



Royal Doll

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Description: For weeks, he came to see me, his eyes following me as I worked the pole. Anyone would have noticed him. A man as gorgeous, obviously rich, and young doesn't really belong in the kind of seedy joint where I take my clothes off to pay the bills.

Callum Noble. An actual, bona fide prince. Or royal psycho, as I call him.

I got a feeling he was there for me specifically, but I didn't think he'd approach me with an offer like that.

I certainly didn't think I'd accept.

Royal Doll is for very naughty readers.

Total Pages (Source): 62

CHAPTER ONE

LIV

He's here tonight. I'm unsurprised, but I notice all the same. The ridiculously tall, young, gorgeous guy wears another expensive suit—blue, this time—that must be tailored for him; I can't imagine any store carrying something that could embrace such large shoulders and show off that narrow waist.

Sometimes, I wonder what he does for a living. He certainly doesn't fit in here. He's several tiers over the bulk of our clientele, in all aspects; age—we cater to the midlife crisis crowd, not twenty-somethings—wealth, beauty. Maybe he's a lawyer. I'd look him up, but I don't know his name, and I doubt I ever will.

He doesn't know mine either. To him, I'm Nala, the girl behind the mask.

My stranger first came on a stormy night at the beginning of the summer. I guessed he must have walked in to get out of the rain. I was in the middle of my routine, but at the moment when I twist, head down, to look at the audience and blow them a kiss, I noticed him.

He's been here every single time I've worked since. I wonder if he comes every day, or if it's just a coincidence that he ends up being here the four nights a week when I work the pole at the club.

I know it's terribly cliché—poor girl from the wrong side of the tracks becomes a stripper—but point me to one single job paying half as well in all of Andaria for an

eighteen-year-old fresh out of high school. I bussed tables the last two years, and it did allow me to have some pocket money—not to mention occasionally eat, when my father forgot to stock the house with anything other than booze.

I finished high school two months ago, and Dad immediately announced that I had to pull my weight if I wanted to stay under his roof. I didn't want to stay under his roof, and certainly not while paying him, so I packed what he allowed me to take and left. I stayed at my friend's Patricia's for a few days, but Tricks's house is pretty cramped, between her twin and their parents, so I made sure I had a place within a couple of weeks. I'm renting a tiny flat with a couple of girls; the rent is cheap as fuck, but I still need to pay it.

Starting in September, I'll get my college scholarship, but it's rudimentary, only covering tuition and board. The books are going to be a fortune, and until then, I need cash, fast.

The seven years of studying ballet with Tricks and Jinx made me flexible, good at following rhythm, so this job made sense. Besides, we're all behind masks; no one has to know it's me. I'm extremely careful when I leave and come to this place, to make sure no one sees me.

I stretch my leg over my head, extending into a full split in the air, which never ceases to cause standing ovations, both by the clapping hands of my audience and by the tents in their pants.

Truthfully, I don't mind this job. After watching my audition, Christina, the boss, immediately gave me a rotation on the main stage, rather than the various poles set up in front of small booths. That didn't endear me to the rest of the employees—apparently, many worked here for years before even seeing the stage—but it means that I get to do it from too far away for anyone to actually touch me.

Most of the time. I get private requests, though. Many of them. Sometimes, I'm even tempted.

Our patrons can request any of the strippers to perform private lap dances, but it's up to the dancer to accept or refuse them. Most dancers automatically accept them all. I'm the opposite. I've never said yes.

The actual menu on their table lists a private dance for two hundred and a lap dance for three. But the offers can be a lot higher. Five hundred for a blowjob. Seven hundred bucks for a pussyjob—I had to ask what that was, exactly. Some guy even offered a thousand bucks to come on my feet, and god, I was ever so tempted. What do I care if someone wants to use my feet for their spank bank? I could really use a thousand bucks.

But it's a slippery slope, and one I don't intend to step on. Being an exotic dancer is one thing. I'm not signing up for prostitution. For one, it's illegal, but more importantly, I want to walk away from the club with full knowledge that I worked hard and did what it took to make my dream come true without cutting corners.

Why spreading myself open for the eyes of fifty guys while wearing a tiny silver thong is okay but having jizz on my feet isn't, I'm not quite sure, but a girl's got to draw the line somewhere. Mine is bodily fluid exchange.

Everyone's clapping, except him. My eyes are inexorably drawn back to his striking figure as I throw my head back in a *cambré* that would make Tricks's mother weep. If she knew how I used the lessons she taught me, I think the poor French lady would pass out. Or potentially murder me. Ballet teachers are intense.

It doesn't matter. It's a good day, with a lovely, appropriately drunk crowd, and I'll end up with another two grand in my pocket by the end of the night.

I blow my last kiss, just like I did the first time my stranger walked into the strip club, and leap down elegantly, curtsying to the gentlemen.

The curtain falls, and I rush to leave.

“Fucking bitch,” Sandra mutters.

I try not to let it get to me. It’s not surprising she doesn’t like me: she’s been stripping since she was my age, and she’s in her thirties now. She doesn’t get nearly as many tips as I do. While I only need to dance, with the occasional split to make them all drool, she’s no longer able to get their blood going with something so prudish.

Tonight, she wears her cowboy getup, a sparkly silver catsuit that she can peel away by ripping it off her body with one tug. Underneath, I know her bra’s cupless, and she has tassels dangling off her nipples. While I wear a thong, she’s likely in a minuscule bundle of strings leaving nothing to the imagination. She’ll also take lap dances tonight in the VIP room. And with all that, I’ll likely bring home as much, just from my four dances.

I smile, biting back any retort. Sandra isn’t my enemy. She’s a warning of what my life could very well become.

CHAPTER TWO

LIV

“Ahhh. Arghhhh!”

I grunt as I let myself into the shoebox apartment.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

It's three in the morning and I'd hoped to be able to crash, but of course, that's too much to ask on a Saturday night. Or is it Sunday morning?

"Oh, Willem!" one of my roommates shrills.

Across the narrow corridor, the second responds with a, "Harder, Pete!"

Then the thumping commences.

Needless to say, we have thin walls.

I drag myself into the kitchen, and heat up a Cup Noodles, before making my way to my bedroom, yawning.

I'm not hungry, but I know better than to go to bed without something in my stomach; if I do, I'll be up in three or four hours, irritated and starving.

Alone in my bed, staring at the ceiling while I wait for my roommates to finish their fuck fest, I find my thoughts drifting back to my stranger, the one who always watches in silence.

I've never seen him from close enough to actually make out all his features but from a distance, he seems incredibly beautiful. Dark, tousled hair. Penetrating eyes that don't shift from the object of their attention—namely, my legs.

I try not to feel weird or guilty as my fingers slide between my legs. After all, he's been watching me for a month, and I'm pretty sure at one point or another, he must

have thought back to my bends and my splits in the shower, his hand around his cock. The difference is I'm not paying for the privilege of using his pretty face.

It's rather sad that I have no one else to fantasize about, but such is my life. At school, the pretty guys lost their appeal the moment they opened their mouths, and I'm too superficial to go for nice personalities blessed with zits. The simple reality is that I've never so much as had a crush.

I could probably just think about Henry Cavill like your average girl, but my stranger's my choice tonight.

I make myself come to the sound of my roommates' fun, finishing after them, and I manage to fall asleep almost immediately.

I wake to a sunny afternoon. I shoot a text to Tricks, knowing she's likely too busy with rehearsals to hang out with me. She joined the corps at the Royal Andrian Ballet last month. She's free most evenings, but that's when I work. Her twin, Jinx, isn't as close a friend—she's a little shy and bookish, and I'm introverted, so when we're alone, the conversation is just scintillating. Not.

Both replies come fast: no, they aren't free.

I sigh, and resolve to visit my third, and sadly, final friend: a swan with a broken wing I've fed at the park for the last couple of years.

Grabbing my ebook reader, I take an inventory of all the things I need to buy for the coming week, planning to stop for groceries on the way in, so I can pick up some spinach and peas for Aurore. I called him that before one of the park rangers informed me that he was a he.

Half an hour later, I'm crouched by the lake, chatting with Aurore as he nibbles his

treats, sipping my coffee, when I hear him.

“There’s a Don’t Feed the Ducks sign, you know.”

I turn, because the low rumble is too suave not to wonder who it comes from, though I don’t expect him to be addressing me.

There are a fair few people in the park today, given that it’s so nice out, but they all fade into the background.

A few paces away, leaning back on a stone picnic table, stands my stranger.

He doesn’t quite belong in broad daylight in my mind, likely because I’ve always seen him in the dim club, but there’s no denying that it’s him. And he’s definitely talking to me.

I stand slowly, at loss for words.

“Well?” he prompts, a smirk tugging at his lips. “Should I get you arrested?”

I blink. “Arrested?”

“You’re not supposed to feed it, you know.”

And you’re not supposed to stalk girls to their favorite swans, my mind shoots back.

But of course, he’s not stalking me. It’s a complete coincidence that we’re meeting here. He doesn’t know I’m Nala. How could he?

In all likelihood, he spotted me on his walk and decided to stop, either in defense of the swan, or because he decided I reminded him of someone.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Still, I run the statistics of my meeting him out here by chance in my head. In a city of millions, what are the odds?

“He’s not a duck,” I retort dumbly.

I could explain that I’ve actually chatted with the wildlife guide here, and was told that giving him swan-appropriate things was just fine; the sign is meant to deter people from stuffing them with bread. But that would require more words than I’m currently capable of enunciating, so he gets “Me Jane. You Tarzan. No duck.”

“So I see.” His smirk broadens. “So, legalities are dependent on the exact wording to you?”

I shiver. It’s a very pointed question to ask a stranger in the park. Again, saying so would require the full use of my vocal capacities, so I settle on, “I guess.”

“Interesting.”

What’s interesting is the fact that he’s crossing the narrow path separating us, until he’s more than near, standing right next to me.

From up close, he’s not what I expected. He’s farworse.

Strong jaw, with a bit of stubble. Straight nose. Clear gray eyes, as intense as when I feel them on me in the dark.

I redirect my eyes to Aurore rather than bear the weight of their scrutiny, feeling my

cheeks explode.

Oh my god, I fingered myself thinking of him not even half a day ago. How fucking embarrassing. And I feel like it could be plastered on my face; if he looks too hard, he'll see it.

“What’s your name?” he asks.

I glance back. It’s a perfectly normal question, objectively, but made incongruous by circumstances. Why would he care about the name of some chick in the park? Unless he knows...but he can’t, right?

“Unless you’re actually called Nala.”

My heart stops.

Oh.

I stand, staring at the stranger as my pulse flies.

“I’m aLion Kingfan.”

He nods. “Figured as much. That still doesn’t tell me your name.”

Somewhere at the back of my mind, an alarm bell rings. I tell myself I should be concerned. But I’m not.

I’ve heard about some of the girls getting followed, and worse, but if he wanted to harm me, he wouldn’t have chosen to do so at four o’clock on a sunny afternoon, in a park full of families and ducks.

“What’s yours?” I counter, to highlight the awkwardness of the question.

I doubt he’d give me his real name, either. Men might enjoy watching pretty things dance in barely there clothing, but that doesn’t mean they want their indulgence to have any impact in the real world.

Usually.

If he gives me his name, I could find him, blackmail him by offering to tell his wife where he spends his nights, or whatever other methods I’ve heard of in the changing room. I wouldn’t, but I could.

I find myself glancing to his left hand. No ring. No hint of one recently removed either.

No wife. His girlfriend, then. Someone who looks like him can’t possibly be unattached.

“Callum Noble,” he replies without hesitation. “At your service.”

My lips part in surprise.

Before I tell him I don’t believe him, he retrieves a card wallet from the inner pocket of his jacket, and pulls one out, handing it to me.

Page 4

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I blink at it. If he's lying, he's certainly well prepared.

My eyes widen at the crest above his name on the black card. Wings to either side of a shield, with crossed blades in the background.

The emblem of the house of Noble. Every kid in the country knows it.

Holy fuck.

"What do you want?" I barely recognize my voice, trembling, weak.

Now, I have the sense to be a little afraid.

The Nobles are some of the most powerful aristocrats in this kingdom. And one of them is standing right next to me. That can't be good.

"For now, a name would do, darling."

He doesn't want my name.

He already has it.

I'm certain of it.

"You tell me," I challenge, lifting my chin.

He smiles, those gray eyes still cool. "I wasn't certain whether you favored Olivia or

Liv.”

The fact that he’s not lying to me gives me a little courage. “Liv. And what do you want now, Callum?”

I should say Mr. Noble, or sir, and probably curtsy, but I’m sure my breach of etiquette can be forgiven given the fact that he’s stalked me.

I don’t know what I expect of him next.

“I have a problem I believe you can fix,” he tells me.

“How?”

“By spreading those delectable legs, of course. What else could I possibly need you for, darling?”

Okay, I’m not surprised. I roll my eyes. “Thanks for the offer, but I’ll pass.”

I start to walk away.

“You haven’t heard about your compensation yet.”

“Still not a whore, but thanks,” I call back without turning.

I seriously hope he’s not following me.

But of course he is, and his much larger strides let him catch up in no time. “That’s a judgmental word. You didn’t strike me as judgmental.”

I’m not, most of the time.

“Shows how well you know me.”

“Not as well as I will soon, I grant, but?—”

“Look, Romeo,” I interrupt. “You’re barking up the wrong tree. Pick up any other girl at the club—or on the street. I’m sure they’ll be happy to...help with your little problem.”

I can’t help lowering my gaze to his crotch.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“That’s hardly little,” Callum replies. “And as it so happens, no other girl will do for this specific issue.”

“And I’m still not interested.” I shrug. “I’ve never even had sex, and I won’t start by selling it.”

He pauses, tilting his head. “Even better.”

I groan, feeling like a parrot as I repeat, “I’m not int?—”

“A hundred thousand euros for one night.”

Now I stop.

And then I turn, slowly.

“You’re actually insane.”

Callum scoffs. “Not the first time I’ve heard that.”

“No. I—no. I’m not fucking you for money. Sorry.”

Anyone willing to spend that much on something others would give for free is bad news. He doesn’t want sex; he wants to tear me apart, and probably leave me dead in the morning so he doesn’t need to pay up.

Callum Noble is majorly bad news. I’m going to google him as soon as I go up; I bet

I find a trail of disappearances of pretty girls he meets, and equally troubling things.

“Who said you’d be fucking me?” he asks, shocking me again.

What?

CHAPTER THREE

LIV

I told him in no uncertain terms I wasn’t interested in his proposition, so I thought he’d move on, but when I’m back on the stage on Tuesday, my stranger is in the room.

Except he’s no longer a stranger at all; I have his name. I know it’s his real name, courtesy of google. Callum Noble, twenty-four, lawyer—I called it—only child and sole heir to the earl Albert Noble, and prince of the realm. I definitely didn’t call those last bits.

And he’s certainly not my anything.

I ignore him as I dance, pretending I haven’t spent the last two days mentally tallying how I’d spend his money. One hundred thousand euros for a shag. How ludicrous. Part of me is insanely curious about the details of the deal. If not him, who was it that I was supposed to screw? Why wouldn’t any other girl work? It’s all awfully mysterious. But curiosity killed the cat, and I plan on having a long life, so I’m not going to indulge myself by asking Callum any questions. I’m just not.

Even if the card he handed me includes what looks like a mobile phone number. It can’t possibly be his. Men like Callum Noble don’t hand out their private numbers to random chicks they want to buy for a night. I bet it’s a secretary’s.

I finish my last routine for the night and get changed in the back. It's crazy hot in July, even at this time, so I'm only wearing shorts and a T-shirt, with a baseball cap to hide my face. I stuff my hair in it, before making my way to the underground parking lot underneath the club.

One of the reasons I feel relatively safe at my job is the fact that the building has a basement entrance reserved for the staff. We're on the ground floor of a skyscraper, with a casino on top of us, and a hotel above that. Patrons can access the basement levels 2 and 3, but the first is exclusive to those who work here. I don't need to go out on the street at the end of my shift, so creeps can't follow me.

That's excluding wealthy, entitled, gorgeous creeps in custom suits.

I wonder how he found me? Once he got my name, working out that I go to the park at least once a week can't have been hard, but how did he get it in the first place? My guess is he bribed my boss, or hacked the employee records.

It should disturb me more than it does, and it would, if he were any other of my patrons. But I guess that coming from a freaking Noble, I'm not surprised. If he wants to find out who someone is, there's no reason why he can't.

Ugh. I sigh, frustrated with myself as I straddle my dingy little Vespa. It breaks down at least twice a month, but it gets me from A to B without having to walk at three in the morning.

Before I turn it on, I grab my phone, giving in.

Me: Is this your actual number?

I intend to immediately shove it back in my pocket, but a reply flashes before I put it away.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Royal Psycho: Why, hello, love. Delighted to hear from you. Yes, it is.

Why does it sound like he absolutely expected me to text him? I told him no, numerous times, in various ways.

And then I bloody texted him, like an idiot.

I stuff my phone back in my pocket and head home, resolutely ignoring the three beeps I feel through my pants.

It's one thirty this time, and I enter a blissfully silent apartment. Ellie and Meg have work in the morning on weekdays, so they save all sexcapades for the weekend.

I make a conscious effort to start the kettle and brew some herbal tea, before sinking on the sofa and retrieving my phone.

Royal Psycho: It's been some time since I indulged in middle of the night texting. Isn't it customary to receive interesting pictures at this time?

Royal Psycho: Or filthy promises. I'm not fussy.

Royal Psycho: Come on, Liv. You wouldn't have texted me if you didn't want to play.

I find myself imagining his voice as I read the words, and I flush.

Me: I was driving, if you must know. And no pictures for you. You've seen enough

of me, don't you think?

Royal Psycho: Not nearly as much as I will, and soon. If a hundred grand isn't enough, name your price.

My jaw drops. Name my fucking price?

Me: I told you I wasn't a whore.

Royal Psycho: Everything is for sale.

Me: Oh yeah? How much do YOU cost?

Royal Psycho: I'd fuck anyone for a billion in cash.

I grunt in annoyance, because truth be told, I don't think anyone would refuse that deal, even billionaires.

Me: What if that's my price? A billion.

Royal Psycho: Now we're talking.

Me: You'd pay it?

Royal Psycho: No, but we can start the negotiations.

Me: Cheapskate.

Royal Psycho: Any businessman worth his salt knows not to pay more than the market value on a product. I'm quite certain you'll lower your fee.

Me: *middle finger emoji*

Royal Psycho: Now, now. That wasn't very mature of you. Two hundred and fifty thousand.

I blink.

My brain can't even comprehend the concept of two hundred and fifty thousand euros. I know the apartment I lived in with my father is worth sixty thousand. A little over four apartments?

I also know how much my tuition is for the next year at Crompton College: ten thousand a year. I couldn't afford that, but it, along with the eight grand for housing, is covered by my scholarship.

I have another acceptance burning a hole in my bedside drawer: the Royal University of Anderia, one of the best colleges in the entire freaking world. They offered me a social scholarship, covering housing, but nothing for the tuition—unsurprisingly. I have good grades, but just getting in was a miracle; the merit scholarships are only given to geniuses like Jinx, or the one-in-a-million talents like Tricks.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

The tuition is fifty thousand a year for Anderian. I considered getting a loan for it, but dismissed the idea. How the hell would I ever repay it, when my choice of study takes seven years?

But if Callum is serious...I could do it. His money could pay for my entire undergrad and then I'd just have to fork out for the post-grad years. And I'd have four years to save up for it.

I bite my lip hard enough to bruise.

Me: Tell me why you picked me.

I need to understand that.

Royal Psycho: That's a complicated answer and not one I want to give via text. Meet me tomorrow?

Me: Right. So you can kidnap me, have your way with me, and get your minions to dump the body in the nearest river.

Royal Psycho: Is that why you're saying no, love? You're afraid of me.

I'd be insane not to be.

Before I reply, he sends me a new message: an address in the posh part of town.

Le Luminaris.

I've heard the name somewhere but I can't immediately place it. A quick Google search tells me that it's the place to be, the restaurant frequented by the famous, the wealthy, and the beautiful youth of Anderia. The crown prince and his siblings are frequent patrons.

Royal Psycho: Tomorrow, 6 pm. You can meet me at the doors, where a hundred paps will take pictures of us entering together. And if your body is found in any shallow rivers in the next few weeks, I'd be the prime suspect. Would that suit?

I stare at the message, trying to name the different feelings flooding my brain. Confusion, interest, bafflement, relief.

I might have played it off as a joke but part of me was genuinely worried about what he planned to do to me. If he's serious about being seen in public with me, then murder, or general harm, is likely not part of his plan.

Oh my god, I'm genuinely considering that nonsense. I am a cat. I really hope it's not lethal. At least, the word is, we have nine lives, and I'm only on my first one.

Me: I'm telling my best friend everything you say.

Royal Psycho: Tricks, right? If you must. She already has an NDA.

He knows Tricks?

I have about a million more questions now.

Me: I don't have anything to wear someplace like that.

He's responded almost immediately to each of my texts but now, he takes a minute.

Royal Psycho: Get something red. See you at six.

I'm about to shoot another protest, and maybe suggest my local pizza joint instead, when I get another text—from my bank.

I have an alert set up to tell me whenever I get, or spend, more than a thousand bucks.

Automatic notification: you have received 2500 euros at 1:47 am on 17th of July 2021, from Sir Callum Edward Charles Roissy-Noble.

Me: ?????

Royal Psycho: Night, love.

CHAPTER FOUR

LIV

Page 8

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I'm lost.

I do not belong in the quirky shop on one of the royal lanes, and it must be blatant, either from the look on my face or my secondhand band T-shirt, because a perfectly put-together adult who looks, for some strange reason, like she could be my age, smiles at me and asks, "Can I help you?"

She's also blonde, though hers is more honey than my almost-white mess. People assume I bleach my hair. That's an expense I can't afford, so I don't; it just happens to grow super pale right out of my skull. Hers is swept in an elegant updo. Her makeup is perfect, and she looks so svelte in her pencil skirt.

I wouldn't even know how to walk in one of those.

Presumably, I can't ask her how I can become her, so I blurt, "I need a dress." With a wince, I add, "For Le Luminaris."

I've gone back and forth on it since I woke up at eleven. Do I go? The sane, logical answer is hell no, but apparently, I'm still a cat, because I want to. I want answers. I can always tell him to shove his offer where the sun doesn't shine again if I want to, but I'd still like to hear why he thought to ask me. Why no one else will do.

All right, I'm flattered. It's stupid, but who can say that they were followed and propositioned by someone of the caliber of Callum fucking Noble? No one I know, that's for sure.

Then when I decided to go, I had to start thinking about how I was going to dress.

Her eyes widen. “I see. I’ve never been, myself, but we’ll have what you need.”

She proceeds to talk my ear off about fashion as she leads me directly to a changing room that looks like it should belong to a princess. Everything is pink or gold, with rich velvet and lace. The room’s larger than my bedroom, with a deep plush loveseat.

I really can’t afford this place.

Except I have two and a half thousand euros in my account that don’t belong to me, sent exactly for this purpose, so I suppose I do. Maybe. Possibly.

“Most people make the mistake of assuming that because Le Luminaris is so exclusive and costly, it’s meant for formalwear, but from what I’ve observed—we do have many clients that frequent the restaurant, I assure you—that’s not the case.”

Maybe I should be offended, but I’m glad she’s assumed I’ve never been, because I need all the help I can get.

“Lum is...how could I say it? The pre-game of the in crowd. They dine there before heading out to a party elsewhere.”

I nod, happy I didn’t attempt to pick out something myself.

I combed through pictures taken at the notorious club, and honestly the clothing was eclectic; some people wore dresses worthy of a Cannes red carpet, but others just threw on jeans and a sparkly top.

“So, clubwear, huh?”

“Highborn clubwear,” she specifies, nose scrunching up. “You’re meeting a man or a friend?”

I snort. “Why can’t it be both? And I could be gay.”

She doesn’t roll her eyes, but I can tell it takes some effort to prevent herself from doing so. “You didn’t notice my low neckline. Pardon the assumption.”

“It’s a guy,” I admit. “But it’s not a date, we’re just...talking about something.”

Her eyes rake probingly over my body, taking it all in. “Thirty-six, twenty-five, thirty-two, yes?” She doesn’t let me reply. “You can remove your clothing and put on a dressing gown. I’ll be back shortly.”

I only have a second to get changed and sit down on the soft sofa before she’s back, several items in hand.

“I forgot to ask about the budget,” the woman says. “These are between five hundred and three thousand, will that suit?”

I blink, and nod. “I guess, yeah.”

It’s wild to me that one single outfit could cost so much; I think the single most expensive piece of clothing I own as of today is a two-hundred-buck coat—and that was a splurge. The winters get arctic up here in the mountains, so I bought a ski jacket in the off season.

I try on the first piece of clothing, an off-white jumpsuit, softer than anything I’ve ever touched, with little studs stitched on the lapel and a wide leather belt. It’s adorable. At eight hundred bucks, it better be. But I remove it and try the next, a little black dress with a frilly, short skirt and a corseted top. That’s hot as fuck. I remove it, fast.

As I try on the dozen outfits, it occurs to me that my shop assistant has only shown

me stuff that I could see myself wearing. It can't be a coincidence. Everything would work at a Taylor Swift concert—a little pop rock, on the edgier side of girlie. It also fits like it's been designed for me, so thirty-six, twenty-five, thirty-two must be my actual measurements.

The three-thousand-buck piece is entirely made of butter-soft leather. I dismiss it regretfully, my eyes darting back to the first thing.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

And then I take the little black dress again. It's far too sexy for meeting my freaking stalker, but it's also gorgeous, and something I'd likely wear again.

And a small part of me also knows that a dress like that holds a little power over men. Callum Noble is already far too powerful; it can't hurt to leave him a little tongue-tied.

"That's the one," I finally say.

"I had a feeling." The woman smirks, raising a single brow. "Not a date, huh?"

It's my turn to roll my eyes.

The dress costs a thousand bucks, which leaves over half of what he gave me for tonight. I could just return it, but instead, I browse the accessory aisle while the shop assistant packs the dress.

I notice a long red chain, with an adorable little bow featuring a pearl at its center.

"Hey," I call. "Sorry, what's your name?"

"Annalise, miss."

"Right. Do you do shoes, Annalise?" I ask.

I could go to another store, but something tells me Annalise is my best option.

“Of course, through these doors.” She waves behind the counter. “Would you like some help?”

I’m relieved she offers. “Please. I don’t want high heels. And red, if you can find it?”

I tell myself it’s because of the necklace. Besides, black and red just make sense. It’s absolutely not because Callum instructed me to find something red. I don’t take orders, least of all from that perverted Noble.

Annalise finds me a pair of mid-height heeled Mary Janes with a bow that goes so well with my necklace.

I make a face as I swipe my card, immediately getting a notification from my bank, who likely thinks I’ve been replaced by pod people. I shop at Primark, not fancy little boutiques.

But I confirm the transaction, and they accept it, swiping away just under two thousand euros in an instant. For some reason, I don’t feel sick.

“If I may, there’s a makeup store across the road that occasionally takes walk-ins. Tell him I sent you. He’ll do your hair, too.”

My hair. Usually, I just let it be or tie it up. But I’ve been invited to Le Luminaris. And there will be photographers. And I have a wonderful little dress.

If I choose to do it, it has nothing to do with Callum.

“Right.”

CHAPTER FIVE

LIV

He's there when I arrive, chatting with some blond guy whose hair is as pale as mine, at the entrance, beyond the bodyguard and ribbon keeping us peasants away from Le Luminaris.

I shift uncomfortably, half expecting to get shooed at the door.

"I'm with?—"

The bulky, tall, bald man in uniform lifts the barrier before I can finish the sentence, waving me in. He didn't even ask for a name.

I stand still for a moment, hesitant to approach Callum while he's with company, but just then, his gray eyes dart away from his guest, finding me.

Then they don't let go.

I can only describe his look as ravenous. I've seen men stare at me like that before, but typically, I'm mostly undressed and showing them my pussy through flimsy underwear when they stare this probingly.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Callum takes his time, his gaze raking over me from the tips of my Mary Janes to the elegant side braid, missing nothing. His friend seems to be asking something, but he's not paying him a bit of attention. Finally, the blond guy turns to see what could possibly have enthralled him that way.

His eyes widen, and his jaw falls as he, too, watches me. But his expression's different than Callum's. He seems...confused?

"If you'll excuse me," I hear Callum say, before he crosses the distance between us, taking my elbow.

He drags me inside fast. The paparazzi, who until then ignored me, flash their cameras, taking several shots on our way up.

Only when we're beyond the dark green gates does he let me go.

"Fucking hell, love," he grunts. "Do you want me to bend you over in public?"

I snort. "I thought you wanted me to fuck someone else."

Callum leads us to a bar, lifting his hand. The poor bartender immediately abandons what he was doing to scurry over. "Scotch, neat, and Cristal for the lady. Bring a bottle."

The man obeys with a nod.

"Cristal?" I ask.

“Champagne. You’ll like it.”

“What if I detest champagne?” I argue for the sake of it.

“You got drunk on cheap cava for graduation last May. I doubt you’ll frown on the upgrade.”

How does he...

Oh. Tricks. I was with Patricia at graduation.

I cross my arms over my chest. “I’m gonna have a talk with my so-called best friend. How do you know her?”

“So many questions.”

“And no answers so far.”

His drink arrives first, and he downs it in one go, looking like he’s been parched and that’s the first bit of water he’s seen in days.

The champagne is next, and this time, he takes the time to lift his flute to mine for a toast. “To a mutually satisfactory evening.”

I can’t exactly pinpoint why I flush. Likely because of the way those dark gray orbs pierce into me. He could be talking about the weather, I’d still be beet red.

“To getting some fucking answers,” I retort, tapping his glass with mine.

A beautiful brunette informs us our private room is ready, and I tense immediately. I thought we were supposed to stay in public? But that’s not what he offered; he said

I'd be seen with him in public. And he's right, it's reassuring. He can't possibly murder me now, without being a prime suspect, as he said.

Then again, he's a fucking peer of the realm, and pretty high on the hierarchy, too. I think it would only take about twenty-five deaths for him to become king.

And I'm having drinks with him.

Wild.

He takes our bottle and we follow the hostess, past the bar and into a dimly lit area with half a dozen closed doors.

I wonder what's happening beyond those. Business dinners. Dates. Something else altogether.

She opens the last one and smiles pleasantly as we walk into the modern black-and-gold lounge.

"I understand you'll be trying our tasting menu tonight?"

Page 11

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Yes,” Callum says without my input.

I roll my eyes, unsurprised, but also unbothered. Tasting menu sounds like exactly what I would have wanted to eat in a place like this.

“The first course will arrive in a moment. Afterwards, please do press on your call button when you’re ready for the next. You will have absolute privacy until you let us know we can come back in.”

And I’m back to being red. I guess these rooms are definitely meant for something other than business dinners.

That explains why the seats seem so comfortable—beds, more than sofas.

She’s gone after one last smile.

“I haven’t agreed to fuck you,” I remind him as soon as the door is shut.

Callum’s washing his hands in a small basin that’s far too pretty—I thought it was a plant pot or something—and I imitate him.

“Love, if it was about fucking me, I wouldn’t ask. Now go sit that beautiful ass down before I change my mind and have you for dinner.”

He makes his way to the sofa on the far wall, and I take my place on the other one, even more dumbfounded than before.

I'm about to ask another question for him to ignore when the door opens again, four servers armed with several small dishes coming in.

Each plate contains less than a bite-size serving of things I couldn't begin to identify. Squares. Fleshy bits. Foam. Air. It all looks dainty and beautiful and nothing like food.

"So," Callum says, reaching out for a dish on his right.

He takes it between two fingers, bringing it directly to his mouth.

I do the same, and lose all my ability to think for several moments.

Oh. My. God.

Is this what rich people eat? No pasta or pizza or potatoes, just heaven on a plate?

I think I come a little in my panties. I want to cry because it's already gone.

"Why you. That was your first of many queries, yes?"

It takes me a while to get over what's in my mouth, but I finally manage to nod.

"Are you sure you wanna know?"

I roll my eyes. "Yes. That's the entire reason I'm here."

Though if I'd known about the food, I would have come anyway.

How do people even make things like that? With what?

“You have a half-sister.”

My jaw falls as my hand stops, halfway to the next dish.

What?

“Come again?”

“I figured you wouldn’t know. Your dad and mom only stayed together for a couple of years when you were born, then you were raised by your mother until age seven, when she ODed, right?”

I nod, rather than launching into another useless lecture about stalking.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Well, just around when your parents separated, another woman had a kid with your dad. She’s about a year and a half younger than you.”

I don’t know what to say. Honestly, given who my father is, the possibility of step-siblings should have occurred to me before now, but it just didn’t.

I have a half-sister? Some girl around seventeen years old?

“Long story short, my friend Hawk has a thing for her. You look alike. A lot.”

This, I can also believe, because I’ve taken a lot after my father; the blonde hair, but also his mouth, his nose, his eyebrows. I think the only thing I have from my mom is the blue eyes.

“He is about to throw his life away and I want to remind him of the...possibilities that could open to him someday if he refuses to marry the harpy his dad’s forcing on him.”

“By fucking me. Because I look like my half-sister?”

It’s all too stupid for words.

“Essentially.”

“That’s insane.”

Callum shrugs. “He can’t fuck her. She hates his guts, for one, but she’s also jailbait.

And a lot more complicated than you. So here's the deal: I convince him with my words, you convince him with your pussy, and we pull him away from the edge. You walk away with a tidy sum that will make your life considerably easier either way it ends."

I shake my head in disbelief. "That's it, that's your grand plan? Persuading your friend to change his mind on something major using the strength of my almighty pussy?"

He nods solemnly. "It'll help that he'll be your first. Pretty sure your prissy little sis is a virgin, too. He'll think about popping her cherry next. Are you on birth control? I'd rather you weren't."

"Oh, if you'd rather I weren't, I guess I'd just pop out some stranger's kid, ruining my entire life for your convenience!" My voice is rising, but he doesn't seem bothered.

I'm guessing the room's soundproof, given its purpose.

"You can take a pill in the morning or whatever. But it'll help."

I stand, ready to leave. "I'm done with this nonsense."

"Half a million."

The words hang between us in the stunned silence.

"I'm going easy on you rather than dragging out the negotiations. That's my plateau. I won't go higher; you're objectively not worth more. But you do this for me, and half a million euros are yours. I'll even register your service to the kingdom, so it's tax free."

“Under what, party favors?” I snap, finding my voice again.

“Yes,” Callum replies without hesitating. “Sit, Liv. The theatrics don’t change the fact that you’re going to say yes. You need the cash. I need your help. It’s a fair deal.”

He sounds oh so reasonable.

And what kills me? He’s right. If I stay on my high horse and walk away from this life-changing offer...there’s a very high chance that sixty years from now, I’ll lie on my deathbed, wondering what if. Regretting it.

Life doesn’t tend to throw curveballs, or chances. Not to people like me. This is mine.

I sit.

And the asshole smirks.

“How did you find me?” I ask out of curiosity, and because it just occurred to me that it likely was no coincidence.

“Gathering dirt on your sister,” he answers obligingly.

It doesn’t matter how nasty it is, he always gives me the truth.

Page 13

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“What, so you could blackmail her into fucking your friend?” The moment I say the words, I know they’re true.

“That was the initial plan, but when I learned about you, I figured it’d be much cleaner this way.”

“Cleaner,” I muse.

“I mean, you are a stripper. You’re not above using your body to get where you need to in life. Your half-sister’s a spoiled brat. She would have pouted through it all. Whereas you’re going to be such a good girl, aren’t you?”

I shiver. “You’re something else.”

He winks. “Eat your mousse, love. It’s to die for.”

CHAPTER SIX

CALLUM

I like when my plans come together this well, usually. I have every piece in place. Hawk is going to accept my offer. All is going swimmingly. So why won’t my fists stop tightening on the damn armrest?

We’re in my apartment, and no one questions when I had the brand-new pole installed in my lounge. All eyes are drawn to the gorgeous blonde stretching on it, dressed in lingerie far more revealing and a thousand times more appealing than the

cheap shit she wears at her club. I picked it out myself. Red lace. Black silk. Her lips are painted bright red, too.

She's wearing a mask for now—a hand-carved Venetian affair that belongs in a museum.

The party could have been for just about anything, but as it so happens, it's my birthday weekend, so it gave me a reason to invite everyone. They would have come in any case.

"Is that new?" my sister asks, sipping wine as she watches the dancer—or rather, the pole.

"Mm," I reply noncommittally.

I don't speak to her if I can help it, and she knows it.

It's sad to say so about one's own sister, but she truly is the worst piece of shit I can imagine. I'm no saint. I can be manipulative to get what I'm after, but she takes pleasure in causing pain. I've always known that. What I didn't realize was how far she's willing to go.

Too fucking far.

I'm the only one who knows what really happened that night. If I'd told my cousin or my friends, the viper sipping cocktails would be dead and buried. I can't bring myself to throw her into the lion's den, given the fact that she is my fucking sister, but I'm not going to let her ruin Hawk's life. I'm just not.

He's the best of us—an artist, with his heart on his sleeve. He's also far too loyal, and easily swayed. She would chew him up and spit him back out, a fact my father knew

when he arranged the engagement. He chose someone she could control, so that we Nobles could take over the fucking world.

I'm not against the concept per se, but I draw the line at using Hawk to do it.

This party goes on like just about any other in one of The Loft's apartments: we start to drink and dine up here, then most of the guests make their way to the Royal Club. It suits me fine. The sooner we're in closer comity, the better.

My sister usually leaves early, but tonight, everyone lingers, watching my gorgeous butterfly extend her wings on her pole. I should have realized they would.

Eventually, though, general horniness wins and my guests leave to fuck a whore, a pledge, or a lady downstairs.

I invite Hawk and my cousin Sebastian to start a game of poker before they, too, think of making an escape. Not that they would during my birthday celebration.

My gaze drifts from the table to the slender dancer still twirling on her pole. She had breaks, but she's been at it for hours. Won't she be tired? I should have hired someone else to dance with her, too. I need her to have some energy for later.

A part of my mind is asking a very different kind of question. Tomorrow is my birthday, after all. Twenty-five. Shouldn't I be the one to get a present? I've never been one to mind sharing, but why should I give her virginity to Hawk, when I could be the one to take it? Shove right into her purity, mark her as mine.

That's a surprise. I've never been one to prefer virgins. They're terrible fucks, and rate as a ten on the cringy meter. Yet I don't seem to mind the idea of taking hers. Claiming it.

That's stupid. My plan is sound. I know just what to say, and do, to get under Hawk's skin and move him like a pawn. I am my sister's brother, for better or worse.

All guests except those at my table have left, and our game's over. It's time. And still...I hesitate.

But then I clear my throat, waving toward the gorgeous trap in lingerie. "Come over here, love, won't you?"

Page 14

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

She moves like silk and water, smooth, gracious, confident. I've read her files enough times to know she owes those movements to many years of training with one of the most severe ballet teachers in the country, but when she's dressed like that, it's easy to forget, and to think that she's just made to be fucked.

Olivia Barrett is but a means to an end, and my little head needs to get with the program.

I offer her my hand. When she takes it, I pull until she's standing right over me.

My hands move to her bare waist and I lower her to my lap. "What do you think of my lovely find?" I ask innocently.

"Remarkable," Hawk declares without hesitation.

"Yes." Sebastian's eyes caress her body, drinking it in.

I take one of her legs and lift it up, putting her foot down on the table so she's giving them both a full view of her tiny La Perla string, as my other hand pushes it to the side.

Fuck. She's drenched.

Does pole dancing always make her wet like this, or is it just tonight? Just for me?

I slide a finger inside her, bringing my mouth to her slender neck.

“Want a closer look?”

Neither of my friends is shocked, it’s certainly not the first time I’ve made a similar offer, but while Sebastian doesn’t hesitate to stand, Hawk stiffens.

“Daphne wouldn’t like that.”

It takes a physical effort for me not to react. Of course, I know my sister’s demanding monogamy of him now, though she’s still fucking two of her girlfriends, our butler, and half of the peerage.

“What my sister doesn’t know won’t hurt her,” I reply.

It’s time to play my trump card, the one I know will work for Hawk. I let go of Liv’s leg to undo the ribbon holding her mask behind her tied-up hair, and take the pins and scrunchie holding it in place while I’m at it.

Her light blonde hair, slightly damp with sweat, falls around her sweetheart face. Silence follows, as Hawk watches everything he won’t admit he wants. He saw her last week. I made sure he did, so he’d understand this as a possibility at the back of his mind.

Seb, however, never saw the girl who could very well be Grace’s twin.

“How?” he gasps.

Having Sebastian here, like everything I do, is entirely strategic.

“Meet the lovely Olivia. She’s eighteen—almost nineteen, in fact—and, believe it or not, a bona fide virgin.” I trail a series of slow kisses along her neck, relishing her discreet shivers. “She’s my entertainment for tonight, but you know I don’t mind

sharing.”

“How does she look exactly like fucking Grace?” Sebastian asks.

“Accident of birth.” I chuckle. “Aren’t most things? Their dad was a cheat, on top of a deadbeat.”

“Jesus,” Hawk swears under his breath.

My slow exploration of her wet opening changes, my finger dipping inside her faster, deeper. I run my thumb along her clit, taking a sip of wine, ever so casual.

She muffles a moan, her leg dropping to the floor.

“Now, now, love, I know you can keep it up for us,” I chide gently. “Our friends don’t want to miss the show, yes?”

She lifts it back up, flushing, and clamping her mouth as shut as she can.

“Want a taste?” I ask Sebastian.

“That’s just insane,” Hawk says.

Page 15

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I don't see him leaving, though.

I know he won't. He barely needs any convincing already. Because he's wanted this since he was sixteen and they introduced him to a fifteen-year-old bombshell he couldn't have.

Sebastian gets to his knees without further prompting, bringing his mouth to my gorgeous stripper's cunt.

This, too, is uncomfortable to me. I don't think she's done much dating in her life, hence the deplorable state of her hymen, and well, if it's the first time she has someone go down on her, why isn't it me?

Fuck. I need to get a grip. I'm doing this for a specific reason, and it has very little to do with getting off. I will, but that's just a bonus. I'm here to save Hawk from the misery of a marriage to my bloody sister.

Liv's back arches over me and she can't help the wail coming out of her throat when Sebastian's tongue draws slow circles around her clit. I don't stop fingering her cunt, but one of my hands moves to her lovely tits.

My eyes remain on my friend. "Come on, Hawk. If my sister's dry cunt is the only one you're gonna fuck for the rest of your life, you deserve this before you tie the knot."

He's stiff as a post, wrestling with all things moral and right and good, no doubt. But Sebastian sucks her clit, so Olivia moans again, and Hawk stands, a fucking tent in

his pants.

I got him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIV

It wasn't supposed to be like this.

First of all, I wasn't supposed to be sitting on his lap, on display for two other guys, one finger in my pussy and a tongue lapping at me like I'm fucking ice cream; he only said he wanted his friend to fuck me. There was no talk of another guy. Though what's the difference between two and three of them, really? He bought me for a night, and according to our contract, I'm his from eight in the evening till eight in the morning.

He wasn't joking when he said I'd be properly hired by the crown as an entertainer. Jesus, I wonder how many times they've done this.

But what shocks me isn't the third guy—a dark-haired hottie around Hawk's age. It's my reaction.

I should hate every second of this. I should be lying back and thinking of England as I sacrifice my dignity for a comfortable life. I shouldn't be on fire, aroused by every touch. I entirely blame Callum and his fingers, though the other guy's tongue definitely knows what it's doing. My body moves of its own volition, hips lifting to get more of the maddening torture as I pant, and bite my lip just so I don't beg.

Hawk, the blond guy I saw with Callum at the restaurant only four days ago, stands like a deer in headlights, his flight instinct driving him hard.

“Have you already sucked a cock, Liv?” Callum asks me.

I don’t know why, but I feel my inner wall tighten. “N—” I don’t trust my voice. “No.”

“Don’t worry, love. We’ll teach you, won’t we?” A low, rumble chuckle vibrates behind my back. “Open your mouth.”

I do as I’m told, and the psycho removes his finger from my pussy to bring it to my lips.

That’s gross.

But I’m getting paid half a million fucking euros to do as I’m told for another eight hours, so I close my lips around it.

Given better access, the dark-haired man between my legs moves from my clit to my entrance, his wet tongue entering the space Callum’s finger left vacant.

Oh, god.

“With three of us here, we can teach you all sorts of things. Why, we can plug all of your holes until you’re airtight.”

My panicked eyes seek him out; I have to twist a little but I manage to stare at him, hoping I can see that he’s kidding.

Except I don’t. All I see in those gray eyes is a flash of heat and amusement.

“God. She’s so fucking wet,” the man between my legs groans against me.

I don't even know his name.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Come on, Hawk,” Callum urges. “Her bitch of a sister chased you from your house, didn’t she? I bet you’ve dreamed about teaching her a lesson more than once. And now you can. You know that kid always had a crush on you. She just lashed out because you didn’t give in. Now, you can take your revenge. You can fuck her sister. Imagine when she finds out, huh? You wouldn’t touch her, but you filled her big sister with cum.”

Those words are weapons, aimed right at a part of Hawk I would never have guessed existed. He knows his friend in and out and he’s aiming right where he’ll hit his mark. I can tell even before the blond guy moves.

“You’re so sick,” Hawk says.

But he’s the first to open his belt, and free a hard cock from his pants.

I’ve never actually seen a cock in person, though porn has taught me plenty. His is...scary.

It’s long. Very long and straight, like a fucking pole. It’s not as wide as I imagined, but the idea of that ten-inch tube going anywhere near me makes me recoil in fear.

Hawk is content to remain at a distance, though, jerking the shaft up and down as he watches.

Callum lowers the cup of my bra underneath the swell of my tit to directly cup it, his finger running around the lobe of my nipple. “These are smaller than your sister’s, I think,” he muses.

I don't attempt an answer; I know that evaluation is for Hawk more than me.

Meanwhile, the stranger between my legs adds a finger to his tongue, and fuck, I can't help the spasms running through my entire body, making me jerk up, moan, tremble.

"So fucking tight!" he grunts. "I can't wait to be inside you, beautiful."

Inside me.

It dawns on me then. I'm not going to be fucked once. All of them are going to use me, at once. Likely for eight hours straight.

Oh god, what did I get myself into? Will I survive it? My cardiac rhythm can't be healthy right now.

Without much in the way of a warning, my body betrays me, losing all control as I come, and come, and come over the lap of my buyer, while a man whose name I still don't know keeps licking me, for the viewing pleasure of a third stranger.

"Good girl," Callum praises me. "Now you're just wet enough to take a hard cock, huh?"

Fuck.

"What do you say? Should we reward Sebastian for being so generous with his tongue?"

So that's the name of the man whose golden eyes are staring at me from between my legs, his mouth wet with my juices.

“Or maybe Hawk should get to play? He hasn’t had a chance yet. Besides, I think out of all of us, Hawk might need a good fuck more than the rest. You see, he’s about to enter into holy matrimony, after all.”

I look at the miserable sod who strokes his cock while watching us.

This whole thing is objectively disgusting. That guy’s about to be married. I’m the stripper whore he cheats on his wife with on the eve of the big day. What an awful cliché.

But I know what my answer should be.

“Well, Hawk already has his cock out.”

I don’t know how I manage to sound sultry. I certainly don’t try. But he does have a cock, and he’s stroking it, and he looks...

Scary. Too big.

Beautiful.

“You know you want to play,” I tell him.

Where does that even come from?

“You can think of my spoiled bitch of a sister. You can tell her you chose me.”

Page 17

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I'm only echoing Callum's statement, and it breaks whatever restraint held Hawk together up until this point.

He doesn't even pause, jumping to his feet and aligning his cock right at my entrance, before lifting me up as he drives right in.

Can I just say, Ouch?

"Holy fuck. Holy fuck, Cal—no, I thought... Shit, she really was a virgin?"

I was so drenched, he managed to enter me in one go, but the lack of care still burns. I wince, biting down hard to prevent myself from screaming.

"Shit. Sorry. Liv, was it? Sorry, darling," Hawk tells me softly, his hips retreating, and entering in slow, shallow thrusts. "I'll make it better. It'll all be good for you, I promise."

Except those words aren't really for me. Nor is the softness behind them. He's seeing someone else entirely, just when he took me as hard as he could. It's about a girl named Grace who wronged him—someone I've never met, but who looks enough like me for Callum to have spent a fortune on this.

I let him move me as he'd like; if Callum wanted an experienced lover, he would have picked someone else. He wanted a doll. I'm just that: a puppet used as a prop, a replacement.

Hawk took me like he hated me and now fucks me like he loves me, because he loves

and hates that girl.

My body's stopped screaming, the slow rhythm coaxing more pleasure out of my aching core.

My hips start to sway up to meet his thrusts, when something shifts under me. Callum's lifting me up. Hawk instinctively grabs hold of my legs, and both of them drag me from the table to a low sofa. My back's only just hit the velvet when Hawk pushes my ankles over my head, and changes the rhythm back to a fast, deep, hateful pounding.

To my surprise, my body still doesn't register any pain. Just tendrils of pleasure traveling from my core through my legs, my belly, my tits.

I've only had a moment to adjust when another cock, this one thicker, if a little shorter, and curving up, meets my face.

I open my mouth obligingly, but Callum's quite happy to run it along my cheeks, my nose, my forehead. His hard dick slaps my face and he grunts with satisfaction. "You should see yourself right now, gorgeous."

His balls settle on my lips, cutting off any reply I might have thought about. I do the first thing that comes to mind; I close my mouth around them, sucking them in.

Callum hisses, hips swaying, as the man between my legs starts to go so fast I think he could split me in two. His balls hit my ass at each of his moves, which indicates that, unbelievable as it might seem, he's managed to sheathe the entire thing in me.

I can't see it over Callum's cock, but Sebastian wraps my right hand around his shaft; I close my fingers on it, at a loss what to do with it. Thankfully, he doesn't seem to want much input; he just moves back and forth, using my hand to wank himself.

Callum brings the tip of his cock to my mouth, now.

I bite it.

It's meant to be playful, an argument when I can't use my voice to snap at him. He should have told me he planned...this. I would still be here, but I would have been more prepared.

His ridiculously handsome face splits into a grin. "Good girl," he tells me, which is ridiculous because no good girl in the world has ever handled three cocks at once. "Open wide."

I let my jaw go as slack as I can, parting my lips, to let the wide shaft in.

"Fuck. I'm going to come," the man whose hips are slapping my ass every other second grunts, growing impossibly larger, moving faster.

"Do it. Flood her," Callum encourages, his cock in my mouth, cutting off any protest I might have made. "Breed her. She's not on anything. You could have your heirs right now. You don't need an heiress for it. You're going to launch a fucking legacy."

So that's why he didn't want me on any contraception; to make his friend realize he could have children that easily, with anyone; to feel like he could.

I'm fully aware that somewhere in his mind right now, Hawk is fucking my half-sister, not me. Thinking about impregnating her, not me.

"Do you really want your entire life to be about the next tea party and what the neighbors could think? This could be it. We have plenty of money. You're an heir twice over. Take what you want."

“Fuck, fuck, fuck.”

Heat floods me, as Hawk pushes in one last time with grunts and morefucks. Then he grows still.

The same can't be said for Callum, who moves faster in my mouth, the tip of his cock hitting my palate. I retch each time.

Page 18

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Tilt your head back, lovely, and breathe in when I push in. Don’t fight it.”

Easy for him to say; he’s not the one getting a bloody aubergine crammed in his mouth.

I’m concentrating so much on trying to stay alive, obeying his instruction, which only results in his cock being shoved deeper down my throat, that I don’t feel Hawk move away, or Sebastian taking his place, at least until the other guy’s ramming his cock between my sensitive legs.

It’s different. Larger. Bolder. He repositions my legs, spreading them wide, his fingers pushing my pussy open, as he barrels into me. I suck in air—at least, I try, but only end up sucking in more cock, until Callum’s seated inside me to the base.

Neither of these men is gentle as they split roast me, causing pants and moans and muffled curses that can’t escape past Callum’s cock. I let them fuck me because I have no other choice. If I tried my best to move, to fight, to push them off, I couldn’t, so what’s the point? Besides, they bought this. They bought me. And there’s no denying that part of me is enjoying it. Why else would I move my hips to meet each abrupt thrust? Fuck. I love this. I love it all. The helplessness. The sheer depravity, the fact that I’m nothing but a mindless cock socket for the time being. That I couldn’t be any more if I tried.

I come all over Sebastian’s cock, walls squeezing him, and my release tears his from his groin.

He’s only just painted my cunt with his cum when Callum withdraws from my throat.

I cough, struggling for air.

He doesn't wait for my wheezing to stop before lifting my legs up in the air, over my head, and shoving his cock where both of his friends just were. Wet, repulsive noises accompany each of his moves as he sinks into the dripping hole, his taut cock reaching deeper than I would have thought possible, hitting a completely different angle than either of those who tore inside me.

Two cocks are presented to my hands, hard again, and I reach for them with...eagerness? No, that can't be it.

Obedience.

Callum fucks like he does everything else: with utter control. The moment my body starts to tighten, bracing for a release, he slows. He teases.

I'm moaning and whimpering and panting, desperate.

It's only when I say, "Please," that he takes pity on me, resuming a maddening, steady rhythm that slowly increases, deepens, and then races to the oncoming precipice.

I scream. I beg some more. I jerk both of his friends. This time, I think I pass out, coming so hard all notion of space around me disappears.

My pussy's dripping with the cum of three different men, and I'm on a cloud.

Being a doll doesn't seem like such a bad thing.

"Come on, darling," Callum's voice purrs as he scoops me up.

I'm glad he doesn't expect me to be able to move. I couldn't if I tried.

"Let's get you to a bed."

If I thought he meant to sleep, I was sorely mistaken.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LIV

In the two months it took me to make the call, my life has changed drastically.

No longer being a virgin is only the tip of the iceberg. I've moved to the dorms, as planned—except I'm not attending Crompton College. I attend the Royal University. I called the acceptance office, and apologized for my late registration, explaining that I'd been trying to sort out the financial side of things before confirming I would be one of their new freshmen mid-September.

"Understandable, and you're not late at all. The deadline is Sunday," the kindly old lady informs me with a smile. "Did you end up sorting the finances, honey? There are grants and aid packages we could talk about—as well as an installment system. I can make you an appointment with the department..."

"I'm fine actually," I replied, finding myself flushing as I signed away more money than I've spent in my entire life without blinking.

The college is a dream, as is the fact that I no longer have to count pennies for every little thing. It's hard to get out of the habit of checking which banana is the most financially sound. And I don't truly try to stop myself; I'll always notice the price of things. It's just that now, I sometimes decide I'm going to eat organic anyway.

The biggest change is that my future was fairly set until now. I knew exactly what classes I would take: those leading to a secure income right out of school. IT or finance.

Now, I just don't know. I was paid half a million euros at eight am sharp on that Sunday morning, before Callum even dropped me off. He must have scheduled the transfer because he was still spooning me, and lazily thrusting into me from behind at the time.

My clothes are another change. I didn't want to stand out too badly at my crazy exclusive, crazy expensive new college, so I opted to pay a visit to Annalise. I wasn't sure it was the right call, given the fact that I had no intention of dropping all my money on clothes, but she asked about my budget, and didn't even wince when I admitted I didn't want most of my tops to cost more than fifty bucks.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“That’s entirely reasonable for casualwear. A couple of fancier things around the one, one-fifty mark, maybe?” she suggested. “For parties and the like.”

I agreed to what seemed a reasonable solution; six thousand bucks later, I have a brand-new wardrobe, top to bottom, underwear included. I only skipped footwear; I have the Mary Janes when I want to dress up, and my beat-up Converse work fine otherwise.

I feel more sure of myself. The security, the clothes, the fact that I’m attending the best university in the country, is a huge boost of confidence.

I try not to think about that night much during the day. Or the next three days, when I still felt them each time I walked, or moved.

They fucked me all night. After bringing me to a dark bedroom, my wrists were tied to the bedpost, and Sebastian, Hawk, and Callum took turns, jerking themselves over my skin, against my tits, in my hand when they weren’t inside me. Then I was carried to the shower and fucked again. Back to the bed, on all fours this time. It must have been two or three when the guests excused themselves, leaving me with the birthday boy. I didn’t even think to try to leave, just passed out, only to be awoken with a hard shaft pumping inside my burning pussy.

Trying not to daydream about it is one thing; I mostly manage. But at night, there’s no helping the memories flooding back to me, so I wake up drenched and frustrated in the middle of the night.

I think that’s why I could only bring myself to contact her at the start of October.

After all, she was the one they really wanted. I was the replacement, because I was easier to buy and less complicated.

The girl across the table from me has dark hair. The differences between us stop there.

“We really do look alike,” she marvels, sipping her chai latte.

“Dad and his super swimmers,” I retort with a snort.

She tilts her head, her expression mostly blank. “What is he like?”

I shrug. “He’s a drunk.”

What else is there to say?

My half-sister nods. “Mom said as much. We went no-contact because he hit her. I’m...sorry you had to grow up with him. Is there anything we can do to help?”

I didn’t really understand my instinct to get my shit together before I tried to get in touch with my little sister, but now I do.

“No,” I assure her sincerely. “I’m fine.”

“Really?” She’s surprised, but not particularly relieved. I don’t get the feeling she would have been annoyed if I had asked her for cash.

“I didn’t reach out for money. I have some...” I hope she doesn’t ask how. I’m just eighteen, and she likely knows our father can’t keep a job for shit. I don’t want to explain how I came into my newfound prosperity.

“Okay. But if you need anything—well, we have money.” She winces. “I sound awkward. I didn’t mean...” Grace hesitates, chewing on her bottom lip the same way I do when I’m not sure what to say. “We’re sisters. I don’t want you to struggle, when we have the means to help. My mother married a rich man, you see, and he’s very generous.”

I smile. While it’s abundantly clear to me that Grace is mostly shy, and a little bit on the awkward side, I can see how some would see her as stuck-up.

“You’re kind. But I’m truly fine. I did struggle for a while,” I admit, “but I manage now. I’m going to RUA.”

Don’t ask me how, don’t ask me how, don’t ask?—

“Oh wow! Me too, next year. I got early admittance. What are you studying?”

“I’m undeclared, so I picked up a few different courses to explore my options. I figure I can decide on a major next year, or the year after.”

A new, insane luxury.

“Are we the same person?” she jokes.

It’s all I can do not to laugh in her face as I imagine her dangling her ass around a pole in a G-string. Maybe not.

“And how did you find me, if I may ask? Did you see me and figure it out?”

I’m prepared for this question. “Actually, one of your friends did. Callum Noble? He told me he thought we might be related in July.” All of that is entirely true. “I asked him to give me some time to tell you myself.”

“Cal?” She's shocked. “Oh. I wouldn't have thought he knew what I looked like.”

Page 20

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

She chuckles, cheeks flushing.

Oh, goodie. My sister has a crush on the fucking psycho.

I absolutely don't expect the sudden rush of protectiveness, but well, she's me, except younger, adorable, sheltered, and not ready to deal with bloody Callum Noble.

"Oh, no, sis. Don't go there." Rather than explaining all the reasons why she shouldn't, I say, "I liked it. It's mine."

She gasps, then leans forward with a giggle. "You did? Do tell!"

"Nope."

The manipulative little thing pouts. "But I must live vicariously through you. Everyone thinks he's droolworthy, but he hardly ever dates..."

"Well..." I need a second to think about what I can say to satisfy her curiosity without shocking her. "We had dinner. He's an interesting mixture of a gentleman and a crass-as-fuck motherfucker."

"Isn't he just?" she says with a snort. "I mean, I don't hang out with him much, of course, but my...stepbrother's friends with his cousins. We've attended the same parties for a while. How can one be so eloquent yet so very rude?"

"Right?"

“But I wasn’t asking about the extent of his vocabulary, Olivia.”

“Liv,” I correct. “And that’s all you’re getting. Facts on his very large vocabulary.”

She practically chokes on her drink.

Grace makes me think about Jinx a little; quiet and easy to blush, but so very sweet and fun when she opens up. By the time our cups are empty, I don’t want to let her go. And she might think the same, because she offers to let me tag along with her. She’s seeing some friends at a fancy gallery opening.

The gallery, it happens, belongs to the Forts. Mr. Fort saved a princess a decade ago, and his daughters ended up engaged to princes as a result. The youngest sister, Belladonna, is one of the most beloved girls in the entire kingdom, adored by the media and public alike. As it turns out, she’s a friend of Grace’s.

If someone had told me before summer that I would be attending events in the company of the highest of the peers of the realm, I would have laughed hard enough to crack my ribs, but here I am. It’s not even that weird. Grace introduces me proudly, and people marvel over our looks. I meet fellow students, none of whom stop to ask why there are holes in my Converse.

“Love your hair!” a gorgeous Asian chick says. “You have to tell me who dyes it.”

“No one. It actually grows like this, believe it or not. It’s a little lighter at the end of the summer.”

“Gosh! That explains why you don’t have roots. She’s just so pretty.”

“And I adore the look,” Bella announces. “A little edgy, not quite emo.”

“Give me your number!”

I get everyone’s numbers.

I don’t know why I expected all of them to be stuck-up as fuck—and maybe they are to complete outsiders, but they’re used to Grace, and I share her face.

I’m having the best of times, completely relaxed, though my social meter is about to hit empty. I’ll have to recharge over the next few days.

And then, I look up at a particularly gorgeous painting across the modern white hall, and I see him, leaning on the opposite wall, surrounded by friends in sharp suits.

And his gray eyes are set on me.

CHAPTER NINE

LIV

In a crowd of tall, fit, well-dressed men gorgeous enough to belong on the big screen, none should stand out, yet he does. I could say that’s because I have intimate knowledge of what’s under the suit, but one glance shows Sebastian’s there too, and he doesn’t capture my attention the way Callum does.

I make myself turn back to my half-sister, who just asked something. “Sorry?”

Page 21

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“I said, have you tried the gallery before?”

“Oh. Um, no, actually. I’ve only visited the national museum. But it’s gorgeous.”

“We should eat at the restaurant here one day. It’s delicious.” She smiles. “If you want to, of course.”

“Yeah, sounds great. Tell me when?”

“Feel free to name drop me,” Bella offers. “They’ll squeeze in a table even if it’s full. Actually, text me, too, and I’ll crash your date. I freaking love the new chocolate cake.”

“I love whenever I don’t have to feed myself,” I admit.

I used to cook and I’m not terrible at it, but I’m not fond of it either. Now, outside of the dinners covered by my meal plan, I’ve developed an unhealthy relationship with various takeout apps and the taco truck across the road from the dorm.

Grace inhales sharply. “I love to cook!”

“Good to know we weren’t actually cloned after all.”

The gallery launch is a private event, by invitation only—Grace brought me as her plus one since all of her friends have their own invites—and I can already tell the art isn’t the star of the show: it’s basically a posh party with an open bar.

Smartly dressed servers hand us glasses of bubbly, appearing to top them up before they ever get empty. I'm not even sure how many glasses I've drunk, but I'm on the tipsy side, which isn't good.

I can't help it, my eyes drift toward his corner a fair few times. He's stopped watching me now, acting like I'm not there.

I don't like it one bit.

I note that the crowd in the large gallery hall was somewhat segregated at the start—us girls under twenty-five around Belladona, the proper adults together around the bar, and the guys; Callum's friends. While he's the one I can't help watching, the attention's mostly monopolized by another man, a little taller than him, and with an easy smile that doesn't reach his eyes.

There were also a few older people—past fifty—but they soon left.

As the evening draws on and the champagne flows, we mix and match a little; some of the guys come closer to us, a few girls venture to their side.

I stay firmly planted by Grace, and Callum remains on his wall like his back is glued to it.

But Sebastian does make his way to us.

Bella's being hugged by a gorgeous dark-haired man everyone knows—her other half, Prince Nicolai.

Sebastian kisses her cheeks first, but then, he tilts his chin towards me. "Liv. It's been a while."

I hope I don't blush too obviously. I'm surprised he remembers my name, honestly. I was just a pair of tits and a couple of holes to him. "Sebastian."

"How's RUA treating you? I hear we're both freshmen, but I don't think I've seen you around."

No surprise. The campus is pretty vast.

"I love it," I say. "What do you study?"

"Political science. You?"

"A bit of this and that. I don't know what to focus on yet."

It makes me sound so flighty, but he nods like it's perfectly okay. "There's a career advisor if you need it, you know. Once you get a feel for what you like, their job is to talk you through your options and tell you how to get there."

Bella elbows him gently. "And how would you know that? Weren't you born destined for the House of Lords?"

"Ouch." He rubs his side for show. "And I know that because I have a billion cousins, including some who needed to work shit out."

"That's pretty great. I'll have to reach out to the office in a few months." I smile.

Page 22

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“So what classes are you taking in the meantime?”

“Mostly general education stuff. English, Italian for my second language, and math, natural sciences, but I also enrolled in the dance program.”

Bella whistles. “The dance program is pretty serious at RUA, isn’t it? I have a friend in there, and she dances part time at the Royal Ballet as part of her course.”

“Oh, I’m not specializing in performing arts like an actual professional would. I only take eight hours per week.” I shrug. “I’ve been doing ballet since I was seven, so it’s mostly because I’m used to it.”

“Ballet. Nice.” Sebastian winks, the cad. “You must be flexible.”

I try not to think of the times when I proved to him how much I was, and fail miserably, as the heat rising around my face attests.

“Maybe you know Tricks,” Bella says. “Patricia. She’s a friend?—”

I can’t believe it. “Seriously? She’s my best friend.”

“No!”

“I’ve been friends with her since grade school. In fact, I dance because her mom took pity on me when I kept showing up to watch her. She’s our teacher. I couldn’t afford the classes, but she let me join anyway.”

As soon as I say it, I regret it, expecting looks of pity or scorn from that crowd. But everyone's just focused on the coincidence.

"Small world!" Grace marvels. "Jinx is in our class at RAA."

I'd forgotten Jinx was still in high school. She might be the smarty pants out of her sister and her, but Tricks's performing arts course has different requirements; she graduated this year, at the same time as with me.

Both of them got scholarships at the Royal Academy of Anderia; Jinx for her brains, Tricks for her talent.

"I'm surprised we didn't meet before," Grace ponders. "Tricks comes to most parties..."

I snort. "I'm not. I don't go out much."

Not for lack of trying on her part, but I'm not a social butterfly. I'm fine tonight, but if I'd been invited ahead of time, I likely would have found an excuse to cancel.

"Serious, huh? All work and no play makes Liv a dull girl," Sebastian drawls, before flashing those dimples. "Well, maybe not."

He's blatantly flirting with me, and I don't know what to do with it. Ignore him? Flirt back? The dynamic is weird for someone who already came inside me four or five times.

Not to mention his friend across the room.

"Well, you must come to my birthday next week," one of the girls tell me. "Say you will, pretty please?"

I nod to Astrid, fully aware that it's likely one of those things I will cancel last second. The petite Asian beauty grins like agreeing alone is a present.

Why is everyone so damn nice?

"I need to pee," says Grace, which apparently launches a veritable exodus to the bathroom.

Was every girl holding it in, waiting for someone to crack first?

I can't talk. I remember the existence of my bladder at that exact moment, and follow the herd like a well-trained sheep.

CHAPTER TEN

LIV

One thing about me: when I need to go, I need to go. Part of the issue is that I don't really notice the need to pee until I'm desperate. I blame a decade of bi-annual performances: three hours in elaborate costumes, with very little chance to pop by the toilet. I know how to hold it. And then, I don't. One of the many reasons I don't do well in social circumstances. Why are women's loos always so freaking full?

I tap my foot relentlessly.

Page 23

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Fuck this.

I dip out of the endless line leading to the toilet, and skedaddle to the man's bathroom, blissfully line free. It's not my first time and it won't be the last. I'm grateful no one's peeing in the urinal; one guy's washing his hands, but he only lifts a quizzical eyebrow before moving along.

The relief is palpable when I finally get to pee.

I don't take long, then it's my turn to wash my hands. I bet the line hasn't moved one bit at the girls'. I don't even know how we, as a gender, take that damn long on the loo.

I'm just about to leave, my hand on the knob, when the door swings open.

I suck in a sharp breath at the sight.

Dark hair.

Cold gray eyes.

And that mouth.

“You.”

Callum Noble seems to be taking up all the air from the room. Or maybe just from my lungs.

“Yes, me.”

I open my mouth, to justify my presence here, or I don't know what, but then, his mouth is on mine, and he's pushing me backward until my back hits the closest wall, next to the urinals. His mouth is demanding, and I don't even think about the fact that we're in the damn men's bathroom, or the fact that this is Callum Noble, the man who literally bought me for him and his friends to use. All I know is that the way he kisses me should be illegal. Drugs are less addictive. I don't even react when he lifts my leg, setting my foot down at the top of the porcelain, and brings his hand between my legs, using the access my denim skirt affords him.

Only when he puts my panties aside do I think to breathe, “Wait?—”

“No.” His mouth descends to my neck as two fingers curve right into my pussy.

Holy fuck.

I've touched myself since that night. Of course I have. Almost every night. But it's never been like this. Currents of energy travel all the way from my core through the rest of my body as his hand moves in and out of me, my breath hitching as I fold against him.

“Callum!” I manage to whine. “Any—anyone could walk in!”

His mouth finds my ear. “And it makes you so wet, doesn't it?”

I want to tell him he's insane. Deluded. Not all of us are perverts like you! I could say. But I am drenched, and given the fact that his fingers are still fucking me, there's no denying it. Besides, that's far too many words. The last ones were hard enough to get out.

“I can guarantee that someone is going to come here before I’m done fucking you, love.” Callum smirks against my skin. “Do you want them to watch? Or should I let them line up behind me for a turn?”

I feel my walls tighten around his fingers and I tell myself it had nothing to do with those filthy words. I don’t want...that. Definitely not. It’s one thing to let three guys have me to change my life, seize my chance, get half a million fucking euros, but I’m not turned on by the idea of letting some stranger fuck me in the damn toilet for the hell of it. Because I’m sane. And normal. And?—

The door opens.

“Holy shit!”

I don’t recognize either of the guys walking in, but they were in Callum’s crowd.

“Damn, Noble. Warn a man, would you?”

He glances over his shoulder and smirks. “What will it be, love? Are they watching or do you want all their cocks? Either way, you’ll be the center of attention, I promise.”

As he talks, his hand casually slides along my collarbone, lowering my loose T-shirt to expose one of my tits.

“Am I picking?” he asks, that dangerous glint in his eyes.

I realize that not answering isn’t an option unless I want to spend the rest of the night with many, many cocks inside me.

Page 24

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

And I don't. Because that would be insane. Not to mention, unsanitary.

Not that what we're doing right now is all that clean either.

"W—watch. They can watch."

"Indeed, they can."

I didn't even see him open his pants, but telltale velvety softness slides against my entrance, and his fingers leave my pussy. I find myself swaying my hips to align the glistening hole with his hard shaft.

I should ask for a condom. But then again, I did fuck him bare less than two months ago, and I wasn't even on the pill then. I am now; and after a health test, I know I'm clean—so he is too. Or at least, he was in July.

Before I can make a conscious decision one way or another, he's pushed inside me, filling me so damn much.

The first time, there had been some discomfort through the night, but it's entirely absent today; there's only fullness and tension that make me shiver inside out. His hand grasps the back of my neck as he slides out, and sinks back inside, ever so deep, making my core tingle.

I like this. I like this a lot.

Not just the steady rhythm of his thrusts in and out of me as his mouth swallows my

moans and his hand on my tits, or the other, tightening around my throat.

I like watching the two guys who have forgotten the reason why they came here in the first place, and are standing right behind Callum, eyes devouring us.

The door opens again, and again, and a third time. There are five onlookers, and no one is going to leave until the end of this.

One of the guys pisses right next to us, washes his hands, and keeps his cock out, grasping it firmly as he enjoys the show. Enthused, the others follow suit, touching themselves like we're nothing but a porn video.

Either way, you'll be the center of attention, I promise.

Callum had sounded...reassuring. Like he believed that I wanted that. And while I didn't ask for it...I revel in it.

"Hold her up," Callum grunts, leaving my throat long enough to grasp the knee of the leg resting on the lavatory, and hand it to the closest guy. "Open her up for me."

I don't doubt he could do it himself, but he wants more than an audience. Their participation is a turn-on. For him. For me.

The stranger doesn't need to be told twice. He pins my knee to my shoulder level. Another one seizes my supporting leg, lifting it too. An animalistic sound rises up from Callum's throat as he angles himself differently, reaching new depths. My entire body weight falls on him each time he rocks his hips into me, in thrusts so powerful I could black out.

I'm so close to losing it, and the asshole knows it, because he pauses just as my core starts to tighten, only resuming his onslaught when I've somehow regained control.

“You’re such a good whore, Liv,” he praises me.

At least I think there's praise somewhere, buried deep under the insult. Maybe it's in his reverent tone, like he can't possibly think of something better than a whore in that moment.

“Fuck, look at how she's dripping! Your pants are gonna be drenched, man,” some blond guy laughs, bending to get a better view of Callum's cock going in and out of me.

“Jesus. I don't think I've ever seen any girl that wet. You're sure we can't have a piece, Cal?”

“Next time, if you're good. Tonight, my lovely whore wants to go home with my cum dripping down her leg, no one else's. Don't you, Liv?”

I want to tell him to go fuck himself, but all I manage is a long wail. His thumb found my clit, and it's not being gentle with it. Pinching. Pulling. Slapping.

My legs start to tremble, toes curling.

Once again, Callum stops moving, though his cock pulses inside me. “You're not coming until I'm ready to paint your cunt white, got it?”

I think I'm crying.

“I asked you a question.”

“I—” My voice comes out so fucking high-pitched. “Which one?”

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Callum snorts. “Do you only want my cum inside you, love?”

It’s not fair he’s making it sound like it’s about him, rather than about the fact that I don’t want to get used by everyone in the bathroom. More guys walked in. Some, much older than me. All are staring at us, and I don’t doubt that if he gave the okay, all would pounce.

“Yes.”

“Thought so. Sorry, gentlemen. This pretty little doll is entirely mine.”

The last word comes with one thrust so deep the back of my skull hits the wall.

He’s sheathed inside me to the hilt, and I feel his cock rearrange my insides. Then he withdraws all the way and does it again.

It’s completely different from the steady, fast rhythm he tends to favor. The cadence is brusque, unyielding, painful.

I’m not going to last long. I can’t.

“Please,” I whimper helplessly.

“Yes, love?”

“P—please let me come. Please.”

“You’re ready for my cum, then, huh?” I bob my head up and down, chanting my plea again and again in rhythm with his violent lunges.

Then he grabs hold of the knees still held up by the guys to our sides and puts my ankles on his shoulders, balancing my back on the wall again.

A third angle, and this one hits an impossibly sensitive bundle of nerves that has me screaming so hard it’s a miracle the police aren’t barging in.

And a good thing too. I don’t need a bigger audience.

I thought it must be a fluke, but each time he moves, Callum triggers an incomprehensible explosion of senses inside me.

“Now,” he croaks, voice tight. “Come with me now, love.”

I lose it. My body collapses back against the wall as it explodes. If someone told me I’d died, I wouldn’t question it. His cock’s buried in me, heat gushing down my leg, coating my insides, so he must have come with me.

I can’t move, or talk, or think, completely useless as he straightens me up, leaning me forward on his warm chest rather than against the wall. He lowers one of my legs to the floor, then the other, but thankfully, Callum doesn’t expect me to be able to walk just yet; he’s holding me upright, one arm around my underarms, while the other caresses my hair.

His mouth is on my skull, pressed against my hair, and I hear a few sounds that seem gentle, like he’s cooing to a baby or something. I don’t mind any of that.

I don’t know how long it takes me to realize our audience is particularly appreciative, some guys clapping, others throwing their fists in the air like their favorite team just

scored a goal.

“Do you loan her?” I hear someone ask.

“Hey, if you ever need a third?—”

“You guys are fire, man.”

I flush, realizing that everyone here has seen my face, and seen me do...all this. It's not like stripping behind a mask, a whole stage away from the perverts paying for it. We did this here, in front of anyone who just wanted to walk in. And they all think I'm a whore now.

No, notthink.

TheyknowI am.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LIV

Iflee, practically running all the way to my house. I can't bring myself to return to Grace and her friends' side. Her posh friends who all welcomed me.

Page 26

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Well, they won't now.

Because they will hear about this, I have no doubt.

What the hell was I thinking?

I wasn't. Not until it was over. I was completely brainwashed, acting like the damn sex doll he constantly accuses me of being.

I hate Callum Noble.

It's abundantly clear to me that I need to stay far, far away from him. I can't explain the power he has over me; I doubt anyone else would have been able to make me do this without even considering whether I should.

If I felt weird, I'd suspect I was drugged, but other than completely humiliated, I feel fine. This was all me. Or rather, all him. I don't think anyone else could have made me do anything like that. What is it with that guy?

He's hotter than hell and delivers countless orgasms? a voice at the back of my mind suggests.

I tell it to mind its own business and shut the fuck up.

The fancy gallery at the heart of the upper town isn't far from the campus—a mere twenty minutes' walk through the park, twice as long going around, and my restless energy demands I keep going, ignoring the line of cabs waiting in the street.

It's only when I'm in the middle of the park, all alone in the dark, close to midnight, that I pause. I might have been hasty.

There's something about darkness that makes you feel utterly alone and yet, watched. Followed. Stalked.

We're in the middle of the summer, and the burst of wind rustling the leaves should have been a relief.

It's not. I shiver, and at twenty-nine degrees Celsius, it's certainly not because of being cold.

Worrying my bottom lip with the edge of my teeth, I make my legs move forward, speeding up.

Less than five minutes and I'll be out of the engulfing darkness.

It's just the darkness. There's nothing looking at me from the shadows.

But the sudden, undeniable fear that seizes my insides isn't the kind I can reason with; it's an old instinct, written in all of our DNA from the time our ancestors were nothing but prey running from apex predators.

It's hard to tell myself I'm at the top of the food chain right now. I'm a hundred and twenty pounds, and while I'm athletic, I have never taken any sort of self-defense training. An oversight I will remedy, stat.

If I live the night.

I have no reason to pretend anymore; I let my fear push me from a brisk jog to a sprint for the last few meters until I reach the metal barrier and line of streetlamps

indicating my return to civilization.

I didn't run for long, but I'm so out of breath I stop and bend forward, inhaling deeply.

This side, although there aren't many people in the street, I feel considerably safer.

And stupid. I also feel so stupid.

Why didn't I just grab my phone? The camera has a flash. I could have used that as a light, if my brain hadn't been short-circuited, first by cocks, then by primal fear.

I make a mental note to avoid the park at night in the future.

Straightening up, I chance one last look over my shoulder, expecting it to look less daunting now that I'm on the other side.

It doesn't. The watchful darkness still has me repressing shivers in the southern European summer.

I need to go home.

I can't quite recall how or when I do make my way back to my dorms, but the next thing I know, I wake up, groggy, achy, as though I'd been partying all night.

Page 27

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I'm not one to linger in bed, but I do today. Not even my bladder can convince me it's time to get to my feet.

I let myself crash again, waking much later in the day. This time, I have no choice but to run to the bathroom and pee.

My entire face flushes, remembering the last decision that pressing need forced me to make. The men's bathroom.

What was I thinking?

I upgraded to a private dorm room, although they're usually reserved for juniors and seniors; for three thousand per year, I can have my privacy and my own bathroom, such as it is.

It's not bad really; the room itself is spacious and the boiler doesn't run out of warm water until around seven thirty. My father's apartment was certainly worse. It is pretty depressing that I don't really have a home except for this place, but it's really not that bad.

I spend my Sunday trying to focus on work, but replaying yesterday in a loop whenever I don't catch myself. It takes me five hours to assimilate the text I'm trying to read instead of two.

My phone taunts me, tempting me into sending him a scathing text. Somehow, it would feel like accepting defeat though. Better that I leave him alone. Pretend I'm unaffected.

But the bottom line is, yesterday, I had sex in front of over a dozen strangers. Maybe they even took pictures. I didn't see anyone do it, but the possibility is terrifying. Did they post them online? Will they?

The good news is, I'd never met any of those people other than Callum until then; the likelihood that I'd just bump into them now seems low.

I decide right there and then that I'm never allowed to spend any amount of time alone with Callum Noble ever again. The next time I see him, I'm running in the other direction—although that reduces me to the prey he accused me of being all those weeks ago.

And here I'm doing it again: thinking about him rather than my Lit assignment.

I sigh deeply, and force myself to breathe.

It's not that bad. It's not. Because I have a fat amount of money in my account, and nothing holding me here. If yesterday's mess has destroyed my life, I can always pack up and leave. It would be a shame, when I just got to know Grace, but we can always chat online.

And you'd waste all the money you've spent on school this year.

Ugh!

Callum Noble is the literal fucking worst.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CALLUM

I've always been the patient sort, happy to painstakingly set up a castle of cards and step back to watch it fall when the time comes.

But this girl is seriously trying me.

I watch her now like I watched every day for the last few weeks. There's no denying the changes; she's jumpier, suspiciously looking over her shoulder, scanning the faces around her, trying to check if she knows them. If they could have been there that day.

I like it. Frankly, her fear shoots straight to my cock.

What I don't like is the fact that she's still not fucking grabbing her damn phone. Why does she even have that thing, to tell the time? Someone should tell her there are watches for that.

She's worried, feeling backed into a corner, and she's not calling me. What does a man have to do to get her damn attention?

It should have been the most obvious move. She's worried about people talking about her, giving her shit; she should come to me. Tell me to leash the dogs. She knows they're in my circle.

But then again, I also expected her to talk to me after the first night, and she didn't.

Maybe she's not that into you, dumbass.

I dismiss that asinine thought as it comes. What's not to like? Besides, I've seen the way she looks at me, then pretends not to look at me, blushing, fidgeting. When she knows I'm around, her eyes inexorably return to me. She's definitely got a little crush, which is entirely mutual.

Right. Because you stalk everyone you have acrushon.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I know it's deeper than that. Fascination, maybe. Closer to obsession.

It started because I was intrigued. I wanted to understand how someone could be physically so similar to Grace Haven, yet, get my cock's attention with little to no effort. I think Grace is about as exciting as a piece of dry gluten-free toast without butter, so it was a bit of a mindfuck. I watch to try to explain it. Maybe it was the clothes, or the fact that she doesn't hold herself like there's a broomstick up her arse. And the next thing I knew, following Liv became my favorite hobby. As soon as I have a moment of free time, I hunt her down, and I watch.

It's not a habit I've developed in the past; she's my first obsession. And I'm pretty certain I'm not too much of a creep, given the fact that I don't intend to harm her. If I wanted a piece of that, I'd just cross the street, get into the cafe where she's studying, say hi, back her up into the closest empty room and fill her with my cum. She wouldn't say no. I'm not trying to prey on her. I'm just watching.

But there's no denying that it's growing entirely too frustrating. If she called me, I wouldn't have to resort to following her like a lost puppy. We could hang out. I could take her to that cafe, to another fancy restaurant—she loved the first—and other places.

I'm not going to ask her out myself. I gave her half a million; she'd feel obliged to indulge me, and I don't fucking need to get a damn pity date. She has to come to me, dammit.

All right, it's a matter of pride, and it pisses me the fuck off that she's seemingly content to keep me out of her life when I want...

I run my hand through my hair in frustration. What I want, exactly, is a pretty good question, but I'm fairly certain the answer isn't sitting across the street.

My phone buzzes in my pocket. I'm irritated before I check the name, as I know it's not the one I want to see.

Camilla.

Of course it is.

"What?" I bark.

"That's how you greet me?" She chuckles. "Who pissed in your Cheerios, darling?"

"Whatever you want, spell it out." I'm in no mood to deal with her brand of manipulation.

"Father wants you for dinner. What's that gonna cost me?"

I take a moment to think.

She and I have had an understanding based on mutual need for most of the last ten years. As kids, those needs included making her bounce up and down my cock, but I got over it. Women like her and Grace—well-to-do, perfectly poised socialites—are boring fucks.

We both know our agreement will come to an end, and soon, but I'm not above letting her bribe me into delaying the inevitable.

"You're gonna fuck five guys when I tell you to."

I don't have a specific need for her at the moment, but banking future fucks is the standard way I make her pay for my help. I don't doubt that someday there will be another enamored fool drooling over her, who I might need for one reason or another. Pimping her out has proved profitable in the past.

"Five!" she whines. "Come on, Cal. You're not being fair."

"You want dinner with your dad," I remind her. "Not a public appearance at some charity. You know he's going to drill me about when I intend to pop the question." Which is never. "It's five, or you find yourself another beard."

She sighs. "Fine. Friday night, five thirty, at La Maison D'Elle."

I hang up, eyes trailing back across the street.

La Maison's a great place. Liv would love it. And I can show it to her.

Just as soon as she uses her fucking phone to text me.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LIV

I'm the first to be shocked when Friday comes and I don't cancel Astrid's birthday.

Part of me wants to hide in my room and never come out again, of course, but after a full week without a single incident—not a nasty word, or even a weird look—I have to conclude that against all odds, the madness of last weekend didn't leave any consequences.

Which makes no sense.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Not one to question my luck, I intend to make the best of it. And that means hanging out with Grace and her friends.

I might get along just fine with the people in my class, but they all seem to have gotten together based on long-established social circles, and I don't belong to any of them. I haven't really been embraced by anyone the way I was at the gallery. So after class, I head into the lanes to shop for a present—seeking Annalise's advice, as I always seem to when I'm out of my depth.

I feel a little foolish, asking the poor shopkeeper for advice, but she just leans in eagerly over the counter. “Well, what do we know about that girl?”

I have to take a moment to think. “She's short and cute. Wears bright colors—she was in a yellow dress last week. She's a student at RAU, too...” I sigh lamely. “That's about all I know.”

“Is she wealthy?” Annalise checks.

I have to think for a moment. Most students who can afford that university definitely are, but well, then there's me. I wouldn't consider myself wealthy at all, despite my current bank balance. After three more years of tuition, most of the cash will be gone. To me, wealthy means being so comfortable that financial planning for the next ten years doesn't bring any sort of panic.

“I think so?” I venture, because most of the girls at the opening seem to have been.

“Well, then, she has anything she could need. You're looking for something

sentimental. Something you care about and want to share.”

That makes a hell of a lot of sense.

Suddenly, I know what to get her. And bonus, I can buy it here. Given Annalise’s effort, I would have hated to go to a competitor for the present—although I fully intended to get myself a second pair of shoes to make up for it.

“She liked my necklace. The red one,” I say.

I’ve worn it most days since purchasing it; I tend to wear a lot of black or white, so a touch of red never hurts.

“Maybe you have something similar in yellow?”

As it so happens, she does. The long chain has butterflies instead of bows, but it’s in the same vein. I thank her profusely, and as she painstakingly wraps the box in a complex fashion—almost too pretty to ruin—I pick up a second pair of shoes anyway. Black ankle boots. It’s starting to rain, summer changing into autumn, and I don’t like having to choose between soggy Converse or drenched feet in the Mary Janes. I also own a pair of winter boots, but those are purely practical, and butt ugly. I’ll have to replace them in a few weeks.

“Any idea what I should wear to La Maison D’Elle, by the way?” I ask, wondering what I would do without the shopkeeper slash life coach.

Panic and stay in my room, canceling everything at the last second, probably.

“Oh! La Maison is lovely,” Annalise gushes. “The black dress you wore in August would be just fine. But if you were after something else, you can get away with smart casual, and up to semiformal. No one would blink at a cocktail dress or jeans. Do you

know how the others in your party will be dressed?"

I think back to the gallery evening. "I mean, last week, every woman other than me wore a dress, I think. Wait, one of them was in a suit, with a shirt."

"Tailored dress? Or something they'd wear at the beach?"

I get the feeling she's dumbing down the choices for me, and I'm grateful. "Definitely tailored. Though I'm not certain their idea of beachwear and mine would align."

She snorts. "Likely. Well, it sounds like your crowd favors semiformal. As I said, the black dress would be fine."

Except...that's the dress I wore with Callum. I can't exactly say why, but I don't want to wear it again; not for a party. It would be like bringing him with me, which is the last thing I want to do.

"Would you recommend anything in the store?"

I might as well have told her Christmas is three months early.

Three hours later, my hair and make-up have been handled by Phillip. I'm bundled in a deceptively simple powder blue cocktail dress, off shoulder, a little higher at the front than the back. I didn't want to look like I was trying too hard, so I passed on bright reds or complex designs. But the dress rocks.

It's also unbearably Stepford wife, so of course, I'm wearing it with ripped tights with a snake design and my new ankle boots, paired with a new long necklace. This one falls to my navel, with several charms and beads. I also got matching earrings. The accessories make it look a little less like I'm on my way to church, and more like

I'm back from a rave, but quickly changed into something more suitable to trick parents into believing I was totally at a girl's slumber party. I like the vibe. Never mind that my parent wouldn't have noticed if I'd come back naked.

I get to the restaurant at six thirty-five, exactly five minutes late, which is the minimum to not seem completely dorky, in my humble opinion, and of course, I'm one of the first to arrive. The birthday girl isn't here yet. My sister is though, along with the Fort princess and a pretty dark-skinned girl with a daring buzz cut.

"You're so pretty," Grace laments with an adorable pout, after kissing both of my cheeks. "Why do I get a sister who's prettier than me?"

"Well, that's quite simply not true," I argue empathically. "You're shorter, and therefore, more adorable."

"But I don't have your tits."

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I can't deny that, as the sweetheart neckline of her burgundy skater dress emphasizes. "You have two years to catch up on that front."

"I wish my sister was as awesome as you," her friend Lucinda says with a deep sigh. "Mine would have just told me I could only dream of ever being half as cute as her."

"That would be because your sister is evil," Bella retorts. "Mine is awesome. And if I ever dare say she's prettier than me, she'd launch into a three-point thesis about why I am absolutely wrong. Even though it's true." She smiles at me warmly, like I've passed some sort of test. "Shall we get drinks now, or wait for the birthday girl?"

As if summoned by the offer of drinks, Astrid strides in, wrapped in a shimmery gold dress worthy of the Oscars.

I'm smiling at her, until I spot something my eyes can't help but drift towards.

He's here, dressed in a dark suit, with a silky blue shirt, seated next to an incredibly gorgeous, tanned beauty with dark waves and smoldering eyes. She's everything I'm not.

Callum holds her hand across the table. They're seated with an elderly couple—a man with salt-and-pepper hair and an elegant, older beauty who can't possibly be anyone except his woman's mother.

Oh my fucking god.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I've never considered myself someone with a temper. I don't tend to get angry. I'm a problem solver. When someone causes issues or breaks my trust, I tend to just remove them from the equation, never bothering to think about them again. My reaction to seeing Callum Noble having a lovely dinner in a trendy restaurant with a girl he's clearly serious about and her fucking parents not even a week after railing me in the restroom should be to cut him out of my life for good. Which happens to be handy, as I'd decided to do just that even before today.

Except I'm not surgically removing him from my mind, the way I've done with countless other scum. I am fuming.

I try to make myself focus on what's going on around me—my newfound sister, who's epic; her friends, who are pretty cool; the adorable birthday girl, who loves my present so much she immediately throws it over her gold outfit—but my eyes keep drifting back to the asshole.

He's all touchy-feely, kissing the brunette's knuckles, whispering sweet nothings into her ear, making her laugh. I never considered myself a violent person, but I'm clutching my knife so tight the metal digs into my flesh. I suddenly understand crimes of passion. If he were closer, I could imagine myself plunging it into his stupid hand.

Here's the thing: I don't like cheats. The very notion of a person betraying someone else's trust is disgusting to me. And up until now, I've prided myself on never having so much as flirted with a guy with a ring on his finger. Sure, some married guys found their way to the strip club where I worked, but it was their business, and I never directly interacted with any of them. That's one of the many reasons I was never interested in lap dances. I don't want to be an accessory to infidelity.

But turns out, the guy made me the other woman, by fucking me when he's quite

clearly taken.

I hate him. I hate him IhatehimIhate?—

“Who are you staring at?” Grace asks, following the direction of my gaze.

Shit.

“Oh! That’s Cal and Camilla. I didn’t see them.”

Camilla. A ridiculously perfect, posh name to go with the perfect, posh girlfriend. I bet he’s not fucking her in any public bathrooms.

It takes a mountain of effort, but I do force a smile. “Looks like it.”

“Where?” Bella cranes her neck. “Oh, yeah. Ugh. Don’t they match ridiculously perfectly together?”

Astrid snorts. “Too perfectly. They look like brother and sister.”

She’s right: both have dark hair, light eyes, the same-ish complexion.

I try to help it, but I can’t. I clear my throat, then the question’s out before I can stop it. “How long have they been together?”

“Forever.” Lucinda rolls her eyes. “Like, I moved from England when I was, what, twelve? And they were already an item.”

Grace nods. “Yeah, but I don’t think they’ve ever been that serious. I mean, I’ve seen her date other people.”

That defuses some of my tension.

“By the looks of things, it’s about to get pretty damn serious,” Bella retorts. “I mean, dinner with the parents? No one does that unless there’s a ring coming in the near future.”

Page 31

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

So much for that. I'm right back to seething and wishing my eyes could shoot lasers into his treacherous back.

Just then, as though the sheer force of my gaze got his attention, Callum looks over his shoulder and sees me, glaring at him.

Then the asshole has the gall to smile, and wave.

Fuckingwave.

I'm going tomurderhim.

But in the interest of having an alibi—not to mention, some self-respect—I fake my brightest smile and wave back.

Then I redirect my attention to the table of girls around me. We're meeting for dinner, then the rest of Lucinda's birthday is happening in a club.

I do my best to stay focused on the conversations around me, but my mind refuses to let go of the jerk and his damn girlfriend. Dinner is delicious, though a lot more casual than Luminaris: I recognize all the ingredients, at least. And the wine is perfect, and better yet, plentiful. The servers never stop pouring, and I don't try to stop them.

We're halfway through our mains when the happy couple leave, Callum's arm thrown around Camilla's shoulders in the most natural of embraces.

I snap.

I blame the wine, but I can't help it: I grab my phone and search for his name.

Me: Does your girlfriend know you like to buy girls to fuck in your free time?

I put my phone back in my pocket. It's not like he's going to reply, given the company he's in, but I feel better, now I've called him out on his shit.

My hand's still clasping the device when it buzzes into life, signaling a reply.

Really?

I half expect someone else has messaged me—although the only other person communicating with me at the moment is seated next to me, and definitely not texting.

But it's from Callum.

Callum: So that's what it takes to get your attention, huh?

I blink at the screen incomprehensibly. Get my—what the hell is he on about?

Me: Don't text me again.

I don't even have time to put the phone back into my pocket before the three dots are flying.

Callum: You started, love.

I'm incredibly annoyed about the fact that he's right.

Me: And now I'm ending this. Bye.

Callum: Strange that my messages are still getting through. Never heard of the block button?

Again, he's correct. I could have just blocked him. And I certainly should now. But I find it much more satisfying to just reply with a middle finger emoji, so I do that, before putting the device back in my pocket.

I can't pinpoint why exactly, but I feel considerably better. I guess I don't do well with unresolved issues. I said my piece now. He knows I think he's full of shit. And needless to say, I'm never letting him touch me again.

I can focus on my friends for the rest of the night, and only daydream of murder a time or ten.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LIV

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

It's past two in the morning by the time I stumble into my room, giggling for no reason and finding the floor particularly uneven.

The girls might be a year or two younger than me, but they can drink me under the table. I know better than to do shots with my sister ever again.

I'm only just conscious enough to remember to take a bottle of water from my mini fridge and put it on my bedside table. I throw my leather clutch on there too, as I have the painkillers I will no doubt need in a few hours.

All in all, it was a lovely evening. We drank, we danced, we drank some more and danced until my feet were sore, despite the block heels of my ankle boots. Some guys tried to cut in, but the girls never let them interfere for long, cutting the flirting down to a minimum. Apparently, that's something Grace's friends are known for on girls' night out.

Bella's fiancé was at the club, along with a bunch of his friends, but while they left together, they all stuck to their side booth.

I really like those girls. I hope I'll get invited again.

I drop down on my bed, back against the mattress, closing my eyes, because the world is spinning a little too fast. I can feel myself drifting off into the deepest slumber, and then there's nothing.

I have never felt better in my entire life. Pleasure rolls over me in waves, starting in my wet center, and traveling everything along my skin. So, that's a wet dream. Except

I'm not truly dreaming. There's only darkness around me.

The first thing I consciously notice is the steady, high-pitched squeak of metal rasping against the wooden flooring. It pulls me away from the sumptuous delights of sleep. But then there are other things. Wet noises, grunts, the stench of sex hitting my nostrils.

And friction, right there, between my legs. The weight of a body moving over me, inside me.

My body's still languorous after the copious amount of alcohol I've ingested, but I will myself to blink.

I can barely see a thing, and yet there's no denying who's currently screwing me within an inch of my life.

I want to scream at him, but I'm panting too hard to manage a word.

I try to move my hands, but firm, unyielding binds keep them in place. Too bad. I would have slapped his treacherous face.

"Awake, huh? What a shame. I was having such a good time."

The intruder fucking me lifts my legs over my head and sinks in harshly, deeper, with a visceral groan.

"You know it could have been anyone? You left your fucking door open, love. Did you want to get fucked in your sleep by a perfect stranger?" Callum punctuates the last few words with punishing thrusts, making my poor single bed scream, and slam the back wall. "I think that slutty pussy of yours did. You're so drenched."

“Fuck you!” I manage to scream.

“I am fucking you, and you’re taking my cock so well, aren’t you? You truly are the perfect little fuck doll, even in your sleep. Especially in your sleep.”

I strain against the cuffs, wanting to wrap my fingers around his throat and squeeze, but the metal just bites my wrists, so instead I flail my legs to try to kick his damn face.

The asshole laughs. He has the fucking gall to laugh, while grabbing my ankles, and pinning them to the mattress, spreading me wider.

“Go back to your fucking girlfriend and leave me alone!” I demand.

It’s highly depressing that although I’ve decided to never do this again, my body is completely betraying me, drenched and hot and clenching, taking everything he’s giving me, begging for more.

“If I’d known all it would take to get your attention was parading Camilla, I would have done it much sooner.”

“I don’t give a single fuck about your girlfriend.”

Callum grinds in and out of me with that maddening smirk. “Right. This is quite obviously you, not giving a fuck.”

I know I can’t get to him, but that doesn’t stop me from wrenching the restraint as hard as I can, writhing away from him, struggling to get up, to move.

His rock-hard body’s hold on me is completely unbreakable, and my futile attempts only seem to stimulate him. His gray eyes bright with indisputable hunger, he plows

in and out of me, until neither of us can manage another word. There's nothing but the friction, the heat, the bestial need to come around his cock.

I'm not even ashamed of the fact that I'm no longer fighting when he lets go of my leg and brings his hand to the apex of my thighs, parting my pussy lips and bringing his thumb right to my clit, rubbing it in fast circles, then slapping the raw flesh.

His free hand cups my breast, as he leans in and brings his mouth to the other nipple, sucking it between his lips as his cock drives me fucking insane with need.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

My pussy grips his cock so hard, and I sob as I explode around him. Callum's cock engorges and slams deeper than ever one last time before he loses it inside me.

I wish I could say I immediately start to scream at him, telling him to leave me the fuck alone, threatening to report him, but for the next minute—or the next hour—all I can do is learn to breathe again.

Callum's no better; he slumps on top of me, likely because there's no room in the small bed anywhere else, heart pumping. He would have crushed me if he wasn't supporting some of his weight on his elbows.

"I fucking hate you," I finally manage to wheeze.

The jerk chuckles again, shifting to stare right at me.

He's in my reach now, so I bring my hand to his shoulder and rake my nails along his arm, leaving angry red marks in the dim light.

That's deeply satisfying to me. Better than any slap would have been.

His girlfriend will see it. She'll see it and she'll know some girl touched him. That's as close to payback as I can give him.

Except Callum mustn't have realized that, because he only smiles wider. "Careful now, love."

His voice is thoroughly entertained.

Asshole.

“Scared your girlfriend will see my scratches on you?” I taunt, in case he didn’t get the memo.

He’s a man, after all.

Callum shakes his head, chuckling again. “You are so incredibly jealous. Don’t worry, though. I think it’s sweet.”

I frown, trying to understand why he doesn’t seem to care one iota.

Maybe they have an open relationship. After all, Grace said they had dated other people. But the whole scene with the parents said otherwise.

“I’m not jealous.”

Not. One. Bit.

“Aren’t you now?” Callum sits up a little, hovering over me, hands either side of my face. He lowers his mouth to my cheek, and then the other, before bringing it to my ear.

I’m going to stop him.

Anytime now.

“But if you insist on marking me, I might just do the same to you.”

“You wouldn’t,” I snap.

His chest rumbles with amusement, as his mouth travels down to my neck, lips sucking on my skin, softly at first, then deeper, harder.

Shit.

“Are you giving me bloody hickeys? Who even does that?”

It only occurs to me now that my hands are still firmly locked. I’m right back to trying the cuffs, but they’re just as unyielding as they were on round one.

“Callum!”

He gets to a spot between my neck and shoulder and fucking inhales me like a vampire.

I make a mental note to never tell him he can’t do something.

“Cal!”

His hand slides between my legs, although it’s disgustingly slick with various body fluids, three fingers sliding inside me.

“You’re not going to fuck me again!”

So much for not ordering him around.

“Aren’t I?”

“I will scream!” I promise.

“Is that a promise?” the asshole has the gall to breathe against my nipple, before sucking those, too.

He takes his time, while his fingers never stop exploring, teasing, curving inside me.

His mouth progresses slowly down my body, and by the time he’s made it to the inside of my thighs, I’m a fucking mess, clamping my mouth shut to stop myself from begging for relief from the onslaught.

Then I just can’t help it. “Please!”

“Please what, my lovely little doll?”

“Please let me come,” I whimper.

“Oh? And why should I? It’s not like you’ve been a very good girl for me tonight.”

I hate him, I hate him, I hate him.

But I know, without a single doubt, that if I tell him as much, his response will be more teasing, when I need to fucking come. Now.

“Please. I’ll do anything.”

I hate how fucking desperate I sound.

“Anything, huh?”

“Yes.” Anything he asks of me anyway, which happens to lead to more orgasms.

“Tell me how jealous you were tonight.”

But that.

Anything but that.

I tug my restraints.

“Tell me you marked me because you want to prove to Camilla, to the world, that I’m yours, my possessive little doll. Tell me you’re mine.”

“Fuck you!” I scream.

He chuckles, and to my utter shock...he gets to his feet. “Yeah. Thought as much.”

Callum grabs something from his pocket; because of course he’s not even undressed,

having only lowered his pants to his hips. I see a flash of silver, then he's unlocking my hands.

“Seriously, though. You have to be more careful. It could have been anyone. I get being drunk, but if you're not capable of locking a door behind you at night, I'm going to have to take measures you won't like to see to your safety.”

He's saying a lot of words, none of which make a lick of sense for me.

“Wait; I actually left the door open behind me?”

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Yep. Not that I’m complaining. I did have a wonderful feast.”

What few brain cells I have left see fit to engage. “You’re so fucking twisted for fucking mewhile I was asleep.”

The unabashed jerk shrugs. “Twisted is all you get with me. Good night, love.”

And then, though my pussy’s pulsing, the skin on fire, and I literally begged him for sex, he’s gone.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

LIV

It would be considerably easier to pretend Saturday night didn’t happen if it weren’t for the many, many bruises all over my skin. I look like I’ve been mauled by an army of mosquitoes. And also, the fact that I can barely move without feeling him inside me on Sunday.

In the changing room of the studio, I take a selfie of my neck, arm, and torso in my red ballet leotard and angrily send it to Callum.

Me: How am I supposed to explain this to my teacher??

I have a sheer, black warm-up top that I put on, and don’t remove even when I’m sweating three hours later. A couple of hickeys are on display, and I do get knowing grins, but no one points it out. It’s not like I’m the first to come to class with that type

of mark. It's just the first time for me.

By the time I'm back in the changing room, I have my reply: a picture of Callum Noble on a horse, dressed in a tight polo shirt. I can't miss the clear three straight lines running through his tanned skin, angrier than any of my bruises.

Yeah...I'm not in a place to complain.

Callum: I told everyone my favorite doll got possessive. Feel free to do the same.

Me: *middle finger emoji

He's so freaking infuriating.

Callum: The guys would love to meet you by the way.

I stare at my phone for the longest time.

Me: Meet me like Hawk and Sebastian did? I bet they would.

Callum: Let's not pretend you didn't love every moment.

I flush, fully intending to pretend just that, but another message follows the first.

Callum: Dinner tonight?

Me: ...?

Callum: It's that time when people ingest sustenance.

He's fucking impossible.

Me: The last time you took me out for dinner you had a highly indecent proposition in mind.

Callum: Indecent with a side of twisted. That's me. The guys and I have a reservation at 6 at the steakhouse on South Main. Feel free to extend the invitation to whoever.

He sounds like he absolutely expects me to come, which in itself should be enough to make me want to not show up...except I'm intrigued.

He wants to have dinner, in a public restaurant, with his friends. It's... I can't decide what it is.

Weird, for sure. Inappropriate, given that he was having dinner with his girlfriend and her parents days ago—though he insinuated they had an open thing. Disturbing, in the sense that I should have shot it down right this second. Even if he and Camilla have an open thing, I have no intention of being the other girl in any trio.

But, for all that...I want to go.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Before I can question myself, I send a text to my sister, Bella, Lucinda, and Astrid. If I'm doing this, I might as well have four pretty buffers. Not that their presence stopped what happened at the art gallery.

No men's toilet for me, I tell myself. I'd better pee before I go.

After ballet, I have a study period I spend arguing with my debate group about the necessity of the monarchy in modern-day Anderia—gleefully supporting the nope side—and then I only have time to run home to drop my stuff and change. I showered after ballet, so I just remove the band top I wore all day, and replace it with a fresh one, patently refusing to pick anything nicer.

I know the steakhouse on Main; it's close to campus, so I've eaten there a couple of times, and ordered takeout more often than I can count. Even Annalise would agree that jeans and a T-shirt is perfectly acceptable there.

I make it at ten past, and my eyes immediately find him, seated at the head of a long table, an empty seat to his left.

Grace is already there; she and the other girls made it clear wild horses wouldn't stop them from having dinner with Callum and his polo pals.

One glance around the table, and I know why.

Not a single guy is anything less than a fucking ten. There's a tall and gorgeous Asian flirting with Lucinda; Sebastian, seated so close to Bella she might as well be on his lap—though she is engaged to a bloody prince. Another guy stands out, because he

reminds me of both Sebastian and Callum: dark hair and light eyes like theirs, a similar mouth. He's certainly older than me, but I'd be hard pressed to say by how much. Twenty-five? Thirty? No clue.

The last is very well known. The heartbroken heartthrob who lost his fiancée when Bella's sister broke off their engagement—and left the country, to boot. Only Less Valmont doesn't seem the least bit heartbroken now, laughing his ass off at something Grace just said.

Callum stands as I approach, wordlessly pulling out the chair next to his, bringing it to the head of the table along with his, rather than the first seat on the long side.

“Hey,” I say awkwardly.

He presses his lips to my cheek as I approach, and throws his arm over the back of my chair once we're both seated.

I don't need a mirror to know that I'm beet red.

“Are you gonna introduce Liv, or should I?” Sebastian says, raising an eyebrow.

Callum rolls his eyes. “Everyone, Liv. Liv, you know that asshole, Caden is his brother, Less is our...second cousin twice removed?”

“From your mother's side, yes, I think so.” Less Valmont nods.

“Are we doing the whole familial relation thing again?” Caden, the older guy I don't know, sighs. “It's awfully tiresome. I mean, you guys are first cousins, we are second and third...”

Callum wrinkles his nose. “Yeah, please don't enlighten my girl on how inbred we all

are, man. And this is Declan Huxley—Hux for short.”

That name, I do recognize. “Aren’t you a professional soccer player?”

“Yes, ma’am. You’re a fan?”

I snort before I can help it. “No, but my father never missed a game.”

He smiles. “I can send you a ticket for him.”

Yeah, I don’t think so.

I haven’t spoken to my father since I moved out. I have no reason to reach out, and he hasn’t either. I don’t expect he will at any point in my life. And the thing is, I really don’t mind. I feel more kinship with Grace after two weeks than him after close to two decades.

“Pass, but thanks.” I manage a smile. “We aren’t close.”

“How about your mom?” Hux asks.

That’s the most natural question in the world, and one that always tends to follow those about my dad. “She’s dead. Wasn’t much to write about either.”

“Ha!” Caden snorts.

Meanwhile, Hux leans across the table to shake Callum’s hand.

“What am I missing?”

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Nothing, clearly,” Sebastian says. “No crazy mother of the bride or bossy in-laws, and hey, a terrible father so you’re a freak in the sack with daddy issues. You’re pretty much the perfect passage, baby.”

“That’s rude!” Bella swats his arm.

“Definitely true, though.”

“Anyway, we’re not together,” I’m quick to add.

And for some reason, the guys actually laugh their asses off—all of them, Callum included. Meanwhile, Grace’s jaw drops to the floor, and the rest of the girls are just as shocked.

“We’re not!” I insist. “You have a girlfriend.”

“I have a fake girlfriend, love,” he replies, “And a real pain in the ass who took a month and a half to text me.”

I stare at him. “A fake girlfriend.”

He shrugs. “We were in high school when our parents started to hint at looking for engagement prospects. It was handy to pretend to have someone—but Camilla and I have an agreement that ends the moment we want it to.”

“A fake girlfriend,” I repeat, shock giving way to irritation. “And you didn’t think to let me know?”

The asshole has the audacity to shrug again. I want to murder him, and my hands are free this time, so I wrap my fingers around his thick neck, and tighten them.

It turns out, strangling people is harder than it seems.

And now the entire table is laughing at my expense, Callum included.

“You could have texted me any time, love. I would have told you whatever you wanted to know.” He winks, before bringing his mouth to mine.

Some of the things he said and did Saturday make a hell of a lot more sense all of a sudden, and I do feel foolish.

Tell me you’re mine.

At the time, I thought he was the kind of spoiled, gorgeous, entitled asshole who thought he could have his perfect princess on his arm and me—the nobody—after dark.

But maybe, just maybe, I don’t know anything about what Callum Noble thinks.

And it’s not entirely impossible that he might want me for more than in the dark or in public toilets. The question is how much more. I have no idea, and the scary thing? I don’t think I’m really in charge here.

If he gave me nothing but the occasional nasty fuck, I’d still beg for it. And I’m here. I’m here today aren’t I? After his bullshit from the weekend.

He has a hell of a lot of power over me.

Because...I like what he does to me. I like when he touches me. I like how he calls

me love and Liv and even doll.

Oh, fuck. I'm in a hell of a lot of trouble, aren't I?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

LIV

The food is delicious, in a casual, relaxed atmosphere, and the company, pretty nice, too.

Caden is twenty-three. I wouldn't have guessed, because of the way he dresses, and speaks and just looks. He finished his law degree at Harvard last year and returned here to pass the bar in Anderia, only to be swooped up by the best firm in the country. Oh, also his dad's the king's actual big brother, which makes him fourth in line for the throne: there are the three royal siblings, followed by him, as his father abdicated. Sebastian's fifth.

When I stare at them openmouthed as Caden explains he might one day rule over us all—it would only take a few accidents after all—Callum laughs, and assures me that as their maternal cousin, he's only twenty-third.

Less is higher.

It's wild that I'm sitting there with people like them. Hell, I even fucked two of them.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

But like Grace and her friends did, the guys let me in, completely unbothered by the fact that I'm not part of the glittering elite.

I relax. I let Callum kiss me and touch my arm and act like it's completely normal, refusing to freak out about it. So, what, he's touchy. He was touchy with Camilla too.

After dinner, I let him take me back to my dorm room, and there I let him kiss me on my bed forever, like we have all the time in the world, devouring me slowly, hungrily. But I'm the one who needs more, so I straddle him, and proceed to remove the annoying little buttons of his eggshell white shirt.

I want to see him this time.

When I've succeeded, I'm rewarded by the sight of hard pecs, abs, a slender, narrow waist, and that hardness poking at me in his pants.

"Like what you see?" the smug prick asks, fully aware that anyone would.

"I'm not sure. I'll need to see a little more." I hop off his lap to peel his pants down his legs, taking his boxers with them, until I'm on my knees in front of him, his pants around his ankles.

It should feel like a vulnerable position, me at his feet while his huge cock points straight at me, but I don't think I've ever felt more powerful.

My lips part to take in the tip, and I run my tongue around it, taking my time.

It's not the first time his cock is in my mouth, but this time he isn't ramming it down my throat until I beg, sob and choke over it.

This time, I'm in charge.

I might not have tons of experience at this, but I've watched porn, which gives me a place to start.

My hand moves to his balls, as I lick from the base of his cock to the tip, and back again, my hand twisting around the shaft.

He sucks in a breath, his legs tensing, and a chuckle escapes me.

This is a hell of a lot of fun.

I play. I toy with the sensitive eight-inch pole in my care, licking and sucking and blowing, and wanking, relishing all his grunts and moans. Payback's a bitch, darling. Deep down, I know it's only a matter of time before he snaps and takes control. Callum isn't the kind of guy who just lets people manipulate him. So I'm not surprised when he fists a handful of my hair and tugs it back, forcing me to look straight into his gorgeous eyes.

I grin.

"You like that, huh? Being a fucking tease."

I love it.

"Your throat or your ass?"

My pussy clenches with need, liking neither option.

“Am I coming at the back of your throat or inside your asshole, doll?”

I lick my lips. He went deep in my mouth before and I remember the feeling—it wasn’t pleasant. I could have choked. But my ass? I’ve never had anything in there. The prospect is daunting.

And maybe, just maybe, also a little...intriguing?

“Should I make the decision, darling?”

“Ass. My ass, please.”

He lifts an eyebrow, as though I’ve surprised him. “Ass it is.”

Without another word, he stands and kicks his shoes off, along with his pants. Callum grabs me by the waist, throwing me over bed and roughly lowering my jeans.

It’s my turn to be the mostly undressed one.

I twist to look over my shoulder, watching him take my place on the floor, parting my butt cheeks. I tense, but when he brings his face to me, it’s to lick the folds of my pussy with his clever, clever tongue.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I whimper, hips grinding over him. Fingers join his lovely tongue, and I almost don't notice that one slides around my tighter hole.

It feels...nice. Lovely, in fact.

“Like that, do you? I figured you might, darling. At first glance, I just knew you'd be the kind of person who would love a cock in each hole. And you will, won't you, love?” While his thumb rubs my clit, his index curves in my cunt, his middle finger slides in my butt. “That's it. Relax. Trust me, you can take it. You're gonna take quite a few inches in there in a minute. And you'll like it.”

The finger slides in easily, and I can't deny the sensation's intriguing.

His index leaves my pussy to leave room for his tongue again, and the free finger now joins his index in my butthole. One finger goes in as the other goes out, and again, and again, both of them curving inside, pushing the tight walls. By the time his thumb joins the two, I'm bucking against him, back arched.

His tongue's relentless against my clit, my folds, my inner lips. It's just too much.

“Christ, I think you could take a full fist,” Callum grunts against me before straightening up, fingers still stretching, teasing. “Another time. Do you have lube, love?”

With frenzy, I open my bedside table, rummaging through it to find the small bottle of lube I use with my vibrator. I hand it to him with trembling fingers.

A disgusting wet noise fills the air, and moments later, there's a cold, wet hardness pushing against my ass.

I push back, needy, greedy.

"That's it, love. Open for me. You were made to take it."

He enters me slowly, but his cock is so slick with lube once it's past the muscles, it slides in to the hilt, like I've taken a hundred hard dicks deep in my ass before.

Oh, god. I've never felt so full. His cock's rearranging all my guts, and I can't even breathe, let alone think.

Then he draws back.

Iscream as he plunges back in. Holy fucking hell, this is good.

"That's it, my beautiful doll," he praises me, his hand sliding at my front as he circles my clit with his hand.

His other hand reaches for my throat and lifts my upper body up, so that I'm flush against his chest as he drives in and out of me.

"I'm not gonna last, Liv. Can you come like this? I can't come without you."

That admission does things to me, and like my body was waiting for it, all of my nerve ends come alive, propelling me to the edge.

"Yes! Yes. I'm gonna come," I wail.

His movements grow frantic, unfinished half thrusts, fingers rubbing too hard, too

fast. Exactly how I need them to. I tighten around his shaft, my pussy weeping along with me; I'm dripping all over him, and then I lose it, falling limply in his arms.

Callum thrusts and thrusts again, before warmth floods inside me as he grunts.

I don't understand how it's possible, but every single time he fucks me, it's better. More powerful.

Callum Noble is breaking me, little by little. I don't think there will be much left when he's done with me. But I can't control the fall.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LIV

The good news is, I can technically get out of bed after all that. Unfortunately, there's a six-foot-something gorgeous hunk spooning me so I don't want to.

In his sleep, Callum's all handsy, grabby, so exactly the same as when he's awake. Except he looks younger. Less bossy. More...attainable, somehow. He's still ridiculously bloody gorgeous, but for a little while I can pretend I'm not in bed with someone who's twenty-something in line for the throne of our kingdom.

"I can feel you staring."

Oh. So much for him sleeping.

Page 40

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“You stayed the night,” I say in wonder.

He grunts against my hair. “My neck may never recover.”

I chance a glance at his feet, which are hanging in the air. “My bed definitely isn’t Noble-sized.”

“If only the size were the only issue.” Callum sits up and rolls his neck, before dragging my body to his lap.

Sometime overnight, we both shed all our clothes, and there’s something incredibly intimate about sitting against him, bare, without a single layer of fabric between us. Especially while we’re not actually fucking.

“Can we talk about your pillow, though? What woman only has one? And a shitty one. And don’t get me started on the springs in that mattress. Is it a form of torture?”

I roll my eyes. “You’re so fragile.”

“I’ll show you fragile.”

The amused, delighted threat is clear in his rumbly voice, and I expect to be gagging on cock within seconds, but Callum is far more evil. He starts to tickle me.

I honestly don’t remember ever being tickled. If anyone had asked me whether I was sensitive, I would probably have said no.

Lies. All lies.

I'm writhing, laughing uncontrollably, attempting to get away, but it's Callum, and he doesn't need handcuffs to overpower me.

"Please! Oh, Callum, please!"

"Nah. But beg me some more. I might change my mind."

His fingers explore every crook that drives me into frenzied hysterics. Then all of a sudden, there's pressure at my entrance and Callum drives into me from underneath, pushing through my tense walls, all the while never stopping his assault on my underarms, my knees, my damn feet! He grinds his hard cock into me, relentless fingers teasing me until I can barely breathe.

"Stop it! Please, Cal, stop!"

"Tell me you're mine and I might."

Relentless, exasperating goddamned jerk!

"I'm yours," I whimper. "I'm yours. Please, st?—"

Stop. I was going to say stop. But his mouth crashes against mine, devouring my breath along with the last word. His hands leave my poor limbs to clasp the back of my neck, my waist, eagerly running his large palms over my skin, smooth and reverent.

Callum doesn't tend to fuck me like this; taking his time, not racing to the finish line, all the while kissing me. I don't know what to make of it. My hips move to meet his of their own volition, my back arching into it as I ride him. Suddenly, my insides are

on fire and demanding more, and I don't know how he got the signal, but Callum's also grunting, lifting his hips to reach deeper, the head of his cock hitting a bundle of nerves inside me that has me screaming into his shoulders as my teeth bite down.

My orgasm comes in soft waves, not as explosive as some of the previous ones he so ruthlessly forced upon me, but comfortable, peaceful. It feels less like brutal, visceral, bestial coupling and more like...affection. Or something close to it, anyway.

Sex with Callum Noble is an addiction I don't know how to stop. Not that it's up to me. If I did attempt to prevent it, I'd still end up full of cum. Good thing I don't seem to mind.

"I'm on the pill, by the way," I tell him.

He's never asked, which is highly irresponsible, but the way we've been fucking hasn't left much room for reason.

"You are?" he replies, with a careless indifference. "That's a shame."

I snort. "Christ, you're so ridiculous. How many bastards do you have running around?"

"That would be none. I always wrap it up unless I'm certain the woman's on contraceptives, and clean."

"You literally said it's a shame I'm on the pill, weirdo." I wrinkle my nose. "Is breeding your kink or something?"

"I'm not going to deny I do love going bare. But I wouldn't want to impregnate anyone except my gorgeous little doll." His mouth falls to my shoulder, kissing it.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“You don’t want to impregnate me, either, idiot.”

“Don’t I?” He chuckles. “You can’t deny it’d make things easier.”

“What?” That makes no sense whatsoever.

“You’re fighting me. You’re deliberately refusing to see that I want you bound.” His mouth moves from my shoulder to my neck. “Attached.” Now he’s at my ear, whispering, “Tethered to me.”

Callum draws back to look into my eyes.

“Knocking you up would have gotten that across. But as you took precautions, I’ll have to convince you another way.”

“You’re insane.”

“I’ll have you know that the Crown has tested my mental capacities and found me fit for duty, age eighteen,” Callum replies primly.

“Someone should fire whoever came to that conclusion. You don’t know me. You don’t want...whatever you just said.” I shake my head. “I’m a novelty. Different from the girls you usually see, so that’s why you’re having?—”

“If you say the word fun, I will have no choice but to resort to kidnapping,” Callum retorts.

His expressions tells me he is kidding. He seems highly entertained. Meanwhile, I'm actually losing my mind over here. Doesn't he know how those words would affect me? How fucking devastated I'll be when he tells me he was joking, or that he changed his mind?

"I'm considering it, anyway. A few months locked into a tower ought to persuade you."

"Callum, I'm just trying to be realistic. We're having fun. It's great. But?—"

"Kidnapping it is."

He stands, taking me with him, and carries me to the bathroom.

My tiny shower looks downright claustrophobic with him in it, but he doesn't heed any of my protests as he lathers me with soap and proceeds to clean every inch of my skin.

I admit, I don't protest much, especially when he gets to my tits.

But then, once we're both dressed—me in denim shorts with fishnets and a band tee, him in yesterday's suit—and out of doors, I realize he wasn't kidding. He's not letting go, hand firmly anchored around my waist.

"I have class!" I tell him in a whine as he all but drags me to the parking lot.

"Love, when I tell you I will do something, I will do it. My word isn't worth much if I don't. So you can get that cute ass in the passenger seat, or I can toss you on it. These are your choices."

I glance behind my shoulder, to the elegant university's main building, calculating the

likelihood that I can get to it before he catches me.

The odds are not in my favor.

“What would we even do?” I’d like to think I’m not pouting. “Don’t you have work?”

“I’ll take a personal day, to show you the meaning of fuck around and find out.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LIV

It’s not my first time in the building, but when I took the lift directly to the seventh floor that fateful summer day, I didn’t realize this was one house.

It has a receptionist, footmen, a waiting room. I thought we might even be in a hotel.

No, Callum doesn’t have a house. He has a Hall. Fern Hall, to be exact, an historical monument built in the eighteenth century for one of our monarch’s mistresses. The town manor takes up half a block, just a few streets down from the royal palace, with a view of the park.

“Is this...your parent’s place?” I look around, half expecting to see his mom and dad around the corner.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

He shakes his head. “No, I bought it from the Harwicks when I got access to my trust fund at eighteen.”

I blink. “You bought this. At eighteen.”

I knew he came from another world. I didn’t realize it was an entirely different galaxy.

He smirks. “I got lucky. The Harwicks needed an infusion of cash, and not many wanted to deal with renovating a place with so many features that couldn’t be touched: the ceilings, the stained glass, some of the walls.”

Somehow, though, despite the complex ornamental ceilings, columns, and yes, those stained glass windows on the first floor, this place did feel modern. Dark wood, simple decor, in deep reds.

“After renovating, I sold the west wing. Less, his brother Nic, Hux, Hawk, Caden, and Sebastian live next door. They each own a floor. The sale recouped what I spent on the property and all improvements, with a fair bit of change to spare.”

“So you meant to say you bought the entire block, not just half.”

This is unbelievable. “And those seven floors are all yours?”

“Indeed. I mostly use the penthouse, on the upper floor.”

“What do you do with all the space?” I wonder.

“Orgies, mostly.” He shrugs, as casual as if he was talking about the weather. “About once a month or so, I get all the eighteen- to thirty-year-old royals together in one place—with their partners, their friends, their dolls, their toys. Not many people have the space for a gathering like that in town—and why travel to a country estate when I can host?”

I’m completely out of words.

“You’ll love it, won’t you, my precious doll? You adore being the center of attention.”

I flush, looking away. “I really don’t understand you, sometimes. Like, you say I’m yours and all that, and at the same time, you seem to like nothing more than letting other people touch me.”

He snorts, leading us to the lift again. “For me to share something, it has to be mine in the first place. Be honest, love. How does it make you feel when you’re being watched? When Hawk, Sebastian, and I shared you?”

My insides clench as my core tingles. I don’t say anything, but Callum still smirks smugly. “That’s what I thought.”

The lift opens up to the floor I already know.

“There are people who are completely possessive with their affections. I’m not one of them. I love showing off what’s mine. I want the entire universe to know just how beautiful and precious it is, and be quite certain that it belongs to me,” he explains as we walk into the familiar lounge, with that pole still set up near the window.

I wonder if people can see it from outside.

Maybe.

Probably.

Considering what he just said, I'm fairly certain he set it up so they would see. Maybe not in detail, at that height, but still.

"I realize that's not how the majority of the population feels. But here's the thing, love. You like to be shared, too. You know that," he adds somewhat gently. "And that's one of the many reasons I'm keeping you."

"Keeping me," I repeat with an eye roll.

"And you're staying right here until you can assure me you understand that. Make yourself comfortable."

I don't believe my comfort is Callum's primary concern. First, he bends me down in the billiard room, then he gets me to dance on the pole, naked, before fucking me on the floor next to it. We break for lunch, only for him to request a lap dance in the library.

"I've never actually done one of those."

"Another first I'm getting, huh?" He seems ridiculously smug about that.

I think we fuck in every single one of his many rooms—on the upper floor, anyway. I'm glad he doesn't set out to explore the entire hall.

The next day, I actually can't get out of bed, even if he'd let me—even if I'd tried. My muscles are on fire.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

He orders a massage for us both, and the Swedish man with hands of iron who looks like an extra in a Viking show has me moaning on the table, first because he works his thumb right into all of my aches and knots, and then, because his sleek fingers are deep in my ass and pussy, almost as skilled as Callum. One glance towards his table, set up next to mine, and I see his dark-haired masseur with one hand around his balls and the other, jerking his shaft.

Okay, then.

“I didn’t know you were bisexual,” I say, as I’m floating in a bubble bath after we’re both boneless and deeply satisfied.

I’m not going to lie: watching some guy jerk, then suck him was disturbingly hot.

“I’ll fuck any hole, so make that pan. Sex doesn’t necessarily mean much to me, past the release.” Gray eyes bore into mine. “Unless it does.”

It’s dinner time by the time I manage to pinpoint my issue with the whole thing.

He’s right, I don’t believe or trust that he’s actually into me, and there’s one simple reason: he approached me as a substitute.

I ponder on how to broach the subject for a while, before he says, “Spell it out.”

“What?”

“Whatever has you frowning and sighing and fidgeting. Let it out. There’s literally

nothing you could see that would shock me, or piss me off, or turn me away.”

When did I become so transparent?

“Do you have a thing for my sister too?”

He doesn’t hesitate. “Hell no. She’s a baby.”

There’s no mistaking his grimace.

“And I’m not?” I reply with a snort.

I know there are a couple of years between Grace and I, but we really do look alike.

Callum sighs. “I’ve known her for four years. I saw her grow up. And she’s still seventeen. I haven’t seen you with braces.” After a beat, he continues. “But beyond the obvious, you’re different. She’s more...controlled. I prefer to be the one in control, in case that wasn’t clear.”

That makes sense, but I still don’t really understand how someone could be into me and not her. Especially someone who approached me only because of our resemblance.

“Besides, she can’t move like you do,” he adds teasingly. “I doubt she’s as flexible either.”

“But how could you be into me if she repulses you?”

“You’re right. Physically, you’re very similar, and when I first saw you, I only really saw a blonde Grace,” he admits. “That was before we ever met, at the club. Then I ordered a report on you, to get a sense of what I could use to convince you to fuck

Hawk. I learned many things. Such as the porn you watched.”

Oh god.

I might not have had sex, but I used to watch sex videos fairly frequently, each filthier than the last.

Group things.

Gangbangs.

Blowbangs.

I’ve always liked that sort of vibe...and he knew from the start.

“You’re such a fucking stalker.”

He’s completely unapologetic. “Yeah, it hits differently, watching you dance in the club, while knowing what gets you off. I imagined a dozen cocks coming all over you like they do in your favorite videos.” Callum grins across the table. “I was a goner from there on. The rest was just confirming what I suspected about our chemistry.” He reaches out, fingers brushing one wayward strand of hair back. “Doesn’t hurt that you’re adorable.”

“Did you...” I clear my throat. “Did you arrange for a foursome because that’s what I like to watch?”

Page 44

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Of course.”

I lick my lip. “And the deep throat?”

“Yeah. I figured I’d leave the double penetration until you have a bit of anal training though.”

Holy fucking shit.

“It shocked the hell out of me when you told me you were a virgin,” Callum announced. “I mean, the PI file did kind of confirm that: I couldn’t see proof of any dating, or any private shows at the club...but that’s a hell of kinky list of interests for someone who hadn’t even had sex.”

He’s not really asking me, but I find that I want to share.

“When I was little my mother would receive...clients in her flat.” I wince. “She’d tell me to go in the closet, but sometimes I’d watch under the door. I used to hear them. I guess that stayed with me.”

After a long moment, Callum reaches for my hand, squeezing it. “I’m sorry you lived through that.”

“You are?” I don’t know why that surprises me.

He nods deeply. “Children are meant to keep their innocence. You should have turned into a pervert at a pool party orgy at sixteen like the rest of us.”

“Sixteen?”

“Oh, yeah. Estelle had this tiny string bikini on and damn Caden pulled the little bow.” He chuckles. “Next thing I know, my cousin’s lifting her pussy up to his face and half the other girls want to know what makes her scream so hard so they’re sitting on our mouths.”

“Seriously?” The sheer decadence of the scene he describes is baffling.

“I don’t even know who jumped my cock—I was asphyxiating under a fat pair of buttocks. Good times. I’d had sex before, but that party determined how I fuck. How most of us fuck really.”

My introduction to that sort of thing was nasty, but his somehow feels worse; not the kind of things sixteen-year-olds should naturally lean towards.

Again, it shows a stark difference between my world and his. I never went to a pool party, but if I had, it would have ended with swimming.

“We’re a mess,” I conclude.

“Yep. Would you pass the bread?”

He doesn’t fucking care one tiny bit.

And when I search my feelings, I find that I don’t either.

We are seriously fucked up, but we wouldn’t work if we weren’t.

Shit. I think his kidnapping idea is working. Maybe it’s Stockholm syndrome, because I think I finally get it.

“Okay,” I say, not actually reaching for the bread. “You like me. And I think, in your weird, seriously need a shrink kind of way, you’re serious about it.”

He smirks. “That was faster than I thought. Now tell me how you feel about that.”

I flush. “I like it.”

I’m fairly certain any other answer would result in another day or two in his golden prison, but that’s not why I admit it.

“I like you.”

“Wasn’t so hard, now, was it?” Callum’s smile broadens, showing me all his teeth. “But I really would like the breadbasket, please.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

LIV

Page 45

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I am freed on Thursday. Callum drops me off in time for my classes on his way to work, kissing me in front of the university.

I could get used to this.

He picks me up after work, and does the same the next day, and—following a sinfully lazy weekend in his hall—the Monday after that. I'm pretty sure that by Wednesday, I am used to it.

"I have a room, you know," I mention, in case he forgot that fact.

I've only dropped by my dorm to change clothes and pick up course work over the last week.

"I don't think my neck will ever forget your bed," Callum retorts. "The only way I'll ever sleep in your dorm is if you let me change the damn bed."

After a week in his expensive furniture, I'm tempted to allow it, but I just say, "Or you could sleep in your bed, and I could sleep in mine, occasionally."

Even I don't like the thought of that.

"Don't wanna."

Me neither, so I let it drop.

The next day, I stop being invisible. Overnight, people go from completely ignoring

my existence to saying hi to me in the corridors, or stranger yet, pointing and staring.

It's not until I check my phone at lunch that I learn why.

Grace: OMG!!! Is it true you moved in with Cal??

Lucinda: Good on you, girl.

Grace: Why am I learning that from a magazine?? You're losing sister points.

Bella: What magazine? I want the gossip!

Astrid: [link](#)

Astrid: Spill, girlfriend.

Before composing a reply, I click on Astrid's link, and read a three-page piece detailing how I have been picked up and dropped off every day by none other than Callum Noble.

Who is the future earl's new live-in wonder, you wonder? Meet Olivia, nineteen, student at the Anderia Royal University, Mr. Noble's undergrad alma mater before he crossed the sea to?—

It says very little about me, sticking to my valedictorian status and my course schedule at school, blissfully skipping the pole dancing. God bless crooks who love to pay cash. There aren't many records of my former employment. I can only imagine how problematic that would have been for Callum. He might not care about it, but I imagine he would certainly mind his image being ruined over it.

I quickly return to the group chat.

Me: I haven't moved in. We've just been hanging out.

Grace: Every day??

Me: Only for a week.

Bella: But every day?

I don't have any choice but to admit as much.

All the girls go crazy, sending many emojis.

Grace: Drinks tonight? You can tell us all about it.

Lucinda: If your sex god lets you out of his cave, that is.

Page 46

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I accept the drinks.

The rest of my inbox is just as insane.

Tricks: CALLUM NOBLE?? Jesus, warn a girl, would you! And WELL DONE!

Jinx: Is it true? I know the media can be stupid. Tell me it's true, pretty please. I want to live vicariously through your Cinderella story.

I laugh at both, and spontaneously decide to invite them for drinks with the other girls. They're all in the same school anyway. Jinx and Tricks can't afford the fifty-buck cocktails we'll sip at my sister's favorite club, but there's no way I'll let them pay.

I send the information to the girls, and Bella's the first to answer.

Bella: Wonderful. I love J and T.

Grace: I don't know them well. Let's change that.

The others acquiesce too, if a little reluctantly: a thumbs-up and a "no problem."

I muse at the different greetings; those four have been lovely to me, but I don't really think they like my other dance school friends, except for Bella.

Then I think back to Jinx, who's extremely awkward, to the point of weirdness, and Tricks.

Tricks...is loud.

I might love the attention, as Callum so likes to point out, but I don't like it on me all the time. Just when I dance and do other, mostly naked things. Tricks was the most popular girl in our old middle school. She was never mean or a bully, but she did always like to draw the eye, and well, it didn't make her loved by other girls; especially when she batted her pretty lashes and flirted with their boyfriend.

We got close because we were the two principal dancers in her mom's school; I ended up being favored over Jinx when we were about thirteen, because I took ballet seriously and Jinx preferred to attend comic cons and read manga. Tricks and I ended up spending a lot of time together for years. She never did anything to hurt me, but that doesn't mean she was a saint.

I regret my impulse, but there's nothing I can do about it now that the invitation is sent.

I tell Callum I'm hanging out with the girls tonight, and to my surprise, he doesn't try to stop me or barge in. I half expected him to. He can be pushy.

Callum: I'll pick you up. Text when you're done?

Me: You could let me go home, you know.

Callum: We could do that...I remember how fun you can be when you're drunk. Go home. Leave the door open. I'll see you when you're asleep ;)

And now my panties are ruined in the middle of the day. Great.

On my way to the bar, I'm worrying about what Tricks could possibly have done to earn their scorn, when a voice makes me stop dead in my tracks.

“Hey, Olivia! Wait up.”

Shit.

If I had to compose a list of the people I don’t want to see again, my father would have been number one. Yet, although it’s definitely not his part of town, there’s no denying that my drunkof a sperm donor is crossing the street, waving at me like we’re a happy, happy family.

Someone shoot me.

I’m almost at the bar, and all of a sudden, I freeze, not wanting to bring him any closer. Shit. Grace is there. She hasn’t seen his abusive ass since she was a toddler for a reason. It’s one thing for me to deal with him—I have my entire life—but I don’t want to bring his attention to her.

Squashing my instinct to run, get into the bar, and tell whatever security that he’s bothering me, I stay put.

“What do you want?”

“Is that how you greet your old man?” he drawls.

“Yes. What do you want—money?” I guess, knowing that there likely is no other reason why he would have approached me.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

He saw the article, somehow. Maybe someone he knows, someone in the building, brought it to his attention. He's guessing I have some cash, or at least, access to it through a man, and he wants a cut.

"Now you mention it..." He scratches his chin. "Had a bad hand at poker. You understand. I wondered if you'd mind helping out your old man."

"I would mind," I snap, knowing it's the only way forward.

If I give in and hand him anything at all, he'll never leave me alone.

"I'm at school on a scholarship and live in the dorm, Dad. I don't have spare cash to bankroll your habits."

A lie, but one so believable he doesn't question it.

"What about that man of yours?"

"No one asks for cash from their boyfriend for their drunk of a father. Get lost, Dad. You're getting nothing from me."

"Hey now, wait a?—"

"Is this man bothering you, love?"

I blink, startled. But indeed, Callum just appeared at the corner of the street. He walks towards us smoothly, bringing his arm around my shoulders.

“Yes,” I say, recovering quickly. “Yes, he is.”

Dad puffs his chest. “I’m her father!”

“Oh, yes. Heard all about you.” Callum looks at him from top to bottom, with the haughty arrogance of a prince staring at a particularly repulsive slug. “And given that you just raised your voice in front of my girlfriend, let me make it crystal clear that I’ll have you arrested if you ever get within fifty feet of her again.”

Without another word, he starts to walk toward the bar, taking me with him.

My entire body is tense, but I manage a, “Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it.” He puts his lips on my forehead, squeezing my arm.

“How were you here so fast?”

“I missed you,” Callum says simply. “I figured I’d go to the bar, too. Less, Caden and Seb are joining us. Don’t worry. We’ll leave you girls to your chatting. I just want to be close to you.”

Finally, my body starts to loosen in his arms.

I must have been a pretty awesome person in my previous life to deserve a man like him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

LIV

I wake panting, whimpering, my insides already fighting a battle I wasn’t present for.

In all honesty, I didn't drink all that much last night—it's the middle of the week, for one, and I'm not much of an alcohol fan, when I'm not trying to forget shit like the guy I've been fucking hanging out with his girlfriend and her parents. But with Callum's message in mind, I took an herbal sleeping aid.

Callum's not the only freaky person here. I liked waking up with him deep inside me. I might not have been very fond of him at the time, but that part was a trip.

This time, my hands are free, and I'm face down on my mattress. After a week of his expensive box spring, I can see what he meant about my lumpy bed. But observations about the springs digging into my skin don't take up my mind for long. Not really understanding what he's done to my body means that I'm sensitive in various areas without truly expecting it. My nipples, my clit, my pussy and ass all are aching with need.

Callum's plunging into me prone bone, his cock punching my damn g-spot like it's a boxing match. I can't tell he's close, by his grunts and his shallower, faster thrusts, and so am I.

It feels like I'm cheating somehow, like reading the end of the book at the beginning, going straight to the happy, happy ending. I scream into my pillow as my body races towards my climax.

"Holy fuck!" I grunt, toes curling.

Page 48

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Bloody hell, love, you’re gripping my cock so fucking tight!” Callum surges forward, groaning, and does it again. “Come for me. I need you to come right now, Olivia.”

I don’t need to be told twice. I feel my body giving in, plummeting into the abyss with him.

Fuck, this is amazing.

Still breathing hard, Callum drops on top of me, and buries his face in my neck. “Welcome back, sleeping beauty.” He kisses my cheek, then chuckles, as he pulls me against him, so there’s enough room for both of us on the tiny bed.

His hand immediately flies between my legs, seeking my clit.

“How do you have so much energy?” I groan, feeling his already-hardening cock against my back. “Aren’t men supposed to need a second to recover?”

“I’m twenty-four, not forty, you little minx.” He snorts. “Besides, I don’t wank.”

My eyes widen. “You don’t?”

“No. Why would I when there are so many holes to fuck?”

Damn him and his clever fingers, but my body’s already tingling with need.

“I mean, I ended up fucking my hand a fair few times that month when I was

watching you dance at the club,” Callum admits. “But as a general rule, I don’t see the appeal. I’d much rather reserve all my cum for you.”

I snort. “And they say romance is dead.”

“You don’t want romance. You wanna wake up with a cock in your cunt.” He chuckles against my ear. “Damn. Caden would be so fucking jealous if I told him how much you like this.”

That doesn’t make much sense. “Caden?”

I don’t really understand how Callum’s cousin figures in the current situation.

“Mmhmm.” His mouth moves back to my neck.

“He’d want to fuck me?” That’s highly surprising to me.

I’ve only seen his cousin that one time at the restaurant, but I absolutely didn’t get that vibe from him—unlike all of his friends.

“He’d want to fuck you while you’re asleep, for sure.” Callum snorts. “We’re alike in more ways than one, he and I. He’s always had a thing for somnophilia. Technically, it’s shiskink. He mentioned it to me. I never thought to try until you were right there, vulnerable, and ripe for the taking.”

“You’re such a predator,” I say, and it’s very much the truth.

But the thing is, I am willing prey, and he knows it.

Still, at the back of my mind, I wonder whether he’s capable of doing this sort of thing to a woman who wouldn’t be into it.

My answer is immediate and vehement: no.

Callum only ever reaches pleasure from my own satisfaction. He needs me to come. He wants to take me like a savage but he wants me to like it.

Caden, on the other hand? I'm not so sure.

"Yes, my delicious little prey. I truly am."

"And your cousin..." I hesitate. "He does that sort of thing often?"

Callum takes a minute to think. "I don't think so, no. I mean, it's not that easy to find girls—or guys—open to the idea. It takes a fair bit of trust."

He's right. If I didn't trust him, I certainly wouldn't have taken Valerian specifically intending on letting him do whatever he pleased with my body while I was out of it.

"But I know he's paid some people to play out his little fantasy, a few times."

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

It makes absolute sense—why resort to violence when cash can get him what he wants?—and I shouldn't be shocked. Isn't that the Noble way? He paid me, too. And so long as they consented to do it, it doesn't matter whether it's for money or because they find it hot.

“That's a pretty sweet gig. Earning money while you sleep.”

“I'm not sure they think so the next day. Caden is probably a rough motherfucker.” I feel Callum's chuckle against my back. “Ugh, I hate your bed. Come home with me.”

I'm the one who made a point of coming here, but now we're on the hard, lumpy piece of furniture, and I decide I hate my bed too. “Okay.”

There are things which are just not worth arguing about. Sleeping on this torture device definitely is one of them.

“Do you have a suitcase? You should bring some things, so you don't have to rush back to get changed or whatever.”

This, I should probably argue against. I come back to campus daily to study in any case; popping back by my room is no hardship.

But it would be awfully convenient to have a few things at his place, given how much time I'm spending there. And I'm too tired, content, and practical to shoot myself in the foot.

“Sure.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

LIV

It takes three weeks for him to say it, as he helps me unpack more clothes and some of my schoolbooks.

“You could just move in, you know.”

In all honesty, I have to commend his restraint, because I’m fairly certain the words have been on the tip of his tongue for days.

“I mean,” he adds casually, “I have the room. You can have a walk-in closet. Half of the office. Or your own office, for the sake of both of our productivity.”

“No, Cal, I can’t.” I roll my eyes. “We’ve been together for a month and known each other for two. That would be insanity. We’re not insane.”

“Aren’t we?” He shoots me a grin that highlights those cheekbones. “We’re not the definition of sane either.”

“True. But I’m not going to move in with you. What if you grow tired of me? Where would I live?”

He exhales loudly. “Does it seem to you like I’d get tired, darling?”

It doesn’t; but that doesn’t mean he won’t. The thing with Callum is, he’s a little obsessive around the edges. That’s why we ended up here. I don’t have a high enough opinion of myself to think I’ll be his sole, and last obsession. He has me now. Someday, he’ll likely move onto the next shiny thing. And there’s nothing wrong with that. People get together, have fun and break up all the time. I just have to make

sure I come out on the other side with a life. And a place to live.

I'm trying to work out how to say all of that without making it sound like I don't trust him—I do. I trust that he likes me and is enjoying my company. I just don't think it'll be forever. And who would think they'd spend forever with their boyfriend after one month? Especially given how we started.

“Look, Cal?—”

“I'll drop it for now,” he announces, surprising me.

I cock an eyebrow. “Really?”

That's not like him at all to give up so easily.

“Yep. You're about to say no, along with a lot of other words that won't please me. Let's skip that. You're not ready. Consider the subject dropped.”

Well, that was easy. He mustn't have been as keen on the idea as I thought. Or at least, he understands my point. I smile and keep packing, firmly intent on not analyzing the degree of disappointment I feel because he gave up so easily.

So much for not being insane.

My phone buzzes, and I check my messages, frowning, at first, because there's a new text from an unknown number.

They pop up every other day, increasingly threatening, all of them with the same message: I'm a bad daughter, I'll get what's coming to me, I should share my wealth after all the years he spent supporting me, blah, blah, blah.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

The thing with my father is, he never lifted a finger to help in any way shape or form. I had to learn to do my laundry, the shopping—using the food stamps the government sent every month, 'cause he sure as fuck wasn't giving me any money. I've had part time jobs since I was seven, babysitting or cleaning for the neighbors, just to pay for basic necessities. I packed my own lunch, signed my own school forms. The only thing he provided me with was a roof, and even that wasn't always safe, with his dodgy friends around.

My salvation was having Tricks and Jinx in the building. Their mom let me attend her ballet school for free, invited me to eat all of the homemade dinners I ever had in my childhood, and never said a word when I'd sneak into the house late at night to escape the apartment.

He ignored me my entire life, treating me like an inconvenience, because the government was going to make him pay for me any time he had a job if he didn't keep me around. Now, it's my turn to pretend he doesn't exist.

I block that number, too, and open the actual text that caused the notification: a message from Annalise.

“I have to pop into town to grab the stuff I ordered for Halloween. Do you need anything?” I check with Callum.

“Only your cute ass in a slutty costume tonight,” he replies. “Do you need another drawer?”

I really do. But I have two, and three is far too much for someone who's definitely

not living here. “No, thank you. Who said my costume was slutty?”

“Me. Because you’re a slut.”

It occurs to me that I should be at least pretending to be offended, rather than giggle as he draws me into his arms.

He’s right though: I am an eager slut for him. Whatever game he has in mind, I’m happy to play along.

Over the last weeks, he’s fucked me in every position I’ve ever heard of and some I haven’t, covering every surface in his place with body fluids. Good thing he has an excellent, discreet cleaning staff.

After the way we started, I expected that he’d invite half of his friends to jump me daily but he seems quite happy to keep me to himself, too. And I can’t say I mind, though I also liked having an audience.

Tonight’s the first time we have plans with his friend since the steakhouse, when he introduced me to them. We’re supposed to attend the Halloween parade thrown by the crown every year, followed by a party here.

Or rather, anorgyhere.

Every floor will be open except for the penthouse.

I can’t deny I’ve been looking forward to tonight for days—even more so after Annalise managed to find the perfect outfit for me. It was hard to explain to her what I needed: something I could wear in public at the parade, where we’ll no doubt be photographed by the paparazzi always eager to write about Callum’s life—which right now, extends to me—and also appropriate for after.

I fumbled my way through an explanation, saying we'd go to a nightclub afterwards. But she got the memo. She had to order the dress from abroad, but promised she'd move heaven and earth to get it to me in time.

We picked a secondary choice she kept in store just in case stars weren't aligning, but according to this text, I'm getting my dress.

Two hours later, I gasp as I try it on.

It's long, tight and sexy—something that Morticia Addams could wear—but the dress is made of various layers, many of which are removable.

The first combination, that I'm wearing at the parade, has long, sheer bell sleeves, but underneath, there's a boned top, and that top can also be unhooked into two parts, leaving only an underbust corset.

The skirt's similar: there's a leather overskirt, and a mesh one underneath. So, I can look like a sexy, classy witch, or an emo porn star, depending on the mood.

"I also found a headpiece for you," Annalise says, handing me the most adorable little fascinator, with spiderwebs instead of normal mesh and a tiny pointy hat in the middle.

"Oh, my god, it's adorable."

"On the house," she tells me with a smile. "You're going to put my future kids through college, anyway."

It's true: I haven't gone anywhere else since finding the little shop that I now know belongs to her. I haven't had any reason to. She has most of what I need and when she doesn't, she knows how to get a hold of it. She's also less expensive than the big

luxury stores out there, carrying only the most obvious brands. Annalise works with little, but high-quality designers.

“Are you going to the parade?” I ask.

Annalise seems to know everything going on in town—and what to wear for it—so I’m assuming her social calendar is pretty packed outside of the shop.

“Sort of. My family watches it from the castle,” she replies without fuss.

“The castle?” I blink.

Page 51

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

“Yes.” She smiles. “I don’t go often, but Halloween is my favorite holiday to spend there. The cook makes the most delicious little cupcakes with pumpkin icing.”

Watching my expression, the shop owner chuckles. “I’m the queen’s niece. Not that it matters, as I’m technically disowned by my parents, but my aunt doesn’t care.”

“That sucks. Why were you disowned, if you don’t mind me asking?”

She shrugs. “I like simple things. Such as owning my shop. Making my own money. Not marrying some old guy on command for a title.”

I’ve spent enough time in her world to know that’s not unusual. “I’m so sorry.”

She snorts. “Don’t be. I do really well. Before I put my foot down, I was a stylist for the elder royals, and trust me, I much prefer the lanes. At least here, I get to play with wonderful dresses such as this one. I do have a wonderful lingerie set you might want to try with it, by the way.”

Her store doesn’t carry much lingerie—just a few iconic pieces—but she pulls it out of the back.

A cupless bra attached to what looks like a collar. Matching panties—or, rather, strings attached together.

I swallow.

She definitely gets the vibe of the royals, doesn’t she?

It turns out, I likely didn't need to spend that much time trying to explain what I was after for Callum's orgy, after all. I wonder if she has an invite. Probably.

"Does it come in red?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CALLUM

She's trying to kill me, there's no other possibility.

Objectively, by this point, I'll admit that my hobby might seem a little strange. I got the girl. I got the girl in my house, in my bed, and it's only a matter of time until she admits she's never walking out of it. So you'd think I'd stop stalking her. But I just love watching her when she's by herself. I'm also fully aware that I could tell her about it; she wouldn't mind. My delicious little doll is as twisted as me. But her not actually knowing is half the fun.

I had to cut back my hours at the office because I'm following her every day, as soon as she's out of school. Good thing I don't technically need a job.

I picked law because there's a contract shoved in my face every week, and it's always useful to know what the hell they're saying, and I founded my firm because I had nothing better to do. Now I do, so I work from ten to four. Fuck anyone who has anything to say about it. I've hired a handful of grunts who can hold down the fort when I'm busy. I represent artists and authors, anyway, so the hours are flexible.

Today, I took the afternoon off to watch her go to her favorite shop in the lanes, and get her hair and makeup done, before heading back home.

And my place is her home. She knows that deep down. Why would she go there and

not her dorm, otherwise? We're officially meeting at six for the parade.

The Halloween parade, like all other events in the streets of the capital, starts in the park, circling it before walking up to the avenue leading up to the palace.

Temporary bleachers have been set up at their end point, where the true spectacles will happen, and I have seats reserved every year. Most of the time, I don't bother to show, but Olivia was so excited when I mentioned it.

"I've never actually seen it properly from up close! There's always such a crowd. To have the best view, I had to watch it replay on TV."

No one really goes unless they're under twelve, but if my girl wants to see the circus outdoors, we're seeing the circus.

God, I'm so whipped.

I know I could just cross the road and join her, but instead, I watch her walk, that tight ass downright sinful in her leather mermaid skirt. Everyone turns to watch her in the street; she causes whistles, blatant second looks, and she loves it, slut that she is.

My cock tightens in my pants. I know she wants to be watched. Some of the guys shamelessly checking her out aren't safe, but she doesn't care. If she could get away with stripping and spreading her legs right here in the street, she would. She wants to be prey. That's an instinct that calls to me. I really can't get over how fucking perfect she is for me.

She reaches the square in front of the castle, where a crowd's already assembled although the parade hasn't started yet—our meeting point—and looks around.

She's fucking terrible at it. If she paid a little attention beyond the obvious, she'd see

me. Just because I'm wearing a beanie and standing behind a tree shouldn't keep her from spotting me. But she doesn't. She never does. Maybe that's why I can't stop myself from following.

She's a little early, so I wait, watching her move from stand to stand: there are various vendors tonight, selling candy cane, cotton candy, hot dogs, pretzels, candied apples. I try to guess what she'll pick.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

Pretzels.

They're freshly made, so worth the carbs for her. Olivia isn't the kind of girl to count calories closely, despite being a dancer, but she only eats fast food if it's extra delicious.

I'm deeply satisfied to watch her queue in front of the pretzel stand.

My watch beeps, which means it's time for me to join her, and I'm about to walk away from the line of trees, when I see a silhouette pull away from another tree.

So much for calling Olivia unobservant. Why didn't I see him?

There's no denying that he's a fellow stalker, walking like a predator, dressed not to get noticed, in sunglasses and baseball cap, although it's six and definitely not sunny enough to justify either. Sunset is in minutes.

It would be one thing if he was just a random pervert preying on whatever tits and ass they can look at, maybe planning to flash them. But that guy's aiming for the same fucking target as me. His gaze is fixed on my gorgeous girl in her black dress, with her red collar.

Oh, hell, no.

I'm not sure what he's planning. It doesn't matter. He's approaching her and he has no right to. She's mine.

I trail him, and I have to say, preying on the predator is exhilarating in a very different way. When I follow Liv, I know I won't do anything to hurt her. Best-case scenario, I'll get to fuck her while she sleeps—which I know is a major turn-on for her as much as it is for me—but most of the time I just derive pleasure from watching her, knowing she's mine.

I'm not an observer right now.

I am a hunter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

LIV

I bite into the buttery softness and moan. How fucking delicious.

I got two pretzels, but if Callum doesn't show up in the next three minutes, he's on his own.

I've ingested most of the salted goodness in three bites when some guy says, "Hey, you're Olivia, right?"

Ugh. Paparazzi. It's not my first time dealing with one of them. I'm about to say that, no, I don't have any comment, when the guy pulls a fucking knife and brings it up to my throat in one smooth move.

I drop the pretzel and gasp.

What the fuck?

I'm too startled to even scream for help, and then, watching the three-inch blade

pressing against my skin, I know better than to do it.

He could kill me in one single move.

“What do you want?” I croak, voice tight.

“For you to stop being a fucking bitch, that’s what,” he snarls, his blade cutting a red line across my throat as he walks forward, forcing me to backtrack, away from the avenue and towards the trees.

Shit!

“You’re going to take your fucking phone, call your father, and transfer him the money you owe him, understood?”

I have no clue what he thinks I owe my dad, but I don’t have any other choice but to nod. My fear would have made me agree to just about anything right now.

In all honesty, I never expected this. I thought Dad was just hot air, angrily harassing me, but he ultimately has no power over me. And sure, he has gross, dangerous friends, but I didn’t think he’d sic them on me.

I underestimated him.

Shit, shit,shit.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:44 am

I focus on the problem at hand. Whats and ifs and hows don't help me stay alive.

"I'll do it. I'll send him money—I promise."

"I don't give a shit about promises. Do it now."

Hands trembling, I reach for my phone. I can't transfer a substantial amount remotely without extra security, but this guy doesn't know that, and I have to at least pretend to comply, so he leaves me alone.

My eyes dart to the crowd around us, all of them focused on the festivities, the stands, the balloons and music. The parade must have started.

He's in close quarters, and to an onlooker not really paying attention, it must have seemed like we were a couple embracing or something.

It takes me two tries to unlock the device. "I don't—" I swallow. "I don't have my father's number."

"Fucking bitch," he groans, looking down to his own pocket to retrieve his own phone.

It occurs to me that if there was ever a time to run, it would be now. Except, a flick of his wrist would be enough for him to stab me in a fucking artery, so I don't chance it.

He's staring down to grab his phone, when a passerby in a beanie, head down, approaching from behind me suddenly turns, grasping the hand holding the knife by

the wrist, and twisting it behind his back.

I step back as he grabs the knife and wordlessly, seamlessly, shoves it into my aggressor's back.

The man screams, but the man in the gray beanie wraps his hand around his mouth, before withdrawing the knife.

I watch wordlessly, eyes wide. Callum pockets the knife and holds the limp body by the shoulders, like he's helping a drunk friend stand up. He even pats his back and says, "There, there. You just don't know when to stop, do you, friend?"

My eyes scan around us. There are a couple of people heading towards the parade, none of them watching us.

On autopilot, without checking, I grab the guy's other shoulder, and help Callum bring him to the closest bench.

Holy fucking shit. He killed him. Easily. He aimed for the heart and it was over in an instant. Like he knew just where to plunge the blade.

It should be terrifying. I should question why my boyfriend knew, without a single moment of hesitation, how to end a life.

I shouldn't be sick to my stomach at the idea that he might be taken away from me if anyone found out he just killed someone.

After we've dropped the guy on the bench, Callum brings his arms around my shoulders, and holds me tight, hands soothingly caressing my back.

I don't know how long we've been like this when I realize that this isn't smart. We

should...go away. Wipe the evidence. Destroy the knife?

“He was...” I croak. “He was?—”

“Shhh. He’s never going to hurt you again. No one is.”

“But,” I insist. “He was sent by my father. My father!”

Callum hesitates. Then all he says is, “Hm.”

I sob, soaking his shirt.

“It’s me.”

I lift my head, surprised to see Callum on the phone.

“I need a cleanup crew—the grove by the palace. Self-defense.” Pause. “He was after Liv.”

He’s calling someone. Does that mean it’ll be okay? Now I can think vaguely clearly, I realize he’s right. It was self-defense. The knife, my cut, maybe even some city cameras—they can prove it.

We’ll be okay. Right?

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

“Of course. We’ll be just fine, darling. That’s a promise.”

I didn’t even realize I asked the question out loud.

An indeterminable amount of time later—but it feels soon—there are six men in dark suits and an unmarked black van pulling up, although it’s a pedestrian area, and then the body dripping blood under his shirt is gone. So is the red smear and the puddle on the green bench, though the white concrete is a little stained.

It’s over.

It’s over.

Then why doesn’t it feel like it?

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

LIV

For the first time in my life, I don’t see the parade, though I had the best seats. There’s no party later. The upper echelons of Anderia likely hate my guts now, because Callum cancels his orgy at the last minute for my sake.

It’s not until the next day that I realize what the dread coiling in my stomach is about.

Callum’s clean-up crew wiped away the incident like it never existed. There’s no report of death by knife on the news. No policeman comes to question either of us.

But someone did know the thug was coming after me today. Someone who would kick up a fuss, if only to get my attention. Blackmail me with the information.

He sent him. He sent that guy, no doubt telling him to hurt me if I didn't comply. And maybe after I complied too, to make sure I stayed in line the next time he texted.

"My father is a problem."

My voice is so broken. I don't think I've talked all night, and most of the morning.

Callum has stayed glued to my side. He's pulled me on his lap now, and is feeding me grapes I wouldn't eat if he weren't shoving them right into my mouth.

"I know," he replies simply.

My eyes meet his, now gray and cold, as they get sometimes. I've always found it hot—the way they can turn to ice. Now I understand it.

He knew exactly how to kill. Quickly. Efficiently. Like someone who'd done it before.

"You're going to kill him?" I ask.

He presses a fruit to my lips. I part them obediently.

"I don't have to, love. He wants cash. I'll give it to him."

My stomach drops; that's the last thing I want. Dad doesn't deserve a reward for...well, anything he's done my entire life, and certainly not yesterday.

"A substantial amount that can turn his life around, attached to a laundry list of

conditions in an ironclad contract. First of all, he'll have to leave the country."

That's a start, but he wasn't there last night. He still found a way to get to me. What's to stop him from doing it again?

I make myself nod. It's not like I can ask Callum to kill someone else for me. He was right anyway; it was self-defense—or my defense—with my aggressor. If he went to my father with the deliberate intention to kill him, it'd be an entirely different story altogether.

I can't ask. So I don't.

"I'm sorry you had to live through that. I thought..." He sighs. "Foolish of me, but I believed that while we were just dating, you didn't need a security detail. You don't have enough money, or a rank, to make you a person of interest to the wrong crowd. I never considered this. You'll have a security detail starting tomorrow."

Some of my dread fades.

If someone had told me before yesterday that I'd want someone to follow me around, I would have rolled my eyes so hard. But right now, it sounds amazing.

Page 55

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

“I will?”

“Of course. No one is hurting you but me,” Callum promises, holding me tight against his chest.

I lower my head to his shoulder and let him.

I don't try to go out for the rest of the weekend. On Monday, I have to force myself to leave the safety of the penthouse.

I know Callum drew up the fifty-nine-page long contract over the weekend, and brought it to my father's attention. The asshole was only too quick to accept, of course.

He's going to get a million euros by the end of the business day; the likelihood that he'll come after me right now is low.

But after he blows the money, that's another story.

I make myself go to class.

By December, I don't even flinch when I hear loud noises.

I'm good. Everything is good. Manageable.

The next time Cal asks me to move in, I accept eagerly. I rarely ever leave the apartment, anyway.

“Would you like to see someone about the attack?” Callum offers. “I...my cousin and I—we’ve been trained to expect that sort of thing since childhood. Kidnapping, attempted murder. There are people who don’t like the fact that aristocracy exists. Besides, we’re filthy rich. So we’re prepared. I know it came as a shock to you.”

As usual, he knows exactly what I need.

I go to therapy, which helps a bit.

But nothing entirely removes my newfound anxiety until Christmas Day comes, bringing many gifts, including one I never would have expected.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

LIV

The snowstorm is insane this year; we’re used to it in Anderia, as the entire country’s in the mountains, but it’s a lot, even for us.

Callum’s best friends are all snowed in on the high peaks, in their mountain resort, so we expect to be quite quiet, yet on the twenty-fifth, the footman announces a visit.

“Caden!” I grin at Callum’s cousin, hugging him. “I thought you were still up in the Valmont manor?”

“The snow let up three days ago. I was there until this morning, though, if you ask anyone.” He shoots me his best winning smirk, one that I would likely find entirely irresistible if I wasn’t so used to it from Callum.

I tilt my head. “Why would I ask where you were?”

“Some people might,” he replies lightly. “Is your man in?”

I wave towards Callum’s gym. “He’s sweating—in the boring way. I doubt he heard the footman’s call, given how loud his music is when he works out. He should be done in ten, but I can get him...”

“Don’t. It’s you I wanted to talk to.”

That’s...odd. “Do you want a drink?” I offer. “It’s a little early, but if we can’t day drink on Christmas Day, when can we?”

He chuckles, following me to the lounge. “Yes, please.”

He sheds his coat, leaving it at the back of one of the armchairs, before retrieving a piece of paper from his back pocket. “This is for you.”

My eyes go from the rolled-up paper to his and I frown, taking it.

It’s an article, from an American paper, judging by the spelling.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

...found at 7:59 this morning.

...drug overdose.

...identified by the landlord...

...no proof of foul play.

...immigrant recently moved to New York...

My eyes scan through the entire paper, and return to the picture on top. A man who would still have been handsome in his late forties, if not for all his substance abuse.

My jaw falls as my eyes return to Caden.

I'm sitting. I haven't even made a conscious choice to sit, but I'm in the armchair now, and he's taken over my job behind the bar, pulling glasses.

"Champagne, wouldn't you say?" Caden offers, smile never wavering.

But they don't reach those cold, familiar eyes.

"You did this."

Without waiting for my reply, he retrieves a bottle of champagne from the fridge and opens it with a loud pop. "He'd already used up about forty percent of the cash, in two months. I imagine he'd be out by the end of next year, and coming for more."

Caden shrugs. “Which I can’t say I mind, but his methods have proven problematic.”

He circles the bar and hands me a flute, just as Callum walks into the lounge, sweaty and glistening. “Thought I heard obnoxious self-importance.”

“Cousin.” Caden grimaces. “You stink.”

“I know. Hug?”

“I’d rather be flogged, thanks.”

The casual banter is usual for them, but completely surreal given the bomb Caden just dropped.

He killed my father, who was apparently in New York.

Made it look like an accident.

He was in the mountains if anyone asks.

But no one will.

“Are you all right, love?” Callum asks.

I can’t formulate a word, so his frown is redirected toward his cousin, who shrugs. “I might have killed her dad. Merry Christmas?”

Callum shoots him a glare, before rushing to my side, protectively. “Hey. Are you okay?”

His hands run over my lap, while his voice drops down to a smooth whisper; he’s

babying me, like he thinks I'll break like I almost did at the start of November.

I guess I should have said something sooner. "Sorry, I... That's a lot to take in, all of a sudden. I'm not even sure I'm not dreaming the whole thing."

Exhaling to ground myself, I set the flute down and stand, crossing the distance between me and Caden. I wrap my arms around his shoulders. "Thank you. I was... I tried to ignore it, but I was so scared of what he'd do next. Thank you, thank you, thank you. You're crazy. But thank you."

"It was my distinct pleasure, darling." He snorts. "You're going to be a Noble. No one is ever going to get a second chance to hurt you."

He achieves what therapy, time, and an entire security detail couldn't achieve: I feel safe.

Also, clearly, I'm surrounded by murderers, but as they're on my team, I don't mind.

Page 57

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

Callum is reactive. If there's someone intending to hurt him, me, or anyone he cares about, he'll dispose of them without losing a minute of sleep. But Caden has no issue with preventive measures. And as far as Dad was concerned, that's what I needed.

It's not just about me; it helps Grace, too. She's also his child, and if he had ever learned that she was well off, he would likely have also targeted her, somehow.

For the first time that night, I sleep peacefully.

And I wake with a positively wicked idea in mind.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

CALLUM

"I'm gonna marry that girl," I announce, just in case anyone here doubted it.

Anyone conscious that is. Olivia's still not quite certain about it, but she also happens to be deeply asleep, like she only is after taking the sleeping pills her doctor prescribed for anxiety last month.

"I will if you don't," Caden retorts.

The horny motherfucker's fucking salivating. And why wouldn't he be? Tonight is about him. His present for murdering her dad for her.

Smug asshole.

If I'd thought that's what she wanted, I would have had it done in November. But to be fair, the way things happened now is safer; as far as anyone looking into it is concerned, I gave him cash and sent him on his way. And no one with the surname Noble traveled to the States last month. Our hands are squeaky clean.

"Damn, that's one lovely ass," Caden muses, like he's never even looked at it before.

To be fair, he's never had a chance to watch it like this.

She usually sleeps naked, but tonight, she put on one of her naughty little lingerie numbers for us; a see-through black thong with little bows, like she's a present to unwrap, and a bra to match. She's passed out on her tummy, one leg folded up, so I can't properly get a good look at her tits, but I bet we can perfectly see her nipples through it, just like we have a full view of her slit and clit between her legs.

When she told me she wanted to offer herself as a Christmas present for Caden, to thank him for his present to her, I grew hard immediately. The only thing better than to fuck her asleep would be to share her asleep. The fact that she asked me only makes it hotter. She knows who that pussy belongs to.

"Can she take two cocks?" Caden unceremoniously starts to peel his clothes off.

"We'll find out," I promise, following his lead.

"That might wake her up."

"I don't know—she took the prescription pills. She should be out for most of the night."

I haven't actually fucked her in her sleep since October. She didn't ask me to stop, but I didn't quite feel like it, while she was vulnerable and so scared. But I know she

ignores several of her alarms on the nights when she does take those sleep. Sometimes, even shaking her awake doesn't work. Not for long. She drawls something unintelligible and crashes again.

"Fuck. How did you get so lucky?" Caden grunts, bending over her, hands palming that gorgeous ass.

I'm generous enough to leave him to it. This is about him, after all. And I have her every night. I sit by her and bring my hand to my cock.

I spoke the truth when I said I don't really wank, but I'll make an exception while watching her get worshipped.

Caden takes his time, sniffing her ass, before pushing the panties aside and licking the crack from top to bottom, and lower, towards her pussy. She moans absently as she always does, like she's having a great dream.

"Fucking hell." His cock against her leg, he sways his hips to get some friction while he keeps licking her.

Her hips rock back and forth slowly in her sleep, as she instinctively seeks pleasure. She twists on top of the cover, to lie with her back against the mattress, bare to us.

Fuck. I was right. Everything is on display in that lingerie. I immediately bring my hand to her tits as Caden resumes his onslaught on her clit from a new angle.

As I watch him, I wonder what his deal is. I've seen him fuck a conscious woman before. He never takes much time on foreplay, especially the giving kind. Yet now he looks like he could spend hours devouring her cunt.

"She's drenched," Caden marvels, sitting up to bring the head of his cock to her

entrance.

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

It's pierced with a ball on top and a ladder underneath, which I'm told increases pleasure for both parties. I watch him enter her slowly, his eyes riveted on her sleeping form.

Other than her hips moving a little again, there's no reaction from her.

"Oh god, that pussy's pulsing around me," he grunts, sinking in, and out, and in. "But she's completely asleep."

Emboldened by her lack of reaction, he grabs hold of her legs, bringing them to his shoulders.

"That's it. Just stay limp like that for me and take it," he orders her, drilling her faster, harder.

My hand deliberately moves slower around my shaft, because if I'm not careful, I'm going to come while watching, when I'd rather be balls-deep inside her.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck," Caden chants.

He abruptly drops her limbs and withdraws, climbing over her limp body to aim his cock at her face as he comes, painting her white.

I chuckle. "That was embarrassingly fast."

"I dare you to last as long," he says primly. "That damn cunt!"

“Oh, I will.” Not that I did the first time, but I’m used to her. The way her body craves this, even in sleep.

To prove it, I take his place between her legs and ram home. She’s already wet and sensitive, those walls sucking me in, but I have a point to prove, so I take my time.

Caden doesn’t just watch, unlike me; he’s licking her tits, bringing her unmoving hand to his cock and wrapping her fingers around it to wank himself with her help, opening her mouth, then sliding his tip past her lips and filling her with shallow thrusts.

Using her like a doll.

“The camera,” I remind him.

That was part of his present—from me: an old polaroid all set up, waiting to be used on the bedside table.

I think we both forgot it until now.

“Hell yes!” He’s quick to grab it, taking shots of his cock in her mouth, with her face wet with cum, mine in her cunt, her bare stomach.

“Move over, would you?”

I’m almost ready to come, and there’s one thing I meant to try today.

When he scoots a few inches back, I move her to the side, before bringing my cock to her asshole. It’s well and truly used by now, so it lets me in without any protest. I lift her leg, giving Caden full access. He’s quick to catch on, wordlessly sliding back into her pussy.

Oh, god. This is so tight.

We've worked up to this for a while. In a way, it's a bit of a shame she's not awake for it, but it makes sense to do it this way: the next time we'll do it, her body will be used to it, though her mind will likely still need adjustment.

I make a point to push in when he withdraws, setting a rhythm that drives me fucking insane. The friction of a good fuck, but multiplied by the fact that there's another cock across the slim wall between her holes.

And she fucking sleeps through it like a good girl.

We race each other, both of us refusing to give in first, railing her pussy and ass until we're both panting, swearing, sweating.

I can't take it anymore; I come, not even ashamed to be first. No; he stopped moving too, filling her at the same time as I did.

Holy shit.

We're doing this again.

I roll onto my back to catch my breath.

Page 59

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

“I think I’d die of a heart attack inside of a year if I had that in my bed every night,” Caden wheezes.

I laugh.

“Wait until she wakes up.”

He doesn’t. He fucks her again twice, taking her ass, and then her pussy again, before falling asleep.

I stay up, though, watching the wonder in my bed. I want to know the moment she shows signs of waking, so I can fill her cunt again.

EPILOGUE

LIV

“Callum!” I yell from the lounge. “We’re gonna be late!”

“And whose fault is that?” he asks, walking in.

He’s fiddling with his cufflinks. I roll my eyes, and walk to him to help.

“Yours, for being naked in the damn shower. Slut.”

“T’myourslut,” he retorts, bringing his mouth to mine in a kiss that quickly turns into something more, like it usually does with us.

I grunt against his lips. “Don’t! It’s your cousin’s wedding.”

“Second cousin,” he retorts, his eager hands sliding along my legs.

I slap them away. “Hey! We like Less, remember? Besides, his mother will murder you if you’re late.”

He sighs, because he knows it’s true. “Fine. The sooner we go, the sooner I can fuck you in the bathroom.”

I roll my eyes. “We’re not doing that at a wedding.”

“It’s a royal wedding,” he reminds me. “It’ll be perfectly safe.”

By safe, he means, no royals kiss and tell—or watch others get plowed against dubiously hygienic surfaces and tell.

I ponder his answer. “Okay, fine, but not until after they say their vows.”

“We’ll see.” He kisses my neck, and leads me out to the car.

“What if it was your wedding and, I don’t know, Hawk or Caden disappeared for a quickie in the middle of it?”

“I’d certainly understand, and forgive. My bride though...not so sure.” He tilts his head as he opens the car door. “Will you?”

“Hm?”

“Will you forgive our dear friends if they leave our wedding to fuck in the bathroom, darling?”

I stay planted right there, incapable of thinking of a single thing to say. My brain short-circuited at the whole wedding thing. Preceded by the word our.

“Personally, I’d say it’s acceptable extenuating circumstances, though they’ll have to be back in time to give me the rings. But if you have something against it, let me know. I’ll warn the guys. I know none of them want to be on your bad side. They like to fuck you far too much.”

He’s teasing me; I know he is, because he’s wearing his best smirk. The one he uses when he’s pulling my leg.

I refuse to let him win. “If we ever get married and any of the guys disappear, I’ll castrate them.”

“If?” he challenges, leaning in over the door.

I swallow.

Six months ago, I would have had many words to say. Most of them, a clear denial that this could even be happening.

Except it is.

I know exactly what he's not saying.

"You're not proposing to me on Less's wedding day. Ivy will castrate you, and I like your balls." I slide in the seat, determined to look unruffled.

Except... holy shit.

"Yes, ma'am."

He shortly slides onto his seat in the classic Jaguar.

"And there'd better be a ring when you do ask."

"Like I don't have that in my pocket."

I gasp, and dive into his breast pocket with a squeal.

I'm not accepting a proposal today. But that doesn't change the fact that I wanna see the shiny.

BONUS

CADEN

“Hello, Mr. Barrett,” I say politely as I walk into the temporary rental.

He’s lived here for a month and hasn’t bothered to look for accommodations that wouldn’t drain his recent influx of cash.

“It’s a pleasure,” I lie smoothly.

The drunk, barely standing waste of space brings his bottle of scotch to his mouth.

“So you’re that twat my girl’s shackled up with, huh?”

He hasn’t met Cal; their interaction was purely virtual, but if he had, he could still confuse the two of us. Firstly because he’s drunk, and secondly because we do look alike.

“No, that would be my first cousin, Callum. I suppose I would have been your nephew-in-law, under different circumstances.”

He hasn’t invited me in, but I close the door behind me.

“Different circumstances?” he repeats, butchering both words.

“Yes. See, my cousin is a simple, reasonable man. The best, truly. I want to assure you, your daughter couldn’t be in better hands.” Not that this piece of shit cares. “But you see, my cousin is, well...optimistic. He believes giving you a little money will rid him of you. I know better. I know that man came after your daughter because you told him to, and you’d happily do it again. I’d wager you actually already decided you would when you’ve run through the cash you just got, right?”

“Now wait a minute...”

“Shhhh.” I grin. “It won’t be long now, my friend, and there is nothing you can do about it.”

My victim blinks, his slow brain not getting it.

“‘bout what?”

“You’re dead, Mr. Barret. The toxin running in your veins would kill a horse.” I tilt my head. “Someone of your constitution...well, it’s surprising you’ve lasted this long.”

He stands abruptly; a mistake. Sudden movements will only pump his blood faster, therefore spreading the poison he’s just ingested with half of his drink in seconds rather than minutes.

Not that anything will save him.

Page 61

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

“What—what did you do to me?” His hand goes to his heart. “What are you doing here!”

He tries to lunge but falls face first, then struggles to crawl up.

His body drops back down with a hollowthud.

“I’m here because I like watching, at the end, Mr. Barret,” I explain to the corpse.

My gloved hand retrieves the bottle, and I grab the sterile syringe from its box in my pocket.

I fill it and inject him three times.

The poison will perfectly fake the effects of an overdose, but it’ll help if they find the right drugs in his system. Not that anyone is going to look too far at what killed dear old Brad Barret tonight.

I go to the toilet and flush the rest of his scotch. The toxin dissipates fast, but one can never be too careful.

I’m done, and about to leave when I hear it.

It’s barely a noise, not even a breath, but I know better than to let that stop me from checking.

Shit. That was careless of me. I did observe Barret all day, waited until he drank

enough, and I made sure no one was coming in...but maybe there already was someone in the apartment.

Who? My investigators assured me he was alone. He'd been visited by street grunts who carry his coke a few times, but that always had been brief.

What did I miss?

It could just be a cat.

I push open the door.

Definitely not a cat.

A problem.

The emaciated girl in a tiny crop top and a skirt short enough to show her butt crack has hollow, hungry eyes. She looks young. Far too young to wear this. Far too young to be here.

“How old are you?” I hear myself asking.

It doesn't matter. She was here today, which means she's a problem.

There's only one way I deal with problems.

“What?” those light eyes falling on the body behind me.

“Your age, kid,” I repeat.

She swallows, her eyes returning to mine. “I'm—I'm...” She clears her throat.

“Lying to me will not end well.”

“Sixteen. I’m sixteen. I said I was eighteen so they’d let me join.”

No one with eyes would believe that waif is anywhere near eighteen. “Why did you whore yourself out?”

Those eyes are suddenly full of fire, like she hates me for pointing out what she’s clearly been up to. “None of your business.”

I chuckle. “And here I thought you might have some survival instincts.”

She returns to the corpse, swallowing a sob. “It’s my ma. She’s dying. Cancer. I needed?—”

Source Creation Date: June 26, 2025, 10:45 am

“A decent healthcare system, which isn’t going to happen this century here,” I summarize. “It’s courageous of you to do this for her. But foolish. You wouldn’t make enough to pay for cancer treatment on your back.”

“Fuck you!”

I laugh again. She’s so idiotic, it’s actually fun. “No, thanks. Come back in five years and I might, though.”

Except she won’t be alive in five years. She shouldn’t be alive in five minutes.

I’m smart—unlike her—and that means making the right decision.

The right decision is disposing of this waif.

Except I don’t want to.

“Here’s what’s going to happen, kid. You’re going to pretend tonight never happened.”

I am in so much fucking trouble.

“He was a horrible man. I’m not gonna say anything.”

I almost ask her what he did to her; then I decide against it. It would probably lead to me kicking his body, which would be even dumber than letting her see another day.

“You’re going to tell me your name and your address. Then you will go home, throw those clothes in an open fire, go to school, get good grades. And tomorrow, your mother is going to get into the best hospital. Her treatment will be taken care of by an anonymous donor.”

The pale green eyes fill with tears. Fuck. Now I’m playing Father Christmas. Someone shoot me.

“Hold this.” I hand her the bottle in my gloved hand.

“Why?”

“Because I want your prints on the murder weapon, in case you ever get a little chatty.”

I’m surprised to see her immediately take it. I figured she’d argue. Maybe her survival instincts aren’t that terrible.

Mine are.

“Do you like it?” the kid asks me. “Killing people, I mean.”

I retrieve the bottle. “Yes.”

She nods like it’s the most logical thing in the world.

“I bet it makes you feel powerful.”

“I am powerful.”

“Yes. Because you can get away with murder.”

I laugh again. Three times in an hour. When was the last time that happened? “You’re a smart kid.”

“And you’re really not going...to hurt me?”

I don’t know if she means rape or kill. The first is out of the question; and to my surprise, so is the second.

“No. I don’t think that’s necessary. Do you?”

She exhales so deep, before that mouth extends in a monkey grin. “You’re like my guardian angel, then.”

Ah! Here I am again, cracking up. “I suppose I am, kid. I still need your name.”

“I’m Rory. Aurora Grant.”

The End