovery.

And here's where we find out if Killion's training was worth a damn. Time to earn my keep, whatever the fuck that is.

But I keep the act up—smile tighter, hand sliding to his thigh, keeping the fantasy alive. His muscle tenses beneath my touch, hard and solid through the expensive fabric of his suit. "Then I guess you'll just have to figure me out, won't you?"

"Hmm." He finishes his drink, sets it down with a deliberate clink, and then—abruptly—his hand clamps over mine. Tight. Cold.

And under the table, I feel it. A blade. Pressed just below my hip, the pressure slight

but unmistakable through the thin silk of my dress.

"Let's see who's really in control tonight, Lydia."

Well, shit. This wasn't in the training manual.

The steel doesn't waver—cool metal against my skin, a ticking bomb waiting to explode. My pulse hammers, blood rushing in my ears like a freight train, but outwardly, I don't flinch. Don't panic. Just let my smile widen, slow and dangerous as sunrise.

"My, my," I breathe, letting a thrill edge my voice, "aren't you full of surprises?"

Is Landry's first assignment her last? Or will she become Killion's most dangerous doll?

Victor's blade presses into my hip, cold metal against warm silk. My pulse pounds but my smile never falters. Six weeks ago, I was a bored housewife chasing thrills in sex clubs. Now I'm a weapon—molded by Killion's brutal training, sharpened by Sienna's ruthless lessons.

"Let's see who's really in control tonight," Victor whispers, his breath hot against my neck.

What he doesn't know is that Landry James died the moment I signed that contract. What emerged is something far deadlier, something that hungers for more than just a cheap high.

As the knife trembles against my skin, one thought burns brighter than fear: I was born for this game.