



# Her Double Desire

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**Category:** Erotic, Romance

**Description:** They're going to double her desire. After a wild night out, I expected a bad hangover. I didn't expect to find a tattoo on my body that reads: Property of Stone House. Without realizing it, I put myself up for auction. Then I meet the two men who "bought" me. Shawn has a quiet intensity to him, quick fingers that know how to make a girl beg for more. Jared is swoon-worthy from his handsome face to his big muscles. When I tell them there's been a mistake, they aren't happy, because I'm supposed to be a gift for their boss. And he'll be home in two weeks. So they make me an offer: Stay and learn what it's like to be spoiled by a life of constant pleasure, or pay back the money they spent at my auction. I promise to give their plan a shot. And... the more time I spend with them, the more addicted to their world I become. I'm falling for both of these intoxicating men. But when our two weeks ends, I'll have to make a choice: Break my promise... or break my own heart.

**Total Pages (Source):** 50

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

## Chapter 1

Veronica

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Something is rattling.

It's an awful sound that peels away the cushion of warm sleep around my mind. Groaning, I move my mouth, tasting something worse than rotten lemons. As wild as my night was, I know I didn't eat any spoiled fruit.

Unless that flavored raspberry vodka Sonya kept forcing down my throat counts, I think, chuckling, then wincing as the sound irritates my growing headache.

Carefully, I crack my eyes open. The source of the rattling noise—a circular fan—oscillates in front of me on a dresser. I roll onto my side and regret it immediately. Every inch of me, toe to top, aches.

Pushing myself onto one elbow, I hang my head over the edge of the bed I'm apparently lying on. I don't remember a bed—I barely remember anything after Sonya and I stumbled out of our third bar.

What happened last night, why do I hurt so much?

Grabbing my forehead, I smooth my dark hair away and stare at the blackness behind my eyelids. Just breathe. No need to rush. Or is there? Dammit, I hate being so

confused. Drinking myself into a blackout isn't my normal routine. But yesterday, I had a perfectly good justification.

Ugh, I don't want to think about that.

All I want is a glass of cold water. Maybe some heavy, salty breakfast; those are perfect for hangovers. Is this a hotel? I hope so. I really, really don't want to go far to find food.

Sighing, I run my nails through my hair, tucking it behind my ears as I gradually sit up. I take in the light yellow walls, the open bathroom door to my right, and a chestnut door in front of me. If this is a hotel, it's a cheap one; I don't see a mini-fridge or even an electric kettle. Too bad, I have a special love for instant coffee.

Tucking my chin, I notice I'm wearing a long, white, silky shirt. A quick check and I know I've got nothing on under it but the neon pink panties I wore last night.

A pit grows in my belly. Did I undress myself? As I start to look around, hoping to spot my outfit, my hair tickles my cheek. I brush it away, my hand drifting over my neck. Something there crinkles like plastic. "What the hell?" I whisper out loud.

I gingerly trace the thing on my throat. It wraps entirely around from under my chin to my nape. My heart thrums with rising panic. Is this a bandage? Did I get hurt last night?

Adrenaline pushes away some of my nausea. Quickly I stumble from the bed, gripping the door frame of the bathroom. I spot a small mirror above the porcelain sink. Hurriedly I step closer, gripping the edges of the round basin.

The whites of my eyes are pale pink, like I've been rubbing sand in my face. My hair hangs in various tangles and loops—I need to brush it badly. But I'm most concerned

about the thick, tan bandage clinging to my throat.

Hot fear races through my veins. The gaps in my memory are becoming more foreboding. Whatever happened last night, it can't be good.

Grimacing, I tug the bandage gently. As I peel it away, images flash through my brain, each of them more gruesome than the last. But of all the things I expect to find, I never predicted... this.

Curving, delicate letters, black as night, are inked into my skin.

Is that... a tattoo?

It swirls around my whole throat, high enough that I worry a turtle-neck won't cover it. Studying it with mounting unease, I'm unable to make sense of it. What is this design? My fingertips follow the hard angle of a letter 'T' and that's when it clicks. Of course it's hard to understand—it's a written word in a mirror being reflected backwards.

I squint and focus. P... r... o...

A buzzing rises in my ears as my mouth dries up.

No. Holy shit.

My tattoo... is a declaration.

'Property of Stone House.'

Trembling, I brush my fingers along the new ink. No matter how many times I outline the name, it doesn't ring any bells. What the hell is Stone House? Did I pay

someone to do this to me last night? If this was Sonya's idea, I'm going to murder her.

Something 'thuds' downstairs, causing me to realize there is a downstairs.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

I step softly across the cold floor on my bare feet. The hangover has been replaced by fight or flight; I'm in a place I don't know with a tattoo I don't remember getting. Quickly I search on the floor, then in the tiny dresser, desperate to find any of my things—but mostly I want my cellphone.

There's nothing inside the dresser. It's completely bare.

Turning in place, noticing there are no windows, I eye the only other door. This probably isn't a hotel. I'm starting to think I'm in someone's house.

Easing the heavy door open, I peer out into a long hallway. Unlike my plain room, the hall is glamorous. Recessed lighting makes it bright and welcoming. Beautiful wallpaper with geometric diamond designs and large oil paintings of landscapes screams luxury.

Where the hell am I?

Creeping down the hall, I strain my ears for any noises. I don't think I'm alone, but I can't be sure. As I turn a corner, I find myself approaching a fenced balcony and curving stairs.

A jumble of conversation reaches my ears; I freeze, holding my breath. I try to gauge if the voices sound friendly or not. There's no point in stalling, I tell myself firmly. You need answers. You won't get them without talking to someone. Maybe whoever is at the bottom of the stairs brought me here last night out of kindness.

Maybe they know why my fucking throat is tattooed.

I crest the balcony and scan below. There, in a room so elegant it belongs in a HGTV show, are two men. From my angle, I can't tell much about them. They're huddled together and talking urgently.

As I'm deciding how to approach them—and far too aware of my lack of bra or shoes—one of them glances upwards. Our eyes lock. His are a vibrant green that makes me inhale sharply.

His jaw is angular, his temples touched by salt and pepper hair that's thick along his scalp, but cut closer on the sides. His tanned skin is complimented by a silver vest with a bronze and teal skinny-tie. The only men I know who dress in tailored outfits like that are people who sweat money.

He's undeniably handsome. As he studies me, his eyes narrow. The edge of his full lips draws high like a curtain before a grand show. I've experienced many things in my life, but never such a combination of fear and attraction.

“There you are,” he calls, drawing the attention of the other man. “I was beginning to think you'd sleep straight through the night.”

I stiffen; I'm not naked, but I feel extremely exposed. The second guy folds his arms and squints. “You're sure that's the one we got last night?” he asks. “She looks... well, a little rougher than I remember. Don't you think so, Jared?”

“Of course not,” Jared snaps. “I know the face of the woman we bought, Shawn.”

A fingertip of fear glides up my spine. Bought? Surely I heard him wrong.

Jared's smile spreads wider. He approaches the bottom of the curling stairs, his palms lifting in a peaceful way. “Come down and say hello. Let's get a better look at you so we know what we're working with.”

I make no move to descend, my fingers grabbing the banister. My skull won't stop swelling. "What... what's going on, where am I? Who are you?"

The men share a long look, conspiring in silence. Finally, Jared clears his throat. "You mean you don't remember?"

"Of course not!" I shake my head slowly, my vision getting tight and crunched. "Someone just tell me what's going on. One minute I'm raising hell with a friend, the next, I... I..." As the world flickers at the edges like a dying film strip, my knees wobble. I slip forward down the stairs before I can stop myself.

Distantly, I hear someone shout, but my mind has shut down from the stress of the situation. But that's okay. Because I think, if I fall asleep again, when I wake up next time, everything will be alright.

It has to be.



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

### Chapter 2

Veronica

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Hands touch my face, soft and cautious. Something cool presses to my forehead. I open my eyes a crack, wincing from the bright lights above.

Shawn stares down at me, frowning while he mops my face with a wet cloth. “Are you awake?”

Uncomfortable with a stranger so near and intimate with me, I sit up and recoil. My hands curl on top of plush carpet. I'm sitting at the bottom of the stairs. Lifting my chin, I count the steps. Did I fall down all of them?

“Relax,” Shawn says, reading my mind. “Jared managed to catch you before you broke anything.”

I see the green-eyed man hovering nearby. His arms are wound tight over his broad chest, creating a dimple in his gleaming tie. He caught me? I know he wasn't far away when I blacked out, but to manage to grab me in time, he had to be extremely quick.

Shawn tilts his head. He's close enough that the scent of oranges and almonds enters my nose; it's a wonderful fragrance. “Are you going to faint again, little lamb?”

“I'm not a lamb.”

“No,” Shawn snorts, standing straight and tossing the damp cloth into a small trashcan. “You're only the worst purchase I've ever been a part of.”

Carefully, I rise up on my feet. It's a relief when my legs don't give out. “What the hell do you mean purchase. Does that have something to do with this tattoo on my throat?”

Shawn takes in a big breath of air. Before he can respond, Jared lifts a hand, silencing him. “It's clear you've forgotten much of your evening. Perhaps we can help your memory. Do you remember walking into Brander's Alley Ink?”

The instant he utters that name my skull splits. Hissing, I bury my fingers in my scalp. I'm swooning from the vivid memories assaulting me.

That's right... Brander's Alley Ink. I remember now.

I wish I didn't.

Last Night

Sonya laughs, shoving another shot my way even as I'm falling out the front door of the bar. Both of us are giggling helplessly.

“Veronica, one more! One more, in celebration of our fuckingshit heel boss!”

“I can't, I can't,” I complain, pouring the drink down my burning throat. “I should stop! We've been out... fuck, what... Sonya!” I grip her arms, snorting at my own helpless giggles. “Sonya! Listen to me. What time is it?”

“Not time to go home!” she declares, pushing me down the dark street. Together we stumble along, our voices carrying through the air.

Clasping her shoulder, I gesture at the starry sky. “We can be free you know! We can both quit that fucking job, before either of us gets fired!”

“Only one of us is getting fired, and it's you.”

I shake my head angrily. “Let's both quit with a bang, shove it up their asses! Tim thinks we're too stupid to know what's up, but we do!”

Sonya props me up, wiping her mouth as she considers me. “You want to go out in a blaze of glory?”

“Yes! That's exactly what I fucking want!”

She points, and I follow her finger towards the the blinking red glow of a sign above a doorway on our quiet backstreet. “Then do it,” she says. “Show them what you think of their shitty rules.”

I focus on the shop, digesting her words slowly.

Brander's Alley Ink.

It's more perfect than I could have come up with if I'd had time to plan. Our company has hammered home multiple times, often in passive aggressive emails, how “unprofessional” tattoos are in the workplace. They're explicitly not allowed. A fire-able offense.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“You're right, Sonya,” I say, pushing off of her and lunging forward. “It's time to make a fucking point.”

We stumble through the door of the shop. The bell above the door rings in our ears, drawing the eyes of the people inside, and drawing my attention to them. It's hard to focus on them where they're sitting. My vision is blurring, the ceiling lights making me sweat.

There are walls of binders and brightly colored jars. Multiple portraits and elegant designs cover the brick walls. I want to look at everything, but if I turn too fast, my brain takes an extra second to keep up.

“Excuse me,” Sonya says. “My friend here is looking to make a change.”

“What kind of change?” Someone laughs, but when I try to single them out, all the faces merge together.

“I'm tired of my job!” I shout. Sonya helps me stand straighter. On the far side of the room, I notice a young man. He seems my age, though it's difficult to tell in my drunken state. What I can tell is that there's an elaborate tattoo circling his throat. I can't read it from where I am but it's clearly designed to shock people.

In other words? It's perfect.

“That.” I gesture at his neck. “I want one of those.”

A man with a thick beard snorts at me from the bench he's straddling. “Is your friend

alright?" he asks Sonya.

"Going through some control issues," she answers, giggling.

The man hesitates. For a long moment he considers me. I feel judged... like a prize pig at a country fair. He rubs his chin, rising up, placing his heavy hand on my shoulder. "You sure you want in on this game, young lady?"

"Yes, very much so."

He motions over at Sonya. "What about you?"

"Oh, no," she laughs nervously, waving her hands. "I'm all good."

Part of me thinks Sonya should get inked, too. It was her idea, wasn't it? Or was it mine? My brain is too smothered by alcohol to recall.

The stranger helps me through a black door. "Where are we going?" I mumble.

"Well, we don't do that kind of work right up front."

"Long as I get it, gonna make... a point," I slur.

"Yeah, yeah, I heard ya. I think you're nuts, but I heard ya."

The more we walk, the more confused and tired I become. I wonder where Sonya is, but my concern is never voiced. The older man nudges me into a brightly lit room. There's someone else in here with me—a woman with imposing black eyes and vibrant red lips.

I'm helped onto a low, flat table. The cushion is covered in something like plastic

wrap. I wince now that the ceiling lights are pointed right in my face.

“She wants in,” the guy says. I never got his name. “Prep her quick as you can.”

“Did she sign the paperwork?”

“Aw shit, no. Thanks for the reminder, Sunnie. Hey, hey, girl?” He pokes me; I realize I've shut my eyes.

“Mn?” I mutter, blinking up at him. “Am I getting the tattoo now?”

“After, sign this first.” He's holding some papers out, pressing a pen into my hand. Yawning, I scribble where he points, looking at the other person in the room with us. Sunnie is beautiful, her arms covered in inked sleeves of colorful dragons and koi fish. “Are you doing the tattoo?”

“No, not yet,” she sighs. “Franklin, what's wrong with her?”

“I don't know, drunk I guess.”

“Fine, whatever.” She scowls, sliding her rolling chair to me, lifting a bright lamp. “You have a name?”

“Veronica Buck,” I say, shielding my eyes. “Who are you?”

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“Doesn't matter. Take your dress off.”

This seems normal enough in my disoriented state, so I slide it free, tossing it aside and leaving me in nothing but my pink lingerie. “The boys will be happy,” she says, whistling. “You're gorgeous.”

“No I'm not,” I giggle. “I'm plain ol' Veronica.”

“Well, we don't get too many natural girls in here, that's all I'll say.” Sunnie motions for me to lie back, so I do, happily resting my eyes. Gotta piss Tim off and quit with a bang.

Falling in and out of sleep, I hear them whispering. I'm distantly aware of cold palms rubbing me all the way down to my toes. Then they're gone again and I wonder if I imagined it all.

“There,” Sunnie says, “That oil will make her look even better under the lights. Go get her out on the stage, it'll be done with soon. I doubt she'll be happy if we let her sleep and tell her she'll have to come back next month.”

“Right,” Franklin snorts, half lifting me off the table. “Come on, now. Veronica, was it?”

Hooking my arm around his shoulders, I hang on to him. “Bingo bingo. Who're you again?”

“Just your guide.” He leads me out of the room and down a narrow hall. I can hear

the buzz of voices. Together we break through some curtains, exiting into a room with a stage and rows of mostly empty chairs.

“Shit,” Franklin growls, “think we missed the cut-off. Hey, hold up!” I grunt when he drags me bodily to the platform. “We got one more, sorry.”

There's a squat man with too many chins standing in front of me. He twists a notebook in his grip, considering me curiously. “Fine, what's her name?”

“Veronica,” Franklin says. He backs away, giving me a pat on the back as if to say “good luck!”

And then... I'm standing in the center of the stage all alone.

People are chatting. None of their faces are familiar. The cool air reminds me that I'm wearing nothing but my lingerie. It's so absurd, I start to think I'm asleep. Nothing else could explain this.

“Gentlemen, we have a late and final entry!” The man with the notebook marches back and forth across the front of the stage. “Do we have an opening bid for the young Veronica?”

Well, now I'm definitely dreaming.

“Has she been trained before?” It's a rich, male voice that shouts the question.

Another voice angrily says, “What's it matter? We lost out on all the others. Just bid on her so we can bring someone back with us!”

My head is burning, my stomach cold and uneasy. Brushing back my hair, I try to clear my vision, but everything is moving, things doubling before me. I drank too



much, damn you, Sonya.

“No bids?” The announcer asks.

“Answer the question!” The first voice yells, and people mumble in agreement.

The auctioneer flaps his book at me. “Well? Any training?”

“Training?”

“Yes, have you worked with anyone before?”

“Uh,” I answer slowly, “Of course. I guess I have... what, four years?” Is that really how long I've worked for my asshole boss?

The announcer raises his eyebrows, seeming impressed. “Hm! Folks, the answer is four years! What a surprise.”

Everyone begins talking louder, excited by this new information.

I wish my boss was around to hear this. Maybe he wouldn't fire me after all.

“Thirty grand,” a new voice calls.

“Fifty!”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

I scan the crowd and spot a man with brilliant green eyes. He's focusing on me so hard it clears some of my alcoholic fog.

“Fifty-five!”

“Seventy.”

“Jared,” the man sitting next to the green-eyed guy snaps. “Really? Seventy? Oliver is going to want an explanation!”

My vision is swaying, but I notice the announcer is rubbing his hands gleefully. This isn't normal, I think sluggishly. None of this has anything to do with tattoos. Where's Sonya?

The squat man tucks his book under one arm, then claps. “Seventy going once! Twice! No one else? Fine! Come grab her and settle your debt, gentlemen.”

Two men leave their chairs to approach the stage. There's a heavy, foreboding air to them. Groaning, I bend in half, dropping to my knees. Expensive shoes move into my line of sight, just inches away. I see my reflection in their shiny surfaces. Look up, I think. Look at these people and ask them what's going on.

But I can't. I'm overwhelmed by a sensation like being on a boat in a hurricane at sea. Lifting my head is impossible.

“Oh,” the auctioneer says nervously above me, “she seems ill, uh, can someone...”

Everything fades. My whole world narrows in on the sensation of rough wood pressing against my cheek.

Then I'm swallowed by blackness.

### Chapter 3

Veronica

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My eyes are wide, my palm over my mouth as the memory shifts in my head. Anxiously, I eyeball the two men staring at me with different expressions. Jared is curious, but Shawn seems frustrated.

“You remember everything, then.” Jared says it like a fact. I nod in affirmation. “What about the branding process?”

“How could she remember that?” Shawn laughs, not bothering to soften his disdain. “She was drunk off her ass, nothing could wake her. Did you really need that much alcohol to find the guts to put yourself up for sale?”

My stomach coils in a knot. I understand what they were talking about earlier, saying they'd bought me. Licking my lips, my throat dry and raw, I struggle to sound calm. “I didn't put myself up for sale.”

Jared's frown stretches severely. “Excuse me?”

“It was an accident.” I wave a hand flippantly. “Sorry if I caused any trouble for anyone. I swear, I'm suffering plenty of embarrassment over it right now.” I give a weak laugh. “Ugh, could I get some water? This hangover is murdering me.”

Shawn's eyebrows haven't moved away from his hairline. "I'm sorry, back up. You didn't mean to walk out half-naked onto the auction stage last night?"

"I didn't know that's what was happening," I say, trying to keep my smile on. But their black moods are warning me that this situation might be even worse than I realized. "I thought I was just getting some really over the top ink! I was going to piss my boss off, you know, since you can't have visible tattoos at Mickame Insurance... and... and I was just trying to make a grandstand before I quit because I knew Mr. Buchanan was planning to fire me anyway!"

It sounds ridiculous when I say it out loud.

Shawn covers his mouth, muffling his chuckle. Abruptly he bends over, hands on his thighs, still laughing while trying to talk. "Fantastic call, Jared! You got us to purchase a slave who isn't actually a slave!" Wiping his eyes, he sneers at the green-eyed man. "You'll be the one taking the fall for this, not me. I didn't even want to buy her."

"You agreed to it," Jared whispers calmly. "If either of us goes down, we both go down, Shawn. Or do you think Oliver will just shrug off the fact we blew his cash on a woman who thought she was getting the equivalent of a tramp stamp on her face?"

Before my eyes, Shawn turns pale as cream. "What are the chances that Brander's Alley gives us a refund?"

Jared levels a flat stare on him. "You know their policy."

"What's their policy?" I ask, throwing nervous looks between them both.

"Half to Brander's," Jared says, "for providing the auction location, tattoo services, paperwork, lawyers, and full anonymity to all involved. The rest goes into a special

bank account used to guarantee your room, board, and any other necessities for five years, as long as the contract remains intact.”

It takes me a bit to parse this. “You're telling me that I sold myself, but none of the money belongs to me?”

“It's yours in the sense that, legally, it has to be used in your interest, as long as you work for this house,” Jared explains. “Telling Brander's to give that chunk of money back would cause them to hack a percent off just for the convenience. It's like cashing out your retirement fund early.”

Is this all about money? I wonder. Of course it is. Everything in this world is about money. Even this house, these men, are dripping in luxury. And here I am, barefoot in a plain white shirt. The contrast is stark.

The more I learn, the more furious I'm getting. “Someone has to fix this,” I say, tapping my neck. “Brander's or you guys, or whoever this Oliver person is, someone is going to take responsibility and remove this ink.”

Shawn ignores me, facing Jared fully. “What do we do? Are we screwed because we foolishly assumed this girl meant she had four years of slave training under her belt, and not... sorry, what was your old job?”

“I worked for an insurance company,” I mumble.

Shawn puts his head in his hands.

I toss a look over my shoulder. There's a double set of doors with painted glass. The wide windows next to them show hints of sunlight through their blinds. That's my way out of here. I know I have to leave, this situation is insane and these men are consumed by their own regrets instead of being interested in helping me. I need to call

Sonya. “Where are my things?” I ask.

Jared has his hand over his chin. It's like he's in his own world.

“Hey,” I say, louder. “My things? Purse, clothes, phone?”

“In the lock-box,” Shawn says, lifting his head just enough to stare at me. “Did you think we robbed you? I'll go get your things, might as well get you off the property so we can start working on how we'll explain the news to Oliver.”

He takes one step before Jared says, “Wait.” He fixes his intense, unblinking eyes on me. “She's not leaving. Not just yet.”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

I carefully start inching backwards towards the front door. “Your friend is right, it's better if I get out of your hair. This is clearly a big mistake. I'm not a slave, and sorry for your situation, but I can't help.”

Shawn scrubs at his cheek, growling in irritation. “Just accept that we wasted Seventy grand on someone who isn't even fit to lick our shoes, Jared.”

Jared doesn't spare a glance at his companion. There's something cunning about him, like he's able to predict what I'll do before I do it. My blood heats up as his lips form a satisfied smile. “Maybe we can make this work. Veronica, you said you were quitting your job, right?”

“Yes, that's right.” I'd have to, now, with this huge neck tattoo. Christ, will anyone hire me ever again?

“Then,” he muses, standing in front of me, so near I can see the flecks of black in his green eyes, “why not take us up on our offer? After all, if you walk out and break your contract, your debt to us will be extensive.”

Ice creeps up my spine. “Wait. What debt?”

Jared snaps his fingers at the blonde man. Shawn digs into his charcoal jacket pocket, stepping forward with the fluid grace of a jungle cat. “Don't call me like I'm a dog,” he mutters, handing some papers to Jared.

“This,” Jared says, showing me the stack, flipping until he points at my scribbled name, “is the contract you signed last night. Of which you do remember signing. Am



I correct?"

Ready to start swearing and screaming, I force a single nod.

"I hate to break it to you, I really do, but if you read through this..." He spreads them so I can easily scan the fine print. "It explains that if you end the contract, you'll owe us your share of the payment plus the percent Brander's takes off the top. I'd guess that's around Twenty grand when it's all said and done. Do you have Twenty grand?"

My eyes fly wide. "Of course I don't!"

"Then what would you like to do? Work here for us, or..." He hands the papers back to Shawn, wrinkling his forehead at me sympathetically. "Would you rather be smothered by debt? We have very good lawyers, I should add. And with that ink on your throat, I doubt any high-paying job will give you a second look. Paying that money back will be a tremendous task."

I grit my teeth. "I didn't know I was dealing with bullies."

"Little lamb," Shawn says, his tone dropping low. "You're dealing with something far worse than that. In this house, we don't hide the fact that we're monsters."

Jared is emotionless as he faces me down. But when Shawn says monsters, I see him frown. Then it's gone. "Veronica," he says patiently, "This isn't meant to be a threat."

"Except it is," I argue.

"Think of it as you scratching our back, and us scratching yours."

"That implies I get anything out of this arrangement!"

“You do,” Shawn says, shrugging. “Many people would be grateful to work for Stone House.”

As he says the name, I brush the ink circling my throat. “Then why can't you go find someone else, if it's so glorious.”

Shawn's eyes narrow, his blue irises becoming pure shadows. “Because the auction is once a month, and the event we need you for is in two weeks.”

I cock my head higher. “That makes it sound like I have some leverage. You both are terrified about what will happen if I walk away, aren't you?” Neither of them respond. “Instead of threatening me with this contract breaking shit, start by telling me what working for this Stone House or whatever means.”

Jared is quiet. I sense that we're in some unspoken contest of wills. I don't think he's used to people standing up to him.

As he starts to smile, my heart thuds again. His lips spread apart, and when he talks, it's like he's purring into my ear. “Becoming a pet under this roof means many things. You'll be the subject of constant attention... of extreme pleasure like you've never imagined in your life. Your existence starts and ends with filthy sex.”

Arousal licks at me, making my skin glow.

“But,” he goes on, the velvety sin vanishing from his voice, “The biggest fact is you'd belong to Oliver Vox, the head of this house, and the owner of Stone Vineyards.”

“Stone Vineyards?” I ask dubiously. “Wait. Like the actual winery?” I've seen their bottles, they're always priced out of my reach.

“Yes, Oliver is the CEO. This mansion belongs to him, we're on miles and miles of

his private property.”

“Jesus,” I laugh in disbelief, marveling at this information. Oliver has been in Forbes as one of the richest men in the country. I didn't know he was into kinky stuff likeslaves or whatever.

Are these guys his friends? Employees? Some mix?

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

Shawn hooks Jared's elbow to bring him closer, talking under his breath. "You really think we can pull this off?" He's clearly doubtful, but I sense he wants to believe in this arrangement. "Can she really be made suitable for Oliver in time?"

"It's going to take a lot of work, but... I think we can do it." Jared gauges me. When he speaks again, it makes my lower belly twitch. "How many men have you been with, Veronica?"

"I—been with? Like, a relationship?" My cheeks are burning, especially as the two of them chuckle.

"She's blushing. We're doomed," Shawn sighs.

"Stop," Jared hushes him. "Veronica, I'm trying to ask how experienced you are. Have you ever been shared by multiple men?"

"You mean... like threesomes and stuff...?" I trail off.

"Yes, like being stuffed by two men at once," Shawn says, flashing a devilish grin.

I shift in place, trying to keep my breathing normal. All this sex talk is way beyond my comfort zone; I'm getting hot and bothered. "Then, you two," I swallow, pointing at them one by one. "Are together?"

"God, no," Jared says, shaking his head.

"We both like women." Shawn nods at his friend, his smirk a full crescent. "Or are

you asking if we've fucked a woman together? Because yes, yes we have. Though some of us think we're special because we prefer monogamy."

"Stop it, you're just going to confuse her." Turning back to me, Jared offers his hand. His skin looks smooth, his nails clean, his fingers enticingly long.

I don't know why he wants a handshake, but I can't resist; carefully, I wrap my palm in his. The chemistry that flows from our contact makes me pull in a breath. I'm imagining all the things his skilled fingers can do. My attention flicks to his face, then when that's too intense, back down to his tailored vest. He's dressed to kill. He could audition for a James Bond role and land it.

His chuckle is pleasant in my ears. "Listen to me," he says gently, sandwiching my hand between both of his. "It doesn't matter what the masters and guests are into. Here, what matters is that you serve them. For that reason, we need you to understand what you're agreeing to."

"I already asked you to tell me that," I whisper, gazing at our linked hands.

He lifts the top one away, his fingertips touching my chin, forcing me to look into his eyes. I try to break away from his smoldering green irises, but I can't. "Five years, Veronica," he says seriously. "That's the length of time your contract requires you to work for us."

Five years?

It's an insane length of time. Except it also isn't. Not if I think back to the job I was being fired from. I'd had a multiple year contract with Mickame Insurance, too. In exchange, they'd paid for two years of business school for me.

I'd expected to work there into my old age.

And then Sonya had warned me that our boss was going to fire me in front of everyone today, shaming me in front of my coworkers, ruining my reputation.

When you think of it like that, it isn't as if this arrangement is so weird. Plus, they said I'd get room and board. A place to live is more than many people can ask for.

"Okay, Jared," I say, staring bravely into his eyes. "Be blunt. Tell me what you're asking me to do for five years."

"First, I'm not Jared to you. It's Sir, from now on. All the people you meet here are above you except the other servants." He grips my chin harder.

Getting the point, I wince and say, "Sorry. Sir." Asshole, I think, relishing the privacy of my own thoughts.

Jared's smirk makes my heart race. "Better. Now, you said be blunt. Alright. The men expect you to pleasure them however they desire. You need to know how to do that. You have to be capable of wrapping your lips around a stranger's cock without turning crimson."

"That's not true, some will enjoy it if she blushes," Shawn says, winking at me. On cue I turn pink, making him laugh. "Yes, like that. Perfect."

"I can't do that," I gasp, shaking my head side to side.

Jared releases me, his hand drifting up to press at his temple. "Shit. You're not a virgin, are you?"

My whole face is scalding. "No. But I've only ever slept with one guy, my first boyfriend, and we barely did it twice."

“Are you god damn kidding me,” Shawn groans. “That's worse than being an actual virgin! We could at least spin that as a positive to Oliver.”

“We'll figure it out,” Jared says. I tense up under his glare. “You'll have to get good at pretending you love everything you're doing or having done to you. If Oliver finds out you're playing at this, if you reveal you're some frigid prude—”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“I'm not frigid!” I shout, surprised by my own backbone. “I said I barely had sex, not that I didn't like it!” Realizing what I admitted, I bite my bottom lip. It's official, my filter and decision making skills are busted.

Shawn watches me with his eyebrows knotted up. “Huh. How do you know you like sex if you fumbled at it twice with your awkward boyfriend?”

“Sex is more than just two people fucking,” I say. Looking at them is hard, but I make myself do it, daring them to tell me I'm wrong. “Also? I've watched plenty of porn.”

Jared covers his smirk with two fingers. “You're trying to say you masturbate a bunch.” Instead of waiting for my answer, he leans over me, his shadow blocking out the array of bright lights. “All I'm trying to make clear is this. If you offend anyone by acting frigid, the charade is over. Oliver will claim you intentionally lied about your skills when you signed the contract, and that makes it forfeit. You won't have a say in if you stay or not, then.”

My skin prickles uneasily. Pretend I'm into strangers? No, I don't think... But what else can I do? Paying back that money is impossible. My fingers drift up to my throat. This tattoo has taken away every option I can think of.

Jared is scrutinizing me. “You need water and something to eat,” he says. “Then a bath. We can make you look like an expensive slave, at the very least.”

Shawn spins on a heel, walking through an archway to the left. “I'm not here to feed people who should be serving us. Call me when you want help with teaching her the



rules around here.”

Jared pinches the bridge of his nose. “Whatever. Veronica, follow me.”

For a second I debate not going. I'm positive they won't stop me from leaving now that they've explained the situation in full. They've put the choice in my hands. Plus, they're smart men; they know better than to commit literal kidnapping.

If I walk out of here, I'm robbing myself of the only path I can see that frees me of twenty thousand dollars worth of debt.

With a final, longing look at the exit, I trail after Jared.

### Chapter 4

Veronica

---

The house is so big that I'm shocked at how... empty it is.

“Are we the only ones here?” I ask, chasing after Jared in my bare feet. “Where's Oliver? And can I get some clothes and my phone now, please?”

His shoulders cut an impressive shape as he strolls down the hallway. From behind, I can't complain about the view. “Do you always ask so many questions?”

“Only when I wake up in a house full of strangers,” I reply, rolling my eyes, knowing he isn't looking.

His chuckle is brief, but real. It lights me up inside to hear him make such a genuine sound. He motions for me to pass him; I do, turning a corner into a spacious kitchen. “Only a few select people live here. But Oliver has plenty of help. It's late enough that the morning cooks and cleaning crew have gone, they'll be back in the evening.”

I nod, only half listening. It's hard not to gawk at the huge granite island, white cabinets, and farmer's style sink. But most stunning is the view through the windows spanning one wall. Rolling hills of rich green extend as far back as I can see before melding with the navy blue mountains on the horizon.

There's rows of wooden stakes weighted down by coiling green vines. Heavy purple grapes dangle from all of them. The vineyards.

“Amazing, isn't it?” Jared speaks from just behind me. I twitch, reminding myself how easily, how quickly, this man can move. It's how he saved me from breaking my neck on the stairs.

Peeking up at him, I look back out at the landscape. “How far are we from Santa Barbara?”

“When we left there last night with you, it took us around three hours to drive here. You do the math.”

A shiver rocks my limbs. I slept through the whole trip.

“Sit,” he says, yanking me from my inner turmoil. He points at the large island with its square bar stools.

Reluctantly, I leave the window. Perching on the stool, I watch him move around the kitchen, gathering a glass of water, then digging in the gigantic fridge. When he puts a plate of fruit in front of me, my stomach rumbles so violently I know he hears it.

“I'll be back with your phone.” He walks out of my line of sight.

Frowning, I take a long gulp from the water. It's so cold it makes my teeth itch; it's exactly what I need.

I'm nearly done with the fruit plate when Jared returns. He walks so softly that I study his shoes. The glossy black loafers should definitely be making noise. Is this guy a ninja?

He sets my blue smartphone on the island. I reach for it—he traps my hand under his on top of the phone. “I don't care who you call,” he warns me, “But don't say anything that would imply you're in trouble. We don't have the time to explain your situation to the authorities. And Oliver will be furious if he has strangers stomping all over his house because you gave someone the wrong idea.”

My hand flexes under his. It's like a small bird captured by a cat that wants to toy with it. I keep my voice cool. “I'm just calling my friend, Sonya. If she doesn't hear from me, she might get the cops involved herself.”

Jared glides his hand away. But as he does, he runs his fingers over the veins on the back of my hand. It sends a buttery tingle through my skin, and I lose some of my composure. He watches intently—he wants to see me crack.

Standing tall, he adjusts the cuffs of his long-sleeved light gray shirt. “You have five minutes, then I want you to meet me in the bath. It's back where we came from, down the left hallway.”

“Alright.”

Jared leaves me alone once more. But even if he's gone, I feel his presence. Especially on my hand, where he clutched my fingers tight. Swallowing another mouthful of icy water, I try to rid myself of the inferno he keeps feeding inside of me. It helps. A little.

My phone shows several missed calls from Sonya. Her texts from last night are nonsensical. There's also a photo she sent me from before we left the first bar—it's us making duck-faces at the camera. I cringe, then scroll down.

Sonya: U there?

Sonya: Hello hello hellloooooooo???

Sonya: adddsk

Sonya: I just woke up. Did I dream we went to a tattoo shop? I thought I got something done, but there's nothing on me anywhere!

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

I cup my throat. It wasn't a dream. Her voicemail is from nine this morning, asking me if I'm really not going to show up at work, and that she gets it if I don't, I'm not obligated to face my boss just so he can fire me in front of a crowd.

That call was five hours ago. It's almost two in the afternoon; she should still be at work. I dial quickly, putting the phone to my ear. Wondering what, exactly, I'll tell her, I listen to it ring.

Her voicemail picks up, beeping loudly. "Hey Sonya," I say, sounding way too chipper. I clear my throat and bring it down a notch. "Just calling so you don't worry about me. I'm not coming back into work... well, ever, I guess. Some things happened. Big, crazy stuff. Anyway, call me when you can. But I'm fine. So... yeah."

I end the call, the silence around me more notable than before. I told her I'm fine, but I'm not. God, what will I say when she calls back? How do I phrase my new job in a way that won't make her panic? Sonya is stubborn, she'll assault me with questions until I give her the truth. I'll have to tell her eventually.

Eventually.

That's the keyword. For now... I can think in tiny steps.

And I already know what I'm supposed to do next.

It's time for that bath.

### Chapter 5

Veronica

---

Calling this room a 'bath' is grossly underselling it.

Gold and black marble reflect off every surface. Rich, velvety towels embroidered with the initials O.V. hang on iron circles in the glittering walls.

There's a long, curving counter covered in a variety of containers, all unknown to me, but making the room smell divine. The floor is fitted with a number of different sized pools of steaming water. This space could service a hundred people, easily.

“This... this is amazing,” I gasp, turning in place, marveling at how this was a mere walk down a hallway. Stone House is more astounding than I predicted.

“It's very wonderful,” Jared agrees, though he sounds edgy. “Take your clothes off and get in this bath here.” He points at the one nearest him.

“I—just take my clothes off? You're going to watch?”

“Of course I'm...” He stops himself, smoothing his hair like he's at his wit's end. “Veronica, Listen. We need you to follow directions. First rule of serving at Stone House, you're always supposed to obey.”

“But asking me to strip with no time to ease in...”

He begins shaking his head. “Maybe Shawn is right, this is a fool's errand.”

I can't explain it, but his disappointment galls me. “I'm asking you to let me adjust, that's it.”

Reclining against the counter, he rubs a fingertip over his mouth. I'm sure it's just an absent motion, him thinking through things, but to me, it comes across as erotic. I stare too long—he catches me, and his smile is deadly. “Would it help if I stripped myself naked first?”

Yes, please. “Oh,” I breathe out. “No, no.” How can he say that with such a straight face? “I don't think that would help me relax.”

“What if I stripped you?” He curls his hand. “I can get you naked faster than... that.” He snaps his fingers; my heart pistons against my ribs.

“I've got this,” I say quickly. “I'll do it myself.” I set my phone on the counter. Tangling my fingers in the hem of my shirt, I summon all my inner strength. Just pretend you don't care. He sure doesn't. Get over it, hold your head high.

I throw the clothing to the floor before I lose my courage. Though the room is sweltering with steam, I tremble in my pink panties. I want to be brave, to shove this in Jared's smug face, but when I see the intensity in how he's watching me, I start to falter.

Jared lifts his eyebrows. Clenching my jaw, I tug my panties down my thighs and step out of them. His smile grows hungrily. Just like that my indifference shatters; compulsively, I cover my pussy with my hands.



“You're very beautiful,” he murmurs, his warm eyes eating me up.

I bite my tongue and make no comment.

“Now, into the water, let's go,” he says, clapping his hands sharply. It isn't hard to coerce me, I don't want to stand around naked.

The water seeps into my skin deliciously. I sink down in the bubbly liquid up to my neck. “Oh, that feels good,” I whisper.

“Yes, our guests compliment our baths quite frequently.” Jared crouches beside me, his ankles by my head. “Here,” he says, handing me a sponge that's slippery with a sweet smelling soap. “Wash yourself.”

I'm not some filthy rat, I think indignantly. Rubbing the suds all over my hair, I encounter many tangles. I guess I do look pretty awful after my night of binge drinking.

Scrubbing my shoulders, then my collar bone, I touch the tender area where my new tattoo is. Five years of servitude. I close my eyes and inhale deeply. Washing my arms, my back, and then my soft belly, I dunk under to rinse off and come up with a cough. “Alright, done.”

“Good.” He hooks his hands under my arms. Easily, he lifts me from the bath, water dripping everywhere.

“Whoa, hey!” I argue. Jared binds my arms at my lower back. When I glance over my shoulder at him, I glimpse his cocky grin. “Why are you restraining me? I'm going along with your plan!”

He lets go of my arms, moving to the side to retrieve a thick white towel. “I just like

seeing what you'll do. You're not like most of the women I deal with.”

“Why, are they all meek slaves?” I say mockingly.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

His wide grin cuts me down like a razor. “Exactly.” Lifting the towel, he ruffles my hair to dry it. “Arms out to the sides, spread your feet.”

“I can dry myself off.”

“Of course. But I want to do it, so I'm doing it. Are we really going to hit a wall over obeying me already? This is the easy stuff, Veronica.”

I consider resisting. But what's the point? Either I stay in this house and play this game, or I leave and accept the consequences. Sighing, I extend my arms, then push my feet apart on the warm marble floor.

Jared drags the towel down my body, soaking up all the droplets of water. I'm glowing from humiliation when he reaches between my legs. Gently, he sweeps the towel along my tender skin. A flash of heat travels from his contact up to my lungs, stealing my breath.

“Hmn, I'll have to shave your cute pussy.”

“Excuse me?”

“Shave is the wrong word. But this hair has to go, Oliver likes smooth slaves.” He walks to the counter, grabbing up a tiny bottle. The mischievous glow on Jared's face tells me this is bad news. “Relax,” he says, noticing my wide eyes, perhaps hearing my thumping heart as he draws close. “It won't hurt, it just dissolves hair. It might tingle, though.”

Kneeling, he squirts the lotion into his palms. Without asking if I'm ready, Jared begins massaging along my inner thighs. His palms slide on my sensitive skin, tracing the muscles until he brushes across my pelvis. Making circles with his fingers, Jared rubs deeply into my curls of hair. It's too much, too personal.

“Wait, wait...”

“Shh,” he soothes, rolling his thumb over my outer lips. “Let me work.”

I'm reacting wildly from his touch, like I'm tuned in and can't change the channel. Needing something to grab, I brace myself on his shoulders. Jared tenses under my touch. It's the only thing that stops him from rubbing me. Then he's back to work, running his slippery palms everywhere until my entire triangle is covered in glossy lotion.

Then the tingles begin.

Everywhere that he's touched me comes to life. I inhale in shock. The sensation is strange; pleasurable and hot. My clit swells in its hood, my face flushing with shame. Calm down, relax, don't get turned on in front of this jerk! But my body is thrumming from some combination of the lotion and Jared's massage.

I hear him chuckle, his fingers tracing lightly up my knee. “Are you already this excited from a little bit of playtime?”

Shivering, I toss my head in denial.

“If you're this responsive,” he purrs, curling his palm straight on top of my pussy and giving it a squeeze, “then our chances of satisfying Oliver have gotten far better. Fuck, you're so damn wet.”

Gritting my teeth, I try to resist arching into his touch, but fail miserably when he lightly pets my clitoris. He strokes me calmly, then out of nowhere, begins to gently pinch my sensitive bud. “Aah... Jared, please...”

Dangerous shadows swarm in his face when he looks up at me. He's kneeling at my feet, and yet I know down to my bones that he's the one in control of this situation.

His nostrils flare as he leans close to my pussy. “Your cunt smells delicious.” He shifts; I spot his cock tenting his expensive pants. “Do you understand how badly I want to lick you from your ass all the way to your clit, Veronica?”

“Jared—”

“Sir,” he reminds me fiercely, squeezing me by my hips.

“Sir,” I pant. “Yes, right, Sir. Sorry.”

“You're still learning,” he murmurs, finger-pads coasting down the widest curve of my thighs. “I can be very forgiving, when it matters. Very kind. Would you like me to be kind to you, Veronica?” His stare is a forest fire; I feel its heat on my swollen labia.

I'm quivering all over, my tendons holding me up by sheer will. I'm done. This is too much. Five years of this? No way, I'll never survive with my dignity intact.

One of his hands inches towards his belt. The other strokes its thumb straight across my engorged clit. An explosion goes off in my brain—I yelp, pulling backwards, away from his enticing touch. “That's too much! I can't... we can't...”

“You're right.” He rasps the words out, standing quickly. His hand is nowhere near his belt now. Instead, it's running over his mouth. “This isn't the time for this.” He's

acting indifferent, and he's so good at it, that at first I believe him. Somehow, he's unaffected by our encounter. That it was all in my head.

But when he turns away, he wobbles a little. Jared has been rock solid until this single moment.

Something about me is getting to him.

“Let's finish preparing you,” he says, changing the subject back to why we're here. He lifts a warm towel I hadn't noticed. When he wipes at my mons, all my hairs go with it, a soft and smooth region left behind. “There, a perfect pussy for the world to see.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

Deep inside me, something aches, a craving that wants him to keep touching me. Even if he's using a towel to do it, I'm starving for the contact.

What's happening to me? Why does my body love this?

Jared walks away, tossing the towel in a basket and rinsing his hands in a sink. I rock in place, my juices sticking to my skin, making me aware of how aroused I am. I try to will it away, but when I reach down, exploring the foreign satin of my bare skin, it only makes my clit twitch. “Okay,” I say, summoning what anger I can, “You've plucked me like a chicken. What's next?”

“Don't be so dramatic.” He frowns.

“I'm not trying to be.” I'm all tangled up inside—a bomb that should have gone off, but never did. My need for release is souring my mood. I did learn something that I have Jared to thank for, though; apparently women can get blue-balls. “I just hate not knowing what's going to happen until it already is.”

“Slaves don't get to choose what happens to them.” The words come out like steam between his clenched teeth. “Your job is to trust us implicitly.”

“No one could possibly be okay with blindly trusting strangers!”

“They are!” he growls, whirling on me. “Every slave I've ever worked with has been happy to obey. I've never had to make them act that way! Never had one talk back to me. Until now.” He makes a fist, hesitates, then walks for the door.

“Sir?” I ask nervously.

“Go back to your bedroom,” he shouts, his steps echoing down the hall. “I’m done with you for now.”

My nerves are wrecked from stress. He actually made me feel bad for not meekly bowing to his commands! How stupid. How fucking insane. I wasn't asking too much, just for more patience, more warnings, before he did stuff like... like...

Shuddering, I reach between my thighs and finger my wetness. I wasn't ready for the things he was able to do to me. Certainly not prepared for what his skillful hands were capable of.

More importantly...

I don't think he was ready for the way I affected him.



### Chapter 6

Veronica

---

I find a selection of fluffy robes in the bathroom. Draping a crimson and black one on, I drop my phone in a deep pocket. Clutching the thick material tight, I wander into the hall. The array of doors all look the same. This place is a maze. How do I find the room I woke up in?

Up ahead, I notice one of the doors is cracked open. I'm pretty sure I didn't shut my door when I crept out, I think, heading closer. Low, passionate grunts reach my ears.

Peeking through the crack, I clap a palm over my lips. It's the only way to muffle the shock that wants to explode out of me. It's hard to stay silent when I'm looking at something so incredible.

Jared is stretched out on a king size bed. The blankets are ruby-red, the same shade as the angry cock he's clutching in his fist. Before my eyes, the hot-as-sin man is masturbating.

His teeth are clenched like he's hurting himself. No—like he's overwhelmed by pleasure and has no choice but to bring himself to climax. His hips thrust into the air once, twice, as if he's fucking more than his own hand.

Still fully dressed, his shirt clings to his sweaty torso. His belt is dangling open, pants

slung low enough to let him grip the base of his cock.

Something buzzes against my leg. I jump, fumbling in my pocket to quiet my phone. This is the worst time for a phone call!

The bed springs stop rustling. Shit, that means Jared has stopped moving. Did he hear my phone? Does he know I'm outside his door, peeping on him like a voyeur?

Not waiting to find out, I back away, then sprint down the hall. Please don't let him have seen me!

Up ahead I spot the big curving staircase I fainted on. I have my bearings now. Lifting my phone, I see that it's Sonya calling. Tapping the green button, I dodge into my tiny, plain room, then shut the door. I suck in breath after nervous breath. "Hello, Sonya?"

"Veronica? Are you okay? You sound like you're jogging!"

"I'm fine." Dropping onto the bed, I fall backwards and shut my eyes. "Okay, I'm not exactly fine."

"If you had a hangover as bad as mine this morning, I believe it."

"It's more than that." Pinching the bridge of my nose, I work out how to explain everything. "Sonya, do you remember last night?"

She snorts. "It was too memorable to forget, Little Miss Impulsive."

A cold spike of shame digs into my belly. "I think I was more than a bit impulsive. Sonya, I..."

“Sorry, hold on.” Her voice vanishes—she's talking to someone else in a whisper.

“You there?”

“Yeah, sorry, I'm still at work.” There's a long pause. “Are you mad that I went in? I know you were fired up last night about Tim, maybe I should have quit, too. In solidarity.”

“No,” I assure her. “It's fine. You're allowed to want a paycheck, Sonya.”

Her laugh is hollow on the edges. “You say that, but... I just want us to be alright. No drama. But, yes, I do need the money. That credit card debt won't pay itself off.”

I cover my face with my forearm. “Yup. I know all about debt.”

“Veronica, in your voicemail, you said you had some big changes happening. I saw you leave with those two guys last night.”

My lungs expel all of their air. She saw me leave with them? “I guess that's why you didn't freak out and call every cop and private eye in the city to find me,” I say, trying to lighten the mood.

She doesn't bite. “Are you with them now?”

Glancing around the room, I sigh through my nose. “I am. It's really not a big deal.”

“But you called it a big deal.”

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“I said big changes, that's different—look. Okay. I'm trying out a new... career. Something that might be more long term than selling insurance behind a desk.”

“Veronica...”

“Yeah?”

“Are you happy? That's all that really matters.”

I take too long to respond. “Of course I am. I'll talk to you soon, Sonya.”

“You better. I have to go anyway, Tim is whining about something, as usual. Bye!”  
The call ends. I listen to the dial tone with my eyes closed, then toss my phone under my pillow.

Am I happy?

Exhaustion steals the last of my strength. Spread out on the bed, the sound of the fan whirring constantly in the background, I give in to my body's demands and fall asleep.

### Chapter 7

Veronica

---

“Veronica?”

My eyes snap open. I don't recognize the ceiling above me, or the feminine voice that just spoke. But when I see the circular fan whirring away, I remember everything.

Groggily I sit up, holding my forehead. At least my hangover is finally gone. There's an older woman with curly red hair standing by my bed. Her hands are folded politely in front of her light yellow apron; she watches me with a kind smile.

“Sorry, who are you?” I ask, rubbing my eyes. “And what time is it?”

“I'm Joanna. Master Nolton asked me to make sure you were ready for dinner.”

“Master... Nolton?”

“Jared,” she says patiently.

Hah. It strikes me as messed up that I'm just now learning his last name. My stomach clenches, I give it a rub. “Did you say dinner?”

“I did.”

“As in eat it, or help make it?”

Joanna throws her head back, covering her mouth as she laughs. It's a sweet sound, coaxing a smile out of me. “Why would you help cook it, dear?” Her attention darts to my throat; I place my fingers there, understanding.

Sex slaves are expected to serve in one way only.

“Okay,” I say, hopping off the bed. “How do I get ready?”

She tips her head down in a slight bob. “I'll show you where your wardrobe is. Master Nolton said to take your pick from the collection, his only request was that you look your best.”

A knot grows in my guts. Jared wants to show me off like I'm a shiny new toy. I nervously wonder how many people will be at dinner. I almost ask, but then I bite the question back, deciding knowing the truth is worse.

Joanna doesn't walk for long. Gripping the brassy handle on a double set of doors, she spreads them apart, flicking a light on inside. I follow her in, gaping at the gigantic hallway closet we've entered. “Holy shit,” I whisper.

“Yes, the Masters keep an amazing collection. There'll be many things in your size, it's all labeled.”

She's right; as I start to flip through the hangers on a rack, I see there are tiny markers sticking up on the metal poles that tell me the sizes of the clothing in each section.

Browsing in wonder, I brush my fingers over a long, mulberry colored chiffon gown. Different sizes and styles... because I'm not the first woman they've bought to serve them before. “Joanna,” I say hesitantly, “How many slaves have worked at

Stone House?”

“Before you?” she asks, blinking. “Let me think. I've worked for Master Vox for ten years, now. He only began dabbling in this lifestyle last year. Guests would bring their own slaves to parties that he hosted, but including you, he's only ever bought three.”

“Where are the other two?”

Her mouth tightens at the corners. “He sent them away.”

My hand freezes on the dress as I stare at her. “What, why?”

“I'm not sure. He doesn't tell me the details of his private life, and I'm smart enough not to ask.” She gives me a warning look. “All I know is they were here, and then they were not.”

Swallowing down a lump, I look at the clothing, because I can't handle Joanna's stern face. If Oliver got rid of them, I guarantee he did it by making their contracts forfeit. Jared and Shawn said he has good lawyers.

And if he kicked out two actual slaves before me...

What chance do I have?

## Page 19

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“There's a vanity over there,” Joanna says, pulling me from my miserable train of thought. “And more shoes than you could count. Make yourself presentable and be in the dining room in half an hour.” Apparently done with me, she shuts the doors as she leaves.

Make myself presentable? I'm sure that's exactly how those two jerks phrased it. I've given them the impression with my drunken-chic that I don't have a clue how to make myself look nice. We'll see about that.

Gathering up a few things, I park myself in front of the vanity.

I've got work to do if I want to blow their minds.

Which I really, really fucking want to.

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Sweeping into the large dining room, I barely notice the grand piano, or the candles, or even the many huge oil paintings. I'm too busy being caught up in the hungry-eyed expression of the two men waiting for me.

Jared is sitting at the long table, his fingers pinched around the stem of a wine glass. He's dressed like he was earlier—dark pants, another vest, long sleeves. But I know it's new and clean. I saw how he ruined his clothing with his own lustful sweat.

When he looks at me and shifts in his chair, the memory of what I caught him doing early swims into my brain. His cock was magnificent when he was jerking himself



off.

Boiling between my thighs, I'm grateful when Shawn whistles, distracting me from my dirty thoughts. He's also dressed much like before, his dark jacket spread wide, showing off how his silvery tie stretches over his long, lean torso.

“Color me shocked,” he says. My smug pride at showing off how well I can 'clean up' grows. Except... when Shawn's gaze scrapes from my face down to my toes, lingering on my chest and hips in between, I wonder if I've bitten off more than I can chew. Is baiting these men a wise decision?

Jared stands and slides out a chair for me. As I sit, he stretches closer, his mouth dangerously near my earlobe. “You look gorgeous.”

The pleasure that assaults me is pure and unfiltered.

Once he's back sitting across from me, I look at the pretty room with its chandelier, teal tablecloth, and leather-backed chairs. There's a glass of wine already filled in front of me. “This is weirdly normal,” I say, lifting it and taking a small sip.

“We both thought it would be good to take a breath and get to know you,” Shawn says. “Especially because, on further inspection of the paperwork you signed, you didn't really fill any of it out.” He reveals a paper-clipped stack from inside his black suit-jacket.

I motion for him to pass it to me across the table. He extends the papers, but when I grab them and tug, he doesn't let go. Frowning, I yank harder, but he just holds tight. Bracing the edge, I lean further across—that's when I notice he's staring down the front of my dress.

Shawn chuckles playfully, then releases the papers. “All yours.”

Dropping back in my seat, I sink down, feeling self-conscious. Focusing on the paperwork, I flip through, reading as I go. There are flecks of pen everywhere, like I was randomly scribbling. “I don't remember trying to fill this form out.”

“We've already established you were drunk.” Jared swirls his drink, studying me over the top. “Just answer the questions now.”

“Won't that make it harder to lie to your boss about me?”

“He's more than my boss,” Jared mutters. “I'd rather not lie to him at all.”

Wait, what does he mean by that?

“You'll answer verbally,” Jared says, “No physical evidence. This is just for mine and Shawn's benefit.”

I take a slow breath, then begin scanning the page, answering as I go. “My full name is Veronica Buck. I grew up in Silver Lake, California. I'm twenty-three years old, and...” Trailing off, I stare at the next question to make sure I read it right. “Of course I don't have any STDs!”

Shawn bursts out laughing. “I assumed. How long ago was that one boyfriend of yours?”

“That's not a question on here.”

“Answer it anyway,” he says coolly.

I grip the papers so they crinkle. “Three years ago.”

“Holy fuck,” Shawn laughs. But he doesn't look amused, he actually looks annoyed.

“Your sex drive must be broken.”

Jared watches me carefully over the rim of his glass. I know what he's thinking—that my sex drive is working perfectly. He experienced it earlier. So why isn't he speaking up and telling Shawn?

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

His lips part, and my palms sweat, thinking he's going to reveal my behavior when we were alone in the bath. "Keep reading," he says softly.

I turn my attention back to the printed words. My face heats up. "You want to know my experience level with anal sex?" I laugh nervously, but the two men remain quiet. "How many times do I have to tell you boys that I've never done anything beyond vanilla missionary? Shawn's been mocking me about it all day."

Shawn swallows his drink in one gulp. "I'm sorry, did you think our rules don't apply because we're having dinner?"

I blink a few times. "What?"

His chair scrapes loudly as he gets up, approaching me around the table. The simmering danger in his eyes freezes me where I am. Shawn leans over me, one hand gripping the back of my chair, the other resting on top of the papers on the table. "You boys?" he asks, quoting me. "I might have to accept that you're some sexless excuse for a servant, but I don't have to listen to your cocky attitude under this roof, little lamb."

I'm speechless. When I glance at Jared, I see he's got his head resting on one fist, watching us.

Fingers capture my cheeks, spinning me back so I'm staring up at Shawn. His aura is wildfire, singeing away my confidence. He's right, I've forgotten I'm supposed to act subservient to these two. It's not in my nature.

“Do you really want to play with us?” he asks in a whisper. He turns my face slightly, considering me with intense interest. “I’m not used to having to teach slaves how to behave. For most of them, it’s in their bones. Their hearts. They craved to follow every command from their masters. But you? You’re a fraud, and a bad actor.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to play,” I say, my nails digging in my knees. The pain helps me focus so I can speak my mind. “It’s that I don’t know how to, still.”

Shawn narrows his eyes. I feel like he’s absorbing everything he can about me in this single moment. His hand falls from my face, then he whirls away, his black suit-jacket flipping with the motion. “I’ve lost my appetite. Eat if you want, Jared, but when you’re done, bring her into the parlor.”

With him gone, some of my defiance returns; I glare at Jared. “Can you believe him?”

Jared has his hands linked together over his mouth. There’s no pity in his expression. No moment where we share even a bit of understanding over how ridiculous Shawn is being.

“He’s right. It’s time to hand you off to him.”

Thinking of the blonde man with his cruel words chills my blood. “What does that mean, hand me off? What’s he going to do?”

“Whatever he wants, Veronica.” His palms slam down on the table, rattling the silverware. I was wondering when we were going to eat, but much like Shawn, my appetite is gone now.

Jared stands smoothly, circling towards me. He motions for me to stand, and the fierceness in his vibrant eyes forces me to jump up. “Jared—”

He pins my arms behind my back, facing me away from him so that my chest is pressed on top of the table. His fingers circle the fabric of my gown, throwing it over my waist. There's cool air on my naked skin.

Then the slap comes.

I cry out, reeling from the stinging heat on my ass. He actually spanked me!

He holds me by my upper arms, turning me towards him. The dominance in his gorgeous face leaves me stunned. "Listen to me, Veronica," he growls, his pupils dilating. "As long as you're under this roof, you will never call me anything but Sir. Ever. Do you understand me?"

My ass cheek throbs. I'm conscious of my skin, my hard nipples, my rapidly swelling pussy. A flutter in my belly keeps me paralyzed from speaking.

His hand cups my jaw. "Answer me. Say 'yes, Sir.' Do it now."

"Yes, Sir," the words come out in a rush of air.

He smiles ever so slightly. It's beautiful... and it's ominous. His hold lingers on my face, his thumb brushing my bottom lip. This tenderness comes out of nowhere. I barely have time to make sense of it happening before he tenses up, his facade cracking, hinting at his own turmoil.

Jared backs away. He dusts his pants, and I swear I can see him trying to disguise a massive erection. The sight of it makes my mouth dry.

"It's settled," he says, pacing out the door. "Let's go find Shawn."

### Chapter 8

Veronica

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Shawn is waiting for us in a parlor of red carpet and silver accented walls. He's sitting cross-legged on a sofa the same metallic shade. He sips from a coffee mug, refined and bored as anyone could ever be.

I stand before him in the beautiful gown that was meant to impress at dinner. Now it makes me feel vulnerable with its plunging neckline, the silky material as much armor as a butterfly's wing. And these damn heels—why did I pick such steep ones?

Because they made me look sexy, I remind myself bitterly.

But attraction isn't enough to win these men over.

They want pure subservience.

Something I know I can never give them.

“So,” Shawn sighs, setting his cup on the nearby table. “You guys didn't waste any time coming in here. I barely touched my coffee.”

“She was acting too comfortable.” Jared shrugs casually, refusing to look at me. “She might not have the strength to go through with this plan.”

My hands ball at my sides. I'm plenty strong enough.

Shawn motions at the door. "I'll do what you want, but I need to do it alone."

Jared looks cross, but he says nothing in return. Before he rounds the corner, he shoots a side-eye my way. I can't tell if he's warning me, or worried for me, or what. But my heart throbs, regardless.

And then I'm alone with Shawn.

His river-blue eyes hold steady on me. My pulse becomes erratic. He scans me in a patient, knowing fashion. The way his lips curl up at the edges, showing his pearly teeth, fills me with dread. "Let's begin, little lamb."

Shawn moves, and I'm ashamed by how I jump. He doesn't get up, though, he only leans forward to take a sip from his coffee. "I'll lay out the rules for you. Please listen, I'll only be telling you this once. After, if you don't obey these... guidelines," he chuckles, "then I'll be sure to punish you each and every time. Do you understand?"

I marvel at how one man can give off such a threatening aura while doing nothing but sipping from a cup. I answer with trembling words. "Yes, Sir."

"Good girl. Jared burned that one into you quickly. Now for the rest." He uncrosses his legs, switching which one is on top. "The basic rule is simple. Never question us on anything we tell you to do. The fact is," he says, smiling over the drink at my uneasy face, "we own you. We are always right. So if we say something, do it, and do not hesitate. Your job is to serve us, and your aspiration is to make us happy. Obeying us should make you happy, it's your greatest joy as a slave."

Mentally, I reject his instructions. He's wrong, they don't own me, and there's no way



serving them will be my greatest joy, fuck that.

“More so,” he goes on, studying his fingers idly, “you will understand that men will ask you to do things you, apparently, have never done.” His grin widens. “To make this work, you'll need to get over your pride.”

It's like I swallowed a hot rock that's crushing my organs. I'm sweating now, my hands clenching fiercely by my hips. I want so badly to tell him to eat a dick.

He sets his cup on the coffee table to his right. “Let's begin by testing your ability to follow directions. Come here, kneel in front of me.”

Recalling the spank from Jared, I steel my nerves, then force my heels to carry me forward. Clumsily I kneel before him, the carpet plush against my skin.

“Good, though that wasn't the hard part,” he laughs. Sitting up, he unbuttons his black jacket, carefully folding it over the top of the sofa. Beneath, he's wearing a white dress-shirt that stretches over his muscular torso. I knew he was in good shape, but seeing how fit he is throws me. “I want you to unzip my pants, Veronica.”

My jaw drops, everything in me tensing at once. Shit, this is it, I should have known. With all the talk about 'obeying' and what's expected of me, it should have been more obvious. I should have been more prepared.

I'm not.

Shawn strikes like lightning, his fingers winding in my hair. Somehow his grip brings me no pain; he's in total control. “What did I tell you? To listen and not hesitate, correct? Answer me!”

“Yes, yes, Sir!” Strangely, his dominance is... exhilarating. In a way that intrigues

me, and also concerns me. It's exactly like with Jared earlier.

“Will you listen if I let you go?” He's whispering, his breath warming my ear while he bends over me.

## Page 22

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“Yes, yes, yes,” I groan. A spark of heat rolls through my core. His hand abandons me.

“I warned you, I won't let you get away lightly. If this is too much for you, leave. Get out of this house and don't bother coming back.”

I hold his gaze steadily. “I already made my choice.”

“Then unzip my pants,” he whispers.

Dropping my chin, I see the obvious bulge of his erection. What a sadist, he's turned on by these games. But then... the more I think about the thick shape of his cock where it's pressing against his pants, begging to be set free, the more my insides throb. I squeeze my knees together, but it just makes me more aware of my emptiness.

My breath quickens; I open his top button and guide the zipper down. With his trousers opened, the dark color of his underwear is exposed. His member rages against the thin material eagerly.

“Go on, take it out,” he coaxes in a hoarse voice.

I lick my lips. My hands are trembling, and I'm sure Shawn can see it, too. You can do this. I'm not a prude... and if I listen to my body, this situation is thrilling. Shawn's plenty good looking, and his energy is powerful.

I need to do this.

And some primal part of my brain wants to.

Making fists, I wrench control back and grip the elastic of his boxers. Carefully I slide them lower. His cock bounces into the air, surprising me with the sight. It's long enough that it can lie flat against his belly and reach his lower abs. The tip is fat with a defined crown, a droplet of precome blooming there, displaying how turned on he is.

I know he's watching me expectantly. Without looking up, I wrap my fingers around the base of his cock. He's so thick my fingers don't touch; his veins pulse, making him jerk in my grip, and I release him.

His light groan turns into a chuckle. Taking my jaw gently so I have to look up at him, he whispers, "I hope you never get so used to this that you stop blushing all the time. It's intoxicating to see you get so flustered."

Caught up in the moment, I let myself get lost in the magnetic pull of his eyes. I catch something there; it's brief, but I see his smirk slip, his stare flicking down to my mouth. He wants to kiss me—I'm sure of it. My mouth waters in response.

"Back to work," he says huskily, pushing me towards his stiff erection. "Let's see what you can do." He spreads his legs further, like he's getting comfortable.

Taking his dick in my palm, I hold it tight. I wasn't kidding earlier; I don't have much experience with this stuff. My ex was very shy and uncomfortable with himself. He never asked me to give him a BJ—I barely saw him naked, he preferred the lights off the rare times we got naked together.

Just do it like you've seen in porn. The collection of videos on the internet is massive. I've watched girls suck off guys before, I get how it's supposed to be done.

I give his cock a tentative lick. Salty, warm.

“Don't hold back,” he growls. “Get it all wet if you want it to go down your throat.”

His command sends a bolt of lightning through my belly. Adjusting my grip, I push my lips against his smooth shaft, running my tongue along his entire length. His curly haired stem tickles my nose; his swollen cock-head fills my mouth. Again and again, I lap at his cock until it starts to glisten with my spit.

“Much better,” he hisses between his teeth. His tone goes ragged, like he's struggling to speak. Knowing I'm working him up heightens my own pleasure. Shawn's heavy breathing increases with every lick of my tongue.

Calm down, don't get worked up over having a man's dick in your mouth!

Except I am excited. This isn't just new, it's astounding. I'd never picture myself kneeling at someone's feet—someone I just met—and giving him a blowjob. I'm better at it than I thought I'd be, too.

He lets out a raw, uncontrolled moan. Tiny hairs lift on my arms. That same static travels through me. I push my thighs together, enduring how my empty pussy is clenching, desperate to be stuffed.

I'm grateful Shawn has no clue I'm getting turned on. I'm not ready for him to have that much power over me; I'll stick to driving him over the edge.

Circling the ridge of his cock-head, I sink lower. “Fuck,” he snarls. His length fills my mouth, my jaw stretching to accommodate his size the deeper I go. All too quick, he hits the back of my throat, causing me to gag and pull backwards.

“No, no.” His fingers wrap in my hair. He holds me tight, demanding I inhale his

thick dick. “Relax your throat, Veronica.” Shockingly, he pops past my barrier. Just as I think I'm going to suffocate, he pulls me free.

I suck in air with a wet, hungry noise. He's grinning at me, his eyes fierce and molten. “You...” I manage, reaching up to cup my throat. “I thought I was going to choke.”

His eyebrows lift an inch. As he talks, he palms his cock, leisurely jerking himself as I watch. “I have a reputation that frightens some people. But I'd never hurt you, Veronica. I only want to teach you how to suck cock like a pro.”

“Having you that deep... it was frightening,” I whisper, my attention fixed on his engorged dick.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:21 am*

“Some of the best things in life are.” His voice is cryptic; it draws me back, both of us considering the other for a minute. “But you know,” he says, adjusting on the sofa, “I think you're enjoying this.”

Unsure how to answer, I go quiet.

Shawn nods at me, suddenly all business again. “Back to work.”

Obediently, I lean forward, holding his shaft and suckling at it.

“Pump it with your hand,” he demands.

Gingerly, I start jerking him. Shawn's throaty moans of passion flood my senses. Bracing one hand on his thigh, I fuck my face on him. My hair sweeps into my vision; he reaches out, tucking it out of the way. He's watching me with rapt attention.

His cock swells in my mouth. My groan is muffled; the arousal in me is building at a steady pace. As I shift on my knees, I'm aware of my slick juices sticking to my skin. Focus, I think, sucking him harder, faster. That's when I realize something incredibly dirty.

I want him to come!

Increasing my speed, I stroke Shawn with a tight fist, bobbing my lips over his tip. His hand on my head is solid, trapping me as his hips suddenly arch.

“Fuck, that's it, stay there! I'm... holy fucking god, ah...”

Warm seed fills my mouth and coats my tongue. There's too much of it; I have to decide to pull away and spit, or swallow. My searing desire makes the choice for me. Shutting my eyes, I gulp his semen down and shiver with excitement.

And lord help me, the second I've tasted it all, I want more.

“Amazing,” he whispers.

Beet red, I dare to look at him for a split second; the amused heat in his face makes me wrench away.

“Unless I'm wrong, and I rarely am, I think you enjoyed that,” he says.

“No!” I cling to the denial, too ashamed to be honest. “No, I didn't, I...”

“Tsk.” He tucks himself away, then zips his pants shut. Smoothing his hair, he angles his head thoughtfully. “Stand up, take off your dress.”

Maybe it's the strange buzzing in my blood, the unsatisfied ache of being aroused for so long, but I don't argue. On stiff legs I stand up. He's barely a foot away from me on the sofa. I know he has a good view when I slip the gown down my shoulders, exposing my firm, naked nipples on my breasts. My cunt is barely hidden in the lacy slip of a thong I chose to wear. It's damp from my arousal.

The gorgeous dress drops to my ankles.

Shawn's mild smirk brings me no comfort. “Liar. I hate liars.” Gracefully he rises, tugging at his shirt collar and tie with deft fingers until he loosens them, as if he's over-heated. “Stand there, don't move.”



Sweat runs down my spine from anxiety. His gaze is perceptive as it travels over me. He moves like a shark in the water, circling until he's at my back. His fingers brush my neck and startle me. "Ah!"

"So jumpy," he laughs. "This tattoo, do you like it, now that you know what it means?"

I want to twist around so I can see what he's doing. Breathing through my nose, I whisper, "Not at all, Sir."

"I guess there is some honesty in you. I don't care if you like it or not. This whole game we're trying to play is silly, and I'm only involved so I can save my own skin." He follows the curving letters, sending ripples down my back.

It's like there's a single string running from my head to the ceiling, keeping me taut and still. I'm beyond nervous. "Can I ask something, Sir?"

Shawn pauses with his fingers resting on my jugular. "Go ahead."

"What would happen to you if I left, or if Oliver isn't fooled by this charade? If it's about money, I mean... between Jared and you, surely you can pay it all back?"

His hand falls away from me. "You only met me this morning, but you believe you know who I am, what I have access to."

I flinch. "I just assumed..."

"You're not wrong," he cuts me off. "I am well off. Yes, it's about more than money when it comes to keeping Oliver happy. That man has so much more to offer, but he only gives it to those he trusts. If you fail, it'll hurt my image."

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

He hasn't touched me in a few minutes, so when his fingers pet over the nape of my neck, shifting my hair away, I jump. His breath rustles over my sensitive, naked shoulder. "Oliver is a powerful man," he whispers. "He has high expectations for anyone he surrounds himself with. Only perfect slaves should wear the mark of his house." He strokes my tattoo. "I'll work hard to make you the next best thing."

His palm swings around, catching me on the ass. Yelping, I can't stop myself from starting forward to escape; my brain is on autopilot.

Shawn wraps an arm around my shoulders, halting me before I can go far. I freeze, my spine pressed on his chest, my plump ass shoved against the front of his pants. "I told you not to move," he says into my ear.

"I'm sorry," I blurt, "you surprised me!"

He nuzzles my shoulder. Reaching between us, he cups my rear end, massaging the place he spanked. "It's fine. I wanted to surprise you, I like the sounds you make. Bend over, grab the table."

I shoot my eyes forward and spot the coffee table. It's only as high as my knee; if I reach for it without moving my feet, my ass will be pointed straight up in the air. And I know the view he'll have. "Hold on," I start.

Shawn kneads his fingers into my ass. It's painful and pleasurable all at once. My mouth falls open, a tiny whimper escaping. "Be a good girl and do what I tell you. We'll both have a lot more fun this way."

He eases his hold on my skin. Before he lets go completely, he tugs at my hip, driving my ass into his pelvis. The distinct, very firm shape of his hard-on jabs into me. Is he ready to go again already?

Shivering, I lean down and brace myself on the table. His cup is near me; I see my reflection in the leftover coffee. Some strands of hair are stuck to my forehead. My lips are parted from my anxious breathing.

Shawn rolls his fingers down my thighs, then up again over my hips. “Stay like this. I don't expect you to move this time. Understand?”

“Yes, Sir,” I whisper.

His touch slides over my ass, one hand reaching around to stroke my hip-bone. Then he slides lower, outlining my panties. Winding the lacy edge in his grip, he snaps it sharply, throwing the underwear aside.

Goosebumps rise on me from his aggression. With them comes a new, agonizing rush of arousal. Shawn caresses my hairless pussy, his fingers spreading on either side of my puffy lips. All of the cells in my body vibrate expectantly. I want him to touch me—I also want him to back off. It's so damn confusing.

He plays with me for awhile, just grazing his fingertips over my skin. He explores the dip of my waist, the groove of my spine. He edges close to my cunt, then moves away, touching me less than the air is.

Soon, I'm quivering on the spot.

When he finally runs a single finger through the dripping cleft of my pussy-lips, I groan desperately. “So fucking turned on, aren't you? Let's see how you like to this.” His contact vanishes, long enough for me to wonder if he left the room. That's when a

sharp spank arrives, cracking directly onto my right ass cheek.

Squealing, I gape over my shoulder at him in disbelief. He smacks the opposite muscular globe next. Shawn locks eyes with me. Then he glides his fingers back over my pussy, stroking my clit with expert skill. "Oh god," I whine. He makes small circles, and before I squeeze my eyes shut, I spot his wicked grin.

He's loving this.

A third spank comes; then a fourth. Shawn alternates between brief bursts of hot pain on my skin and rewarding me with contact on my eager clit. My arms tremble as I hold the coffee table tight, my fingers going numb. I forget which end of the world is up. I can't process everything he's doing to me.

Another spank. "Ah!" I gasp.

Those amazing fingers swirl along my pussy's seam.

Hanging my head, I give in to the waves of passion. I'd have come by now if he wasn't tempering my pleasure with his attacks. A bolt of muscle-clenching delight steals my breath when Shawn pushes two fingers into my cunt.

It's fucking heaven. I'm on the edge, so close, so ready to finally orgasm after everything I've been put through today. I'm buzzing like a live wire. Holding still is impossible, I rock side to side, hungry to get him to stuff more fingers inside... get them deeper, do anything to get me off.

"Fuck," he breathes out, and I know he's losing some of his control. "You want to come so badly, you'd do anything for it, wouldn't you?"

My only response is an obscene whimper.

“Beg me, you filthy girl,” he says.

“Let me come,” I sob, unable to fight back. Unsure why I'd even want to. Everything he's doing feels so good I'm dizzy from it. If this is what it means to serve in this house, then maybe... maybe it won't be so bad at all.

“That's not begging.” He palms my ass, the tender skin tingling. Spreading me wide, he starts to slide his fingers out. “Begging is pretty. Begging is exposing your soul. Try harder.”

I whip my head back; something wet hits my cheek. Coffee? I didn't notice my hair had slid into his abandoned cup. I contort my body so I can stare at him. Shawn's pupils are dilated, his mouth a severe line free of any expression. But I don't need any hints about his mood, I know what he wants.

“Please, Sir, let me come. I need to come so badly, I'm going crazy. Please... please, I can't take it!”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Fire flashes through his widening eyes. He loved that, I think happily. Gripping my hip, Shawn buries his fingers beyond the knuckle back into my pussy. I keen, arching my back, flexing everything to keep him inside of me.

With his thumb he massages my clitoris. His fingers roll in me, exploring my hot, soaked inner walls. And then, without any warning, the orgasm assaults me. I fall forward, my cheek resting on the table, ass lifted skyward as he pumps his knuckles in my clenching cunt.

For a little while, I'm nothing but a being of pure bliss.

It's the best orgasm I've ever had. Better than the ones I've given myself. Panting, I endure the aftershocks, grateful he hasn't yanked his fingers out yet. Each helpless squeeze of my muscles is so much better with something inside.

Panicked footsteps storm through the house. "Shawn!" Jared shouts, standing in the parlor doorway and looking aghast. "What the hell are you doing?"

His voice brings me back. Blushing furiously, I stare at Jared. "I... we were just..." I stumble on my words.

"We were making sure she can handle working here," Shawn says, guiding his fingers out of me. I openly whimper as the sensation of fullness vanishes. He pats my ass once, but gently this time.

"You were supposed to teach her how to follow our rules," Jared says, eyes narrowing as he approaches. He seems... pissed, and I wonder why.

“Oh, calm down. You wanted me to train her, correct?”

“Yes, but this...” Sighing, he squints down at me. I'm glowing pink from toe to scalp. He's digesting the sight. Not all of his anger has vanished when he asks crisply, “How was it?”

My jaw drops. I'm supposed to answer that?

“Tell him, Veronica,” Shawn commands. “Better, stand up and show him.”

Blushing hot, I stand tall with my hands dangling at my sides, twitching nervously. Jared scans me and I'm sure he appreciates what he sees, though that darkness hasn't fully left his face. Is he mad at me, or is he...No, he can't be jealous.

Jared reaches out, feeling the juices coating my thighs. The contact ignites my arousal all over again. It takes all I have not to grab his hand and make him finger me the way Shawn just was. “I guess it was good,” he says to himself. His attention darts to Shawn. “She's not a prude at all. Might not care one bit who gets her off.”

“Of course I care!” I snap, shooting daggers at them both. His words aren't meant to be a compliment, I can sense it. I've upset him somehow, and now, Jared is cutting me down. I've never been good at accepting insults. It's why I'm here, after all—I couldn't quietly handle the firing coming my way at my old job.

My pride is a curse.

Shawn's smile is angled high on one side. “Still so much fight in you.”

“I can't stand here while someone calls me a sex freak!”

“As the person who watched you nearly cream yourself while giving me a BJ,”

Shawn says, “Your argument is wasted.” He turns to Jared. “The girl likes cock. She begged me to let her come. Personality wise, she'll fit in fine. It's her temper that might fuck us over.”

Jared's hands curl so tight his knuckles go white. “We'll figure it out.” He refuses to look at me, he's staring at his feet. Pushing air through his nose loudly, he walks towards the door. “I'll see you both in the morning.”

“Sir,” I say anxiously, lifting a hand.

He doesn't respond, he leaves without another word.

It's a rejection that hurts in a way I can't explain. Jared is a stranger, through and through. Beyond that, he only wants me to please a man I've never met so he won't get in trouble.

If that's how he feels, why is he acting so furious at catching me with Shawn? He's the one who handed me to him!

Putting a palm to my forehead, I grimace. “What did I do wrong?” I ask.

Shawn crouches, then offers me my dress. I take it, surprised he bothered to give it back to me. “Don't let Jared's mood get to you. “

“He wants me to fuck other people, right?” I say it bluntly, but Shawn seems unaffected by my harsh language. “He needs me to be the same kind of perfect slave that you do. So why is he behaving like he walked in on his girlfriend cheating on him?”

Shawn flinches, seeming to gather his thoughts. “I said it earlier, he's less... comfortable with aspects of Oliver's house than some of us are.” His shoulders lift,



then fall. “We have a long week ahead of us. Get some rest.”

Clutching the dress, I follow Shawn towards the exit from the parlor. As we pass under the edge of the archway, he pulls up short. I nearly slam into him. “Sir?” I ask uncertainly.

“If things go poorly at the event with Oliver, maybe you...” Shaking himself, he strides around the corner. “Forget it. Goodnight.”

I stay there in the arch, letting Shawn leave the same way Jared did. Earlier, I wanted to get away from the both of them.

Now, in just a few hours, they've turned my heart into a giant maze.

One that I'm not sure has a beginning or an end.

### Chapter 9

Jared

---

I haven't watched a sunrise in some time. But I watch this one.

I've been awake for over an hour before the glow of the giant star crested the horizon. I showered and dressed myself in the dark, and now, I've got the best seat to the most reliable show on Earth.

Leaning on the balcony outside my room, I study the massive arrival of the sun as it brushes the rest of the world. That giant curve reminds me instantly of the person I wasted all my sleep trying not to think of.

Veronica.

Her curves are more defined than the sun's. Her energy just as hot. I've only known her for a brief time and she's somehow burrowed into the part of me that rules my desire. I ache for her. I crave her in a way I'm not familiar with.

But she isn't mine.

She belongs to someone else.

Remind yourself of that, I think. Remember it every single minute. I tried to last night,

when I stumbled across Shawn and her together. I didn't have time to prepare myself for that scene. I'd thought he'd break her spirit, hammer home what her mannerisms need to be while she's a part of Stone House.

Instead, he'd helped himself to the soft pieces of her I'd resisted.

I took one look at her naked body, and the chains holding my jealousy at bay came apart. One word roared up inside of me.

Mine!

I'd wanted to fuck her before anyone else did. It was a selfish urge, but it's the truth. I'd held back in the bath. That had been a mistake.

Shawn has never held back as long as I've known him. Running a hand over my face, I groan angrily. I should have told him I wanted her first. But I hadn't thought I'd have to. Shawn and I rarely chase the same women. The few times we had I could count on one hand—and those are the times he'll never let me forget.

I make a fist and grit my teeth. Does that mean I should ask him to back off? Or should I be the one who stops pursuing her? Again, I know it won't matter soon. Once Oliver has Veronica, she'll be his unless he says otherwise.

Even if he said he'd share, I don't think I could.

Not after what happened with Luna.

I need some air.

Walking through the quiet house, I pass by a few servants who have arrived to do their daily cooking and cleaning. They nod their heads at me; I motion back, hurrying

towards the backdoor.

Sliding out into the fresh morning air, I'm halfway across the grass, heading towards the stable, when a voice pipes up behind me. "Sir?"

My heart throbs painfully. Hearing Veronica's voice impacts me more than I'm prepared for, like a cold splash of water from a shower you assume will be hot. Glancing over my shoulder, I see her standing there in a pair of black leggings and a loose, robin's egg blue calf-length dress. One of her white flats is rubbing her opposite ankle uneasily.

"How long have you been awake?" I ask, looking her over again.

She fans out the hem of her dress with a half-smile. "It's hard to sleep in a new bed. I needed something to occupy myself, so I went and explored the wardrobe."

Unsure how to respond, I glance at the stable.

She follows my eyes. "Are you going somewhere, Sir?"

I hate how I'm thrown off by her presence. I'm used to having solid control. Digging my claws into what stability I can find in my psyche, I nod my chin at Veronica. "I see you've remembered how to address me today." Her whole face becomes the same shade as an apple; my heart beats faster. "I was going to go for a ride."

Her eyes widen a hair. "There are horses here?"

The childlike excitement comes off of her in waves. Before I can bite my tongue, I ask, "Would you like to see?"

## Page 27

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Veronica's smile is a beacon of joy. “Yes, please!”

I'd hoped to clear my head of my feelings before getting close to this girl again. Taking her riding... just the two of us... is the opposite of my goal.

But honestly...

It feels incredibly good to be selfish for once.

\*\*\*\*

We ride through the vineyards at a solid pace.

Veronica follows my chocolate stallion on a silvery-gray mare, never struggling to keep up with me. She climbed onto the horse like a natural as well. “This isn't your first time,” I call, “is it?”

“My mother had horses when I was younger,” she says. “I rode them constantly. I got in trouble a lot for always running off to ride instead of helping out or doing my homework.”

A laugh rises from me, and god, it feels good. “Rebellious even then.”

“I'm trying to be less so, Sir.”

“You don't have to call me that out here,” I say, peering back at her. Veronica's eyebrows arch high in surprise. “Stone House has rules, but there's no need to enforce

them everywhere.”

Her forehead crinkles. Kicking her horse forward, she pulls up beside me. “Then I can speak my mind without getting in trouble?”

“I can't forget the things you say,” I remind her, smirking. “But unless it's incredibly offensive, I doubt I'd hold it against you.”

Pushing her mouth into a pout—one that I ache to kiss—she clears her throat. “Why were you so angry at me last night?”

I dig my heels into my stallion. The horse snorts, shaking its head, and I have to take a minute to trot it in a circle and calm him down. When I'm done, I eyeball Veronica, then motion at a hill ahead. “Follow me.”

I don't wait for her to agree. I just start my horse galloping.

The wind is glorious on my face. Everything smells fresh and green out here by the mountains. Together, we ride up the slope, then at the top, I dismount. Veronica is a second slower than me. “Look,” I say, throwing my arm out back towards the house.

She turns, and the both of us take a moment to enjoy the view. It's nice from the kitchen, or most anywhere on the property, but here, on the hills, it's magnificent.

Veronica inhales until her chest rises. I watch helplessly, thinking about the ways I could strip her dress from her body. Her eyes dart to mine, the pupils wide, serious. “Answer my question.”

Fuck. “I don't know what you expect me to say.”

“I want to know why you were giving me so much attitude. You told Shawn to do

whatever he had to, and he did.”

“I didn't expect him to go so far with you so fast.”

She tightens her jaw, but some of the hardness melts from her glare. “Well, it sucked having you act so awful. Okay? I'm confused enough by this situation. I don't need you making it worse with your petty attitude.”

A grim line forms across my lips. “I know I told you the rules don't apply outside of the house, but don't think that means I'll stand here and let you speak down to me.”

She crosses her arms, turning away. The joy of our ride has vanished quicker than the trip to get here on the hill. She's fuming, I think, watching her silently. I don't like being made to explain my confusing emotions to anyone, let alone her.

I also hate seeing her being miserable.

Thinking of a solution, I start to speak in a calmer voice. “I don't want you to be confused. Or stressed, if I can help. That does nothing for any of us. If you have other questions, ask me them.”

Slowly, she looks up at me. “You told me that Oliver was more than your boss. Then what is he?”

“A friend. Our families knew each other, we grew up together. When his father passed away, the vineyards became his.” I falter as the memory of his grief comes at me. Oliver had been close to his dad, and though the death hadn't been a shock, he'd gone to a dark place for some months. “I... helped him through that tough time.” I'd done more than that; I'd taken over signing paperwork, pretending it was his signature, despite the risk of being caught.

Veronica folds her legs so she can sit on the ground. “He's lucky he had you in his life.”



*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

I run my hand over my head. “He thought so, too. When he came out of his depression, saw how I'd salvaged his father's business, he made me his personal consultant. It's a pointless title that just means we talk to each other candidly, and he pays me a lot of money for my honesty.”

“And your reliability,” she says, trying to catch my eye.

I do it, but only for a second. Then I stare back over the vineyards. “I guess.”

Veronica plucks at the grass, not pulling it out, just feeling it with her fingertips. “Were the sex parties your idea?”

“Not exactly. Shawn can be thanked for putting the seed in Oliver's head. We met him at a business convention one year, and I think something about his...” I chase the air for the right word. “Vibe? It pulled Oliver in. Shawn took us to a private party in the convention's hotel. It was essentially an orgy. I told Shawn off for bringing us into that situation, then dragged Oliver out of there.”

“What, why?”

“Oliver was seeing someone. A woman named Luna.” Fuck, I hate this story. I regret offering Veronica answers. But she asked, and deep down, I itch for her to understand who I am. “He left with me that night, but he stayed in touch with Shawn. That was when the sex parties came up.” I drop down next to her, gazing up at the periwinkle sky. “Everything changed after that.”

“So you hated the whole kinky party stuff?”

Chuckling under my breath, I roll my head so I can watch her. “I didn't mind the idea of the parties. And early on, I guess I even enjoyed them.”

Her blush is so damn addictive. “What changed it for you?”

My grin fades away. “She did.” The second I say it, I spot the pain in Veronica's face. Immediately I want to soothe her. “Not a girl I was seeing,” I explain. “Luna.” Shifting on the grass, I rest my elbows on my knees. “Oliver wanted to experiment, but he'd never cheat on her. He invited her to his first 'party.' He was worried she'd hate it.”

Veronica scrunches up her nose. “How could she not? I'd be upset if my fiance sprung something like that into our relationship.”

Leveling a somber look on Veronica, I swing my head. “You don't get it. Luna loved the parties more than Oliver did.”

She does a double-take. “What? How?”

“The experience opened up her mind. She had exhibitionism in her blood. It wasn't long before she asked if she could fuck some of the guests, coaxing Oliver into doing it with her. Then she graduated to having him watch her play with other men.” A wave of distress swallows me. My memories of those nights, seeing the pain on my friend's face, are still vivid. “In the end, Luna wasn't jealous, but Oliver was. Especially when she left him and began seeing someone on the side.”

“She cheated on him? That's terrible!”

“Oliver was torn apart by their break-up. I watched it all, did my best to help him through it. I think it's why he eventually leaned so heavily into the sex slave thing. The idea of someone who was devoted to pleasing him, obeying him, was... alluring.”

She tilts her head down, staring at her feet but not really seeing them. I wonder if she understands what I'm saying. If any of this is resonating.

Some of her hair falls forward, hiding her lovely face. I can't bear for her to be hidden; I reach out, tucking the pieces behind her ear. It reveals the tattoo on her long throat. The sight causes my emotions to war with each other.

Veronica's hazel eyes fixate on me. They're trending towards blue, like they're stealing the color from the sky. "Jared..." Her tongue darts out to wet her bottom lip. She's going to say something else.

I don't let her.

"Mmmff," she manages, my mouth capturing hers in a wild kiss. Weaving my fingers in her hair I nudge her to the grass until she's under me. I hadn't planned this. Now that I'm here, I try to go slow, my lips gliding across hers, giving her space to breathe.

Veronica doesn't want space.

Her nails dig into the back of my head, pulling me to her roughly. A rumble leaves my throat—her insistence is a fucking turn on. I knew she had a wild side, I'd seen it myself. Shawn made her come first. Abandoning our fun in the bath is a huge regret.

But I can make up for it now.

Reaching along her hip, I scoop up her dress and yank it high. Her leggings are soft under my palm—blocking me from her perfect skin. "Get these off," I growl, grabbing the upper elastic where it circles her belly.

She shimmies out of them. When she's free, she grabs my jaw, making me kiss her again. Her tongue curls across mine until everything is buttery. "Ah," she hisses, "the

grass is cold.”

“Then let's warm you up.” With one hand I unloop my belt. The buckle clinks as I shove it down my legs, pressing my boxer-clad erection against Veronica's panties. Her whole body vibrates—it's fucking ecstasy.

I grind against her several times, in love with how her trembles roll across the head of my rock-hard cock. I almost—almost—don't grab a condom from my pant's pocket. What I'm doing... the way I'm pursuing my lust for this woman... is risky enough. No need to throw the chance of a baby into the mix.

“Jared,” she whimpers. Her hands wrap in my shirt; taking her cue, I throw it over my head, my short hair getting tussled. Leaning back on my heels, I luxuriate in the desire in her eyes. Her lips are parted in an “o” that's painfully erotic. It's not that I'm a stranger to woman being attracted to me. I just never wanted someone to respond as much as I want her to.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

It fuels me. Drives me. Makes my cock swell with new life.

“I hate that I wasn't the first one to make you come,” I admit, drawing myself back over her body in the grass. My nose rubs on hers; I kiss her like it's the last time, even though I refuse to let it be. “But I will be the first one here to fuck you. That part of you is mine.”

For now.

No—I'm not going to think about that. In this moment the only thing that exists is Veronica and me. Our urge to connect... to fuck like beasts... that's all I'm going to focus on.

Opening the condom, I slide it over my length. Veronica watches with rapt attention. “You really want this, don't you?” I tease, palming my full length.

She bites her knuckle. “Don't make me say it.”

“Now I have to.” Cupping her chin, I study her pink cheeks closely. “You're dying to fuck me. You're craving my cock. Say it.”

Her breath comes out in a shudder. “I want your cock.”

Heat blossom in my lower belly, my balls tightening. “Jesus, that's hot.” Gripping the base of my shaft, I pump it slowly. “Don't be ashamed. I'll tell you a secret.” With my free hand, I grab the edge of her white panties and rip them down her thighs. “Last night, when I walked in on you and Shawn... when I saw you standing there naked

with your juice dripping from your cunt... I wanted you more than I've ever wanted anything in this world.”

I can't shut my mouth, the truth spills out. Veronica's eyes fly to their widest size as she gapes at me. Everything holds still. Just for a moment, but it's painful as I wait and wonder if I'll regret revealing this to her.

She reaches out, gripping my hips, pulling my rigid cock towards her. “Fuck me,” she pants, “stop making me wait for this. I've wanted it since you teased me in the bath. Why did you stop, why did you hold back?”

Instead of answering I kiss her silky lips and drive my full length inch by thick inch into her pussy. She trembles in my muscular arms, groaning as she endures me filling her up.

My fat tip spreads her labia, sliding in easily to her embracing walls; she cries out, breaking our kiss. By the time I'm in her to the hilt, I think she's about to orgasm. “Are you that close already?” I ask, delightfully amazed. “Your cunt is milking me like it's dying of thirst, pet. Tell me if you're going to come before I start actually fucking you.”

“Please,” she moans. Her head tosses in the grass, eyes squeezed shut. “Jared, fuck, I can't believe... I'm already on the edge!”

Her responsiveness drives me wild. I grip her hips and begin to pump, wasting no time in sending her closer to climax. Her pussy tightens. “Don't you dare come, not until I do, got it? I have complete control of your body. It belongs to me—your orgasm belongs to me.”

Her inner walls clench around my cock. Colors explode in my head from the pleasure. Veronica has a dirty, perverted side as big as my own. Her pussy is melting

on my shaft, each of my solid thrusts creating obscenely wet noises.

Reaching under her dress, I toy with her hard nipples, thrilling at how she whimpers. Fondling her perky chest, I arch into her. I told her to wait for me to come first, thinking I'd take some time, but the way she's meeting my thrusts with her own is sending me into a passion-filled spiral. I'm on the cusp of coming; my cock flexes inside of her with every beat of my heart.

Her nails cut into my shoulders. "Come," she begs me, staring into my eyes wantonly. "Please, just come inside of me, I can't hold back—I... I'm so fucking close, Jared, ah..."

With a grunt, I hold her still as my dick pulses inside of her. "Come for me," I growl, pressing my teeth together. I kiss her throat, her tattoo, and fuck her as I lose any semblance of my composure.

The first spurt of my seed sends her over the edge. Veronica squeals, gyrating and tossing her head back as the orgasm takes hold of her. Her muscles hug my cock so gravely I'm staggered.

Breathing heavily, she goes limp under me. I don't move from my position; I have the best view any man could want. Not the vineyards, not the early morning sky free of clouds. Lying on the green grass, I get to count all of Veronica's eyelashes. I can watch the side of her neck thrum as her blood races through her veins.

I get to watch her just be.

After a while she blinks, turning towards me. Her lazy smile lights up my heart. "Hi," she says, her teeth glinting as she begins to laugh.

It's contagious. I join her, loving how my skin, still sensitive from our sex, feels as it

rubs on the soft grass. Even the air tastes better.

We roll apart, taking a moment to clean ourselves up and redress. I'm redoing my belt when she speaks up. "I wasn't crazy. You were jealous last night."

My bones turn to solid cement. I finish clipping my belt buckle, not looking at her as I talk. "Don't take too much stock in it. I wanted to do to you what Shawn did, he just got there first."

"If he finds out what we did up here, will he be upset like you were?"

"I wasn't upset," I say hotly, scowling at her. I'm thrown off by her sly smile—she's baiting me. Her cocky expression fades as my shadow falls on her. Bending low, I grip her thick hair, pulling her on her toes for a rough, oxygen deprived kiss.

Veronica gasps for air when I'm finished. "You're worried about Shawn's feelings. Does that mean you like him?" I ask.

She falters, toying with the hem of her dress. "I do," she says slowly. Her eyes cut away, like she regrets what she's just said. "Please don't take that wrong. It's confusing, all of this. I didn't expect to like either of you, never mind both." Her hair flips side to side as she shakes her head. "Nothing about this situation is normal, but my feelings, if I shut up and listen to them, they're the only strong voice I have."



*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“What does that voice say?” I ask in a hushed tone.

Her hand circles mine, lingering there. “That it's okay to go with your heart. It's not wrong or bad or weird to want to be with two people... if you desire them both.”

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We ride back to the stable. It's a quiet, quick trip, both of us lost in our thoughts. Her observation continues to haunt me.

It's not wrong to want to be with two people if you desire them both, huh? I didn't expect to get such wisdom from a woman I'd fucked senseless moments beforehand.

Hopping off my horse, I take the reigns from hers and lead them both into their stalls. I'm inside the stable briefly, but the shadows mess with my vision enough that when I step back into the morning sunlight, I have to blink away my blindness.

That's when I see Shawn standing near the garage.

His jaw tilts upwards; he glances from me, to Veronica. She's smoothing knots from her hair and hasn't spotted him yet.

My hand perches on the edge of the wide stable doors. Shawn casts me a knowing look. When he doesn't turn away, I loosen my grip on the rough wood so I can gesture at Veronica. “Go inside and clean up.”

The edges of her perceptive eyes crinkle. Holding my breath, I wait to see if she'll

challenge me. It's always so damn exciting when she does. "Okay," she says, backing away. Her fingers weave together at her middle. I watch how she rubs one knuckle and I imagine taking her slender fingers and sucking them into my warm mouth.

As she turns, her dark hair catches the sun, turning from chocolate to burnt-orange for a split second. Like the feathers of a crow as it soars in the sky. I watch her until she vanishes around the stable, and then I hear the gentle crunch of shoes on packed dirt. "What were you two off doing?" Shawn asks behind me.

"Nothing." My arms wind over my chest as I face him fully. He's dressed in tan pants and a long-sleeved cream colored shirt, the kind of clothing most people would be terrified to risk wearing outside. But I know Shawn. He's too rich to worry if his outfit gets dirty.

He looks past me, towards the house. "You went out on a ride, didn't you?"

"What if we did?"

"Why would you waste your energy doing that? Oliver doesn't give a shit if she can ride a horse."

My insides clench. Oliver. The reminder of Veronica's fate is frustrating.

Shawn steps closer until we're eye to eye. "If I didn't know better, I'd think you wanted some alone time. Just you and her and nothing in between. A romantic hillside romp."

"Back off, Shawn."

"My god, are you falling for her?"

“I said back off.” My teeth come together so hard it gives me a headache.

The mocking humor melts from his face. “Fucking hell, Jared.” He shakes his head sharply. “What are you doing to yourself?”

“This isn't just about me,” I grumble.

“What do you mean?” There's something in his glare; something jagged and primal. He's daring me to tell him the truth. I know once I do that everything will change. I should keep my mouth shut.

Except... I can't. Not about this.

I steady myself before I talk. “She told me she wants both of us.”

His look of pure shock is almost worth the knot in my guts. “I'm sorry, she told you, to your face, that she wants both of us?” He ruffles his hair, looking more disheveled than I've seen him before. “The balls on that girl.” His tone is as cold as usual, but the edges of his mask are cracking. My news is affecting him.

“Yes,” I agree quietly, “she's very brave.”

Shawn hesitates, studying me from the corner of one eye. “Full honesty. You want her too, right?”

“I do.” Lying is pointless, I don't even try. “And you? For all your cruelty, something you've done has attracted her to you.”

His smile is subtle. I can tell he's thinking before he answers. “When I was alone with her, she surprised me. I won't pretend I'm not excited to have more fun with her.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“We have two weeks until Oliver arrives,” I say.

Shawn's smile becomes a full blown grin. “Were you always this greedy? I like this side of you, Jared.”

“The feeling isn't mutual.”

“But that won't stop you from sharing Veronica with me, hm?”

I loath how he's using this situation to tease me. He's also too perceptive for my liking. Shawn knows he pisses me off. He also knows it isn't enough to make me walk away. “If she wants both of us, then that's what I want as well.”

He stares eagerly at the house, one finger perching on his lips. “When do we break the news to her?”

“Tonight,” I say solemnly. “I don't want to wait longer than that.”

I've only got two weeks with this woman.

I'm going to make the most of it.

### Chapter 10

Shawn

---

I pace across my bedroom for the fifth time.

It's hard to hold still when I know what's coming.

How will she react?

All day long I've thought about this moment. Whenever Veronica was in the same room, I'd stare at her, burning with lust... with unbridled excitement. I knew a secret that she didn't. God, I love secrets. Almost as much as I love picking people apart to figure out what makes them tick.

My greatest thrill is getting into a woman's head. Once I learn her fantasies, her wicked dreams, the perverse things she's aching to do and is often too afraid to say out loud... that's when I shine.

The only time I'm ever satisfied.

Footsteps thump outside my door. My head snaps up, focusing on Veronica and Jared as they enter together. She's wearing the same blue dress as she was this morning when I saw her riding on her horse, but her leggings are gone. Her long hair is loose, sweeping down her back, tickling her elegant neck.

Jared shuts the door behind them, the noise heavy with finality.

“What's going on?” she asks, staring between us, her paranoia blooming.

“I heard a fun story today,” I say, smiling shrewdly. “Something about a girl who's greedy enough to want not just one of her new masters, but two of them.”

Her feet anchor to the floor. As I watch, her blush spreads up her throat and keeps going. I'm seriously obsessed with her reactions. “You told him?” she asks Jared.

“I did,” he says. His fingers drift down to stroke her jawline. “I'm not so cruel that I'd deny giving you what you really desire, pet.” I'm fascinated by how she gazes up into his eyes, her bottom lip shaking, her muscles straining in anticipation.

Jared stabs one quick look at me, then he wraps his mouth on hers. Their kiss is shorter than a blink, but it twistssomethinginside of me. Ignoring the feeling, I move to sit on the bed. “Undress her.”

“Don't tell me what to do,” he answers. But of course he reaches for the hem of her dress. I'm not asking him to do something he doesn't already want to.

“Hold up,” she says, lifting her hands. “Are you serious? You two... and me, we're really going to do this?”

“Not if you don't want to,” I say with a light shrug. “I thought we were done reminding you that you're free to leave. But, I think—I know,” I add with emphasis, my grin curling at the corners. “You've been curious to see what being shared by us actually means.”

Jared runs his fingers over her ear, down to her temple. She looks back at him with her lip pulled between her teeth. “Don't be scared. Your body knows what it wants.

Listen to it.”

Her eyebrows furrow, then her forehead smooths. What did he say that got through to her? “Okay,” she swallows the word.

“That's not what you say,” I whisper hotly.

Veronica bows her head in my direction. “Okay, Sirs.”

My cock flexes from hearing her subjugate herself. Jared lifts her dress off of her gorgeous curves until she's wearing nothing but black lingerie. “Lie her over my lap,” I tell him.

He gets her positioned across my body. Her black panties are far too sexy. Gripping the material, I tug it between her cheeks. “Ah!” she says, trying to look up at me.

“Relax,” I whisper. I meet Jared's eye. “This will be fun for all of us.”

My palm explores her creamy skin. Veronica gasps, the noise making my blood run quicker. I make sure to run my fingers over her thighs; the groove of her spine. The longer we play, the closer I get to the crevice between her perfect ass-cheeks.

It's easy to read her. Beyond the sound of her breathing, I can smell her lusty scent. She loves being played with. Palming her ass, I spread her thighs slightly. A tender stroke here, then there... it's not long before she's unconsciously lifting her hips, reaching for my hands.

When I finally explore between her crease, straight across her damp panties, she moans helplessly. “Such a dirty girl,” I chuckle. “How wet is she, Jared?”

The other man comes closer, crouching between her legs. “Incredibly soaked.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“Fuck,” she whispers into my knee. But she doesn't stop rocking her body. I know the signs of someone too far gone to turn back. Veronica is ours; she'll let us do anything.

I jerk my head towards my dresser. “Middle drawer, black box.”

He heads to the dresser, done pretending he doesn't want to play. Good—I wasn't sure if he'd back out. I'd keep playing without him, but it's so much more fun with three people.

Gathering the box, he cracks it so he can scan inside. His tiny grin says he's pleasantly surprised. “Fine, let me warm her up first.”

“No. Let me.” I hold out my palm; he drops one of the items from the box, a bottle, into it. Dripping some of the oil onto my hands, I rub them over Veronica's hips. I waste no time coating her ass, outlining her rear, playing with the pliant globes and spreading them wide.

She squeaks, lifting her head again. “That feels really good, but what are you doing?”

“Giving you a massage.” Gripping the thin material of her panties, I draw it deep enough in her crease that it looks like her ass and cunt are trying to devour it. With slippery fingers, I trace her exposed pussy-lips, loving how she squirms. My erection is painfully hard.

Tugging the panties down her thighs, I let Jared grab them so he can toss them aside. Coating my palms with more oil, I keep exploring her soft skin. Each time I get close to her asshole, I stop, skirting it just barely.



Veronica grinds her hips. My patience frays with her overt sexual need. I'm usually stronger than this... more distant. Something about this woman is erasing my walls, and I can't tell if I like it or not.

Eager to stay on top, I brush her asshole with a fingertip, making her mewl.

I can feel her heart fluttering through her breasts and into my thighs. Jared and I look at each other. He offers me the last item from the box and I take it. "Ready, little lamb?" I ask into her ear.

She shivers. "Yes."

Grinning wide, I press the first of the metal anal beads against her asshole. It's as big as a walnut, and even slippery with oil, it takes some work to insert it inside of her.

Jared kneels down beside her face, cradling her chin. "How does it feel?" he asks.

She inhales sharply. "Different. And... kind of good."

His grin might rival mine. "Are you sure you want to do this with us?"

Waiting for her answer, I slowly slide another bead inside. Veronica whimpers, and when she rocks her hips, I feel her juices soaking through my pants. Fuck, my cock is on the verge of exploding.

Keeping his hold on her chin, he kisses her then and there. I don't watch, I'm busy being fascinated by how her ass is chewing up the metal balls. One by one, I push them into her clenching tunnel, noting how quick her breathing is getting.

She said this felt kind of good?

No.

She fucking loves this.

Finally I reach the base of the toy; it's a fluffy bunny tail. "Good girl, well done. Your hungry asshole took it all."

Her cheeks are on fire, but she keeps humping me, unable to control herself. She's like an animal in heat. The longer I watch, the worse my own urge is becoming.

Breaking the kiss with Jared, she tries to get off my lap. "What... what did you..."

"Let her see," he says, standing up.

Taking her hands, we help her to her feet. She spots my erection, but I have no shame. What amazes me... is how she bites her lip as she looks, like she's thinking about how much she wants to suck me off again.

Adjusting myself with a wince, I lead her to the floor length mirror in my room. Veronica's mouth falls open as she twists to see what I've done.

The fluffy bunny tail is exquisite where it sticks out of her plump ass. As she contorts herself for a better look, she pants under her breath. The sensation of being stuffed back there is getting to her. "You like it," I note, coming to stand behind her.

She doesn't look away from her reflection. "I've never done anything like this."

"I told you this place was all about introducing you to exceptional pleasure," Jared says. He crosses his arms, staying by the bed. His attitude is a little stiff—wasn't he the one who suggested we share this woman?

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Eyeing him, I place my hands on her shoulder's. "Go help Jared strip down. He seems lonely."

"I'm not fucking lonely," he mutters.

"Then you want me to keep her all to myself?"

He opens his mouth, but Veronica speaks first. "Stop it, don't fight. I want to undress him, I just wasn't sure how to ask." I watch in amazement as she shrugs me off, approaching Jared.

His eyebrows creep up as she gets near him. Wordlessly, she drags her nails down his shirt. Popping a few buttons, she guides it up over his chest. I focus on her round ass when she squats low, fiddling with his pants until they're around his ankles. He steps out of them, but when she reaches out for his boxers, he shakes his head.

"Now what?" she rasps, her eyes cloudy with need.

Together we attack.

Gripping her chin, I tilt her back so I can lick her neck. Her scent reminds me of fresh raspberries... of a kiss in the summer when I was young and idealistic. Veronica's heavy lashes dip low when I unhook her bra. Tenderly, I suckle at her hard nipples.

I'm itching to explore every inch of her nubile figure. Tracing her lean muscles, I toy with the bunny tail. I flick it, then tug, forcing erotic moans from her pink lips.

Something shoves me aside—Jared, who muscles in so he can kiss her. I realize, then, that I still haven't. But why should I? Kissing is meant for emotional events... for people with open hearts ready for love.

Idiots, more precisely.

Unlike Jared, I'm not foolish enough to let myself get caught up in feeling anything for Veronica. She's a pawn. Our gift to Oliver.

Another step towards redemption for a mistake that still haunts me.

“Move,” I say flatly, pushing Jared aside. He admonishes me with a scowl. Ignoring him, I lie flat on the bed, pulling my briefs down to expose my cock. It bounces into the air like a flag claiming a new country. “I'm done waiting. It's time for the real fun, little lamb. Come ride me.”

She's fixated entirely on my rigid cock. I'm just as fascinated by her reaction to the sight of it. It's because she's nearly a virgin, I remind myself harshly. I can't let myself get wrapped up in her raw obsession. She'd respond the same way to any cock, not just mine.

I'm not special.

I...

“Fucking hell,” I whisper thickly as she straddles my hips. The view of her naked body, her ample breasts with their rosy, upturned nipples, is striking. She meets my eyes, and briefly, we share an understanding. It's a simple one—the desire to make each other feel good—but it's been so long since I've connected with anyone like that. It might even be the first time.

A foil square hits my chest; startled, I grab the condom Jared threw. He sends me a pointed look, so I send one back. Right, don't want to knock up the boss's new toy. When I think about that... how all of this effort is being done to make Veronica perfect for Oliver... a gigantic ball convulses in my guts.

Is this jealousy?

Bitterness?

I throw the condom at Veronica, focusing on her instead of the tiny, miserable voice in my head. "Put it on me."

She fumbles with the condom. It's the first time she's put one on a man, I think, amazed. Her ex really was awful. Carefully, like the condom is a grenade that could go off, she glides the latex over my cock-head.

I thrum in delight, burying my hands in the blanket. "Good girl," I whisper.

"Thank you," she says, glancing up at me.

My smirk returns. "Well? Fuck me. Unless you don't want to."

We all know she does; quickly she scrambles forward, spreading her thighs, hovering her dripping cunt over my thick tip. Her limbs shake as she lowers herself.

The heat resonating from her snatch makes me swoon. It takes all I have not to lift my hips and slam into her. I want to relish this... I want to experience it without missing a beat.

"Aaah," she hisses, sinking down onto my first inch. White fire flares in my skull, then in my chest, then in my belly. My balls draw up, hands reaching down to grab

her hips. I don't move her, I just hold her as she lets her weight bring her down onto my patch of pubic hair.

And it's fucking astounding. All of it, every little moment.

One single, agonizing stroke shouldn't feel this perfect. But it does, and as I look past her shoulder, I catch the longing in Jared's stare. He knows what I'm feeling; he wants the same thing.

Sharing this woman might be harder than either of us bargained for.

### Chapter 11

Veronica

---

Delicious pressure. Like I'm in the darkest bottom of the ocean, and also swimming through a cloud.

That's what fucking Shawn is like.

I haven't moved from sitting on his cock yet. I'm afraid to—what if the pleasure is so great it kills me? Can you die from sex? My heart could explode, it has to be possible.

But, to die like this...

It might be worth it.

“How?” he suddenly asks, guiding me up along his length, and I think there's no end to it. “How can you be so good when you're so new?”

I shake my head, unable to answer. My tongue is heavy, my body using all its energy to handle the vibrant pleasure growing in me. I want to come, I need to come. That's my reality.

Hands wind around me from behind; it's Jared. He presses his warm mouth to my shoulder, then my cheek. His fingertips find my clit, grinding it as I fuck Shawn.

Individually, they're too much. Together? It's a tsunami of blinding heat.

Though he's fighting to regain his normal control, I can see in Shawn's face that he's losing himself. His teeth are bared, lips curling back, hands crushing into my middle. Faster and faster he drives his cock into me.

Jared speeds up his pace—from the corner of my eye, I see he's jerking himself off as he rubs my clitoris. I remember seeing him do that before.

“There,” Shawn gasps, holding me so tight it'll leave bruises. “Come for me, little lamb. I know you're there. Do it.”

His command resonates with me. It pushes me off a cliff, sending me tumbling into a mind-blowing orgasm. I hear myself cry out from far away.

When I hunch my shoulders, trembling with overwhelming passion, Jared pulls at my bunny tail. My ass squeezes, resisting, but the beads begin to pop out, one by one, sending me rolling into another helpless orgasm.

Beneath me, Shawn groans long and low. His eyes close as he thrusts into me, and through the condom, I feel him coming. Jared pulls his hands away, forcing me off of Shawn.

“My turn,” he says, flipping me onto my belly.

I don't see his cock, but I feel it spearing my slippery pussy. Even though I was just thoroughly fucked, his size still strains my walls to capacity.

Jared's weight settles on me; he murmurs in my ear what I can't be sure is English. Either I'm too far gone, or he is. His cock is in constant motion, not slowing even after another orgasm rips through me.



My entire body rocks in place. “Good girl,” he whispers in my ear, and I feel his compliment writing itself on my soul. He grinds into me faster, harder, intent on his own needs.

Sweat dampens the blankets under me. He's slick with it, it coats my spine as it forms on his solid chest. “Perfect,” he pants softly. “So fucking perfect, Veronica.”

Veronica.

So much of my experience with these men has been distilled down to good girl and pet or other nicknames. Having him whisper my real name here, now, is sublime.

Abruptly his cock grows inside of me. I'm worried the condom will split, how can it possibly hold him? It doesn't disguise the heat of his come as it fills the latex, and I treasure that.

Slowly, his ragged breathing smooths out. Coiling his arms around my waist, he braces me so he can pull his spent cock free.

“That,” I hear Shawn say from the other side of the big bed, “Was amazing. Good job, everyone.” He's back to joking around.

I turn over, lying on the wet blanket. Jared is sitting on the edge of the mattress, facing away, his head hanging low. I imagine a heavy weight is resting on his shoulders but I don't know why. “Sir?” I call.

He glances at me, then stands up. “I need to throw this away,” he says, vanishing into the master bathroom. When the door shuts, I wince. He's acting so weird. Didn't he enjoy this? I did, and Shawn seems to have, too.

Propping myself on my elbows, I scan the other man's face. He's looking very comfortable on the pillows. "Is Jared okay?"

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“Didn't you realize by now that he's a broody type?”

Water runs in the bathroom. He's taking a shower. “No, something is wrong. It's like he's worried about something.”

He folds his arms behind his head, watching the ceiling. “Who knows.”

Biting my bottom lip, I work through the bundle of thoughts tumbling in my mind. I have so many of them. Is he worried about me not being good enough for his boss? “Joanna mentioned that Oliver released the last two slaves he'd bought. Why would he do that?”

Shawn crinkles his nose. “It's complicated.”

“Try me.”

He looks torn between spanking me or being amused. “You're lucky I'm too tired to reprimand you for your attitude.”

“Sorry, but please, will you explain? Does it have anything to do with... Luna?”

His smile fades; he looks back at the ceiling. “Jared told you about her.”

“This morning, yeah.”

“How much did he say?”

Unsure what he's alluding to, I study his face for a hint. He's too good at slipping his emotions behind a wall, though. "Stuff about her cheating on Oliver, that's about it."

He holds my stare. Apparently satisfied, he drums his fingertips on his cheek. "The first girl Oliver bought, I think it was too close, time wise, to what had happened with Luna. He hadn't gotten over her yet. Tensions got pretty high, he pushed that slave harder than she was okay with."

My pulse begins racing uneasily. "Did he hurt her?"

Shawn considers me from the corner of his eye. "Not exactly, but I've never seen him so eager to lash out at another person. Jared and I talked it over, and we suggested he pay off her contract fees, send her on her way, and purchase someone more fitting to his... new tastes. But the next one wasn't any better."

I'm listening with rapt attention, but my mind keeps wandering back to the fact that the guy I'm supposed to be preparing myself to be enslaved to has "newly" violent urges.

He sighs, then says, "Oliver felt so guilty about how he behaved with the first girl, that he pulled way back with the second. He acted like her sugar daddy instead of a master. She even made him buy her a house in the Bay area. That time Jared stepped in, and unlike the first slave, Oliver had his lawyers dismantle this contract. The girl had to sell her house to pay back the debt."

Now I understand why he and Jared had emphasized that Oliver could, and would, destroy my contract if I made any mistakes.

"I can tell you're worried," Shawn says, "But don't be." The lamp-light dances over his shoulder, highlighting the lines of his muscles. It's a lovely sight. "The way things are going, you..." He stops himself, like he just realized something serious.

“Sir?” I ask gently.

Shaking himself, he puts on a fresh smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes. It's plastic in every way. “You're perfect, Veronica. Oliver is going to be very happy.”

He isn't lying.

But I wish I knew why he sounded so miserable.

### Chapter 12

Veronica

---

Standing before the tall mirror, I hold still while Shawn ties the silken bodysuit into place, his fingers working down the straps in the back. It's creamy as milk with mesh across the top of my breasts and belly, partially see-through. My curves are highlighted by the tight material.

He glances at me in the mirror. Deliberately, he strokes his fingers over my collar bone. The suit is cool, enhancing the sensation of his touch. I bite back a soft moan.

“Easy now,” he whispers, dragging his hand down to where the outfit ends above my hip. “You shouldn't get too excited, or this next part will be especially frustrating.”

Shawn lets me go, walking to a dresser and fiddling with something inside. My eyes stay on my reflection, taking in how beautiful he's made me look. I touch the tattoo that proclaims me as property to a man I've never met.

And if tonight goes well, then this is me for the next five years.

How has two weeks flown by so fast?

Each of my days has been filled with lessons from Jared and Shawn. And our nights... well. I spend those being filled by these men. It's been amazing. I didn't expect to be so

sullen now that it's all over with.

Hands touch my waist, startling me from my train of thought. “Here we go,” Shawn says, unsnapping the bottom of my bodysuit. He exposes my naked cunt, then begins strapping something cold and metal to my thighs. It traps my pussy away from the world.

“What's this?” I ask, bewildered by such a thing.

“This,” he chuckles, giving me a soft slap on the rear, “is a chastity belt. It should make for some fun tonight. You're not allowed to take it off or touch yourself, understand?”

I don't reply, I just gawk.

Shawn tugs the chastity belt higher, drawing the straps into my crease.

“Ah!” I gasp, staring at him. “Sorry, yes, I understand, Sir.”

“Of course you do. No coming for you until someone else decides to allow it. It'll be a fun game,” he says in a raspy voice. I get the idea he's turned on already. “Let's finish up.”

He reclasps my bodysuit. I can vaguely see the outline of the belt's heart-shaped front through the material. Watching my reflection, I turn side to side. The sight of myself sends a bolt of pleasure to my clit. “Ah,” I grimace, reaching down to adjust the belt. I can't feel anything through it, it's agonizing, but also incredibly hot.

“Are you getting worked up overyourself?” Shawn asks in delighted disbelief. “You might be the horniest little slave ever.”

Refusing to rise to his taunt and give him a reason to punish me, I stay quiet.

He sighs like he's disappointed. "Come along, then. Let's parade you downstairs."

Walking is strange; the soft bodysuit slips over my nipples, the belt's straps digging into my ass. Jared is waiting for us in the entry hall. When he sees me, his jaw tightens, a line creasing between his brows.

He reminds me of a man barely holding himself back. I so badly want to know what he's thinking as he looks me up and down. He's become cold the last few days. The man who talked candidly with me on the vineyard hills is a distant dream.

"She looks perfect," he whispers.

My entire body tingles at his compliment.

"Of course she does." Shawn studies his friend for a minute. Tossing me a look over his shoulder, he moves away, peering around a corner. "The servers arrived?"

"Joanna is making sure everything is where it needs to be," Jared says, still overtly ogling my curves. "Veronica, come with me, I'll show you where you need to go."

"Yes, Sir," I say automatically. Obeying him is starting to feel natural, should I worry? Or is that good, because it will make things with Oliver easier?

Oliver...

I promised Jared and Shawn I'd give him a chance. In a way, I never expected to get this far. I'm sure everyone else thought I'd break, too. Should I thank my rabid pride, or blame it?



We stroll down a long hall I haven't been down, passing a number of rooms as we do. Jared points at the doors. "These are places guests might gather for more privacy. But, down here... this is where you'll wait."

Together, we descend a stairwell. At the bottom is a room bigger than any other I've seen so far. Dark gray walls, black rugs, white pillars and golden chandeliers, it's magnificent and somehow sinful. It smells like cinnamon and sage, the source unknown to me. Couches of all sizes, round cushions and small pillows, crowd the space to create an air of comfort. On one end is a bar stocked with top shelf alcohol.

"This is where Oliver likes to entertain the other masters," Jared explains. "Your job is to behave, do anything you're asked, and don't embarrass us." He faces me, and there's a serious tilt to his eyebrows. "Can you do that?"

I answer without waiting a beat. "Yes, Sir."

Inside, I'm far less positive.

### Chapter 13

Jared

---

I hug back my second glass of whiskey. Once I poured the first, I knew stopping would be hard. But that's the word of the night for me. Stopping.

Fuck. I want to stop this whole event from happening but it's too late.

“Oliver just arrived,” Shawn says, coming to stand beside me. He motions at the bartender, and she quickly pours him a glass of something amber colored.

“Veronica is trying to hold it together,” I say softly.

“Good.”

“Good?” I scoff, eyeballing him in disbelief. “That's all you have to say? Good?”

“Yes, good. She looks good. And she'll be good.” Shawn turns his glass in his hands as he shrugs. “That's her job.” He's still wearing his irritating smirk, but I realize something.

“You aren't looking at her,” I whisper.

There—he stiffens, shoulders hunching a bit.

“Do it,” I demand, jerking my chin over at Veronica where she's kneeling across the room. “Fucking look at her.”

“Why? I'm the one who dressed her, I know what she looks like.”

“You can't do it, can you?” A sour laugh rips from my throat. “You really are a coward.”

“Ex-fucking-scuse me?”

“Yeah, you're too afraid of what you'll feel if you see her being swarmed by other men, or touched by someone that isn't you... to actually witness her giving herself fully to Oliver.”

The second his name is off my lips, Shawn whirls on me. The rage in his eyes is terrifying. Even in my righteous fury, I come close to backing up. “Fine,” he hisses, slamming his glass down on the bartop. He turns so he can see Veronica. I watch his profile, counting the seconds as he forces his eyelids wide, not blinking.

She's kneeling quietly by a white pillar. Men wander near her, gazing on her with predatory stares. Though her chin is tucked, eyes sealed away by her downcast lashes, her body language spells out her emotions to us both.

She's bone-deep levels of afraid.

The corner of Shawn's frown moves first. Bit by bit, the anger and indifference morphs into something much more human. Something sad. “Fuck,” he whispers under his breath.

Lifting my glass, I tap it on his. “Now we're on the same page.”

“It doesn't matter.” He finishes his drink, letting the bartender refill it. “Oliver gets what Oliver wants. He always does. Our desires never factored in.”

“Maybe,” I say gently. “But what about hers?”

“Please. She loved what we did to her, but it ended there.”

“I'm not so sure.”

He starts to argue, then instead, he casts one final glance over his shoulder towards Veronica. I wonder if he's trying to read her mind. If I've planted some seed of doubt that's made him wonder, like I have for some time, that this woman cares about us much more than we've allowed ourselves to believe.

Because knowing she wants us...truly wants us...

That would make giving her up impossible.

### Chapter 14

Veronica

---

It's not long before people begin to arrive.

I kneel in a far corner beside a tall pillar, hoping I'll be ignored. Sitting there, I witness men of all types wandering around. I see other slaves as well, all of them with tattoos like my own on their neck, though different names. Curiously, I wondered what happens if a slave changes owners. Who pays for the tattoo to be removed and replaced?

If I wanted to change mine, could I?

That's when he approaches me.

His face is angular, Puckish in a way. The midnight blue of his three piece suit is exquisite—certainly expensive. He fixes his dark eyes on me and then gives a sideways smile. “Hello there, pet. And who might you be?”

I clear my throat, speaking politely. “Veronica, Sir.”

“Ah, Veronica,” he muses, tilting his head and looking me over. “You may call me Sir Mace. Stand for me.” He doesn't have a commanding voice like Shawn does. I'm not compelled to obey. Still, I rise up, becoming conscious of my revealing outfit.

Mace steps closer until he towers over me. With seeking fingers, he reaches out and strokes my throat. “You're Oliver's. I heard he spent seventy thousand dollars to own you, you must be quite good, then.” His gaze rolls like lava down my body, his other hand tracing over my bodysuit.

I was expecting Oliver to approach me, not another man. What do I do? What does he want from me?

“Such a lovely little pet, Oliver always gets the best stock. I'm not sure how, considering how incompetent his staff is,” he chuckles.

My backbone straightens. “Shawn and Jared aren't incompetent.”

He squints at me, his mouth a humorless smile. “No?”

“They're attentive, determined teachers. They were... more than kind to me, these two weeks.”

He holds my face, staring into my eyes so fiercely I feel my own begin to water. “I want more of you, I think,” he whispers, rubbing his thumb across my lower lip. I cringe instantly. “Come with me, unless you wish to play right here.”

Digging my heels in, I shake my head. “I'm waiting for someone else, Sir.”

Mace laughs, dragging his nails over my stomach. “Aren't you obedient. That's good.”

My attention darts around the room. I'm searching for Jared, for Shawn, for some kind of instruction. I don't want to make a scene. I also know I'm not prepared for this... this stranger.

Suddenly, Mace wraps a hand around my wrists, bringing them up between us. His voice is velvet heat. “Relax, Pet. You passed my test.”

“Test?” I whimper.

His grip becomes tighter. It almost hurts. “Mace was a fake name to throw you off. I'm Oliver, your new master. And you're right, Jared and Shawn aren't incompetent, not if they bought a gem like you for me.”

A rush of vertigo hits me. This is Oliver? “Sir, I didn't know.”

“Of course not. That was the point.” He releases my wrists. I blush furiously as he traces his hand down to the shape of my chastity belt under my outfit. “Goodness. Did you upset someone so badly for them to punish you like this?”

Unsure what to do, I close my eyes. “Shawn decide this, so...”

“Shawn did?” He snorts, shaking his head. “He's always been a sadist. Still, this is an interesting turn.”

My eyes flutter open, letting me catch a glimpse of other people in the room observing us. And then I see two sets of eyes that send lightning straight to my heart. Jared and Shawn; they're watching me from the back bar.

I can't tell what their expressions are, it's too dimly lit. But they're definitely watching. I don't want to let them down. Licking my lips, I try to think of something to say to Oliver, to dig up a sexy phrase, or anything alluring. But I can't make any clear thoughts except one.

Help me.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

This is nothing like being with Shawn or Jared. My body isn't buzzing eagerly, no part of me wants to do this. And the longer I stand here, the more my urge grows to simply run away.

“Now,” he whispers thickly, one hand brushing through my hair. My goosebumps prick with disgust. “I want you to get on your knees, unbuckle my belt, and show me what you can—”

“No!”

He pulls up short, eyes stretching wide. “Did you just say no?”

“I'm sorry, I... I can't do this.”

“I don't understand.” He scans me anew, searching for an explanation that I know he won't find.

“It's not you,” I say, hugging myself firmly. “I'm sorry, I really thought I could handle this. But I can't. Jared and Shawn...” Saying their names makes tears prick at the corners of my eyes. I fight them back. “They tried so hard to prepare me. They were right, I'm not strong enough for this.”

His eyebrows come together in a fierce wrinkle. “They didn't warn me that you were the sensitive type.”

“Please, don't be mad at them. This was all a huge mistake. I'll get my things and then I'll just leave.”



“You understand what will happen if you break your contract,” he says flatly, squinting at me with a flash of curiosity.

I'm already walking, eager to get away from this whole god damn mess. “Yes, I know.”

I stumble away on shaking legs. It's not just my muscles that are weak, I feel like all of me, my entire being, is coming apart at the seams. I ruined everything, I think, crushing my eyelids shut. All their work, two weeks of preparing, and I threw it out the window.

Why wasn't I capable of giving in to Oliver? I'd come to adore the things that Jared and Shawn made me feel. What could possibly be the difference between their games and...

Hot sparks rocket up my spine; I trip, then recover. It's because I care about them. I hadn't let myself pour over it deeply because I'd trained myself to see our escapades as nothing more than filthy fun.

I'd been blind to my reality.

To my rawest feelings.

I love them.

Fuck. Fucking fuck. The regret hits me hard, stealing my breath and making me cringe. I love them and I let them down. Walking away from this place doesn't just saddle me with debt. It ruins their reputation. They're going to hate me. If I stayed and faked it for Oliver, I'd have been miserable. But am I so pathetic that I couldn't suffer for them?

I don't deserve their love.

Hands touch me as I draw close to the stairs that will take me to the exit. Disoriented, I almost fall until those same hands grab me close, keeping me on my shaking legs. “Are you alright, Veronica?”

Shawn focuses on me with eyes that have warmed too much to maintain his normal icy-blue. Even his pupils seem lighter somehow, as if they've been filtered by compassion... by concern...

And it's all for me.

### Chapter 15

Shawn

---

She fits perfectly in my arms.

I'm still kicking myself for not storming over to Oliver and telling him to back off. Jared had felt the same as me, I could tell by looking at his hand crushing his glass. His knuckles were bone-white.

But before either of us could act... Veronica had walked away.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“I'm leaving. I can't stay, Shawn.”

“It's Sir—”

“No,” she snaps, but the bitterness in her tortured face isn't meant for me. “It's not Sir. Not anymore. I messed up, I couldn't... I couldn't do it.” Tears glisten on her bottom lids, spilling over in a single streak. I ache to wipe them away. “Shawn, I'm so sorry. I really am. I swear, I tried, but I couldn't and now everything is messed up, and I have to get out of here.”

“Veronica, wait.” I can't handle the pain in her beautiful voice. I grab her wrist; she

tugs to escape, but I don't let her go. "Just calm down. If you're upset because of the debt, I—" What am I doing? "I can pay it for you." I force a smile, hoping she'll copy me and cheer up. "You said it before, I'm well off. This is nothing for me."

"This was never about money," she whispers. Her head hangs low, her hair falling forward to hide her from the world. "Money can be replaced. But the way Oliver will think about you and Jared now, that's unfixable. I messed up so badly, Shawn. I should have left that first day and let you tell Oliver what had happened. That would have been easier on you."

My mouth tenses in a scowl. "How can you say that?" Her chin comes up, her wet eyes sparkling with confusion. Cupping her cheeks, I pull her closer to me. "You really think that if I could go back in time, I'd erase these two weeks with you?"

A force I can't name drives me forward until my lips touch hers. It's a kiss I'd convinced myself I'd never get to experience, not with Oliver around.

But she's not his.

She never was.

"Come with me," I say, breaking away. She stands there with her lips parted, their surface shiny, begging for me to kiss them again. Resisting, I pull her gently up the stairs.

"Where's Jared?" she suddenly asks.

Guiding her away from that room full of slaves and masters and people still trying to figure out which they really are, I don't look back as I answer. "He's waiting for us."

### Chapter 16

Veronica

---

Weaving through the crowd, he takes me up to the main level, his hand on the small of my back when we round a corner. The set of stairs tires me out, yet his touch encourages me on. I'm not sure where we're headed.

He opens an elaborate door for me. I recognize it a second too late—it's the place I saw Jared when he was splayed on a bed, masturbating.

Stepping inside, I see those same crimson blankets. The walls are gold and red, the shadows made darker by the shaded lamps.

Standing to one side is Jared.

“Sit,” he says to me, so I settle on the soft bed.

They share a quick glance, then Shawn peels off his jacket, draping it on a chair in the corner. They're not explaining anything. Maybe they think they don't have to; our bodies are attuned to each others, I know what they're planning. But I can't do anything without knowing why they aren't pissed at me.

“Wait,” I say, my voice fragile. “I don't understand. You both saw how I messed up with Oliver.”

“I saw, yes,” Jared replies.

“Then why are you pretending this is like any other night. I wrecked everything because I was too damn weak.”

He comes closer, leaning over me with a mysterious smile. “It takes strength to make a decision like yours. All that matters is you didn't force yourself to do something you'd regret.”

My heart swells, too big for my rib cage. The strain makes my tone jittery and weak. “I'm sorry.” It's all I can think to say.

“Don't be sorry.” He wipes at the dampness lingering on my cheeks. “I'm not.”

“Jared,” Shawn says. The green-eyed man stands, moving over so the two of them can talk in hushed whispers. I'm too uncertain about what's going on to know how to feel. Are they really not mad? After listening to them tell me over and over how worried they were about how I'd do with Oliver, it's hard to reconcile them acting so...

Soloving.

What changed?

Shawn is undoing his shirt as he approaches. I open my mouth to ask him something, but his hands on my chastity belt silence me. “You've been in this for so long, but you never got to experience what it's really meant for.” His hands come down on either side of the bed, just outside my legs. His mouth is hot when it nips my throat, his teeth eliciting a moan from me.

“Shawn, ah...”

“Call him Sir,” Jared growls. The other man looms over me with darkness swimming in his sharp eyes. He's removed his shirt, leaving him naked from the waist up. The sight is glorious.

One of Shawn's hands brushes over my shoulder, toying with the straps of my bodysuit along my spine. He keeps mouthing my throat, then goes higher, nuzzling my ear. He's more passionate than he usually is.

Jared's hands skirt over my chest, finding my firm nipples through the bodysuit. My eyes roll in my head. “Oh, my god.” He smirks as he watches me, and his erection in his pants says he's loving how he's making me shift side to side.

“You really like when he plays with your tits, don't you, little lamb?” Shawn asks.

“Please, Sir!” I groan, arching my spine and leaning into Jared's touch.

“What do you want?” he asks tauntingly.

Chewing my bottom lip, I rock into his fingers. He gently tugs my nipples; Shawn unties the suit, pulling it down my belly, exposing my naked breasts. Both of them let out primal groans.

“What do you want?” Jared insists.

“To come,” I gasp, grinding back and forth where I sit. Shawn turns me towards him, kissing me full on my mouth. As he does, Jared bends close, licking my left nipple. I shiver in wicked delight. I want more—need more.

Shawn reaches around, fiddling with the clasps until the metal padlock is freed. “Good girl, I think you deserve a reward.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“Oh god, yes!” I sob, slumping back fully, my bones useless. Their scent is in my nose, Shawn's palm sliding over my tender pussy. Everything is extra sensitive, too much to bear in silence.

Crying out, I turn my cheek to the blanket, the material cool compared to my skin. Shawn presses a single finger to my swollen clit. “This won't take long, will it?”

“No, Sir,” I whine.

“Do you know why?” He starts rubbing me faster, my heart matching his pace.

“Why?” I pant, staring down my body at him as he works. The bed shifts as Jared kneels beside me. He takes my hand, lifting it until it rests on his exposed cock. It's rigid in my grip, my belly getting tingly from how excited he is.

“Because,” Shawn purrs, sweet molasses and decadent malice, “You're our dirty little pet, and you're going to be so very, very happy with us.”

Wait... does he mean...

The boiling pressure hits an abrupt crescendo. The pleasure drowns me; I come violently, my shouts barely registering to my own ears. Every cell is alive and on fire.

Jared leans into view. He considers me for a long moment, taking in every inch of me, including my blushing cheeks. “Show me how wet you are.”

I want nothing more than for him to see my pussy, hoping it'll push him into finally



sliding his dick into me. Shawn moves away as I spread my legs to give them a nice look at my pink folds coated in my juices. My clit is twitching in plain view, begging to be touched.

Plaintively I look up at Jared, willing him to help me.

His stare twinkles like a million stars, but his tone is dark as a pit. “Play with yourself.”

Shivering, I brush my pussy, getting my fingers soaked. Carefully I slide one inside. Gently at first, I rub my clit. Soon, I'm attacking it vigorously.

Jared makes a noise in the back of his throat. “Holy hell.”

“Please,” I whine, the tension of another orgasm building. “Fuck me, one of you, just... just fuck me!”

“You don't care which of our cocks is filling you?” Shawn teases.

I'm hot all over from lust and a hint of shame. “As long as it's one of you, it's fine.”

Shawn's tiny smirk becomes genuine surprise. I think he's flattered, my honesty getting past his aloofness.

Jared fists his cock. When I look, he nods at me. “Turn around, hands and knees.”

I spin, pressing my chest into the blankets. They make my sensitive nipples buzz. He didn't ask me to spread my legs, but I do; I arch my back and press my ass backwards, presenting myself to these men.

Hands touch my hips—I don't know whose. I push back into the contact. Abruptly it

vanishes. Glancing over my shoulder, I groan desperately at Jared where he waits.

“Reach back and spread yourself open,” he says in a throaty hush.

Flooding with a new wave of arousal, I put my cheek on the bed so I can use both my hands to peel myself wide open. I know he can see everything. My own heat is scorching my fingers.

Large palms graze my lower back. Peeking open my eyes, I watch Shawn where he stands to the side. He's removed his shirt and pants, standing there with his hand fondling his massive hard-on through his forest-green briefs. They cling to his shaft, outlining the ridge of his cock-head.

When he sees me looking, he winks.

Jared dips his fingers along my inner thighs until I'm quivering. “Amazing, isn't it?” His touch shifts, running down the crevice of my ass, diverting just before the wet folds of my pussy. “A tiny push, and we can get you to do anything.” Expertly, his fingers fondle my labia, the first hint of him finally penetrating me with anything causing me to groan in delight. “Fuck, your beautiful pussy is so wet.”

“Yes, yes, fuck yes,” I ramble, staring into the backs of my eyelids. More, I want more! Jared is finally being kind enough to slide his elegant fingers into my aching cunt.

As he penetrates me, he growls. “You're squeezing me, Veronica. Your pussy doesn't want me to leave. But wouldn't you like something bigger?” Chuckling, he curls his fingertips. There's only two inside of me, and my lower belly is a hot mess of trembles.

“Fuck me, I'm losing my mind!”

He patiently strokes inside of me. I push back to try and force him deeper.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

The bed springs shift; Shawn is on the mattress beside me. “Will you become our pet?” he asks in my ear.

The question catches me off guard, though I keep grinding onto Jared's hand. “W-what? But, I messed up with Oliver, I...” Jared twists his fingers, rubbing the roof of my pussy and making me whimper. Fuck, that feels amazing!

Shawn's hand strokes over my hair. He turns me towards him, his face close to mine, and all the while Jared pushes me closer to an inevitable orgasm. “Forget Oliver,” Shawn says. “Be honest with yourself, and with us. Do you want to be ours, little lamb?”

I'm lost in a sea of pleasure... confused by their multiple hands and voices...

But I still know the answer to this question.

“Yes,” I breathe.

He leans down, kissing me as he grips my hair firmly.

Jared's thumb runs over the smooth skin of my rear, resting on my pulsing asshole. The intimate touch makes me burn with nervousness and lust all at once. “Good girl,” he whispers.

He removes his fingers, dragging them over my slit until they're slippery. He returns to teasing my sensitive asshole. I wriggle my hips eagerly. Persistent, careful, he slides his thumb past my ring of muscle, letting it pop inside.

I squeal into Shawn's kiss. A new hand—his, or Jared's—fondles my bulging clit. That's all it takes; my muscles hug around the thumb in my ass, my cunt flexing madly as the orgasm rules me down to my molecules.

Using my hair, Shawn guides me up onto my hands. That's when I notice his cock is free. There's no more smile on his face or in his eyes; he's all business when he nudges his thick dick at my lips. Obediently, I begin lapping at his full length.

Jared's thumb retreats from my ass. The emptiness doesn't last long. Warm, plush, the head of his dick rolls against my lower lips, teasing a moment, threatening to push inside but never doing so. “Veronica, you're going to be so happy with us.”

I don't know the details... or how they plan to work out my contract with Oliver...

But I believe him.

He grips my waist, shoving his cock excruciatingly slow into my depths. I can feel every vein on the surface, each inch of him coaxing out my muffled cries. It's bliss, pure fucking bliss, and I'm in a fog of passion as he reaches to his root.

Yes, yes, finally fucking yes!

“Pay attention,” Shawn snaps, using his hold on my hair to help leverage the BJ I'm giving him. He fills my mouth for two strokes, then he yanks free. “Never mind, I want something a little warmer.”

Maneuvering me, Shawn adjusts until I'm kneeling between him and Jared. His cock-head presses eagerly on my pussy. “Wait,” I gasp. “What about a condom?”

“I'll pull out,” he promises, his voice tight from effort. His heavy breathing burns my neck when he leans in to kiss my ear. Ever so slowly, he enters me.

I'm sandwiched between two of the sexiest men I know.

We're joined together, their cocks as deep in me as they can go, their chests flaring with their wild breaths, giving me no space. I have no plans to escape their rigid members, but if I wanted to, I couldn't.

"Veronica," Jared sighs, a whisper in the music of my thumping heart and raw panting, "No one is going to touch your body but us, ever again." His tongue slides over my throat, soft and wet. "Got it?"

It's the most glorious prayer I could ask for. "Yes," I manage to answer.

His lips settle on my shoulder-blade. "You belong to us... and we belong to you." He hesitates, his pace slowing. "Everything is going to work out. Because I love you."

My world goes still. Jared stops moving, so does Shawn. I try to turn so I can see the man behind me; I'm aching to see what's in his eyes. To understand if he means what he says.

Then Shawn grips my jaw, forcing me to face him. "I love you, too." He's challenging me to deny his admission, ready to prove it anyway he has to.

Bending upwards, I kiss him gently. "I love you, Shawn." I nuzzle him once, then twist, finding myself caught up in a kiss from Jared that can only be called carnal. "And I love you, too. I love you both. I truly do."

Shawn draws backwards enough so just his tip is inside me. It sends bursts of pleasure straight to my clit, making me worried I won't be able to handle what's coming. There's no time to debate, he cups my tits, then slams into me with a solid stroke.

I'm electric from the fullness of them burying themselves into me. Every fiber in my body clings to their cocks, wanting more, nervous they might leave me at any moment.

I have nothing to worry about.

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Together they drive into me again and again, each time sending my arousal to new levels I never imagined. I can't make any words, just moans. Fingers tug at my tender nipples, expertly rolling them between thumb and forefinger, sending shock waves down to my melting cunt.

My mind is blurring, my own juices coating my thighs, the need for release immense, almost painful. "Your cunt is so fucking tight," Shawn hisses. "Do I really have to pull out? Wouldn't you like me to pour you so full of my come that it drips out of you?"

The wanton moan that I sing is too much for him; his cock flexes, he gasps, and just as I shake with another orgasm, Shawn rips his dick free. Spurt after spurt of his jizz lands on my belly. The warmth of it makes me delirious.

The pleasure hits me in consuming waves from my scalp to my toes. I'm one big ripple. I worry I'll black out, the bursts of color behind my eyes intense, the vibration in my muscles and skin too acute, too alive.

The pressure of my orgasm sends Jared to the brink. Unlike Shawn, he doesn't even try to pull out. Wrapping his arms around me from behind, he embraces me as he grunts. His cock pulses, warning me of his come right as it pours into my ass.

This is true carnal bliss.

Nothing else could ever compete.

Exhausted, I go slack, my body unable to stand any more. My pussy clenches with



random after shocks. My rear-end joins in when Jared extracts himself. With no one to hold me up, I collapse face-first on the bed.

“Relax,” Jared whispers in my ear. “You need to rest.”

He's right. Breathing deeply, I lie there in drained passion. The backs of my eyelids are dark, then they get darker—someone turned off the light.

Blinking, I slowly adjust to the shadow filled room. Both of them have left me alone on this grand bed that smells like all of us. I snuggle into the pillows, inhaling deeply, trying to absorb the connection we had so it can never vanish.

Those two... they both said they love me. Remembering their certainty makes me clench up. My smile is so huge it hurts. Jared and Shawn have taught me so much. Not just about how to embrace my sexual urges, but how to allow myself to be open enough to consider they could love me.

However, as much as I adore them... how I itch to obey them... they aren't really my masters. No, what I serve is something much more powerful. A fierce, protective, demanding thing that I can never be truly free from.

My heart.

### Chapter 17

Veronica

---

It's early morning when I come awake.

Sitting up in the bed, I wonder why I'm alone. Wait, this is my room? Who carried me back here?

Disoriented, I kick my feet over the side of the mattress. I'm so thirsty. I need some water. Throwing on one of the long, loose shirts I'd begun storing in my dresser, I tip-toe into the hallway.

At the top of the stairs, I hear voices talking urgently. Curious, I creep closer, lying flat on the landing until I can see who's standing by the front doors below. Oliver and Shawn?

"I don't understand," Shawn says.

"She didn't speak to me for long. But in that time, it was clear who her feelings were meant for."

"Oliver, we didn't sabotage you, I swear."

"Do you think I distrust you that much to assume that?"

Shawn hangs his head slightly. “After what happened with your fiancée, I’ve always gone to great lengths to make sure you never thought I was trying to steal anyone from you.”

He pauses, then glances at the front door. “What happened with Luna had nothing to do with anyone but her. She wanted to play with you here, where there were rules. You asked me if it was okay, and I said yes, because I knew what I was agreeing to. That’s much different than her cheating with strangers behind my back.”

Wait. Shawn slept with Luna?Running back everything the two men had told me in pieces, I clasp my palms over my mouth.And Oliver said it was okay?

Shawn runs a hand over his neck. “Still, I introduced this lifestyle to you in the first place. I’ll always feel somewhat responsible.”

Chuckling dryly, Oliver pats the other man on the shoulder. “If not through you, I would’ve found my way eventually. And if Luna hadn’t cheated on me after exploring her desires here, that, too, would have eventually happened. Her sins are her own.” He lifts his eyes, spotting me on the stairs. I freeze. “Think about your future and not the past, Shawn. You and Jared have some decisions to make.”

I’m still shaking when Oliver slips on his blue jacket and exits out the doors. Shawn waits a moment, watching out the window. That’s when I stand, making myself loud as I descend the stairs. He spots me, his expression going from surprise, to delight. “Veronica. It’s early, go back to sleep.”

I nod at the doors. “I saw Oliver leave. What’s going on?”

With his usual fluid grace, he comes to stand on the bottom step. “He never stays for long. He’s always got something pressing to work on.”

“I heard him say something about you and Jared having to make a decision.”

“We do.” He breathes in, then lets it out. “Thirty grand.”

There's tension lines around his mouth. “Thirty grand for what?”

“For you.” He climbs another stair, then another, until there's only one between us.

“Well, twenty to pay off your debt. Ten to have your tattoo removed.”

I clasp my hand to my throat. “I can't pay that, you know—”

“I'm paying it.” He slides his palm along the railing, staring at the polished surface.

“Oliver told me to split it with Jared, but honestly, if I have to, I'll pay for it all myself.”

My chest rises and falls faster and faster. “Why would you... that's too much, Shawn. Way too much to ask of anyone!”

His laughter is harsh. The blues in his serious eyes are brittle, like a newly formed frost. “Why are you making this so painful for me?” He climbs the last step, looming over me on the stairs. “Is it fun for you to torture me, make me beg you to accept how I feel about you? Is it revenge for all the fucked up mistakes I've made?”

“Shawn,” I say, his name breaking on my tongue, coming out strangled.

“I love you,” he growls, grabbing me by the shoulders. “Do you think I'm shallow, that money or power mean more to me than what my heart says? Are you judging me the way Jared always does?”

“I'm not judging you.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

Both of us turn, staring at Jared where he's perched on the landing. He's wearing gray, loose shorts and a sleeveless black top. I've never seen him so casual—he must have heard our voices and woken up, coming to check on us.

Shawn releases me, his focus solely on the other man. “Of course you are. You have ever since what happened with Luna.”

Jared's eyes soften. “I know that wasn't your fault, Shawn.”

“And yet you still blame me! It comes out in the way you look at me, the way you speak to me! I'm not stupid, Jared. You've always had this high and mighty attitude around you.”

“No, that's not it.”

“You think it's my fault that Oliver had his heart broken. He forgives me, you know.”

“Shawn...”

“He knows it's not my fault she started cheating on him! She wasn't sleeping with me!”

I'm frozen where I stand, my eyes the only movement as I glance between them both. Whatever is going on, it's been cooking for some time.

“I'm not judging you for Luna,” Jared says earnestly. “Maybe at one point I was pissed about what happened, and it was easy to think you had something to do with it,

but I wasn't treating you badly over that stuff.”

He curls his upper lip. “So you're going to pretend we've been buddy-buddy, then?”

“No, just—shut up and let me talk. The reason you got under my skin so easily was because you were always so flippant about everyone's feelings.”

“Then we're back to you thinking I fucked over Oliver.”

“No! I'm talking about your deeper feelings!” Jared slaps a hand against his own chest, drumming it. “I hated how you drifted from partner to partner, never having any real connection.” He hesitates, then he looks right at me. “When I saw you and Veronica together that first night... it scared me. I kept thinking about you hurting her, tossing her aside. I felt so possessive. I was ready to protect her.”

“Protect her from me?” he whispers.

Shawn leans on the railing, as if he needs it to stand. There's unbridled sadness in his half-closed eyes. I can't keep myself still—it hurts too much to see him like this. Pressing my hand to his forearm, I squeeze. “It's okay,” I say gingerly. “Everything is fine, Shawn.”

He flips his attention solely to me. “It is now, yes.”

“You were always cold and distant,” Jared says. “Until last night. The moment it clicked with you that Veronica was in love with us. Really in love.”

Shawn lifts his eyes towards Jared. “Oliver says she's ours. He won't get in the way, but we still have to pay back her debt.”

I find my voice again. “I can't let you guys do that.”

Fingers brush my cheek; Jared stands beside me on the step, one arm curling around my shoulders. “Haven't you learned by now that you can't stop us from doing what we want?”

Another hand wraps in one of mine. Shawn grips it tight, crowding me on the stairs. “That's right, little lamb. You thought we were insistent before? By opening your heart to us, you've given us full access to you.”

He kisses me so lightly my lips come alive with static. His tongue brushes my top teeth, then his mouth tightens, dominating our kiss. Shawn pulls away so I can catch a breath, but then Jared dives in, turning me towards him for an entirely different brand of kiss.

Neither is better than the other.

Both of them are perfect.

Are you happy?

The question comes out of no where. It's what Sonya asked me on the phone on my first day in Stone House. I'd lied to her then because I hadn't been able to answer with a true yes.

Now I can.

### Epilogue

Veronica

---

“I'm so glad you made it!” Sonya squeals as she throws her arms around my neck. “How long has it been, two months?”

Laughing lightly, I hug her back. “It's been forever. Sorry, it's like a three hour drive to get to the city.”

She holds me at a distance, scanning my neck in open wonder. “That tattoo... it's something else, huh?”

I set my fingertips on it. I don't have to look to know what she's reading. Property of Her Heart. “Yeah. It really is.”

“Well, introduce me,” she says, wiggling her eyebrows. I move aside to reveal Jared and Shawn. I'm grateful they came—I'm not sure I'd be brave enough to attend to Sonya's office party alone.

As it is, I keep looking around nervously for Tim, my old boss.

Sonya clears her throat obnoxiously. Grinning, I wave at the two handsome men. “This is Jared, and this is Shawn.”



She looks them up and down, then does it again while I roll my eyes. “The pleasure is all mine, boys.” Clapping her hands, she points at a table covered in drinks. “Help yourselves!” She motions at them until they get the hint and leave me alone with her. “Geez,” she whispers, elbowing me. “Fuckinghotties.”

I cover my face. “Don't hit on my boyfriends, please.”

“I'll try my best, you greedy little animal.” Clicking her tongue, she pulls me towards a wall. “This place has been a bummer. I'm thinking of leaving, like you did, but I'm waiting for the right opportunity.”

“Oh, well, that's great!”

“Hopefully, yeah. I—oh, hang on a second, that's Samuel, a guy I'm trying to have put a good word in for me at a Publishing house. Sam, hey!” Sonya flags the guy down as she hurries over to meet him.

Hovering by the wall, I fold my arms behind my back. It's super weird to be back in this building. It's only been two months since the fateful night I wandered into Brander's Alley Ink, but it feels like a decade has passed.

“Veronica?”

My heart sinks as I go face to face with Tim. My former boss is wearing a blue and yellow striped button down that bulges over his belly. He's also got the same sparse mustache I'm sure he's been trying to grow out since he was ten years old.

“Mr. Buchan—I uh, I mean, Tim. Hey, how are you?”

He narrows in on my neck tattoo and sticks there. “I didn't know you were into that kind of thing.”

“What thing?”

He shifts on his heels, looking uncomfortable. “I mean, you know. To each their own. In the end, you quit, but you weren't a great fit for the Mickame Insurance family, anyway.”

Indignation flows up my body. “Excuse me?”

He takes a sip from the red solo cup he's holding. I don't like how his uneasy frown morphs into a creepy smile. “Though, hey, if I'd known you were so kinky, I would have fired you sooner.” His belly swings closer to me; I back up, but there's no where to go with the wall behind me. “We could've had alotof fun, Veronica. I mean, I already had the boss thing going for me, you just had to beg me to meet you in the employee bathroom and... well...”

“Back off,” I snap.

His eyebrows arch as high as possible. “What?”

“I said back off, Tim. You're acting like a real piece of shit right now.”

His mouth crumbles, and I think I hurt his feelings. But then something monstrous crosses his face. He shoves himself against me, speaking low, hot, next to my ear. Some of his drinks spills on my shirt. “You think you got one over on me when you quit before I fired you, huh? You didn't. You'll always be a sad little girl who ran away from her problems. And you—”

He never finishes his thought; he can't when Jared rips him off of me, sending him flying on his back across the floor. “Get away from her,” he snarls.

Shawn fills my vision, his eyes worried, searching mine. “Veronica, are you alright?”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“I'm fine,” I say, smiling gratefully.

Tim sits up on his elbows, scowling as the whole room watches the scene. “Are you nuts? You can't just assault me!” he cries.

Jared crouches down, elbows on his knees, as he levels with Tim. He speaks soft, but I can hear him. “Little man, get out of here right now, or I'll destroy more than just your employees' opinion of you. I'm rich enough, connected enough, that I could buy this whole company out from under you.”

Tim swallows, the knob in his throat shifting. “You're lying.”

Jared's smirk stretches as far as humanly possible. “Want to test me?”

I knew Tim had no backbone, but I'm surprised to see him scramble on hands and knees towards the exit. When he's gone, Jared walks over to me. “You worked for him?”

“He seemed less shady before.” I touch my tattoo, frowning. “He showed his true colors tonight.”

“Veronica!” Sonya gasps, rushing to my side. “What was all that? Did Tim hurt you?”

“No, no, forget about it.”

“Can I get you anything?” she asks urgently.

I start to shake my head, then I stop myself. “A drink would be great.”

“Leave that to me,” Jared says, kissing my hand. His grin is all mischief; he loves embarrassing me. I blush red-hot as he wanders towards the back table.

Shawn follows him closely. “I don't think he knows how to make a proper drink. I'll go help.”

Left alone with Sonya, she puts her hand on mine and squeezes. “Let's go sit for a minute.”

“Sure.” My legs could use a rest after that crazy scene.

I follow her to a desk in the corner. She drops onto a chair and does a little spin. I settle on mine with less fanfare. “Veronica,” she begins, “I have to say, I was a little unsure about what you were up to. But those guys seem pretty amazing.”

“They are,” I agree. In ways she doesn't even know. “I'll tell you a secret. When I first met them, I was terrified.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, I woke up, had no clue where I was, my head was splitting... it was awful.” I smile at the memory. “Then I wandered around until I found those two jokers. I thought they were sexy, but they were also intimidating. I was sure I'd hate their guts forever.”

Sonya scrutinizes me, then she rolls her chair, bumping mine. “You mean you don't remember?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Girl,” she laughs, shaking her head. “Don’t tell me you were that drunk! I mean, I was smashed, sure, but my memory still works.”

Wrinkling my forehead is all I can manage.

“Jeez,” Sonya sighs, resting her arm around me. “I feel a little bad that I left you, now. Maybe I shouldn’t have listened to you when you told me everything was fine, but I guess it ended up working out anyway.”

“Sonya, will you please just explain already?”

“I asked that big guy at Brander’s how long your tattoo was going to take. He told me if I wanted to say bye to you, I should head into the alley ASAP. I was super confused, but I went out there. You were sitting on the ground with a bucket between your knees—in case you got sick, I guess.”

I... can’t remember what she’s talking about at all. “And then what?”

“Well, I sat down next to you, and you told me some lady named Sunnie had demanded you get some air because she didn’t want you vomiting on her table while she inked you. I asked you if you were still sure about getting a tattoo, and you... laughed.” Her smile becomes strangely serene. “You told me you’d figured everything out. That it was okay if everything had seemed so terrible earlier, because now, you’d found people who wanted you. Really, really wanted you.”

Sonya looks across the room. I follow her eyes, seeing Jared and Shawn as they talk to each other next to the big table of drinks and snacks. “I said that?” I ask softly.

“Yeah. You said you were really happy to belong to someone.” She pauses for a moment. “And then you also told me that those two were super hot, and you couldn’t wait to get their clothes off and ride their faces.”

*Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:22 am*

“Sonya!” I gasp, half laughing as I push her off of me. My friend cracks a giant grin. When she starts giggling, my laughter gets louder. Wrapping my arms around her in a hug, I pull in a long breath. I wanted them from the very beginning, and I didn't even remember it.

It's a pleasant surprise. One I plan to keep to myself—those two men don't need their egos getting any bigger.

“Veronica?”

Sonya and I split apart. Jared is standing there with one arm behind his back, the other extending down to me. His smile is even more welcoming, the strength of it nearly pulling me to my feet. “Is everything okay?” I ask.

“Well, we were getting you a drink. Then Shawn decided there was a better way to cheer you up. He wants to get out of here,” he says, glancing at Sonya.

Staring past him, I see Shawn is watching me. His eyes are smoldering in that quiet, but expectant way of his. The heat of them warms me down to my core. I know precisely what he wants.

“Go ahead,” Sonya says, parking her chin on her hands. She winks at me knowingly. “Next time, I'll come visit you.”

When I place my hand in Jared's, a powerful, delicious thrill runs through me. It's exactly like the first day we met, when he told me what he had in store for me if I stayed at Stone House.

He lifts me, holding me steady with his natural strength. His broad chest flares along with his nostrils as he breathes me in.

There's movement on my left. "Ready?" Shawn whispers in my ear.

Resting my gaze on Jared, then on Shawn, I don't respond. I'm too busy absorbing their beauty... their fierce energy... their intense, sexual aura that comes off them in waves whenever they're in my vicinity.

Am I ready? What a question.

Standing on tip-toe, I press my lips on Shawn's. He makes a gritty, soft sound; then I kiss Jared. They're both rumbling anxiously now. "Yes," I say, linking one of my hands in each of theirs. "I'm beyond ready."

Together we stride for the exit, our legs pumping, our bodies light with the desire that commands us to hurry away so we can finally be alone. All of the eyes in that room are on us. They glow with intrigue... with envy. And they should.

Everyone dreams of finding one person who loves them.

I've found two.