



# Forsaken Vows

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance, Adult

**Description:** What happens when two people find out their spouses are cheating—with each other—but neither of them cares as much as they should?

Zane is fed up. Her picture-perfect marriage has been crumbling behind closed doors for years, and catching her husband with another woman doesn't break her—it frees her. Sam was looking for an excuse to end things with his wife.

When Zane and Sam cross paths in the aftermath of their partners' affair, what starts as a shared moment of frustration quickly becomes something messier, deeper... and harder to walk away from.

Healing isn't neat. Revenge isn't always loud. And sometimes, love shows up in the most unexpected places—right when you stop believing in it.

**BBW**

Insta love-ish

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# Page 1

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## Chapter 1- Zane

I should've listened to my parents.

They warned me about my husband, Mark. They told me he was too old for me. Fifteen years is too big of a gap, Zane. He's already lived a whole life before you, my momma had said. But I was young, starry-eyed, and sad. Lonely.

I had grown up an only child in a strict house full of rules, schedules, and expectations. My parents were lawyers, educated, brilliant, relentless. They preached Black excellence. They were strict. My parents weren't mean, but they were just indifferent sometimes. They had provided for me, given me everything I could need. Everything but them. I spent too many dinners alone, too many nights in a big house that echoed with silence.

I didn't have many friends. My parents stayed in the poor neighborhood they grew up in. All the kids there thought that because I had more than them, I thought I was better than them. It was like my parents wanted my life to be hard.

I just had Tacora, my best friend since childhood. We used to talk about starting a business together, fixing up old houses, making them beautiful again. But she had to leave Florida when her mom couldn't afford to stay—when we were sixteen. That devastated me. I had never felt so alone.

Then Mark came along.

He was a junior partner at the firm my mother made me intern at. He was confident,

powerful, handsome. And he noticed me.

He wooed me with expensive gifts, dinners at restaurants every night, late-night drives in his brand-new Bentley with music playing low in the background, his hand resting possessively on my thigh. He told me I was beautiful, that I was special, that I wasn't like other girls my age—I was mature, sophisticated. A woman.

And I believed him.

By the time we got to the sexual part of our relationship, a month after meeting, I was already gone. I was in love.

Then I had sex for the first time.

I had thought it would be bad, like in the movies. But Mark took his time, guiding me. He rocked my body, whispering in my ear, talking me through it, telling me what to do, what to feel, what to want.

He taught me to crave it.

And I did.

Then he proposed.

We got married.

My momma had tried to stop me on my wedding day. She said she knew men like Mark. “You think he wants a partner? No, baby. If he did, he would marry his equal. He wants a doll he can brag about. A pretty little thing to sit at home and wait for him.”

I hated her for saying that. Hated her for not believing I was everything Mark had said I was. Hated her for trying to ruin my happiness.

Then, as soon as we were married, everything—the sex, the gifts, the affection, the attention—came to a screeching halt.

My parents were the type of people who saw life in terms of wins and losses. So I grew up thinking I had to win at everything—or it didn't count. Which was why I fought so hard for Mark.

And I realized how right momma was and wished I hadn't fought them.

That was six years ago.

Mark could only be bothered with me when he wanted to show me off now.

Tonight, I sat on the edge of the bed, horny and sad, my fingers smoothing over the lace stretched across my thighs. The candles I'd lit flickered around the room, casting shadows on the walls, making everything feel softer, more intimate. I had spent all day preparing—curling my hair, making sure my skin was smooth, my lips full and glossy. My silk lingerie hugged me in all the right places. It was a waste of time.

Mark stood by the dresser, adjusting his watch, barely sparing me a glance. He had come in just an hour ago. Now he was on his way back out.

He looked good in navy slacks fitted perfectly around his hips, his white button-down crisp. He smelled like the cologne I bought him last Christmas.

I swallowed down my pride and decided to ask for what I needed. My pussy was so wet.

"Mark," I called softly, shifting so my thighs pressed together. "Come here for a second."

His eyes flicked toward me, then back to the mirror as he fixed his cuffs. "I have to go soon."

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I forced a small smile. "It's already nine. Can't it wait?"

He sighed, like I was exhausting him. "I told you, Zane. This deal is important."

I nodded, tucking my lips between my teeth. "I know, baby. I just..." My stomach tightened, but I pushed forward. "I thought maybe tonight we could—"

"Not tonight."

I let out a breath. "Not even for a little while?" I ran my hands down my thighs, making sure my voice stayed soft, tempting. "I need you to fuck me."

He finally turned then, his gaze dragging over my body. For a brief second, I thought I saw something in his eyes. Something. But just as fast as it appeared, it was gone.

"Is this a ploy to get pregnant?" he asked. His face going red which meant he was getting angry.

Who got angry because their wife wanted to fuck them?

My face burned. "I want a baby, yes. But I want you too. We haven't even... not in weeks." My voice cracked, and I hated that he could hear it. "You can pull out. You don't even have to cum in me." I was on the verge of begging. I was so tired of touching myself.

Mark rubbed his temple, another sigh escaping him. "I don't have time for this, Zane."

He didn't have time to fuck his wife? To say I was frustrated was an understatement. I wanted to scream. The muscle in my stomach tightened, making it harder to breathe right.

I swallowed hard. "Okay. No sex. What about letting me get a job? You said you would think about it. I'm bored here all day. I feel useless."

He scoffed. "I told you, there's no need. You don't have to work. Everything you need, I provide."

"But what if I want to work?"

He was already shaking his head. "We'll talk about it later."

Later. Always later.

Mark grabbed his keys and wallet from the dresser and strode toward the door. He didn't kiss me goodbye. He didn't even look back.

The moment the front door clicked shut, the tears I had been holding back finally fell.

I sat there for a long time, staring at the door, tears running down my face waiting for my breathing to steady. I knew better than to cry, but I couldn't help it.

Wiping my face, I reached for my phone. I scrolled through my music, searching for something sad. Something to match the hollow feeling spreading through my chest. I settled on Kill Bill by SZA instead of something softer.

Sliding under the covers, I pulled the blanket up to my chin. The silk lingerie against my skin felt ridiculous now, like I had dressed up for nothing.

I was said, but wouldn't cry myself to sleep, though.

Not tonight.

Chapter 2- Sam

\$4,367.52.

For a handbag. And shoes. I was pissed.

I ran a contracting business. I owned a couple of properties I renovated and sold. I worked my ass off, breaking my back, and my wife or—my soon-to-be-ex-wife if she kept this up—had dropped more money on shoes and a handbag, in one afternoon than most people paid in rent.

She knew what I was trying to build. But she didn't care.

I didn't even hear her walk into the kitchen. I smelled her expensive perfume first.

"Janet," I said, holding the receipt up between two fingers and turning away from the island. "You wanna tell me what the hell this is?"



## Page 3

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She stepped into the kitchen, silk robe tied loosely, her blond hair curled.

“What’s what?” she asked, her tone fake. Knowing damn well she knew what I was talking about.

I turned the receipt so she could see it, my hand shaking from the pressure building in my chest. “Four grand. Four thousand damn dollars. On a handbag and shoes?”

She rolled her eyes dismissively. “It’s Chanel, Sam. It’s costly but not expensive. Really, compose yourself.”

“Compose myself?” I dragged a hand down my face, pacing across the kitchen floor. “We just had this conversation. You promised you were done blowing money on dumb shit.”

She waved me off. “It’s not that deep. I put it on my card.”

“Our card,” I corrected. “Let’s not play dumb. You don’t have your own money, Janet. That card is connected to my bank account.”

In my mind, what was mine was hers, but she needed to control her spending habits before I changed my mind.

She pouted slightly, stepping closer, fingertips grazing my chest as though her touch would distract me. “You’re acting as though we’re destitute.”

I caught her wrist. “We’re not broke because I don’t let us get there. But that doesn’t

mean you get to treat my grind like it's unlimited."

She withdrew her hand, clicking her tongue in annoyance, then abruptly dropped to her knees. She placed her hand on my thighs and batted her eyelashes up at me.

"Allow me to rectify the situation," she purred.

I stepped back so fast you would've thought she burned me. I didn't want another one of her lazy blow jobs.

"Nah. I'm good."

She blinked up at me. "Are you serious right now?"

"Dead serious."

She stood up, robe sliding just enough to put her tits on display. Too bad I wasn't looking. I don't know what it was about her recently. I just wasn't feeling her. It probably had a lot to do with her attitude. She felt so entitled.

"You need to calm down. You act as if I bought a car."

I laughed, but with no humor. "It's not about the money, Janet. It's about respect. And you keep proving you don't have any for me."

She crossed her arms, chin tipped up like she was tired of me. "Then why are you still here?"

Her words didn't even hurt like they should have.

"Good question."

I grabbed my keys and walked out.

I pulled out of the driveway. I should've never gotten married to her. I wanted a wife and kids. I'd just been too quick to choose the wrong woman, and it was dawning on me too late.

I needed a drink. Nothing heavy—just enough to take the edge off. I headed in the direction of my now empty Airbnb. I could stop and restock the liquor cabinet on the way.

“Shit.”

I realized about thirty minutes down the highway that I'd left my wallet sitting on the counter.

I hit a U-turn, heading back. Annoyed. Exhausted. Ready to snatch it and leave again before Janet even knew I came back.

I pulled up to the house, parking behind a neighbor's car on the street instead of pulling into the driveway so Janet didn't realize I was back.

I was about to open the car door when I saw...

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My neighbor, walking up to my front door. He glanced over his shoulder, then slipped inside my house like the door had been left unlocked for him.

I didn't move. Didn't breathe for a second.

I just sat there, watching.

I leaned back in my seat, the rage settling in my gut like concrete. Then I smiled.

I watched their shadows through the windows as he was led upstairs by my wife.

“Got you,” I said under my breath. I had been looking for an excuse to end my marriage, and I had just found one.

Chapter 3- Sam

“Oh fuck, right there—don't stop!”

Her voice cracked through the speakers, breathless and filthy.

Slap. Slap. Slap.

Wet skin, low grunts, the creak of my fucking floors.

“Deeper,” she cried, and he answered her with a rough grunt and another thrust that made her scream. “Yes, daddy, just like that. God, you feel so good—”

I didn't listen anymore, but I didn't turn it off either.

A week after catching my neighbor creeping into my house, I sat outside my home, watching him fuck my wife. My heart pounded as the feed from the cameras I'd snuck into the house confirmed my suspicions. They were wrapped around each other on my living room floor. I wondered if it was the way he fucked her—hard and fast—that made her moan louder than she'd ever moaned for me. It was different, rougher. Maybe that was my mistake, trying to treat her gently.

He pounded into her, making her flesh shake, making the parts she always complained about jiggle in a way she supposedly couldn't stand. But now, she seemed to like it.

She started gaining weight after that last vacation. It was a slow, inevitable spread that comes with age. I noticed it—the way her thighs started to press together, the way her hips grew wider. I liked it, liked the way she felt softer in my hands. But I never got to really experience it. She was too busy hiding it.

But she wasn't hiding from him. She let him see it, let him touch it. She was into it—the way her back arched, the way her mouth opened in a silent scream. Maybe that's why she let him in—because he gave her something I hadn't.

Janet's moans didn't cut into my heart like they should have. They went straight for my pride. I was angry. The anger came from the fact that I'd told her we should separate, maybe even divorce before it came to this. Neither of us had been happy for a while, but she swore she wanted to stay, promised me kids and fidelity. And like a fucking fool, I let her talk me into wasting more years than I needed to.

I should have never married her. I met her when I was twenty-two and she was thirty-two. I had been fucking for years; I peaked young, had women throwing pussy at me since forever. When I met Janet, I didn't even want that anymore. I wanted a wife, a

family. I thought because she was older it would make her more mature. Now I was thirty-five, and she was forty-five, and that maturity still wasn't there. The idea of having kids with her put a bad taste in my mouth.

I kept watching, my grip on the steering wheel so tight it felt like my knuckles would split. The video began to blur the longer I stared at it until I couldn't take it anymore. I shut it off. So much fucking wasted time, and I had nothing to show for it. And I couldn't even divorce her right now. My lawyer told me to gather enough evidence so she wouldn't be able to deny anything then send her the papers.

I thought about Zane, Mark's wife. She was a pretty little thing, with thick curves I couldn't help but notice. When she and her husband moved in, she brought dinners—enough for a whole family—to the neighbor's pretty picnic baskets. It was the best damn meatloaf I'd ever had. Janet couldn't stand her on sight. Zane was everything Janet wasn't, and also everything she didn't want to be. Zane was a homemaker and took pride in it, but looked like one of those girls in the music videos. Janet was also jealous of her youth.

Would Zane be more broken up over Mark's betrayal than I was about Janet's?

Thinking about her being sad pissed me off. She seemed so innocent and sweet.

I stepped out of the car, the cold night air biting against my skin. It was an oddly cool night in Florida.

I started walking in the opposite direction of my house before I even thought about what I was about to do, making my way down the sidewalk to Mark's house.

Bang, bang. My fist pounded against their heavy wooden door, harder than I intended. When Zane opened it, her light brown eyes widened in surprise at seeing me. She was shorter than I remembered, but I had only been up close with her once,

and I hadn't looked too hard then. I had to drop my head to take her in. She was wearing a black silk housecoat. Her hair was short with curls. She had a cute, round face. She was young—younger than me, her husband, and Janet, maybe by ten to fifteen years. Or maybe she was the exact same age. Black women always seemed to look so young at all ages. She had flawless skin, a brown I'd never seen in nature, and innocent, wide eyes.

"Sam? What are you doing here?" she asked, her voice soft and full of confusion. I was surprised she remembered my name.

She was a fucking pixie come to life. I thought about just walking away. I didn't want to be the one to break her heart. But she needed to know the truth, no matter how painful. I couldn't bring myself to tell her outright though.

"I need to show you something," I said, my voice rough to my own ears so I tried to soften it. "It's about your husband. You need to see it to believe it."

She hesitated, her eyes searching mine. I saw the uncertainty, the curiosity, the fear. She opened her mouth to speak. I cut her off.

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"We're just taking a short walk to my house."

Still, she hesitated, tucking her plush lips between her teeth, but eventually, she nodded. "Alright, let me grab my coat and shoes."

She left the door open. The house was cooler than outside and smelled like freshly baked cake. I wondered if that was all she did—cook and clean. Did she have a job? Probably not. She only ever left the house for a short while without her husband and always came back with shopping bags.

"I'm back," she said in a soft voice, stepping into my personal space. Up close she smelled like strawberries and vanilla. She had changed into a T-shirt with Whitney Houston's face on it, a silk-looking skirt that stopped above her knees, and a pair of slides.

As she stepped outside, I felt a pang of guilt. I was about to destroy her world.

### Chapter 4- Zane

I didn't know why I was following the giant man who lived down the street. He wasn't much more than a stranger to me who happened to live in the same neighborhood, but something in his pretty eyes had pulled at something in me. Now he was speed-walking, and I struggled to keep up with him in the middle of the night. His grip on my arm was tight as fuck, but I don't think he noticed.

I couldn't guess what he wanted me to see that involved my husband. He was in Miami for business.



But maybe whatever it was could explain why Mark had changed so much.

He led me down the side of his house. The path was dark and silent, causing goosebumps to pebble my skin. My left hand gripped the blade in my pocket. I wasn't stupid. I had grabbed it when I went back in the house just in case.

Sam stopped at a window in the back, nodding for me to look. I already had a bad feeling, but I pushed up on my tiptoes anyway.

"This is not the first time they've done this," I whispered to myself more than Sam.

The kisses were too sweet, their touches too intimate. Bile rose in my throat. My knees buckled, and I would have collapsed if Sam hadn't scooped me up effortlessly.

Despite the chaos in my mind, my brain decided to focus on all the wrong things. I wasn't a small woman, but Sam lifted me like I was. It was kind of sexy. I wanted to laugh at the thought. Was I losing my mind? I had just witnessed my husband having sex with another woman and I was thinking about how sexy her husband was. I had to be losing my mind.

Sam took charge. He carried me to his car parked down the block. His arms were solid around me, his chest warm against my side. I was glad it was dark out and none of the neighbors could see us.

He opened the passenger door, lowered me into the seat with more care than I expected—like I was glass. He leaned, his body crowding my personal space, his arm brushing my breast. The click of the seatbelt echoed in the quiet of the night. His knuckles grazed my hip—too slow to be accidental, or maybe I had imagined it.

I held my breath as heat prickled up my neck. His fingers lingered, rough pads catching on the thin fabric of my shirt. His exhale warmed my collarbone, and for a

stupid, reckless second, I wondered what his mouth would feel like there instead. My skin hummed thought. His scent messed with my sense. He smelled like cedar and smoke. Maybe paint. And there was the faint trace of whiskey. He smiled manly.

Then he stepped back, and cool air rushed in replacing his warmth.

But his eyes stayed on me. He watched at me. Stared, actually. His eyes traced my face like he was trying to read something written just beneath the skin. They touched my mouth, my cheeks, my wet lashes, everywhere. I couldn't look back. I felt too naked and vulnerable.

What was he searching for?

Permission? Weakness? The raw, ugly truth.

My cheeks flushed hot.

My reaction made no sense to me, even now, with my heart in pieces and my husband's betrayal fresh between us, my body reacted to this strange man in a way my body had never reacted to anyone before.

Then suddenly his eyes darkened, and his jaw ticked. Like he'd found it—whatever he was looking for—and didn't like it.

“You're beautiful, you know that, right? Fuck him.” he said, voice low.

The words hit something soft in me, but I didn't respond. I couldn't. I just sat there, humming from his compliment, and in the same breath, feeling the need to sob.

He let out a long breath through his nose, like he was really fucking tired. “I shouldn't have let you see that. I'm sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

“You good?” he asked.

I nodded, though I wasn’t.

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The neighbors had said he was mean. Abrasive. The kind of man who made children cry at barbecues and never waved at anyone unless they waved first—and even then, maybe not.

So why was he being nice to me?

He shut the door gently.

I sat there and let him drive.

He didn't talk, didn't ask where I wanted to go. I stared out the window, watching the city slip past in shadows.

I don't know how much time passed before he pulled into a gated drive in one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Clearwater and punched in a code. The gate slid open slowly. The house on the other side was small but expensive—clean lines, dark wood, quiet money. I followed him inside without a word.

He pointed to the couch. "Sit."

I did.

He disappeared into the kitchen and came back with a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. I blinked at him, still heavy with everything I'd seen. In my feelings.

"I don't drink that," I mumbled. "It's too strong. I'm a lightweight."

He frowned, like me saying I didn't drink annoyed him for some reason, but didn't say anything. He tipped the bottle and poured it anyway. Two shots. One for him. One for me.

I noticed how thick his fingers were around the glass.

“Drink. You need it,” he said, shoving the glass in my direction.

I did need it. So I did.

It burned going down. I asked for another.

He took a seat across from me in a leather reclining chair. We sat in silence for about thirty minutes—him drinking, me sipping.

Then, out of nowhere, Sam said, “I haven't wanted to be married to her for a long time. I'm glad your husband's fucking her.”

I looked at him, surprised by his admission.

“I love my husband, I think, but I don't like him. I'm not glad he's fucking her, but it makes sense... He hasn't fucked me in forever. I like sex. I like the way it makes me forget everything else. The push and pull, the heat, how it quiets the noise in my head. I miss being touched.” At this point, I was rambling, and I didn't know if it was the fact that I was able to say how I felt out loud without being judged, or maybe it was the liquor, but I kept going either way.

“I knew something was going on, but I didn't say anything. I've just never been good with confrontation. I'm still not. My mother says I'm a pushover, and Mark's the type that'll walk over you if you let him. And I let him.”

I didn't know why I was telling this man everything.

Yeah! I'd blame it on the liquor later.

Sam nodded. "Seems we both stayed too long in a place we didn't belong."

It was my turn to nod. I raised my glass to my lips, and swallowed, letting the alcohol burn its way down and warm my insides.

"Yeah, seems that way."

We drank more. The burn stopped bothering me after the fifth glass. It dulled the edge of my pain. I welcomed it.

Sam didn't talk much. Just sipped slow, his eyes distant. Like he was trapped in his own thoughts, probably replaying every mistake he'd made that led to tonight. Same as me. He sat with his legs spread in that chair, his knuckles resting on the arms.

I stared at him. Really looked at him for the first time.

The light from the window behind me cast a soft glow over his face, catching the neat line of his beard. It was shaped to his jaw, connecting to his mustache. His hair was cropped low in a tight Caesar, the waves barely visible but still there. His skin was light, a warm golden tone. I wondered if he was mixed-race. He looked young, but older than me—early thirties, maybe—but there was something in his eyes that made him seem older than that. Like he'd seen things.

He had long lashes and these deep, soulful, grayish eyes.

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God. He was beautiful.

His wife, Janet, was older—I knew that. She was uptight and unfriendly to the women in the neighborhood. Like some older women get when they start to realize they're the oldest in the room. He was too beautiful for her.

Looking at him caused something hot to uncurl low in my belly and spread until my body tingled.

“We should fuck. Get payback,” I blurted out.

The words came from nowhere and everywhere. Saying them out loud caused heat to bloom in my chest, my neck, between my legs. I stood, glass still in my hand, and crossed the space between us before I could second-guess myself. He didn't move, not even an inch as I climbed into his lap, knees straddling his thighs, my skirt pulling tight around my hips.

He still didn't touch me.

I leaned in to kiss him.

His hand came up fast to stop me, fingers wrapped around my jaw, holding me in place. His thumb pressed just under my chin.

“Oh, baby girl,” he said low, his voice deep and warm, like gravel under silk. “I would love nothing more than to ruin your little pussy right now just to watch your pretty ass come undone.”

His words changed my breathing patterns.

His lips brushed mine as he spoke.

Cream pooled out of me. I had no dignity left. But I didn't want to be anywhere else in the moment.

“But I can already tell... you'd regret it the second you came down from the high.”

His other hand slipped around my back and under my shirt, his fingers dragging slow, lazy circles across my skin. I could feel every groove, every ridge in them.

My breath caught.

“And you'd hate me. I don't think I could take you hating me.”

I swallowed hard because I didn't know what else to do. My skin pulsed under his hand. I should have moved. Should have laughed or cried or walked away.

But all I had for him was “Okay.” And that word barely made it out.

He didn't push me away. So I sat there, in his lap. His hard dick pressed against the heat between my legs. I needed physical contact. Needed to feel wanted. Warm. Alive. I needed to feel something else but grief. This was enough.

After a beat, I pulled back slightly, just enough to meet his eyes.

“This house,” I said, voice still soft. “Is it yours?” I asked it like I hadn't just crawled into his lap and stayed there. Was I drunk?

He nodded once. “Yeah. Bought it before the neighborhood blew up. I use it as an



Airbnb.”

I nodded too.

We sat like that a while longer. His hand on my back. My weight in his lap. Both of us pretending this was normal.

## Chapter 5- Sam

She asked me for a big, greasy hamburger. It was the least I could give her after blowing up her world. I ordered it on UberEats, and soon as it came, she ended up sitting cross-legged on my couch, devouring it like she hadn't eaten in days. She ate messily and unselfconscious. There was ketchup smudged on the corner of her lips as she talked with her mouth full. I watched her quietly, not saying much, just letting her purge herself. She slurred her words a little, the whiskey still heavy on her tongue.

“You know,” she said, pausing to lick a drop of sauce off her thumb. She had the prettiest, plushiest lips. I wanted to touch her mouth. Just trace the curve of the bow with my tongue.

I exhaled the thoughts quietly.

“Just a week ago, I begged him to fuck me. I actually begged him.” She laughed, but it was hollow, tinged with bitterness. “He said he didn't have time. Probably because he was rushing off to fuck yours.”

I imagined her begging—voice shaky, trying to hold on to a man who didn't even want what she was offering. Who didn't deserve it, really. It made me want to punch her stupid-ass husband.

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Most men cheated on wives like Janet with women like Zane. Something had to be wrong with him.

I leaned back in the chair, fingers tapping the armrest. I didn't say anything. I could tell she didn't need my response, just someone to listen.

Instead, I let my eyes wander over her. She was pretty—short hair framing her face like a pixie's, big innocent eyes. No makeup, clear skin, her cheeks flushed from the alcohol. She was striking. I thought about how she'd looked earlier, sitting in my lap, skin so soft, her breath warm against my neck.

The old me would've taken her up on her offer without a second thought. I would've fucked her so good, she'd walk back into her husband's house looking at him like he was a joke.

I bet he fucked her with his eyes closed—routine, quiet, lazy.

I would've made her remember she was a woman—flesh and fire and need. She would've hated him for letting her forget.

She'd sit across from him at dinner and remember the way I made her scream into a pillow.

She'd touch herself under the sheets thinking about how I held her eyes while I was inside her.

I would've made her loud. Made her claw at the sheets.

Would've demanded she give me every inch of her body like it owed me something.

Old me would have ruined somebody like her.

But I wasn't the old me.

Despite Janet, I still wanted a wife.

I wanted Sunday mornings and the sound of little bare feet running on hardwood.

I wanted someone who met me at the door like she was glad I made it back.

I wanted a family.

And after trying once, maybe that made me stupid. Soft, even. But I wanted what I wanted.

She kept talking, her words spilling out, her feelings, complaining about him like she'd been holding them in for years.

Then, out of nowhere, she said, "I want a baby," and burst into tears.

I was caught off guard. She cried so hard her shoulders shook, and I saw the years of pain and disappointment written all over her face. And that made me angrier at her husband. Because what kind of man leaves a woman like her—full of want, full of love—with nowhere to put it?

What kind of man makes a woman like her beg just to feel like a woman?

"My momma didn't like him," she sobbed. "I haven't talked to them in years because of him. And now... now I'm just... alone. He won't let me do nothing."

She cried harder for a second.

I didn't know what to do with it—her pain, her need, the way she folded into herself.

She reached for her glass with tears running down her face. I leaned over and took it from her before she could lift it to her lips.

“I shouldn't have given you this,” I said, my voice low.

She looked up at me, her eyes red and swollen, and for a second, I thought she might argue. But then she just nodded, wiping her face with the back of her hand.

“Your wife is old.”

“She's 45 and I'm 35,” I rebutted.

She pouted and wiped her eyes, her tone shifting. “So? She's still not attractive enough for you. How'd you meet her? Why'd you marry her?”

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She was slurring worse now, her shaky emotions adding to it.

I leaned back in my chair, considering her question.

“My parents own a restaurant,” I finally said. “Had more women by twenty-one than some men get in a lifetime. Too many, maybe. I got tired of it. Then Janet came in one day. She was different. Or maybe she wasn’t. Maybe I just wanted her to be.”

She nodded like she understood.

We sat in silence for a while longer.

Then she started rambling again, telling me about how she wanted to rebuild old houses and about her lonely childhood and her best friend and more about loneliness, then she stopped in the middle of it all. Just stopped talking.

Then she stood.

In one swift motion, she pulled her shirt over her head, shimmed out of her skirt and let it all fall to the floor.

Then she just stood there in front of me in nothing but a matching red bra and panties, her skin glowing under the warm light of the living room lamp.

Jesus. She wasn’t good for my heart, and my dick was already hard from her jumping in my lap—it hadn’t gone down. Now it felt too hard.

“You think I’m pretty, Sam?” she asked. “You think my body’s nice? You saw a lot of women. You would know.”

My jaw clenched. My fists curled. I think this was the most restraint I’d ever shown in my life.

She stood there with this look on her face, begging me to make her feel something—wanted, seen, chosen.

She didn’t know what she was doing.

Or maybe she did.

Maybe it was just the liquor.

Or maybe she was just tired of being invisible.

Either way, I looked my fill. Checked out her thick thighs. Her belly wasn’t flat, but her waist curved in, giving her a figure-eight shape, and her breasts were perfectly round. She looked soft. Womanly.

Fuck!

She had the kind of body built for being held down and fucked deep—and praised with a filthy mouth and long, slow strokes.

And I wanted her.

I wanted to taste her. I wanted to pin her to the wall and eat her until she cried. I wanted to fuck her slow until she forgot her own name.

But I wouldn't.

Whatever I was feeling wasn't just lust. It was something meaner.

Something needier. Something that had teeth.

I stood up, breathing all heavy. I grabbed her clothes from the floor, redressed her myself.. She didn't resist.

“You need to sleep this off, Zane. Lay down.”

She nodded, voice small. “Okay.”

She simply laid down and curled into the couch. I pulled the throw blanket from the side and laid it around her shoulders.

I stood over her a moment longer, watching her settle. Still wanting. Still hard. Still restraining myself.

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At some point, she fell asleep. I took my spot back in the chair and just watched her for a while, wondering what she was going to do now.

I used to think soft women like her wanted anchors. Someone to cling to.

But in a few hours, I had her figured out.

The cooking. The homemaking. Wanting babies.

Zane didn't want an anchor.

She wanted to be one.

She wanted to hold someone down.

To be the reason they came home.

To take care of someone the way no one had ever taken care of her.

She wanted to be needed.

Wanted her softness to matter.

Her warmth to mean something.

She wanted to love someone the way she wasn't being loved.



And it pissed me off to know a woman like her was trying to prove she was enough for someone who never deserved her. Shaking my head, I leaned back in my chair, closing my eyes.

When I woke up, the sun was fully up, streaming through the windows. She was still asleep, her hair a mess, her face peaceful.

For a moment, I imagined what it might be like if this were our life.

We were just two people who'd found each other in the wreckage of our failed marriages. What if I leaned into that? What if I gave her the baby she wanted, let her build the family she'd been begging for?

I could see her in my kitchen, barefoot, humming off-key. I could see her arms being the ones I collapsed into when the world got too heavy.

I could see it.

But could I get her to see it?

I stood quietly, careful not to wake her, and headed to the kitchen to make coffee, thinking about stealing another man's wife—

But was it really stealing when Mark opened the door and left it unlocked while he was fucking my wife on my living room floor?

Chapter 6- Zane

I woke to the shriek of the fire alarm. My heart kicked up before my eyes were even fully open.

For a split second, I thought I was home. That I'd fallen asleep with something in the oven again.

I sat up. My stomach rolled. My head spun.

I groaned. Blinking, I looked around.

I'm not home.

Suddenly, where I was and why all rushed back to me.

Janet. Mark.

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The window.

The whiskey.

Me in my underwear.

Sam—the too-attractive man who had seen me in my underwear.

I had straddled this man.

His dick had been hard too. I sighed.

God. Why did I have to drink so much last night?

I pushed myself up, my throat dry. I waited for the heartache to take over—for the panic—but there was neither. Just an eerie sort of quiet inside me.

I felt numb. In a good way. The way you felt when you finished something you'd been tired of working on.

I stumbled off the couch, heartbeat thudding in my chest, and followed the smell of something burning straight into the kitchen.

Sam stood in front of the stove, waving a towel at the smoke. He was shirtless.

Every part of me went on pause.

This man was broad and built like he'd been sculpted from clay by a woman.

And the ink. There was so much ink.

From his shoulders down to the curve of his spine, his back was a canvas of black and grayscale tattoos. Layers of story etched into skin. A snake coiled around a dagger. The word discipline inked across the base of his neck. A compass on one shoulder blade, a pair of dog tags woven into the pattern. Cars and women drawn as demons and skulls. Each one was intricate. All of it was drawn with the kind of detail that said whoever he was—or used to be—he lived hard, fast, and without apology.

Heat crawled between my thighs.

I found myself reaching for him. Ready to trace the ink, just to feel it under my fingers.

He didn't turn around but he spoke. "You can touch them," he said, with almost a hint of amusement in his voice. Like a man who knew exactly what his body did to people.

My hand hovered mid-air for a second too long.

"I wasn't—" I started, but the lie fell flat.

I was.

And he knew it.

He looked over his shoulder at me then back at the stove, flipping whatever he was burning with the calm of someone unbothered by everything.

“You wanted to,” he said, smirking slightly.

I did want to but I lowered my hand. I was afraid if I touched them—or him—I might learn something I wasn’t ready to know about myself.

So I didn’t.

I just stood there, staring. Aching. Wanting.

It took me a minute to find my words, something witty to prove I wasn’t intimidated. “You should put a warning label on your back, in the middle of all that.”

He chuckled—not smugly, just amused like.

He looked over his shoulder again. “Good morning. Sorry I woke you. Didn’t expect the damn fire alarm to be that sensitive.”

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I had forgotten about the fire alarm. Him mentioning it brought the sound back.

I moved past him, turned off the burner, and grabbed the spoon from his hand.

“I thought your parents owned a restaurant,” I teased, smirking. Trying to turn lust into laughter. I was so wet between my thighs it was shameful.

He grunted, tossing the towel he’d been fanning the smoke with onto the counter. “Doesn’t mean I know how to cook.”

I giggled. “I can, call me Chef and you can be the busboy,” I said, nudging him with my hip. “Clean those pans. I’ll make us something edible after I use the bathroom.”

He nodded and stepped aside.

“There’s a towel and a toothbrush laid out in the bathroom,” he said. “Shower’s yours.”

“Thanks,” I said softly.

He didn’t look at me, just nodded again and turned toward the sink.

I left him in the kitchen. I stayed in the bathroom longer than necessary after I finished showering, my hands gripping the edge of the sink. My skin still felt warm from the water. My head was clearer.

I still wasn’t hurting about what I’d found out. Not like I thought I would.

I was angry but not hurt.

Maybe I expected it. Maybe I didn't care.

I was more embarrassed about how I'd unraveled the night before in front of Sam than anything else.

The crying.

The rambling.

The stripping.

God.

I pressed my forehead to the mirror.

I exhaled. For the first time in a long time, I could hear my own thoughts without Mark's wants, needs, or judgment crashing into them. I pushed away from the sink. Same had laid a big t-shirt out for me. When I put it on it hugged my frame but dropped to me knee's.

When I came out of the bathroom, Sam was sitting at the kitchen island, scrolling through his phone.

His eyes lifted when he heard me, lingering a little longer than they should have—but he didn't say anything.

I moved around him like it was mine. Pulled ingredients from the fridge. Cracked eggs. Sliced vegetables. My body knew what to do, even if my brain was still frazzled from the night before.

He watched me cook. Not just casually. He laid down his phone and watched me like I was TV.

It was unnerving.

The feeling it caused was visceral. Like I was slowly being pulled apart from the inside and handed back to myself in pieces. But I was in my element. I could function without crawling out of my own skin.

When I finished, I made him a plate and set it in front of him without a word.

I didn't expect a thank you, Mark never gave me one. I didn't even look at him. I just turned to walk away, trying to hold on to the calm I'd found while cooking now that I wasn't.

Before I could, he reached out and grabbed my hand, He turned it over like he was getting ready to read it, then he brought it to his mouth, and placed a kiss to my palm. His lips were so soft.

"Thank you, sweetheart," he said.



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My whole body flushed. It was sudden—my chest, my neck, even behind my knees.

A wave of heat rolled through me, slow and low and thick, starting from that single point of contact and spreading underneath my flesh like melted honey.

Maybe to him it was just a kiss on the palm.

But to me, it felt like something sacred.

And I didn't know what to do with that so I held it quietly. I nodded. Tried to keep my face schooled as I pulled my hand back and sat across from him—like nothing had happened.

I read once that a woman can bloom under the right kind of attention.

Not gifts or flowers or loud declarations. Just... being noticed. Genuinely. Softly. Like someone sees her and doesn't look away.

And maybe that's what this was.

He took a bite, then looked up at me.

“What are you gonna do about your husband?” He asked bluntly.

I swallowed. Hard. “Nothing. Not right now,” I said, picking at my food. “He's in Miami for a week. Which I now know he isn't—or wasn't—but he probably won't come back to our home for a week. I have time to think. I don't know what to do,

really, Sam. I don't have money. I don't have a job. I just—I gotta think.”

He nodded slowly.

“Can I ask you something? A favor. And if the answer is no, I'll drop it. I mean that.”

“Okay.”

“My wife doesn't know exactly how much money I have,” he said, voice low, careful. “She just likes to spend it. I own this house, half my parents' restaurant, and a few more properties. I don't want her getting half of what she never helped build. If I'm going to protect any of it... I need documentation. Proof of the affair. Something I can use. Multiple occasions. Something she can't deny.”

I sat back, thinking.

He looked at me dead-on. No pressure. No sweet-talking.

“You don't owe me anything,” he added. “And don't say ‘okay’ unless you mean it. I can find another way if it'll hurt you. Speak up for yourself.”

The way he said it made my chest tighten.

I wasn't used to being heard—or people caring about how I felt or what I thought. It was heady. I felt physically woozy.

I looked at him and smiled.

“I'm not staying with Mark,” I said quietly. “And I don't feel bad about helping you. So yeah... okay.”

He nodded, then reached into his pocket and slid something across the table.

A key.

“You need a break? Time away?” He looked at me, his face serious.

“You come here.”

## Chapter 7- Sam

I kept thinking about Zane. It was harder than I wanted it to be, putting her in an Uber earlier, and sending her home. She didn't want me to drive her, just in case someone saw us together.

I don't know what it is about her, but there's something behind her eyes that made me want to keep her, protect her.

I almost told her to stay. The words were there, hot and heavy on the tip of my tongue, but I swallowed them.

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Because what if she asked why?

I didn't even know why I wanted her there so bad.

Still don't.

I unlocked my front door. Climbed the stairs two at a time. I'd seen on camera that Janet had left the house earlier that morning. I had paperwork and information I didn't want her getting her hands on. I canceled the Airbnb reservations for the property I had taken Zane to. Figured I'd lay low there for a while. I needed the quiet, And I didn't even want to be near Janet. I might choke her lying, conniving ass a little.

I moved quick. Grabbed my deeds. Property and mortgage, my tax statements.

I was zipping a duffel shut with what I'd come for and a few changes of clothes when I heard the front door.

Shit.

I heard keys jingling. The sound of heels clacking up the stairs. I sighed.

Janet turned the corner, stepping into our bedroom. She was dressed in gym clothes. I could smell cologne on her from ten feet away.

"You're back?" she asked, her eyes all wide, stepping into the room with an armful of bags from her favorite boutique in Tampa. I knew she hadn't spent my money

because I'd put a five hundred dollar limit and alert on her card. She was lucky she had access to that. My lawyer told me it would look bad if I completely cut her off.

She had way more than five hundred dollars worth of shit and I hadn't gotten any alerts, so she must have been spending the neighbor's money—or some other fool's.

"I thought you were going to be gone all week," she asked.

Shit. I'd forgotten I told her I had a contractor's conference out of town.

I cleared my throat, keeping my eyes down. "Yeah. I fucked up—forgot some paperwork I need. Had to drive four hours back just to grab it. I'm heading back out now."

I started walking toward the bedroom door, not giving her time to question me. She stepped into my path, dropping her bags.

"If you're still mad about the bag and the shoes, I'll take them back."

I didn't look at her. "I'm not mad about that."

"You seem strange," she said. "Is something going on?"

"Nope," I said, brushing past her.

She reached for my face, puckering for a kiss.

I leaned out of range before her lips could land anywhere near me.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her frown.

Fuck her.

I didn't owe her shit anymore.

I walked straight out the front door and out of it and got into my car. I stared at the windshield for a beat, then pulled my phone and scrolled until I found the contact I was looking for. Park, was the investigator I'd hired to handle things quietly. He was an ex-police officer with access to people I didn't have.

For some reason, I didn't think Mark and Janet had just met. I wanted to know the full story.

Janet was careful. But I knew she'd get sloppy once she thought I was hours away.

I hit call.

Two rings.

"Callahan," Park answered like he'd been waiting on my call.

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“She thinks I’m out of town for the week,” I said, eyes still fixed on my own reflection in the glass. “This is the perfect time.”

“Understood.” He hung up before I could say anything else.

I sat there for another long second. I could see Janet peeking out of the window upstairs. I pretended I couldn’t. I tossed the phone on the passenger seat and pulled off.

I could feel that my jaw was clenched. It was pissing me off that I couldn’t just confront Janet and tell her to get the fuck out of my house.

I didn’t mean to drive by Zane’s house.

But somehow, I ended up there.

I thought about stopping, knocking, and asking if she wanted to come with me.

But it was broad daylight. I didn’t want the neighbors seeing us. Didn’t want to give her more to deal with than she already had. So I just sat there at the edge of her driveway, engine running for a few seconds, but then I drove off.

My chest felt heavy. My jaw tightened even more.

I couldn’t put words to what I was feeling. But I knew—just after a few hours—I wanted her around.

## Chapter 8- Zane

I felt strange being there.

Even though Sam had offered—You need a break? Time away? You come here—it still felt like I was walking around someone else's life in borrowed shoes.

But I didn't want to be in my house. Not right now. Not with my thoughts. I might have messed around and burned all of Mark's clothes. So I packed a small bag with a few changes of clothes and some toiletries, left my car in the driveway, and got in an Uber back to where I felt safe right now, and let myself in with the key he gave me.

I wasn't sure how long I'd stay. A day, maybe. Just long enough to think clearly. Long enough to not cry in the same bed Mark used to make love to me in.

When I get overwhelmed, I clean.

When I'm anxious, I cook.

So that's what I did.

I scrubbed the kitchen first—wiped down the counters, rinsed the whiskey glasses from the night before, threw the burnt pan into the sink and soaked it. I even opened a few windows to let in some air.

Then I ordered groceries. Enough to fill the fridge.

And I cooked.

Nothing fancy. Just the kind of meals that stick to your ribs. Roasted chicken. Seasoned vegetables. Mac and cheese baked with three cheeses. Collard greens.



Garlic mashed potatoes.. I even baked a small peach cobbler and left it to cool on the stovetop.

I figured I could leave Sam a few plates. He said his wife didn't cook.

Said he couldn't cook and I had witnessed that when he burned the eggs.

So this was me saying thank you the only way I really knew how.

By feeding someone.

By making them feel taken care of.

I was transferring the last of the food into meal prep containers when I heard the door open. The sound of heavy boots. The rattle of keys.

I looked up and my eyes landed on Sam. I sighed like a teen girl. He was even more gorgeous in the light of day.

He paused in the doorway, his eyes scanning the kitchen before landing on me. I smiled big to cover up my gawking.

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“What are you doing here?” he asked. His tone wasn’t angry, exactly—but sharp enough to make my stomach twist.

My smile faltered. “I—sorry. You said I could come if I needed to get away. I didn’t mean to—”

He held up a hand, cutting me off.

“I’m not mad,” he said. “Just surprised. I was thinking about you, then here you are.”

What did he mean he was thinking about me, and what was he thinking? I wished I was one of those women who would have just asked. I fought the urge to wring my hands.

He sniffed the air, the edge of his voice soft now. “Smells good in here, sweetheart. What you been up to?”

I laughed, my shoulders dropping as I exhaled. “Cooking. For you.”

I motioned to the containers lined up on the counter. “I didn’t want to be home right now, so I just... did what I do. I brought a change of clothes and stuff. I hope you don’t mind.”

He walked over to the island, lifted one of the lids, peeked inside.

“Nah, I don’t mind. We can be roommates.”

I blinked. “Roommates?”

His eyes met mine. “You heard me. We’ll be living together.”

There was something in his gaze that sent the butterflies in my belly into a full-blown riot.

Before I could say anything back—before my brain could even decide what to think or even what to say—he tilted his head and focused on the food, eating with his hand. Acting like he hadn’t just sent me into a mental frenzy. I needed to calm down. I was a married woman who had just found out her husband was cheating. I was probably... spiraling mentally and projecting all my heartbreak into the closest thing that felt good and safe and warm.

And he was all three.

I should have been grieving, but here my ass was standing in this man’s kitchen, wearing borrowed peace and cooking him food like I’d done it a hundred times.

And I liked the feeling I got from how thankful he looked and sounded.

I liked that he looked at me like I mattered. I liked that he hadn’t told me to leave.

And God help me—when he called me sweetheart and said we would be living together... I liked that too. Too much.

I sighed again, mentally this time.

Jesus, be a fence and keep me from crawling across this kitchen island and making a mistake I can’t take back.

And Lord, if you're not gonna stop me, don't let me beg. Not out loud.

I pressed my thighs together and wiped my hands on a dish towel, like it could clean away my dirty thoughts.

"You wanna ride with me?" he asked, grabbing a bottle of water from the fridge like this was just any day.

"Where?"

"Got a property I need to check on. Nothing major, just some inspection stuff. Last night, you said you were Mrs. HGTV." He smirked. "Come on. Help me out."

My mouth opened slightly, I was surprised. "Really?"

He nodded, already heading toward the door. "Yeah, come on."

I grabbed my bag and followed the dumbest smile on my face.

He'd listened. To me.

And I couldn't remember the last time someone really had.

### Chapter 9 – Sam

She was wearing these little shorts and a thin, plain white T-shirt to combat the Florida heat. The combination would have been simple on most women, but her wide hips and round ass made it something else altogether. And her scent—her scent had fingers that were crawling all through my brain. She smelled like vanilla and something warm I couldn't place, something that made me think of sweaty, slow Sundays in bed. And I already knew her thick thighs were as soft as they looked—I had felt the give of her whole body in my hands—and now I couldn't un-know it, and it was driving me crazy that I couldn't, because the memory was causing me to want to do things to her that I knew would make our situation even messier than it was.

My knuckles ached around the steering wheel from gripping it so tight. I kept my hands at ten and two like a good boy, when I had been everything but most of my life, just to keep myself from reaching over and gripping a hand full of her. She hadn't said much since we got in. Just buckled in, tucked herself against the door, and stared out the window like she was trying to outrun whatever she was feeling. Which was fine. Because I was feeling enough for the both of us.

She looked like she was overthinking. Too much time spent in one's head could send a person spiraling. I wanted to ask her what she was thinking. Instead, I asked the safest question I could think of. "You have siblings?"

She blinked hard, like I pulled her out of someplace deep. "No brothers. No sisters. It was just me."

I glanced at her. “That why you want a big family?”

She gave a soft smile. “Yeah. I used to dream about it. A house full of noise. Somebody to always love you.”

That hit something in me. I nodded.

“I got a little brother,” I said. “He’s eleven.”

Her eyebrows lifted. “Eleven?”

“Yeah. My parents like each other a lot, with their old asses. I had to remember to put my headphones on at night growing up,” I said, chuckling. “It’s weird being thirty-five with a fifth grader calling me ‘bruh.’”

She laughed—really laughed—and it did something to my chest.

“My parents split their time between here and North Carolina. Still work at their restaurant when they’re here,” I added. “Married thirty seven years.”

“Thirty seven years?” she echoed, like it was a fairytale.

“Yup.”

“That’s... beautiful,” she whispered.

I glanced at her again.

“You ever think about what you want now?” I asked. “Now that the lies are exposed?”

She looked down at her lap. “I don’t know,” she said quietly. “I think I’d want peace first, and just to be happy second.”

I nodded. That made sense.

She shifted in the seat, brushing imaginary lint from her jeans. “What does your wife think you’re doing today?”

I tapped the steering wheel once before answering. “She thinks I’m four hours away at a contractor’s conference.”

Zane looked out the window again. “Do you think she’s with him right now?”

I didn’t answer right away. Not because I didn’t know—but because I didn’t want to say it out loud and hurt her feelings.

“Probably,” I said.

She nodded like that made sense. Then went quiet again.

We ended up making it to the property about thirty minutes later. It was small—two bedrooms, one bath, an old-style house that I wanted to make open concept so it seemed bigger. It was nothing fancy, but in the right hands, it could be valuable.

We stepped out of the car. The gravel crunched under her sneakers as I walked behind her, watching her ass bounce. I unlocked the front door, standing there, making her have to slide past me, touch me. I was not ashamed of at all about it.

“This is...” Her words trailed off like she couldn’t figure out how to describe the mess we were looking at while being kind.

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“It needs work,” I said. “But the bones are good.”

She walked slowly, running her fingers over the kitchen counter. “Yeah, a lot of work. It’ll be expensive. You ever think about using recycled materials?”

I frowned. “Recycled?”

“Yeah,” she said, moving into the living room. “Like reclaimed wood, repurposed tile. You can cut down your supply costs and still keep the design sleek and modern.”

I rubbed the back of my neck. “I didn’t know that was even an option.”

She smiled now. “There’s a place about two hours from here that sells everything from lighting fixtures to hardwood flooring. Some of it’s vintage. Way better than what you get at Home Depot.”

I nodded slowly, impressed. “I didn’t know that. You got good ideas.”

She shrugged, but I could tell she liked the compliment.

“I need you on my team,” I said. “You’re hired.”

She froze like she didn’t know if I was joking. “What?”

“You said you need a job. I have one for you,” I said. “You know your shit.”

Her smile curled her lips slowly. “I wasn’t planning on getting a job today.”



“Well,” I said, locking eyes with her, “you shouldn’t be so helpful then, beauty.”

She looked away, but not before I saw her blush.

We kept moving through the house, her steps light, her fingers trailing over old wood and pointing out things that needed to be fixed or thrown away.

She turned the corner going into the master bedroom too fast and caught her foot on a lifted floorboard.

“Shit—” she yelped.

I caught her before she could fall. One hand wrapped around her waist, the other on her back..

I pulled her against me, tight.

She gasped, both hands gripping my shirt, eyes locked on mine like she couldn’t decide if she wanted to be embarrassed or breathless.

Her chest rose against mine. Fast.

I didn’t let go. Didn’t even blink.

I wanted to bite her bottom lip.

“You good?” I asked, voice low, not moving an inch.

She nodded too quickly.

I dipped my head, not close enough to kiss her—yet—but close enough to make her

feel like I would. I wanted to witness her reaction up close. “You gotta watch your step, sweetheart. But if you fall, fall into me. I’ll catch you every time.”

It was corny, but she didn’t pull back.

And I still didn’t let go.

Her lips parted. Her fingers gripped my shirt tighter. She looked up at me like she wanted to say something smart—but didn’t have the compacity.

I was just about to kiss her. Give in to what we both knew was coming.

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But she pulled back—slowly peeling herself out of my arms like she didn't want to leave. Her chest still heaving a little, not meeting my eyes.

Then she muttered something under her breath.

I caught it, barely. Sounded like,

“Jesus, be a fence...” or something like that.

I laughed. I couldn't help it.

“What did you say?” I asked.

She glanced at me sideways, trying not to smile. “Nothing.”

“You said something,” I rebutted, but let it go.

I reached up and grabbed her hand. “Come on,” I said. “Let's go get lunch before I make you tell me.”

She didn't argue.

Chapter 10- Sam

Outside, she turned to me. “Can I drive?”

I narrowed my eyes. “My truck? It's too big.”

She tilted her head, one brow lifted like she was daring me to say no. “It’s a Range Rover. Not a tank.”

“Sweetheart, it costs six figures.” I tried another excuse.

She smiled like she knew exactly what that smile did to me. “So.”

I stared at her for a beat, jaw flexing, but tossed her the keys anyway.

She drove like a madwoman.

She peeled out of the driveway like we were in a *Fast & Furious* reboot and she was Vin Diesel’s understudy. One hand on the wheel, the other switching through the playlist on her phone, thighs flexing every time she hit the gas.

“Jesus, Zane,” I muttered, bracing one hand on the dash. “You’re not being chased.”

She just laughed and kept going fast as fuck.

The music was loud—something slow and sultry from Mariah the Scientist—but her mood didn’t match it. She was hype, leg bouncing, grinning.

She started singing.

Half the words were off-key. And she was loud.

It should’ve been annoying.

It wasn’t. She made even annoying seem cute.

But then she took a sharp turn, one hand still doing air choreography like she was

performing on Tiny Desk, and my life flashed before my eyes.

“Zane. The road. Pay attention to the goddamn road.”

She stopped mid-lyric, mid-gesture, and rolled her eyes so hard I saw it from the passenger seat.

“I’ve got it, Sam,” she said, real dry, like I was being ridiculous and getting on her nerves.

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“You’re driving my shit like it’s a go-kart!”

“Relax,” she said, completely unbothered, flipping her blinker on two seconds too late. “It’s insured.”

“That’s not the point! “I barked.

She bit back a laugh. “It’s a little bit the point.”

“What about dying?”

She laughed at me like I was a joke.

I exhaled through my nose. Deep. Slow. Trying not to say anything else that sounded like I was afraid for my life.

She was glowing. Joy looked good on her. She looked like she hadn’t just caught her husband fucking my wife less than two days ago, and I wondered if I had anything to do with that.

We pulled into the Publix lot. She threw it in park and turned to look at me, eyes all big and innocent but filled with mischief too.

“We’re having a picnic on the beach.”

“Are we?” I raised an eyebrow.

“Yes. It’s a nice day. Sun cures sadness. You want me to be cured, don’t you?”

I blinked. “I’m not sad. And you didn’t have to be dramatic. I was going to say yes.”

She laughed—head thrown back—then jumped out of the truck and came around and opened my door for me. Her fingers curled around my hand without asking.

My hand closed around hers.

We walked like that into the store. Through produce, past the rotisserie chickens, down the freezer aisle. Like it was normal. Like we knew each other.

I was just grateful my shirt was long enough to hide the situation going on below my belt.

What kind of man gets hard from holding hands?

Apparently, me.

Halfway through seafood, she suddenly cleared her throat and dropped my hand as if she suddenly realized she was walking around a public place with a married man that wasn’t hers. I looked down at the space where she’d been and then up at her. She looked guilty but was pretending to study the shrimp.

I didn’t say a word. I helped her pick out sandwiches, strawberries. She ordered steamed crab legs and shrimp. Grabbed a couple slices of cake.

We were on the way out when she told me, “I need to use the restroom,” she said before she turned back to go inside.

I had unloaded what we bought and was sitting in the driver’s seat when she came

back, opening my door.

“Why can’t I drive?” she asked. I could hear the pout in her voice. I didn’t even look over at her little self. I spoke, sunglasses covering my eyes, one hand on the wheel, the other resting on the gear shift.

“Because you drive like you ain’t scared to die. Go get in, sweetheart.”

She laughed, but walked around the car, taking her time, frowning at me through the windshield.

The beach was crowded when we got there, but not enough to stop us from finding a space. When we did, she peeled off her shorts and shirt so fast I barely had time to process it. My head went right to left. There were too many men’s eyes turned in our direction. I gritted my teeth, my face going hot.

“Put that back on, you in your underwear,” I barked, sharper than I meant. She was wearing black lace with her smooth skin peeking through the fabric, fat pussy print very visible.

She turned over her shoulder to look at me, short hair wild from the wind, eyes wide. “Sam, it’s literally the same amount of fabric as a bikini.”

She wasn’t wrong. I shut up, reminding myself this wasn’t my woman. I bit my tongue while she ran toward the water.



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We sat on towels. She made a mess and laughed with her whole body when the wind blew napkins across the sand, then she chased them laughing harder. We built the world's worst sandcastle. Lopsided. Crumbling.

Then she pulled two bottles from the bag like it was a surprise party, looking around like the police would jump out at any moment.

“For me,” she said, showing off the Sutter Home. Then a bottle of gin. “For you.”

“When you steal those?” I joked.

She grinned. “When I went back in the store to pee. I made a detour. But I paid for them.”

How she got fucked up off Sutter Home is beyond me. One moment we were talking about nothing and everything, then her words slowed, and her head started falling to one side when she smiled.

“Are you drunk?”

“No. I'm fine, pretty man. Let's go, I gotta pee.”

She tried to stand, to grab the cooler, missed the handle completely, and burst out laughing like it was the funniest thing in the world.

“All right,” I said, already moving toward her. “I got it.”

She took one wobbly step toward me, arms outstretched like a kid about to fall.

I caught her before she could.

“How you get just as drunk off cheap wine as whiskey?” I asked, already bending to lift her.

Before she could answer, I had her off the ground—her legs dangling, arms wrapped around my neck, her face buried in my collar like she belonged there.

“You smell like sun, pretty, pretty man,” she mumbled, voice syrupy and low.

I didn’t respond to the sun comment or her calling me pretty. Just held her tighter and started walking, her laughter bouncing in the dark.

She kicked her feet once like she was on a ride, then laid her head down and sighed so hard I felt it through my chest.

At the house, she had sand in her lashes, salt dried on her neck, a sleepy smile glued to her face.

I turned on the shower while she leaned against the counter, one eye half-closed. She stripped down boldly like she didn’t care what I saw. She stepped into the spray with a sigh that sounded like relief.

I turned to leave.

“No, stay?” she nearly screamed, eyes fluttering. “So I don’t drown or fall or... do something dumb?”

I sat on the toilet, fists clenched on my knees, too stupid to look away.

She hummed something under her breath—some song from earlier—while dragging her soapy rag over her nude body.

I liked how confident in her skin she was, that her moment of self-doubt hadn't been the usual her.

She didn't know what she was doing to me.

Either way, I sat there watching her, a man on fire, trying not to burn the whole house down.

## Chapter 11- Zane

The next day, I sat on my edge of the bed—Sam's guest bed, technically—phone in hand, thumb hovering over the call button like it weighed a hundred pounds. My chest felt tight. I hadn't talked to my parents in years. Not since I'd married Mark. Not since I chose him and silence over their concern and disapproval. But now I couldn't stop thinking about them. I needed them now more than ever. I knew my daddy would be at work. Momma had retired to travel. I could only deal with them one at a time, and Momma would be easier.

I took a breath. Then another. Pressed "Call."

It rang once.

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Twice.

“Hello?” my momma answered.

I closed my eyes. “Hey, Mama.”

“Zane?” My mother’s voice came through like a song.

There was a beat of silence. “Is everything okay?”

“No.” I swallowed. “But I’m okay.”

The line stayed quiet again, then I heard her sigh. “What happened?”

And I told her.

Not everything—not the details about Sam or the beach or how I was currently curled up in Sam’s house, wearing his shirt, lusting over him. But I told her about Mark. About Janet. About how I felt so stupid and so stuck, and how I wished I’d listened to her.

“I was trying to love him the way you loved Daddy,” I said. “Even when it stopped being good.”

“Oh, baby,” she whispered. “I should’ve just been louder about you not marrying him. I could see from the start he wasn’t for you.”

Tears ran before I realized they were coming. I wiped them with the back of my wrist, shoulders shaking. “I’m sorry, Mama. For cutting y’all off. For thinking I knew everything. For making y’all worry. None of this is your fault.”

“We just wanted you to be safe. To be happy. We still want that.” Her voice cracked. “You come home whenever you need to. You hear me?”

“I hear you,” I whispered. “I love you. Tell Daddy I love him too.”

“We love you too.”

When I hung up, the air felt easier to breathe. Lighter.

I went to find Sam. He was in the living room, shirtless, eating leftovers out of a plastic container like it was a gourmet meal. He ate like he was starving sometimes. I liked that he enjoyed what I made for him, though.

I just stared for a minute. The way I was feeling him didn’t make any sense—not under the circumstances. It was messing with me because I didn’t know if it was because of what I’d been missing, or because he was really this good.

He looked up when he saw me, mouth full, a little sauce on the side of his cheek. “You okay?”

I nodded, but it felt too small. I walked over, slid onto the couch beside him, knees curled under me. “I called my mom.”

He blinked. Swallowed. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. First time in years.”

He didn't say anything right away. He set the container on the coffee table and turned to face me, like he knew I wasn't done.

"She answered. Listened. No 'I told you so.' Just... Momma stuff." My voice cracked. "I didn't know how much I missed that."

Sam reached out, tugged gently at my ankle until my legs draped across his lap. His hand rested there—warm, still.

"I'm proud of you," he said simply.

"I feel like I've wasted so much time."

"Nah," he shook his head. "You're too young to dwell on that shit. You're gonna make a lot more mistakes. That's part of life. What matters is you keep choosing yourself after."

His thumb brushed the curve of my calf, I don't even think he realize what he didn't even realize he was doing it. But it was sending shock waves right to the spot in between my thighs.

I nodded. "You're right..."

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And he was right. Put into perspective, I could see it.

I felt better about it, but in the back of my mind, there was still a feeling of dread. It was only day two and I was already thinking about how I didn't want to go home. Not because of Mark. Not even because of the cheating.

What was I going to do when I didn't have access to Sam anymore?

What was I going to do without his version of care that I hadn't even earned, but he freely gave?

He made things feel safe without being soft. Solid without suffocating me.

I'd never had anyone feed into me like he did—quietly, consistently, without needing a thank you or a performance.

He didn't ask for anything, but still made me feel like everything I had to give mattered.

I swear, he was like... like some kind of human charger. Every time he looked at me, touched me, listened—he was topping me off again.

What was I gonna do when the battery ran out and I couldn't plug back into this man?

Because at some point, we had to separate.

At some point, I'd have to go back to my real life.

But right now, wrapped in the warmth of his couch, his thumb tracing lazy circles on my leg,

I would just let myself feel the full force of him.

## Chapter 12- Sam

By day three of playing roommates, it was obvious we were already too comfortable with each other.

We were laid out in the living room, both in pajamas, too full from the meal she'd made to move. My stomach had a little roundness to it now—proof of the damage we'd done on the peach cobbler, baked mac, and something she called smothered happiness—which was basically steaks drowned in gravy. I'd inhaled it like I hadn't eaten in days. I was positive I'd gained at least five pounds since she started using my kitchen to express her love language.

We hadn't brought up our spouses since the beach. Neither one of us answered our phones. It was like nothing existed outside of these walls.

She was on the floor, back against the couch, head tipped lazily toward the ceiling fan. Her hair was smoothed down on her head in little waves. She looked pretty. Simple. She yawned, stretched, then looked up at me with that glint she got in her eyes sometimes when she was about to do or say something mischievous.

Nah, I didn't like that word because she was a grown woman. I rephrased my thought. Zane looked like Sunday school, but there was a little hell in her too, and she got this look...

“Let me hit it.”



I raised an eyebrow. “Excuse me?”

She pointed to the blunt in my hand. “That. Let me hit it.”

I laughed. “Absolutely not.”

She pouted. “Why not? I like trying new things with you.”

Her saying that made my heart feel funny, but it was still a no for me. I couldn’t deal with another night of her acting up—getting naked or touching me. My patience was already thread-thin. I was about to fuck Mark’s wife.

“You can’t hold your liquor, and I’m not giving you weed. This is Gelato 41. It’s strong. You told me you’ve never smoked before.”

She got up, crossed the room. She grabbed me by the ear like somebody’s mama, tugging hard enough to make me try and pry her off. Her other hand pressed into my chest for balance, her thigh sliding between mine, titties in my face.

“Gimme,” she giggled. Somehow, she got me in a headlock—probably because I was trying not to drop my blunt. She was warm and wild in my arms, giggling like a woman with no idea how good she felt.

My dick was the first to react. My brain came in second. She ended up damn near straddling me again by the time she yanked it from my fingers. I let her have it.

“Feral child,” I muttered, shaking my head.

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She settled between my spread legs on the rug, on her knees, facing me like she was getting ready to beg me to put us out of our misery. And fuck me. I could barely breathe. The sexual chemistry between us was undeniable. My hand twitched, wanting to touch her. She was breaking me in half and giggling while doing it.

She brought the blunt to her lips, took a pull like she knew what she was doing—then hacked so hard her whole body folded. It took everything in me not to laugh at her. She looked up, eyes red, mouth twisted, and if looks could kill, I'd be six feet under.

“You should've warned me,” she wheezed.

I threw my hands up. “I did,” I said. “You just don't listen.”

She sucked her teeth but didn't hand it back. She went back to her original spot and back to reading whatever romance book she'd been into, puffing in between coughs.

She was determined to smoke my weed even if it had her eyes watering.

I returned to the blueprint pulled up on my laptop.

About thirty minutes later, out of nowhere, I saw her shake herself—like a wet dog in movies.

Then she called me. “Sam,” she said, voice too serious. “I don't like this.”

Her eyes were wild. She was rubbing her arms like she was trying to warm herself.

“I feel like my skin is trying to crawl off,” she wheezed.

Here we go. I sat up immediately. “Okay, okay. You’re fine. Breathe.”

She got up and started pacing, muttering something under her breath. Then she bolted. I was caught off guard for a second, and it took me more than a few to react.

I followed her down the hall. Found her in the shower. She went in fully clothed, letting hot water hit her head and shoulders. Her shirt stuck to her skin.

“Get out of the shower, Zane. You just need to lay down,” I said gently. “Come on.” I walked toward her to help.

She jumped out of the shower, water dripping off of her, shoved past me—soaking wet—and ran for her phone.

“I’m calling 911.”

“Don’t do that.”

“I’m dying.”

“You’re not dying.”

She held the phone up to show me the emergency dial screen, her thumb hovering. I grabbed it gently from her hand.

“No more alcohol or drugs for you. Ever.”

She stared at me.

“Come on,” I said, taking her hand and leading her to the bedroom. “You need to lie down.”

She didn’t argue. I pulled back the covers and helped her out of her wet shirt, then pants and panties. I kept it clinical, didn’t look too long. I didn’t touch her after that, because every time I did, it got harder to pretend I didn’t want more than this. More than temporary. More than borrowed time.

When she crawled into bed, I got in behind her, and despite my contrary thought from just a few seconds earlier, I wrapped my arms around her, telling myself I was just doing it so she wouldn’t run again.

“I feel like I’m floating,” she whispered.

“You’re not,” I said. “You’re right here.”

“I don’t like this feeling. I can see your words...”

I rubbed slow circles into her hip and choked back a laugh. “Okay. Then talk to me. Let’s distract your brain.”

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“About what?”

I thought for a second. “If you were a pro wrestler... what’s your walk-out song?”

She laughed into the pillow before answering, “Yeah, Glo.”

The rest of the night went just like that.

We made it through the high.

It wasn’t until she was asleep that I thought about the fact that we were sharing a bed. And it felt right.

There was no way in hell I should be this deep, this fast into whatever this was. But here I was, watching her sleep, thinking about what kind of man she would need me to be.

I should have gotten up, but instead, I pulled her closer and spent the night wrapped around a woman who wasn’t mine.

### Chapter 13- Zane

I woke up to the heat of him. Not touching me—watching me.

Sam lay on his side, propped on one elbow, his eyes dragging over my face like he was trying not to miss a detail. I blinked slowly, brain catching up to the moment, to the soft gray of morning light leaking in through the curtains.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” I whispered, voice scratchy from sleep. I could still taste the weed I’d smoked. This was what... my third time embarrassing myself in front of this man? But he didn’t seem to mind.

He didn’t answer right away. Just studied me.

“I was making a list,” he finally said, voice low. “Of all the reasons I should leave this bed.”

I swallowed. “And?”

“I can’t remember a single one now that you’re awake.”

That did something stupid to my body. A low ache bloomed behind my ribs like something invasive. And I felt it again, that awful, magnetic pull. The one we’d been trying to fight since that first night. The one that had teeth and claws and no boundaries.

“We should keep this simple. It’s already so messy,” I said, even as I braced for what I knew came next—because I knew both of us were at a point where showing restraint was something neither of us wanted to keep doing. Our spouses hadn’t, and my thought was... why should we?

He leaned in closer, his lips brushing mine. “Nothing about this situation is simple.”

I should’ve rolled out of that bed, grabbed onto common sense, and remembered why this was wrong.

But then his hand slid over my hip, warm and possessive, pulling me closer until our noses brushed. His thumb found the bare skin just below my rib cage and my pussy gushed.

“We’re playing with fire,” I warned.

Sam smirked, eyes dropping to my lips. “We can burn together.”

His mouth crashed into mine, all heat and need and teeth and lips and tongue—we were in a space where our repressed hunger was finally being set loose. I kissed him back like I didn’t care about the consequences. Maybe I didn’t.

His hand found the back of my thigh, pulling it over his waist, aligning our bodies until I could feel how hard he was for me—how long he’d been holding back.

“Tell me to stop,” he whispered against my jaw, lips brushing skin like a question.

I should’ve. But instead, I wrapped my arms around his neck and whispered, “Don’t you dare.”

His growl was pure sin. He flipped me beneath him, mouth trailing fire down my neck, over my collarbone, down my stomach. I arched up to meet him, the heat between my thighs already unbearable.

Then his mouth was on me, sucking my pussy like he needed to taste every part of it. He tongue fucked me then used his fingers to stretch me.

I cried out, my fingernails grazing his scalp, messing up his waves. My hips lifted off the mattress, chasing the rhythm of his tongue, the way he teased and worshipped me like I was the only thing he’d ever prayed for.

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He had me open—shaking. Eyes rolled back. Toes curled tight.

Every breath I took came out shaky. Every thought dissolved into nothing but him. The way he made me feel like I was breaking apart and being put back together all at once.

Then I broke. And when I came, I did so with tears on my cheeks. “Oh God,” I choked. My hips bucked, legs trembling, and I cried out his name. I needed him to hear how good he made me feel.

Seconds later, I was begging to feel him. He came back up my body slow, dragging his mouth along my skin, placing kisses like apologies between every heartbeat.

“Look at me,” he murmured.

I did.

His eyes weren't soft. They were stormy. Wild. Like he was high.

He maneuvered a hand between us. My legs spread further when he found my clit. He stroked it a few times, long enough to make my eyes roll to the back of my head.

Then he watched me as he guided himself into me—slow, careful. He was big and thick, and I wasn't prepared for the sting that came with being stretched by all of him. The breath rushed from my lungs. My nails dug into his shoulders.

“Sam,” I gasped his name, barely louder than a whisper.



He groaned, forehead pressing to mine. “I’ve waited so long for this,” he said. “Too long.” He said it like it had been more than four days, but I understood his sentiment.

His hips began to move—in and out—we pushed against each other. His hands moved over my waist, down my back, gripping the back of my thigh again to draw me even closer.

Every thrust took me higher. Every breath between us grew shorter. The tension built fast inside my core, pulling me closer to that edge.

“I can’t—” I choked out.

“I’ve got you,” he promised. “Let go.”

My second climax rolled through me—all heat and velvet, sharp at the edges. I held him deep, locked him there. He swallowed my gasp.

His rhythm shifted—going deeper, rougher, faster. He groaned my name, his hips rolling. I felt him begin to pull away.

My hands slid up his back, holding him tighter, legs wrapped around his waist.

“No,” I breathed, voice barely audible.

His eyes met mine, confused.

I shook my head and whispered, “Stay. Please... cum inside me.”

His breath caught. His hands froze on my hips.

“I want a baby,” I said, almost too quiet to hear, but he heard me. His body shook.

He looked down at me, face twisted in shock. His eyes burned. Then he kissed me deep and started to fuck me like he wanted one too. “I shouldn’t want this,” he said against my mouth. “But I do.”

“I want it,” I moaned, gripping him tighter, milking him.

And when he let go—deep inside me, body trembling against mine—I felt everything.

His pulse.

His cum.

His surrender.

Even as the world spun and our bodies shook, I held him there, refusing to let him go, locking my legs tighter around him.

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“I hope it takes,” I whispered, just loud enough to be heard over our breathing.

Chapter 14- Zane

The smell of eggs filled the kitchen.

I stood at the stove in his oversized shirt—no bra, no panties—his scent all over my skin and this thick, fluttery feeling in my chest I couldn't shake.

What we'd done was stupid. Irrational. Dangerous.

But I couldn't stop smiling. I felt good. My body felt satisfied. I had never felt satisfied.

Sam sat behind me at the counter, shirtless, sipping coffee, like we hadn't just crossed a line that couldn't be uncrossed.

My hand dropped to my stomach without thinking.

I bit my bottom lip.

What if he really got me pregnant?

My brain ran wild.

Without common sense. Without thought of the consequences. It filled with names for our baby.

Something sweet, short, easy to spell.

No crazy spellings.

Maybe "Nova."

Maybe "Jax."

“What are you smiling about?” Sam asked, voice still scratchy from sleep.

I didn't turn around. “Nothing.”

A beat of silence passed before I felt him come up behind me, warm hands sliding around my waist. One of them rested low—flat against my belly.

“Still nothing?” he murmured against my neck.

I stirred the eggs with one hand, the other still covering his. “Still nothing.”

Another beat. No one said anything else.

His hand didn't move. And we both just stood there, in this dangerous little dream world we were building.

I knew I was being crazy.

But for that one moment, in his shirt and his arms, with his touch saying everything his mouth wouldn't, I let myself believe this is where our happily ever after began.

Chapter 15- Sam

This was reckless, but it felt good.

We had said the first time would be the only time. Then agreed on just one time. Now we were five times in too deep, and I had her bent over the kitchen sink while I kissed up her spine and thought about how fucking stupid this was. But it felt good.

Her skin was warm. Soft. And when I grabbed her hips and felt her push back into me like she needed it just as bad as I did, any logic I had left went straight out the window.

I wasn't even wearing pants. Just a towel that hit the floor the second I saw her rinsing off a plate, standing there in my T-shirt and nothing else.

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“You sure you wanna do this again?” I asked, voice rough, breath already heavy.

She didn’t answer. Just arched her back and looked over her shoulder at me like she knew I was already gone.

And I was.

Fucking irrational. Me thinking about giving a woman who was married to the man fucking my wife a baby was irrational. Nutting in her was irrational. I hadn’t even had sex without a condom until Janet, and that was after a year of talking and being tested.

Still, I lined myself up and pushed into pussy slow.

Her knuckles cracked, and she moaned—quiet, needy, breath catching every time I sank deeper.

She worked her hips, fucking me back. Her pussy sounded as wet as it felt.

I gritted my teeth. “You feel too good. Too damn good.”

She didn’t say anything. Just took it.

The calls from my wife had doubled since last night. So had her husband’s. The clock was running down—five hours until she had to go home smile like nothing happened.

And yet here I was, fucking her like I was trying to put a baby in her before checkout.

I gripped her hips tighter and leaned in, kissing her shoulder, her neck, her ear.

“You know this is fucking messy, right? That we’re starting something that neither one of us is gonna want to stop?”

She nodded. Then moaned real pretty. “Cum in, Sam.”

My nut creeped up my shaft as soon as the words left her mouth.

I didn’t pull out.

Couldn’t.

I came inside her with a grunt, hand sliding over her stomach, palm flat like I wanted to feel what I just gave her settle inside of her.

She was shaking. Breathing heavy.

My dick was still hard. I pushed deeper.

Ten minutes later, I was in the shower, trying to convince myself to let her go home.

When I came back out, she was on the edge of the bed, legs closed tight, shirt sticking to her back with sweat. She looked up at me and smiled.

I picked up her phone from the nightstand. She glanced at me, curious. I knew her code—6969. The girl was a repressed freak.

I put my number in. “Text me. Tonight. Tomorrow. Monday morning. I don’t care.” I pulled on my jeans. “Text me when you’re free and we’ll meet here.”

She bit her lip. I could see she was overthinking the situation.

I shrugged. “They started it. We might as well finish it.”

She nodded slow, like her body was moving on a delay. I didn’t say anything else. There wasn’t anything left to say that wouldn’t make this harder.

After she showered and packed, I walked her outside when it was time for her to go.

She slid her hoodie over her head with trembling hands. Neither of us made eye contact. The air between us was quiet, stretched thin. Her Uber pulled into the driveway just as the sky started turning orange. The sun was setting, ironically.

She turned to me, her bag in one hand, the other clinging to the hem of her sweatshirt like she needed something to hold onto.



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“I’ll text you,” she said, barely above a whisper.

I nodded. “Okay.”

We stood there a second too long.

I followed her to the curb. Watched her slide into the backseat without looking back. No dramatic wave. No kiss. Just a quiet closing of the door that felt heavier than it should’ve.

The car pulled off slow.

I stayed there, arms crossed, jaw tight, watching the taillights disappear down the street.

She was gone. For now.

And I didn’t know what came next.

### Chapter 16- Zane

The inside of my house felt cold when I walked in after a week, and it was not the temperature. I didn’t want to be there.

I dropped my bag by the front door and stood there a minute. Just... looking. Everything was exactly how I left it. It looked lived-in. It looked like love. But it didn’t feel like home anymore.

I walked toward the kitchen on muscle memory, my footsteps echoing against tile that Mark said would “last forever.” Mark had let me pick the house I wanted. Gave me money to buy whatever I wanted. Said I deserved everything.

I thought about calling Sam. Just to hear his voice. But I didn't. Not because I didn't want to—but because I needed space for a minute to think everything through. Now that this fine man wasn't in my face, tempting me, I could see how maybe I'd been acting on emotions.

My hands rested on my stomach.

What if I was pregnant?

I had wanted to ask Sam what we'd do if I was. That moment I was wrapped around him, begging him to cum inside me, flashed in my head. I had to exhale, as my nipples tightened. I could feel the space between my thighs get wet. I didn't even want to unpack why I felt so desperate and needy around him... why I felt desperate and needy away from him.

But what if I made a mistake?

A reckless mistake—and he went back to his wife, and I left Mark and ended up with a baby who didn't even have a daddy. But then, I was getting ahead of myself. He hadn't promised me anything.

Tomorrow, I'd figure it out.

Right now, I had to figure out how to explain to my husband why I hadn't answered his calls in a week—when everything in me wanted to ransack his shit and burn it. But I'd promised Sam I'd give him time.

I sighed again. I decided I'd make Mark's favorite—honey garlic chicken, stir-fried vegetables and risotto, which needed prep and time to marinate. Then I'd bake a cake and cookies for the women's shelter to keep my mind off what had become of my life.

I grabbed vegetables for the stir-fry from the cutting board.

Chop. Chop. Chop.

The house was too quiet—but I left it that way. I didn't want music or a podcast or the TV.

I scraped the vegetables into a bowl and wiped my hands on a towel.

The quiet might've been a bad idea because my mind drifted to Sam.

And suddenly I wanted to feel his hands on my waist. I needed to feel his hands anywhere on me, and it was pissing me off that I couldn't.

I let out a breath I didn't know I'd been holding and went to the fridge to grab the leftover dough from a week ago. When I baked, my mind went blank.

Press. Fold. Turn.

But baking wasn't helping. Not this time.

## Page 30

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 9:12 am*

I was thinking about how Sam listened to me. Even when I was rambling or saying something dumb. He'd tilt his head like every word mattered. He remembered what I said.

And God, the way he touched me. The man fucked me like he had superpowers.

It was just sex though.

Though... the sex was more than sex.

My stomach flipped.

The way he pulled me close at night, like he needed to feel me there to rest prove that. The way he looked at me when I was doing the most mundane shit proved that. The way he made me feel like I was a blessing that dropped in his lap proved it too.

I pressed the heel of my hand into the dough harder.

Why couldn't I get him out of my head? Why couldn't I forget the way he said sweetheart, or the way he kissed my forehead like he was grateful I existed?

I felt my throat tighten.

Mark had never looked at me like Sam did. Not even in the beginning.

He gave me things. Paid for things. Took me places.

But he never saw me. Not like Sam did.

The dough stuck to my fingers, but I didn't stop. I kept kneading, tears brimming in my eyes, threatening to drop into the mix of flour and butter and grief.

It was ironic—one of my favorite books was *Like Water for Chocolate*.

I used to love how her emotions flavored the food. Could my sorrow turn the dough bitter? Would my longing make it sweet?

Was there magic in my grief—enough to make something rise.

I blinked hard, erasing my stupid question from my head, I wiped my cheek with the back of my wrist, and kept kneading.

What if I never saw Sam again?

Was he really going to give me a job? How would that work?

I felt myself getting mad.

I closed my eyes and there was a flash—me on top of Sam, his hands gripping my thighs, his voice ragged when he called my name as he came.

The memory lit me up again. Made me ache.

I was standing there—mad, horny, with tears in my eyes.

I finished cooking in that state. Then I packaged everything I had baked. I'd take it to the shelter the next day.

I took a shower. Dressed in a nice dress because Mark liked formal dinner.

The food was cold when I finally stood up from the table a few hours later. I moved on autopilot—scraping uneaten food from the plates, rinsing them, wiping down the counter.

Then I went and sat in the living room in the dark. It was past midnight when the front door creaked open.

Mark walked in like nothing was wrong, dropping his keys in the bowl, loosening his tie. His cologne hit the air and made my lip curl. I wanted to hit him so bad.

I clicked on the light and he looked startled but recovered, immediately going on the defense—like he hadn't just walked in hours after he said he'd be home.

“You didn't call,” he said casually.

I didn't respond.

"And you didn't answer when I called you," he added, his tone tight now.

"I didn't feel like it," I said, still not looking at him.

There was a pause, like he didn't know what to do with that.

Then he laughed. "You're mad again because you're not getting your way. You can't want a baby that badly."

I stood and looked up at him, finally meeting his eyes.

"No. I don't even want your baby anymore."

His whole face changed.

He stepped toward me, grabbed my arm, digging his nails in..

I tensed for a second.

"What does that even mean?" he asked, voice rising. His face was red—even the tips of his ears. He understood my tone. And if he didn't, I wasn't going to explain it.

"Nothing," I muttered, shaking him off. "I don't feel well. I'm going to lie down."

His voice followed me as I walked away. "My parents are coming to visit tomorrow."

It was on the tip of my tongue to sayfuck him and his parents.

But I'd promised Sam.

And suddenly, I was mad athim, too. He asked me to stay in this situation to benefit him—and he hadn't even called me all day.

I didn't say anything to Mark. Just clenched my teeth.

I headed straight for the guest room and closed the door with a quiet click when what I wanted to do was slam it so hard the hinges cracked.

But I didn't want to give him that. The satisfaction of thinking I was mad about his fucking baby.

I didn't even know why I thought it would be a good idea to have children with him—just for him to neglect.

Once inside, I finally let go—threw the decorative pillows off the bed, kicked off my shoes, screamed into a pillow. Beat the mattress.

Then I lay down in the dark, staring at the ceiling.

When I finally closed my eyes, he popped into my head again.

Sam.

His mouth on my neck. His fingers trailing down my spine.

I could feel the slow rotation of his hips...



His voice, low and rough in my ear, talking me through it—“Cum for me. Gimme what’s mine...”

I let my hand drift down my body. Slowly.

I was sure I was making myself worse.

But I didn’t stop.

## Page 32

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 9:12 am*

I imagined my hand was Sam's big, callused, warm hand sliding down my stomach, his fingers parting my folds, massaging my clit.

He had a way of touching me that made me feel like I was something precious and filthy all at once. Massaging my clit in tiny circles I gasped, my back arching—one hand between my thighs, the other gripping the pillow like it might anchor me.

I wasn't even trying to cum. I just wanted to feel something that didn't ache.

But my orgasm still crept up—tight and desperate.

I imagined him saying. "Let me see how pretty you look when you fall apart."

I could hear his voice in my ear. Feel his breath on my skin.

"You like this dick, don't you?"

I felt his mouth brushing my neck in my mind. "Let me get deeper, baby."

When I came, it was with tears slipping out the corners of my eyes.

I was crying. Crying while masturbating and I could still hear Sam's voice in my head. Cooing to me, coaxing me.

"Say my name while you cum. Don't hold back, baby. I want all of it."

This couldn't be healthy.

## Chapter 17- Zane

“This shit’s for the birds,” I said out loud, to nobody but the walls.

Mark had been gone all morning—of course. Said he had errands to run, but I knew better. He just didn’t want to be here. Didn’t want to deal with preparing for the family he invited over. Before, I hadn’t asked. I hadn’t even noticed he never did. Now I noticed.

What the fuck was I even doing?

I stood in the kitchen, hands flat on the counter, staring down at the ingredients lined up like soldiers waiting for orders. A roast, potatoes, garlic, rosemary. Dinner for Mark’s parents—people who had never liked me, who only showed affection in the form of backhanded compliments and “suggestions.” People who would complain, about seasoning or richness or how I should’ve used butter instead of oil.

He should’ve asked the neighbor bitch to cook for them. She was already fucking him. Might as well let her play wife too.

Mark’s parents hated me anyway. Always had. Thought I was a gold digger. Like I ever asked him for anything. If all I wanted was money, I could’ve stayed home with my parents—I wouldn’t have gone without.

But that’s the problem with people like Mark’s parents. They see certain people, and decide who you are in five seconds, and shove you into a box you never asked to be in. And the worst part? I let them without protesting or correcting them. I let them because I loved Mark. Because I thought I couldn’t live without him.

How fucking stupid was that?

Thinking about it made me want to square up with in momma and kicks his daddy in the dick for the old shit he said.

I blinked hard. My head hurt. My chest was tight. I was cursing too much. Thinking too much. Feeling way too much.

The overhead light buzzed. The fridge hummed. I stared at the roast, at the marbling, the way blood pooled under the plastic. I glanced at the knives. My fingers twitched.

“Fuck this.”

If I stayed in that house one more second, I’d cry or scream or combust.

I left everything on the counter. Snatched open the fridge, grabbed the foil-wrapped cake, the cinnamon rolls, the cookies I’d. Packed it all into two paper grocery bags, slipped on sneakers, grabbed my keys, and left.

I didn’t leave a note. Didn’t text. Old, delusional me would have felt bad, but now? Fuck it.

Monique, a brickhouse type with wide hips and a wider afro and a light complexion, was at the front desk at the women’s shelter when I got there. She used to be a resident once—the girlfriend of some abusive Miami Dolphins player who she said would beat her for blinking too hard. Now she was free of him and used the money she sued him for to keep the shelter open.

She pulled me into a hug the second she saw me.

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“You okay?” she asked. “You look like you’re about to snap.”

“I just needed somewhere to breathe.”

She frowned. She didn’t ask questions. Just grabbed my hand and led me to the breakroom, left the baked goods at the desk.

“What’s going on?” she asked, sitting down across from me. Her pretty face balled up.

I told her some of it—not about Sam. But the part about Mark. About him fucking the neighbor. The way I couldn’t leave without having nothing. How stupid I felt.

She nodded, listened, then said, “That sounds like financial abuse.”

I blinked. “What?”

“All that ‘he lets you’ spend money one stuff and then throws it in your face? But won’t let you work. Go to school. That’s control That’s abuse.”

I frowned. “No... I mean, I have access to everything.”

“Is your name on any of it? Do you know how much he makes? How much he owns or saves?”

I didn’t answer. I didn’t know.

That silence was all she needed to hear.

“Exactly,” she nodded after a beat. And it wasn’t like she was being self-righteous or condescending. She was trying to make me see what I hadn’t even thought about.

I left not long after. Drove straight to the bank. Waited in line, pulled out a check from a dusty old checkbook, and wrote one out to myself. When I got to the counter, I smiled like I belonged there. Slid it over.

The teller typed. Frowned. Typed again.

“I’m sorry, ma’am. You’re not listed on this account.”

My stomach dropped. “That can’t be right.”

She double-checked. “It’s in Mark Blackwell’s name only.”

I walked out in a fog. Everything buzzing around me except my body, which felt like stone. My phone vibrated—Mark.

I didn’t answer.

Why hadn’t I thought about any of this before?

I’d let myself become a placeholder in a life where I didn’t own shit. My mama taught me better. My daddy gave me the blueprint. I’d ignored them both for a man who put my name on nothing.

A text lit up my screen:

I’m picking up my parents. I need you to cook something and get the guest room

ready.

I didn't respond.

Instead, I parked at the closest park I could find. I wondered where I could get whatever Sam had me smoking at his house from. But I didn't know those types of people, so I sat there for hours. Scrolling through social media. Pulling up and staring at Sam's number every once in a while. Wanting to call him. Needing to hear his voice.

But what if he was with his wife? What if I was just a mistake to him? A pretty detour? Even revenge. He had been with his wife a long time. How could he not love her even a little bit?

Mark kept texting about dinner.

Around six, I picked up a pizza and went home.

His parents were already sitting in my living room, smug and self-important-looking head asses. I dropped the pizza on the coffee table, gave them a polite smile.

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*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 9:12 am*

“I have a headache,” I said. “Dinner’s handled.”

I turned and walked upstairs.

Mark followed. His voice was tight, sharp. “What’s gotten into you?”

I stopped halfway up the stairs, turned to him slow.

“Unless you want me to show my ass in front of your parents, I suggest you leave me alone.”

My heart was pounding so fast. I wanted to hit him. I had never wanted to hit anybody.

I closed our bedroom door in his face before I did something I’d regret.

Later, he came to bed. I felt the mattress shift.

“You keep acting like this,” he said, voice cold and distant, “and you can be replaced.”

I didn’t move. Didn’t blink.

Just laid there breathing slow and steady.

Pretending to be asleep.



But I heard him.

And I really didn't care.

I wanted to tell him so.

But I tucked my lips.

Sam had a month before I said fuck it all.

## Chapter 18- Sam

I showed up at Zane's front door like I gave a fuck about some damn paperwork. Truth was, I just wanted to see her. Touch her. Hear her voice after three whole days of nothing.

You don't let a man inside you like that and then go ghost. You don't ride his dick like your life depends on it and act brand new by Monday. But she did.

Mark opened the door, and his eyes got wide seeing me. I wanted to punch him in his smug-ass face.

"Sam, how are you? I didn't know you were stopping by."

I smiled. The fake one I wear when I'm about to do some shit I shouldn't.

"Just came to follow up on that transfer request. The property rights. I won't be able to meet you tomorrow, so I was hoping you'd have access to them. Maybe you could print them out tonight, if that's cool?"

I had paid him \$700 for papers I didn't even need just to have an excuse to show up

at his house and disrespect him in it.

He nodded. “Yeah, no problem, buddy. I can pull that up. Come in. Give me fifteen minutes.”

He said it like he didn’t mind, but I could see it in his eyes—he did.

He turned and disappeared down the hall. I could hear pots being clanged around in the kitchen. They had one of those old-built homes with kitchen doors. I knew Zane would be behind the closed door.

I made my way there.

She didn’t hear me when I walked in. She was standing at the sink in a skirt that did nothing to hide how thick she still was. Her ass was sittin’ right.

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It was irrational, but I was pissed she was even dressed like this around him. That ass belonged to me, not him. She shouldn't be in his house like this—not after what we did. Not after the way she moaned for me.

She jumped when she turned around and her eyes landed on me, wide as hell.

“What are you doing here?” she sounded panicked.

That made me smile, because the way I was feeling—she should be scared.

“You really wasn't gon' call me?” I asked, low and tight.

“I didn't think I should.”

I stepped closer, close enough for her to feel the heat rollin' off me.

“You let me bust inside you, but you didn't think you should call?”

She frowned, stepping back. “You didn't call me.”

“I didn't even realize I didn't have your number 'til it was too late,” I said. “I kept checking my shit like a fool.”

I had no business being there. I had no reason to still be this mad—but I was. All I knew was, I needed her. I needed her to feel me. To remember what we were.

She opened her mouth to explain, something about Mark's parents or some weak-ass

excuse. I didn't wanna hear it.

I grabbed her by the hips and turned her around, cutting her off, bending her over the kitchen island. I didn't rush. I slid my hand up that skirt slow until my fingers met lace.

"What are you doing?" she whined. I could feel her heartbeat racing through her back. She was scared—but not enough to move. Not enough to stop me.

I attempted to pull her panties down. She reached behind her, grabbing my hand.

"Stop, Sam. He's here."

"Step out of them," I said, ignoring the way her grip tightened.

"N-n-nooo, baby," she stuttered.

"I don't care if he is or not. Now take 'em off. You want me to rip them?"

"Yes—no—baby, please."

I didn't have time to be gentle. Not tonight.

She was pissing me off being indecisive, so I ripped them and stuffed them in my pocket.

I slid my fingers between her pussy lips and played with her clit slow. "Tell me you missed me," I said, voice sharp, "then swear you won't go another day without calling or texting me."

She moaned. Her hips trembled.

“You missed me?” I said, sliding two fingers inside her. “Say it.”

She didn’t answer—but that pussy did.

It opened up for me like it remembered how good I could make her feel. Her legs damn near gave out when I slid two fingers inside of her. She caught herself on the marble, breathing hard. I splayed my free hand on her back, pressing her down. Her ass lifted.

I pushed my dick into her. She was already soaking wet. Her thighs were warm, sticky, hungry. I started stroking her slow. Deep. Pushing her shirt up, I watched her back muscles flex every time I hit her spot. I wished I had more time.

“You don’t call me, then let me fuck you raw in your husband’s house?” I asked, gripping her hip. “You fucking disrespectful.” I taunted.

“I shouldn’t be doing this,” she whispered.

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I leaned in close, chest pressed to her back. “But you are.”

Her moans cracked off the walls. Her ass bounced back into me, rippling. Her nails clutched the edge of the counter like she was scared she might scream.

She didn’t care. Not really. If she did, she would’ve made me stop. But she wanted this just like I did. Needed it.

“I want you to cum on this dick,” I growled. “And I want him to hear you.”

Her pussy clamped down like it heard me loud and clear. She choked out a cry, her body shaking. Her juices coated my dick and she was loud, messy for me.

“Don’t slow down on me because you got yours, better make me cum. Your husband should be coming back.”

I spread her ass cheeks and pushed deeper and stopped moving.

She started popping her ass, fucking me.

Look at you, getting aggressive with it. You want this nut, fuck me harder.

She sped up, winding her waist.

My nut crawled up my shaft like my soul was leaving and my spine tingled.

I nutted in her, one hand gripping her throat from the back, gritting my teeth, trying

not to say her name out loud.

“Hey, babe?” Mark’s voice came from the other side of the door.

I hurried and pulled out of her, leaving my nut leaking onto their kitchen floor and pulled up my gym shorts, pulled her skirt down while she tried to catch her breath and wipe her face with the back of her hand. She hurried to sit down. Her legs were visibly trembling.

I smirked as I took a few steps away from her.

Mark walked in, eyes going straight to her. “You good, babe? You look hot.”

“She’s good,” I answered for her, walking over, grabbing the papers like they mattered. “Appreciate you for these. I’m heading out.”

I turned at the door just before leaving, added one more thing.

“Oh—and I hired your wife.”

Mark blinked. “Hired? When?”

“This weekend? She didn’t tell you?” I smirked. “She’s going to be helping me flip a couple houses. Starting Monday. I expect her bright and early.”

I looked right at her.

“That’s right, Zane, right?”

She nodded. “Yeah—right,” she stuttered, smoothing her hand over her thighs. She looked like she was about to bust out crying.

“Bright and early Monday,” I repeated. “Wouldn’t want to have to come get you.” I laughed. Then walked out like I didn’t just fuck his wife five feet from his face.

And I didn’t feel guilty.

Not even a little.

Chapter 19- Zane

The door clicked shut behind Sam like nothing had happened. Like my knees weren’t still shaking under this table. Like I didn’t have his cum dripping down the inside of my thigh while Mark poured himself a glass of some expensive alcohol. I needed a glass. My heart still hadn’t slowed—I felt like a live wire was active in my body.

“You okay?” Mark asked again. “You seemed... flushed.”



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“I’m fine.” My voice cracked on the lie.

He raised an eyebrow. “What was that about anyway? You’re working with Sam now?”

I stood. Slowly. Carefully. Afraid if I moved too fast, he might smell Sam on me.

“He hired me. Said I’d be helping him with property flips. It’s just part-time.”

Mark scoffed. “You don’t need to work.”

I stopped walking. That sentence—those five little words—dug under my skin like splinters.

“And why is that, Mark?” I turned to face him. “Because you said so?”

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose, like I was annoying him. “Come on, Zane. Don’t be dramatic.”

“I’m not. I went to the bank today to get money out. To buy myself something I wanted.” I paused. “And you know what I found out?”

He stared, silent.

“My name’s not on the bank account. Not one of them.”

His mouth opened, closed. “You have the card—”

“But not with my name on it, Mark. And I bet my name’s not on the deed to this house either. How much money do you make? Do you have life insurance?”

He shook his head, like I was being unreasonable. “You want to talk about this now? Because our neighbor gave you a pity job?”

I took a step closer. I wanted to smack him. “I can’t have a baby. You said you didn’t want me working. What am I supposed to do with myself, Mark? Just sit here in this house and pretend the walls aren’t closing in on me?”

His eyes flashed. “Don’t do that. Don’t twist this. I’ve taken care of you—”

“Exactly,” I snapped. “You take care of me. Like a pet. Like I’m not supposed to want anything of my own.”

He leaned on the counter, sipping his bourbon like I wasn’t on the verge of snapping. “I just think you should be patient. Maybe something better will come along.”

Better? Sam had already come along. I was letting Mark ruin him for me.

“You come home late every night,” I said, quieter now, trying to make myself sound like I cared. “Is it your job that keeps you out, or is it her?”

He looked up. The flicker in his eyes wasn’t guilt. It was panic—fear of being found out. But he covered it up quick.

“I think we’re both tired,” he said instead, brushing past my accusation like it wasn’t real. “And if you really want to work, then sure. It’s your decision. You have my permission. No one’s stopping you.”

Permission. He wanted to frame it like he was letting me. Not just agreeing so I’d

change the subject.

He came toward me then, arms out, trying to embrace me.

But as soon as he touched me, my whole body recoiled.

I could still smell Sam on my skin. Still feel him between my thighs. Touching him felt like betrayal. Thinking about what Sam did to me made my pussy ache.

I pushed Mark away gently. "I'll sleep in the guest room tonight."

He frowned. "Zane—"

"I need space," I said flatly. "You understand, right? Or do you want access to me tonight so you can tell me again how replaceable I am?"

He didn't speak again. Just stood there looking confused and inconvenienced. Like I'd disturbed the little fantasy life he'd built for us.

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I turned away from him and walked down the hallway, arousal making my thighs thump.

By the time I stepped into the bathroom and locked the door behind me, I was shaking again.

I turned the water on hot. Peeled off my clothes slow, one piece at a time. The panties were gone—ripped from my body by another man. My skirt still smelled like him. I could still feel Sam's fingers digging into my hips.

How was I supposed to get over how he fucked me when he did it so well?

I stepped into the shower and let the water wash down over me, steam filling the glass walls. My hand trailed between my thighs, fingers slipping over my swollen pussy lips.

His cum had leaked out of me.

It turned me on.

I pressed my palm flat against the tile and let my fingers dip inside of me. I fucked myself slow at first. Then faster until my breath hitched. My knees threatened to give again.

Sam had been a bully, and I loved it.

My other hand cupped my breast, thumb rolling over the nipple, thinking about how

he gripped my throat and fucked me from behind. How his voice had dropped when he said, “You disrespectful.”

I moaned softly, the water masking my whimpers. My pussy tightened again, the orgasm creeping up fast—too fast—like it had been waiting on me.

When it came, it was sharp. Deep. Like I was confessing something with my whole body.

I leaned my forehead against the wall and tried to breathe.

Sam was chaos. He was going to get me in trouble.

But I hadn't felt this alive in years.

Chapter 20- Sam

Hard-headed ass.

After showing up at her house, it took until nearly midnight Sunday for her to text me.

I watched my phone all weekend. Every time it lit up, I thought it was her. Every time it wasn't, it made me want to drive back to her husband's house and make her realize who she belonged to now. I wasn't thinking straight. I hadn't been since the first time she moaned my name with my dick still inside her. But I didn't care.

When her text finally came, it was short. She asked me for the address to the house we'd be working on, and when I answered, she texted back:

“I'll meet you at the house tomorrow morning.”

No I miss you.

No explanation as to why she hadn't called me after I made it very clear she had to.

Now she had me at the house an hour early, waiting for her, wondering if she was pregnant. But I pushed that to the back of my mind.

I stood outside on the front porch, the air thick with heat already, and it wasn't even eight a.m.—but that was Florida.

The property was a beat-up two-story we were supposed to turn around in ninety days—ugly as hell now, but if she learned how to see past the mess, she could make real money. Build something of her own. Have options again.

I was thinking about that when I heard the crunch of tires on gravel.

Her black G-Wagon pulled up slow, and she climbed out, hair slicked to her head again with waves, black leggings hugging those thick thighs, oversized tee slipping off one shoulder.

I should've been pissed at her.

Instead, my first thought was how fast I could get her bent over the hood of her own car.

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I smiled—actually fucking smiled—at the woman who was driving me crazy.

She didn't come close right away. She kept her distance, arms folded tight across her chest.

Oh, she had an attitude.

“Morning,” she said like she wasn't trying to look too hard at me.

“Morning,”

She shifted from foot to foot, eyes darting to the porch, the peeling paint, the half-demolished walls.

“I meant to text you this weekend,” she mumbled.

“Why didn't you?”

Silence.

She took a breath, like I was annoying her by asking.

She pouted, and her face turned even prettier.

“Look,” she said finally, “you can't pull that shit you pulled in my kitchen again.”

I stared at her. Hard.

“You mean when I made you cum on your husband’s marble countertop? And why you cursing at me, pretty?” I asked, cocking my head.

Her cheeks flamed red. Her hands balled into fists at her sides.

“I mean it, Sam. And I’m grown. I can curse.”

I took a slow step toward her. Then another. Until I was standing close enough to kiss her. She craned her neck.

“You liked it.”

She glared at me. “This isn’t about whether I liked it or not. You can’t do it anymore.”

I dropped my eyes—her nipples were poking through the thin fabric. I smiled.

She caught me looking and brought her arms up to cover them.

“I’m not making any promises.”

Her mouth opened like she wanted to argue.

I cut her off.

“Now give me a kiss and hug before we get started.”

She hesitated like she wasn’t going to do it.

I reached out and grabbed her shirt, pulling her into my space.



One hand slid over the dip of her spine, dragging her flush against my body, I got a grip of a hand full of ass, while the other cradled the back of her head.

Her little soft ass gasp wrecked me—like a crack in the drywall that split wide all at once, sudden and without force.

I leaned down and started kissing her lips slow. My lips pressed against hers until our breath were tangled and she was moaning, then I slid my tongue into her mouth, tasting her the way a man feasts after starving.

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Let my hands slide down to the swell of her hips, then further until I got a good handful of her ass and pulled her tighter until I could feel the heat between her legs through her thin-ass leggings.

Her hands fisted in my shirt, desperate, clinging like she needed me.

She smelled like berry and sweet grapefruits.

She tasted like honey and heat.

My dick throbbed.

When I finally let her go, she swayed like her body didn't know how to hold itself up without me. Eyes glassy, lips swollen and I just knew her pussy was wet. My heart was throwing itself against my ribs, but I turned like it wasn't. Like I didn't want to drag her back in. I needed her to feel the absence, the hunger I felt. The way I saw it was she should be just as gone over me as I was over her.

An old woman who hadn't been there before was standing outside the house next door, frozen at the edge of her driveway with a water hose in her hand. She was a cute, with light brown skin and long gray hair, wearing a muumuu. I could tell she was probably one of them girls men chased when she was young.

I nodded at her, real polite.

“Morning, ma'am. Beautiful day, ain't it?”

“It would be if it was my turn next for a kiss like that,” she grinned.

I grinned back at her.

Zane groaned and pushed past me, keys jingling in her hand. “Morning, ma’am,” she called politely without looking at her.

I laughed.

I watched her walk ahead of me into the house—hips swaying, thighs rubbing together—and had to bite back a groan.

I followed her inside.

She was waiting just on the other side of the door.

“You can’t be kissing me like that,” she said.

“Why not?”

She stared at me for a long minute.

“Because you can’t,” she snapped.

I walked up on her again. Until we were touching.

“Are you really trying to find a reason to fight with me right now now? I know you don’t really give a fuck about me doing what I did the other night. What’s wrong?” I gripped her hands and brought them up to my lips, pressing a kiss to her warm hand.

“Nothing really. I just... I don’t know...”

Okay. I let it go. “When you do know, we’ll talk about it.”

I wasn’t going to force her.

She could pretend all she wanted. Put up whatever little walls she thought would save her from what was happening between us. But at the end of the day, it was happening—and her body already knew what her mouth was too scared to say.

I stepped back and tossed her a pair of work gloves from the pile of supplies on the floor.

She caught them awkwardly, almost dropping them.

“Come on,” I said, walking toward the kitchen.

She followed me silently.

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I pointed to the cracked kitchen walls, the ugly cabinets hanging off broken hinges.

“We demo first. Knock all this shit out. We open the floor plan up, then we can start on your suggestions and go look for reused cabinets and other stuff we need.”

She nodded slowly, pulling on the gloves, her fingers fumbling a little.

“Don’t look so scared,” I teased.

“I’m not scared,” she snapped.

Her little attitude made my dick hard. Made me want to bend her over one of these raggedy-ass countertops and fuck her full until she got some act right in her.

I handed her a hammer and watched her grip it tight instead.

But then stopped her before she swung.

“Hold on.”

I jogged back out to the truck, grabbed the little surprise I threw together last night when I couldn't sleep.

When I came back in, she was still there, gnawing her plush bottom lip.

I wanted to do that for her.

But I needed to chill. I could tell I was applying too much pressure too soon. Of course she was confused. She needed time.

I tossed her the pink hard hat.

She caught it awkwardly, peeking inside.

“They got hard hats with silk bonnets in them now now?” she asked, one eyebrow cocked.

I smirked. “Nah. I glued one in there for you. I know how Black women are about their pretty hairdos.”

She stared at me, blinking slow, like her brain couldn’t compute my words.

For a second, she didn’t say nothing.

Just turned the hat over in her hands, running her fingers over the inside like it was some kind of treasure.

Then she shook her head. “You’re trying to make me fall in love with you.”

She said it half-joking. But her voice cracked just enough that I knew—knew—I’d hit something deeper than she wanted to admit.

I shrugged, nonchalant-like, rubbing the back of my neck, because the truth was itching under my skin.

“Maybe that’s just what’s happening.” It was at least on my part.

“Sam,” she said. A warning was heavy in the way she said my name.

“I’m just saying.” I held up my hands like I was innocent and not trying to push her in the direction I wanted her to go.

She sighed, slipping the helmet over her hair.

I pulled the second part of her surprise from behind my back and slapped it against her chest.

“Sign these.”

She narrowed her eyes, suspicious. “What is it?”

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“Read it,” I said. “Ain’t selling your organs or nothing, so calm down.”

She flipped through the three pages slow. Her lips moving silently while she read.

“It’s a contract,” I said. “Fifty-fifty split on the profits when we flip this house.”

Her head snapped up.

“You told me you needed a job,” I said. “Needed your own money. I doubt you want to end up back at your momma and daddy’s house once everything blows up. I’m making sure you have everything you need.”

Her mouth opened. Closed. Opened again.

She dropped the papers on the counter, stepped into my space, and pinched me hard right below the ribs.

“The fuck was that for?” I grunted, grabbing her wrist.

She smiled up at me, sweet and crooked.

“Making sure I’m not dreaming,” she whispered.

Without thinking, I reached out, brushed my thumb across her nipple through the thin T-shirt, and pinched down.

She gasped and slapped my hand away.



I cackled low.

“Nah, baby. You felt that, didn’t you?”

She nodded, absentmindedly.

“See, wide awake.”

Chapter 21- Zane

We left the house just before sunset, both of us sweaty, dirty, and worn out from swinging hammers and gutting walls.

My clothes were stuck to my skin with sweat and dust, and my hair was ruined under the hard hat.

Sam asked if I wanted to grab dinner, and for a second, I almost said yes.

But reality set in fast.

Mark would be waiting for me.

My phone had been buzzing non-stop with calls from Mark that I hadn’t answered. This would probably be the one night he was home on time. Checking on me.

Guilt twisted in my stomach.

Not because of Mark though, because I told Sam no. He was disappointed.

I saw it.

Even though he covered it with a nod, acting like he wasn't mad.

But I knew better.

I knew he was mad about me not calling or texting him already, but I had been too in my head about it. I kept thinking if I let myself fall for him and he one day wanted nothing to do with me...I wouldn't survive it. It wouldn't be like it was with Mark.

When things started falling apart there, all I felt was regret—wasted time, wasted chances.

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But with Sam?

I knew it would break something in me that couldn't be fixed.

I tapped on my steering wheel, frustrated, still sitting outside the house in my car long after Sam had pulled off.

All day I had been thinking about everything he said to me.

How he touched me.

How he wasn't trying to buy me.

He was giving me a way out.

A way up.

He wasn't controlling like Mark was.

He saw me.

Nobody had ever read me the way Sam did.

I wanted him.

God, I wanted him.

Why couldn't I have met him instead of Mark?

The rain started just as I pulled onto the street—heavy, fast, slamming against the windshield like the sky was falling apart.

I bit my lip, hands clenching the steering wheel.

I didn't want to go home.

I didn't want to walk into that perfect house and sit across from a man who didn't even see me unless he needed something to brag about.

Sam's house was closer.

And right now, all I wanted was to be somewhere I didn't have to pretend.

I headed in the direction of Sam's Airbnb before I could talk myself out of it.

He said he hadn't been back home since that night he came and got me.

He said he didn't plan to either.

He was lying to his wife about being out of town on business until his investigator got enough evidence on her and Mark.

Then he'd file for divorce.

My heart hammered in my chest at the thought. Then what?

I didn't want to think about the then what, I focused on driving. Keeping my eyes forward and my mind blank.

The windshield wipers were fighting the rain—and losing, it was already hard to see. I just needed to concentrate on driving. Ten minutes later, I was putting the code into his privacy gate, and parking in front of his place.

I sat there for a full minute, breathing, staring at my own trembling hands.

Then I got out, dragging my tired, aching body up the short walkway.

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I knocked once.

The door opened almost immediately.

Sam stood on the other side of it, in basketball shorts and a black T-shirt, barefoot, smirking.

"I knew you were coming," he said. "I ordered you ribs and a spiked strawberry lemonade from your favorite spot."

I didn't say anything.

I grabbed his hand and pulled him toward the bathroom like I owned him. I finally understood I had a right to want more and he would give it to me.

I pulled him into the bathroom.

He didn't say anything.

Just leaned back against the sink and watched me as I worked.

The shower steamed up quick, hot enough to fog the mirror in seconds.

I peeled off my shirt, tossing it somewhere behind me.

Kicked off my boots, shimmied out of my leggings—

not looking at him, because if I looked, I might lose my nerve.

He didn't say a word.

I could feel him—his eyes heavy as fingertips tracing my flesh.

When I finally turned, he was already pulling his shirt off, and I mapped out the places I wanted to kiss.

His eyes were heavy, he looked almost pained.

We stepped into the shower together, the spray washing over our dirty skin, plastering my hair to my back.

His hands found my waist first.

Then my hips.

He slid his fingers over my stomach, up to my breasts, cupping them like he needed to memorize me.

I kissed him this time.

Pressed my mouth to his.

He groaned low in his throat, grabbing the back of my neck, deepening the kiss.

His mouth tasted like Hennessy. The water beat down on us, but I only felt him.

His tongue sliding against mine.

His hands everywhere.

His dick pressing against my thigh, hard and ready.

When he finally lined himself up, rubbing the head between my slick folds, I whimpered.

He pulled back just enough to look me dead in the eye.



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"You know you mine now?" he rasped.

I nodded, breathless.

"Sam... please."

He wrapped one big hand around my neck making me swallow my words.

He slid into me slowly, dragging a moan from both of us. He let my neck go so his forehead could rest against mine as he bottomed out inside me.

I clutched his shoulders, nails digging in, feeling the stretch, the ache, the overwhelming fucking relief of finally having him where I needed him.

He moved slow at first, deep and steady, like he had all the time in the world to tear me apart.

The water masked the soft, desperate sounds leaving my throat.

But nothing could hide the truth anymore.

I loved this man.

God, I loved him.

I wrapped my legs around his waist and he gripped my ass, lifting me higher, driving into me harder, deeper, until I was trembling against him.

"Like I was saying." He pushed deep enough for me to feel it in my stomach. "You're mine now," he growled into my neck, his teeth scraping my skin. "Ain't no walking away now. You came to me."

I cried out, the orgasm building sharp and fast, spiraling out of me until I was shaking uncontrollably.

When I came, it ripped out of me, soaking his dick, making him curse low and filthy against my mouth.

He fucked me through it, holding me so tight I couldn't even think about running.

"Shhh, baby. That's it," he growled in my ear, voice low and thick with need. "Ride that shit. I got you."

He kissed me hard, like he needed my breath to finish. When he came, it was with a deep grunt, grinding into me, burying himself as deep as he could.

We stayed tangled under the water—his fingers running slow and steady down my spine, my forehead pressed to the warm strength of his collarbone.

And for the first time in a long, long time—

I didn't feel empty.

## Chapter 22- Zane

The rain had stopped sometime after midnight, but we were still tangled in Sam's bed, smelling like soap and each other.

I lay sprawled across his chest, tracing slow circles on his skin, feeling the deep,

steady beat of his heart under my palm.

I should have been home. I'd cut my phone off to stop it from vibrating.

We were both too lazy to move, and too caught up to pretend we wanted to be anywhere else.

“You know,” he said, voice rough from sleep, “the first girl I ever liked kicked me dead in the shin. She reminds me of you. She was cute and soft.”

I laughed, lifting my head to look at him.

“You're lying.”

“Swear to God,” he said, grinning. “Second grade. I told her she was pretty. She called me stupid and kicked me so hard my momma had to come get me.”

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I giggled. “You probably deserved it.”

“Probably,” he muttered, sliding his fingers up the curve of my thigh, squeezing lightly. “Would you have kicked me if I told you you were pretty?”

“Nah,” I said, grinning. “I would’ve tripped you.”

He laughed, deep and full.

But then his hand tightened on my hip, and when I looked up, his smile was gone.

His eyes were so serious.

His expression made my heart speed up.

“What’s wrong?”

“Listen to me,” he said, voice dropping into something rougher and harder. “When you go back over there... until everything is settled... no kissing him. No hugging him. No laying in bed with him.”

I blinked, stunned at how fast he switched.

At how much I liked the way his voice turned into a low growl just for me.

“Sam—”

“I’m serious,” he cut in. His thumb dragged slow against my side like he was branding me with every word. “No hand-holding. No letting him touch you. No letting him pretend he still got a right to you after what he did and how he treated you.”

I smiled against his chest, trying not to show how much it thrilled me that he cared enough to lay down rules.

I should have been a little scared by his tone, but I wasn’t. I somehow knew he only had good intentions for me. You know how you can just feel it? I never felt that with Mark. I understood why now.

“You sound like you ready to fight somebody over me,” I teased, pressing a kiss just under his jaw.

“I’ll fight him,” he said, dead serious. “I’ll fight whoever I need to.”

I couldn’t help it.

I laughed. Soft and low.

“And if I don’t follow your rules, are you going to fight me?”

He gave me a serious look. “No, I’ll whoop his ass twice.”

I rolled my eyes.

“Fine,” I said, dragging my nails lightly across his stomach and feeling his heartbeat skip. I did it again. “But then you gotta listen to my rules too.”

He cocked an eyebrow, amused. “I’m a man. I don’t have rules.”

I frowned. “I will bite you on your dick.” I warned him.

He laughed.

“I’m for real,” I said, sitting up a little, straddling his waist. “No flirting with your wife. No smiling at her. No talking sweet to her, even if it’s fake. Don’t even look at her for too long. Your eyes mine now.” I said, being a little possessive myself.

He made a sound low in his throat—something like a grunt and a growl mixed.

“I’m not going within fifty feet of her ever again,” he said, grabbing my hips and squeezing. “Soon as the papers are filed, I’m gone. I ain’t got shit to say to her.”

I bit my lip, trying to hold back my smile.

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Trying not to let him see how much I loved hearing that.

We both went quiet after that, the air between us thicker now, heavier.

Finally, he spoke again, voice rough and careful.

“You think you might be pregnant?”

The question hung there.

I swallowed hard.

Shrugged.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I’m late... but I’m always late.”

He nodded once, slow, like he was already making plans no matter what the answer was.

“If you are,” he said, voice firm, “we do the same thing we doing now. Figure it out.

Ain’t no running. Ain’t no pretending. We make it work—despite anything or anyone.”

My throat burned, and I had to blink fast to keep the tears back.

I leaned down, kissed him slow, grinding my hips just enough to feel his dick waking

up.

He groaned low in his chest, grabbing my ass in both hands, rolling his hips up into me.

I smiled against his mouth—then pulled back fast, laughing.

“I’m hungry,” I said, popping up off him.

He lay there for a second, staring at me like he was trying to decide if he should drag me back down and finish what we started or not. He threw an arm over his eyes and let out a deep, suffering groan.

“You are evil for that, pretty,” he muttered. “But most pretty things are evil.”

I laughed harder, turning toward the door. “You’re being dramatic.”

Before I could get two steps away, he was up.

He moved fast.

He caught me around the waist, lifted me straight off the ground like I didn’t weigh a thing, and carried me toward the kitchen.

“Sam!” I squealed, laughing, hitting his shoulder.

“You play too damn much,” he grumbled, but he was smiling.

We didn’t talk about anything solid that night. Just made promises we should have talked about more. I knew and he knew our expectations were too high and that this probably wouldn’t end well, but we pretended. And even pretending, somehow felt



more real than anything I ever made with Mark.

## Chapter 23- Mark

I banged on Janet's front door hard enough to wake the dead.

Three days.

Three goddamn days.

Zane hadn't been home since Monday morning. She said she was going to meet Sam at some job site, and I hadn't heard from her since. No texts. No calls. No passive-aggressive notes on the fridge. Nothing. And now, her phone was off.

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I knew something was off. Knew it the second she started walking around the house in silence, started sleeping in the guest room, and asking me about money and deeds. Stuff that wasn't her business.

She was thinking too much. I didn't like when Zane thought. That wasn't her role. That was mine. She was there to cook and clean and look pretty. All the men at the office envied me because I had her.

The door swung open. Janet stood on the other side in a silk robe barely covering the black lingerie underneath. Her hair was curled. Lipstick perfect.

I didn't care.

I wasn't here for that.

"Where's your husband?" I demanded, voice clipped.

She blinked, lips parted slightly. "Excuse you?"

"My wife hasn't been home in three days. She said she was meeting Sam at a site. I haven't seen her since, and your husband's not answering the phone."

Janet folded her arms under her chest, clearly annoyed I wasn't drooling over the view.

"Why would she be meeting him at a site?"

"He hired her."

Her brows pulled tight. "He what?"

I exhaled sharply through my nose. "He came to my house to pick up some papers and then they dropped the bomb on me that he hired her. She hinted at me having an affair. I had to let her."

Janet tilted her head slightly. "Sam didn't mention her. Not once."

"Convenient," I muttered.

She pulled her phone out and tapped quickly.

I pushed past her into the house and paced her floor.

Why would Zane not come home?

She wasn't bold. She wasn't brave. She was trained better than that. I'd spent years refining her. Breaking the spirit she had when we first met. Zane wasn't strong-headed, but she was smart. She pushed back, sure—but I studied psychology. I studied people. Judges, jurors, liars, and weak-willed women. I knew how to break her bad habits. With time, Zane had stopped needing her own opinion. She started looking to me before she spoke. That was peace.

Janet's phone buzzed.

"It's him," she said.

"Don't tell him I'm here—just say you heard."

She hit speaker.

"Yeah?" Sam's voice filled the room.

"Where's Zane?" she asked.

"The neighbor? Why the hell would I know?" he replied. Too calm to be guilty.

"You hired her," Janet snapped. "She was supposed to meet you on-site Monday morning. She never came back home."

"That doesn't have shit to do with me. I sent her to the site. With the other crew members. She didn't show. I didn't think about it—thought her husband told her no."

"Where are you again?" Janet asked.

"North Florida," Sam said, irritation seeping through the speakers. "I told you. I got a few jobs here after the conference. I'll be back in a few weeks."

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Janet looked at me.

"When did you hire her?" she asked him, her voice tight.

Sam paused. "She was walking past the house while I was working on my car a while ago. Said she needed work. I gave her some. Same as I did for a couple other neighbors. You know I help when I can."

I frowned. Fucking do-gooder. This was his fault.

Janet nodded slowly like it suddenly made sense.

Sam's tone shifted. "Why are you interrogating me?"

She stumbled over her words. "I—I was just surprised. That's all. Never mind."

She hung up without another word.

I stared at her. "You believe him?"

She gave a half-smile. "Your wife is not his type, so that's not something we have to worry about."

"Excuse me?" What the fuck did she mean my wife wasn't his type? If Janet was his type, he would have no problem being attracted to Zane. She was young, pretty—she had the things Black guys liked.

Janet stepped forward, and I knew she was about to toe the line I kept telling her not to cross. I would never leave Zane for her. I wasn't stupid.

"Zane's probably off pouting, trying to get your attention. You ignored her too long. She'll be back. But if she doesn't—" Her eyes dropped to my chest, then lower. "—then I guess I get to keep you all to myself."

Something inside me snapped.

I shoved her. Hard.

"That's my wife you're talking about."

She stumbled back, but the smile never left her face. "You're right. I'm sorry."

Then she dropped to her knees in front of me like she'd been waiting for that moment all night.

"Accept my apology?" she pouted up at me, her big blue eyes exuding fake innocence.

Her hands moved quickly as she undid my belt and pants. My mind was occupied with other things though.

This was why I never let Zane go anywhere.

Janet distracting me by opening her mouth and taking what I gave her, without words, and right now, that's exactly what I needed—control.

Something I hadn't had since Monday.

My thoughts blurred as I stared down at the top of her head.

Zane was different than Janet in more ways than one.

Beautiful, but naïve. And she never quite fit into the mold my parents wanted for me. They didn't like her background. Thought she wasn't cultured enough. And truthfully, they were right.

Though her parents were lawyers and she came from some money, they weren't wealthy—and they were social justice warriors. They never liked me either.

Zane was eager to please me back when I met her. She ignored her parents when they told her not to marry me. She was willing to change her wayward ways. She wanted to be enough for me, and I made sure she believed she never would be—unless she had me.

But Janet? She'd always been wild. I met her when I was a senior in high school. She was a freshman, mouthy, and ready for everything the world told her not to want. I took her virginity in the back of my father's car, and we were together that entire summer.

Then I went to college. We lost touch.

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Years later, I moved into this neighborhood with my perfect little wife—and Janet was next door. Married now, but still wild, still needy. Still tempting. She was easy to buy with a few handbags and shoes.

She wasn't as beautiful as Zane. Not as soft. Didn't smell as good. Didn't fuck as well.

But cheating with Janet scratched something in me.

Made me feel powerful.

Especially knowing her husband was some young thug who she said could have any woman he wanted. But I could have his wife. That made me better.

Knowing she was crawling on her knees for me, not him, made me want to beat my chest.

I tangled my fingers in Janet's hair, sat back onto the sofa. She didn't drop my dick from her mouth as I leaned back.

Zane would come back.

She always did.

But if she didn't...

Well.



There were plenty of ways to make her regret it.

I closed my eyes and let myself enjoy my win.

Chapter 24- Zane

I couldn't believe how fast a week passed.

A whole friggin' week.

Seven days of waking up tangled in Sam's sheets.

Going to sleep every night with my legs shaking, heart still racing. Exhausted from being fucked dang near into a coma.

Seven days of not going home. Not checking in. Not facing any of my responsibilities.

We'd just been working, fucking, enjoying our time together.

But Monday was coming.

Sunday night, I had to face facts. I needed to go home.

Mark had called my parents.

My mama was blowing up my phone like I was seventeen again.

I couldn't hide anymore.

I sat up in bed, the sun barely up.

I tugged Sam's T-shirt down over my bare thighs.

He was naked, half-asleep, sprawled out looking relaxed.

"I gotta go this morning, Sam," I said quietly.

He didn't move at first.

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Just let out a low grunt like I was already getting on his nerves.

“Go where?” His voice was thick, lazy. But I could hear the shift. He was wide awake

“Home, Sam. Mark called my parents and now they’re calling me like I’m a runaway. I should’ve taken my behind home after work six days ago. I gotta go.”

Still, he didn’t move.

Just blinked slow, then slid his hand down his chest to his abs. His dick was half hard, laying against his thigh.

He was a hot sleeper. He never wore clothes to bed or even used covers.

My eyes got stuck on the thing that had caused me so my pleasure. My coochie twitched.

“You been here all week,” he said, voice deepening. “Might as well stay until you’re ready to go. Not because you’re getting calls.”

If it was up to me, I wouldn’t be leaving.

“Sam, I’m so serious. And what about me staying so your wife doesn’t get suspicious, until the private investigators gets all the evidence you need? You don’t think this is suspicious? I leave the house going to a job you gave me and then disappear. I’m thinking they’ll start to figure out one plus one equals two.”

“So am I. I’m serious. Fuck it. You being there ain’t really helping now that I think about it.”

Before I could roll my eyes good, he grabbed my wrist and yanked me towards him. My body landed on top of his, and before I could fight, his lips were on my neck, and he had already pushed his shirt up and his hand was between my thighs.

“Sam,” I whispered, trying to squirm, but my hips betrayed me.

They always did when it came to him.

“Stop playing,” he muttered against my skin, already pushing my panties to the side. “You know you not going nowhere.”

“Sam...”

“You leaving to do what? Go home to argue?” His fingers slid slow through my folds, through my wetness.

“You this wet and you worried about Mark? Fuck Mark.”

He flipped us fast, so he was on top of me, his weight pressing me into the mattress.

I tried to push at his shoulders,

“Stop,” he warned, and that was it. I stopped.

““Yes, daddy”” damn near slipped from my lips.

This man had too much control over me.

And I wasn't mad about it.

“You running from me now? You need space?” he asked softly, voice too calm to be safe.

His little bit of insecurity was actually endearing, as fucked up as it sounds.

“I'm not running—”

“It feel like you running from me,” he cut me off. “But I know how to make you stay,” he said while sliding his big ass dick inside of me in one deep stroke that had me gasping, and my nails sinking into his back.

“Sam... damn,” I moaned.

My whole body felt tight.

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He started pushing in and out of me.

He fucked hard and heavy.

Making sure I felt every inch.

A breath caught in my chest.

Every roll of his hips had my eyes rolling back.

Every thrust felt like he was fucking my willpower right out of me.

“You don’t wanna go home,” he whispered, lips brushing mine, lazy and cocky.

“You wanna be right here, letting me fuck you.”

“N-no...” I whispered just to be contrZane, even though my legs wrapped tighter around him on their own.

“Yeah,” he corrected. “You do.”

His hand slid up, fingers gripping my throat.

He squeezed until I was looking him dead in the eye.

I guess he wanted to witness my face while he ruined me.

“I’m not ready for you to go, Zane. You stuck now.”

I couldn't respond.

My whole body was tightening, teetering on that edge he loved to keep me on.

"You pissing me off.," he grunted, thrusting deeper.

"You don't even want to go home. So stop talking dumb shit about leaving."

I broke right there, mouth open, moaning too loud as my orgasm hit like a fucking truck.

He kept moving, kept riding me through it until I was clinging to him, tears burning the corners of my eyes.

When I caught my breath, he was staring down at me.

"You good now?" he asked, lips curling into a wicked grin.

I couldn't even speak.

He kissed my cheek soft, slowing down stroke, fucking me lazy now.

"You staying," he said simply.

He pulled out slow, and my pussy clenched, missing him already.

He didn't even cum. He was using his dick to just to prove a point.

Using his dick like a weapon.

He got on my nerves, but I think I loved him.

“I’m good for you, Zane. And you’re good for me, so stay for right now.”

He used that tone—like the Pied Piper playing his flute—while tapping his dick against my sensitive clit just to make me whimper.



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“You want to stay don’t you?”

I should’ve said no.

Should’ve gotten dressed and left.

This shit with Mark was going to get ugly.

“I’m gonna go cook. Make you something to eat for breakfast, then we’re going to finish our movie.”

He rolled off me and slapped my ass as I was on the way to the kitchen, saying, “Good girl.”

I skipped my happy as out of the room, knowing I wasn’t going home tonight.

Hell, I probably wasn’t going home this week either.

### Chapter 25- Mark

I had driven three hours to Zane’s parents’ house. It had been almost three weeks since she’d been home, and I planned to get to the bottom of this. I rang the bell once, resisting the urge to bang against the heavy wooden door. I had better things to do than chase after Zane, but she was forcing my hand.

The door cracked open, and her mother’s face appeared—tight and filled with contempt. Zane had obviously not gotten her looks from her overweight, plain-

looking mother.

“You have about five seconds to get off my porch.”

I didn't move. “I'm here for Zane.”

“She's not here.”

“Where is she?”

Her eyes narrowed. “Not your business anymore.”

“What does that mean? I'm her husband.” What had Zane been telling these people?

She stepped fully into the doorway now, hands on her wide hips. “Not for long.”

“I have a right to speak to my wife.”

“You had a right. Then you lost it.”

A car pulled into the driveway across the street. A boy stepped out with a backpack and looked at me.

“You okay, Mrs. Myrick?” he asked, scowling in my direction.

She nodded. “Go in the house, baby. He ain't nobody.” She waved him off before turning her attention back to me.

“I don't know how you thought knocking on my door would achieve anything. I don't like you. I saw through you and those cheap suits you wear the moment I laid eyes on your beady-eyed ass.”

I said nothing.

She shook her head slowly. “You are exactly the man I told her not to marry. Arrogant. Controlling. Weak.”

I raised a brow. “That’s rich, coming from someone who couldn’t spare a moment for their daughter. She’s who she is because of you.”

She leaned in, voice low, a smirk covering her face. “You get off my porch and leave my fucking daughter alone, Mark, or I swear to God, you will regret it.”

I adjusted my cufflinks slowly and schooled my features, though my muscles felt coiled. Zane’s mother, Susana, was one of those women who thought that because she had a degree and made as much money as a man, she didn’t have a place beneath men in this world. Her husband should have taught her that place.

“She will come back,” I said.

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She let out a laugh with no humor in it.

“And when she does,” I continued, stepping down from the porch, “I’ll make sure she never speaks to you again.”

Her smile didn’t fade—and that worried me.

I turned and walked off, ignoring the door as it slammed behind me, louder than it needed to be.

I crossed the street and got into my car, eyes fixed on the house as I drove away.

They thought they won.

But I wasn’t done.

Not even close.

I would find Zane.

Chapter 26- Zane

I had my feet on the dash, Anderson .Paak was spilling out of the speakers as the road stretched ahead of us in long, lazy lines. My phone buzzed for the third time in twenty minutes, and I didn’t even have to look to know who it was. My momma had been calling me for two days, but I already knew she was only going to tell me Mark had visited her. Sam’s investigator had already informed us. I found it funny—Mark

was running around looking for me but still fucking Sam's wife every night.

"Your mama and daddy?" Sam asked, one hand on the wheel, the other drawing circles on my thigh, making my nipple ache. This man had a way of turning me on with just a simple touch.

We were on the way to the resale warehouse I'd told him about. It was a four-hour drive, but we planned to make a day out of it.

I nodded, chewing my lip.

"You tell them about me yet?"

"I told them you're my boss."

He grunted, not hiding the smirk pulling at the corner of his mouth. "That what we're calling me? Your boss?"

I cut my eyes at him and laughed. "You want me to tell them I'm sleeping with a married man who's paying me—and I'm also married?"

"Damn," he muttered. "When you say it like that, this sounds like a scandal."

"It is. And you are scandalous."

He glanced over and gave me that lazy, cocky grin. "Yeah. But you like me this way."

I nodded, because I did.

The silence that followed was comfortable. Easy. Like breathing. I'd forgotten what

this kind of quiet felt like. It wasn't the same kind that came with the loneliness I'd been experiencing in my marriage.

Around noon, we stopped at a roadside farmer's market thirty minutes in. I grabbed two jars of honey and a bag of kettle corn. Sam paid without asking, then snuck off to buy a jar of something that looked suspiciously like moonshine. He winked like he had plans for it. I winked back because Sam fucked like a madman when he was drunk.

"I should probably call my momma back," I said before we got in the car.

Sam raised a brow. "You want space?"

"No," I said quickly. "I don't care if you hear. I'm just calling her to let her know I'm safe. She knows where I'm staying. I just don't want her to show up at your house with her pistol thinking I've been kidnapped because I'm not answering the phone."

He laughed.

I hit redial standing in the open door. My daddy answered. I could hear my momma coaching him in the background.

"Baby girl, you alright?"

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“I’m fine, Daddy. I meant to call Momma back, but I’ve been working hard on that house I told you about. I be tired.” It was mostly the truth.

“Where are you?”

“With my boss on a trip to buy supplies.”

My momma’s voice cut through the line next. “Are you safe?”

“I am. I swear.”

They asked too many questions. I gave them the answers they needed, and I promised to call them again tomorrow.

We got back on the road after that. It was less than an hour to our destination. I was leaning my head on the window, watching the trees blur, until Sam slowed down unexpectedly.

“Look,” he said, pointing to the right.

It was a sunflower field.

Not a patch—a whole field of them. The yellow heads swaying, reaching toward the sky like they were praise dancing.

“Pull over,” I whispered. Something about seeing them made me want to run through them, touch them.

We got out. Sam reached for my hand, his fingers threading through mine as we wandered deep into the rows.

In the middle of it all was a tall tree, half-swallowed by the edge of the field. Carved into the trunk were the words:

Love loves Kevlar

And under the name, someone had carved a tree, and each branch had a different name. There were fifteen—I'm assuming children and relatives.

I ran my fingers over the letters and imagined what they looked like. With names like Love and Kevlar, they were probably Black. With dark skin and nice-looking. People who carved their names in trees were always nice-looking in the movies.

Sam was quiet.

“You think they're still together?” I asked. Hoping they were, but not too much. It seemed too easy for love to dissipate. You could be carving your name into a tree one day and falling out of love the next.

He looked down at me, eyes soft.

“I do. I at least hope so, since they have such a big family tree.”

A crack of thunder rolled low in the distance, interrupting our conversation. We both looked up. The sky had shifted. Clouds were darkening fast.

The rain came suddenly—big, heavy drops fell from the sky like the clouds had just decided the earth needed renewal and opened.



My hair was silk-pressed, and the last thing I needed was for it to get soaked. I shrieked and tried to run, but Sam caught me from behind, spinning me into him, mouth crashing onto mine like he was starving. He fed me his tongue.

The kiss turned frantic. Then slow. Then everything in between.

I grabbed at his shirt, and he helped me peel it off, his hands sliding down my back like he couldn't get enough of me. We sank down into the grass, wet. I was so cold and trembling, half-mad with how much we needed this. Needed each other.

He pushed my dress up around my hips and slid my panties to the side and pushed inside me, sucking my titties as he stroked me slow. His dick caused a deep, aching stretch that burned. His body was warm despite the rain and wind. I clung to him. For warmth, for pleasure.

The sound of my name rolled off his tongue like a confession as he danced inside of me.

The rain soaked us both, my hair flattened to my scalp, his breath hot in my ear.

This shit felt magical.

“I love you,” I said.

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It slipped out. But it was true. I had known him for less than 90 days, and I was hopelessly, irrevocably in love. I'm talking about fight-a-bitch-in-the-street type crazy type love.

He stilled—just for a second. Then pushed deeper. Fucked me harder.

“I love you too, Zane.”

Luckily, my tears were hidden by the rain.

We stayed there, bodies tangled together, moving in the grass, the tree with someone else's love story watching over ours.

I closed my eyes, listening to his heartbeat under the storm. And for the first time in my whole damn life, I felt I actually understood what love meant—and felt like.

### Chapter 27- Sam

We walked into that hotel lobby looking like two people who'd been doing exactly what we'd been doing—fucking in the rain. I could tell by the all-white marble and fresh flowers and bellhops that smelled like cologne samples that this bitch was going to be expensive. My shirt and jeans were still half wet. It had been a terrible idea to have sex in the rain, but I couldn't help myself. I never could when it came to her.

People looked up from couches and cocktails like we didn't belong there. But I couldn't bring myself to give a single fuck.

I waited behind a white dude that reminded me of my father—the relaxed, down-to-earth type. His wife kept looking back at me with a snooty look on her face. But I didn't pay her any attention. My mind was back in the field of sunflowers.

I still couldn't believe Zane had exchanged "I love yous," but it had slipped out of both our mouths too easily. There was no second-guessing, just the truth soaking into our skin like the rain we'd lost ourselves in. And I could tell she meant it when she said it—I saw the tear she tried to hide.

This shit kind of felt surreal, because I thought I'd been in love before. With Janet. But now I realize that was just convenience. I wanted to settle down, and I convinced myself Janet was the one. But now, when I think about it, I don't even think I ever really liked her.

Maybe the same would happen with Zane.

The thought crept in before I could stop it. I turned to look at her.

Zane's hair clung to her face like wild vines. She stood by the elevator, covering her hard chest with her arms. She was trying to be unnoticed, but with her white dress clinging to her body and her pretty face, she was hard not to notice—at least to me.

She looked like love to me... the real kind. The kind that ruins your plans, fucks with your logic. She noticed me looking at her. She smiled in my direction, and my heart jumped. I sighed. I was gone.

I got the key cards and headed upstairs. The suite smelled like eucalyptus and money. The lights were soft, the bed was huge, and the A/C was blowing too cold for me.

I dropped our bags and peeled off my damp shirt. I had an extra one in my gym bag, but Zane had nothing. We hadn't planned on staying. She glanced over at me as I

took the jar of moonshine I'd bought from the bag.

"You really brought moonshine on a day trip?" she said, hands on her hips, grinning.

I chuckled but paused when I looked at her. "Yeah. I always stop and buy one when I'm up this way. I wasn't going to drink it. The owner can make it taste like strawberry cheesecake. You should try it."

As soon as I said the words, something clicked in my head. I'd been fucking her for weeks.

Raw.

No pulling out. Just straight fucking.

She reached for the jar and twisted the lid.

"Hold up," I said, suddenly serious.

She blinked. "Why not?"

I rubbed the back of my neck. "Because you shouldn't drink on an empty stomach. Just go hop in the shower, alright? I'ma run to the store real quick. Grab us some stuff. We'll order room service, then the drinks."

She frowned a little but didn't push. "Okay. Don't take forever." She handed me the jar and sauntered out of the room.

I left fast.

Went to the Target down the block, grabbed T-shirts, shorts, toothbrushes,

deodorant—random shit I thought she might need. Then I stood in front of the pregnancy test section trying to figure out what test to buy. I picked up two brands. Just in case.

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I grabbed her favorite candy too, the nasty things shaped like little dots that tasted like Play-Doh. I didn't overthink buying the test. It was just in case. But cool and calm didn't last past checkout.

By the time I got back to the room, my nerves were tight and my palms were sweating. She was sitting on the edge of the bed in one of the hotel towels, drying off.

She looked up when I walked in, and my chest squeezed.

"Got you some stuff," I said, setting the bag on the dresser.

Her eyes went through it fast, then stopped when she saw the pink box.

Her lips parted. "Sam..."

I sat down across from her, leaned forward with my elbows on my knees.

"I need you to take that," I said, quiet. "Please."

She held my gaze for a long second, then nodded slowly. "Okay."

She went into the bathroom without another word.

I sat still. Counting seconds. Thinking about how we'd been reckless under the circumstances but not being able to conjure up a bit of shame or guilt. We didn't start this. Janet and Mark did.

Five minutes felt like twenty.

When the door finally opened, she didn't say anything. Just walked over to the nightstand and turned the test around so I could see it.

Two lines.

Clear as day.

Shit.

"Shit," I said out loud before I could stop myself.

Her face shifted from neutral to sad. Her eyes dropped and her whole body went tight.

"You mad?" she asked, voice barely above a whisper.

"No," I said quickly, standing. I cupped her face in my hands. "No, no. I'm not mad. I swear."

She still looked unsure, like she was bracing for me to say something fucked up.

"I'm just thinking," I said. "I gotta move my whole damn timeline up now."

She blinked. "Timeline?"

"Yeah. My divorce. Your divorce. The wedding. All of it has to come before little SamKeisha gets here."

There was an awkward moment of silence before she blinked, then burst out

laughing.

“I swear to God you are not naming my baby SamKeisha—”

I kissed her, tasting her mouth.

This wasn't how I planned to do things.

But none of this had been planned.

Suddenly, she jerked back, eyes on mine, plush lips in a small “O.”



“Did you just say wedding?”

Chapter 28- Zane

Three days.

It had been three days since I peed on that stick and watched two pink lines show up and change my whole damn life.

I was spiraling.

I couldn't eat.

Couldn't sleep.

Couldn't stop thinking about what came next. I had pictured a thousand scenarios, and I couldn't picture this ending well.

Sam was in the living room after we'd come back from buying what was needed for the house we were working on. He was watching a game with the sound low and scrolling through all the pictures and videos the private investigator had sent him. He had been doing everything he promised.

I was sitting in the bedroom with a pillow clutched to my stomach like that would make the thoughts stop.

I was pregnant.

By a married man.

A married man I hadn't even known a full three months.

And now we were talking about getting married?

Like this was some Black romance fairytale.

My phone lit up with a message from my mama:

Call me. Now.

I didn't have the strength to reply.

I was scared I would bust out and tell her everything. And what did "Hey Momma, I'm pregnant by a married man" even sound like when I had just started talking to her again after making the mistake of marrying Mark and then spending years in silence?

I didn't even know how to explain this, and I didn't want to hear the disappointment in their silence already.

I dropped the phone face down.

I couldn't do it.

I turned over in bed, sighing.

What was Mark going to do?

He wasn't the type to just let shit go. I'd seen the look in his eyes when I crossed lines he didn't approve of. If he found out I was pregnant by another man?

He'd burn the whole world down trying to punish me.

The heat of shame crawled up my neck as I pressed my forehead to the pillow, eyes stinging.

I didn't hear Sam come in, but I felt the bed dip and knew he had.

He didn't say anything at first. Just rubbed the back of my thigh slow with the pads of his fingers, like he was easing up to whatever storm he felt coming off me.

"What's going on in that head, baby?" he asked, voice low and filled with warmth.

I didn't answer.

“You ghostin’ me in the same house now?” he teased. “Disrespectful ass.”

I turned my head, blinking up at him. “This is a mess,” I managed, even though his words made me think about him fucking me in the kitchen back at Mark’s house—and caused a little tingle.

He raised a brow. “You mad you’re pregnant?”

“No,” I said quickly. “Not that. I wanted this. It’s just... I don’t know. Everything.”

He nodded like he understood. “Talk to me.”

I wrapped my arms around myself without thinking, like I needed something to hold me still.

“I’m pregnant by a married man,” I blurted, sitting up. “And I’m married. And now we’re talking about getting married like that makes it make sense.”

He just tilted his head and waited for me to finish.

“What’s my mom gonna say? What’s my daddy gonna say? And what the hell is Mark gonna do when he finds out?” My voice cracked. “He’s not gonna let this go.”

Sam reached out and grabbed both my hands, pulled me closer.

“I know exactly what kind of man Mark is,” he said. “And fuck him, really. You don’t have to deal with him, so it doesn’t matter. Let me handle Mark, and you handle nourishing our baby.”

My throat tightened. I blinked hard, trying not to cry harder.

“I got you,” he said. “Not just when shit feels good. I got you when it’s complicated. I got you when you panicking. I got you when the whole world don’t make sense and you feel like you don’t deserve this. You do. You deserve me, and I deserve you. You happy, ain’t you?”

Tears filled my eyes so fast it pissed me off. I nodded. “I’m so fucking happy.”

I don’t think he could help the smirk that tilted his lips. He was so self-assured it could come off as cocky sometimes—but I liked it.

“You think I’m rushing this,” he said, voice softer now. “But baby, you were telling me you wanted exactly what’s happening before the test even came back. You were begging for it.”

His hand slid up my thigh, gripping the meatiest part. He squeezed, and I almost moaned and forgot what we were talking about.

“I don’t care if it’s fast. I just care that it’s real. And what we have is real.”

I swallowed hard, the panic still buzzing in my chest—but not as loud. I don’t know if it was because he was touching me or because I actually believed what he was saying.

“You’re gonna be a mother,” he said, lifting my hand and kissing the inside of my palm. “And I’m gonna be a father—and whatever else you need me to be to make

you feel safe. Fuck everything else, because me and you and this baby the only people who matter.”

He reached up and grabbed my jaw, focusing me, his eyes meeting mine. “You understand?”

I nodded.

“Nah, baby. I need you to use your words.”

“I understand,” I said.

He smiled, all thirty-two of his pearly white teeth on display.

I leaned in, pressed my forehead to his, and whispered, “I’m scared.”

He kissed me slow. “Me too. But we in this. And baby, I’m not going nowhere.”

His hand that was on my thigh moved closer to my pussy. He pushed the fabric of my panties to the side.

“Lay back. A nut will calm you down faster than words.”

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I did what he said because he was right..

Heart pounding, my core heating.

Our new life wasn't perfect.

But I did want it more than I ever wanted anything before.

Chapter 29- Mark

It had been six months since Zane disappeared.

And not the kind of "I need space" disappearance.

I meant gone. Vanished. Like someone wiped her off the damn map.

I'd sat outside her parents' house for three days straight. Watched the door. Watched the windows. And still... not a single glimpse of her.

Nothing.

The private investigator I'd paid good money—more than I should've—came up with less than nothing. He stopped answering my calls two weeks ago.

And then, as if to rub salt in a festering wound, both Janet and I received divorce papers on the same day.

I didn't need a damn psychic to tell me why.

Sam.

I'd underestimated that bastard. Something in the back of my mind had told me he was involved. I'd thought that since he showed up at my house that night. But I also thought he was just a construction thug who lucked into a few good contracts and a pretty wife. No way Zane would want someone like him.

And now he'd either brainwashed her, or she was too weak to say no.

I blamed Janet.

She was the crack in the dam.

If she hadn't seduced me, none of this would've happened. It was too risky. Too close to home.

Janet walked into her bedroom, makeup perfect, sipping some overly sweet drink out of a wine glass like she didn't have a goddamn care in the world.

"Stop staring at me like that," she said casually, not even bothering to sit.

"If you'd kept your legs closed, none of this would've happened."

She rolled her eyes. "What are you talking about?"

"You're the reason we both got divorce papers."

"If you really cared about your wife, you wouldn't have been fucking me. And it's not like I'm the first woman you cheated on her with," she said smugly.



The words were like a slap in the face.

So I returned the favor.

Literally.

My hand connected with her cheek so fast I didn't even think. The sound echoed through her apartment. She staggered back, eyes wide, mouth open.

“You fucking bastard,” she whispered, one hand flying to her cheek. “You put your hands on me?”

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“You better learn not to run your fucking mouth like that. Don’t talk about my wife like that.”

“I wasn’t talking about her,” she snapped. “I was talking about you. If you weren’t such a controlling, weak-ass man, you might’ve kept her.”

“I did keep her,” I growled. “For years. Until you ruined it.”

“No, Mark,” she said, voice shaking now—but not with fear. “You did that all by yourself.”

She stepped back, toward the phone on the counter. “I’m calling the police.”

I froze.

Just for a second.

Long enough to realize the panic thudding in my chest wasn’t fear of her—

It was fear of losing everything I’d built.

My reputation.

My career.

The power I’d spent years wrapping around me like armor.

All unraveling because one woman walked away.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

I was the one who was supposed to leave.

The one who filed.

The one who got the last word.

Instead, I was standing in someone else's house, desperate, humiliated, and seconds away from a police report.

"Janet," I said, breath ragged. "Don't do this."

"Get out," she snapped, pointing at the door with tears pooling in her eyes. "I already signed the papers. Sam gave me a hundred grand just to walk away. I don't need you anymore."

I clenched my jaw. That bastard bought her off.

I turned, walked out before I did something worse.

I barely remembered the walk home. My mind was running wild with pieces I couldn't put together. All I knew was this—

Sam and Zane had been cheating before she left.

They had to be.

And somehow, he'd convinced her to vanish and erase me from her life like I was

some minor footnote in her past.

I realized how illogical my thoughts were, but they also sounded true to me.

This shit was driving me crazy.

Chapter 30- Sam

I hadn't expected to cry in the doctor's office.

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But there I was—grown, tattooed, built like a man who'd spent years in the gym—wiping my face with the hem of my T-shirt while the ultrasound tech pointed at the blurry image on the screen like it was something miraculous.

“She’s measuring perfectly,” the tech said. “Nice strong heartbeat.”

Her voice sounded distant, muffled beneath the rush of blood in my ears. Everything was blurry. The room, the sound, the weight of Zane’s hand in mine. I hadn’t even realized I was crying until Zane turned to me, her lips forming the words, You okay?

I nodded, swallowing hard. “Yeah,” I whispered. “I’m good.”

But the truth was, good didn’t come close. I was stunned. I’d helped make a child. We had. Me and her. On some romantic type shit. I didn’t feel like I deserved it.

After the appointment, we walked out hand in hand, her belly starting to show.

“Janet signed the papers,” I said as we waited at the crosswalk.

Zane raised an eyebrow. “For real?”

“Yeah. Guess she finally believed I was serious. Especially after the hundred grand I dropped into her account.”

She laughed. “That’s all? I thought she’d hold out for more.”

I smirked. “She thought it was half my money.”

Her mouth fell open. “She seriously thought that was half? With how much you work?”

“Yep,” I said, chuckling. “Didn’t even question it. Didn’t ask for lawyers. That and the house was enough.” I didn’t even have to mention the camera in the house or what the private investigator found.

Zane leaned into me, resting her head on my shoulder. “I still can’t believe you gave her the house. That’s a nice house.”

“Didn’t want it,” I said simply. “Too many memories I’m not carrying forward.”

She nodded, quiet.

I glanced down. “You good?”

“Yeah,” she said. “I think so.”

But she didn’t sound sure. I knew she was probably thinking about Mark not signing his papers. I was going to give it a few more weeks before I knocked on his door.

I let it be, though—opened the car door for her and helped her inside. We were headed somewhere I knew would lift her mood: the house.

Her house.

Or at least, the one she’d always described to me. A wraparound porch, blue shutters, a kitchen big enough for a long table and too many chairs. She’d mentioned it once, not even thinking I was paying attention. But I’d written it all down after she fell asleep that night, then found a place that matched it exactly.

“Where are we going?”

I kept my eyes on the road. “To view the property you wanted.”

The house sat forty minutes outside Clearwater. It was old but solid, recently renovated, full of possibility. Just like her.

“You really think we can get it?” she asked as we pulled into the gravel driveway.

“Already made the offer,” I said. “We just need to walk through it one more time, make sure you love it.”

Out of my peripheral, I saw her watching me. She stared at me like she didn’t know what to do with the way I loved her. And that shit made my soul feel funny as fuck. I knew it was my soul because that feeling didn’t sit in my chest or my gut—it settled deeper, like something ancient and quiet had been sparked inside me.

I parked the car and killed the engine in the driveway of what would become our home together, but neither of us moved right away. The house stood in front of us, bathed in late afternoon light. Zane’s fingers tightened around mine just slightly, like she was afraid if she let go, this might all disappear.

“We are really doing this?” she asked softly—not a question.

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“You sound scared. You don’t want this?” My heart kicked up a beat.

She looked at the house again, then back at me—eyes wide, full of everything I didn’t have words for. Then suddenly she was nodding, fast, like she couldn’t say it quick enough.

“Yes,” she said. “Yes, I want this house. Yes, I want you. Yes to all of it. Don’t say stupid fucking stuff.”

I smiled at that last part because I seemed to be rubbing off on her. Zane eight months ago would’ve never talked like she was. Before I could point it out, she leaned over the console and kissed me. Hard.. Like she needed me to feel everything she couldn’t say out loud. Her hands slid to the back of my head, her lips moved against mine with so much emotion it damn near knocked the breath out of me.

I almost cried again.

I kissed her deeper instead. Let my soul talk to hers for a while before pulling back. She stared at me, eyes all glazed like she wanted to pull me back into her.

“If you don’t stop looking at me, I will fuck you in broad daylight in this car.” My voice was so deep it sounded almost like I was growling. I didn’t give her time to answer. I adjusted my dick—it was so hard it almost ached—got out of the car and made my way to the passenger side.

I helped her out of the car and up to the house. I held the door open, letting her explore. Her fingers traced the walls, her bare feet padding across the new wood



floors. In the nursery, she paused, touching her belly as if she could already see it—our life here.

“We could grow old in this place,” she said softly.

I stepped behind her. “That’s the plan.”

By the time we left, she was smiling too big.

We stopped for dinner at a quiet little spot nearby—nothing fancy, just good food and soft music. She ordered salmon and lemonade. I got a steak but barely finished it because I was too busy watching her face every time she laughed.

That was enough for me.

She slid the dessert menu toward me. “You want something sweet?”

“Already got you.”

She rolled her eyes, but she was smiling. “Corny.”

“Maybe. But true.”

We paid and stood to leave, her hand slipping into mine like it belonged there. Because it did.

We were halfway out the door, stepping into the cool night air, when a voice cut through the quiet.

“Zane?”

She froze.

I turned just in time to see Mark standing near the curb, holding the hand of a woman who looked like she'd stepped out of a magazine—long blond hair, pretty face, clearly confused.

But Mark wasn't looking at her.

His eyes were locked on Zane.

Then they flicked to me.

And just like that, all the anger he'd probably been holding back for the past six months erupted.

“Motherfucker,” he growled, and before I could react, he was striding toward us—chest out, fists clenched, face twisted with rage.

I moved in front of Zane because I'd be damned if he touched her.

“Nah,” I said, holding up a hand. “Not here.”

But he didn't stop.

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His girl was yelling something, but he wasn't listening.

I braced myself, adrenaline surging. I wasn't about to let him near her. Not now. Not ever.

Without turning, I said her name. "Get in the car, baby."

"No," she said, her voice shaking.

"Get in the fucking car, Zane," I barked, then lowered my voice. "Trust me."

Mark was too close for her to walk away though.

"Six months," he spat. "More than six fucking months, and this is where I find you? Knocked up? With him?"

Zane didn't answer. Just stared at him like he wasn't worth the breath it would take to respond. Good girl.

He kept going despite her silence. "You ruined my marriage," he hissed at me. Then gave his attention back to Zane "You think this is gonna last? You think he loves you? He's using you, Zane."

"You don't know shit about me," I finally said. "But you're about to learn if you don't go back to your fucking date, bitch-ass."

His hand twitched like he might swing.

I almost hoped he would.

I was ready.

Then Zane's voice cut through the tension.

“Mark, if you touch him, I swear to God, I'll have my lawyer ask for half of everything you got. I've got months of pictures of you fucking his wife and several women from your firm to make sure I get it. Leave me the fuck alone.”

His mouth moved like he might say something. I focused on the fear in his eyes.

She wasn't afraid of him anymore.

And that terrified him.

She stepped up beside me. “I'm not your wife anymore, Mark. And I'm not coming back. So take your little girlfriend and go the fuck away from me.”

Mark looked like he'd swallowed glass. He said nothing. Just stood there, breathing hard, before finally turning and storming off down the sidewalk—his girl scrambling after him in her heels.

I exhaled, realizing only then that I'd been holding my breath.

Zane looked up at me.

“I'm shaking,” she whispered.

I pulled her close. “It's over.”

“No, it’s not. He’s going to cause trouble.”

“I know. But he won’t touch you.”

She was everything to me.

And after tonight, I knew one thing for certain and two things for sure—

She was going to be protected.

Even if it meant putting Mark in the ground myself.

### Chapter 31- Mark

The curtains she had loved were the first thing to go.

I'm not entirely sure why I started with them—maybe because they'd witnessed everything and done nothing when she walked out. Maybe because destroying something she'd chosen felt like the beginning of justice.

My heart hammered in my chest as I tore them straight off the rods, listening to the metal rings clatter against the hardwood floor like scattered bones. When I threw them across the living room, they landed in a heap.

It felt wrong, but I could do what I fucking wanted—this was my house. Every inch of it—the design, the renovations, the furniture—paid for with my money.

I picked up a lamp next, hurling it with enough force to shatter the base into jagged white fragments across the floor. The destruction felt good. Necessary.

In the hallway, our wedding photo still sat on the table.

I stared at it for a beat too long before slamming the frame against the wall.

Glass bit into my palm, but I barely felt it. Physical pain was nothing compared to the hollow, gnawing betrayal in my chest—the kind I couldn't out-argue, out-earn, or drink away.

“She made a fool out of me,” I muttered, pacing like I was cross-examining ghosts.

“Fucking played me.”

By morning, everybody at my firm would know—because Jenny didn’t know how to keep her bleached blonde mouth shut.

I should’ve never fucked a secretary.

I threw my head back and screamed. The sound that came out was animalistic.

I had given Zane everything—security, a respected name, a life without struggle.

And now?

Now she was playing house with some blue-collar nobody who thought swinging a hammer made him a man.

I ripped the throw pillows from the couch and hurled them across the room, knocking over the Charleston vase she’d insisted we buy.

When that wasn’t enough, I punched the drywall.

She thought she could just be with him and disappear.

I wouldn’t let her.

“You think this ends because you sent me some papers, you fucking bitch!”

Blood dripped from my cut palm.

I wrapped it in a dish towel, pulling it tight until the skin beneath turned white.

“This isn’t over,” I said to the empty room. “You think I’ll vanish from your life like some bad memory? That’s not how this works.”

Down the hall, I opened the safe.

My .45 sat inside.

I didn’t reach for it—just stared, contemplating.

Dark thoughts lingered in the back of my mind.

I could kill both of them.

I sat there, staring at the gun for longer than I should have before forcing myself back into the living room.



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*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 9:12 am*

I sank onto the couch—the same one where she used to lay with her head in my lap while I read briefs or watched the game.

And now she was pregnant by somebody else.

Telling me she was leaving me.

I just stared ahead, jaw locked, replaying the humiliation of seeing her swollen belly.

She had walked out without looking back.

Turned our marriage into a phase.

I clenched my fists until the cut in my palm throbbed in time with my pulse.

She would pay.

Maybe not today.

Maybe not tomorrow.

But the world had a way of circling back.

I had no plan. Just rage.

And sometimes, for men like me, that was enough.

## Chapter 32- Zane

I hadn't had my nails done in months. Not since before the morning sickness kicked in and life started moving fast and loud and messy.

Sam told me he was taking me to get them done. I knew he was trying to keep my mind off Mark. He'd called my lawyer the night after the restaurant incident and demanded I meet him before he would sign the papers. Neither my lawyer nor Sam thought that was a good idea.

We pulled up to a Black-owned spot in Tampa I'd heard about on TikTok.

Sam opened the door for me and planned to try.

The smell of lemongrass, peppermint oil, and cocoa butter hit me first.

I was waiting at the reception desk when Sam grabbed my face and turned me so I was looking at him. He smiled—that same cocky, melt-you-down smile he always had when he was up to something.

“What?” I asked, half-frowning.

“You said you wished you had a friend to go baby shopping with—for the baby, the shower, and all that...”

I blinked at him, confused. “Okay... and?”

“So why not the OG? Your day one?”

“What are you—”

“Look,” he said, stopping me mid-sentence, pointing toward the back of the shop.

I turned my head and saw her.

Tocara.

Thick and glowing, standing behind the reception desk like she owned the damn place. Big curls piled on top of her head, gold hoops swaying, her eyes locking on mine.

“Bitch,” she breathed.

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I almost cried.

“Tocara?” My voice cracked, and I didn’t even care. I moved before I could think, wobbling around the desk with my belly leading the way. She met me halfway, arms already wide.

We hugged so tight my chest burned.

“I been looking for you since I moved back two years ago,” she whispered. “You disappeared.”

“I got married,” I choked. “So much happened.”

She pulled back, holding me at arm’s length. “I heard from your man. Girl, we got catching up to do.”

Sam slid out like magic, telling me he had errands to run. He left his card at the front and told the receptionist, “Whatever she wants, she gets.”

Me and Tocara talked like no time had passed. She did my nails while grilling me like a big sister. I told her everything—Mark, the divorce, Sam, the baby.

“He really loves you,” she said, eyes warm. “I can tell. We talked a few times since he contacted me. And I’m not just saying that ’cause he brought your ass back to me.”

We stayed at the shop for two hours, then grabbed dinner at a little Cuban spot Sam

picked out for us. Tocara was in the middle of telling me about her fiancé and why she moved back to Florida.

“Found out he was community dick,” she said, chasing the words with a bite of black beans and rice. “Caught him in my damn bed with this bitch named Shandra. My bridesmaid. Supposed-to-be business partner.”

My mouth fell open. “In your house?”

“Leaving cum stains in sheets I bought. Candles I liked, even listening to the playlist I made. All I heard was moaning and Tank.”

I gasped. “Tank is sacred!”

“Right?!” she said, shaking her head. “I’m standing there with a bag of shrimp from Publix, talking about, ‘Babe, I got your favorite—’ and there go Shandra, tooted up, airing her ass out on my shit like she paid rent.”

I clutched my chest. “What did you do?”

She didn’t even blink. “Dropped the shrimp. Grabbed the bat. Beat the both of them out my house, naked.”

I nearly choked on my drink. “Noooo.”

“They tripped over each other trying to get out. She tried to press charges on me and everything,” she said proudly, then sipped her drink. “I don’t do betrayal. You gon’ feel me if you fuck over me.”

I nodded, heart squeezing. “That’s why I needed you back. This baby needs aunties who don’t play.”

Tocara reached across the table, her fingers grazing mine. “And you gon’ have me.”

Right then, Sam appeared at the table, hand brushing my shoulder. “Sorry to interrupt, but I think we should head out. You’re getting tired. I’ve been watching you for the past five minutes, your eyes lolling.”

I opened my mouth to protest, but Tocara smiled knowingly. “Go on, mama. Let your man take you home. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

We stood, hugged tight like no time had passed.

She promised to come with me to my next ultrasound and threw out baby shower themes before we parted ways.

I didn’t know how much I needed that.

I felt full. Not just from the food—but from life. From friendship. From something that felt like real joy.

Sam pulled up in the truck, already out the driver’s seat, passenger door open for me.

“You good?” he asked, brushing hair from my face.

“I’m perfect,” I said. “Thank you.”

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He grabbed my arm to help me in. I pulled away to face him.

“I got a question. What is wrong with you? You’re too perfect not to be hiding something.” The thought had me staying up at night. It didn’t make no sense how fucking good this man was to me.

“What’s wrong with me?” he repeated, like he was trying the words on for size. “Plenty.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“I got a temper I’ve spent years learning how to leash. I fucked over a lot of women. I don’t like being questioned too much. I can be mean and abrupt. I ain’t perfect, Zane. Not even close.”

He looked me in the eyes. “But I’m honest. I’m yours. And I don’t play about people I love.”

His voice softened.

“So yeah, maybe there’s shit wrong with me. But none of it will ever affect you or my child.” He raised his hand, bringing his thumb to my lips to trace the curve of the bottom one as he leaned in. “You lucked up, baby. You fucked around and found me after I finally became a man.”

Swoon. I swear I almost melted right there into the sidewalk.

“Say something. You got this weird look on your face,” he murmured, his deep voice sliding right over every nerve ending I had.

“I think...” I swallowed, blinking slow. “I’d fight a bitch over you. I ain’t never been in a fight, but I would.”

I said, then slid into the car while he threw his head back and laughed.

We were pulling into the gravel drive of the Airbnb where it all started. We would be there for another three months while our house was being renovated.

I was halfway out the car when a hand grabbed my upper arm and yanked me fully up.

“What the fuck—”

I didn’t even get the sentence out.

Mark.

His face was red, his eyes wild, and his breath hit me in the face, stinking like cheap liquor and anger.

“I saw you. You have a lot of nerve parading around town like this. As if I’m not still your husband?”

“Let go of me!” I shoved at him, panic flaring in my chest, my heart threatening to break out of my rib cage.

“Mark!” I heard Sam yell.



Mark had me in his grip.

Then he didn't.

Sam snatched him off me with the force of a wrecking ball. They stumbled back, and Mark swung on Sam first. His punch was sloppy, wild, hitting nothing but air.

He missed.

Sam didn't.

His fist connected with Mark's jaw so hard I heard it and flinched. Then Mark lunged at Sam, taking both him and Sam to the ground, fists flying, limbs tangled, cursing loud enough to wake the neighborhood.

"Stop!" I screamed. "Stop it!"

But it was too late.

Someone must have called the police, because soon red and blue lights painted the driveway, and stern voices shouted commands.

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By the time the officers pulled them apart, Sam's lip was split, Mark's eye was swelling shut, and both men were breathing like enraged bulls.

When the police asked me what happened, I told the truth.

It didn't matter—they cuffed them both anyway.

“Just procedure,” one officer said, as if that made it okay.

As they led Sam to the squad car, our eyes met. He didn't look angry, just calm, steady—like this was just another obstacle we'd overcome.

“Don't worry,” he mouthed.

I glared at Mark as I clutched my belly and watched them both being driven away in the police cruisers.

Tears spilled down my cheeks. I didn't even try to stop them this time.

Mark had lost his damn mind.

That wasn't what love was supposed to look like.

But Sam fighting for me, protecting me, made it feel like it was.

Chapter 32- Sam

I hadn't stepped foot in my parent's restaurant since meeting Zane. My mother had opinions about everything—especially how I lived my life—and I wasn't in the mood to hear her mouth. But after the fight with Mark went viral—some neighbor had posted the whole damn thing on TikTok. We knew we had to face the tell out parent's before they heard it from someone else.

Zane sat beside me, quiet but composed. Back straight, legs crossed, eyes watching the front entrance. She looked calm on the outside, but I knew she was unraveling inside. I saw the way her fingers tapped against her thigh—three quick beats, then a pause—the same rhythm they always followed when she was holding herself together by a thread.

First through the door were her parents. Her mother looked like her—but with longer hair. Her curls bounced with every step. She was heavier than Zane but had the same curvy shape. Her father was one of those Morris Chestnut types, in a suit that looked expensive against his dark skin. Expensive glasses. Expensive shoes. His naturally frowning face deepened when he saw me. They looked at Zane, then me, then each other. Not a word. Just judgment humming in the air like a slow burn. They definitely gave off the high-powered lawyer vibe.

Then came mine.

My mother was first—light-skinned, tall, with an expensive wig flowing down her back. Not a wrinkle in sight, even though she'd spent her childhood running in the Jamaican sun and her adult life running a busy restaurant. My father trailed behind her—pale as a ghost, bald, and still looking like he didn't know how he ended up married to a Black woman from the islands.

Zane waved her parents over. She'd seen them before—before the pregnancy. She didn't get up. They hugged her and took a seat, both wearing that“who in the hell is he?”look on their faces.

“Sam,” my mom said, slow and drawn out, eyes narrowing as she looked around. I made sure the restaurant was close to closing and that they were in town and not working before telling them what time to meet us.

“Sit down,” I told them all, gesturing to the table. “Please.”

Everybody looked around like this was a setup. Which... fair.

I sat down next to Zane and reached for her hand. Her fingers tightened around mine, steadying me the way she always did when I was ready to explode. She was the only person who could do that—silence the noise.

Her father cleared his throat first. “So... what is this?”

“This is a conversation we needed to have,” I said. “Face to face.”

Zane’s mother gave her a long side-eye. “I thought you said this man was just your boss, sweetheart. Why is he holding your hand?”

Zane shifted but didn’t let go. “That’s what I told y’all. Before.”

Her father folded his arms. “Before what?”

I leaned forward. “Before we fell in love. Before I got herpregnant. Before I decided I was going to spend the rest of my life with her.”

Zane stood up and showed everybody her belly.

You could’ve heard a damn pin drop. Her mom blinked rapidly. Her dad looked like he wanted to throw a chair. My own father looked like he needed a drink. And then there was my mother—who sat back in her seat like she was watching an episode

ofScandalunfold.

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“You’re still married, and you look like you’re about to blow,” Zane’s dad said sharply, directing it at her like I wasn’t even sitting there.

“So are you,” my dad chimed in.

“We know,” Zane said softly, retaking her seat. “But it’s over. On both sides. Mark is dragging things out because he’s petty and dangerous, but I’m done. I’m just trying to move on in peace.”

“With him?” her mom asked, pointing a manicured nail at me.

“With him,” Zane confirmed.

My dad sighed. “Sam, what is really going on? We haven’t talked to you in months. You just... disappeared.”

“I didn’t disappear. I’ve been busy.”

My mother raised an eyebrow but stayed quiet.

Zane’s dad turned to me now. “You really think this is smart? With a baby on the way? No divorce? Emotions still raw? You want to raise a child in this mess?”

“I want to raise my child with love,” I said. “And stability. And peace. We’re trying to build something solid.”

He opened his mouth to say something else, but Zane’s mother cut in.

She caught Zane's eyes and folded her arms, tilting her head, eyes narrowing.

“You told us all this about Mark, Zane. You remember that? Said he made you feel seen, protected, all that. And look where that got you.”

Zane's jaw tightened, but she didn't say anything.

Her mother pressed on, voice low but laced with heat. “You rushed into that marriage, Zane. You didn't want to hear a word from me or your father. Said we were being judgmental. Controlling.”

Zane glanced down, her hand instinctively going to her belly.

“And now here you are again,” her mother said, softer now but no less direct. “You're still married. Pregnant by a man we've barely said two sentences to. And you want us to be what—happy?”

“Mama—” Zane started, voice cracking.

“No. Don'tMamame. I'm not saying he's a bad man. I'm saying slow down. You're moving like you're trying to prove something. Like you need to be chosen to feel whole.” She exhaled. “Baby, I just don't want you making permanent decisions while you're still healing from the last ones.”

Zane opened her mouth to respond when my mother spoke.

“Enough.”

Everyone looked at her. My mom leaned forward, voice low but firm—like only a Black mama could be when she was about to shift the entire room.

“Everybody needs to calm down. We don’t have to like this, but we don’t have to stress them out at a pivotal time like this. That’s a grown woman carrying a child. Our grandchild.”

She speared each parent with a look.

“She needs peace, not strife. Let them talk instead of y’all fussing at them.”

Zane’s mom sat back slowly. Her dad still didn’t look thrilled, but he wasn’t barking anymore.

“I love your daughter,” I said. “More than I’ve ever loved anything in my life. I will protect her. I will protect my child. We’re not asking for permission.”

Silence again. Until my father muttered, “Well, I guess it don’t really matter what we say...”

My mom gave him a swift smack to the arm before turning to us. “Tell us how this happened.”

I started talking. Told them everything. Ended with me being bailed out of jail for whooping Mark’s ass. Luckily after it was the judge dropped the charges and neither one of us ended up with a criminal record. But I made Zane take a protective order out against Mark.



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Zane's father was the first to speak. "I might end up liking you after all. I've been wanting to beat Mark's ass about my daughter." He smiled, but it looked more like a grimace.

Mama just shook her head, muttering in patois as she reached across the table to squeeze Zane's hand.

And just like that, the war was over before it could truly begin.

### Chapter 33- Mark

I should've taken the day off.

First thing that morning, a senior partner pulled me into his office with a look that said it wasn't about billables. He didn't waste time. Just leaned back in his chair and said, "You need to get your personal life in order, Mark. You're making us look sloppy."

Sloppy.

That's what he called me.

Like I hadn't given fifteen damn years to that firm.

Like my name didn't mean something.

It wasn't just him. The whispers were loud today. The paralegals didn't even try to

hide that they knew my life was falling apart. I passed two of them by the copier and heard them talking...

“...and he’s mad his wife moved on? Please. He’s slept with half the paralegals in this office. Including me.”

“And me too,” the other one laughed.

“Trash.”

I should’ve turned around. Should’ve walked right back into that office and thrown their damn coffee across the wall. But I didn’t. I just stood there, frozen, letting the heat rise behind my ears and settle in my jaw.

Trash.

That’s what they thought of me.

All because Zane was out here playing soft-bellied victim, even though she was the one who did the worst. She was strolling around town with her belly swole from fucking a construction worker.

He wasn’t even in her league.

But somehow, he got her.

I wish I never saw them coming out that night a few days ago. I had been in the bar down the street, sitting on the patio, when I saw them on the sidewalk. I wanted to know where she was staying. It pissed me off to see her smiling so happily at him.

Like she wasn’t wearing a ring I paid for when she laid up with him.

I wasn't supposed to follow them. I knew that.

But I did.

I wasn't supposed to get in a fight, but I was just defending myself.

I'd sat outside the place twice since then. Just parked down the street, engine off. Not close enough to be seen, but close enough to see.

I knew I looked crazy.

I felt crazy.

But no matter how many times I told myself to let it go, I couldn't. It clawed at the inside of my chest like a live thing. They'd embarrassed me. She had embarrassed me. And now people thought she was the victim? That I was the monster?

No.

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No. I wouldn't let that become the story.

Chapter 34- Zane

Thirteen days until I was scheduled to give birth.

I should've been the one losing my mind. I was the one about to have a baby bust out of my vagina.

But it was Sam who was about to lose his mind.

He was pacing back and forth in our bedroom like he'd just drunk a gallon of espresso and chased it with anxiety. The hospital bags were open on the floor, already packed, already triple-checked. But he was going through them again like he didn't trust his own hands.

"Where's the—" he muttered to himself, tossing a pair of socks to the side. "I know I put it in here..."

"It's in there. You packed everything," I said from the bed. "Twice."

He ignored me.

Next thing I knew, he left the bag half-zipped and moved to the corner of the room, where the crib was half-built. He grabbed the drill, put in two screws, then stood back. He wiped sweat off his forehead—he was sweating like a whore in church even though the AC was on.

Then he went back to the damn hospital bag.

“Sam,” I called. “Baby. You’re scaring the baby with all this pacing.”

He looked up like he’d forgotten I was in the room.

“I’m sorry,” he said quickly. “I just... I need to make sure everything’s right.”

I raised an eyebrow. “You’ve made sure. Now you’re making me anxious. Sit down before I call your mama.”

That got a smile out of him, even if it was tight.

He sat on the edge of the loveseat, hands clasped, shoulders hunched. His knee bounced like it had somewhere to be.

“I don’t want to mess this up,” he said quietly.

I tilted my head. “Mess what up?”

He didn’t answer right away. Just stared at the wall like it was holding secrets he hadn’t cracked yet.

“This,” he finally said. “All of it. You. The baby. Us. Everybody thinks we’re going to fail.”

My chest ached for him. It was interesting, watching him show this side of himself when he always seemed so strong.

“Sam...”

He shook his head, cutting me off. “I know I sound stupid. It’s just—I’m watching the days tick down. We have to move into our home and it’s not furnished. And you’ve got court with Mark in three days, and what if he tries some shit again? What if something goes wrong during delivery? What if I can’t protect you? What if I freeze or panic or I’m not what you need?”

He ran a hand over his head, frustration pouring off him in waves.

I stood up slowly, my belly heavy, my feet sore. But I crossed the room anyway.

And I dropped to my knees in front of him.

He blinked. “What are you—?”

“Helping you calm down,” I said, sliding my hands up his thighs. “And I like making you feel good.”

He stared at me like I was unreal, like I was made of magic.

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I eased down the front of his gym shorts, watching his breath hitch as I freed his dick. He was already hard and leaking.

“You don’t have to—” he started.

“Shut up,” I murmured, pressing a kiss just below his navel. “Let me take care of you for once.”

I kissed the tip before guiding his mushroom head between my lips. Slow, unhurried, I worked my mouth down the shaft until I couldn’t take any more. I gripped the rest with my hand. He leaned back on his elbows, chest rising and falling, eyes locked on mine like I was anchoring him to Earth.

Up and down, I sucked him in and out of my mouth. I could feel the tension bleeding out of him second by second.

His fingers threaded into my short hair, directing the pace. “So fucking good,” he groaned as I sped up. His hips started moving. He was close. I could taste the salty beginning of the end.

I gagged slightly when he went deep. Eyes watering. Spit slipping out the sides of my mouth.

“Make me cum,” he practically begged.

My pussy throbbed, but this wasn’t about me. I tightened my lips, and he let out a long, shaking breath. His body went tight. I sucked out everything he gave me.

“Damn,” he whispered.

I climbed up beside him, resting my head on his chest, belly pressing into his side. His arm wrapped around me automatically.

We stayed like that for a long moment, just breathing.

“I’m scared too,” I admitted. “About court. About giving birth. About everything. But we’ve made it this far, Sam. We’ve survived a crazy-ass ex, a jail stint, a viral video, and two sets of skeptical-ass parents.”

He chuckled.

“We’ll survive the rest too,” I whispered. “You hear me?”

He kissed the top of my head. “I hear you.”

Chapter 35- Mark

I wasn’t worried when I walked into the courtroom.

Nervous? Sure. But worried? No.

Zane had always been dramatic. I figured this hearing would be just another performance. In front of the judge she’d act wounded, scared even. Her lawyers would make noise about my temper, my past, the fight with her boyfriend. And I’d take the heat. I could handle heat. I was a goddamn lawyer.

But I wasn’t prepared for the way she looked when I walked in.

Calm. Poised. Happy. Like she’d already won.



She sat at her table, stomach round, chin up. That smug bastard Sam sat behind her. I recognized her lawyer. She was one of the best. I wasn't paying for him when she came back. I'd actually make her get a job to do it and pay for her bastard herself. She'd learn to appreciate what I gave her.

I took my seat across the aisle, heart kicking once, then again. I nodded at the judge and slid my hands across the table like I owned it.

I hadn't bothered hiring another divorce attorney after I fired the first one who wanted me to just sign my wife away. This was just posturing. A show.

The judge called things to order, and her lawyer stood first. She started talking about "escalation of conflict," "harassment," "unnecessary delays in signing final papers," "financial abuse." Then she mentioned the restraining order.

I laughed. Loud enough for the judge to glance at me.

"My apologies, Your Honor," I said, straightening my tie. "But this narrative that I'm some kind of threat is absurd. The only reason this isn't finalized is because we haven't sat down to divide assets."

"She doesn't want anything from you," her lawyer said. "She just wants out. You've delayed the proceedings twice now—once by skipping mediation, and once by changing counsel at the last minute."

"I was within my legal rights to do so."

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“But not morally,” she shot back.

I leaned forward, speaking directly to the judge. “Your Honor, I’m not the villain here. My wife is sitting in this courtroom pregnant by another man. Let’s not pretend she’s some innocent flower.”

Zane leaned over, whispered something to her attorney. The woman nodded, then reached into a file folder.

“I was going to save this,” her lawyer said smoothly, “but since Mr. Blackwell wants to discuss morality...” She handed something to the bailiff.

I shifted in my seat, suddenly uneasy.

The bailiff handed a stack of photographs to the judge. He flipped through them silently. His eyebrows went up.

“I assume you recognize the woman in these, Mr. Blackwell?”

I couldn’t breathe.

No. No. She didn’t...

The judge slid a photo across the bench to me. It was me.

And not just me.

It was Sam's wife.

Naked. On her knees. In my living room.

My stomach dropped.

A low murmur rippled through the courtroom. I turned—and Zane's parents were seated next to Sam now, a Black woman about Zane's age was next to them, she turned to glare at me..

"These were obtained by a licensed private investigator," her lawyer said. "Taken while my client and Mr. Blackwell were still married. These not only establish infidelity—they show that he knowingly slept with the wife of the man he now claims is the root of his marital breakdown."

"Objection!" I barked, slamming my palm on the table.

"On what grounds?" the judge asked, unimpressed.

"This is an ambush."

"No," Zane's lawyer said calmly. "This is the truth. If you can't handle the truth, that's not the court's problem. It's yours."

My eyes locked on Zane. She stared back at me, lips tight, head tilted like she pitied me.

That broke something loose in my chest. It started aching.

"You followed me?!" I stood up. "You had me followed?! Is that who you are now? You needed dirt so bad you sent someone to sneak around our house?!"

“You were screwing Sam’s wife on my couch—and his!” Zane snapped, standing too. “I didn’t need to send anybody to make you dirty. You did that all on your own.”

“She’s lying!” I shouted, pointing now, voice booming. “She wants this to look like I’m the problem, but she’s the one who walked out! She’s the one spreading her legs for a man she barely knew!”

The judge banged the gavel. “Mr. Blackwell—control yourself!”

“I will not sit here while she paints me like some monster when she—” My voice cracked.

Zane’s voice cut through the room, quiet but deadly.

“You are a monster, Mark.”

That did it.

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I shoved the chair backward, pacing now. The bailiff moved in, watching me, ready.

“They’ve been plotting on me since day one,” I muttered, more to myself than anyone. “She got you believing he’s some hero, like he didn’t snatch my wife right out from under me.”

“Mr. Blackwell,” the judge said firmly. “One more outburst and I will hold you in contempt.”

I stood still, hands balled into fists at my side. I looked around—at the eyes on me, at Sam smirking in the corner. Zane’s parents were looking all smug. Zane’s hand curled around her stomach like I hadn’t once kissed that belly myself.

That was supposed to be my child.

And that’s when I knew.

I’d already lost.

The judge cleared his throat. “We will reconvene next week for final filings. If Mr. Blackwell continues to delay this divorce, sanctions will be imposed. You are advised to sign the papers before that date.”

I sat back down slowly, vision blurred, throat tight.

Because this wasn’t a hearing anymore.

This was an execution.

And I'd put the gun in her hand.

But I wouldn't die quietly.

Chapter 36- Sam

“This ain't over, bitch!”

The words cracked through the air the second we stepped outside. Mark's voice, full of ice, echoed off the courthouse steps.

“I didn't marry you to have you divorce me!” he shouted, eyes wild, suit wrinkled as he walked in our direction.

Zane stiffened next to me, and I stepped in front of her before he could get in her face.

“Nah,” I growled, squaring up before I even thought about it. “But you sure as hell 'bout to get the fuck outta her life.”

Mark's face twisted like he bit into something bitter. “Why are you even speaking to me about my wife?” he snapped, pointing. “You're just some nobody construction worker playing family. You're a nobody.”

I smiled. That slow, dangerous one that always came right before I did something reckless. “Better than you on your best day, bruh. You lost her, not me. Get the fuck on.”

The way his chest was puffed up, the way his jaw clenched like he was choking on

his own pride—I could see he was ready to swing. I wanted him to, so I could beat his ass again. The adrenaline rushing through my veins had me ready to go.

“You wanna go again?” I stepped forward, my voice low, taunting. “Let’s finish what we started.”

People were watching. Phones were out. And I didn’t care.

Because fuck Mark. He was the only one with something left to lose. And I was ready to strip it from him—his job, his freedom, his life if he kept playing with me and mine.

“Back up!” a deputy shouted, rushing over just as we got chest to chest. Hands were suddenly on me, another officer grabbing Mark. “Let’s go! Separate!”

“You ain’t shit!” Mark roared as they dragged him back into the building. “You won’t keep her—she’s too goddamn expensive for you! You aren’t me. You think a paycheck-to-paycheck ass nobody can replace me?”

I yelled back, “Ain’t nobody tryna be a narcissistic motherfucker who can’t fuck his wife right! Bitch, I got money. And I’mma blow it on her.”

“Sam!” Zane’s voice cracked sharp in my ear.

I turned to her.

*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 9:12 am*

She was doubled over.

Her hands were on her knees, and her face was twisted up like pain had sucker-punched her straight in the gut.

“Oh shit,” I muttered, rushing to her side. “Baby, what’s wrong?”

She grabbed my wrist. Hard. “My water—Sam—it just broke.”

“Call an ambulance!” I yelled.

One of the courthouse staff was already on their phone.

I knelt beside her, trying to stay calm as a puddle formed beneath her feet.

She was breathing fast. Too fast. And my hands shook as I brushed sweat off her forehead.

“I got you,” I whispered, even though I was two seconds from losing my shit. “I got you. Just breathe, baby.”

Her mother came barreling down the steps like she’d been shot out of a cannon.

“What happened?”

“She’s in labor,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady. “Her water broke.”



Zane groaned, low and deep, her body already starting to tremble.

The ambulance pulled up in under five minutes. They loaded her in quick, asking questions I barely processed as I tried to stay calm. Her father answered most.

I started to climb in behind her.

“Sorry, sir, there’s no room. The hospital is two blocks up on Ulmerton from here.”

I kept myself from snapping and turned to head to my car as they took off. My heart was beating so fast. Zane’s mother stopped me.

“Did that make you feel better?” she asked, dead serious.

I blinked at her.

She wasn’t yelling. She was scolding me like my momma did—and would’ve if she was there. The disappointment in her eyes hit harder than any punch Mark would’ve thrown.

“I’m sorry.”

She nodded. “It’s okay. I like you, Sam,” she said, lowering her voice. “You’re good to my daughter. I see that. But this?” She pointed back toward the courthouse. “This can’t be how you handle situations when it matters. Not now. Not when she needs you clear-headed.”

I swallowed hard.

“Yeah,” I said quietly. “You’re right.”

She nodded, softened a little, then pulled me into a quick hug.

“Now let’s go. If you make me miss my grandbaby being born, you gon’ have to fight me next.”

Tocara came out of nowhere blocking our path. She had stopped at the restroom.

“What’s going on, where’s Zane?”

“You missed a lot, but Zane’s about to have the baby.

### Chapter 37- Zane

Seven days and a C-section later, I was finally leaving the hospital. My stomach felt like it had been stitched by God himself—tight and sore with every shift—but I didn’t care. My daughter was nestled in my mother’s arms, pink-faced and sleeping like she hadn’t just changed my whole damn world.

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*Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 9:12 am*

Evelyn Samara. She was perfect. Round cheeks, a head full of thick curls, and a scream that already sounded like mine when I got pissed off.

Sam was off getting the car. My daddy pushed my wheelchair down the hospital ramp. I was bundled in my robe, sore as hell. My mom walked beside us, holding Evelyn so tight like she might disappear.

Sam's parents were already outside waiting. His mama was holding one of those fancy pink diaper bags, and his daddy had a goofy, proud smile plastered on his face. They'd cleared out a room for us in their mini-mansion until the house we were renovating was done. The Airbnb Sam had us staying in was too cramped now. We needed space—for her, for us, for the new chapter we were limping into.

The air was bright. The world felt alive. I was smiling. Tired, yes, but smiling.

Then I saw him.

My heart kicked off.

At first, I thought I was seeing things. We'd made TikTok again. I'd heard people had called Mark's job and got him fired because he had lunged at me outside the courthouse. He was public enemy number one after somebody found our court transcript on the public database.

He was just standing across the street like some kind of ghost that hadn't realized he was dead yet. I blinked, and he was still there—with wild eyes. Only now, he looked worse—drawn out, thinner, twitchy. He looked like he'd aged a year in a week.

I opened my mouth to say something, but the words died when he moved.

Fast. Then he was outright running.

"YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT ME!"he screamed, voice cutting through the moment like a blade.

My body tensed. My mom turned slightly, confused. My daddy stopped the chair.

I saw the gun before I heard the shot.

And for a split second, the world slowed.

I felt the pain before I heard the boom. A hot sting ripped through me. My breath caught, and the air left my lungs like someone had snatched it.

My thought seconds after was,This motherfucker killed me.

Epilogue

Six months ago, I thought I was about to lose everything.

Mark tried to kill Zane for not sticking around after his misdeeds. One bullet. That's all it took to turn my world sideways. He'd aimed for her heart, but she'd twisted away—luckily, he'd just grazed her arm. But that didn't make it any less terrifying.

I'd heard the shot, and my soul damn near left my body. I knew something had gone wrong.

My feet didn't hit the ground—they flew. I dropped the keys mid-run.

And by the time I got to them?

Her daddy was stomping Mark into the pavement like he was trying to put that bitch six feet under it. Mark didn't even fight back. Just laid there, leaking.

Police came. Evelyn was safe. Zane was bleeding and shaking, but alive. I held her, whispering that everything was okay, my voice steadier than my hands.

Mark was in jail now. He got five years. They disbarred him before the ink dried on his sentencing papers. Funny how quickly a villain falls when the world finally sees him for what he is.

Now, six months later, I'm standing in the garden behind my parents' house—the one my mama designed herself. Sunlight cut through the oak trees, painting everything gold. I'm in a suit too expensive for somebody like me, but Zane liked it, so I was wearing it. The tie felt like a noose, but I'd choke gladly today.

“You ready?” my pops asked, adjusting my collar.

I was deep in thought. Thinking about the baby. About the night Zane screamed my name through contractions. The nights she screamed it during orgasm. About the first time Evelyn wrapped her tiny fist around my finger. About everything that happened.

But then...

Zane stepped into view.

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Walking slow. In all white, she looked like Cinderella or some shit. Like a miracle I didn't deserve. Evelyn was in her arms, with a tiny flower crown on her head. My daughter, giggling. My wife-to-be. My life.

Next to them, walking tall and trying not to trip over his too-big dress shoes, was my twelve-year-old little brother, Malik. He was holding Zane's bouquet. He was grinning hard, cheeks flushed, eyes locked on her like she hung the damn moon.

"He asked to walk with her," my mama whispered to me earlier. "Said she looked like a goddess in that dress."

"So fucking ready," I finally answered my father, not taking my eyes off them.

If anybody had told me that catching my ex-wife fucking my neighbor would lead me to this, I'd have told you to shut the hell up.

But it did.

Because from the ashes of one phase of my life came the best thing that ever happened to me.

My family.

My peace.

My forever.

And nothing is taking them from me.

Not now.

Not ever.