



# The Sweetest Surrender

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**Category:** Romance, Billionaire Romance, Adult

**Description:** Effervescent, Fearless, and self-assured, Selena Strauss is always the life of the party. Her buoyant personality is a pleasure to be around causing her to garner the attention of a hot commodity she's had her eyes on for a while. Being in the proximity of her walking wet-dream, Selena finds herself immensely infatuated with the possibility of their relationship flourishing into something much more. That is until the reality of her parent's divorce becomes the focal point of Selena's life, and suddenly Selena's not so sure that the happily ever after she's chasing is real.

Jordan Alexander Rose is unapologetic about his ninety-five percent success rate. As co-owner and lead partner of Rose and Garnett LLC, every move Jordan makes is calculated, methodical, and planned for a spirited outcome. That's why when the woman he's dating, Selena Strauss, begins to lose hope in love; Jordan sets out to win a case that involves more than just a sealed victory, but a succumbed submission of Selena's mind, body, and spirit. He's never been a man to give up and teaching Selena a lesson on true love will invoke her sweetest surrender.

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## Chapter One

Bringing the champagne flute to her plump full lips, Selena Strauss took a sip of the Welch's sparkling juice cocktail as she watched her friend gloat at the image before her. Selena's bronze leg bounced as it lay casually across the other, and she sighed with a contented relief. Standing in front of a full-length mirror, Phoebe Alexandria Rose squealed with her sister Eden as they stood in Jenna's Bridal Boutique.

"This is definitely the one," Phoebe said as she modeled the wedding dress with a twirl here and there.

"I don't understand. If you've put your wedding off for a year, why are you picking out gowns now?" Selena asked.

"Because it's going to take me that long to get everything perfect for our big day," Phoebe answered.

"What if you find another dress that you like six months from now?"

"I won't because I don't plan to look for another one after this."

Phoebe and Eden squealed again.

"Well, I'm happy for you," Selena said with a soft bat of her curled eyelashes.

"Thank you, that makes two of us," Phoebe responded.

“Um, you mean five of us,” Samiyah added.

The Rose women all nodded, completely excited for Phoebe’s big day. They hadn’t all come together at once. The Rose women consisted of friends who’d become new in-laws like Samiyah who married Jonas Alexander Rose; multimillionaire former heavyweight champion. Once they’d been married in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the brothers seemed to each get hitched one by one. Each of the men carried his own multimillionaire career full throttle, and the family’s name and wealth reached across the globe.

Now, one of the Rose sisters, Phoebe Alexandria Rose, was newly engaged to Quentin Davidson, fitness expert and multimillionaire tycoon, who’d been a friend of the family for decades. Phoebe gloated as she twirled in the mirror donned in what would be the official wedding gown she’d walk down the aisle in.

This happening for you gives me courage,” Eden said.

Phoebe nodded. “And I’m rooting for you and Derek. My fingers are crossed.”

Phoebe turned to look at herself, and her heart warmed at her appearance. This was happening. Phoebe and Quentin would be man and wife. It was surreal. After accepting his proposal, Phoebe had cried her eyes out, and Quentin had captured her lips with a heartwarming kiss. Quentin brought out all the stops to win Phoebe’s heart back after a huge misunderstanding went terribly wrong. Knowing that The Spice Girls was Phoebe’s favorite girl group of all time, Quentin had arranged for the group to perform their famous hit “Wannabe” along with a marching band that blocked off an entire avenue to gain her attention. Quentin kissed Phoebe through one complete performance before giving her room to breathe.

“I love you,” he’d said, and Phoebe laid her head on his shoulder, comfortable in his embrace.

Since their television announcement, the Rose brothers—Jonathon, Jordan, Jonas, Jaden, Julian, Josiah, and Jacob—had thrown Quentin and Phoebe an engagement party where they danced the night away. It lifted Phoebe's spirit to see her brothers and Quentin interact again. They'd all cut Quentin off at one point, thinking he would end up breaking Phoebe's heart. But Quentin quickly showed them the man he truly was. Now, standing here with her sisters and friends, picking out the gown she would be wed in, Phoebe gave thanks inwardly then turned around to face them all.

Selena saw the glow wash over Phoebe's face and could only imagine what she must be feeling. Everyone in the room could sense her happiness and understand the totality of her big day.

Except for Selena Strauss.

Selena had attended countless weddings within the last few years as all of her co-workers at S & M Financial Advisory had gotten married to a Rose brother; her boss, Samiyah Rose, Claudia Rose, and then her co-worker Octavia Rose. Even though Selena was the odd man out, that didn't stop Selena from wishing on a star. It was no secret that the Rose men had been deemed the playboys of the century, but Selena witnessed something entirely different. She'd had a front row seat to the happiness her friends shared with the men. And the men treated their wives as if they were the only women on earth.

Selena wanted to feel that kind of love, too... with a Rose man.

From the second she'd been introduced to the family, Selena set her sights on Jordan Alexander Rose. Something about the way he moved, silently with confidence and high authority, caused Selena's nervous system to go into a frenzy whenever she saw him. As part owner of Rose and Garnett LLC, Jordan was one of Chicago's most sought-after attorneys, with a client list so prestigious he wouldn't keep it on a database of any kind to prevent a breach of confidentiality. The list was on paper;

locked in a safety deposit box at Rose and Trust Credit Union, the bank his brother Jonas owned. Whenever a new client was added to the roster, that list would be updated, but it never left the vault.

Although he was an attorney, Jordan was not a man of many words. He said only what was necessary. Even at family functions, personal outings, or courtroom appearances, Jordan's stealthy character was on display. Jordan was a thinker, a reader, a researcher, a writer. Not only did he see the world through his natural lens but also through the thoughts, facts, and arguments of others. While attending one of his high-profile court cases, Selena sat in the back and watched Jordan stroll slowly, with his hands in his pockets in deep thought as if they were all having a moment of silence. And when he spoke, a quote by Roy T. Bennett cruised from his magnificent lips.

"A wise man once said, it is important that we listen with curiosity, speak with honesty, and act with integrity. The greatest problem with communication is we don't listen to understand. We listen to reply. When we listen with curiosity, we don't listen with the intent to reply. We listen for what's behind the words."

Jordan had gone silent again; giving everyone in the courtroom a chance to do just that, listen for what was behind his words. When he resumed, everyone in the courtroom was tuned into his final deliberation, hanging on every syllable as if he spoke with the sage words from a biblical publication. Selena couldn't help herself. Her eyes traveled over his chocolate skin, fresh haircut, and neatly trimmed beard. She watched his sexy lips move and found herself taken in by not only his arguments, but the undercut of his tailored Armani suit. She'd outlined his strong muscular frame, his predacious stroll, and his piercing brown eyes as he took in each member of the jury singularly.

It had taken the bench fifteen minutes to come back with a not guilty verdict, sealing Rose and Garnett's victory. Jordan had smiled slow and reassuring. His client, a man

accused of killing his wife due to an eerie 911 call she'd made minutes before her death, thanked him profusely, ecstatic over not being locked away for a lifetime. In a case like this, men were always presumed guilty until proven innocent by way of the media and the public. But one thing Selena loved about Jordan was, he didn't take a case he didn't believe in. Jordan didn't defend the guilty, and his investigations into the matter were committed and thorough.

Leaving the courtroom that day, Jordan was bombarded by reporters, asking questions about not only his win but his personal life.

"How did you know for sure that your client was innocent," one reporter asked.

Jordan was silent for a moment before he responded, quoting another famous author, Ernest Hemingway. "When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen."

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The reporter seemed flabbergasted, so she fired off another question. “Can you expand on that response, Mr. Rose?”

“The proof is in the recording,” he stated plainly.

“What about the woman in your life,” another reporter shouted. This piqued not only Jordan’s interest but also Selena’s as she stood off to the side watching him as her long black strands of hair whipped in a current of wind. At Jordan’s lifted brow, the reporter expounded, “Are you the same way with her, quiet and thoughtful?”

A simmering charismatic smile trudged across his face, and again, he quoted a famous author.

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

The reporter seemed flustered as her cheeks reddened, and a blush fell over her. “So, who’s the lucky lady?” She went on to ask.

Jordan winked and sauntered off. Selena was completely taken by him. Since then, they’d developed a close friendship and gone on a few dates. On New Year’s Eve, while Selena was pondering what she should do for the night, Jordan called her up and asked if she’d mind spending her new year with him. Selena jumped at the chance, but in the moment, she played a little hard to get. She couldn’t let Jordan know just how into him she was for fear of seeming desperate. So, Selena played it off as if her entire evening was planned down to the T.

It had only taken two words from Jordan to change her mind.

“Pretty please.”

All of Selena’s pretending took a nosedive, and she acquiesced faster than she had a chance to carry on with her shenanigans. Jordan took her to Sydney, Australia, where they brought the New Year in on a cruise in the frosty temperatures of the night. Since then, Jordan and Selena dated on a regular basis. Selena had even confided in him about a book of poems she’d written in college that ended up destroyed after she graduated. That was a milestone for Selena because she only mentioned her poems to her close friend Octavia Davenport once—when Octavia entered her office and caught her doodling on paper.

When Selena revealed the leather-bound jacket, Jordan asked her why she kept it hidden instead of publishing her words.

“My aim was never to publish,” she had replied, shrugging. “I guess these words were mostly for me, you know? Something I needed to get out of my system. Besides, then it would be open to opinions, and let’s face it, I’d have a major attitude if I didn’t get glowing reviews.”

Selena placed her hands on her childbearing hips and popped her full lips, adding a neck roll for emphasis.

Jordan chuckled and nodded in understanding.

“Sometimes, things are better left in private so you can enjoy them immensely without the sake of interference,” he added, staring her down with his intense probing gaze.

Selena found a double meaning in his words, even as he’d leaned into her and gotten



closer, causing traumatic jumping jacks to skitter across her chest.

“That’s true.” Selena’s voice became breathless. “However, there was that article in my college campus newsletter where I took a chance and printed the words.”

Jordan’s gaze had become even more piercing as if it turned him on to hear it. “Congratulations. That took courage. So how did it get destroyed?” his deep voice thundered.

Selena tried not to shudder, but an uncontrollable shiver fell over her skin anyway.

“Um...” Selena tried to clear her thoughts and find her words. “During the move from college, the company I hired to get my things back safely did just the opposite.” Selena remembered the condition of her journal. She remembered running her hand over the leather then flipped the journal open to reveal a book full of ruined dried up pages as if the book had been dropped in a bucket of water. She shrugged. “Oh well.”

Their rapport had been nothing but pleasant, and although they dated regularly, neither Jordan nor Selena gave their relationship a formal title.

Selena was the happily ever after type of woman. She believed in love everlasting without a shadow of a doubt. At least she did until news broke that her parents were getting a divorce. It had come just days before Christmas, and Selena initially didn’t believe it. Couples had disagreements sometimes, and although Selena never saw her parents go so far as to mention divorce, still, she didn’t want to believe them. Selena tossed those divorce “rumors” to the back of her mind and figured when they got over the spell they were going through, they’d be back to loving each other again. Nevertheless, in the back of Selena’s mind, there was a small fear that if they didn’t, life as she knew it would be devastatingly different.

Growing up in the house with her parents came with fond childhood memories that

Selena cherished with her heart and soul. Her upbringing was one of happiness, and each of her parents played a significant role in the person Selena was today. She'd seen them in love, happy, and strong for one another in times of despair. They were her quintessential role models for as long as Selena could remember. The possibility of them divorcing, even as an adult, tore her apart and rushed wave upon wave of depression over her. For now, Selena would hold on to hope because it was the only thing she had left to grasp.

The owner of the bridal shower approached. "Is this the one," she asked.

Phoebe did a little tap dance and squealed again. Samiyah stood and waddled over to her sister-in-law. Samiyah looked like she could use some help. She'd been pregnant forever, and Selena didn't know a stomach could stretch so wide.

"I'm happy for you, Phoebe," Samiyah said, tossing an arm around the gushing bride-to-be. "I would love to stay and celebrate with you, but I'm not feeling so good. This baby is kicking my ass. I need to lie down."

Selena stood. "I can take you home."

"Thank you, girl," Samiyah said.

The women crowded around Samiyah and hugged her.

"You didn't have to come out, honey," Phoebe said, and they all agreed.

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“I know it, but I didn’t want to miss this.”

Samiyah moved, and everyone moved with her as if waiting for her to need their help. She paused and looked at them all while swiping her fallen bangs out of her face.

“You guys, I promise I won’t break.”

The ladies all glanced at each other. They weren’t so sure.

“We just want to walk you and Selena to the car,” Eden chimed.

“Yeah,” their sister Jasmine added.

Samiyah pursed her lips. “Really?”

“Come on,” Selena said, slipping her arm around Samiyah’s waist.

“Selena, I walked in here just fine, I’ll be all r—”

Samiyah’s words dispersed as a rampant pain pounded in her cervix. Samiyah’s eyes bulged, and she grabbed her stomach.

“Oh God,” she said.

Alarmed, the girls all gripped her at once.

“What’s wrong?” Selena asked with an elevated voice.

Samiyah held still with her teeth locked as the pounding faded off and disappeared. She took a deep breath then calmed as her racing heart tapered into its normal rhythm.

“Nothing,” Samiyah said. “False alarm.”

The girls all exhaled a deep breath.

“Okay, let’s start over,” Selena said.

“Okay, Aaaah!” Another round of pounding pain knocked around Samiyah’s core, and this time it increased ten-fold. “Oh my God!” Samiyah yelled as she bit back on her teeth. A headache instantly took root. A gushing of warm liquid slipped down her legs, and when it splattered to the floor, everyone in the vicinity froze for a split second before Claudia yelled, “Her water just broke!”

Everyone scattered and spoke at the same time.

“I’ll call an ambulance,” the owner shouted.

“I’ll get the car!” Eden quipped.

“I’ll call Martha Jean!” Claudia said, knowing Samiyah’s mother would be devastated to be the last to find out.

“Wait! Wait!” Samiyah said. They all turned to her. “Can someone call my husband!?”

“Of course—, Yeah—, Give me your phone,” they said, continuing to talk around

each other.

“The ambulance will be here in five minutes,” the owner said.

“That’ll take too long,” Selena said. “We have to get her to the emergency room now!”

The girls dispersed quickly, moving so fast that they ran out the door with Phoebe still in the wedding dress.

“Ma’am!” the owner yelled. “Ma’am!”

But the women kept going in a rush to Mercy B Hospital.

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### Chapter Two

“Selena, I would like to make it to the hospital in one piece, please!” Samiyah shouted.

Selena hit a corner hard, causing the car to skid, kicking up asphalt. The motion sent the car into a tilting rock as the vehicle adjusted to the sharp turn.

“Selena!” Eden yelled in the back seat with Samiyah.

“What do you want me to do? She’s going to have that baby in the back seat!” Selena hissed.

“She’s not going to have this baby at all if you don’t slow down,” Phoebe said with her hands clutched to the passenger-side door.

“That door isn’t going to save you if the car flips over,” Selena said, chuckling.

“That is so not funny,” Phoebe retorted.

Selena laughed harder, her guffaw going into a rambunctious howl. Tears crept from the corner of her espresso brown refined eyes, and Selena swiped her black shoulder-length hair off her shoulder just as she hit another corner. Phoebe gripped the door handle even tighter, her eyes bulging as she held on for dear life. In the backseat, Samiyah panted, inhaling and exhaling deep breaths. The pain in her abdomen was like a constant beat of drums the way it battered against her.

“How is this funny!?” Eden asked sharply. Eden turned to glance out the back window. “Jasmine is nowhere in sight. You’ve lost her and the others with your reckless driving. Do you even have a license?”

Selena’s laughter died down, but a smile still leered on her face. She tossed a glance in the rearview mirror at Eden.

“To answer your first question, this is so funny because your twin is up here scared shitless. The horror on her face is deathly comical. I could fall over laughing, but then we would really be in trouble.”

Eden snorted. “And now we’re not?”

“No, we aren’t. I’m a professional race car driver. I came in first place in three different competitions in high school. You should check my credentials.”

“Damn your credentials,” Phoebe shouted, causing Selena to howl even louder. Fresh tears populated in her eyes, and Selena tried with all her might to focus on the road. “High school hardly counts as professional anyway,” Phoebe added.

“Okay,” Selena said. She made a show of straightening in her seat and properly wheeling the vehicle. “We’ll be at the hospital in thirty seconds, how’s she doing back there?”

Eden glanced down at a panting Samiyah who was splayed across the back seat with her head in Eden’s lap and her legs cocked open as if the baby was on his or her way.

“How are you doing, Samiyah, talk to me,” Eden said.

“Woo, woo, woo,” Samiyah breathed, not bothering to speak for fear that she would mess up the meditation she currently had going on.

“I think she’s okay, she’s got it under control. Samiyah, blink once for yes and twice for no.”

Selena guffawed just as Samiyah screeched. “Aaaaaaah!” A searing pain ricocheted through her, and Samiyah’s eyes rolled as she felt delirious.

“It’s okay, we’ll be at the hospital in—”

“We’re here!” Phoebe yelled as Selena sailed into the emergency room’s underpass, right in front of the entrance.

Selena threw the car in park and hopped out, running around the vehicle into the hospital. The four-inch heels she wore didn’t slow her down as the double doors opened, allowing her inside. “We need help. There’s a pregnant woman outside, and she’s gone into labor!”

Everyone turned their attention to her, and the lady behind the registration desk grabbed her desk phone and dialed a number. An overhead intercom sounded, and the woman’s voice rang through.

“Code Rapid Response, emergency room entrance.”

The woman slammed the phone down and exited the safety of her office. She was an older Caucasian woman with light gray eyes and a head full of gray curly strands. Another set of double doors to Selena’s right flew open, and a full staff consisting of doctors, nurses, respiratory therapists, and lab techs jogged toward the entrance wheeling a patient bed.

“Where,” one of the doctors asked.

“This way!” Selena said, turning to jog back out to the car where Phoebe and Eden



stood, coaxing and taking deep breaths with Samiyah as if they were helping her with her laboring.

“We’ll take it from here, ma’am,” the same doctor said.

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Phoebe moved out of the staff's way, and Eden joined her as they all watched them check Samiyah before removing her. With a joint effort, the staff lifted Samiyah onto the bed and surrounded the moving platform as they rolled her back inside followed by Selena, Phoebe, and Eden. The ladies jogged just as fast as the medical staff with the trail of Phoebe's gown swishing across the floor. When they made it to the delivery ward, the staff entered a room, and a nurse stopped the group as she turned to them.

"I'm Nurse Staples," she said, "I'll be on your friend's team to help her deliver this baby. What's your friend's name?"

"Samiyah Rose!" Phoebe shouted.

The nurse's brows bunch suddenly. "Hmmm, that name sounds familiar."

Eden let out a laden breath. They didn't have time to talk about why the nurse probably knew Samiyah's name. She would find out later that Samiyah was married to a celebrity boxer when Jonas came flying through the hospital.

"Anyway," the nurse said. "We'll take good care of her. If you'd like, only one of you can come in. Usually that's the father."

"Well, he's not here, so I'll stand in for him until he gets here," Phoebe interjected.

"Ma'am!" a heavy voice behind them pulled their attention as all four pairs of eyes turned to the two police officers trotting toward them.

“Yes, sir?” The nurse questioned.

The officers glanced at Phoebe. “Are you Phoebe Alexandria Rose?”

Selena and Eden frowned as Phoebe answered, “Yes.”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to come with us.”

“For what?” The three girls said in tune.

“Theft,” the other officer said matter of factly.

“Bullshit,” Selena hissed.

“I’ve never stolen a thing in my life!” Phoebe said.

“Yeah, and this is harassment. Do you know who our father is? He’ll have your badge,” Eden snapped her fingers, “within seconds for mistaking us for thieves.”

The second officer glanced at Eden, and his eyes leered at her in thought. Just then he turned and sent the back of his hand flying against his partner’s shoulder. “They’re the Rose triplets,” he said, smiling, suddenly star struck.

The first officer also smiled as recognition set in. The second officer held out his hand to Phoebe. “Congratulations on your nuptials.”

Phoebe hesitated before shaking the officer’s hand.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Unfortunately, we still have to take you in.”

The girls all looked aghast, and Eden sank her hands into her hips.

“I’m sorry I have to go,” the nurse said. “I’ll return in a minute.” She left their sides to trail into the delivery room.

“Did you pay for the dress, ma’am,” the first officer asked.

Phoebe’s cheeks reddened as it dawned on her that she hadn’t officially purchased the gown.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake,” Selena spat. “Do you really think she’s going to steal this dress!? Our friend just went into labor, we were at the bridal shop, the owner knows we left in a hurry to get her to the hospital. Phoebe doesn’t need to steal this damn dress. She could buy this whole city if she wanted to!”

Eden puckered her lips and nodded, agreeing with Selena’s retort.

“I don’t doubt it,” the first officer said, “but again, we still have to take you in because the owner called us. We’re sorry, ladies. I’m sure you can have her out before she’s officially booked.”

The first officer reached to grab Phoebe’s arms, twisting them behind her back.

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“Hey!” Phoebe shouted.

“Get your hands off of her!” Selena and Eden chimed as they reached to protest the officer’s arrest.

The officer took his handcuffs out and Selena grabbed one of Phoebe’s arms to pull her away from the officer while Eden did the same on the other side. They struggled and tussled before Selena instinctively sent a hand pushing into the middle of the officer’s chest as to say back off.

The second officer grabbed Selena and pulled her hands behind her back.

“Hey!” Selena shouted. “What are you doing!”

“You’re under arrest for assault on a police officer.”

“What!?” They all shrieked.

Just then the double doors opened, and Phoebe and Eden’s third doppelganger sailed through the door with Claudia, Octavia, Santana, Carla, and the rest of their crew, which consisted of friends and extended family members. There was still no sign of Jonas or any of the men.

“What’s going on here!?” Jasmine shouted, coming to the side of her sisters.

“Ma’am,” an officer said, getting frustrated. “Your sisters and friend are under arrest.” The first officer glanced at his partner. “We may need to call for backup.”

“Whoa, nobody’s calling backup,” Claudia said right behind Jasmine. “What happened?”

“They’re arresting Phoebe because the owner of the bridal shop said she stole this freakin’ dress. Can you believe it!?” Eden shouted, continuing to wiggle and tussle with the officer retaining her.

The women’s eyes all widened in shock.

“That’s ridiculous!” Claudia shouted.

“We know, that’s what we’re trying to tell them, but they won’t listen!” Selena hissed.

“Wait,” Jasmine said, “surely we can work this out. I can call the owner right now and pay for the dress over the phone.”

“You’re free to do so,” the officer said, “but we still have to take her in.”

The group all gasped.

“Why?” Jasmine and Claudia chorused.

“Because we were called. Somebody’s got to go.”

Frustration seeped into their bones.

“What about Selena and Eden, why are you detaining them?”

“For assault,” Selena said, rolling her eyes. “I barely even touched him.”

The officers didn't say another word; instead, they moved with purpose through the group of women. The first officer had one grip on Selena's arm and another grip on Eden's arm. The women trailed the officer as all three of the girls were handcuffed and taken outside to the police cruiser.

Jasmine and Claudia whipped out their phones, calling their own set of backup while the rest of the women looked on in shocked horror.

"All right!" Selena shouted as one officer attempted to force her head down into the back seat.

"You don't have to do all that," Jasmine quipped. So many times, she'd tried to tell her sisters that the system was set up to destroy them. But they always suggested she was over exaggerating. Jasmine was mad as hell now. The audacity of their claims was just downright ludicrous, and she'd have Al Sharpton on the phone in no time.

Side by side, Phoebe, Selena, and Eden sat in the back seat, shoulder to shoulder, cuffed and buckled down. They all peered at the rest of their bridal party as the cruiser drove away to the downtown precinct.

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### Chapter Three

The metal bars slammed, locking Phoebe, Eden, and Selena within the boxed cell. They still couldn't believe they'd been taken to jail. They all glowered at the officers as they walked away with smirks on their faces. Each one of them seethed in her own right.

"I can't even believe this shit," Selena said, rubbing her wrists where the cuffs had been clamped too tight.

"When I'm done with them, they will never have a job again," Eden added.

Phoebe sighed and shook her head. This was not how she expected to spend the day when she woke up this morning. All of her happiness had been temporarily stomped as she took in the entirety of their situation.

Selena turned her back to the cell and took an eye around the metal-like structure. Three other women sat in the back, one clearly a prostitute with her heavy makeup, mini skirt, see-through body-hugging top, six-inch heels, and 1980s styled hair. On the floor, a young lady looked like she was in another world as a haze covered her eyes, and she didn't blink within the thirty seconds Phoebe watched her. The lady next to her stared back at Selena, Phoebe, and Eden; wondering what they'd done to be thrown into the slammer.

"Hey," the third girl who sat on the floor chimed, "you're the Rose sisters!"

Phoebe groaned. This would surely make headlines, and she could kick herself for



not remembering to come out of the wedding dress.

“I’m sorry, you guys,” Phoebe said.

Selena and Eden frowned over at her.

“This is not your fault, so don’t even start,” Selena said with Eden agreeing.

“Yes, it is,” Phoebe retorted. “I should’ve just went with my gut and stayed with our customary bridal shop.”

“That woman knows you can pay for this dress. That’s why she stumbled all over herself trying to make the sale,” Selena said.

“Even so, if we would’ve gone to Miranda’s, she wouldn’t have called the police on us.”

Eden and Selena pursed their lips, and Selena crossed her arms. It was true, but that was beside the point.

“Does anyone of you have a lighter?” the scantily dressed woman asked.

They all stared at her with one eyebrow hitched.

“Where would we happen to have a lighter?” Selena asked.

The woman shrugged. “There are plenty of places to hide it. I’m sure you know that.”

Eden rolled her eyes.

“How long do you think we’re going to be in here?” Phoebe asked, turning her head

to whisper. The question was directed at Selena and Eden, but the scantily dressed woman answered.

“As slow as they move, probably twenty-four hours. By then you would’ve been searched, so if you have anything on you,” the scantily dressed woman paused then continued, “you better give it up now. Like say, a lighter?”

“What exactly do you plan to light?” Selena asked. Either this girl was delusional, or she really planned to set the cell on fire.

The scantily dressed woman smiled and stuck her hand between her legs and pulled out what appeared to be a loose cigarette.

“I just need a hit,” she said.

The women all scrunched their lips, and their faces turned into a scribbling mask.

“Oh my God...” Phoebe sang.

“We’ve got to get out of here,” Eden said. “If she finds a way to light that thing, I’ll die.”

“Besides that, they’re going to search us,” Phoebe said.

Phoebe couldn’t imagine what it must feel like to be stripped of your privileges and examined like a criminal with no basic human rights. In fact, the thought made her lawyer intuition kick in, giving Phoebe another reason to create a bill to pass for people who were locked up that didn’t have a record or was a first-time offender. In this day and age, shit happens; everyone didn’t come to jail with the thoughts of smuggling something in.

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“I take it none of you have ever been strip-searched before,” the scantily dressed woman said. By their silence, she smiled. “Oh, how adorable. You’ll be all right. Here, I’ll show you how it’s done, so you’ll be prepared.” The woman took a step forward, and Selena planted her hands on her hips.

“Don’t even think about it,” she said.

The woman paused her forward progress. “Okay, you don’t know me. It’s understandable that you would act that way. I’m Blaire by the way, this here is Carey.” Blaire pointed to the woman on the floor who looked like she was high on something. “Pay her no mind. When we came in last night, Carey was so geeked-out, she was talking to herself in that corner right there.”

Blaire laughed, finding Carey’s predicament extremely funny.

“Anyway, she’s coming down off it now, and she’ll probably pass out in a minute or so. But here, what I’ll do is show you with Carey how your strip search will go.”

Blaire reached down and pulled at Carey, trying to get her up on her feet.

“That’s not necessary,” Selena said.

“No,” Phoebe and Eden agreed.

“Oh, it’s no problem,” Blaire proceeded, continuing to pull the poor woman to a stand. “Carey doesn’t mind at all. Do you, Carey?”

Carey mumbled, but none of them understood what she said. Blaire looked back at them. “She doesn’t mind,” Blaire whispered with a wink.

When Carey was finally stable on her feet, Blair positioned her feet apart, making her legs stretch. “Okay, Carey, I need you to squat.”

Carey didn’t move; instead, she wobbled like she was going to hit the floor. Blaire glanced over at Selena, Phoebe, and Eden, “She just needs a little coaching is all.”

“Blaire, we appreciate your concern but really, you shouldn’t have. We can imagine that a strip search is exactly that,” Selena said.

“Well,” Blaire whispered, “if you have any contraband, like say, a lighter,” she continued to press, “the guard will make you squat, like this.” Blair squatted with her feet apart. “Then he’ll make you cough, so if you do have something, it’ll fall out. Now if you’ve got strong pussy muscles like me, then it doesn’t matter what they do. They can ask you to take a shit, you’re still going to hold that lighter clamped against those walls, you know.” Blaire shook her head. “They think they can get anything to drop out that way, and don’t get me wrong, they can with most, but I smuggle shit in every time.” Blaire cleared her throat. “Just last week when they caught me with my trick on 38th and Fairmount, I stuck a round of quarters in my pussy.” Blaire shrugged. “I’d just gotten paid and the john only had change wrapped in that damn bank paper. They never found it either. Hell, I’ve hidden dicks the size of Alaska in this poo-tang, forget about a round of quarters.”

“Oh my God, I think I’m going to be sick,” Eden said.

“Anyway, you all should be all right, but they will probably tear up that pretty wedding dress trying to get you out of it. Sorry.”

Phoebe shuddered, and Selena felt her vibrate beside her.

“Don’t worry about that. I’m sure we’ll be out of here before any of that takes place, and your dress will be fine,” Selena reassured.

Phoebe glanced at her then back to Blaire. “Damn this dress,” she said. “I’m more worried about the strip search. I can’t wear this gown on my wedding day now. It’s been totally ruined, and on top of that, when my Quentin does get here, he’ll see me in it. I’m going to Miranda’s, where I should’ve gone initially.”

Phoebe turned to her sister. Eden looked physically sick like at any moment she would regurgitate everything she’d had for breakfast. Selena saw it, too, and she reached around Phoebe and caressed her arm.

“Are you okay?” Selena asked.

Eden trembled slightly. “We have to get out of here.” Eden turned around and shouted through the metal bars. “Hey! Don’t we get a phone call?!”

“I’m sure Jasmine has called our cavalry by now,” Phoebe said.

“Well, what’s taking them so long to get here then!?” Eden snapped.

“We haven’t been here twenty minutes,” Phoebe responded.

“Five minutes is enough!” Eden screeched.

An officer traipsed up to the cell, and the door buzzed and opened.

“It looks like you don’t need a phone call, Ms. Rose,” the officer said. “Your bail has been made.”

“Oh, thank God.” Eden exhaled. She stepped out of the cell, and Phoebe followed

her.

“Not you, just her,” the officer said.

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Aghast, Eden turned back. “You’ve got to be kidding me!”

The officer cajoled. “I’m just yanking ya chain. All three of you are free to go.”

The ladies all sighed collectively, and the officer laughed. They all cut their eyes at him and left the cell so fast you’d think a murderer was after them.

“You bitches are sooo lucky!” Blaire yelled from inside the cell. Blaire walked to the bars and shouted through them. “If you see a guy outside in a yellow raincoat, tell him to tell Marlon to hurry up, it’s getting cold in here!”

“A yellow raincoat?” Phoebe said, speaking to Selena.

“Don’t even try and figure it out,” Selena said.

As soon as the women were up front, they were greeted individually. Phoebe took off as soon as she spotted Quentin, and he was right there to scoop her up. At his side was Derek James Clark, their fraternity brother, best friend, and Eden’s crush. Eden blushed but didn’t run up to him like she wanted to. Their relationship was still developing on the down-low.

When Selena locked eyes with Jordan, a thrill of unexpected pleasure roamed down her spine. His sharp gaze and masculine features sat strong as he accelerated his walk to get to her. When they met, Jordan’s thick arms encircled her petite frame, and with a brushing caress, he palmed her back, pressing Selena closer into him. Selena shuddered from the possessive grip of his claim, and her hefty bosom settled comfortably in the strength of his heavy embrace as his brown eyes bore into her.

“Are you all right?” his deep voice thundered.

Selena pressed her plump lips together and swallowed the lump in her throat. “I’m fine,” she said. “Thank you for getting me out. I expected my father to post bail while chastising me at the same time.” Selena chuckled.

Jordan tilted his head. “No offense to your father, but he’s not quick enough.”

Selena blushed. “How much was it? I can pay you back when I get paid on Friday.”

Jordan didn’t respond immediately then he smirked. “I don’t think I broke the bank, baby girl.” When Selena went to protest, Jordan hushed her with a breathtaking kiss to her lips.

Swept away, Selena’s eyes faltered as Jordan’s manly lips sank deeper against her mouth, his probing tongue invading her cove, snatching the air between her lungs only to give it back in a rushing breath. Selena shuddered again as a raging warmth cascaded over her skin and curdled in her gut before trailing straight down to her sex. With a mind of their own, Selena’s hands trailed up Jordan’s biceps and shoulders before coming to a comfortable rest around his neck. They’d been transported completely away from the precinct in a world where only they resided.

“Mmmm...” The deep throttle came from Jordan. He spoke against her hot mouth. “I’ve been wanting to do this all day,” he murmured.

“Yeah,” Selena said, “me too.”

They rested their foreheads against each other before Jordan kissed her on her cheek then glanced up at the officers standing around gawking at them. Straightening up, Jordan coached Selena to his side as he squared off his thick masculine shoulders and switched into attorney mode.



“Where’s the chief of police?” his dark voice bellowed.

Selena squirmed beside him, and she wondered if Jordan felt it. Just the sound of his voice revved her in ways that should be against the law. The officer Jordan posed his question to shifted on his feet, and his eyes darted around.

“Get him on the line, now,” Jordan barked.

“I don’t have his number,” the officer said, and a few others snickered.

Jordan stared at the officers for another long second then smiled. “I see. It’s a good thing I have him on speed dial then. It’s such a shame that his officers don’t have direct communication with him. I’ll be sure to let him know you guys lost the number,” he stated sarcastically.

The amusement on all of their faces dropped, and Jordan pulled out his cell phone and hit a button. The name Chief Fletcher appeared across the screen before Jordan put the phone to his ear. The arm that was wrapped around Selena pressed against her skin as Jordan held her possessively. Selena bit down on her bottom lip and wallowed in the feel of his strong embrace and the simple way he cuddled her with his massive hands.

“Good morning, Jordan,” Chief Fletcher answered, “or maybe I should say good afternoon since it’s after twelve. I was just telling the missus I have a golf date with your father this afternoon. What can I do you for?”

Jordan’s voice was stern and straightforward when he spoke.

“Chief Fletcher, this call is a personal one, but not in the way you might think. I’m standing in your downtown precinct because your officers dragged my sisters and someone near and dear to my heart down here like they were criminals.”

Jordan's voice seethed with a hot ferment that let the chief know Jordan was not pleased or amused. Plastered against his side, Selena blushed at Jordan's sentiment; someone near and dear to my heart rang through her ears on replay.

"Not only that, but an eyewitness has informed me that they were manhandled when being put inside the police cruiser. You're up for re-election next year, correct?"

"Ah— yes, son, I am."

"It would be such a shame if the city of Chicago found out your officers were roughhousing women. It would also be a shame if they knew your officers didn't even have your number where you can be reached. How could you provide for the city if you don't have simple contact with your detectives?" Before the chief could respond, Jordan continued, "That was rhetorical."

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Jordan paused for a long moment. “I hate talking in circles, Chief. So, I hope you’re hearing me good. I WILL sue this entire department from the head down to the little guy sitting at the security booth for disrespecting my family. YOU will never see another term again if this doesn’t get resolved. And before you talk about threats, I’ll be clear to let you know, THIS is one.”

Chief Fletcher had gone quiet, and Jordan let him mull it over without saying another word. Jordan was certain the chief heard him. Everyone in the room had, including Quentin and Derek, who stood brooding like bulls right beside Jordan.

“I’ll take care of it, son,” Chief Fletcher assured.

Jordan disconnected the line and glanced back down at Selena. He cupped the oval curvature of her chin, letting his gaze roam over her brown skin with a searing intensity.

“Are you sure you’re all right?”

Selena licked her lips. “Yes,” she said.

“You would tell me if they hurt you, wouldn’t you?”

“Um,” Selena stammered. She wasn’t used to being looked after by anyone other than her parents. Her pause made Jordan’s jaw lock, and he cut his eyes at the officers. “Yes,” she finally said. “I wouldn’t take shit from anyone, police officers included.”

Jordan knew Selena wasn’t one to hold her tongue, but her hesitance made him

wonder if she was telling him the truth. Jordan would find out soon enough.

“How’s Samiyah?” Selena asked.

Jordan released the glare he held on the officers and looked down into the crescent of her sultry eyes. “Still in labor.” He glanced back at them with an expression that made Selena think he would rip their heads off one by one.

She slipped her hand up his chest, bringing his attention back down to her. His gaze warmed as it settled on her face again.

“Let’s go to the hospital. That’s where we should be.”

Jordan nodded, and they all turned to leave the premises. Outside, the windchill was unforgiving as it lashed against their faces and tornadoed around them. When Selena, Phoebe, and Eden glanced around and spotted a guy standing off to the side in a yellow raincoat, they all balked.

“No way…” Phoebe said.

This made Selena laugh. The men turned to the women with questionable stares.

“Hold on for a second,” Selena said to Jordan. She tried to walk off, but his grip tightened. She looked back at him and stroked his arm. “Just a quick second.” He eventually released her, and she quickly walked up to the man.

“Excuse me.”

The man glanced at her with a thin toothy grin.

“Blaire told me to tell you to tell Marlon to hurry up. It’s getting cold in there.”

The man's smile faltered, and he shook his head.

"Thank you," the man said.

"No problem." Selena chuckled then turned to walk off.

"Miss," the man yelled after her.

Selena peered back over her shoulder.

"You wouldn't happen to have a lighter, would ya?"

### Chapter Four

The gang sat in the hospital waiting room, anticipating news from Nurse Staples who'd come out every now and again to give an update on Samiyah's labor. Selena paced while the others spoke quietly.

"We didn't even get a chance to have the gender reveal party," Phoebe said. She'd come out of the wedding dress, paid for it, and trashed it all at the same time. Now she sat in a pair of dark denim jeans and a thick black wool sweater with a huge loose collar that covered her neck in a toasty blanket.

"Well, we'll know for sure now, won't we?" Eden said.

"Yeah," Phoebe responded. She glanced over at Selena.

"Are you nervous?" Phoebe asked her.

Selena cut her eyes to Phoebe as she nibbled on her fingernail.

"Does it usually take this long to have a baby?" Selena asked.

It was eight p.m., and Samiyah had been in labor all day.

"Some women go two or three days in labor before giving birth," Claudia added.

Claudia had been at the hospital in a continuous pace since the girls were taken off to jail. There had been a few times when Claudia wanted to storm the labor and delivery

room, but she knew it wasn't her place, and she understood.

Imagining being in labor for seventy-two hours made Selena nauseated. "Jesus, that's a long time to be in pain," she said.

"The doctors give you medicine to rid your pain," Claudia said. "It's not so bad."

"How would you know? Have you been pregnant before?" Selena asked.

All eyes turned to Claudia, including her husband Jaden. Claudia stammered. "No—um, of course not, I'm just saying, they give you the good drugs to keep you sane."

"Hmm," Selena murmured.

"I'm sure you would make a great mother."

The dark voice came from Jordan as he strolled up behind Selena. Closing in, Jordan took the palm of his hand down her shoulder in a grazing stroke, causing a stinging flare of heat to wash over her. She opened her mouth to respond but no words came out. Jordan tipped her chin with an innate tap of his hand. Selena blushed and leaned into him, giving Jordan the opportunity to place a warm kiss against her forehead, on the bridge of her nose, then finally her lips.

A languorous sigh released from Selena as she was taken once again by Jordan's masterful kiss. Since they'd been dating, Jordan had done a lot of holding and kissing her, but they had yet to seal the deal with sexual foreplay although Selena dreamed of it more times than not. She was enjoying their time together, and their friendship grew daily, so she wouldn't force it. The last thing she wanted was to seem too attached. For once in her life, she'd love to be loved wholeheartedly by someone she could spend the rest of her life with. But just as the thought trekked through her mind,

the pending divorce of her parents captured Selena's thoughts.

It made her grimace, and Jordan felt her grow cold as her lips stilled. Slowly, he pulled their mouths apart but continued to hover just over her sienna skin.

With a penetrating stare, he questioned, "What are you thinking?"

His voice was so soothing that Selena wished she could curl in it. She gulped thickly.

"Um... nothing, I'm fine."

Jordan's gaze grew more intense. She was lying to him, and he couldn't imagine why. Knowing their relationship was fairly new, Jordan didn't push the subject, but he couldn't help but wish Selena would open up to him.

Give her time...

He would. After all he didn't have much of a choice, and even though Jordan knew that, he still wanted to tug it out of her.

"You don't trust me enough to tell me when you're hurting, but I can see it on your face and feel it in your touch."

Selena wanted to deny his claims. It wasn't that she didn't trust him per se, but she didn't want to sound like a crybaby. She was grown after all. How many adults acted or felt like children when their parents were threatening to divorce? Maybe if she was sixteen but thirty-four?

Selena's hesitance gave Jordan the impression that he was right, which he usually was. In his profession, Jordan could almost tell anytime someone was being untruthful or even gauge their reaction to certain happenings, like he did with Selena



just then.

Sadness slipped over him but disappeared just as quickly. The doors to the labor ward opened, and Nurse Staples strolled out with a huge smile.

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“Family of Samiyah Rose,” she said. They collectively surrounded the nurse with heightened anticipation. “You’ll be happy to know Samiyah’s no longer in labor, and she’s just given birth to a set of healthy newborns.”

Everyone in the room gasped, some covering their mouths while others beamed brightly.

“Twins!?” Selena shouted.

Nurse Staples nodded. “A boy and a girl.”

“When can we see them?” Phoebe questioned.

“We’re currently moving Samiyah to a room where we’ll let four of you in at a time.” The nurse glanced at the wall clock. “About fifteen more minutes, and we’ll be out to get the first four, so you can decide amongst yourselves who will go first.”

Claudia squealed, and they all laughed. She looked around. “Oh, please let me go first, you guys,” she begged. “I promise not to take too long.”

The family laughed at her again. Claudia had been Samiyah’s best friend since grade school. They’d grown up and shared tons of memories before finally deciding to open a business together: S & M Financial Advisory.

“You and Martha Jean can go with Pops and Norma if no one else minds,” Jordan said. “We’ll take the second round if that’s okay with you, sweetheart.” Jordan glanced at Selena.

“I’m cool with that.”

Everyone else agreed.

“But don’t take all day, I’ve gotta see my babies,” their aunt Matilda called out. They all snickered, and Claudia squealed again.

Two and half hours later, Claudia, Martha Jean, the Rose patriarch Christopher and his wife Norma filed out of the hospital room with glows on their faces. Selena and Jordan stood.

“How are they?” Selena asked.

“Beautiful,” Christopher said, basking with pride at his grandchildren. Christopher tossed an arm around Norma’s shoulder and pulled her in. “Just beautiful.”

Nurse Staples stepped forward. “I’ll show you to their room if you’re ready.”

With haste, Selena and Jordan stepped forward followed by Phoebe and Quentin as they trailed behind the nurse into a dimly lit room where Jonas sat bedside, holding one bundle and Samiyah held the other.

Selena pulled her hands to her face and covered her mouth. With wide eyes, she cooed, “Oh my God,” as she moved closer to Samiyah with Phoebe by her side. Jordan slipped around to the other side with Quentin and slapped hands with his brother.

“Congratulations,” Jordan said, bending to gain a better look.

Jonas’ smile was so grand it made the muscles in his face pain.

“Thank you, brother. I couldn’t have asked for a bigger blessing.” Jonas glanced at Samiyah. “This woman is so thoroughly incredible, and I’m honored to call her my wife.”

Samiyah beamed, and a tear slipped down Selena’s face. Selena glanced over at Jordan to find him watching her closely. He winked, and Selena returned the gesture.

“Would you like to hold her?” Samiyah whispered, not wanting to be too loud since her newborns were sleeping.

“Can I?” Selena said in surprise.

Samiyah laughed. “Of course, just go over to the sink and wash your hands real quick, and she’s all yours.”

Thrilled, Selena jogged swiftly to the sink and turned on the faucet. It wasn’t long before she was joined by Jordan who stood so close a vibrating trail of chills covered her skin, making her dizzy. Wrapping his thick muscles around her, Jordan’s arms cruised down the length of her arms as his chest pressed into her back and he held his hands up under the downpour of water. Selena relaxed against him as Jordan washed his hands with hers, adding more soap to the mix of their fingers. Rubbing them together, Selena shuddered as the aphrodisiac of his cologne engulfed her. Without pause, Selena found herself leaning back even further into him, and Jordan’s solid frame welcomed the soft heat of her backside as her ample behind grazed across his pants.

Selena almost went into a trance. Being in Jordan’s arms felt so right it was ridiculous. He must have thought so too because for the longest they lingered there at the sink before Jordan turned the nozzle and reached for a paper towel. He dried her hands off first then his own before tossing the paper in the trash.

“After you,” his deep voice drummed.

Selena blushed and strolled unhurriedly back over to Samiyah.

“This is Zoey Alexandria Rose,” Samiyah said, handing baby Zoey over to Selena.

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“Oh my God, she’s so adorable,” Selena sang, smiling down at the sleeping bundle.

“And this,” Jonas said, “Is Zander Alexander Rose.”

Jordan slipped baby Zander out of Jonas’ arms and cuddled him against his chest. “He has dad’s nose,” Jordan said. Without warning, baby Zander’s eyes fluttered open, and he blinked several times before staring up at Jordan.

“Hey, little man,” Jordan cooed. “I’m your uncle Jordan. Remember that name because I’m your favorite.”

Jonas and Quentin chuckled while Samiyah, Selena, and Phoebe snickered.

“Today is your official birthday. I want you to know, for a while you’ll get away with anything you want. You’ll be cuddled, spoiled, and protected at all times. But in no way does this mean this life you’ve entered is going to be easy. Sometimes things will be hard, but I want you to remember, whenever you need guidance, or help, you can get that from me.”

At Jonas’ raised brow, Jordan added, “Well, you can get it from your father, too, but if he makes you mad, you can come to me.”

They all chuckled again.

“I love you, little man. When you’re ready for law school, let me know. You’ll be my apprentice.”

Baby Zander yawned, and a tiny smile cornered his lips. The gesture caused Jordan to grin in return, and he bent to kiss baby Zander on his forehead. When Jordan pulled away, Zander had gone back to sleep.

“Congratulations again, you two,” Jordan whispered. “You’ve got everything two people should have in life. Love, family, and security. Cherish it. Most people don’t get a first chance, never mind a second.”

“Thank you,” Samiyah and Jonas chorused. “This will be you one day,” Jonas said.

Jordan smiled languidly. “I’m counting on it,” he said, looking over at Selena.

### Chapter Five

Selena rubbed her wrists and let out a slow exhale. Today had been a long one. Going to the bridal shop was supposed to be a highlight, but turned into a semi-nightmare with her, Phoebe, and Eden being thrown in jail. How in the world would she explain it to her parents when the news was broadcast on a bulletin board in the next coming days?

“I’ll take care of it.”

The nocturnal sound of his baritone voice pulled Selena from her woes. She glanced over at Jordan, taking in his profile in the dimness of the night. Reaching over the console, Jordan took a soothing hand up her shoulder as his fingertips skipped lightly up to her chin. With a slight tug, Jordan’s hand lingered there, and Selena closed her eyes and exhaled at the simple caress of his touch.

“I know you have connections,” Selena began, “but I’d rather not get you involved. I’d hate for people to think you called in favors to get me off just because we’re dating. That could ruin your reputation, and I couldn’t live with myself if that happened.”

A smile tugged at the corners of his solidly designed jawline.

“I wouldn’t do anything that was unethical, so that’s something you don’t have to worry about,” he said, not trusting his own words at the moment. With the way he was feeling about Selena as of late, it was possible he would do just about anything for her. “However,” he continued, “I didn’t misrepresent the information given to the



chief today. Those assholes manhandled you and my sisters. And somebody's got to pay for that."

A small semblance of a smile trailed across Selena's lips. "You're too sweet to me," she said.

Jordan held her stare. "And just think, this is my softer side," he said.

Selena peered at him. "Are you saying you have a harder side?"

The direction of the conversation switched altogether. "There's definitely a harder side."

A flurry of heat saturated Selena's body, and she tried not to squirm where she sat, but it was useless. It was time. Their flirty phone conversations had been one thing. Their New Year's Eve celebration had been another, but the dates they'd endured had taken Selena on an entirely different roller coaster. And now she wanted him, physically. So, what was he waiting for? Why hadn't he propositioned her?

A ringtone sounded, cutting through their moment. Selena's gaze drove down his toned form, landing in his lap where his phone illuminated from an incoming call. Madison. This felt like the millionth time Selena had seen that name pop up on his phone within the period they'd known each other. Jordan had never elaborated on his ties with Madison, but Claudia told Selena one day while they were having brunch.

"How are things with you and Jordan?" Claudia had asked.

Selena's smile was forthright, shining like the rays of sunlight. "You say that as if there's such a thing as me and Jordan," Selena responded.

Claudia pursed her lips and dipped her head. "Are you really trying to be coy because

I know better.”

Selena’s smile widened. “You know I’m just playing with you, girl.” She sighed. “Jordan is sweet to me. Last night, he took me to the opera.”

Claudia’s eyes stretched in surprise. “How was it?”

Selena’s smile faltered. “Boring as hell.”

The women laughed.

“He knew I was bored, too, when I started joking, crossing my eyes, and sticking my tongue out at him. He was kind enough to joke back by pretending he was sleep, slumping against my shoulder.”

The girls laughed some more.

“Well, at least he’s got a sense of humor.”

Selena nodded. “True that.”

“So how long did you guys torture yourselves?”

“Thirty minutes tops, then he had mercy on me, and we left and went to the Velvet Café.”

“Oooh, the new jazz club downtown? I’ve wanted to go there since they opened. How was it?”

“We danced, drank champagne, and I almost jumped his sexy bones on the dance floor.”

“Sounds like a perfect time.”

“It was until his cell phone rang and some woman named Madison called.” Selena grumbled. “I’ve seen Jordan answer his phone in my presence plenty of times, but whenever this girl calls, he always sends it straight to voicemail.”

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“Madison...” Claudia snapped her fingers. “Girl, that’s that dingy blonde so-called debutante. She’s passed around from one elite person to the next, attends all the ritzy and glamorous parties, and is always connected to someone with an extensive bank account. Watch out for that girl. Whenever she’s around, she comes to win.”

That hadn’t made Selena feel better about this Madison girl calling Jordan. After that conversation, Selena searched Google for more information on Madison and found a slew of it.

Madison Santari, socialite and all-around mean girl, had had a thing for Jordan for years. There were pictures of them from the Jan’s Roses event in which Madison appeared to be Jordan’s date. That was only a few months ago, but it gave Selena the impression that Jordan and Madison had history. To this day, Selena never questioned him about it. She didn’t consider herself the jealous type, but the more she saw Madison’s name pop up on Jordan’s phone, the more her lip would twitch, and her gut would knot. It didn’t make it any better that Jordan never answered the call.

Like now as he glanced down at his device and silenced the incoming song.

Selena turned her face away from him to look out the window at her one-bedroom townhouse.

“I should probably let you go and call it a night,” she said.

Before Jordan could respond, his phone lit up again, and although Selena tried with all her might, she couldn’t help but turn and sneak a peek at his screen. It was her, again. Selena caught herself getting ready to question him. But she couldn’t. It wasn’t

her place. Despite the many dates they'd been on, he didn't belong to her and vice versa. Selena cast her sight back out the window.

"Let me walk you to your door," Jordan said.

"No."

The car became quiet, and Selena closed her eyes and bit down on her jaw then silently opened her door.

"Selena..."

The profoundness of his plea gave her pause, and Selena couldn't explain the reason for her palpitated heartbeat.

"You should go. Looks like there's an emergency of some kind."

She exited the car before Jordan could say anything more and scurried up her sidewalk to her front door. Selena opened the screen door, and it closed against her backside as she fished through her purse for a set of keys. She'd just pulled the metal keys out when the screen door opened and a festering heat crawled up her back. Selena's motion slowed as she figured Jordan was standing behind her.

"Selena..."

Her eyes dropped then closed as her pulse accelerated, and her flesh roasted from his nearness.

"Look at me," he said.

Selena's hand trembled, and she hurriedly stuck the key in the door and turned the

lock. Who was she kidding? Fairytales were for kids. If her parents were any indication that love never lasted, then she should just save herself the drama and embarrassment.

Opening the door, she stepped inside then turned to him.

“Thank you for making sure I got in safely. Thank you for bailing me out of jail. Like I said before, you didn’t have to.”

Jordan raked his eyes over her face.

“You’re upset,” he said.

“I’m not upset.”

“Now you’re lying.”

Selena sighed. “Will you stop doing that?”

“What, calling you out when you lie?”

Her voice elevated. “I’m not lying.”

“Then what do you call it?”

“I call it tired and not in the mood to talk to you about it.”

Their showdown was intense and profound. Just like at the hospital, Jordan wanted to press her on the subject, but he didn’t.

Instead, he tipped his head, deciding to bow out of this fight. “Have a good night,

Selena.”

She watched him take a step back and remove their splintering connection by turning and marching down her porch and walkway. Selena shut the door and blew out a heavy breath, coming out of her clothes all at once for a hot shower. She would pray to God that tomorrow was a better day. But Selena could already tell that would just be too good to be true.

### Chapter Six

It was worse than she thought. Selena groaned and took her fingers through her hair as she sat in her office, staring at the major headline in the Illinois Tribune.

#### Runaway Bride and Friends Turn Police Vigilantes

Two pictures showed Phoebe, Eden and Selena running out of the bridal shop and then being put in the back of the police cruiser. The article conveniently left out any mention of Samiyah going into labor, making it seem like the trio was intentionally trying to steal the wedding dress. It was completely misleading and sharply edited. It was no wonder her mother had been calling for the last hour, and Selena had just made it to work. Besides that, the word vigilante didn't even fit this context, even if they were trying to steal a damn dress.

With Samiyah out of the office and Claudia working between S & M and her charity Caregivers Organization, Selena and Octavia were in for an arduous work week. A soaring whistle left Selena's mouth in a slow drugging sigh. When the phone on her desk began to ring, it didn't surprise Selena that her mother resulted to calling her job when she couldn't get Selena on her cell.

"Good morning, Mom," she answered.

"Oh, finally you answer the phone!" Margaret Strauss shouted. "Young lady, what is going on, and why do I find out through WTZB news that you're a part of some vigilante team!?"



Selena groaned again. Not only were they in the newspaper, but also on TV. This was a mess that Selena had to fix somehow.

“Mom, you haven’t heard this from me because you know it’s not true.”

“So, you didn’t run out of a bridal shop with your friend in a wedding dress? Because there’s a picture of you all fleeing the store.”

Selena wondered who’d snapped the pictures. She’d grown accustomed to being caught in a picture or two because of the Rose family’s popularity. Anytime something silly came out in the newspaper or on TV, she would roll her eyes and laugh it off. But this was just ridiculous. Whoever it was must have been lying in wait for them to leave the bridal shop. It wouldn’t surprise her if the owner called the paparazzi herself, trying to make a quick buck.

“We were there for Phoebe’s fitting, Ma. You know she’s newly engaged to Quentin Davidson.”

“Yes, I am aware, but how does that explain these pictures and accusations. Police vigilante?”

“They’re twisting the story. Samiyah’s water broke while we were there, an—”

“Oh my God, Samiyah’s water broke!?” Margaret asked, slicing through Selena’s words.

“Yes, Ma, that’s what I’m trying to tell you. When her water broke, we all panicked and ran out of the shop, trying to get Samiyah to the hospital. Phoebe didn’t mean to take the dress. She was trying it on at the time.”

“Hmm,” Margaret mumbled. “The news anchor didn’t say anything about that.”

Selena sighed.

“Well, what are we going to do about this? They can’t get away with calling you guys vigilantes. We’ll sue them!” Margaret shouted.

The buzzing in Selena’s ear made her question her mother’s whereabouts.

“Ma, where are you?”

“Oh, I’m at Sunny Nails.”

Selena imagined her primping mom, sitting in a nail salon with the phone stuck to one ear and the other hand in the nail tech’s lap. Margaret never went a day without making sure her appearance was flawless for her husband. Margaret had always told Selena, if you don’t dress nice and look good for your husband another hussy will. Margaret stuck to her daily routine. But now that she and Selena’s father were headed for divorce, Selena wondered if all of her mother’s upkeep had been for naught.

“I’m handling it, Ma, don’t worry.”

“How?”

Selena glanced at her clock on the wall.

“I’ve got a friend who’s helping me resolve the matter.”

The phone went quiet.

“Ma?”

“Would this friend happen to be Jordan?”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

Selena could hear the smile in her mother's voice. Margaret had been a true advocate for Selena finding a husband. That was Selena's goal, too, so when Selena slipped and mentioned Jordan's name during dinner one night, Margaret did not rest until she questioned Selena from here to kingdom come. However, Selena didn't feel the need to gloat about a relationship between her and Jordan when the nature of her parents' divorce loomed.

"How's Dad?" Selena asked, steering the conversation away from her and Jordan.

The silence that followed twisted Selena's gut.

"Ma?"

"You'll have to call your father and ask him, baby."

Selena shut her eyes and propped her elbows on the desk, clasping her head in her hand. She gave a slow rotation to her temples as she felt the signs of a small headache coming on.

"You can't tell me? I'm talking to you now."

The phone went silent again, and Selena blew out a harsh breath. It was interesting how Margaret had plenty to say when she wasn't talking about her marriage.

"I haven't talked to him in a few days," her mother revealed.

The information slapped Selena across the face. "What are you talking about?"

Margaret sighed. "He's been staying at the Ritz Carlton."

To say Selena was shocked was the understatement of the year. A wave of dread coursed through her, and suddenly Selena's heart felt weighed down.

"How long has he been staying at the Ritz?"

"For a few days."

"I don't understand why you guys are doing this now. You've been together forever. Do you not love each other anymore?"

Selena held back the tears that threatened to fall, but her voice shook as she spoke.

"It's not that simple, baby. Our marriage has been going downhill for a while now."

"What's a while?"

"I don't know, maybe two or three years."

Flabbergasted, Selena pulled the phone away from her ear and stared at it incredulously.

"Two or three years? Are you kidding me?"

Margaret sighed again. "I wish I were, but you have to understand, sweetheart, sometimes people just grow apart."

"Grow apart?" Selena bit down on her teeth. "If you were simply going to grow apart, wouldn't that have happened, oh I don't know, fifty years ago!?"

“I know you’re upset, but you must understand—”

“No! You must understand!” Selena screeched, forgetting she was in her work environment. “You’re telling me that you and dad have been having marital issues for three years, but no one told me anything. I’ve been thinking all this time that you guys were happy-go-lucky! Then you spring it on me when you just can’t stand to be around each other another minute, and I’m supposed to what, take it in stride?”

“Baby, listen—”

“Just because I’m not a child anymore doesn’t mean this doesn’t hurt like hell! Ugh!”

Selena slammed the phone down, concurrently slapping the desk with the palm of her hand. She seethed and dropped her head down in a heap on the mahogany surface, feeling defeated. She had so many questions and a mind to corner them both and demand they give her answers. They’d been the ones to instill values of honesty, integrity, and faithfulness in her. How apropos that they didn’t offer it in return.

There was a swift knock at the door followed by a feminine voice.

“Are you okay?”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

Octavia Davenport strolled into the room with her sister girl afro slicked back in a tight ponytail that sprouted out the back. She approached the front of Selena's desk, and her manicured hands sank into the wooden counter as she leaned to get a closer look at her friend.

"Is this about the news?"

That seemed to frustrate Selena even more. It wasn't the end of the world, but it was beginning to feel like the end of Selena's.

"Not exactly." Selena sat up and leaned back in her chair, allowing the swiveling seat to spin one time around. She placed her hands back on her temples and rubbed slowly. "I didn't mean to get loud. I know we have clients in the building. It just seems like my life is crumbling, and I can't figure out how to get a hold of it before everything falls apart."

The sincerity in Octavia's eyes was shown in the subtle way she slowly sat in one of the visitor's chairs and reached out to Selena.

"This is about your parents, isn't it?"

Selena pursed her lips. If steam could sprout out of her nose, it would. Selena nodded.

"I wish I could say I understood, but I can't. However, we could have a girls' night if that would make you feel better, and you can release all that pent-up anger you're holding inside."

Selena could barely smirk. She knew Octavia was trying to help, but the only thing that could release her pent-up anger was a romp in the sack with Jordan. And by the way their night ended, Selena didn't see it happening anytime soon.

"I may take you up on your offer."

Octavia smiled softly. "Great, I can pick up a few things from the store, we could have wine, and I can make us dinner."

Selena was shaking her head no.

"Why not?"

"Because the last thing I want to do is sit around you and Jonathon drooling all over each other."

Octavia opened her mouth to protest.

"Don't even try and convince me. If you really want to have drinks, we can go out. Besides, I may need a good ol' one-night stand to really take the edge off."

Octavia gasped and gawked at Selena. One thing was for sure, Selena didn't have any semblance of a filter. Most of the time, she said what was on her mind, which wasn't always a good thing, but that didn't stop her from doing it.

"I thought you were dating Jordan?"

Selena shrugged.

"What does that mean?"

“I don’t know!” Selena stood suddenly.

“Whaaa?” Octavia was utterly confused. “I just saw you two last night looking like lovebirds, and now you don’t know? What happened between the time you left the hospital and went home?”

Selena just stared at Octavia for a long second. Madison happened, she thought. Her phone call had thrown Selena off, making her a Bitter Betty.

“I don’t think I’m the only one he’s dating,” Selena said.

Octavia frowned. “Why do you think that?”

“Madison Santari is constantly ringing his line. I think they have a thing.”

“Did you ask him about it?”

Selena shrugged and mumbled.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t hear you,” Octavia said, folding her arms.

“No, okay, and I don’t plan to either.”



“Why not?”

“Because,” Selena said, annoyed. “What do I look like questioning him about what he does? He’s a grown man. It’s his business.”

“But you’re dating him. I think you have a right to know where you stand.”

“Yeah, but you of all people know that when you’re dating, it doesn’t make you exclusive. You used to date different men all the time before Jonathon put a ring on it.”

“Which is all the more reason why you should ask.”

“I don’t want to come off as a—”

“What person who’s in like with the man she’s dating? I don’t think there’s anything wrong with that.”

Selena sighed. “I just don’t feel comfortable asking, okay. Jordan’s a big boy, he knows we’re dating. If he respects me and wants to be exclusive, then I won’t have to ask.”

“Do you respect him?”

“Of course, I do.”

“Then why are you talking about jumping in the sack with someone else?”

Selena shook her head in frustration. Octavia straight-up turned the tables on her, and Selena didn't appreciate it.

"I thought you were supposed to be on my side?"

"I am. I'm just calling the kettle black, honey. In your own words, you feel that if Jordan cares enough about you he wouldn't be courting someone else."

"Courting? What is this 1999?"

"Anyway," Octavia said, "you have to give Jordan the same respect you feel he should give you."

"So, that means I can talk to other people then because that's what he's doing."

"You don't know he's talking to Madison. You're assuming. So just come right out and ask already."

"Says the person who hid her true feelings for her now lover, best friend and husband," Selena said.

"You're right. I had my reasons. But you, Selena Strauss, have always been outspoken about everything, and never met a challenge you couldn't beat. So, I'll ask this question. Do you plan to let Madison run away with your guy? Because if she is a skank, then you're giving him right on over."

Selena sighed and rolled her eyes. Not because what Octavia said was ridiculous, but because she was right, and Selena didn't want to hear it.

Octavia arched a brow, waiting for her response.

“What time are you picking me up tonight?” Selena asked.

“I’ll tell you when you answer my question.”

“I need to think about it, okay?”

Octavia peered at her and sighed. “Okay, fine, it’s your life. I’ll be there around eight, so be ready.”

“I will be ready at seven. It’s not like I have anything else to do, ya know.”

Octavia rose to her feet and mumbled as she gravitated toward the door.

“Can you send in my next client, please?”

“Sure thing.”

Selena stood and strolled to the window to look out over the city. Traffic was normal for this time of the day, and the sun sat high, but Selena knew the wind chill was almost below freezing.

As she watched pedestrians move below, someone cleared their throat. When Selena turned around and saw her father, Walter Strauss, she glowered at him, knowing her depression would venture on into the afternoon.

### Chapter Seven

“Are you still planning to have a one-night stand tonight because I can’t be a part of a coup.”

Octavia ran a keen eye over Selena’s body-hugging black dress and fishnet stockings.

Selena closed the knee-length trench coat and tied the belt around her midsection. She shut the door then put on her seatbelt. Her body shivered as it shook off the winter breeze and adjusted to the heat inside the vehicle. Glancing over, Selena didn’t try to give Octavia any excuses. Instead, she shrugged.

“Maybe catch a few eyes, no coup planned.”

“Look like you might catch something else at this rate,” Octavia said, resting her eyes on the five-inch silver fuck me heels Selena wore. Long silver earrings hung from Selena’s ears, and her wrists were blinged out.

“Are you going to keep judging me, or are we going to this club? You’re supposed to be helping me take my mind off my problems, remember?”

“You know what,” Octavia put the car in drive, “you’re absolutely right. My bad. Here we go.” She pulled away from the curb. “But just for the record, you didn’t give me any slack when Jonathon and I were just friends.”

“Mmhmm yada ya,” Selena said, waving Octavia off.

The women rode through Chicago's eastside, headed for the highway. Selena wanted to keep her mind off of Jordan tonight. He hadn't called today, and she hadn't reached out to him either. Maybe he was keeping Madison warm, she thought, then bit down on her lip. Selena wasn't kidding herself. She hoped Jordan was caught up in the drama of a court case and not Madison's bed. The visualization of it ruffled her feathers and gave her an immediate attitude.

Selena sighed. She should've never put herself in this predicament. Just because Jordan's brothers had settled down didn't mean he would. Selena rolled her eyes at her audacity. Dumb, she thought again. As Octavia drove, Selena reached for the radio dial, needing to steer her mind in a different direction. She found a popular music station that was playing Bruno Mars and Cardi B's new song, "Finesse."

"Oh, that's my jam," Octavia said, increasing the volume.

Selena and Octavia rocked side to side to the beat as they tunneled down the road. Pulling down the visor, Selena checked her golden-brown foundation, finding it mixing perfectly with her bronze skin. She rubbed her lips together and puckered them in the mirror as she turned her head side to side to admire the blush on her high cheekbones. The mascara added the perfect shadow over her deep-set espresso eyes, and she posed as an alluring smile crept across her mouth. Tonight, instead of wearing color, her lips held a nude glossy sparkle that shone like a galaxy of stars. In her peripheral, Selena could see Octavia eyeing her.

"What is it?" Selena asked.

"I was going to compliment you on your glittery lip gloss. It's cute."

"Thanks."

"I also like the way your hair falls after you wrap it. What shampoo do you use

because you always have a bounce?”

Selena sat back, closed the visor, and glanced over at her friend.

“Is this your way of trying to make up to me for all of that judging you did a few minutes ago?”

Octavia twisted her lips. “Is it that obvious?”

Selena nodded. “Pretty much.”

Octavia sighed. “Is it working?”

“Maybe.”

That brought a smile to Octavia’s face. “Well, I’m being honest. I do like your shiny lip gloss, and your hair stays flawlessly straight.”

Selena smiled. “That’s because I use the creamy crack,” she said, referring to the relaxer she added to her hair every month faithfully.

At the mention of a perm, Octavia’s nose scrunched.

“Hey,” Selena said before Octavia could say anything about it. “You do what you like, and I do what I like. If I didn’t relax my hair, I’d be walking around here looking like Celie from *The Color Purple*.”

Octavia guffawed and turned into the parking lot of the Velvet Café.

“You would so not look like Celie.”

“Damn lie,” Selena responded.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

Octavia snorted out a laugh and held the steering wheel tight as she maneuvered into a parking spot at the same time someone else tried to take it. They parked and checked their appearances one last time before making their exit. When Octavia strolled around the car, Selena got a good look at her getup.

“You’re talking about me, look at you.” Selena placed her hands on her curvaceous hips. “You’re one of those hussies my mother always warned me about... leaving the house in that catsuit.”

“What?” Octavia said. “I’m covered completely. You on the other hand,” Octavia whistled as they sauntered closer to the entrance.

“Yeah, yeah, but your curves are putting a massive beat down on that outfit.” Octavia laughed as Selena chuckled. “Did your husband see you leave the house like that?”

“Nope, but he knows we’re going out for drinks.”

At the door, the bouncer didn’t even ask for ID, deciding they were racy enough to enter the lounge without it. The bouncer removed the rope and stepped to the side as Octavia and Selena made their way in. The lounge was supremely dark with pockets of light hanging over the bar, tables, and the stage. For a Tuesday night, Velvet Café held a crowd reminiscent of a Friday night. Taking their eyes around, Octavia and Selena noticed there were more women in attendance than men.

“Must be a girls’ night out,” Octavia said.

“I think this place has specific days for things, like Monday’s all you can eat,



Tuesday's buy one get one drinks, etcetera."

"In that case, we came on the right night," Octavia countered.

"True story," Selena said. "Let's grab that table to the left."

"I'm right behind you," Octavia said.

The women moved through the venue, turning heads of men and women as they sashayed to the table. Selena smiled and winked at a few leering men as they passed by. At the table, they removed their coats and tossed them over the third chair that would be unoccupied during their stay, and sat down, both crossing their legs simultaneously.

A jazz band played on stage, and the women sitting in the front row grooved in a waving lean back and forth in their seats.

"Jazz music moves me every time. I could certainly get used to hearing it," Octavia said.

"You and me both. We should make this a weekly ritual; a way to unwind for the week and take a load off."

"Speak for yourself. I don't have any unbearable loads at the moment."

Selena's hope-filled gleam dropped. "Okay, you're supposed to be supportive and say, yeah, girl, let's do it!"

Octavia laughed. "Then I wouldn't be honest."

Selena pursed her lips. "You're right. You dumped us enough to spend time with

Jonathon before he was your husband.”

Octavia laughed harder. “Well,” she panted, trying to catch her breath. “At least you know.”

Selena rolled her eyes.

“Are you hating?” Octavia asked.

“Just a little bit.”

Octavia guffawed again. “Have you talked to Jordan?”

“Hey, girl, how about those twin babies?” Selena said, avoiding the question.

“Really?” Octavia folded her arms. “Oh, okay, I see how it is, but just know, I’ll be getting in your business a lot more. I won’t let you rest much like you didn’t let me when I was under the gun.”

“What would Jesus do?” Selena countered, causing Octavia to laugh again.

“You’re a true piece of work, you know that?”

“I’ve been told a time or two.”

A waitress wearing black pants and a maroon shirt with the Velvet Café logo attached, strolled up to the table. Her hair hung straight to her chin, cutting off in sharp edges. She held a bright smile, and a maroon lipstick colored her lips.

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“Good evening, ladies,” the woman crooned. “I’m Dee-Dee, and I’ll be your server for tonight.”

“Good evening, Dee-Dee,” they both chimed.

The waitress smiled brightly. She went to speak again but paused and tapped her lip with an index finger. “Are you that woman who found the little girl last year?”

Selena let out a breath, happy that the woman wasn’t about to point her out for that fiasco in the Illinois Tribune.

“I actually didn’t find her,” Octavia said. “She saw my house on the news and showed up on my doorstep.”

Octavia was referring to Ayana Bradwell; a sixteen-year-old teenager who went missing for a few weeks around Thanksgiving. A full search party was put together to find the missing girl, but it was Ayana who showed up unexpectedly on the day the search ended.

“That must have been something, yeah?”

“Definitely.”

“How’s she doing now, if you don’t mind me asking?”

“Much better.”

Octavia didn't want to go into detail about Ayana's recovery. It was a private matter, and it wasn't Octavia's place to tell.

"That's good to hear. Would you ladies like to start off with some drinks?"

"Yes, what would you suggest?"

Dee-Dee shifted on her feet. "Well, I myself don't drink. Sober ten years strong now." She smiled.

"Congratulations," they both chimed.

"Thank you. However, most of the patrons here adore our special, Between the Sheets cocktail. Its orange juice, lemon juice, cognac, and rum mixed."

"Mmmm, that sounds like my kind of drink!" Selena crooned.

"Oh brother," Octavia said. "As if you need that."

"I beg your pardon? That's exactly what I need. I told you this earlier. Wouldn't you rather I have the mixed drink instead of the real thing?"

Selena glanced at Dee-Dee. "We'll take two Between the Sheets, thank you."

Dee-Dee chuckled. "I'll be right back with your first round." The waitress sauntered away.

"Did you hear that? She said with our first round. This must be why there are more women here tonight than men. They all know this is the place to be on Tuesday nights."

Octavia had to agree. “Let’s get back to the question I asked you.”

“You mean the one about the twins?”

Octavia pursed her lips and glared at Selena. “You know good and damn well I didn’t ask you about no twins.”

“But you do want to talk about them though. Say you don’t.”

Octavia smirked. “They are some cute little bundles.”

“An unexpected.”

“Right! It’s crazy that the doctor had no clue.”

“Do you really believe that?” Selena asked. “They wanted to keep the gender a secret so who’s to say the doctor didn’t know.”

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

“I mean, yeah, but I’m sure they wanted to know if they were having more than one baby.”

“It doesn’t surprise me. The Roses have twins and triplets in their family. And did you see the size of Samiyah’s belly? I’m telling you, there was a time or two when I wondered if she was carrying twins.”

Octavia agreed. “Me, too.”

The waitress came back with their drinks stacked on a tray that she effortlessly balanced in the palm of her hand. With a twist, Dee-Dee lowered the tray and with her free hand handed the drinks over.

“Two Between the Sheets cocktails,” she announced.

Octavia and Selena brightened at the light-colored alcoholic beverages.

“These look great,” Octavia said.

“Yes, and that was quick,” Selena added.

“Remember that when you leave your tip tonight,” Dee-Dee suggested, and the girls laughed.

“We will!” Octavia shouted.

Dee-Dee winked. “Do you need anything else? They’re cooking wings in the back.

Here's the menu." Dee-Dee grabbed a folded black patent slip that sat in the middle of the table.

"Give us a minute to look it over," Octavia said.

"Sure thing, I'll be back in a minute."

Dee-Dee left the table again, and Octavia flipped through the menu.

"Are you hungry?"

"Not really," Selena responded, glancing around the place.

The jazz band had been replaced with a DJ. When Beyoncé crooned through the speakers, Selena moved to the beat, picking up her drink to take a sip.

"Good evening, ladies."

Octavia and Selena glanced to their side to find a tall caramel brother with a close-cropped haircut, light brown eyes, and a full beard staring back at them.

Damn, he's fine, Selena thought. He reminded her of Luke Steele, one of Jordan's fraternity brothers, but she was sure this guy wasn't Luke. Their visitor smiled over at her and winked. "I'm Denzel," he said. "I couldn't help but notice you from across the room. My friend and I want to know if you ladies would like some company tonight."

Octavia and Selena glanced at a table a few rows over to Denzel's friend. He was another caramel brother with braids on his scalp, a thick nose, and a crescent smile on his face. He lifted his drink in salute, and the girls waved back. Denzel's friend was cute, but Denzel was the better looking of the two. Selena cleared her throat, but

Octavia responded before she could.

“I don’t think my husband would appreciate you fellas keeping us company. And her boyfriend probably wouldn’t either.”

Selena whipped her head around to Octavia.

“Oh, forgive me,” Denzel said. “The gorgeous ones are always taken.”

“You’ll have to excuse my friend,” Selena said. “She’s a little confused. I actually don’t have a boyfriend.”

This time Octavia turned to glare at Selena. A satisfactory smile gleamed from Denzel.

“In that case, do you mind if I have this dance?”

Selena rose from her seat and accepted his proffered hand. “Not at all.”

Selena didn’t bother glancing back at Octavia as Denzel walked her around the table to the dance floor.



### Chapter Eight

Once Selena and Denzel made it to the dance floor, Denzel slipped his arms around Selena's waist, and she in turn slid her arms around his neck as they moved in a soft wine.

"I didn't catch your name," Denzel said. There was alcohol on his breath. It was strong as if he'd been drinking most of the night.

"Selena."

"Like the Latin songstress," he responded.

Selena laughed. "I think she was Mexican-American and Cherokee, but yes, that's the one."

"It fits you, nicely."

Selena blushed. "Thank you. I bet you tell all the girls that."

"Not when it's something like Bonquisha."

Selena threw her head back and laughed, and a chuckle cruised from Denzel.

"So, Selena, your friend back there seems to think you have a boyfriend."

"Mmhmm," she said, settling her laughter.

“But you don’t?”

Selena hesitated. “I’m dating someone, but that’s about it.”

Denzel swept an eye over Selena. “And he hasn’t locked you down yet?” Denzel asserted. “It’s about to be his loss.”

Selena smirked. “Why? Because you’re going to?”

Denzel licked his lips. “You sound as if that’s a foreign thing. I mean, me taking you off the market.”

“You don’t even know me. I could be a gold digger.”

Denzel cracked another smile. “True, but somehow I don’t think that’s your thing.”

“Hmm.” Selena almost rolled her eyes. This guy was so smooth with his game she almost believed him.

“How long have you been single, Selena?”

“Apparently, too long,” a thick ominous voice behind them snarled.

Selena whipped around, and her whole body encompassed a surge of heat as her eyes met Jordan’s dark piercing gaze. It ripped right through her clothes, driving down to her center as his dynamic sparkling brown orbs danced over her shapely curves in a way that told Selena she would never belong to another. His masculine spicy scent drifted over to her, consuming her as she stood frozen.

Seeing Jordan reminded Selena of just how insanely beautiful this man was. His six-foot-three frame, with muscles ripping through his commanding physique, caused

more chills to colonize over Selena's skin than when pressurized heat met kernel popcorn. His transition from the suit and tie combination Jordan usually wore to this laid-back, snugly fit gray sweater, dark denim jeans, and black timberland boots gave him a roguish New York state of mind kind of look. Just a glimpse of him sent Selena's nerves into a frenzy, and she needed a reminder to blink, breathe, and respond before she collapsed where she stood.

Selena was thoroughly transfixed, drinking up his strapping build like it would behoove her not to. The excellent way his toned thighs whispered against his denim and the perfectly aligned collar of his boot welcomed the outer edges of his jeans was so devilishly sexy Selena's throat dried. Dayum!

Jordan's gaze lingered around her feet, then trailed back from her sharp high heels, fishnet stockings, and hovered right around her groin. He eye-fucked her; unmistakably branding Selena with an unflinching, virile trademark.

"Hey, gorgeous," his dark voice grooved. He stepped in and slipped a hand around her waist, pulling Selena away from Denzel into the solid expanse of his chest.

Up close and personal, Selena tried to swallow, but the dryness of her throat was scratching. Forgetting that she was dancing with Denzel, Selena smiled and blinked softly while trying to comprehend where he'd come from.

"Hey..." Selena said, attempting to find some semblance of words.

"You don't mind if I interrupt your date, do you?"

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

The question didn't really need an answer since Jordan had no intentions of letting her go. That snapped Selena right out of her coma.

"He's not my date," she said hurriedly.

Jordan peered at her. "No?"

Denzel decided this was the time for him to speak up. "Na'll, she wasn't, but she's about to be."

Jordan arched a menacing brow over at Denzel. The threatening look made Selena shudder, and suddenly she was afraid for Denzel's safety.

"I don't think I was addressing you, young man." Jordan's gaze glowered at Denzel. "Didn't your father teach you never to speak when grown folks are talking?"

Oh shit.

Selena turned quickly toward Denzel and shook her head, giving him fair warning not to proceed down this path. If Jordan was anything like his brothers, a brawl would most certainly leave Denzel in the hospital and Jordan fighting off a lawsuit. Selena didn't want to cause that kind of disarray; the media would have a field day. Besides that, she would feel horrible. Without giving Denzel a chance to heed her caution, Selena gripped Jordan's hand and pulled him off the dance floor to the farthest corner of the room.

As she pulled him over, Jordan watched the bounce of her bodacious bottom and

curve of her winding hips. He pulled his lips between his teeth and blew out a simmering breath.

When he'd gotten the call from his brother Jonathon that Selena and Octavia were going out for drinks, Jordan took the opportunity to meet up with her, wanting to be near Selena again. He'd been stuck on conference calls and in meetings all day. After the hellish night Phoebe had, she too was bound to the office trying to clear out cases that were in desperate need of closing. But Jordan missed Selena, and he noticed that with each new day, his craving for her increased. It was interestingly insane and jubilantly welcomed at the same time.

Last night when he left her house, he could sense an attitude waving off her. The problem with Selena was she didn't want to discuss things with him, and Jordan wasn't a man to force anything on anyone. That didn't stop him from wishing like hell she would confide in him. But Jordan had reminded himself that when Selena was ready, she would.

Turning on her heels, Selena smiled up at him, and the hijacking of his heartbeat was titillating to say the least.

"He wasn't my date," Selena reiterated. "I came here with Octavia, and he asked me to dance."

Jordan ran his tongue across his pearly white teeth and sucked air through them as his eyes covered her again. Selena shivered and slipped closer to him, sealing their bodies so tightly together she felt the beginning of a solid hard-on pushing against her belly. Oh fuck.

"Don't do that again," Jordan's dark voice beat.

Selena arched a brow and folded her arms, removing their closeness by just an inch as

she stepped back into a hip. “Do what exactly,” she challenged.

Jordan knew he was on a slippery slope, but he didn’t care one iota.

“I thought we had a thing going here, Selena.” Her name off his tongue melted her flesh, but she held firm.

“Me, too,” she said.

“Then why does Bozo the Clown think you’re single?”

Selena blinked rapidly; her mind in a swirl trying to make sure they didn’t officially claim each other. When she found no such conversation, she replied, “I wasn’t aware that I’m not. We’re dating. People date multiple people all the time.”

“Is that what you want?”

Hell no. “It’s whatever.” Selena shrugged.

Jordan cocked his head to the side and peered at her. “It’s whatever?”

Selena backtracked. “I mean, I’m having a good time getting to know you, Jordan, but I don’t plan to be exclusive to you if you’re going to see other people.”

Jordan wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her closer, his smooth brown lips hovering just over Selena’s. Her mouth parted on a soft gasp as Jordan rubbed the tip of his nose against hers.

“But I’m not seeing anyone else, gorgeous. It’s just you.”

Selena’s heart swelled, and her throat clogged. A waitress passed them, and Selena

quickly reached out.

“Yes, ma’am,” the waitress said, turning back to Selena.

“Can I have a Between the Sheets cocktail, please? And a glass of Brandy for my guy here.”

“Sure thing.”

“That’s more like it,” Jordan said, taking possession of Selena’s mouth.

A soft moan slipped from her lips as the heat from their mouths sizzled against their flesh. Jordan’s hands cruised down her back and squeezed her ass, pushing an unquenchable heat to her pussy.

“Mmmm,” she moaned, and Jordan coached her back into the wall, sealing her there as he removed his arms and placed them on both sides of her head. They pulled apart, slowly, staring into each other’s soul; breaths mingling and heat wafting around them.

“I missed you today,” he said.

Selena bit down on her lip. “I missed you, too.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t call. It’s been hectic these first two months of the new year.”

“You don’t have to explain. I know your work is important... AND you’re a Rose. Everybody who’s anybody wants to be a part of your winning team.”

Jordan smiled. “Yeah, but that isn’t an excuse. I don’t want you to think I’m neglecting you. And this idea you have that I’m seeing other people, where did it come from?”

Selena hesitated. She wasn’t sure if she was being paranoid or not, but addressing Madison could be problematic. She sighed.



“Talk to me, sweetheart,” his thick voice grooved.

“I know you talk to other women since,” she paused, “I’ve seen them call your phone. You and I have a good thing, but it doesn’t tell me where we stand.”

Jordan pushed a kiss against her forehead.

“How about this,” he said. “I have only one burning desire within me. And it’s for you, Selena Strauss.”

Selena squirmed, and her hands roamed up the solid wall of his abs. Jordan’s gaze dropped as their connection roasted him from her touch. When Selena’s hands met his heated neck, she tightened her fingers and pulled him in.

“Then I guess you belong to me then,” she whispered against his mouth. “No takebacks.” She smiled.

Jordan smirked and sank his mouth to hers. They moaned as their lips shifted and sucked one another together, coated in a stream of longing. Pulling back on a pant, Jordan added, “That means no more dancing with other men, lest I turn into an animal and someone calls wildlife management,” his deep voice throttled.

A risqué laugh escaped Selena, and Jordan’s heart knocked at the erotic sound and exquisite curve of her lips.

“You have a beautiful smile,” he said.

“Thank you, so do you.”

“Hmm, you think so?”

Jordan paused and struck a pose, turning his head to the side, front, then the other side. Selena laughed, and Jordan snuggled his face into her neck, inhaling her scent mixed with the sweet fragrance she wore.

“Your drinks, ma’am, sir.” The waitress stood idly next to them. For a minute, the waitress didn’t know if she should interrupt them or not, but watching was making her painstakingly jealous. She’d been single since man discovered the earth was round, and Jordan and Selena were making her sick.

Jordan pulled back far enough to take their drinks off the waitress’ hands. With a drawn-out sip, Selena sighed victoriously at the cool but warm way the mixed drink drizzled through her.

“Good?” Jordan asked.

“Very.” She wiggled her eyebrows.

Jordan chuckled. “How did you know Brandy was my favorite drink?”

“Because that’s all you have when we’re together.”

“Hmmm.”

Selena smirked.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

“Tomorrow, I’d like to take you out. What does your schedule look like?”

Selena thought about the date. It was Valentine’s Day. A blushing smile curved her lips. “The usual. Working, then home. But the real question is, what does your schedule look like?”

“Honestly, I have a full day ahead of me. But, I’m canceling it all to spend the day with you.”

Selena’s eyes lurched. “Can you do that,” she asked, surprised.

A grin stretched across his luscious lips.

“Of course. I own the joint.”

Selena giggled and took a sip of her cocktail. “I see, Mr. CEO,” she said, batting her eyes.

“And don’t you forget it, girl.”

Jordan took back the rest of his Brandy.

“More?” Selena asked.

“More of you.”

The beat changed from the soft jazz melody to a reggae beat. Jordan sat his glass on

the bar's counter and grabbed Selena's hand, pulling her enticingly away from the corner. Selena took a final sip of her cocktail then sat it next to his abandoned glass as she allowed him to coach her to the dance floor. When they arrived, Jordan grabbed her other hand and slipped Selena's arms around his shoulders before taking her whole around the waist.

Selena's body trembled with a vibration that shook her nerves and tingled her spine as Jordan's masculine hands sailed down her back, and hips, covering Selena's body like a multilayered cloak. Selena began to move, chasing the beat of the Jamaican sound. Her hips rotated side to side, and Jordan stuck with her groove, following every sway of her soft twists. Holding Selena close, Jordan sank his nose back against the crook of her neck, causing Selena's eyes to falter.

Damn, she wanted this man bad; in her bed, in her life, in every aspect of her existence. Her mind slipped to her parents, and she cringed. Her thoughts jumbled, playing back and forth; telling her it was possible to love someone for a lifetime while denying it in the same thought. It had become Selena's vice, and a part of her wondered if it was fair to continue moving forward knowing there was a possibility of their demise.

Fact was, Selena didn't want to spend her life with a man to only separate years later. The one thing she couldn't get back was time. So should she spend that hoping they could fall in love and stay in that place? Or was she so naïve that even this dance was a figment of her imagination? Selena's thoughts tossed and swayed. Jordan twirled her and pulled her back into his front. The connection of her ass to his pelvis sent a shockwave through them both in a downpour of heat that surged through their bodies.

Selena shut her eyes and let out a soft breath. This man was so hypnotically intoxicating it should be a sin. And if for whatever reason it was, it was the sweetest sin she'd ever endured in all her life. Jordan's hands rested against her hips as they grooved together. His magnificent lips skipped down her neck and sank into her

flesh. Selena yelped when his sharp teeth pricked her skin. It sent a tunnel of heat traveling through her that covered her nipples and caused a sudden drip to coax from her pussy into the seat of her panties.

She panted. Actually, huffed and puffed as if she'd been taken on a ride so riveting it made her dizzy. If he could do that from a mere dance, Selena could only imagine what he could do between the sheets. That made her nerves spiral with excitement and anticipation.

The song changed, and Selena twirled back around to face him.

“Look what you did...” he said, glancing down at his jeans.

Selena didn't need to look to know. She'd felt that monster poking at her backside throughout that dance. Selena sucked her teeth.

“This we can fix,” she said suggestively.

Jordan's gaze receded into a nocturnal shade.

“I hope you two don't mind if I interrupt for a second,” Octavia said, coming to stand by their side.

They heard her, but neither of them moved their eyes away as they continued to mull over Selena's insinuation.

“Wassup?” Jordan said.

“I need to corner my girl for a minute,” Octavia replied. “I promise to bring her back before you can blink.”

It was then that Selena glanced at her friend. Octavia's lips were pursed with an eyebrow raised. Just then, Jonathon slapped Jordan on the back then tossed an arm around his neck.

"Take a walk with me, brother," he said.

It was like taking candy from a baby, trying to pull the pair apart as neither of them wanted to leave each other's side.

"I'll be back," Jordan said, reaching out to tweak her chin.

Selena blushed and nodded silently, unable to find words that would compete with the fluttering conundrum in her chest. Jonathon pulled Jordan away, and Octavia stepped in front of Selena with her arms crossed, breaking through Selena's fog.

"Sooo," Octavia drawled, "what was that you were saying about being single?"

### Chapter Nine

Selena pursed her lips. “Did you break up our moment to come over here and say I told you so?”

Octavia shrugged. “Yeah,” she admitted, chuckling.

Selena shook her head with a leering smirk. “First of all,” she started, “where the hell did they come from?”

Selena turned to find Jordan and Jonathon. They stood at the bar engaged in a separate conversation.

“I told you when we came in here, Jonathon knew we were having drinks tonight.”

“Yeah, but you didn’t say you told him where, when, and what time, girl.”

“What’s the problem? Looks like you and Mr. Googly Eyes are doing just fine.”

“Yeah, after he caught me dancing with somebody else. That just felt deceptive.”

“I tried to stop you. Oh, but no, you wouldn’t listen to little ol’ me.”

“If you had told me there was a chance of them showing up, then I would have listened.”

“No, you wouldn’t. You know why? Because Selena had a chip on her shoulder.”

Octavia mocked. “I take it you asked him about Madison.”

When Selena didn’t respond, Octavia let out a heavy sigh. “Tell me you did.”

“Not exactly.”

Octavia’s eyes bucked. “Seriously, Selena, the only way you’ll feel better about what you guys are doing is if you ask the question.”

“I said not exactly,” Selena repeated then huffed. “If you must know—”

“Yes, I must know, as much as you were in my business...” Octavia mumbled.

“God, you are not going to let me live that down, are you?”

“You already know the answer to that.”

Selena sighed. “Okay, I get it, so here goes. We are officially exclusive... I think.”

“Sa-lenaaa,” Octavia groaned.

Selena giggled. “I’m just kidding, seriously. We are.”

Octavia twisted her lips. She peered at Selena as Selena continued to chuckle.

“Seriously,” Selena echoed. “I wouldn’t lie to you.”

The overhead lights dimmed as the owner of the club, Ms. Tamara Jenkins, strolled to the microphone in the middle of the stage. She was a sixty-four-year-old spicy woman, with a bob cut hairstyle that was jet black with a single lock of gray driving down the middle. She smiled demurely then spoke through the mic; her throaty voice



purring across the room.

“Good evening.”

Everyone responded, “Good evening.”

The woman clasped her hands together. “I want to thank you all for being in attendance tonight. For two hours every Tuesday and Wednesday, we open the mic to any lovers, poets, or the like to get a few words off their chest.” The owner took her eyes around the room. “Is there anybody out there...” she crooned.

Selena pulled her attention back to Octavia just as a small leering smile crept across her lips.

“Don’t even think about it,” Selena said, knowing what Octavia was thinking.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

Selena had put her writing tools away to focus on a degree that would offer her financial freedom, which is why she was now a successful financial advisor. Playing with words, regardless of how deep-rooted they flowed, didn't pay the bills at the end of the day. But just as Octavia went to speak, a deep voice thundered through the mic.

"This is dedicated to someone... who is as candied on the inside as she is on the out." Selena whipped around to stare at him in awe. Jordan paused. "I call it à la mode." The mellow tune of a saxophone filled the room as Jordan took his eyes over the sea of people then back to rest on Selena. He hadn't even spoken a word yet, and already her heartbeat accelerated double time as he cleared his throat. The audience tuned in becoming deathly silent.

"A temptress in your own right

Unforgettable; a saccharine delight

Coated with a fragrance that hypnotizes me

Only, to keep me up at midnight

Images of you replay through my mind

Soft, warm, divine...

The absence of your presence has me lost in a rhyme

Wanting, needing, a lifetime

Is it possible to have someone so sublime?

Caressing my soul even at bedtime

The celestial creation of your sound, body, and mind

Keeps me locked inside your paradigm

Let's not pretend to be just fine

Come home with me girl, let's unwind

Because the fever that burns within me is an extension of you and everything that we must do

Shake off your doubts and fears sweetheart, it's time you let me love you."

The crowd snapped, and whistles scoured from women in the crowd. Spellbound, Selena couldn't blink as she followed the motion of Jordan's lips as he continued.

Sweet as honey

Dessert overflowed

Coffee brown sugar; à la mode."

The crowd was buzzing, and a throbbing between Selena's legs damn near knocked her over. He was a fan of spoken word; not only that, a nurturer of the language. Selena's heart bumped against her breast, and she could feel her pulse quicken. As she stood there, stuck, Jordan left the stage and strolled over to her as more whistles and snaps elevated. Envious stares and whispers went throughout as every eye in the

place followed his path.

When he paused in front of her, Selena could only stare at him, amazed. She should've known. They'd been dating for almost two months now, and his patterns had all the makings of a poet. She was in love. It was official. The feeling was so unexpected she could cry. Not from sadness, but from reserved happiness coupled by an unrestrained fear. Selena didn't want to think about the possibilities of their failure; didn't want to allude to the fear of loving him only to lose him. She wanted to toss those anxieties to the side and never consider them again.

“Come home with—”

“Yes,” she said quickly before he could get the words out. Selena didn't want to think about it. There were no more calculations to be added in that moment. Jordan had finally done what she wanted, and his invitation was fully accepted.

A smile formed on his spectacular lips, and he pulled her in and kissed Selena's mouth. A spiraling jolt cruised around them, sending shards of heat across their skin. Selena's hands sailed up Jordan's arms and sank into his neck. She gripped him and kissed him hungrily, and Jordan responded with fervor.

“You're still on the dance floor...” a nearby voice called.

Selena smiled against his lips, and her open mouth gave Jordan an invitation to consume her further. His tongue traveled down her throat, hot, spicy, and wet. Immediately, Selena closed her mouth around his slippery soft muscle, and they both moaned together.

A throat cleared, and Selena blinked, lost in her own state of abandon. Slowly, Jordan pulled back, but his hands stayed plucked into the skin of Selena's back.

“Girl,” he said, “you trying to take advantage of me on the dance floor?”

He peered at her conspiratorially, and Selena giggled.

“Maybe,” she admitted.

A rumble trekked from Jordan. “Maybe I am, too,” he said.

Finally, giving them some attention, Selena and Jordan glanced over at Octavia and Jonathon standing next to them in a sweet cuddle of their own. Jonathon reached out, and he and Jordan slapped hands.

“That was nice, brother. Real nice.”

“I guess you’re next then, huh?” Octavia quipped.

“Yeah, let me go on up here and romance your fine ass from the stage.”

Octavia and Selena laughed while Jordan chuckled.

“Now this I’ve got to see,” Jordan said.

“Nah, I’m just playing. But I know somewhere else I can romance you,” Jonathon said.

They all laughed again.

“There’s no better time like the present,” Octavia said.

Jonathon looked at his brother. “Ayo, we’re going to get on out of here, we both have work in the morning.”

Jordan laughed. “Aye, man, you don’t have to make up anything to go spend time with your woman. We were getting ready to ditch ya’ll anyway.”

The couples laughed, and they all strolled from the dance floor to the table where the men helped the ladies put on their coats. Leisurely, Jordan tossed an arm around Selena’s shoulder as they strolled to the exit.

Outside, the wind was in an uproar, tussling and whirling around, causing the women to snuggle into their jackets. Jordan turned to Selena and swept her off her feet like a husband would carry his wife over the threshold. He ran across the street with Selena giggling and her arms draped across his neck as her lips pressed into his throat. The heat from her mouth tingled his spine and made his dick pitch.

Selena had been doing things to his body, mind, and spirit ever since he met her. Jordan considered himself lucky in the past; having no selfish relationships, and no hard break-ups. He was unlike most of his brothers and friends- the one who kept to himself, studied profusely, questioned politicians, and stood on the sidelines with his sister Jasmine when it came to equal opportunities. He had relationships here and there, but they were never serious. The women he’d dated weren’t high profile, keeping his relationships a secret from the media.

Until he met Madison Santari. It happened on a rare occasion while Jordan, Quentin, and Derek vacationed at The Hamptons in New York.

Jordan was laying on a beach towel with a shine on his bulging chocolate biceps and tight muscled abs. Sunglasses were strewn across his eyes when Madison walked up,

hovering over Jordan like a ghost.

“Mr. Rose,” she crooned.

Jordan opened his eyes and looked at her from behind his shades.

“I seemed to have run out of suntan lotion. Do you mind sharing some of yours?” She motioned to the lotion sitting next to him in the sand. “I promise not to walk away with it. Matter of fact, you can apply it. That way you’re guaranteed not to lose it.”

Jordan smirked, as if it would kill him to lose a bottle of suntan lotion. He didn’t usually give in to flirtation tactics such as this, but that day he was feeling indifferent. So on a whim, Jordan offered Madison a sexy boastful smile as his eyes took in her light skin, small breasts, bare stomach, and barely-there thong. It was his damn libido that responded to her well-rounded thighs and optimistic smile.

“Why don’t you come sit right here?” he’d said, and the rest was history. That was a year ago. Since then, Madison found herself in his circle more often than ever. As if she could sense he was dating, she’d begun to call on a regular basis. Their conversations were always light, some type of charity work that needed volunteers, or a project that Jordan could be an asset too. It seemed friendly enough, which was why he continued to take her calls. But sometimes those calls came at the wrong time, like the night before when he and Selena were together. Jordan wasn’t fooled by Selena’s sudden attitude, but he wasn’t accustomed to fighting outside of the courtroom. So, without going into it, he left without another word about it.

Unlocking the door, Jordan placed Selena inside his Porsche Panamera and closed the door quickly. The wind continued to whip as he strode around the luxury vehicle to the driver side. The car rocked slightly when he closed the door, and the engine purred when Jordan turned it over. Instantly, heat sailed from the vents, and Selena snuggled into the warmed seats.

“I’ve always loved a car with heated seats,” she said.

“Your car doesn’t have heated seats?”

“Yeah if you tape a heating pad on the back and butt of the interior. But then I’d need a car charger for it to work properly.”

Jordan’s easy-grooving voice dipped into a thunderous laugh. Selena snickered and watched him chuckle at her joke. He was so easy on the eyes, and his spirit was so attractive. Selena loved the way he carried himself. Jordan reached over and caressed her chin.



*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:06 am*

“Silly girl,” he said, reaching around Selena to shelter her with the seat belt. Jordan exited the parking lot, and he and Jonathon blew their horns as they passed each other going in opposite directions.

“I didn’t know you were into poetry. What else don’t I know about you?” Selena asked.

Jordan cracked a smile. “I have a foot fetish,” he said.

This intrigued Selena for sure.

“Now that’s something a girl should absolutely know.”

Jordan chuckled. “How should I have come out and said it?”

After Selena pondered on it, she said, “You’re right, that would’ve been a little crazy to say, I love feet.”

Jordan laughed heartily again while simultaneously nodding.

“Right...” he drawled.

“So that means I get to see your feet then?”

Jordan quirked a brow up at her. “How’s that?”

“Anyone who has a foot fetish must have spectacular toes.”

Jordan guffawed again. “I guess I’ll let you be the judge of that.”

Selena nodded. “Mmhmm. We’ve got something in common, Mr. Rose.”

Jordan perked. “Yeah, what’s that. You like toes, too?”

“Not exactly. I have a shoe fetish. That runs a close second, doesn’t it?”

Jordan guffawed again and slipped his hand in her lap to massage her thigh as he chuckled. The warmth from his heated palm sent a blaze of energy coursing down her lap straight to the sensitive flesh between her thighs. Selena squeezed her legs tight, and her nipples tingled.

The couple made it across town in no time as Jordan’s Porsche Panamera pushed past the speed limits.

“Careful, counselor,” Selena crooned. “If you don’t slow down, you might get a ticket.”

Jordan pulled his bottom lip with his teeth. “That would be despicable,” he joked. “Could you see the outrage? ‘Celebrity Attorney, Jordan Alexander Rose was pulled over for a speeding ticket late last night. He was apparently leaving a club where he’d drank booze and dragged a woman to his home while inebriated’.”

Selena laughed, and Jordan winked.

“That’s how they sound, right?” he asked.

“Man, oh man, you’re so spot on. My mother called me today at work. She almost died that the newspaper called us police vigilantes.” Selena shook her head. “Who comes up with this stuff? Do they even know what a vigilante is?”

“Apparently not,” Jordan’s voice grew serious. “Don’t worry about that, I’m handling it.” Jordan heard the solemnness in her voice when Selena spoke about her parents.

“Thank you,” Selena said. “I hope it’s not too much trouble. My mother was all ready to sue everyone in Chicago for running those stories.”

“Smart woman,” Jordan countered. “How is she?”

Selena sighed. “She said my father is staying at the Ritz Carlton.” Selena’s somber expression deepened. “He showed up minutes after I spoke with her, and we got into it.”

Jordan reached out, taking a soothing hand up and down her shoulder. “Baby, I’m sorry you’re going through this.”

Selena offered a tiny smile. She hadn’t missed his endearment, but the subject matter was so depressing Selena couldn’t rejoice in it.

“My father is saying the same things my mother is, and it’s driving me bananas. I don’t know how to cope. Is this normal?” She glanced over at him, and Jordan reached for her hand and entangled their fingers.

“Certainly,” he said.

“I’m constantly thinking I’m wrong for feeling as if I’m drowning.” Selena shook her head. “Maybe I should see a therapist or something.”

“I know someone who could help.”

Selena held her eyes on him. “A therapist?”

Jordan nodded. “She’s a gem.”

“Have you ever been in therapy before?”

Jordan became quiet as his thoughts shuffled.

“Yes.” He squeezed her hand lightly. “It was a long time ago when I couldn’t cope with my mother’s absence.”

That was putting it mildly, Selena thought. The first time she’d heard about Jordan’s mom being killed in a home invasion, Selena was shocked. Who would do such a thing and why? The worst part about it all was everyone was home at the time of the murder except for Jordan’s father. Christopher Lee Rose had been at work, and Selena was sure he most likely felt most of the blame. But Jordan and his brothers were kids, and his sisters merely newborns. It was a blessing the intruders left them alive with the brutal way his mother was shot down.

This time, Selena squeezed Jordan’s hand. They had more in common than she knew,

no matter how opposite their personalities were.

“Home sweet home,” Jordan sang.

Selena took her gaze from his handsome face to the high-rise industrial loft, and her eyes bulged. Since they’d been dating, Selena had never gone to his home because they were both always on the go; Jordan more so than Selena.

“Wow, this is all you?” Selena inquired.

“Yeah, it’s pretty swanky,” he said.

“I bet. I’m ready to call it home already,” she joked.

Jordan kept his eyes on Selena. “No takebacks.”

### Chapter Ten

They had to take an outside elevator just to get inside. Selena had never seen anything structurally built like Jordan's home before. After stepping into the elevator, Jordan grabbed her hand and linked their fingers again. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a key that fit the lock against the elevator wall. The lock opened, revealing a keypad where he then entered a code and simultaneously it asked him to speak.

"Jordan Alexander Rose," his thick voice grounded out.

The system accepted his voice, and they rode to the penthouse floor.

"Security is no joke, huh?"

Jordan smirked. "I was fine with just a code, but my brother, Jacob, built this place, and he's a bit anal about security."

"Wait, your brother Jacob built this place, seriously?"

"Yeah, he's the architect of the bunch." Jordan smirked at the amazement on Selena's face. Within a few seconds, they reached their destination. When Jordan turned Selena around to face the back of the elevator, the doors receded, and they stepped out onto hardwood floors that shone like they'd just been pristinely buffed.

"Whoa," Selena murmured; she tried to keep her mouth closed, but the magnificence of the room swept her away.

Natural moonlight crept through the wall of windows dashing across the floorboards and countertops. The living room held a massive architectural fireplace, modern furnishings, and a chandelier was competing next to the fireplace for the centerpiece of the room.

“Jordan, this is beautiful...” Selena said, staring at the crystals dangling from the chandelier.

He enjoyed watching her admire the space. Selena appeared giddy with excitement, and he loved to see her smile.

“Do you live here alone? I mean, this place has to be about—”

“Four thousand square feet,” he stated matter of fact.

Selena’s mouth opened wider.

“And of course, I live here alone. But the building does have two other occupants on the first two floors below.

“Wait don’t tell me.” She held her arms out to stop his revelation. “Beyoncé and Pharrell, am I right?”

Jordan laughed. “No, silly girl.” He strolled up to her and wrapped her in his arms.

“Are you sure because I can’t imagine anyone else can afford this.”

“Neither of them pays rent, if that’s what you mean. I own the entire loft, but my chef lives on the second floor, and my fitness trainer on the third.”

Selena nodded slowly. “Because you don’t have time to cook your own food,” she

said.

“Or, visit a regular gym,” he finished.

Selena chuckled. “Damn, must be nice.”

Jordan shrugged. “It’s all right. The more you’re around, the more you’ll get used to it.”

Selena pointed to herself. “Me, you’re talking about me, right?”

Jordan chuckled. “Of course.” He leaned in to kiss her on the cheek, and Selena shivered.

“Come on, you haven’t seen the rest of the place.”

He took her hand and gave Selena a tour of the remaining conservatory as Selena gawked at each new area they entered. The office was bigger than Selena’s office at work; she didn’t know whether to feel shame or awe.

“I could positively work in here,” she said, taking her eyes around the large cherry oak desk, plush shaggy carpet, Barcelona chairs, and an aerial bookshelf.

“Oooh, I envy your bookshelf,” she said, watching how the cherry oak design spanned the length of the wall completely. “Have you read all of these books,” she asked, strolling up to the mantelpiece.



“Yes, ma’am.”

Selena walked the tips of her fingers across the books as she eyed each one to see what Jordan had been reading. Among them were a few classics. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. *Dreams from My Father* by Barak Obama. *Devil in A Blue Dress* by Walter Moseley.

Selena strolled, continuing to eye the books as Jordan watched her. Feeling his eyes following her movements sent a tingling up her spine and instantly Selena warmed. She unbuttoned the jacket and pulled out of it just as Jordan approached to help.

“Thank you,” Selena said, shrugging out of the thick coat.

“Anytime, love.”

His voice was so close to her ear Selena squirmed from his proximity.

“Are you hungry?”

Now that he mentioned it, Selena was a little hungry, but her appetite for him was a bit more edacious.

“What do you have?”

“Whatever you want.”

Selena turned to him then, taking her eyes away from the books.

“Whatever I want?” she said with a raised brow. “Are you telling me that your chef will cook at whatever time you call?”

Jordan seemed amused.

“It’s not that late.” He glanced at his Rolex. “A little after ten.”

Just then, Selena’s stomach growled, making Jordan chuckle.

“See all this talking about food has my stomach reacting to the possibility of a home-cooked meal. And eating this late is sure to put some extra weight on my thighs.”

Jordan ran a wicked eye over Selena, making sure to touch her with his all-pervading gaze. “Trust me, Selena,” he moved forward and slipped his arms around her waist, “nothing about what you just said makes me want to deny you food. Tell me exactly what you desire, and it will be yours.”

Selena swallowed down an involuntary quiver. If this man didn’t stop, she would take him up on everything he had to offer. Selena was not the coy type of girl.

“I have no idea, surprise me,” she said.

“Okay, so you don’t like green peppers, onions, or fish,” he said, remembering a conversation they had over the phone.

Selena smiled, delighted that Jordan recalled that exchange. It seemed like one of the smallest things to consider, but it warmed her inside all the same. “Awe, you listened to me.”

Jordan paused. “You didn’t think I did?”

Selena laughed. “Sometimes the details are easily forgettable.”

“Not when you’re interested in what the speaker has to say,” he quipped. They smiled at each other.

“Well, yeah, you are a good listener.”

He kissed the side of her temple then pulled back, moving swiftly across the room. At his desk, he lifted the phone and punched a three-number combo then waited.

“Hey, Charley, are you busy?”

He listened to his personal chef’s response.

“Starved,” he said, keeping a fierce eye trained on Selena.

She squirmed under his vulturine gaze and wondered if Jordan meant her when he referenced starvation.

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“We’ll keep it light,” Jordan said. “Perfect. Thank you.” Jordan sat the phone back on its base. “Come,” he closed the distance and reached for Selena’s hand, tightening his fingers with hers to pull Selena along. “You’ve yet to see the best room in the house.”

Affectionately, Selena slipped under his arm. They left the office and strolled down a hallway with more hardwood flooring. Picture frames sat along the tan interior wall like canvases in a museum. As they passed, Selena noticed a few familiar faces. Jordan’s brothers, sisters, and father were among some of them. Others were pictures of Jordan with businessmen; some at events where he’d been given a pro bono and public service award.

Selena’s steps paused. “How often are you assigned to a pro bono case,” she asked.

“Assigned?”

“Let me take that back, boss man.”

“It has a nice ring to it, doesn’t it?”

Selena laughed. “The question is how often do you take on pro bono cases?”

“At Rose and Garnett, we’ve set a limit of twenty-five pro bono cases a year.”

Selena nodded as their steps continued down the corridor.

“Do you get a lot of requests for those type of cases?”

“Plenty.”

“Who decides which ones to take?”

“It varies on a case-by-case basis. First and foremost, we look at income. If the defendant is someone who could afford us without a problem, we reach out to them and allow them to hire us as their attorneys. If they can’t afford us, we look at the subject matter. Cases involving children get priority, then everything else. Rose and Garnet is a diverse firm. Our lawyers specialize in family law, corporate, civil rights, criminal, and entertainment law. It’s the number one reason our client list is the leading and most prominent in Chicago.

“Sounds like a one-stop shop.”

“Something like that,” he said.

They made a left and stepped into the master suite. Selena’s eyes lurched. The area was gigantic in size and looked like something out of a Better Homes and Garden magazine. Jordan released Selena’s hand as she moved slowly into the room, her feet sinking into the lavish carpet. She traveled over to the lounge area that boasted modern clean-lined furniture, another fireplace, luxury fixtures, tables, lamps and the like. Jordan flipped a switch, and instead of overhead lighting, sconces sat along the wall, illuminating the room with an iridescent glow. Selena’s mouth hung partly open as she took in the grandiosity of the room.

“Have mercy,” she said, planting her hands on her hips. She pivoted quickly on her heels. “Do you actually use this room?”

Jordan smirked. “Every day.”

Selena shook her head. “There’s no way you live here every day.”

Jordan folded his arms. “Why not?”

Selena took a finger and swiped the edges of a table. “There’s not a single speck of dust in here. Where are the shoes you left by the table, or the coffee mug sitting on the ring from this morning before you left to go to work, or the loads of paper you were going over from a case while being at home?” She paused. “I guess my real question is, where is your sign of life in this room?”

Jordan was thoughtful of Selena’s inquiry. “So, because I don’t have things sitting out of place, it looks like no one lives here?”

Selena backpedaled just a bit. “I don’t mean it should be messy, don’t get me wrong, but my goodness, there’s no sign that an actual person lives here.”

“I have a housekeeper,” he said. “She’s amazing.”

“She?”

Jordan nodded; the smirk on his face, unwavering. Selena was all for equal opportunity, but she didn’t want another female in his house. Selena didn’t care if she was sixty years old. Women didn’t stop flirting, functioning or having a sex life because they got older.

“Mmmm,” Selena said. She began to stroll again, walking through another door that opened the area even wider. A gasp left her lips, more floor to ceiling glass walls. Even the master bathroom was blocked by a glass partition. The drapery and design of the interior turned into a cozy sanctuary. The maroon and gold colors set a sexy atmosphere, and just when Selena didn’t think the room could be outdone, she spotted the showpiece. The bed.

Massive in size, Selena approached its colossal configuration. It was definitely fit for

a king. Royalty even. The cherry oak wood arms stretched to the ceiling with a beautiful cherry oak headboard. Selena sank her hands into the mattress and realized she would literally have to jump just to get on top. A smile curved her lips, and she chuckled.

“The size of this thing is crazy!” Her mouth fell open. It wasn’t as if she’d never seen a king size bed before. But this was everything. There was a split-second when her mind ventured to the sexcapades they could get into on the platform. Just as she tried to shake them away, Jordan’s deep voice drawled behind her.

“You should get on top and see how it feels.”

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The suggestion caused a rippling heat to scour down her neck. Selena closed her eyes for a second then inhaled and exhaled a steady breath. Suddenly, she was excited by the idea that Jordan was going to rock her boat on top of this bed. She was going to do the same. A moment past when Selena realized she was no longer interested in food. She turned around to him and slipped her arms around his neck.

“Why don’t you help me get on top... counselor...” she smiled seductively.

A deliberate voracious smile eased onto Jordan’s lips, and he reached down, cupping his hands right below the creases in her bottom as he lifted Selena, dragging her against the hard wall of his chest. Taking a step forward, Jordan sat her buttocks on the mattress, and the stirring caused Selena to moan. The mixture of firm and softness of the mattress was surprising. With the tip of her finger, Selena reached out to touch underneath Jordan’s strong jawline. Her fingers moved down the column of his throat, and he shuddered. Then, his eyes darkened.

A phone rang in the distance at the same time the doorbell sounded.

“Room service,” Jordan growled, leaning into Selena for a sealed kiss. At the moment, the only room service either of them wanted to have was each other. Their mouths sank as their lips pushed against one another, tasting the details of their orifices. A blubbery wave of tonic swept through them both, and they liquefied into each other. Jordan braced his palms on both sides of Selena; his big hands sinking into the mattress as he ate up her mouth. Selena’s hand fiddled for his shirt, pulling it in almost a gripping yank to relieve him of it.

The doorbell rang a second time, and so did the phone.



They'd all go away in a minute, Selena presumed. Had she said that out loud? She paused a second, but when Jordan didn't react to it, she breathed even, assuming it was just a mere thought. Much to his chagrin, Jordan eased back and ran another wicked eye over Selena sitting ripe for the taking in his bed. He planted his hands on his waist and struggled with answering the ringing doorbell and phone or saying fuck it and letting everyone linger. A deep breath escaped him.

"Don't move," he said.

"I hadn't planned to." Selena batted her long eyelashes, and Jordan had to coach himself away from her to answer the door. As he disappeared out of the room, Selena removed her heels and fishnet stockings. She took a hand through her hair and finger-combed her tresses. When she went to remove her dress, Selena paused. Would it absolutely make her look thirsty if she got down to the bare minimum?

She thought about it a moment more when she heard Jordan's deep voice trailing down the hallway. He was talking to someone. It sounded serious, his voice professional. Oh no. When he re-entered the room, the look on his face said everything.

Selena folded her arms. "Let me guess," she said, "there's a fire that no one can put out but you. Am I right?"

Jordan blew out a harsh breath, and Selena fell back with her hands splayed above her head. It was no wonder Jordan was single. He never had a moment to really enjoy life. Before she could complain, he was upon her. His palms slipped up her bare legs, sending a riveting thrill of pleasure coursing through her pussy.

"If you get your hands any closer, I can't guarantee she won't bite," Selena said. The wicked admonition made Jordan groan. "It's okay," she tried convincing herself. "I need to get to work tomorrow anyway, and I don't have clothes with me here, so,"

she sat up, “if you can drop me off on the way to wherever you’re going, that would be fine.”

“No.”

Selena arched her brow. “Excuse me?”

“You’re not going home. You’re staying here. I’ll be right back.” He turned and strolled out of the room then stepped back inside. “There’s food in the dining area. Ceviche-styled Shrimp Tostadas, with a little avocado and mango salsa. Enjoy as many as you like. I won’t take long.”

Jordan disappeared again, without giving Selena a moment to protest.

### Chapter Eleven

When Jordan returned, the first thing he noticed was the silence. He skimmed an eye around the place and strolled into the dining area. There were no signs of Selena, but there was evidence that she'd eaten some of the food Charley prepared since the buffet tray top sat crooked, and a glass of water was perched next to it. Jordan smirked. In all the years he lived in the penthouse, Jordan never saw anything wrong with being superbly tidy. But in the small time Selena was there, seeing signs of her company in his place softened Jordan's heart and made the residence feel more like home.

Leaving the area, Jordan removed his sweater and at the same time his long legs stretched the length of the hallway, carrying him into the bedroom. Upon entry, Jordan was met with more little signs of Selena's presence. The dress she wore lay on the floor as he passed the sofa sitting in the lounge. It made him instantly hard to think Selena was no longer in it. His steps increased as he moved quietly through the room to enter the quarters of his bedroom. It was dark, as if she'd turned out the lights to hide from him. The closer he got to the bed, the more Selena came into view.

As Jordan stepped in front of her, a heartfelt smile trekked along his face, and his blood thawed from head to toe. There she was, lying comfortably in his bed sleeping soundly, wearing only his shirt; a button down, he wore with one of his tailored suits. It swallowed Selena's small frame and brown skin. Her thick thighs spread from just beneath it as the shirt tapered off midway. A rummaging fluttered in his chest like a raging storm. She had been in his closet, possibly playing around in his clothes. Selena was just that type; playful, silly, full of life. Jordan had first noticed it when his family got together over the summer last year for fellowship and a hearty game of

football. The men had grounded it out, playing dirty in the grass before the women decided to turn up the heat.

It spun into a fun game of flag football followed by a bonfire and his brother Josiah's proposal or fake proposal to his new wife Santana. Jordan watched Selena the entire time. And she hadn't missed it since she was watching him, too. The way she played and laughed stirred him. Nothing seemed to bother her, as if she was on a natural flow with life. Her attitude was refreshing and very different from what he was used to. Watching her now, Jordan imagined Selena twirling through his walk-in closet, trailing her soft fingers against the linens hanging on the racks. He wondered if she'd tried on his shoes, and the thought made him smile harder and almost laugh out loud when he glanced down and noticed a pair of his Tom Ford Austin Cap-Toe Oxford shoes sitting at the edge of the bed.

Jordan knew Selena would make a great mother. His kids would be the happiest, fun-filled children in the world.

Easy... Jordan tried to pause his thoughts, but they continued, showing him a collage of depictions. Selena, twin boys, a little girl, the playground, Disney World, fun in the snow during the winter season. The images rocked him as they never ended, and he saw her in the kitchen cooking their favorite dish while they sat there banging against the table, demanding she hurry so they could get their hands on her delicious food. Where had she been all his life, he wondered.

Jordan slipped a hand down his face and exhaled. Maybe he was losing his mind. He hadn't known Selena but a few months, and they'd been dating a portion of that time. Thoughts of loving her forever were ridiculous and too soon. Then his mind ventured to the poem he'd spoken. Unbeknownst to everyone in the room, it was a freestyle. He hadn't written it down. But watching Selena, the words spilled from his heart, and they had been more than perfect for the occasion.

Jordan left the side of the bed and strolled into the bathroom for a quick shower. Inside were more indications of Selena. There was a towel on the floor and panties by the sink. Fuck. Jordan's libido kicked into overdrive. She'd taken a shower. Usually, having any little thing out of order made Jordan clean up immediately, but the displacement of things made him understand the totality of Selena's earlier argument. She was leaving her mark everywhere, and Jordan loved it a bit more than he probably should. He grabbed her underwear and turned the thin material between his fingers. It was almost as if she'd left them for him; gloating, so he knew she was marking her territory. Jordan pulled his bottom lip in with his teeth and attempted to calm his dick that now pushed against the jeans he wore.

With her panties still in hand, Jordan strolled to the shower and turned it on. He fumbled with her garment a little longer and thought about taking her right then and there before snapping out of his risqué thoughts. Selena had work tomorrow, and it was Valentine's Day. There was nothing he'd rather be doing than spending time with her. So, even though Rose and Garnett were in the middle of a big case, Jordan set his day where he should not be bothered. He was a man who liked to oversee everything. After all, it was his name on the business. But there were more than enough lawyers, partners, and associates to handle a day's worth of work. For that reason, he would take the day off and make sure he and Selena could spend some quiet time together. Jordan had plans to go so far as to turn off his work cell, which he never did.

As he continued to dwell on tomorrow, Jordan removed his jeans, shoes and socks and stepped into the shower. Tomorrow couldn't come fast enough.

When Selena woke up comforted by warm, masculine arms, her mind shuffled as last night's memories danced through her mind. She smiled and bit her bottom lip. A heavy heated body lay firmly against her back and biceps, toned and brown tightened around her. A flavorful fragrance wafted from him making her want to snuggle deeper into his embrace. Moving her head back slightly, Selena glanced at the time

on the nightstand. The clock held bright red numbers indicating it was early morning. Four a.m. She had to be at work at eight, but there was no place Selena would rather be than in her current situation. Stretching like that of a feline, Selena arched her back, pulling her arms overhead as she yawned.

This was a first. Never had she spent a night at a man's house just for the sake of kicking off her shoes and relaxing her feet. But it was pleasantly cozy and appealing. Selena could get used to this as well as the luxury pad she swore no one lived in. Bending back to her former state, Selena sighed and spooned under Jordan. His lips sat against her ear; his breathing a soft wave like a sound spa machine that threatened to put her back to sleep. The rigid circumference of his prodding length fought against the boxer briefs Jordan wore. Selena tried to ignore it, but that monster wasn't one to be overlooked, pressing against her ass, frantic for release.

Honestly, it didn't surprise her that Jordan didn't take advantage. He was a gentleman after all. Selena knew that without a shadow of a doubt. Still, it couldn't have been easy for him to crawl into bed and spoon her knowing she lay underneath his shirt without any panties on. Surely, he'd gotten her little gift left by the sink in the bathroom. Selena turned around to face him. Jordan was the sexiest man she'd ever bore witness to. His skin tone was milk chocolate, not too light, not too dark; just perfect for a sweet tooth. His groomed beard fit his face like it was meant to be there, and the hard planes in his features edged around his surface as if a professional potter had molded him to excellence.

Aroused, Selena's hand drifted down the pecs in his hard chest and slipped inside his boxer briefs. Waiting for Jordan to make the first move was taking an eternity, and right now, all Selena wanted was him. Jordan shuffled lightly as Selena pulled out his dick, and her movements paused as she took in the enormity of his girth. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Her mind skipped. Breathe, Selena. She exhaled a longwinded breath. Okay, so she had underestimated what type of task this would be. Still, she licked her lips, hungry for him to be inside her.

If I die this morning, it will be a beautiful death, she thought.

Her hand slid up and down his shaft, making him harder. Selena's mouth fell. How much grander could he get? It was the first time in her life she thought to call for backup. But there was no reinforcement. It was just her and him, and Selena had started this game, so she intended to finish it. Staring at the swollen length of his manhood, Selena proceeded to stroke him. When she glanced back into his eyes, the dark brim of his stare ricocheted back at her.

A simple smile peppered her lips. "Good morning," her sultry voice droned.

Jordan licked his lips. "Great morning."

Selena's lashes fluttered as she gazed back, going to war with a battle in her heart.

"What do you think you're doing, little lady," he asked.

She bit down on the corner of her lips. "I found a toy, and I wanted to see how it worked."

Jordan chuckled. "Is that right?"

"Yeah. It's too big to fit in my hand, but I'm thinking I may get it to fit somewhere else."

Jordan's dark gaze magnified, making Selena's skin incinerate. Her hand never stopped stroking him, and a stricken groan left his throat.

"Do you know what you've started?"

"No, but I'm willing to do whatever needs to be done to end it."

Gradually, Selena slipped to her knees and removed his shirt she wore in one smooth swoop. Jordan rolled to his back and sat up on his elbows, watching her glide in the dimness of the dark room. The only light was a small shadow of the moon washing across the carpet. In Jordan's eyesight, Selena's silhouette put a coke bottle to shame. It rounded her shoulders and slipped down her side only to coast over a spread of her thighs.

"Condom?"

Jordan moved, swiftly pulling a condom from behind the pillow he lay on.



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Surprise registered across Selena's face. "Prepared much?"

"I was hoping..."

"That you would get laid before I left?"

Jordan didn't deny it, and Selena tinkered out a laugh.

"Smart man," she said, taking the condom off his hands. "This is just not going to fit. She gauged the condom and the sizable length of his erection as if it was a puzzle needed to put together.

Jordan chuckled. "It'll fit."

Selena ripped the foil package. "I guess we'll find out," she murmured, sliding the condom over his head. It rolled down, stretching to the max, but unfortunately, didn't meet his base. "That'll just have to do," she said, crawling on top of him.

Jordan's hands immediately gripped her thighs and rode the curve of her ass. He offered a solid slap to her buttocks, causing a sting to shriek down her body.

"Oh..." she purred.

With his fingers, Jordan peeled back her cheeks, opening her pussy as wide as it would go. Selena braced her palms on his firm chest and sank on top of the head of his dick. Her mouth popped open instantly as his shaft submerged, stretching her pussy to sustain him. A blistering wave of hot chills shot up her spine.

“Oh my God.” She paused as her pulse hammered.

Jordan pulled her more, sliding his dick inside her until Selena sat on top of his pelvis. Selena’s head fell back, and her heart slammed. Already, she felt crazed. Maybe Selena hadn’t thought this thing through, but it was too late.

As if he couldn’t stand to hold off any longer, Jordan lifted her with ease, pulling out then sliding back in. He continued the gradual crusade as gasps fell from Selena’s mouth. When they found a steady harmony, Jordan held firmly to her ass, and together they rocked. Selena bounced up and down, causing steady slaps to penetrate the walls.

“Eeeek! Oh my God,” she panted.

Jordan released an ass cheek and slapped it simultaneously sending another heated rush of rippling warmth sliding down her. “Damn you’re wet as hell, girl. He slipped in and out of her, dragging his dick against her walls like that of a curved clawing hammer.

“Shit!” he barked.

“Oh my God!” Selena shouted as Jordan nailed into her. At the same time, she dropped down against him. Another splintering upsurge of heat shot through them both, and Selena’s toes curled.

“Aaaah, ah, ah, ah!” Selena mumbled as each shout was cut back by the pounding force of Jordan’s jabs. She could feel him in her stomach. Prodding and poking around like he was on an excursion. The blissful attack was making her crazy as Selena’s head rolled side to side. The pops and smacks of her ass meeting his pelvis and rock-hard thighs made Selena’s thighs burn. The feverish coupling of their sex was spellbinding; shaking Selena right down to her core.

“Jordan, Jordan, Jordan...” she chanted.

Jordan released her ass, his hands drifting up her back. He sunk his fingers into her flesh and pulled her forward to meet the ravenous plunge of his tongue down her throat.

“Mmmmm,” Selena moaned, completely done by his cock-strong undertaking. He inhaled her fully, tasting the intricate curves of her lips and trailing to bite down on her chin.

“Damn, this pussy is good, girl. So fucking excellent.”

With her bent on top of him, Jordan recaptured her ass and lifted his thighs, propelling his dick so fiercely fast Selena came in an instant.

“Fuuuuu-ck!” they yelled together as the headboard ricocheted against the wall.

“Oh my God!” Selena bellowed as her orgasm rained down on his shaft.

Pulsations magnified as Jordan’s temerarious stroke deafened; beating into Selena’s backside like he wanted to tear her to pieces. An outcry clawed from Selena’s throat at the untamable way he stroked her.

“Jordan!” she screamed, mystified by the unruly snatching of his penetrated thrusts.

Jordan swallowed her mouth again as he shot semen inside her. It was blissful, like his soul had been caressed on a supernatural level.

“Mmmm,” they both moaned, sucking in one another’s tongues as wet heat spilled from the connection between their thighs.

Jordan kissed alongside Selena's lips, needing to taste her every second his dick continued to pulse inside her.

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“Oh my God...” Selena breathed, dropping her weight on top of him. He held her there and kissed Selena’s forehead, basked in the heat of their perspiration and the tingling in their joints.

“Is that what you were after,” his dark voice beat.

Selena smacked her lips and swallowed but couldn’t form her words. Labored breaths seized her throat, and she panted then tried again to answer him. When nothing came out, she gave up and nodded in response.

“I can’t hear you,” his easy voice grooved.

Hell, I can’t hear me, Selena thought as her eyes closed and sleep tried to pull her under. She was still trying to catch her breath. Still trying to contemplate the reckoning her body just endured.

As she slowly drifted into la-la land, one word escaped her lips.

“Yes.”

### Chapter Twelve

It was a good thing she set the alarm on her phone before she fell asleep. When Selena awakened for the second time, it was the shrill of her alarm that pulled her from slumber. Interestingly, she was still laying on top of Jordan, with her head in the crook of his neck, and his penis tapping her buttocks softly.

“Mmmm.” A moan rose from her throat. Gradually, Selena sat up and now Jordan’s dick curved up her ass to touch the tip of her lower back. Damn. Talk about hung like a horse. What the hell type of magic did his parents cook up while making him? The fleeting thought made Selena wobble and slip to the side of him.

It would’ve been so easy to inch back on his cock, but damn it, Selena didn’t have time. She almost whimpered thinking about leaving him standing at attention the way he was, but going to work wasn’t the only thing that made her change her mind. Selena ached, beautifully so, but it was still an ache nonetheless.

“Where are you going?” His thick voice drummed.

The possessiveness of his tone halted her escape. “I need to shower,” she paused, “and get to work, unfortunately.”

Jordan rolled to his side and tightened the grasp he held, pulling Selena back in his embrace. “What if I don’t want you to leave?” he ground. “Can’t you work from home?”

Selena smiled against his face. Considering he’d mentioned working from home as if

his home was hers. The sentiment gave Selena's heart an extra pick-up.

“Um...”

Jordan kissed her neck; his impassioned mouth leaving a blazing trail of nerves along her skin. Selena exhaled blissfully, and her hands coasted along his chest.

“I want you here...” he drawled. Jordan brought his lips down on hers and invaded Selena's mouth with his tongue. It was like a constant tranquility being with him, and he absolutely took her breath away. Her arms found their way around his neck, and she rested there as their kiss heightened.

If Selena's heart could race any faster than it was right now, she might have a heart attack. There was no way she could miss out on work today. But how in the hell would she refuse him? Pulling away slowly with a hand braced against his shoulder, Selena smiled and batted her eyes.

“Let me call Octavia, and see what I can do.”

The low brimming of his stare was hypnotizing, swallowing Selena in a galaxy of stars. Wanting to taste her mouth more, Jordan met her lips again, and his relinquish was an adverse disengagement. Selena giggled when Jordan smacked her butt as she scooted out of bed, practically jumping to the floor.

“How will I ever get back up there?” she questioned, standing on the side of the bed with her hands to her mouth like a bullhorn.

Jordan laughed; his deep voice a vibrating throttle. “When you're ready, baby, just holler and I'll pull you on board.” He laughed some more, and Selena joined him.

“Ha, ha, very funny,” she said.

“I thought so,” he cracked, and they laughed as Selena sauntered off to call Octavia.

In the lounge area of his bedroom, she dialed S & M Financial Advisory, then keyed in Octavia’s extension.

“S & M Financial, this is Octavia.”

“Hey, girl, it’s me.”

Octavia’s voice lowered. “Honey, where are you? There are two clients already sitting outside your office. Please tell me you’re on your way.”

Selena shut her eyes and tightened her mouth followed by a harsh exhale.

“Not exactly.”

“Oh no... Selena,” Octavia groaned.

“I’m so sorry, but remember that time you disappeared on us for almost a week because Jonathon swept you away to Hawaii?”

“I was wondering when you would pull that card,” Octavia grumbled. “Are you with Jordan?”

“Where else would I be, girl?”

“Just making sure. Listen, I know what you’re going through right now, and I can cancel your appointments for the day, but the two you have sitting outside your office will be disgruntled if I tell them you’re not showing up after they’ve come to the office.”



“Tell them, I can still see them, it will just be through Skype.”

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Octavia chuckled. “You pulling a Samiyah on me now?”

Selena quirked. “What do you mean?”

“Samiyah didn’t want to leave us with so much work, so she’s taking client calls at home via Skype.”

Selena smiled. “Great minds think alike!”

“Yeah, yeah,” Octavia said.

“Come on, Octavia, you’re not mad, are you?”

“No, I guess not. I’m only taking my clients today anyway. Claudia’s here.”

“That’s great, so you won’t be in the building alone.”

“Yay, me...” Octavia said, giving phony enthusiasm.

“I love you, too, girl. Now tell my clients I’ll call one in an hour and the other after lunch.”

“All right, do you need me to email you any specific files?”

“No, my iMac is connected to my MacBook Pro. Oh damn,” Selena paused.

“What’s wrong now?”

“My MacBook Pro is at home.” Selena smacked her forehead.

“Surely, Jordan has a Mac you can use. Just sign in with your iCloud ID, and you should still be able to access all your files from his computer.”

“You’re a genius,” Selena said.

“Yeah, I get that all the time.”

Selena laughed. “Oh, I’m sure.”

“Anyway, I’ve got work to do. Don’t you and Jordan have too much fun.”

“So, you and Jonathon aren’t doing anything for Valentine’s Day?”

“Yeah, I’m leaving after lunch.”

“Oooh, you see how you are,” Selena said.

“What?”

“Sitting here acting like I’m the rebel of the group, and you have your own plans to kick rocks!”

“I think Claudia’s leaving early, too. We shuttin’ this thang down.” Octavia laughed, and Selena smirked with a shake of her head. “I mean, at least I came to work, ya know.”

“Yeah, okay, I’ll talk to you later. Byeeee.”

Selena disconnected the call and shook her head again. Of course, Octavia and

Claudia were leaving early. Jonathon and Jaden probably had them some gondola rides set up for the evening, she mused.

Treading back into the bedroom came with a delicious scenery. As if she had forgotten how gorgeous Jordan was, Selena immediately became hot as she gazed over at his nakedness. He was still laying on his back with his dick sticking straight up in the air. Monster Cock. Selena giggled at the thought, bringing Jordan's attention to her.

"Are you going to stand over there in the doorway or come to papa?" he asked.

Selena's gaze faltered, and a streamline of chills eased down her body.

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“Im’ma just watch from this spot,” she said.

Jordan lifted his head to peer at her.

“I’m scared, and I ain’t afraid to admit it.”

Jordan fell back on the bed and laughed, then just as quickly sat up and stood to his feet. His monumental all masculine persona made a slow stroll across the room, and as he came closer, Selena’s pulse sped.

“I have to, um, take a business video call in an hour,” she said, already breathless. Looking for any excuse to run away from him.

Jordan closed in, cupping Selena’s chin in his hand and adequately pulling her focus from his distended constituent to his face.

“Why are you scared? If memory serves me right, you handled your man like the sexy vixen you are.”

“Ooh, vixen, I like that.”

They smiled, and without warning, Jordan reached down and hauled Selena off her feet.

“Ooh...” she crooned, taken back by his impulsive shift.

“Check this out. I get it, you’ve got work that must be done, and I’m slowing you

down. But, since you have a little time before you make your call, can we have breakfast?”

In his arms, Selena slinked her arms around his shoulders as he balanced her effortlessly.

“Yes,” she said. “Will Charley bring us breakfast, or would you like me to whip up something real quick?”

Jordan’s lids lowered as images from last night came sailing to the forefront of his mind. Selena in the kitchen, and he and the kids banging the tables. A resplendent smile scurried onto his face.

“You really have a nice smile. Very charming, Mr. Rose,” Selena said.

Jordan’s eyes roamed over her. “And you have very nice lips.” He kissed her softly, “and very nice eyes,” he kissed her again, and Selena melted, “and very nice ears, nose, and the sexiest curve when you arch your neck.” His lips landed on her throat, and in the same instance, Jordan paced back around the bed.

Selena shivered in his arms. “I thought you said,” she panted, “that we were going to have breakfast.”

Jordan laid her body down on the bed and tossed her legs over his shoulders. “I am having breakfast.”

His lips sank into her pussy, sending his tongue on an expedition as he dove right in.

“Ssss, ooooooh...” Selena’s head fell back with her mouth open.

With an onslaught of greedy pressure, Jordan licked across her folds and drilled into

her clitoris with skilled accuracy. All at once, he slurped her up, sucking her inside his mouth while sliding his tongue down her labia to catch any of the sweet crème that attempted to escape him.

A growl dark and deep fell from his lips. Selena twisted and turned; digging her feet into the bed as she lifted slightly and rocked against his mouth.

“Aaaah shit!” she screeched, reaching down to rub his head.

Jordan grabbed her hands and moved them to his ears. Selena held on to them as if she was on the back of a bull clutching a rope for dear life while she rode a wild animal. Jordan covered her pussy fully, allowing his tongue to touch every part of her sensitive flesh, and he glanced up at her, turned on by the ecstasy written all over Selena’s face.

When her legs trembled, Jordan knew she was on her way, and he couldn’t resist. Jordan needed to be inside Selena when she exploded. With quickness, he pulled up and flipped Selena on all fours. Jordan didn’t give her time to figure out what was happening when he drove inside her, pushing so thoroughly deep that a moan tore from her throat like a wail from sudden ecstasy. She was so terribly wet that Jordan slipped right in, touching the base of her womb in a tangent plunge.

“Selena... fuuu-ck girl.”

Jordan held on to her waist, keeping Selena from running away from him.

“Jordan! Jordan! Oh my God...” She scurried but didn’t get anywhere. Her hands flailed as she grabbed for the covers, trying with all her might to get away.

Jordan smacked her ass and rocked into her backside. “Where do you think you’re going, huh?” He smacked her ass again and didn’t let up on his pounding.

“Oh my God, Jordan...” Selena whined as the room reverberated from the wet smacking of their connection.



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“You want me to stop, babe?” he asked hammering into Selena over and over. “Tell me,” he said. “No... beg me.”

He reached around and swept his arms under hers, causing Selena to nosedive in the covers. It opened her completely, exposing her pussy as her ass spread. Selena gasped but didn't react fast enough.

“Jordan!” she screamed and with both hands, Jordan held her waist and pummeled into her sweet heat, determined to fuck her brains out.

There was nothing Selena could do. Selena was in such a vulnerable predicament that she decided to stop running. Her entire body went limp as a waving orgasm shot through her, squirting and covering his shaft completely.

“Aarrgh!” Jordan locked his jaw and shot a load of cum inside her. “Fuck!” he panted and their bodies went into shock at the intense release.

Their nervous systems went haywire, and they both continued to vibrate like they'd been zapped by an energy source. Jordan held on to her ass as his dick ejaculated, and Selena's face was in the mattress with her teeth biting into the plushness of it. Seconds passed when Selena freed her mouth, and her lips moved as she mumbled in an ancient language neither of them recognized. After another long moment, Jordan dipped and pulled his elongated shaft from within her, and Selena crashed completely as her limbs gave way to gravitation.

Jordan scooped Selena into his arms and laid with her spooned into the brazen wall of his chest. There, Selena listened to his fast beating heart catching tune to the rhythm

as she tried to gain some sense about herself.

I love you. Selena's eyes lurched, and her heart rocked until she realized it was just a thought.

"This is what I call fucked into submission," she murmured, and Jordan chuckled.

"I told you to beg; you didn't."

"I remember screaming, isn't that begging?"

"Did I hurt you?"

"Hell yeah," she said.

Jordan peered down in her face.

"But I liked it though," she added, and he laughed.

"Because you didn't beg."

"What constitutes begging?"

"Please," he said plainly.

Selena knew that, but in the back of her mind, she had no intention of asking him to stop the blissful beat down he gave. She would be sore for weeks, but it was worth every inch of ache she endured.

### Chapter Thirteen

Selena never made it to the Skype video calls. She sighed, exiting the shower. Jordan had made a quick run to the store, and Selena took that chance to console her swollen pussy. Now standing in his enormous bathroom, Selena grabbed the unopened toothbrush and ripped the package. In a daze, she brushed her teeth, combed her hair, and dried her body.

Inside her handbag were several feminine sprays and deodorants. It was a good thing she crammed her purse like she was going on a mini-vacation, or she would be at the mercy of Jordan's masculine fragrances. There was nothing wrong with what he wore, but Selena liked to smell fruity and delicious. That's what got you into the mess you're in now.

"Oh hush," she scolded herself.

After eyeing herself, Selena exited the lavatory, going to grab her dress. She didn't expect to see the large rectangular box, wrapped in silver gift paper sitting just outside the door.

"Jordan?" Selena said, inching closer to the present. A tiny smile leered as her lips curved.

There was no note or sign of instructions, but Selena did notice the trail of red rose petals leading away from the box into the hallway. A shiver ran over her as Selena wondered what was inside. For the longest moment, she stood contemplating its surprise. With no one around to instruct her, Selena lifted the box and shook it like a

kid on Christmas morning. She laughed at herself and slapped a hand to her forehead.

Sitting the box down, Selena crouched, letting her knees sink into the shag rug. She removed the bow first then ripped the paper to shreds. Flipping open the top, Selena unfolded the paper inside and her smile spread even wider. There was the note, laying on top of the thin garment. Quickly, Selena opened it.

“Forgive me for losing my cool in the bedroom. Next time, just beg.”

A tinkering laugh bubbled from her throat, and Selena’s head fell.

“What am I going to do with him,” she asked to no one but herself.

Selena proceeded to pull out the dress. It sparkled and shined like the apparel you’d see a singing group from the seventies wear. It was beautiful, long and royal purple with a to die for split going down one side. Selena stuffed her nose into the thin fabric. Her eyes shuffled to the fallen card, and she noticed something inscribed on the back. Picking it up swiftly, she read.

“Accompany me to an awards luncheon. I need you on my arm, love.”

A dreamy smile tapered across her lips. Awards luncheon? It would be the first time Selena and Jordan made their debut amid paparazzi as a couple, and it excited her and terrified her at the same time. Why? This is what you’ve been waiting for. It was true, and Selena was so pleased she didn’t know how to feel about her emotions. Slow down, girl, nothing lasts forever. Look at Mom and Dad. Selena’s smiled wavered a little, and the spark in her eye dimmed. She glanced back at the dress and stood, determined not to let her parents’ misfortune deter her.

The doorbell rang, snatching Selena’s attention. “I hope that’s Octavia,” Selena said, standing.

After missing her clients' scheduled video sessions, Octavia called to fuss Selena's head off, and Selena took the chastisement without rebuttal. However, once Octavia finished, Selena begged for her help. Selena needed clothes. She couldn't very well leave Jordan's loft without any.

Selena trotted to the door and noticed the trail of roses led to another box this one square and bulky sitting on the countertop. Selena's eyes beamed, and when her direction changed course, the doorbell rang again. Ugh. Selena skipped to the door and glanced through the security monitor. Octavia paced back and forth, looking utterly confused on how to get in the place which made Selena laugh. Selena reached out and hit a button, and the elevator doors opened. She watched as Octavia stuck her head inside as if to say, "Who goes there?"

The gesture made Selena laugh harder, and as soon as Octavia was completely inside, the doors closed, and the elevator ascended, bringing her to the penthouse floor. Jordan's security was top notch. Selena had a clear view of Octavia the entire ride up. His system made it impossible to sneak up on him, and in his line of work, Selena guessed that was a good thing.

When the doors opened behind Octavia, Selena stood watching her back then cut her some slack and sent out a curt whistle. Octavia pivoted to see Selena wrapped in a terry cloth towel with a huge grin on her face.

Octavia's mouth dropped as she stepped inside.

"What in the Fort Knox?" Octavia began, taking a 360-degree view of the place.

"It's crazy, right?"

"Crazy beautiful!" Octavia screeched.

Selena laughed and grabbed the bag out of Octavia's hands.

"Thank you for bringing me this. You have no idea how much I appreciate you right now."

Octavia's mouth was still hanging open.

"Oh, I didn't forget that four million dollar museum you call a house that Jonathon purchased for you," Selena added, "so don't even act like you're surprised."

Octavia waved her off. "Girl, I'm talking about this place." Octavia strolled to the wall of windows and glanced down. "Holy smokes!" Octavia shivered and stepped back. "I almost got dizzy looking that far down!" she paused and took it all in. "This layout is nothing like I've ever seen!" She squealed.

"I know. It's nothing like I ever thought I'd see in my lifetime," Selena agreed.

"And you've been here all night?"

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“Well, I’ve been in the back, where the bedroom is.”

Octavia’s mouth stretched wider, and Selena giggled and strolled to the box she’d abandoned.

“What’s that?”

Selena shrugged and bit down on her lips with excitement streaming through her. She grabbed the box and ran off down the hall, entering the bedroom.

Octavia followed her, astounded even further the more she ventured.

“Hell yes, party over here!” Octavia screeched. “When do you think Jonathon and I can come over for dinner and a movie?”

Selena guffawed and shimmied into her denim jeans. With a shrug, Selena grabbed her button-down blouse. “I’m sure Jordan wouldn’t mind you guys coming over anytime. That is, when he’s free of course.”

“Oh my God,” Octavia said. “I’m sorry, girl, I’ve just followed you into his bedroom and didn’t think about it. Is Jordan here?”

“Nope.”

Octavia glanced down at the gift box. “Look at this, presents and stuff. Mmhmm, I see where this is going. Before you know it, you two will be...” Octavia made a show of walking down an aisle with her shoulders back and her head held high. Selena

guffawed.

“You’re stupid,” she said.

“Stupid serious,” Octavia returned.

Selena shrugged, “I don’t know about all of that.” She unwrapped the second box and flipped open the top. A gasp fell from Selena and Octavia.

“Ooou...” Octavia crooned. “I am superbly jealous,” she said.

Selena giggled and reached inside to remove the purple and white Manolo Blahniks. “These are absolutely gorgeous,” Selena murmured.

“A man who knows how to gift a woman with shoes. Damn, I’m really jealous now.”

“Why, Jonathon would get you anything you wanted.”

“Yeah, but if I asked him to surprise me with shoes, he’d likely return with combat boots.”

Selena pealed over with laughter and wiped the corner of her eyes as a tear threatened to fall. “Jordan has a foot fetish,” Selena informed her. “And he knows I have a shoe fetish. I think this is his way of not being weird about it.”

Octavia stood by, watching Selena take her hand over the sharp heel and open toe. “Jealous,” she said.

Selena chuckled and stood and slipped into the bathroom; Octavia followed her but not before taking a soothing hand over the stained glass partition.



“Now about this wedding, what do you mean you don’t know about all that? It’s all you’ve been cracking about for the last year.” Octavia mimicked her. “I’ve gotta get me a Rose. I’m not letting you bitches take all the good men off the market.”

“I do not sound like that.”

“Tell the truth sometimes, you here?” Octavia quipped.

Selena pursed her lips and shrugged again. Octavia eyed her hard.

“Hey, what’s gotten into you? Where’s the bubbly, loud, sister girl I’ve grown fond of?”

“Awe, you’ve grown fond of me, girl?”

Octavia smacked her lips and crossed her arms, leaning into a hip.

“All right, look.” Selena fluffed her hair in the mirror as she spoke to Octavia. “Jordan is amazing. More than everything I want.”

Octavia shifted and leaned into her other hip. “But?”

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Selena whined. “I don’t know, I’m beginning to believe happily ever after’s are for movies, books, and suckers.”

Octavia frowned. “So you think my relationship is a sham?”

Selena peered at her friend. “Must you make this about you?”

Octavia exhaled. “I’m just saying, Selena.” Octavia paused before continuing, letting her thoughts roam a minute. “This is about your parents, isn’t it?”

When Selena didn’t respond, Octavia sighed and poked her lip out. She could sympathize with Selena, but now was not the time for her to become all undecided about love.

“Why don’t you talk to your parents, together?”

Selena switched gears so quick it was as if the topic had never come up.

“Jordan wants me to go to an awards luncheon with him.”

Octavia’s brows rose.

“Sure does, it’s the reason he bought me the shoes you saw and that beautiful dress over there to wear.”

Octavia stepped out of the bathroom and took her eyes across the room. When Selena heard her squeal, Selena chuckled. She was just happy the topic had changed.

Octavia reentered the bathroom. “When is it?”

“I’m not sure. I’ll ask when he gets back.”

Octavia held up her hand and high-fived Selena. “You go, girl, I’m not mad at you.”

When the front door opened, Octavia’s eyes lurched. “Oh my God, I’m all in you guys’ personal space. I’m out of here. Besides, hubby is waiting for me at home.”

Octavia turned and fled before Selena could wish her well, leaving Selena to wonder if she’d ever had a husband waiting for her at home.

### Chapter Fourteen

“I didn’t know it was possible for this elevator to go higher.”

When the metal doors opened, sailing currents of wind wrapped around Jordan and Selena. They were rooftop, and Selena’s eyes bulged when Jordan held out his hand and pulled her along the way.

“Are you kidding me?!” she screeched, taking a sweeping eye over the large Airbus H155 aircraft in front of her. It sat in its own space, outlined by the reference of a helicopter pad.

“There’s a place I have in mind that I think you would love.”

Selena gawked at him. “In this thing!?”

Jordan chuckled. “Yeah.”

“Oh my— Jordan...” she turned to him and clutched the collar of his long woolen trench coat, stuffing her face in his chest.

Jordan’s warm hands slipped along Selena’s neck and lifted her face to his.

“Let’s get inside to keep you warm,” his deep voice grooved.

“Who – Who’s flying this thing?” she stuttered.

“Once we’re inside, I’ll give you all the specifics.”

Still gawking, Selena trailed alongside Jordan as he led her to the chopper. He opened the door and helped Selena up on the seat then swiftly made his way to the pilot’s chair.

At the alarm on Selena’s face, Jordan smirked. “Oh, baby, you’re scared,” he said. “Okay, let me give you a little history on this beauty. When Julian and I were in high school, we had a thing for airplanes. Not only did we both want to be pilots, but we took lessons that lasted our senior year. Flying an airplane is a little different than flying a helicopter, but the course available at the time had a simulation for piloting one of these beauties. If we wanted to truly fly, we had to enroll in a course and pass it along with our regular studies. And,” Jordan wiggled his brows and launched the system. “We did. Of course, I don’t fly often. I take her for a spin about three, four times out of the year.”

Selena could feel the aircraft vibrate as the blades above spun faster.

“So now, here we are. You don’t think I’d put you in harm’s way, do you?”

Selena knew the answer to that, but still her heart clutched in her chest, and she reached for his hand. Jordan weaved their fingers together and lifted her delicate hand to place a kiss on the back.

“Just in case, rest assured, let me show you something.”

He reached below and hit a button that in turn opened a compartment. Reaching in, Jordan pulled out his pilot’s license and handed it over to Selena.

“I imagine this is the perfect way to woo a lady,” Selena said as she reached back to put her seatbelt on.

“Maybe,” Jordan responded. “You’ll let me know since you’re the first, yeah?”

A delicious thrill slipped over Selena in a wave of chills. She blushed and watched as Jordan did his thing. When the aircraft lifted, Selena covered her chest with a hand. Her heart stammered just the same as her pulse quickened.

“If it makes you feel any better, there’s a helmet to your left.”

Selena glanced down at the helmet. “Where’s yours?”

Jordan motioned to his right.

“Well, I’m not wearing mine if you’re not wearing yours.”

Jordan’s gaze dropped. “A bit of a daredevil, don’t you think?”

Selena opened her mouth and paused then decided to proceed with her thought. “I trust you.”

Jordan bit down on his lip and smoothly maneuvered the Airbus H155. A smile dashed across Selena’s face at his relaxing poise. Damn, he was sexy, she thought, and not just because of his physical appearance. A man of so many talents could only belong to Selena in a dream.

“You know the view outside is better,” Jordan said.

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“Not when you’re me sitting on this side of the cabin,” Selena retorted.

Jordan’s gaze crept over to her, dark and intense. “Don’t make me turn this thing around and take you back to my bedroom. I have handcuffs.”

Selena’s eyes lurched, and her stomach tumbled. Jordan pulled in his bottom lip with the ridge of his perfectly aligned teeth and winked with a naughty grin.

Feeling daring, Selena spoke, “Maybe later...”

At the arch of Jordan’s brow, Selena nodded.

“Have you ever been bound before, Selena?”

Another wave of butterflies scurried through her. She cleared her throat. “Um, no.”

Jordan’s leering smile touched her skin, and instantly, Selena became hot. She turned her head just as a blush rushed to her brown cheeks. Outside, the city of Chicago was a beautiful sight to behold. The landscape was unparalleled. Skyscrapers and high-rise buildings filled the city with a display of mirages. They cruised past The Willis and Hancock Tower before coming across Millennium Park.

“Wow,” Selena crooned. “The bean is beautiful from up here,” she said, referring to the cloud gate stainless steel structure that sat as the centerpiece of Millennium Park.

“Beautiful indeed.”

Jordan circled the square, allowing Selena to get the best view.

“Look,” she pointed, “we’re caught in the bean’s reflection!”

Jordan followed her gaze and caught a glimpse of the helicopter hovering in the reflection of the cornerstone. They lingered a while longer when Selena sighed and sat back, satisfied.

“Ready for our next venture?”

“Sure am.”

“Hold on to your seat.”

Jordan navigated the helicopter to the left hitting a sharp turn.

“Eek!” Selena shrieked as her insides fumbled, and a fast-paced thrill slid through her.

Jordan laughed as they flew over more high-rises.

“You like giving me heart palpitations, don’t you,” she asked.

Jordan’s smile drew back, and he pinned Selena with a dangerous glower.

“Every chance I get,” he responded.

Another thrill of energy slipped through Selena. If being with Jordan was going to be like this, she would be in for a rollercoaster ride of a relationship.

They cruised downtown, and it came with another round of picturesque scenery.



“I’ve been living here all my life and never knew just how beautiful Chicago was.”

“Being this high makes you appreciate things.”

“That is so true. Thank you, Jordan.”

“Don’t thank me yet.”

The helicopter took another wild turn, and Selena shrieked again. Jordan guffawed.

“You’re doing that on purpose!” She yelled.

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Jordan nodded with a laugh still on his lips. “Okay, you got me.” His laugh continued and Selena swatted at him.

“Im’ma get you back,” she said. “Eye for an eye.”

Jordan’s wide-brimmed smile was a gorgeous delight. “No takebacks,” he said, repeating what she’d said previously.

“A man who welcomes a thrill, what a lovely day,” Selena murmured as Jordan laughed.

“Whatever you want to do to me, I’m all for it.”

“Mmmm.”

Selena’s wheels were turning when she noticed a popular exhibit just below. Her eyes popped, and she glanced over at Jordan, taking notice of the extravagant grin on his face.

“Are we going where I think we’re going?!”

“Yeah,” he responded.

Selena’s mouth hung open as her eyes roamed over the gigantic ice-skating rink below. Maggie’s Daily Park was an exclusive attraction specifically for the city of Chicago. It’s ribbon-like landscape of ice wrapped around for one-quarter of a mile, with the capacity to hold up to 700 skaters. Below, people of all nationalities glided;

some holding hands and others spinning past their counterparts.

“Squee!”

Jordan laughed again as Selena gloated. Her happiness was contagious, and it was what Jordan wanted to see on her face for the rest of their lives. Shit. There you go again, he thought. His mind boggled with more images of him and Selena as a family. Again, Jordan pictured their kids in the back seat of the Airbus, filled with just as much glee as their mother. A tugging in his chest consumed him, and without warrant, Jordan reached out to touch her.

Selena’s wide-eyed expression moved from the exhibit below to Jordan’s handsome face when his fingers fiddled down her skin. She tilted her head slightly as she watched a plethora of warm emotions sit in the inviting aura of his magnetic stare. I love you. There it was again; the words that punctured through Selena during their sexcapade.

Jordan licked his lips then glanced away from Selena long enough to dock the helicopter. As they made their descent, Selena’s exuberance became astounding.

“Squee!” she squealed again.

Jordan chuckled as the Airbus landed with a soft bump. Selena turned back to him. “Touchdown!” she said, throwing her hands in the air. “That was crazy awesome!”

Jordan laughed. “You like that, huh?”

Selena pursed her lips and batted her long lashes. “I loved it,” she said.

He wanted to pull her into his lap and ravish her right where they sat, but the crowd they’d just landed around would certainly be dismayed by his handling of her.

Shaking out of his reverie, Jordan powered down the Airbus and left the aircraft, appearing at Selena's side in an instant. He opened her door, and she held out her hand, and with an exciting jump, Selena was in his arms.

She giggled up a storm when Jordan twirled her around, and the pace of her heart became erratic. Selena slid down his long muscular body, and static energy shocked them as she pounced on her feet. For a cold day, the atmosphere around the two was flailing with a buzz of warmth.

"Come," Jordan said, twirling Selena with a tug of his hand to couple her underneath his arm.

They strolled to the gate and were met by security.

"Mr. Rose!" The security guard held out his hand. "We should've known it was you making such a grand entrance."

"Tell me, boys," Selena began, catching Jordan's inquisitive stare. "Does Mr. Rose normally show up with a princess on his arm?"

Jordan laughed and shook his head. The security guards held up their hands. "We have no idea."

Selena twisted her lips, and Jordan pealed over with laughter. His eyes watered, and Selena pushed him away.

"Oh... don't be like that," he teased.

"Seriously," the guards said, "we really don't know."

Selena rolled her eyes. "Sure, tell me anything."

Jordan pulled Selena back to him, making sure she understood what he was about to say as he stared into her brown orbs.

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“I’ve only been here during its grand opening in 2014 and even then it was a family affair. No other women.”

Satisfied, Selena nodded, accepting his answer.

“Sweetheart, do you really think I’m tacky enough to take you where I’ve taken others?”

Selena twisted her lips. “I hope not.”

“You don’t have to worry about that. I barely have time for lunch. Believe me, I wouldn’t do something so tasteless.”

Selena leaned into him and softened at his words.

“You’re just telling me that to make me feel better.”

“Is it working?”

Selena gasped and covered her mouth then pushed Jordan again as he wailed with laughter.

“I’m just kidding, sweetheart. Come back here,” he said, drawing her back into his embrace.

“So, you think this is funny?”

Jordan held a strong smirk. "I'm just playing around with you, my love. Are you always so easily offended?"

"Yes," Selena stated as facts.

Jordan chuckled again. "I can't promise to never do it again. I like it when you pout. It's sexy."

Selena blushed and bit the corner of her lip. Jordan reached down to kiss her, and as his lips were breaths away from hers, Selena curved him, rolling her head to the side.

"Ooh!" she said, "how's that for jokes?" She crossed her arms defiantly.

Jordan nodded and rubbed his chin with a laugh. "Okay, you got me. But you know you could never get away from me that easily." He pulled her back and captured her mouth so fast the oxygen from her lungs was removed. Selena practically fell where she stood, but Jordan held on to her, giving her breath back only to take it away again. When Jordan finally let Selena breathe on her own accord, she was dizzy, in a mind-numbing spell.

Her voice held a low throaty depth when she spoke again. "That was um... incredible."

"What? The kiss... or, this!"

Jordan scooped Selena off her feet and tossed Selena over his arm.

"Oh my God!" she screamed as she pealed with laughter.

Jordan marched over to the stand before sitting Selena back on her toes. He held on to her until he was sure Selena had her footing.

“You good?” he asked.

“Yeah.” She blushed.

Jordan glanced to the attendant and noticed the elaborate smile on the woman’s face.

“Good afternoon,” he said. “I’d like two sets for me and my lady if you will.”

“Coming right up, Mr. Rose, and here are two complimentary hot cocoas to keep you warm while you wait.”

“Thank you.”

The teetering lady quickly handed over two fresh cups of hot chocolate to which Jordan offered one to Selena.

“I like the sound of my lady,” Selena admitted with another blush. She blew over her warm cup and eyed Jordan as he stared back at her fiercely.

What about my wife... The compelling thought raced through Jordan’s bloodstream and at the same time his heart rate increased. Shit. Selena would think he was crazy if she knew where he thoughts ventured over the last twenty-four hours. Or would she?



### Chapter Fifteen

When the attendant returned, it was with the manager who carried their skates in hand. She was a rather tall woman almost meeting Jordan's height of six foot three inches. Curly black and silver strands coursed through her mane, and her face was flushed from the cool outdoor weather.

"Mr. Rose, thank you and your companion for joining us today here at Maggie's Daley Park." The woman glanced between the two. "Am I to assume you guys are a couple?"

The city of Chicago was infamous for trying to find out who was dating in the Rose family. While they tried to live their lives like anyone else, it was impossible because of their popularity. Jordan slipped an arm underneath Selena's and branded her to his side.

"No need to assume," he said, "this is Selena, my girlfriend."

The woman's mouth opened, and she clapped with glee. Selena blushed even harder. Although they'd made that clear last night at Velvet Café, Selena had yet to hear him say those words out loud. It spun her where she stood and sizzled her blood. Just then, Jordan leaned into her for a kiss on the forehead when Selena turned her face up to meet his lips head-on.

"Mmmm," Jordan's dark voice grooved. He pulled away then gave Selena a warning glare. "Don't get me started, girl."

Selena chuckled and turned back to the smiling manager with a wave.

“Hi, how are you this afternoon?”

“Doing better now that we have celebrities in our midst.”

Selena pressed her lips tightly. She was hardly a celebrity. But with Jordan at her side, she’d just unintentionally become one.

“Here are your skates. Lockers are located over there,” the manager pointed.

“Thank you,” Selena and Jordan chimed simultaneously.

Jordan’s arms fell from her waist, and he clutched her hand, mingling their fingers. They strolled hand in hand to the lockers and removed their shoes and strapped on their blades.

“I didn’t know you could ice skate,” Selena said.

“Growing up, Norma aided us in trying out different things. She nor my father wanted us to grow up with the mindset that we could only do this or that because of our heritage or because we were black men. While we were mostly interested in sports and girls—”

“Of course,” Selena added, and Jordan chuckled.

“They would take us out to try other things. Ice skating was one of them.” Jordan laughed when he thought of some of his favorite times. Hand in hand, he and Selena stepped onto the ice and Jordan made sure she had her balance before he continued.

“I will never forget the look on Jonas’ face. He was so outraged. The only thing he

wanted to do was go to the park and find some girls to talk to. Skating is for wimps he used to say.”

Selena grinned. “I can see Jonas saying something like that.”

Jordan nodded. “Jacob was the happiest. He fell so many times, spinning on his butt and sliding on his knees.”

“Jacob’s next to the youngest of your brothers, right?”

“Yeah. Then Josiah.”

“I’m sure Josiah had fun, too, then.”

Jordan nodded. “He did, but he would act like he was as mad as Jonas since he wanted to be so much like his big brother.”

Selena nodded again with a smile. “I guess most little brothers want to be like their big brothers.”

“Yeah, we all did in our own way. Jonas was our hero. We all took a back seat so to speak while trying to imitate his steps in life.” Jordan rubbed his chin with one hand. “He inspired us to be the best person we could, ya know. And even though we all had an eye out for women, he taught us self-discipline, and made sure we knew to respect them at all times. We listened to Jonas and took his words to heart.”

“Does he know how big of an influence he had on you guys’ upbringing?”

“I think so. We’ve told him as much. I know I have.”

With a quick shift, Jordan twirled Selena, pulling her into his embrace just as a skater

shot past her.

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“Oh!” Selena squealed, clutching his jacket to keep from falling.

“I’ve got you,” his easy voice grooved. Jordan placed a kiss on her forehead, then her nose, then her lips.

Selena held a dreamy eye on him. In a breathy whisper, she asked, “How did you even know he was coming?”

Jordan’s grin was debonair. “I have 360-degree periphery, love, and it’s tenfold when I’m around you.”

Selena shivered, causing Jordan to pull her even closer.

“Would you like my jacket?” He asked.

“Oh, no.” Selena smiled and dropped her head, trying to shake her thoughts. “I’m not cold. Quite the opposite actually.” She pulled away from him just as Jordan’s gaze fell. As if he couldn’t stand to be disconnected from Selena’s touch, he reached for her again, this time, moving a bit faster along the ice. A whimsical smile covered Selena’s face, and her pecan brown eyes lit up. Picking up her pace to match his, Selena skated out, and Jordan twirled her back in without breaking their strides.

“I like it when you’re right here,” he said. “Tucked up under me.”

Selena blushed, and her heart pitter-pattered in her chest.

For the first time, Selena seemed stumped. Her emotions were on overdrive, and she

didn't know what to make of it. Sure, she'd always said she desired to be with Jordan, but the authenticity of their relationship now was so real it scared her. Could Jordan really be her guy? The one she'd waited her whole life for? She sighed and glanced out over the ice. Others around them skated in their own worlds; some holding hands and some skating with children.

"Happy Valentine's Day," Jordan's smooth voice grooved.

Selena glanced back to him, an elated smile already on her face. In his hand he held a maroon box with a gold bow on top. Selena's eyes widened, and in the curve of the ice ribbon rink, they sailed to an easy stop.

"Jordan," Selena's surprised tone said it all. She wasn't expecting a gift. Their relationship was new, and she hadn't gotten him a thing. "You didn't have to get me anything," she said as she proceeded to take the box off his hands.

Jordan chuckled and pulled her in. Other skaters sailed around them. Some looking over at them awkwardly, and others paying them no mind.

"I don't think we're supposed to stop moving," Selena said.

"I think we'll be all right," he said. Jordan turned Selena toward the ice, locking his arms around her. He pushed off and they coasted as Selena opened her gift. Inside, she flipped back red and pink paper to reveal a journal, and not just any journal: the one she'd carefully wove together in her college years. The journal she'd thought was damaged beyond repair. Her book of poems in pristine condition. Instantly, her movements stopped on a gasp as she twirled around to meet Jordan's loving stare.

"How did you— where... why?"

Selena's eyes misted over, and heartfelt tears threatened to spill from the corners.

“I know how much your book meant to you, and I wanted you to have it as you remembered it.” Jordan took a soothing hand down her face then back up to wipe the tear that spilled. “I hope you don’t mind. The very night you told me about it, I searched out the school article and found your words. With a little TLC to the cover, I was able to give you some semblance of the journal you remembered. And...” he kissed her, “your words are beautiful.”

More tears slipped down Selena’s face. The wind around them took a sharp turn, flipping her hair into a current. Selena clutched the journal to her chest, bewildered in a complete tailspin of emotions. Moving her feet, she sailed into him diving her head into his chest. Jordan covered her, and Selena rested there as more tears dampened his shirt.

“Did I do a good thing?” Jordan asked. He wasn’t so sure, but he hoped for the best.

Selena turned her face up to look at him. “Jordan,” she paused and tried to gain her bearings, “you did a great thing. This means more than you’ll ever know.”

He kissed her forehead then exhaled, and Selena relaxed in his arms. They stood there in complete silence for a long stretch before Selena pulled back.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t get you anything.”

“Keep it moving,” someone passing by said.

Joining their hands back together, Jordan skated off with Selena at his side.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “I’m sure we can think of something later.”

The naughty retort turned Selena into mush as a surplus of heat consumed her.

“Handcuffs?” she asked, wondering if Jordan were talking about his earlier comment.

He winked and tucked her underneath him; watching one another as they sailed down the stretch of ice.



### Chapter Sixteen

They skated throughout the afternoon until early evening before venturing off through the park. Surrounding the rink was an abundance of activities for families, couples, and children to explore. An 18-hole mini golf course was located on the south end, and a Valentine's Day dance was hosted in the garden just beyond the picnic groves. Jordan held tight to Selena's hand.

"Have you ever played golf before?" he asked.

"I can't say that I have."

"Interested?"

"If you're teaching me." She blushed, and Jordan reached out and tweaked her chin. "Come here." He pulled them along, tucking her underneath him again as they walked together and entered the golf course. After grabbing the necessary equipment, Jordan stood behind Selena and positioned her just right, coasting a hand down her leg to separate them farther. Selena was using all the focus she could muster to really get an overview of the game and its rules. But Jordan's tight clutches here and there, against her legs, then waist, then finally standing over her with his long limbs stretched down her arms was electrifying. Selena squirmed so many times she was sure to Harlem Shake right out of his arms. Jesus. There was no way her friends were feeling this type of bliss. Were they?

Selena glanced just over her shoulder into Jordan's stare while she was bent just slightly, ready to take aim.

“Now pull your shoulders back.”

Selena did what he said.

“And,” Jordan coached her hand back. “Swing.” Together, they swayed, sending the ball flying down the green path toward its goal. Selena’s eyes widened with elation when she realized the ball was going to hit its mark. It bounced down off onto a third level and roamed around before falling into the hole.

“Oh my God!” Selena tossed her arms up with her gold club swinging in hand.

“Whoa!” Jordan’s reflex caught hold of the flying metal just as it left Selena’s fingertips with a slip.

“Oh!” Selena gasped and covered her mouth with shocked eyes. “I almost took you out!” She shrieked then laughed, doubling over at her clumsiness.

Jordan slipped his arms around Selena and cuddled her up. “You trying to have me out cold. What’s up with that?”

Selena laughed and shook her head, barely able to speak. “I’m so sorry,” she laughed, “I think I got overly excited.”

“That would be a safe assumption.”

Selena laughed some more. “Aww, baby.” She straightened with a smirk and slipped her arms up his shoulders. Warm hands landed on his face, thawing him immediately. The heat sank into his bloodstream and dove down to his groin. As cold as it was, neither of them wore gloves, and it didn’t seem to be a bother.

Selena pulled Jordan’s head down, and they kissed long, soft, and slow. Meeting his

hungry gaze, she spoke, “How’s that? Does it make you feel better?”

A rumble cruised from Jordan. “That makes me feel something more than better.”

“Mmmm,” Selena moaned, “what if I did it again?” She leaned into his hot lips, melting into his mouth.

Jordan was an excellent kisser. His heated mouth took over Selena, making her yearn for him every second.

“We can take this back to my place,” he said. “As a matter of fact, we’re done here, right?”

Selena giggled and withdrew. “What about our dance?”

Jordan leaned his forehead into hers and exhaled, coaching his libido to remain calm. “You’re right.”

“But first I need to beat you at your own game.”

Jordan arched an inquisitive brow. Selena nodded. “Un huh.” She pivoted on her heels and walked away from him headed to the next hole.

Jordan stood by and watched Selena get into the stance he’d taught her and pull back with a perfect swing. The ball sailed down the pathway and found its goal quickly. Jordan boasted a magnanimous grin.

“Nice,” he said.

Selena did a jig and just as she went to raise the golf stick, Jordan flew to her side and clutched it in his palm. Selena turned slowly to face him still holding on, with both of

their arms raised in the air while their others held firm to wrists and shoulders.

“I see right now I’ll need to guard you more often whenever you’re around a stick.”

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Selena smiled naughtily. “I’m going to remember that later. I have a feeling I’ll need a guard throughout the night.”

Their arms dropped slowly. “We’ll never make it to that dance if you start with me, woman.”

Selena kissed his lips then his chin, then face. “I want my dance. Let’s go.”

She didn’t have to tell him twice. They strolled hands locked back to the equipment stand and handed over their items then left for the gardens. People milled about and surprisingly no one seemed to mind the cold temperatures. When they made it to the grove, a young gentleman wearing overalls, a red top hat, and black boots approached them with a smile. Attached to his shoulders was a double strap that holstered a box against his chest with single roses inside.

“I’ve got roses of all kind: Centifolia, Damask, Mister Lincoln, Golden Celebration. They all represent a different level of love. See anything you like?” he asked.

The assortment of flowers was beautiful, ranging from a yellowish white, to pink, gold, and of course red.

Jordan tapped his chin. “Tell me about these different levels of love,” he said.

Happily, the young fella pointed to the pink rose. “Philia, most known as the type of love created on kindness, friendships, trustworthiness, and reliance.”

He moved along to the yellowish white rose.

“Agape, most known as the love for strangers, nature, or God. The love of an Agape rose shapes, enhances and sustains us. Socially and psychologically.”

The young man moved to the next rose, lifting it in his hand. It held a layer of blues, soft and dark.

“The Pragma Rose carries the type of love that is established on reason or obligation, like with arranged marriages. Its focus is on one’s long-term interests.”

He replaced the rose and lifted an orange flower.

“Philautia. Also known as the self-love rose. Its name speaks for itself, but just to elaborate, it isn’t the kind of self-love that promotes pride or superiority. It is a healthy love that promotes confidence, a poignant appraisal of our own value.”

When he lifted a pink and red rose, the smile on his face widened.

“Ludus. A playful, teasing and flirtatious love. It is sometimes mistaken for an Eros love, but is more on the friendly side than it is romantic. Of course, the two could be combined, and then you’ll have a magical love like no other.”

“Tell me more about this Eros love,” Jordan said.

The young man’s full face lit up. “Eros is a sensual, zealous love,” He grabbed the red rose, “it’s the kind that Greek mythology determined was the love from cupid’s arrow. It can build you up and make you stronger and at the same time destroy you and make you weak depending on the way it’s used. It’s the ultimate weapon of love, more so than most of the others combined.”

Jordan sent a lazy sweep of his eyes over Selena’s entire body. He bit down on his lips and sucked air in with his teeth. The gesture had Selena squirming all over the

place again. When he returned his gaze to the young fella, Jordan smiled confidently.

“What would it take for you to make a bouquet of the red roses with one single rose of the others outlining the arrangement for my lovely lady here?”

The young fella’s eyes lit up and so did Selena’s. “I’d be more than happy, sir.” He glanced over at Selena. “This will be one strong sentimental bouquet,” he said. “You must be someone special.”

“She is,” Jordan drawled with a keen eye on Selena.

Her thoughts jumbled, and the soft melodies from a grand piano surrounded the area. “Fall for You” by Leela James began to play. Jordan tightened his grip on Selena, drawing her so close they couldn’t breathe without each other. His lips hovered above hers.

“Can I have this dance?” he asked.

Selena’s heart rocked, and she nodded with a blush. “Yes.”

Jordan bit back on his lip then glanced over at the young fella. “Hold on to that for a minute for me, will you?”

“Yes, sir,” the young man said as he continued to gather roses for the bouquet.

Jordan pulled Selena’s hands, tying her arms around his neck as his slipped around her waist. Everyone in the background faded out, and they swayed so effortlessly as if they were joined as one. Leela James’ voice rang out as she sang about a new friendship, and the substantial sensation of falling in love. With each verse that bellowed, both Jordan and Selena felt the lyrics on a level neither of them had experienced before.

He's the one.

Selena's silent revelation fluttered through her heart, and her eyes closed as she breathed him in. This was actually happening. The rise and fall of Selena's chest was building a slow but exciting hypersensitive dance. It rocked her and held her captive. She melted into his embrace, barely recognizing the movement of her feet as they danced.



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She's the one.

Jordan's lips met Selena as his silent revelation also hammered through him. This must've been the kind of love his father had for his mother. An unconditional, nostalgic crescendo of bliss that molded his heart and shaped his thoughts. Jordan clutched Selena as if she could slip through his fingers and fly away on a current of wind.

The song drifted around them as they both floated on a plane of their own. Their lips continued to mix, and heat slinked down their skin in a coat of wild sensations.

"Spend the night with me," Jordan said. "Again."

A ripple eased down Selena's spine. "Okay," her quiet voice murmured.

Jordan twirled her out and pulled her back in, dipping her with an easy transition. Selena's mouth opened on a gasp as a shrill of energy zigged through her. Pulling her back to her feet, Jordan settled his lips on Selena's temple and the song closed out, slowly. Claps and cheers surrounded them. It was that moment Selena and Jordan realized they'd had an audience. Some around them snapped pictures while others recorded with their phones.

"We have some lovers in the house..." the host crooned from the stage.

More clapping and applauding. Selena blushed and Jordan ticked her chin with a finger. Sweeping her under his arm, Jordan turned to the flower boy and took the bouquet off his hands. Selena held her breath as her heart knocked when Jordan

presented her with the gorgeous roses.

“For you, beautiful.”

Selena blushed so hard her cheeks stung.

“Thank you.” She stuffed her nose in the roses while keeping her eyes on Jordan.

“I have one other thing I want you to witness.” He stepped to her side and interlaced their arms. “Come with me” They strolled away and Selena threw her head back at the flower boy.

“Thank you!” she beamed.

He nodded also holding onto a wide smile. As they walked, Selena’s mind tumbled. There was a time when she thought she knew what love was. But nothing could compare to this. When Selena noticed they were headed back in the direction of the Airbus, a wave of jubilation settled over her. What was Jordan planning to do next? Selena bit down on her lip as she wondered. Before she knew it, Jordan was opening the door for her.

He helped her in and made sure Selena was content before slipping in on the other side.

“What are you up to now?” She beamed.

“I guess you’ll find out in a minute.”

They buckled up and within a few minutes Jordan and Selena were airborne. As the Airbus ascended, the sky changed shape and white clouds turned orange. The glow from the sunset scoured the firmament hanging over the city like a shower of gold.

“Oh my God!” Selena clutched her bouquet, and her mouth dropped. She’d seen a sunset before, but nothing as spectacular as this. And it was right here in her city. The helicopter lingered midair while they both took in the beautiful radiance. When it finally descended, in its wake was another beautiful array of lights as the city of Chicago lit up. Selena looked on with such wonder on her face it squeezed Jordan’s heart.

She was so easy to please and enjoyed moments in life that people took for granted every day. God must have created her just for him. Why else would he have a chance at loving her for the rest of their lives?

With easy mobility, Jordan piloted the Airbus, flying them back the way they came, over the bean, and past the towers. Selena enjoyed every moment of their flight, and her mind, body, and spirit was abuzz with splintering energy. Being with Jordan was a constant thrill that completely took her breath away.

“I had a great time, Jordan.” She paused. “This was the best time I’ve had actually.” Selena slipped a string of hair behind her pierced ear.

“Are you leaving me?” He asked with a questionable smirk.

“No, but I just wanted you to know I enjoyed my time with you today.”

Jordan’s handsome face awakened with delight. “My time spent with you is always pleasant whenever we’re together, but especially today.”

Selena blushed again and cleared her throat.

“Can I feed you?” Jordan’s thick voice drawled. The last time Jordan said that she ended up on her back with his head between her legs.

Selena slipped a sultry eye his way. “Yeah.”

They descended over his luxury loft, parking the Airbus with efficiency.

“Two for two,” Selena said.

“Going for the win, girl.”

Selena giggled, and they left the aircraft for the elevator.

### Chapter Seventeen

Inside the mobile crane, Jordan and Selena held each other, not wanting to depart for a second. A surplus of heat poured around them, and their chemistry blazed as they eyed one another.

“Where would you like to eat?” he asked.

“Wherever,” she said anxiously.

Jordan towered, over her, and Selena held her face upward with her nose barely skittering his chin. It was hard for Jordan to keep his mind focused on feeding her food since his nourishment derived from a carnal craving he held. Without warning, his hand popped the top button of her coat and strolled up the curve in her neck. Selena shivered, and her eyes faltered.

Don’t jump his bones in this elevator, Selena. You’re hungry girl, it’s time to eat, focus. Selena tried to pull herself together, but the heat from his fingertips liquefied her in seconds. The fighting they both tussled with failed, and they both moved simultaneously. Selena scurried up his chest, and Jordan lifted her with ease. Against the wall of the elevator, they kissed as his lips crushed into her mouth. The bouquet of roses along with the book of poems hit the elevator floor quickly.

“Selena...” he moaned.

Their tongues frolicked as they snacked on each other, lips sealing, and breaths mixing. Jordan impatiently popped the buttons on her jacket, exposing Selena’s soft

body to his heated hands. He fumbled with her jeans, then yanked them over her hips.

A yelp shot from Selena as her chest rose and fell with labored breaths. She grabbed his ears and brought Jordan's lips back to her mouth as he peeled her out of the pants. She couldn't get them off fast enough. They disjointed for a second, long enough to remove the denim material and jump back in one another's arms.

Jordan's lips trailed down her ear, and he bit the bottom of her lobe.

"I'm about to fuck you in this elevator..." he said with a thunderous growl.

Selena squeezed her eyes shut, and her body rocked on a thrill of anticipation. She didn't see when Jordan freed himself, but God did she feel him.

"Aaaah!" She tossed her head back and let loose the most languorous squeal in all of her life. "Jordaaaaan!" she moaned, strangled with the ultimate intensity of his invasion.

Jordan took her lips into his mouth and sucked her tongue as he continued to submerge inside her heated core. Selena screamed into his mouth, and Jordan buried himself to the hilt. Snatching her breath, Jordan inched back and rested his forehead against hers.

"You are so wet. What the fuck," he said, tinged at the attack she held on his libido. He took her lips again, and moved back and forth, propelling into Selena as if he'd turned into a madman. "You're never leaving me, girl... shit!" He cursed as they connected over again.

"Oh my God!" Selena squealed. "Jordan, baby!"

He lifted her higher and tossed her legs over his shoulders. "What is it that you want

from Jordan, sweetheart?” He bit down on her chin with his consistent thrusts, slamming into her volcanic fountain. Selena’s language evaded her, and in its place was a moaning, squealing ebonics.

“Ah shit!” Jordan barked. He braced his palms against the wall, lifting Selena’s bottom even more, and his deep-rooted strokes milled into the slippery solidness of her bottom. Their shouts and moans increased, echoing around the elevators walls. Continuous thrusts pushed through Selena, and Jordan made sure to brand her. She belonged to him. There would never be another to come after. As it was, Jordan couldn’t see Selena absent from his life. She was everything he’d waited for unwrapped for his undertaking. He slammed into her again, his strokes becoming temerarious.

Selena was unhinged and completely undone. She squealed and moaned at the constant beating of Jordan’s love and shrieked even louder when his mouth found her neck and his teeth sunk into her flesh. Jordan’s hips held a constant swing as he dug into her center with feverish raps. Faster, then harder, they melted into the elevator wall as their skin smoldered and incinerated from their labor of love.

“I’m!”

Selena didn’t get her words together fast enough. An ocean of crème shot from her womb and covered Jordan’s shaft as she came hard.

“Aaaah!”

A squeal tore from her throat as her release pumped from her in a grand wave of jolted pulses. Her eyes rolled, and her mouth hung, and her body went completely stiff as it continued to bathe Jordan’s shaft in a sea of cum.

It was more than he could handle and that was saying a lot for the type of man Jordan

was. His hips bucked with a jackrabbit intensity as he too came with a splattering surge of semen.

“Selena, Fuck!” He shouted.

As Jordan’s dick ejaculated, he recaptured Selena’s mouth in a carnivorous prolonged electrifying kiss. Their bodies sealed together; neither of them wanting to release the other for fear they would both fall apart. The sensation running through them was too deep, and with their hearts pounding together they would surely collapse.

Slowly as they descended from on high, Selena fought to calm her ragged breathing, and Jordan kissed against her forehead. She stared into his brown eyes, dark and layered with thick intensity. Jordan’s hand moved without his mind instructing it to do so and inserted his key then tapped in a code on the elevator door.

“Jordan Alexander Rose,” he thundered, activating the elevator so they could make their descent.

All at once, the tin box moved, and the shift caused them to bump into each other, making more moans escape them both.

“Fuck, girl. I’m the healthiest person I know and still this pussy is going to give me a heart attack.”



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Selena tried not to laugh, but it tinkered out of her with ease and turned into a sultry whimper. The elevator reached his loft, and the doors opened to his living area. With carefulness, Jordan removed himself from her canal, and they both groaned at the disjoining. Selena's body went limp, and Jordan swooped her up into his arms then left the elevator.

“My roses and journal!” Selena squealed.

“No one will take them, trust me.”

She relaxed, knowing it was safe to forget about it for now. When her stomach growled, Selena covered her abdomen with her hand.

“You’ve worked me up an appetite, Mr. Rose.”

“What do you say we take a shower before going to dinner?”

“I’d say you’re attempting to make me cum until there are no orgasms left to be had.”

Rumbling laughter spilled from Jordan, and his smile widened with hearty pleasure.

“What if I promise not to touch you the entire time?”

“Then I’d call you a liar.”

Jordan’s rumbling laugh scoured from him again.

“Okay, we could take turns if that makes you feel any better.”

Selena wasn't sure it would. Although her stomach was screaming for food, being away from Jordan for even a minute wasn't ideal for her right now. But if they should ever make it to dine, she would have to stick to her guns and shower alone, just this time.

“Okay, me first.”

It only took them another two hours and Selena running away from Jordan when he managed to suck her toes into his mouth. Clearly, he was a foot man since the mere taste of her feet made him harder than a box of rocks. He was an animal, wanting to savor every part of Selena all over again, but she managed to fight him off, and now they were entering Chef Lin's Italian restaurant arm in arm.

The hour had reached midnight, and the restaurant was open until three a.m. Even with the late-night time, the eatery was still heavy with patrons. No sooner than they stepped through the doors did curious eyes, whispers, and blatant stares turn their way.

“Mr. Rose!” A server who was too chipper for Selena's taste scurried up to them. “Thank you for joining us tonight.” The server glanced at Selena as an afterthought. “Hello, table for two?”

“Yes,” Jordan said.

“Follow me.”

And they did, winding around tables some filled with people and their double dates and others with lone patrons. One lady sitting off in the corner appeared to be nursing a martini. Her face was turned down as if she had the blues. Selena didn't know the

nature of the woman's turmoil, but she did feel sorry for her. Valentine's Day was not the day to hit up your favorite restaurant alone. It would just remind you that everyone in Chicago was in love but you. Selena knew all too well about that feeling. She'd had plenty of them.

"Here's your table," the server chimed. "Would you like to order drinks while you look over the menu?"

"I'll take a sweet tea," Selena said as Jordan adjusted the chair underneath her.

"Coke," Jordan stated, "and a shot of Brandy on the side."

"I'll return shortly with your drinks."

The waitress skipped off, and Jordan claimed his seat.

"Have you eaten here before?" Selena asked.

"Yes. Would you like me to recommend something from their menu?"

"Actually, I've eaten here several times before myself, so I know the menu quite well."

At the arch of his brow, Selena went on.

"You know a date or two."

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Jordan glanced up and shouted, “Waiter, we’ve decided to eat somewhere else.”

Selena gasped and tugged Jordan’s hand from the air. “No, I was just kidding,” she said.

Jordan peered at her.

“I’m serious,” Selena insisted, “I only said that to mess with you.”

She held an upright smile on the edge of a guffaw. Jordan tossed another look at the server. “We’re staying,” he said.

Selena slapped a hand over her mouth and laughed. “What is wrong with you, man?”

“There’s nothing wrong with me. I just don’t care to do anything with you that you’ve done with someone else. Isn’t that what you said back at Maggie’s?”

Selena pursed her lips and nodded. “Okay, you got me,” she said.

“I better,” his profound warning implied.

Selena smiled and glanced down at the menu. “So, what do you recommend?”

A silhouette swooped over them and with it a seductive voice. “I don’t mean to interrupt, but can I have a word with Jordan?”

Both Jordan and Selena glanced toward the person who raided their space. In the

flesh, Madison Santari stood, lingering closer to Jordan than Selena cared to admit. Her tall, lean frame was mildly shaped like that of a runway model, and the body-hugging dress she wore was made by some expensive designer, Selena was sure of it. Selena didn't want to look the woman over, but she couldn't help but take in the entire personality that she'd been secretly competing with over the last couple of weeks. Madison was staring at Jordan like he was the love of her life; eyes low, mouth puckered, with a wicked lean into her hip.

Blinking out of her state of reverie, Madison glanced over at Selena. "You don't mind, do you?"

"I'm sure whatever you need to say can wait," Jordan said.

Madison poked her thin lips out. "It will only take a second I promise." She clasped her hands together, and suddenly, Selena had no appetite at all.

Don't even trip, Selena. Take a page out of Octavia's book. Be nice.

Even as the thoughts moved throughout her, Selena was ready to tell Madison to take a hike.

"Sounds like it's an emergency," Selena said.

"For sure," Madison agreed. "I'd never interrupt otherwise, but considering Jordan here hasn't been returning my phone calls, I had no choice but to ambush him."

Madison laughed a soft fluttering sound that made Selena want to throw up. What type of laugh was that anyway? A grown woman should never sound like that. Selena couldn't help but feel vindicated that Jordan hadn't been taking Madison's calls. It made her pulse calm, and the territorial vibe she felt lessened.

“I’ll tell you what, I need to go to the ladies’ room.”

“Selena,” Jordan started.

“What is it, baby?” Selena reached out and touched his chin. “What do you want from Selena,” she crooned, repeating what he’d said in the elevator.

Jordan shut his mesmerizing eyes and laughed an easy hearty groove. When his lashes fluttered back open, Jordan shook his head.

“Girl, what am I going to do with you?”

“Anything you want,” she purred, standing.

The dangerous look in Jordan’s eyes let Selena know she’d hit her intended mark. The annoyed look in Madison’s confirmed it.

“I’ll be back...” Selena sang, twisting her hips as she sashayed to the ladies’ room.

### Chapter Eighteen

In the vestibule, Selena checked her appearance and added a gloss to her lips. After the romp she and Jordan had in the elevator, and then her tussling to get away after that blissful shower, Selena had to remake the bounce in her shoulder-length mane taking a comb through it to curve around her neck. It was perfect as of now, but the rummaging in her stomach wasn't. What are you doing in here?

"Damn you, Octavia," she whispered to herself.

It would be all but expected for Selena to show out on Madison's ass, but she had to learn to be subtle about things. Selena couldn't go her whole life getting loud or flipping out when things didn't go her way.

Except for this time. Selena shook her head. That was it. She'd given Madison a long enough time to say what was on her mind. And really, she shouldn't have. Selena left the restroom just as quickly as she'd entered. It must have been about five good minutes, but that would just have to do. As she sauntered through and around the network of tables, Selena's eyes skipped over the heads around and froze. Peering just slightly combined with an immediate frown, Selena's mind reared, and her legs changed directions as she moved away from Jordan and Madison.

As her footfalls crept to a table in the middle of the restaurant, Selena couldn't help but be taken aback by the carefree and loving way the woman watched her date. They leaned into each other and kissed. A long, drawn out, sensuous coupling of their lips. Selena's heart pounded in her chest just as it became tight with a sudden grip. When she stood just inches from their table, the woman glanced her way with a raised eye

as did the man.

“Dad?” Selena’s voice was a shaking vibration, as if at any minute she would pass out from what she’d just witnessed.

Memories of her childhood reeled through Selena’s thoughts: laying in her parents’ bed at night when she was sick or afraid of the dark; having breakfast, lunch and dinner in the home she grew up in; watching her parents be affectionate and kiss when they were headed out for date night. The playful way her father played with her mother when she was trying to pay attention to her favorite TV show of all time, Law and Order: Special Victims Unit. The lush look in their eyes. The love her parents held for one another. All the lessons they’d instilled in her about honoring your family unconditionally now felt polluted. Selena blinked back a morsel of tears that threatened to spill from her eyes. Now this. A kiss to a woman who was a stranger. Not her mom. An obvious lover. It was branded now, trying to rip Selena from everything she’d grown to understand about love. Her heart beat erratically, and her voice was caught in her throat.

“Selena.”

Her father’s voice was dismayed. It was clear he didn’t want his baby girl to see him with another woman, not until she was ready at least. His gaze bounced around before landing back on her.

“Are you here with someone,” he asked.

Still stunned, Selena’s hand shook with fury. How dare he say anything other than explain his actions.

“What the fuck is this?” Selena finally shrieked.



The woman was stunned, and she glanced between Walter and Selena.

“Watch your mouth, young lady,” Walter said, his voice elevated.

Selena shut her lips tight, still aware that this was her father she referenced. Selena turned on the woman.

“Who are you?”

The woman opened her mouth to speak when Selena shot out another question.

“Did you know that he’s married,” she screamed.

Her outburst garnered the attention of nearby customers.

“I’m sorry, Amelia, this is my daughter, Selena, we haven’t had the conversation yet.”

Amelia now looked just as dismayed as Walter.

“You’re sorry?” Selena shouted again. “Why are you apologizing to her?”

“Selena, you know your mother and I are not together—”

“Why because you’ve been sleeping around with this bitch!?”

Selena was livid and too far away from reason to care about her explosion.

“Young lady, you will lower your voice and not talk to me or Amelia in that manner, do you hear me!?” Mr. Strauss tried to gather himself, and Selena shook with absolute vehemence.

Without giving herself a chance to think, Selena marched up to her father and sent a reckoning palm across his face in a stinging slap. His surprise spread across his face.

“All my life you’ve talked about respect. But you sit here, with this, this... whoever she is, disrespecting my mother!?”

Her father went to open his mouth, and Selena slapped him again as her heart broke for her mom. “You son of a bitch! I don’t want to hear you’re separated! You’re still married! You can’t do this to her! You’re not even trying to work it out!”

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Selena went crazy slapping her father again just as he came out of his seat to return her strike.

“Don’t do it, Walter,” Amelia said.

But he held a hand back to attack Selena when Jordan entered the ring, gallantly shoving in return with the force of a charging bull. Mr. Strauss stumbled, tripping over his feet, and Jordan stepped closer to the man. Jordan reached out and grabbed Mr. Strauss’s collar, fisting it as he gave a one-time warning.

“Listen to your date,” he barked.

With a shove, Jordan tossed Mr. Strauss back into the table and glowered at him in a dare. He waited a beat then turned to Selena, his glower turning into a sympathetic stare. Selena still shook with rage, and once again her thoughts jumbled.

“Is this what you’ve done?” she asked. “Did you hit my mother when she angered you?”

Both Jordan and Selena glared at Mr. Strauss, and he huffed and pulled his suit jacket together.

“Young lady, I don’t owe you an explanation for—”

“Bullshit!” Selena screamed. “You owe me an explanation for everything that’s happening right now. I can’t even believe this. You are not the father I once knew! You... You... Ugh!”

Selena turned on her heels and ran out of the diner. Seconds behind her, Jordan flew to her side and drew Selena in just as she stumbled out into the midst of the chilly night air.

She fell to the ground.

Selena's world was collapsing all around her. The life and love she'd known had been given by her parents were her blueprint. And now, they just weren't. Selena cried heavily as Jordan held her tight. His heart crushed to see Selena in such a grim state of distress. Selena's head pounded, and she pushed away from Jordan, but he held on to her.

"No," he said. "Don't pull away from me. I won't let you."

His words softened Selena's heart, making her cry even harder. Jordan hadn't done a thing to her. He didn't deserve to be pushed away, but the unfaithfulness of Selena's father made her begrudge Jordan, and she shoved him hard again.

"Hit me if you must. Use me as your punching bag if it helps, but please, Selena, don't push me away... please."

And she did. Her hands connected with his chest, heaving a surge of pounds and pushes into what felt like a brick wall. Tears streamed faster down her face, and Selena screamed a long wail of an outcry.

"Why is he doing this!?" She sobbed as her fist hits slowed, and she fell into pieces. "Oh my God, my mother!" she wailed. Selena's head fell against Jordan, and he took a sweeping hand down her back.

Abruptly, Selena blinked back her tears and straightened in his arms.

“I’ve got to get out of here,” she said.

“Wherever it is, I’m taking you.”

“No, no!” she shouted, lost in a hail of thoughts.

“Selena...”

“No, Jordan, okay just...” She turned and staggered then walked away.

“I’m not letting you leave like this.”

“You don’t have a choice!”

Selena jumped into an awaiting taxi that had been sitting for a customer to exit the restaurant.

“Selena!” Jordan shouted, stepping to the back door.

Selena shouted at the driver, and he sped away from the curb, leaving Jordan brimming with intangible frustration.

### Chapter Nineteen

She felt trapped in an endless nightmare. Selena turned her focus back to the client in front of her.

“Yes, Mr. McBeal. For this first quarter of the year, you’re on board to save twice as much as you did last year around this time.”

“So it was all worth the risk.”

Selena smiled. “It was a good gamble.”

“I’m lucky to have you, dear. I’m certain if I had done this on my own, I would’ve invested in the wrong stock and chased my money with my tail.”

The older gentleman laughed at his own joke and reached over the desk to shake Selena’s hand. She accepted it, rising to her feet to walk Mr. McBeal to the door.

“Have a good day, Mr. McBeal.”

“You, too, darling.”

Selena stepped back and closed her door then returned to her chair. She closed out a few files that sat open on her computer and worked to keep her mind from her troubles. Some she’d created and some not. It had been six days since she’d walked up on her father having Valentine’s Day dinner with his, whatever she was, and the anger Selena felt had not fizzled. Her father reached out to her, but Selena made it

clear to the ladies at S & M Financial that she wasn't taking any pop-up visits or phone calls from him.

All that seemed to do was direct his calls to her cell phone, but Selena was a fortress, incapable of being reached. What was worse, Selena hadn't spoken to Jordan. He'd called incessantly for two days before going completely silent. Selena didn't know whether to be relieved or worried that she might never hear from him again. Whichever it was, her week had been stoic as she went about business as usual.

When the phone on Selena's desk rang with the sequenced three quick shrills, she breathed easy that it was an internal call. Selena lifted the receiver and placed it to her ear.

"Yes."

"Do you have a client? It's Octavia."

Selena shifted the phone to her other ear and continued to close out the programs on her computer.

"No."

"Okay, I wanted to touch basis with you about Samiyah's baby shower."

"When is it again?"

"This Friday."

"Oh, okay, what's up?"

"Were you able to get the bakery to agree to make the cake within the time frame we

have?”

“Um, oh, shit,” Selena grumbled.

“What’s wrong?”

“Let me call you back. I need to check on something.”

“Selena.”

Selena sighed. “Yes.”

“Do we need to have a pow-wow? What’s going on?”

“No, I’m good, it just slipped my mind, but I’ll get it done.”

Octavia became quiet.

“Hello?”



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“It must be Jordan,” Octavia said.

Selena frowned. “What must it be Jordan?”

“You’re excited about the awards luncheon this weekend, and it slipped your mind.”

At the mention of the luncheon, Selena groaned inwardly.

“Am I right?”

Selena let out a languid breath. “I um, kind of forgot about that, too.”

Octavia became silent again.

“Hello?”

Seconds later, the door to Selena’s office opened, and Octavia glided through. She sat down in a visitor’s chair directly in front of Selena, then crossed her legs and folded her arms.

Selena looked over Octavia’s Pam Grier appearance as if seeing her for the first time today.

“Tell me what’s going on and don’t lie.”

Selena relaxed in her chair. “You say that as if I lie to you all the time.”

“No, I say that because you try and hide when something’s bothering you all the time. See the difference there?”

Selena let out a harsh breath and told Octavia the full story of her Valentine’s Day night. The more Selena spoke the more the emotional structure of Octavia’s face changed.

“Oh nooo,” Octavia groaned. “Selena, I’m so sorry. Is there anything I can do?”

Selena shut her eyes, fighting back emotion that tried to overcome her.

“Unfortunately, no.”

“God, you don’t think Jordan would do that to you. Help me, please, I’m trying to understand.”

“Octavia, my parents have been together for a lifetime. There’s no way my mother thought she would be going through a divorce after fifty-one years of marriage. How is this fair to her? You spend your whole life with someone for them to have eyes for someone else and leave you?”

“Is that what happened?”

Selena hesitated. “I’m not entirely sure.”

At Octavia’s puzzled look, Selena pushed forward.

“Neither of them has actually said this is happening because of this. All I’ve received was an invitation to dinner and oh hey, Selena, we’re getting a divorce!”

Selena tossed up her arms and shook her head.

“You wouldn’t understand. I’m a part of who they are. If they divorce, we divorce, I have to pick sides, and love one more than the other, and oh God, I just can’t believe this is happening,” she said, overwhelmed.

Octavia rushed to her feet and skipped around the desk just as tears brimmed Selena’s eyes. Octavia threw her arms around her friend and held Selena while Selena gave into her mourning.

“I’m not supposed to be feeling this way, am I? I mean, I’m not a child, but I feel so dumbfounded and disheartened. I don’t know what to do.”

“Selena, I’m no therapist, but I highly doubt that it’s abnormal for you to feel a sense of dread. Like you said, you’ve followed their rules, listened to their advice, and considered them your models. With them breaking up surely it would throw your equilibrium off.”

Selena sniffled. “I’m gonna have to see a damn counselor, aren’t I?” She pouted and rolled her eyes.

“You might, baby, but if you do, may I suggest something?”

Selena shrugged.

“Maybe talk to your parents and encourage them to attend with you.”

Selena thinned her lips evenly.

“I can hardly stand my dad now. I don’t know what I’d do if I were around him again. And his introduction to Jordan was hardly the way I wanted them to meet.”

Octavia nodded with a frown and stepped back to perch her butt on Selena’s desk.

“Your father will understand. Baby, Jordan is a Rose, he’s not about to let anything happen to you regardless of who’s doing the pushing.”

Selena smirked. Thinking about Jordan saddened her more. He was only trying to help.

“I think I may have overexaggerated with Jordan.”

Octavia was nodding again.

“I like him a lot.” Selena’s voice quieted. “Love him, really.”

Octavia’s eyes shot up. “You, love him?”

Selena bit down on the corner of her lip and nodded.

“You love Jordan.” Octavia stated for good measure.

“Yes, I do, okay.” Selena huffed. “I’m in love with him, but.”

“Oh no, no, no.” Octavia shook her head. “You don’t get to say but. There is no but. You are making up a but where there is no but to be had.”

Selena rolled her eyes and cocked her head to the side. “There is a but.” She shrugged.

Octavia heaved a dramatic sigh.

“There is!” Selena swore.

“What’s the but, Selena, come on let’s hear it.”

Selena quieted again, and the silence in the room overtook them both. Octavia placed her hands on her round hips, and when she cocked her head to the side, her afro bounced.

“Okay, don’t get all Foxy Brown, on me,” Selena said.

“I’m waiting for this but.”

“But I don’t want to spend my life with someone who’ll leave me later. Forever means just that. No takebacks.”

“Oh, baby,” Octavia gave Selena a neck roll. “But what if the sky falls tomorrow? But what if 45 hits the nuclear button, and we all die? But what if you make the biggest mistake of your life because of a BUT?”

“Now you’re just making me feel silly.”

“Then I’m doing my job.” Octavia stood to her feet. “Remember on Thanksgiving when you knocked on my front door and I was in my pajamas?”

“Here we go,” Selena said.

“Oh yeah, because I’m about to go there.”

Selena folded her fingers and sat them perfectly in her lap as she crossed her legs.

“You dragged me to my bedroom, and made me get ready to see Jonathon even though he hadn’t returned my calls all week. You went so far as to turn on my shower and pull out clothes for me to wear. And I must admit, I was looking and feeling pretty pathetic. But at the end of the day, I was married. Do you know how happy Jonathon and I are now?”

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“I’m sure you’re going to tell me,” Selena murmured.

“So happy that I try not to miss a night of giving him fellatio.”

Selena gasped, and her eyes popped on a faltering smile.

“Mmhmm.” Octavia nodded. “Dinner is never served without it.” Octavia licked her lips. “It’s the best fellatio I’ve ever given.”

Selena tossed her head back and roared so hard the chair tilted, and she almost toppled over.

“Oh my God! Who are you and what have you done with Octavia!?”

Octavia strolled around the desk with a sway in her hips. “Jonathon turned Octavia out. It’s Mrs. Freak Nasty Rose to you.”

Selena continued to peal over, appreciating every moment of the laugh.

“That just made my whole day. I needed that so bad.” She giggled.

Octavia winked. “I thought you might.”

A heavy knock resounded at Selena’s office door, causing the ladies to become quiet instantly. Octavia peered over at Selena, and Selena shrugged. Octavia took the last few steps to the door and opened it.

“Special delivery,” the young man said.

Selena stood. It was the same young fella from Maggie’s Daley Park with the box of roses. Selena rounded her desk and paced up to him.

“Well, hello again,” she said.

“Madam,” he responded.

“Are you sure you have the right office?”

The young man smiled. “Certain.”

He pulled out a single pink rose and handed it over to Selena.

“Philia,” they both said concurrently. “It’s the friendship rose,” Selena practically whispered.

The young man smiled. “Good memory,” he said.

“There is no way I could forget.”

The young man handed over a small square note.

“Have a great day,” he said, beaming, then turned and disappeared.

Octavia waited for Selena’s explanation and Selena opened the note.

“Let’s not pretend to be just fine. Trust me, Selena, I’m your ally.”

Selena shut her eyes and exhaled, holding the note against her chest. It was a remix of



a piece of his poem from The Velvet Café.

“Whatever’s going on seems pretty sentimental. BUT what I want to know is what do you plan to do about it?” Octavia asked.

### Chapter Twenty

Margaret Strauss entered Frank's Steakhouse with the prose of a confident plutocrat. On her head, Margaret's mane hung in a conglomerate of brown and red curls. The sixty-eight-year-old woman was wrapped in a brown cardigan poncho coat with gold earrings hanging from her lobes. She scanned the restaurant with a piercing eye and paused when she'd spotted the man she was there to meet.

"Good morning," a hostess said. "Table for one?"

"I'm meeting someone, and I've just found them. Thanks anyway," she drawled.

In a catwalk strut, Margaret sashayed over to greet her guest.

"Walter," she said as she pulled up in front of him.

Walter Strauss glanced up and slipped his menu down on the table.

"Margaret."

Walter stood, and Margaret waited patiently as he pulled out her chair and allowed her to sit. Regardless of their pending divorce, Margaret still expected Walter to treat her like a lady. And he did.

"Are you two ready to order?" a male server asked.

"I don't know, I may need something strong for this conversation," Margaret said.

“Why is that? Whatever you have to say couldn’t be worse than the last time you required my attendance at dinner.”

Margaret frowned. The last time they’d had dinner she’d introduced divorce papers, and it had taken Walter by complete surprise. That was over two years ago, and Walter had been fighting Margaret on it ever since. Margaret was adamant about her reasons, but Walter evaded dinner every chance he got to keep from having this conversation, again. Only this time, Margaret hadn’t invited Walter to dinner.

“What are you talking about? You are the one who invited me.” Margaret reached into her tote and pulled out a piece of paper the size of a small square note.

Walter was disconcerted. He too pulled out a small note, and they both reached for the memos, then ran an eye down the message.

“I need you to meet me at Frank’s Steakhouse, 1 p.m. no questions and please be prompt.”

Both letters were signed with each of their Initials.

“What is the meaning of this?” Margaret scolded.

A shadow covered them both, and Margaret and Walter glanced up at the man standing before them.

“It was the only way I could get you two here without argument,” Jordan said. He snapped a button on his suit jacket closed and held his hand out to Margaret.

“I’m—”

“I know who you are,” Margaret said, delighted but intrigued in the same notion.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Walter asked.

Margaret accepted Jordan’s handshake, and Jordan slipped his hand back inside his pants pockets without offering it over to Walter.

“I’m here on behalf of your daughter.”

“She sent you here to set us up like this?” Walter asked. “Why didn’t she just come to us herself?”

Jordan’s jaw ticked. Mr. Walter Strauss clearly had an attitude, and Jordan understood since the last time they’d met he was seconds from knocking his head off. On the other side of the table, Margaret’s eyes rolled over Jordan’s staunch, tight physique. In the back of her mind, she was high-fiving her daughter for catching such a prestigious benefactor, and she couldn’t help but purse her lips and batt her eyes.

“Selena doesn’t know I’m here, and if she knew, most likely she’d try to stop this conversation. But, I care about her sanity, and you two are threatening that. It’s a simple cause and effect. Your divorce and lack of consideration of the psychological stress this is causing Selena is the reason I’m standing before you now.” Jordan waved his hand out to the side. “I’d like you to meet Dr. Shelia Bradford. She’s a family and marriage counselor.”

Dr. Shelia Bradford stepped to Jordan’s side. She was a short woman, medium build with shoulder-length gray hair, serious eyes, and round cheeks. Her attire was that of a professional: black pants suit and crème colored long-sleeved button-down blouse.

Margaret and Walter looked her up and down, half dismissing her as they glanced back at Jordan.

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“We don’t need a counselor. Margaret just needs to come to her senses,” Walter stressed.

“Again, this is about Selena. Whether you’re willing to go through counseling for the benefit of saving your marriage or not, you will go for the benefit of Selena’s stability.”

Walter opened his mouth to disregard Jordan when Jordan leveled him with a deadly glare.

“You seem to be having a difficult time understanding, so let me make it plain and clear, Mr. Strauss.” Jordan kept his gaze pinned on Walter. “Dr. Shelia Bradford comes highly recommended.”

“From who?” Walter asked.

“From me,” Jordan responded. “She was my family counselor when my mother’s life was abruptly taken from us so many years ago. Trust me when I tell you Dr. Shelia Bradford is what you need right now.” Jordan glowered at Walter. “Dr. Bradford will help you try to fix what’s broken, AND, if it can’t be fixed, she will help you two pull Selena into a safe environment where you can give her a clear understanding of what is going on and why.”

“What do you mean by safe environment?” Walter opposed.

Jordan’s glower intensified. “The last time I saw you, you were seconds away from striking your daughter, do you remember that?”

“Walter!” Margaret gasped.

“I wasn’t going to hit her, maybe shake her up a little, but…” Walter sighed. “She slapped me silly. It was just a sudden reaction.”

“Poor you,” Jordan said, laying the sarcasm on thick.

Margaret pushed out a resigned sigh. “I didn’t expect for her to take it this hard.”

“Why?” Dr. Bradford inquired.

“You know.” Margaret tossed her arms up. “She’s not young. The reality of people separating is not something her mind can’t understand. Happens to people every day.”

“On the contrary,” Dr. Bradford said. “Adult children are still your children. Finding out their parents are divorcing can cause trauma to stir within them. Your marriage is their life example. You’ve molded ideas about marriage, relationships, and family throughout years. Questions and doubts about their childhood could come into question. It can be just as tough for her as an adult as it is if she was an adolescent and, in many ways, a divorce can feel like a death.”

Margaret and Walter stared at each other.

“We should have this conversation in my office. After we’ve had a few sessions, I think it’s a good idea to bring your daughter in.”

Walter could see the doubt in Margaret’s eyes.

“We have to do it. If not for us, for Selena,” Walter said.

Margaret exhaled and nodded.

“When should we get started?” Dr. Bradford asked.

“If you’d like, Doctor, you can have a seat and we can make this our first session,” Walter said.

“That’s a great idea,” Dr. Bradford said. She glanced at Jordan and held her hand out for a shake.

“Thank you, Mr. Rose.”

“I’m still Jordan to you, Doctor.”

Dr. Bradford nodded in agreement then took her seat, and Jordan took his leave. Outside, Madison Santari was waiting, leaning against his Porsche with a prim smile on her face. Paparazzi didn’t miss a thing when it came to Chicago’s elite, and this time was no different. They stepped out of the shadows and snapped pictures as Jordan strolled up to Madison.

“Why do I get the strange feeling you’re following me?”

Madison’s smile expanded. “You need a date for the luncheon this Saturday right, and I need a ride home.”

Jordan shook his head with a mild grin. “Because you just happened to be stranded out here, right?”

“Exactly.”

Jordan chuckled and opened the passenger door. “If I were you, I’d make sure to have

a way home next time. I'd hate to see you take a taxi."

Madison's nose crinkled, and Jordan shut the door with a whistle on his tongue as he strolled to the driver's side.



### Chapter Twenty-One

Selena received a different colored rose and note throughout the entire week. It was always the same time of day when the gift arrived. The young man from Maggie's, who Selena found out was Samuel, was prompt with the gift every evening before Selena left for the day. Last night's rose caused the extra beat in Selena's heart to flutter rapidly, and she read the note again and again during the stretch of the night.

"Duty calls me blind, but our connection is like soil intertwined in a vine. Because you were designed with me in mind." –Pragma

Selena had stuffed her nose in the light blue layered rose so many times it was all she smelled for the remainder of the day. The Pragma was the obligation rose. She remembered Samuel saying it was the one that symbolized duty like with arranged marriages. At first being presented with the lovely flower, Selena was slightly taken back. But after reading Jordan's note, she melted to see he found his own quirky way of semblance between them and the meaning that accompanied the gorgeous rose. Now, she sat at her desk with her legs crossed, staring at the door of her office.

It was Friday, and in the next hour, she'd be in the mix of Samiyah's baby shower. Selena could've left early, but she didn't want to miss another rose should one appear. But why don't you just go to him? Something was holding her back. It was the craziest thing since Selena wanted that forever with Jordan. There had been a number of times when she pondered over their last couple of months. It was the best time of her life. But this thing with her parents stalled her, and Selena was so disoriented she didn't know how to proceed.

When the knock on the door came, Selena made no quarrel about who was on the other side. She stood, gathered her briefcase, and then sashayed to the door just in time to catch the fleeting back of Samuel strolling down the hallway. Selena frowned and glanced down at the floor. There, a bouquet of long-stemmed red roses awaited her. Delighted, Selena crouched down and lifted the flowers along with the note that hung out of it.

“Eros,” Selena whispered. A plethora of eros at that. She closed her eyes and inhaled their fragrance, making her dizzy. Sticking her hand inside, Selena plucked the note from the roses and flipped it open.

“Images of you replay through my mind

Soft, warm, divine...

The absence of your presence has me lost in a rhyme

Wanting, needing, a lifetime.”

Selena closed her eyes as an abundance of emotion scurried through her. She strolled from her office, lost in such a daze that she forgot to lock her door. It would probably be best if she didn’t drive. Right now, her thoughts wrecked her mind. At the bank of elevators, Selena absentmindedly went over his words. When the cube arrived to take her down, she stepped on without coaching her legs to move. When her hand hit the button for the first floor, thoughts of Jordan’s top security elevator made her smile softly. She was taken to the first floor and numbly drove over to Samiyah’s three-story luxury estate. When she exited the vehicle, Selena took the note and stuck it in the top pocket of her suit jacket.

The party was underway when Selena moseyed through the door. Pink and blue decorations streamed throughout, and a table hosted a gargantuan load of different

gifts. Snapping out of her reverie, Selena smiled and eased over to the twins' bassinets while watching the women play the dirty diaper game. Currently, Claudia was holding the diaper, and the girls squealed as she stuck her nose inside to sniff the chocolate candy that pretended to be baby's poop.

"Ewww, I can't believe you guys are enjoying this nasty ass game."

Everyone turned to Selena. "Hey!" They all chimed.

"We tried to wait for you. What took you so long," Octavia asked.

"I was waiting for a delivery, and I'm glad you guys started without me because this is just disgusting."

They laughed and Selena reached down to grab baby Zoey just as Samiyah appeared at her side with hand sanitizer.

"Oh, come on, Selena," Phoebe said. "It's not real poop, it's... it's..."

"It's a Snickers candy bar!" Claudia shouted, excited that she'd figured out the dirty diaper's secret sauce. They all laughed again, and Selena scrunched her nose, applying the cleanser.

"Come over here and have some," Claudia said, passing the diaper over to Selena.

Selena slipped baby Zoey into her arms. "No thank you, I'll just have a seat over here."

"Aww, where's that fun, nobody can hold me down Selena I'm used to, hmm?" Jasmine asked.

“She’s been gone ever since...”

The ladies turned their attention to Octavia who had spoken, but Octavia didn’t finish her sentence as she stared at Selena’s non-whimsical form.

“I just had a strange week is all,” Selena said, “no need to call 911.” Selena smiled down at baby Zoey, who was fast asleep.

“Well, we all have strange weeks, that for sure,” Jasmine retorted. “Just look at me, couldn’t get any stranger than this.”

Jasmine unraveled the hair wrap that covered her head in a creative twist. When the thin lacey material fell to her shoulders, a sharp gasp cut around the room.

“Oh. My. God.” Phoebe and Eden said.

“Girrrrl, what are you going through?” Eden shouted.

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Selena's eyes bulged, and she strolled up to gain a closer look at Jasmine. Jasmine had cut her hair. It was shaved on one side and cropped to the base of her skull. On the other side, her tresses hung long to her shoulder and a golden stripe outlined the spot that was trimmed down.

"I like it," Selena said.

Jasmine's eyes widened with euphoric glee. "You do?"

"Yeah, gives you this good girl gone bad kind of look. Only you could pull this off, by the way."

Jasmine squealed. "When I first had it done, I thought Oh my God, what have I done, but inside I was dancing like this." Jasmine stood and twirled on her four-inch stilettos then bent over and made her ass clap.

"Heeey!" Selena boasted.

"Give me my child," Samiyah said, taking Zoey off her hands. Selena handed her over willingly and pretending to toss dollar bills over Jasmine. "We're making it rain over here!" The girls guffawed.

"Well, there's the Selena we've all grown to love," Phoebe said. Phoebe turned her head side to side as she scrutinized Jasmine's new look. "It's something I'll have to get used to."

"Jasmine, you're so bold and out of control. What am I going to do with you?" Eden

asked.

Jasmine stood and pointed at each of them, singing Jennifer Hudson's Dream Girls classic song, "And you, and you, and you, you're gonna love meeee!" Her voice rang out in a howl, and the ladies laughed harder.

"Please stick to your day job!" Claudia said.

Jasmine tossed her arm across her stomach and doubled over in laughter. While she was curved over, Jasmine began to move her thighs and make her ass clap again.

"Heeey!" Selena said, getting in on Jasmine's dance. They all chortled with utter hysteria just as Martha Jean, Samiyah's mom, entered the room.

"What's all the cackling about in here? And look who I found outside trying to figure out if he wanted to ring the doorbell."

The women turned their attention to Martha with jubilation still haunting their faces. When Jasmine glanced up, it was with a flip of her hair as she stood and met Luke Steele's puncturing gaze. Jasmine's laugh was caught in her throat, but her eyes grew, reflecting a sensual gaze.

"Luke!" she said, surprised, as the corner of her mouth curved upward. "What are you doing here?"

Luke stepped further into the room. He was easily, 6'4 with the build of a cock-strong thoroughbred. His shoulders were a muscular tattoo that inked across his toned flesh, tapering off into his corded biceps that almost ripped the sweater he wore to shreds. Jasmine wondered if any of the other ladies were soaking their panties as she was currently. This must have been the equivalent of getting hard as hell for men.

“I stopped by to bring Samiyah and the twins this.” Luke held out a box wrapped in blue and pink baby bottle designs.

“How nice of you, Luke,” Samiyah chimed. “You didn’t have to. I know gifts are not your thing.”

Luke smiled softly. “Jonas has been telling too much of my business to you,” he joked then took his gaze over to Jasmine. His eyes combed over her, taking in the new hairstyle, chocolate brown skin, soft eyes, and full lips. He moved closer to her, and the women in his way made room, parting like the Red Sea. Standing just over her, Luke committed each element of her design to memory, making sure to house the details in a safe place.

“Hey, gorgeous,” he said.

Jasmine instantly blushed, and an exuberant smile was forced upon her face.

“Hey,” she said.

“I’m sorry I didn’t get back in time for Valentine’s Day, but I still got you a little something.”

Luke removed a thin silver rectangular box and held it up for Jasmine to take. Jasmine glanced down then back up into his hazel deep eyes, and her mouth popped open. She giggled as a slow simmering warmth poured down her flesh.

“Oh my goodness, what is it?”

“Open it and find out.”

Jasmine covered her mouth with her manicured hand, giddy as a school girl. She

reached down, took the box out of Luke's hand, and opened it quickly. Her eyes shot back up, and a warm glow penetrated Luke's expression.

"Oh my God, Luke," she whispered. "This is, this..."

"This what, girl, hold up a minute let me see what's going on if you don't mind."



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Everyone laughed as Selena broke through their moment to steal a look at Luke's present.

"Oh damn," Selena said.

The trinity necklace held a mixture of white, yellow, and pink gold. The 18-carat jewel twinkled through and through, sending a wave of excitement, lust, and all that in-between over Jasmine.

"Let me put it on you," his thick voice drummed.

Jasmine turned her back to him, holding her hair so he could connect the jewelry. She was speechless, hadn't said so much as a thank you, and all the women in the room were waiting. When the clasp was sealed, Jasmine turned back to Luke and tossed her arms around his neck, almost jumping into his arms. Luke hugged her back, slipping his arms up and down her body in an efficient caress that charred her skin and sent her nerves on a rumpus.

Watching them from the side, Octavia leaned in to whisper in Selena's ear, "So, are you going to let that bimbo Madison steal your man or are you going to get him?"

Octavia must have seen the same article that was splashed all over the daily gossip magazine; pictures of Jordan smiling down at Madison outside of Frank's Steakhouse. In some frames, Madison's face was aglow; others were of Jordan's Porsche speeding down the boulevard with the two inside.

Selena had definitely seen the pictures earlier that morning when she first arrived at S

& M Financial. Initially, she fumed, but knowing the man Jordan was, Selena decided to believe that nothing had come of that interaction. At least that's what she was hoping. Getting the bouquet of red roses endorsed with Jordan's language of love only solidified Selena's assumption.

When Selena didn't respond, Octavia added, "I remember when I was dating Jonathon—"

"Okay, I get it, I've got to get my ass in gear!"

Everyone turned at Selena's outburst, including Luke and Jasmine.

"I've got to go, you guys, sorry to cut and run!" Selena fled the room, giving no one the opportunity to stop her. First, she wanted to run home so she could transform into a fashionista before she made her way across town to Jordan. She was halfway there when an incoming call redirected her efforts.

"Mom?" she answered.

"Hey, baby, your father is here, too."

Selena sighed but didn't say anything.

"We wanted to talk to you, sweetheart, together, as a family."

"Oh God, you know what, right now is really not a good time. Is there any other day of the week that you guys could possibly ruin my day?"

The phone became silent, and Selena recognized that she was being a bitch for saying it. She sighed again.

“Okay, tell me where you are, and I’m on my way.”

### Chapter Twenty-Two

The evening had turned into night by the time Selena pulled into her driveway. She parked the car and sat back against the seat with a huff, reminiscing about the conversation between her and her parents.

“Selena, Walter and I have been made aware that the news of our divorce is affecting your sound mind.” Margaret had cleared her throat. “We both want to apologize for tossing this at you as if it wouldn’t affect your life.” Margaret glanced over at Walter who sat, sternly watching his only daughter.

When Walter spoke, his voice was calm and profound.

“Selena, I personally want to apologize for the way things happened a few weeks ago.” Walter pushed out a deep breath. “I’m not saying this to point fingers; however, when your mother presented me with divorce papers, I was stunned and angry; angrier than I’ve ever been in my life.” Walter slipped a hand down his face then leaned forward to rest his elbows on his thighs while his fingers intertwined.

“For a long time, I ignored our situation, but it only made things worse. That didn’t stop me from acting out, and that’s when I started seeing Amelia.”

At the mention of the woman’s name, Selena noticed her mother’s slight shift on the sofa. Apparently, Walter noticed it, too, because his eyes cut to her before coming quickly back to Selena.

“For the record, I broke things off with Amelia. Your mother and I have decided to

try counseling before signing the papers. We've already had a few sessions."

This time Selena shifted in her seat, but her glare remained focused.

"We're doing this not only for us, but for you as well. We want you to know that you can come to us about anything you want to know, any fears, anger, or grief that you may be experiencing. Neither of us is asking you to pick a side. Neither of us wants you to think there will be some tug of war when it comes to you."

"Ever," Margaret agreed.

Selena bit down on her teeth as a tear threatened to slip down her face.

"Why did you want a divorce?"

The question was directed at Margaret. Margaret shifted and stared her daughter head-on. "For the last decade, I've been going through the motions, playing a role I felt was expected of me because that's the woman I was. I love your father, but along the way, I lost my identity. I was his wife and your mother and that wasn't enough for me. Unfortunately, I didn't talk to your father about my musings, and it only suppressed what I felt and made it grow larger than life. I couldn't remember what it was I loved to do. I couldn't see any opportunity outside of being Walter's wife, and it scared me to death and made me feel like I was missing out on a good part of my existence."

Margaret sighed, and Walter patted her leg for encouragement. The gesture was small, but was the first sign of love that Selena's parents had expressed in front of her since the announcement of their separation.

"When I couldn't take it any longer, I went to see a lawyer. Even years after that initial meeting, I waited and second guessed myself. But I need more, baby. My

decision had nothing to do with either of you not being enough for me, so let me say that before it crosses your mind. It was about me redefining myself. It was something I didn't think I could do if I stayed in this marriage."

"And now? What's different?" Selena asked.

"Now, I know I shouldn't have gone down this road alone. If I had sought help upfront about what I was feeling, Walter and I could've gotten help long ago."

Selena exhaled, and her eyes skipped from her father to her mother.

"Mom, I don't ever want you to feel like you have to hold something so serious inside. I know I'm your daughter, and you don't want to burden me, but you could never be a liability. I would actually be honored if you came to me with a problem. To help my mother fix anything would give me indescribable joy because you're always trying to do it yourself."

A wave of happiness and sadness slipped over Margaret, and her face dropped as tears ran down her flushed cheeks. Selena left her spot in the chair, and Walter turned toward his wife. They all gathered around each other on the sofa and cried together. It was a welcomed relief for Selena to quench her soul with her family. Afterwards, they had dinner over a lighter conversation; sirloin steak with blue cheese compound butter offered with green beans and roasted fingerling potatoes. It came freshly prepared by a highly recommended chef.

"Hey," Selena began, "earlier you said it was brought to your attention that your divorce was having an effect on my sound mind. If not you, then who made you aware?"

Margaret and Walter glanced at each other.

“Jordan,” they said together.

Selena shook her head and glanced through her rearview mirror. To hear both her parents admit Jordan was the one who brought them together was astonishing. It was the last thing she expected to hear. But what was funnier was the way in which he did it. Selena laughed with a slight shake of her head.

Tricking them both was something Selena would’ve done. Jordan had reached right in and taken a page out of her handbook. Even while they were apart, Jordan took care of her in every possible way.

“Duty calls me blind, but our connection is like soil intertwined in a vine. Because you were designed with me in mind.”

He’d reached out to her heart through poems and spoken to her spirit with his elaborate scheme. What the hell was she thinking pushing him away?

“Girrrrl, you ain’t never been this dumb,” Selena admitted to herself.

She opened the car door, shut it behind her, and moseyed up her sidewalk. As she got closer to her door, Selena paused.

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“I don’t remember ordering anything,” she said aloud. Selena turned to peer down the street both ways then back at the package on her front porch.

“Be careful, girl, you don’t want it to be anthrax waiting to take you out.”

The ridiculous thought became comical, and Selena chuckled as she stepped closer. The box was thin but tall, almost taller than her. Selena frowned and reached into her purse to pull out a switchblade she kept for safety. She laid the box on the porch and opened the edges, deciding that even though it was cold as all get out, she wouldn’t take the package inside without knowing what it was.

After taking the blade down the center, Selena popped the FedEx package open and removed the sheer paper that covered the gift. Its revelation made Selena sit back on her haunches and gasp.

“Tell me how you really feel,” she crooned.

It was the gown Jordan had purchased for her; the one she was supposed to wear when she accompanied him to his awards luncheon tomorrow. He was doing it again; reaching out to touch Selena without being anywhere near. It was her ultimate invitation and his silent language of love. Jordan wanted Selena, not Madison, and this time Selena was sure of it. A prodding smirk started at the corner of her lips then browsed into a wide smile.

“Okay, baby, I hear you.”

She gathered the dress and walked the box to the curb. After fumbling with her keys



and getting inside, Selena wanted to call him, but there was so much she wanted to say that the words steered clear of her.

“Tomorrow,” she promised. Tonight, she would sleep on it, and tomorrow afternoon, when she arrived at his luncheon, everything she needed to say would spill in one breath.

That night, Selena showered and wrapped her hair, applying a moisturizing nightcap. After speaking to her Savior, Selena sat in the middle of the bed and thumbed the numbers on her phone. The need to talk to Jordan now was insurmountable, but after another long second, Selena decided being face-to-face would be the best way to go. She leaned to the side and put her phone on the charger then slipped under her duvet covers.

Her mind settled around Jordan before she finally drifted off into slumber.

“Oh, come on.”

Selena ran back down the hallway and grabbed her purse off the bed. In a flash, she turned and fled back to the front door and wrapped herself in the mink coat that had arrived at her doorstep that morning along with the purple and white Manolo Blahniks. Jordan was in a league of his own, romancing her to the point that when they finally reconnected, she would teeter over with euphoria. He could’ve simply sent the coat and shoes with the dress, but this was just another way for him to claim her, thoroughly. Once again, his moves were calculated, and every intricate detail laid out in his own blueprint. Selena didn’t mind, but what if she’d decided not to go?

He made sure that wasn’t an option.

That he did. She closed her door, locked it, then dropped her keys in her clutch and twirled on her heels. Selena didn’t take a step when her eyes fell on the limo parked

just beyond her porch. At the back door, the chauffeur stood with a smile on his face. The five-inch Manolo Blahniks clapped as she strolled down the walkway and stood in front of the limousine.

“I didn’t order car service,” she said, already knowing who’d sent it for her.

“Mr. Rose, Madame,” the chauffeur said, opening the door to let her inside.

Selena compressed her lips but didn’t make a fuss. She was already fashionably late from fighting with Octavia about her hair.

“You always have your hair wrapped,” Octavia had argued. “Let’s flip it back off your face with tight curls instead. It’ll still lay down in the back. But the flip, honey, will be everything.”

Selena slipped into the limo and rechecked her appearance for the one-thousandth time. The hair flip was executed well, holding a bounce that made her feel like Farrah Fawcett. A dazzling set of diamond earrings hung from her lobes, and her pecan brown eyes complemented the light foundation she applied.

The limo moved down the street and precipitously Selena’s pulse quickened. It felt like forever since she’d seen Jordan, and now her nerves were kicking into overdrive. With everything he set out accomplished, Selena assumed Jordan would be just as happy to see her as she was him. But, there was still that lingering feeling in her gut. What if he was perturbed by the way she’d run out on him?

It would be only fair if he thought she wasn’t a woman who knew how to work things out or talk things through, much like her mother. Selena frowned. She loved Margaret Strauss more than anything in this world, but she didn’t aspire to be like her. In that moment, Selena decided she would do better. Her own demons had sent her running for the hills, and she didn’t even know she had them. She sighed and hoped, for her

sake, Jordan would be understanding enough to give her another chance and not dub her the runaway girlfriend.

Traffic was ironically smooth, and twenty minutes later she arrived at the Marriott Hotel where a host of camera crews stood on the outer edges of the red carpet, waiting to get a shot at whoever was coming in or out. Selena took in a deep breath.

“This is it, girl. Go get your man.”

The door opened on a hail of snaps as paparazzi went into a frenzy.

### Chapter Twenty-Three

He'd done everything in his power to get her there. Jordan sat at a round table of twelve attendees, some couples, and some singles. To his left, an empty chair taunted him as the seconds grew into minutes of Selena's no-show. He kept a calm demeanor and tried not to show his frustration, but inside melancholy, unlike anything he'd experienced, tussled with his soul. Never before had he been stood up, and he hoped Selena would make his day. Unfortunately, that didn't seem to be the case.

Jordan scanned the room again, taking in the royal blue and white colors. The banquet hall was designed beautifully all the way down to the details in the napkins that sat wrapped around the silverware on top of China dishes. The man on stage had given out two awards, and now he was giving out a third. Jordan clapped along with everyone else, oblivious to the name that had just been called. It was when a room full of eyes turned his way, and Phoebe nudged him in the shoulder did Jordan realize it had been his name.

Snapping out of his reverie, Jordan boasted a strapping smile and rose to his feet. On the way to the stage, he shook hands with a few attorneys and nodded at others who were too far out of his reach. He took the three steps onto the stage and shook the hand of the presenter.

"Thank you." Jordan accepted the plaque.

Straightening his shoulders, he stepped in front of the podium as the host stood off to the side and everyone watched, waiting for his words of appreciations and recognition.

“Thank you,” he said into the mic. “Honestly, I never expected to get the Leonard Jay Schrager Award of Excellence. There are so many great firms in Chicago, a lot of them are undermanned, and if I could share this honor, it would be with all of you.”

Claps surrounded the room, and Jordan’s gaze continued to scan.

“To the Chicago Bar Foundation, I...”

Jordan’s words died on his lip as a buzz crawled down his thick neck. There standing in the far-right corner of the room was his dream come true. Jordan blinked to make sure he hadn’t envisioned her only to be disappointed later. There she stood. Although her face was dressed with a soft smile, from his place on the stage, Jordan saw it just as if Selena was standing right under him. He exhaled, soft, long, and slow. He’d elaborately picked out the royal purple gown because he knew the color would make her stand out in the sea of blue and white. And that was his intent, to make sure no one missed the beautiful angel she was while delighting in the fact that she was there for him alone.

Someone cleared their throat, and Jordan blinked and made his speech shorter than he planned. He didn’t even remember what he said. All Jordan cared about was getting her back in his arms, in his life, in his bed. When the crowd erupted with cheers, Jordan was satisfied that he’d said enough, and without giving the host another look, he sauntered off the stage with his gaze burning a blaze right over to her.

“Selena...” his thick voice drummed.

She grinned and stared up into his debonair profile. The Roses and their strong genes were muscular, sharp, and keen. It was the thing that put the icing on an already perfectly baked cake.

“Jordan...” she responded.

His hand slipped to her face, his fingers fiddling just across the curve of her chin. “You’re so beautiful. I’ve missed you terribly.”

Selena’s pulse quickened, and she was sure her eyes dilated.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I’m not the person who ran out on you. I know it may be hard for you to see that, but...”

“I know, Selena. Are you okay?”

Selena exhaled and nodded. “Yes, and I have you to thank for it.”

He stepped closer to her. “If you really want to thank me,” Jordan glanced over her shoulder and leaned closer to her face, “let’s get out of here, and we can talk about it on the way upstairs.”

His words were layered and thick with concentration, causing a storm to rage in Selena’s stomach. Her lips curved just as her nipples retracted.

“Are you sure? I don’t want to be rude or interrupt.”

“Unless you want to stay and listen to everyone else give their speech.”

“What if you get another award?”

Jordan smirked. “Then they can send it up to my room.”

Excitement took over Selena, and she bit down on her lip as a pathway of heat cruised down her belly. She squirmed. “Let’s go,” she whispered with a giggle.

Jordan took Selena’s hand, and together they left in a hurry. The simple connection of

their fingers tingled with sulfuric awareness. When they wrapped around the corner and headed down a long corridor, neither of them could stand it any longer. In an abrupt stop, Selena turned to Jordan and fisted his collar in her hands, pushing his strong body against the wall. On her toes, she lifted to meet his protracted height just as Jordan clutched her wrist and held her arms above her head. With precision, they switched positions and now Jordan locked her in.

A wicked growl trekked from his vocals as his hands slipped down her outstretched arms. The moment went on in slow motion; both of them breathing each other in as they stood with no gap between them.

With his mouth just above hers, Jordan's heavy lids coasted over her face as his grizzly voice spoke, "Marry me, Selena..."

Her entire body stilled immediately. Had she imagined the words? Was it just the moment? Selena's eyes followed Jordan, and he crouched down to one knee. His head fell into the apex of her thighs. Selena's eyes widened, and she pinched herself, had to, just to be certain.

*Source Creation Date: July 3, 2025, 5:07 am*

Jordan lifted his head and produced a glass box that housed a diamond that sparkled through. Selena's mouth dropped, and a rain of chills poured down her skin in a web of heat.

"Jordan!" she screamed and trembled, her hands flying to her mouth.

"I love you, baby," Jordan's voice drummed. "Marry me."

Tears sprang from Selena's eyes, and she hurriedly nodded. Jordan popped the box and slipped the diamond on her finger.

"Oh my God, what the fuck!" Selena said, staring at the size of the rock. "Oooh baby, I love you, too!"

Jordan lifted her as he stood to his feet, and they crushed their mouths together. With the speed of a cheetah, they were out of the hallway and inside the elevator, ripping their clothes to pieces.

"Ah!" Selena shouted as Jordan pinned her arms and face against the wall, taking her hard from behind. "Aaaah! Baby!"

His ravenous mouth took in her ear as he thrust in and out of her sanctum in long propelling wet strokes.

"You turn me into a monster, girl."

Jordan lifted her leg and dissolved inside her while his other hand took in a mound-



full of her breasts.

“Aaah shi-it!” Selena shouted as they rocked the steel cables of the elevator shaft.

Jordan sucked in her earlobe, and his nibble caused a waylay of heat to shoot down Selena’s spine. “I love you,” his thick voice growled. “Forever.”

A single tear cruised from Selena’s eye. “I love you, too,” she panted. “Forever...”

The End