



Bought by the Alien Billionaire

Author: *Athena Storm*

Category: Fantasy

Description: I thought I was signing up for a billionaire boyfriend.

Turns out, I was matched with a seven-foot-tall alien warlord who thinks I'm his fated mate.

One minute, I'm nervously rambling in a greasy diner.

The next, I'm in a glowing spaceship with a growly alien named Rokkon who's richer than anyone on Earth—and way too interested in me.

He's got a mansion, a mysterious locked room, and a very firm way of saying my name that makes me forget I ever wanted a normal life.

I was supposed to live with him for six months.

No strings. No feelings. Just a paycheck.

But now he's sending me roses, reading my thoughts, and making me feel like the center of his universe.

And I'm starting to wonder if this contract came with strings after all

Read on for: A heart-racing sci-fi romance featuring a powerful alien protector, a fierce human heroine, and a bond that defies galaxies. Expect steamy first contact, pulse-pounding action, and a love story written in the stars. High stakes. Deep emotions. Happily ever after guaranteed.

Total Pages (Source): 18

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 4:12 pm

The diner smells like burnt coffee and stale grease, the kind of place where the vinyl booths stick to your thighs if you sit too long. My suitcase leans against the cracked leather seat, its weight a reminder of everything I'm leaving behind. I rock back and forth, my fingers tapping a nervous rhythm on the chipped Formica table. The coffee in front of me is lukewarm, but I take a sip anyway, the bitterness grounding me.

Outside, the sun dips low, casting long shadows across the cracked asphalt parking lot. A black car pulls up, sleek and out of place in this dusty nowhere town. My heart skips a beat. This has to be her.

The door swings open, and Felicity Munch strides in like she owns the place. She's taller than I expected, her heels clicking sharply against the linoleum. Her black hair is pulled into a tight bun, and her grey eyes scan the room with a precision that makes me feel like I'm under a microscope. I scramble to my feet, nearly knocking over my coffee in the process.

"Hello," I blurt out, my voice too loud in the quiet diner. "My name is Vicki Sloane, and I swear I'm not a gold digger, even if I did sign up for the billionaire matchmaking service, which I guess does make me look like a gold digger, even if I'm not one —am I rambling? Sometimes I ramble, and people don't tell me that I'm rambling, and it gets really embarrassing, and I?—"

A low growl cuts me off, so deep it vibrates through the floor and rattles the glasses on the table. I freeze, my mouth snapping shut. The sound isn't human, and for a second, I wonder if I've made a terrible mistake.

Felicity's expression softens, almost apologetic. "Sit," she says, her voice calm but

firm. "And, please, listen."

I drop back into the booth, my hands trembling as I grip the edge of the table. She slides in across from me, her movements smooth and deliberate. The waitress approaches, but Felicity waves her off with a single glance.

"You're nervous," she says, not unkindly. "That's understandable. What you're about to hear will change everything you think you know about the world."

I swallow hard, my throat dry. "Okay."

Felicity arches one perfect eyebrow. "I'm not sure you grasp my meaning. But you will. Take a drive with me."

Before I can respond, she stands and strides toward the door, leaving me gaping after her. Wait, what? My brain catches up and I scramble from the booth, nearly tripping over my suitcase.

"Hey, wait!" I hurry after her, dragging my luggage across the sticky floor.

The car waiting outside looks like something out of a sci-fi movie. The doors slide up instead of out, and the interior glows with blue light from dozens of displays I don't recognize. My suitcase disappears into a compartment that definitely wasn't there a second ago.

The leather seat molds to my body as I sink into it. The car purrs to life - no, that's not right. It hums, like some exotic instrument. We pull onto the highway, the steering wheel moving on its own while Felicity's hands rest in her lap.

"Tell me, Vicki. Do you believe in extraterrestrial life?"

Oh no. No no no. I groan and bury my face in my hands. This can't be happening.

"I knew this billionaire matchmaking thing was too good to be true. You're part of some weird UFO cult, aren't you?" I peek through my fingers at her. "Am I going to have to shave my head and wear a jumpsuit?"

"I doubt your match will want you to shave your head. As to your attire, that's your own business," Felicity says, her lips quirking into what might be a smile.

My heart skips. "Wait, so there really is a match? This isn't all a big scam?"

"No scam."

"Then why did you ask me if I believe in aliens?"

The car swerves without warning. My stomach lurches as we veer off the road, tires thumping over grass and dirt. Fields blur past my window at impossible speeds.

"Stop! Are you crazy?" I press back against my seat, fingers digging into leather. "You're going to kill us!"

Felicity's finger hovers over a button on the steering wheel. My scream cuts short as she presses it and the world tilts. The car shoots upward, my body pinned to the seat by invisible force.

Through the windshield, I watch the ground shrink away. Trees become dots. Roads turn to threads. My ears pop as we pierce through clouds, the sky darkening to a deeper and deeper blue.

This can't be real. I'm hallucinating. That has to be it.

"Did you slip me some LSD at the diner?"

"Forgive the theatrics," Felicity says, her voice smooth as the hum of the engine beneath us. "But it was the quickest way to convince you that I'm not crazy, nor are you in the clutches of a cult."

I twist my hands in my lap, my nails digging into my palms. "Then what is going on? Was the whole matchmaking thing a lie?" My voice cracks, and I hate how small it sounds.

Felicity shakes her head, the motion precise, almost mechanical. "No, the matchmaking is real. You've been matched to a billionaire named Rocky Anderson. The contract you signed obligates you to cohabitate with him for a period of no less than six months, during which time you'll make a sincere effort to explore a romantic connection with him."

I blink, my mind racing. "A sincere effort doesn't mean... I mean, I don't have to?—"

"A sincere effort does not involve your sleeping with him," Felicity interrupts, her lips quirking in what might be amusement. "It just means you're approaching this potential match in good faith. Nothing more. Nothing less."

I flush, heat crawling up my neck and spreading across my cheeks. "Okay. Fine. I can do that. But why the spaceship? Why the... whatever this is?" I gesture wildly at the windshield where stars now twinkle against the endless black.

Felicity leans back in her seat, her posture impossibly perfect. "At the end of the six months, you're free to leave and collect your million-dollar severance fee. All the contract details apply. There's just a certain caveat we didn't write down."

I cross my arms, my patience fraying like a worn-out sweater. "What? What didn't

you write down? Is this Rocky guy secretly a criminal? A spy? A—" My breath catches. "Wait. Is he... an alien? "

Felicity doesn't answer. Her grey eyes meet mine, steady and unblinking. The silence stretches, thick and heavy, until it feels like the walls of the car are closing in.

"No," I whisper, shaking my head. "No, no, no. You're messing with me. This is some elaborate prank. Reality TV or something. Right?" I laugh, the sound brittle and unconvincing.

Felicity's expression doesn't change. "Rocky Anderson is a Vakutan warrior. Seven feet tall, red scales, purple eyes. He's strong enough to lift a car and honorable enough to protect you with his life. But yes, to answer your question, he is an alien."

My mouth opens, but no words come out. My brain stutters, trying to process the insanity she's just dropped on me. "You're serious."

"Completely."

I slump back in my seat, my head spinning. "This is... this is too much. I can't—I can't do this. I mean, an alien? "

"You'll adapt," Felicity says, her tone matter-of-fact. "Humans are remarkably resilient. And Rocky is... unique. You might find him more agreeable than you think."

"Agreeable?" I sputter. "He's an alien! What am I supposed to do? Bring him home to meet my parents? 'Hey, Mom, Dad, this is Rocky. He's from another planet, but don't worry, he's loaded!'"

Felicity's lips twitch again, almost a smile. "You'll figure it out. Trust me."

The car descends in a swooping arc that makes my stomach do backflips. We land in the diner parking lot as if we'd never left, the vehicle settling with a gentle hum. My legs shake as I stumble back inside.

The vinyl booth squeaks under my weight. A plate of chicken fried steak appears before me, but I can barely look at it. My fork pushes the meat around, making trails through the cream gravy.

Across from me, Felicity attacks plate after plate of catfish like she hasn't eaten in days. The bones pile up, stripped clean. Her perfect posture never wavers, even as she demolishes enough food to feed a football team.

"You're an alien too, aren't you?"

She dabs her lips with a napkin. "Yes."

"But if there are Vakutans already here on Earth, why does Rocky need to be matched with a human woman? Couldn't he find a nice Vakutan wife instead?"

Pain flashes across Felicity's face, and I immediately wish I could take the words back. But she answers anyway, her voice gentle.

"There are not that many Vakutan on Earth in this time period, Vicki. And most of them are male. Vakutans have a notoriously low female birth rate."

My heart aches for them, but then her words fully register. "Wait," I say, my voice rising with panic, "did you say 'in this time period?' Don't tell me you're not just aliens, you're time traveling aliens, too?"

Felicity's silence speaks volumes.

"This just keeps getting weirder and weirder."

I stare at her, my mind racing. Aliens. Time travel. A contract that could change everything. My heart hammers against my ribs, and I can almost hear my parents' voices in my head, chiding me for taking risks, for not staying safe and grounded.

But then I think of the endless days spent babysitting my siblings, the nights alone with a book in my hands, dreaming of something more. I think of my parents' aging faces, their expectations that I'll be the one to care for them as they grow older. The thought of being trapped in that life—no. I can't do it.

"No," I say, my voice firm despite the tremor in my hands. "I don't want to back out."

Felicity raises an eyebrow, her expression unreadable. "Why? You've just learned that Rocky is an alien, that this entire arrangement is far more complicated than you imagined. Why are you still interested?"

I grimace, my fingers twisting the edge of the napkin in my lap. "I've spent my whole life taking care of my younger siblings. Now they've moved away, and my parents are getting older. I don't want to get trapped caring for them, too. I want them taken care of, but I don't want to be the one to do it." My voice cracks, and I look down at the table, my cheeks burning. "Does that make me a bad person? For wanting to escape my dull life, and avoid taking care of my ailing parents?"

Felicity's expression softens, just a fraction. "Who am I to judge?" she says, her tone almost gentle. Then she points at the remains of my steak, her lips quirking into a faint smile. "Are you gonna eat that?"

I blink, caught off guard by the sudden shift in tone. "Uh, no. Go ahead."

She doesn't hesitate, spearing a piece of steak with her fork and popping it into her mouth. I watch her, my mind still spinning. This woman—this alien—just took me on a spaceship ride and is now casually eating my leftovers like it's the most normal thing in the world. And yet, somehow, I feel more grounded than I have in years.

I push my empty plate aside, gathering my courage. "Is there anything I should know about Rocky before I meet him?"

Felicity's fork stops halfway to her mouth. She sets it down with deliberate care, her grey eyes fixed on me. The silence stretches until I want to squirm in my seat.

"I'm not certain how much Rokkon would want me to share about him and his experiences," she says, each word measured and careful. "I'm sorry, but I can't be more specific than that. All I can say is that Rokkon is a profoundly lonely and sad man. Remember that, when you are dealing with his... rougher edges."

My stomach twists. Lonely. Sad. The words echo in my head, stirring memories of nights spent alone with my books, dreaming of adventures I'd never have. Of watching my siblings move away while I stayed behind, trapped by duty and obligation.

I'd always imagined billionaires lived charmed lives, their wealth a shield against the darker emotions that plague regular people like me. But maybe money really can't buy happiness after all.

"When can I meet him?"

"Soon," Felicity says.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 4:12 pm

CHAPTER 2

ROKKON

The rain slicks the asphalt, and the motorcycle's tires hum beneath me as I gun it up the winding mountain road. The Catskills loom like shadowy giants on either side, their peaks lost in the low-hanging clouds. My scales itch beneath the image inducer, the sensation a constant reminder of the lie I'm living—Rocky Anderson, billionaire investor. What a joke. I'm Rokkon, a Vakutan warrior, not some suit pushing numbers around. Tonight, I'm shedding the facade.

The bike's engine growls as I lean into a curve, the wind biting at my human disguise. The Grolgath base is up here somewhere, disguised as a logging camp. Pyke would skin me alive if he knew I was out here, but I don't care. I need this. Need the rush, the chaos, the blood. Anything to drown out the hollow ache in my chest.

The road narrows, trees pressing in on either side. A sign flashes by: Private Property. No Trespassing. Perfect. I kill the headlight and slow the bike, rolling to a stop just out of sight. The rain muffles the sound of the engine as I dismount, my boots crunching on gravel. I pull the image inducer from my pocket and tuck it into my jacket. No need to waste the charge. The air shifts, my true form emerging—red scales, ridges along my face, purple eyes that cut through the darkness.

I crouch low, scanning the tree line. The camp's a quarter mile up the road, tucked into a clearing. I can see the faint glow of lights through the trees. No sentries posted yet. Amateurs. Or maybe they're overconfident. Either way, their mistake.

I move through the woods, my steps silent despite my size. The rain drums against the leaves, masking any sound I might make. The camp comes into view—a cluster of prefab buildings, a couple of trucks, and a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire. Humans would see a logging operation. I see a thin veneer over something far more dangerous.

I'm almost to the fence when a voice stops me cold.

"You're a long way from Veritas, Rokkon."

I freeze, my hand instinctively going to the plasma blade at my side. The voice is low, guttural, and unmistakably Vakutan. I turn slowly, my eyes narrowing as a figure steps out of the shadows.

"Pyke," I growl.

He's in his true form, rain running down his red scales. His arms are crossed, and his expression is a mix of amusement and exasperation.

"You gonna tell me how you found me, or should I guess?" I ask, keeping my voice low.

He smirks. "You're not as sneaky as you think. I've been tracking you since you left the city."

"And you waited until now to show up?" I scoff. "What's the matter, Captain? Didn't want to ruin my fun?"

He chuckles, the sound deep and rumbling. "Fun? Is that what you're calling this? Because from where I'm standing, it looks like a one-man suicide mission."

I shrug. "I've faced worse odds."

"And lived to tell the tale," he says, stepping closer. "But this? This is reckless, even for you."

"Reckless?" I let out a bitter laugh. "I'm tired of sitting around, Pyke. Tired of pretending to be something I'm not. I need to fight. Need to feel something besides this... this emptiness."

He studies me for a moment, his expression softening. "I get it, Rokkon. I do. But running off on your own? That's not the way. You're not alone, you know."

"Aren't I?" I snap, the words coming out harsher than I intend. "Every day, I put on that damn image inducer, play the part of Rocky Anderson. Smile for the cameras, shake hands, make deals. It's a prison, Pyke. And I'm suffocating."

He sighs, running a hand over his face. "Listen," he says, his voice quieter now. "I understand. More than you know. But this? Charging into a Grolgath base without backup? That's not the answer. You're better than this."

I want to argue, want to tell him he's wrong. But the truth is, I'm tired. Tired of fighting, tired of pretending, tired of the ache that never goes away.

"So what's the plan, then?" I ask. "You gonna drag me back to the city? Make me play Rocky again?"

Pyke shakes his head. "No. You're coming back with me, but not to play Rocky. You're coming back because we've got a real mission. One that doesn't involve you getting yourself killed."

I raise an eyebrow. "And what mission is that?"

He grins, a wicked glint in his eye. “You’ll see. But trust me, it’ll be worth it.”

I hesitate, glancing back at the camp. The lights are still glowing, the Grolgath unaware of how close they came to a very bad night. My hand twitches at my side, the urge to charge in still strong.

Pyke’s grin is sharp, his teeth glinting in the faint light filtering through the trees. “You’re not the only one who needs to blow off some steam, Rokkon. Mind if I join?”

I laugh, deep and loud, the sound carrying over the rain. “Sure, Captain. Just one rule—whoever kills the least Grolgath buys the beer.”

He chuckles, a low rumble that’s almost lost in the downpour. “Deal. So, what’s the plan?”

“Plan?” I snort, my hand already reaching for the ax stuck in the tree stump nearby. I yank it free, the wood groaning as the blade comes loose. I give it a quick swing, testing the weight. It’s crude, unbalanced, but it’ll do. “I’m going to kill some fucking Grolgath, that’s the plan.”

Pyke raises an eyebrow, his expression a mix of amusement and disbelief. “You’re going in with that ?”

I shrug, hefting the ax over my shoulder. “And just to give the Skinwalkers a fighting chance, I’m going to use this primitive bronze-age weapon.”

Before he can respond, I’m moving. My boots pound against the wet ground, the ax cutting through the rain as I charge straight into the camp. The Grolgath are huddled under the eaves of one of the prefabs, their reptilian forms shifting in and out of human disguises. They don’t even see me coming.

The first one goes down with a strangled gurgle as the ax buries itself in his chest. I yank it free in a spray of greenish blood, already turning to the next. A second Grolgath lunges at me, claws extended, but I sidestep and bring the ax down in a brutal arc. His head hits the ground before his body does.

The third is quicker, backing away with a hiss, his shape flickering between human and lizard. He grabs a pipe from the ground, swinging it wildly, but I duck under the blow and drive the ax into his side. He collapses, writhing, and I finish him with a savage kick to the skull.

“Rokkon!” Pyke’s voice cuts through the chaos, sharp and urgent. “We need one alive for questioning!”

I barely hear him. The thrill of combat is roaring in my veins, drowning out everything else. The ax feels alive in my hands, an extension of my body, and I’m grinning like a madman as I stalk toward the next cluster of Grolgath. They’re scrambling now, some reaching for weapons, others trying to shift into more defensive forms. It doesn’t matter. They’re all going to die.

Pyke’s somewhere behind me, his own laughter joining mine as he wades into the fray. I catch a glimpse of him out of the corner of my eye—a blur of red scales and flashing claws—but I don’t stop. The ax swings again, and the camp fills with the sounds of splintering bones and guttural screams.

The rain mingles with the blood, washing it away almost as quickly as it spills. I’m soaked, my scales slick with it, but I don’t care. This is where I belong—in the chaos, the carnage, the glorious, unrelenting violence. I feel alive.

The rain washes green blood into muddy puddles around my boots. I prod a corpse with my ax, counting. "Twelve for me. How many did you get, Captain?"

"Eight." Pyke shakes his head. "Looks like I'm buying the beer."

I crouch beside one of the bodies, rifling through its pockets. My fingers close around a compad, but as I pull it free, the screen flickers and dies. "Damn. Deadman virus. The data's gone."

"Whatever they were planning, they went to great lengths to keep it secret." Pyke nudges another corpse with his foot. "This one turned his weapon on himself when I tried to capture him alive. I think that in your search for a little therapy you've stumbled onto something far more sinister."

"Good. Let's investigate. I could use another fight."

"I'll call in a cleanup crew." Pyke's purple eyes gleam in the darkness. "But you've got a more important mission."

"What mission?"

"Meeting your match."

I bark out a laugh. "Give me a suicide run instead. Send me to infiltrate the Ataxian homeworld. Anything but-"

"This isn't a request, Rokkon."

"A woman will only complicate things." I bare my teeth. "How am I supposed to maintain cover with some female hanging around? She'll probably want to talk about feelings."

"You don't have a choice."

"This is ridiculous. I'm a warrior, not some-"

Pyke holds up his hand, and a hologram springs to life. My words die in my throat. The woman in the image is... stunning. Curves that would make a Vakutan princess jealous, eyes that spark with intelligence, and a smile that makes my chest tight.

"I suppose," I say slowly, "one must do what one must for the good of the Alliance."

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 27, 2025, 4:12 pm

CHAPTER 3

VICKI

The coffee in my cup has gone cold, but I can't bring myself to take another sip. My stomach's full of butterflies as I sit here alone in this dingy diner, waiting for my ride to... what exactly? A new life? An alien romance? A million dollars?

What if he takes one look at me and decides this was all a huge mistake? The thought makes my chest tight. Or worse - what if I'm the one who can't handle it? Living with an actual alien for six months...

My face burns as my mind wanders to more intimate possibilities. Do Vakutans even have... compatible parts? Oh god, what if it's tentacles or something?

"Stop it," I whisper to myself. "Nobody said you have to sleep with him."

But six months is a long time to live with someone. And he's supposedly gorgeous, even in his alien form...

A sleek black limo glides to a stop outside, looking completely out of place next to the rusty pickup trucks in the parking lot. My heart hammers against my ribs as I grab my ratty suitcase - everything I own packed inside.

I glance down at my worn jeans and band tee. "Real classy, Vicki."

"An alien pretending to be a billionaire," I mutter, pushing open the heavy door.

"What could possibly go wrong?"

The limo's interior takes my breath away - all gleaming wood and butter-soft leather. As I slide inside, I spot a velvet-lined basket with a phone nestled inside. Before I can even reach for it, the screen lights up with an incoming call.

I jump, my hand frozen midair.

The phone vibrates in my hand, its screen glowing. I swallow hard, my throat dry as sandpaper. Here goes nothing.

"Hello?" My voice trembles, betraying the knot of nerves twisting my stomach.

"Hello, Victoria." The voice is deep, smooth, resonant – it's the kind of voice that belongs in a whiskey commercial. My face heats up, and I grip the phone tighter.

"I hope you enjoy your gift?" he says, his tone confident and slightly amused, like he already knows I'm flustered.

"My gift? What gift?" I blink, glancing around the limo. There's nothing here but me and my suitcase.

A sharp knock on the window makes me jump. I press the button to lower it, and a delivery guy stands there holding a bouquet of white roses and a box of chocolates. The roses are pristine, their petals soft and flawless, wrapped in silver paper and tied with a sleek black ribbon.

"Are you Vicki Sloane?" he asks.

I nod, my mouth too dry to form words. He hands me the gifts with a polite nod and disappears before I can even think to tip him. The roses smell divine, their fragrance

light and sweet, and the chocolates feel heavy in my hand, the kind that costs more than a week's groceries.

"The delivery man was late," Rocky's voice cuts through the silence. "I will have to buy the company he works for so I can fire him."

I let out a nervous laugh, but there's no humor in his tone. My stomach twists. Is he serious?

"Wait, you'd fire him for being a few seconds late?" I ask, trying to keep my voice light.

"I've fired people for lesser offenses," he replies, matter-of-fact.

Oh no. My smile falters. This guy sounds like the CEO from every terrible workplace horror story. Not exactly the charming, romantic alien I'd been imagining. My heart sinks a little, but then I glance down at the roses and chocolates, and a warmth spreads through me. It's been... forever since someone did something like this for me.

"These are beautiful, Rocky," I say, my voice softer now. "The roses are perfect, and the chocolates – I've never had anything like them. Thank you."

There's a pause on the other end of the line, and when he speaks again, his tone shifts, just slightly. "You're welcome, Victoria. I'm glad you like them."

He doesn't say anything more, and I'm not sure if he's warming up or if he's just done with the conversation. Either way, I'll take it.

"Try one," Rokkon's voice comes through the phone, smooth and commanding, like it's not a request but an order. I'm surprised by how much I like it. I've spent so much of my life being the one in charge—taking care of my siblings, my parents,

everyone but myself. Having someone tell me what to do, even something as simple as eating chocolate, feels... freeing.

I open the box, and the sight of the chocolates takes my breath away. These aren't the cheap, waxy squares I'm used to. These are pieces of art—each one carefully crafted, glistening under the dim light of the limo. My fingers hover over the tray, unsure where to start.

"Which one should I choose?" I ask, my voice trembling a little.

"The Rum-rose chocolate truffle," he answers without hesitation, his tone confident, like he knows exactly what I need. My fingers find the one he's talking about—a dark, glossy sphere dusted with a fine pink powder.

"Should I just?—?"

"Put the whole thing in your mouth," he interrupts, his voice firm but not unkind. "Let it melt on your tongue before you chew. Trust me."

I do as he says, placing the chocolate on my tongue. The first burst of flavor is rich and velvety, a deep cocoa that fills my mouth. Then the rum hits, warm and smoky, followed by the subtle sweetness of rose. My eyes flutter shut as I let it melt, the flavors unfolding like a story.

"Now, chew," he says, his voice softer now, almost intimate. I obey, and the truffle releases another wave of complexity—a hint of spice, a touch of floral, all blending together in a way that makes me feel like I've never truly tasted chocolate before.

"Swallow," he instructs, and I do, the warmth settling in my stomach like a soft glow spreading through me. I feel a flush rising in my cheeks, a heat that has nothing to do with the chocolate.

"Delicious," I whisper, my voice throaty, barely recognizable. "Can I try another one?"

"Patience, Victoria," he says, words so smooth, wrapping around me like a velvet caress. "There are many rare delights I wish to show you, and the night is young."

My breathing stops, and I'm shocked to feel a warmth between my legs, something I haven't felt in a long time. I shift in my seat, trying to ignore the sensation, but it's impossible. My heart races, and I'm suddenly aware of every inch of my skin, like I'm hyper-sensitive, electrified by the sound of his voice, the way he says my name.

I glance down at my hands, still holding the box of chocolates, and wonder what else he'll have me try tonight.

The limo pulls up to the mansion, and my jaw drops. The place is enormous—a sprawling estate that looks like it belongs on the cover of some architecture magazine. The front is all clean lines and soft lighting, with manicured hedges and a fountain that sparkles under the evening sky. My ratty suitcase feels absurd in my hand, and I'm suddenly hyper-aware of my faded jeans and worn-out T-shirt.

"Your house is... amazing," I manage to say.

"Be it ever so humble," Rokkon quips, his tone dry and amused.

My cheeks burn. Humble? This place is practically a palace. I feel like a peasant who stumbled into a king's court. I fidget with the hem of my shirt, my fingers tangling in the frayed fabric. Why would someone like him—a billionaire, an alien warrior—want anything to do with me? I'm just a small-town girl with no real prospects, no glamorous life to offer.

I go silent, staring out the window as the limo glides up the driveway. My stomach

twists, and I'm thankful for the partition screen between us and the driver.

"Victoria," Rokkon's voice cuts through the quiet, smooth and commanding. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I mutter, too quickly.

He lets out a low chuckle. "You're lying, but I'll let you keep your secrets. For now." There's a pause, and I can almost feel his gaze on me, even though he's not physically here. "Until I strip them away from you, one by one. Until you're bare and exposed to me."

My hand drifts to my thigh without thinking. My fingers brush against the zipper of my jeans, and I feel the heat building between my legs. His voice is doing things to me—things I didn't think were possible. I press my palm against myself, the pressure sending a jolt of pleasure through me.

"Victoria," his voice is husky now, sending another wave of heat through me. "Are you touching yourself right now?"

I freeze, my heart pounding. How does he know? My face flushes, and I'm thankful he can't see me.

"Answer me," he commands, his tone leaving no room for hesitation.

"Yes," I whisper, my voice trembling.

"I can't hear you. Speak louder."

I glance nervously at the partition screen, but it's still up. Still, it feels so wrong to say it out loud, to admit what I'm doing. But the thrill of it is intoxicating, and I can't

stop myself.

“Yes,” I say again, louder this time.

“Say yes, I’m touching my pussy right now, Sir. ”

I’m flooded with a mix of embarrassment and arousal. The words make my heart race, and I can’t believe I’m actually going to say it. But I do.

“Yes, I’m touching my pussy right now, Sir,” I moan, the words spilling out before I can stop them.

He growls, the sound low and primal. “Hearing that makes me hard, Victoria. What are you going to do about it?”

I bite my lip, my fingers moving faster now, the pressure building with every stroke. What am I going to do about it?

"I asked you a question, Victoria," Rokkon’s voice cuts through the silence in the limo, firm and commanding, and my heart skips a beat. The weight of his tone makes me squirm in my seat, my skin tingling with a mix of nerves and anticipation.

"I—I’ll sit on it," I blurt out, my words tumbling over each other as the limo glides to a smooth halt in front of the mansion’s grand entrance. My face burns, and I’m glad he can’t see me right now. The thought of him watching me, judging me, owning me...it’s maddening yet delicious.

"You’ll sit on what? My face or my cock?" he demands, his voice low and unyielding. The directness of his question catches me off guard, and I gasp, my fingers twitching against the soft leather seat.

Before I can even think to answer, the heat building inside me explodes. My body convulses, my back arching as pleasure rips through me like a tidal wave. I thrash against the seat, my legs twisting helplessly, and then—I'm falling. I hit the floor of the limo with a soft thud, my breath coming in ragged gasps as I lie there, dazed and trembling.

"You chose to have an orgasm instead of answering me," Rokkon's voice is calm, almost amused, but there's an edge to it that makes my stomach flip. "You didn't even ask for my permission to cum. I'm afraid you'll have to be disciplined."

I let out a shaky breath, my chest rising and falling as I try to process what just happened. My whole body feels like it's still buzzing, my skin hypersensitive to the cool air brushing against it. "Is this really happening?" I whisper, more to myself than to him. My voice trembles, still thick with the aftermath of my release.

"It's real, Victoria," he replies, his tone softer now, but no less commanding. "More real than I could have imagined."

I swallow hard, my fingers curling against the floor as I push myself up onto my knees. My legs feel like jelly, and I'm still trying to catch my breath. "Okay," I say in a giddy whisper, my voice barely audible over the sound of my pounding heart.

"What did you say?" His voice sharpens, cutting through the haze in my mind.

"Yes, Sir," I reply immediately, the words slipping out before I can think. A thrill runs through me as I say it, a strange mix of excitement and surrender. I feel my cheeks flush even hotter, but there's no time to dwell on it. The door of the limo opens, and I grab my suitcase, stepping out onto the pavement.

The night air is cool against my skin, and I take a deep breath, trying to steady myself. The mansion looms ahead, its grandeur both intimidating and awe-inspiring. I

walk toward the entrance, my heels clicking against the stone pathway. My heart races, and I can feel the weight of his presence, even though he's not physically here yet. Every step feels like I'm moving closer to something I've only ever dreamed of.

"Yes, Sir," I whisper again, more to myself this time, as I reach the massive double doors. My hand hovers over the handle, my pulse quickening. I'm about to step into a world I've only read about in books, with a man who's more than I could have ever imagined. And I'm ready—terrified, excited, but ready.

Page 4

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CHAPTER 4

VICKI

The marble foyer stretches up forever, gleaming under crystal chandeliers. My entire childhood home could fit in this entrance alone. I spin in a slow circle, my battered suitcase and the phone clutched tight.

My legs wobble, still weak from what happened in the limo. Heat floods my cheeks at the memory of those words I said, words I never thought would pass my lips. The freedom of letting go wars with the voice in my head saying good girls don't do such things.

"The Hearth room is down the hall to your left," his voice purrs through the phone.

I roll my suitcase along, wheels clicking against the polished floor. The hallway opens into a vast room with vaulted ceilings and floor-to-ceiling windows. A leather armchair faces the stone fireplace, and I freeze at the sight of the arm draped over its side.

Red scales catch the firelight, shifting and gleaming like living jewels. They form intricate patterns, each one perfectly placed. Not a uniform crimson like I expected, but a tapestry of deep garnets and bright rubies, with touches of sunset orange and golden yellow woven throughout.

My breath catches as I realize what he's doing - letting me see him, piece by piece, giving me time to process without pressure. The thoughtfulness of it makes my heart

flutter.

"Come around where I can see you, Victoria." His voice fills the room, rich and deep as aged whiskey. The phone falls silent in my hand - hearing him in person is so much more potent.

I take a step forward, then another, my sneakers squeaking on the polished floor. With each step, more of him comes into view. The chair creaks as he shifts, crossing one massive leg over the other. His thighs are like tree trunks, scaled and rippling with barely restrained power.

When I finally make it around to face him, my mouth goes dry. His ridged face looks...right. Not monstrous, not alien. Handsome, in a way that makes my stomach knot. His scales catch the firelight, glowing warm and inviting.

But those eyes. Those inescapable purple eyes. They lock onto mine and I swear I can feel them boring into my soul. They're deep and stormy, swirling with emotions I can't quite name. I could stare into them for hours.

My gaze drifts down, tracing over him. He's so massive, so solid. The muscles in his chest shift as he breathes, each one defined and powerful. My eyes widen as they continue lower, over his hard stomach, past a little trail of scales leading down to...

I gasp. He's naked. Fully, unashamedly naked. And he's...big. Not terrifying, but definitely impressive. The way his cock curves slightly, the heart-shaped tip, that ridge along the top. My body flushes hot just imagining what it would feel like.

"Does my Vakutan body frighten you?" His voice rumbles through me, low and rough. A small device appears in his scaled hand. "I can make myself look human if you prefer."

With a click, his features change. The scales smooth into human skin, the ridges fade from his face. He's still handsome, now sporting bright red hair and those same piercing purple eyes. But it's not right.

"No," I blurt out, my cheeks heating. "Change it back."

His chuckle is warm and rich as he hits the device again. The scales return, his true form restored. But then he frowns, his nose wrinkling in disgust.

"What are you wearing?" His eyes rake over my outfit - a worn t-shirt and jeans with grass stains on the knees.

"Jeans?" My voice cracks, my fingers instinctively fidgeting with the frayed hem. The way he looks at them, you'd think I showed up in a burlap sack. My face burns. "They're... they're just jeans."

"They're not even designer jeans," he grumbles, his deep voice rumbling through the massive room. His scaled arms flex as he leans forward in the armchair, the firelight catching the intricate patterns of crimson and gold across his chest. "Your supple, delectable skin deserves better. Get those off, immediately."

A flash of heat surges through me, pooling low in my belly and spreading like wildfire. My knees feel weak, my heart pounding against my ribs. I try to steady myself, to laugh it off, because I can't let him see how much this is affecting me. "Aren't you supposed to buy me dinner first?" I quip, forcing a smirk.

His brow ridges arch, and his violet eyes lock onto mine. The intensity in his gaze is paralyzing, like a predator sizing up its prey. He doesn't say a word. He doesn't have to. My pulse skyrockets, my body betraying me as a shiver runs down my spine. I feel like a kid caught with her hand in the cookie jar, called out in front of the whole class.

"I'm sorry, Sir," I mumble, dropping my gaze to the polished floor. My fingers tremble as I reach for the fly of my jeans, fumbling with the button and zipper. I start to push them down, but his voice stops me cold.

"No," he says, the command rolling through the room like thunder. "Turn around first."

I obey without hesitation, spinning on my heel until my back is to him. The fire crackles in the hearth, casting flickering shadows across the room. My hands shake as I grip the waistband of my jeans, slowly tugging them down. Inch by inch, my skin is revealed to him, the cool air brushing against my heated flesh.

I can feel his eyes on me, scalding and unrelenting. My cheeks flush with embarrassment, but beneath that, there's a strange, intoxicating relief. I've spent my whole life taking care of others, always in control, always calling the shots. But here, with him I get to be taken care of. I don't have to be in charge. I can let go. And it feels... good.

"Good girl," he purrs, his voice low and approving. "You have a fantastic ass, Victoria."

A moan escapes me before I can stop it, my body responding to his words like they're a physical touch. My hands freeze mid-motion, my jeans pooled around my thighs. My breath comes in shallow gasps, my heart pounding so hard I'm sure he can hear it.

"Keep going," he says, the command soft but firm. His voice reverberates through me, setting every nerve alight.

I obey, sliding the jeans the rest of the way down my legs until they're bunched around my ankles. I step out of them, kicking them aside. The firelight dances across

my bare skin, and I can feel his gaze lingering on every curve, every inch of me.

"Come here," he says, and I turn to face him again, my body already moving before my mind can catch up. My legs feel like jelly, but I force myself to walk toward him, step by trembling step. His eyes never leave me, his gaze a weight I can feel pressing against my skin.

When I'm close enough, he reaches out, his massive, scaled hand brushing against my hip. The warmth of his touch sends another shiver through me, and I gasp softly. "You're beautiful," he murmurs, his voice rough and full of promise.

I swallow hard, my body trembling under his touch. "Thank you, Sir," I whisper, my voice barely audible. My heart is racing, my mind a whirlwind of desire and uncertainty.

He leans back in the chair, his eyes never leaving mine. "Now, let's see what else you're hiding, Victoria." His tone is teasing, but the command is clear.

I nod, my hands moving to the hem of my t-shirt. I pull it up slowly, revealing the plain cotton bra beneath. My skin tingles under his gaze, the heat spreading through me, making my breath come faster. I throw the shirt aside, standing before him in nothing but my bra and panties. Confidence floods me. Nobody has ever made me feel like this before, and it feels nothing short of incredible.

"Good girl," he says.

"You like it when I call you my good girl, don't you, Victoria?" he purrs, his voice curling around me like smoke. The words slide under my skin, heating me from the inside out. I can't keep the shiver from running down my spine, and I don't even try to deny it.

“Yes,” I whisper, my voice trembling. The admission feels like handing over a piece of myself, something private and raw.

He smirks, his purple eyes glinting with something predatory and possessive. “Good. Now grab the waistband of your panties and tug them upward.”

I blink, confused for a moment. Up? Not down? My fingers hover over the soft silk, hesitating. But I don’t question him out loud. I never would. Instead, I obey, hooking my thumbs into the waistband and pulling.

The sensation is immediate and intense. The silk crotch of my panties is drawn up between my pussy lips, rubbing against my clit in a way that makes my knees buckle. A whimper slips out, and I feel my cheeks burn.

“That’s it,” he says, approving. His hand moves lazily, stroking his cock in rhythm with my shallow breaths. “Keep going, Victoria. Use your panties to touch yourself while I watch.”

My breath hitches, but I don’t stop. My fingers tremble as I keep the pressure on, the friction sending sparks up my spine. I’m hyper-aware of every sound in the room—the crackle of the fire, the soft slick sound of his hand moving, the way my own breathing comes in shallow gasps.

He’s watching me. Really watching. His eyes don’t leave me for a second, and it’s like I can feel them tracing every curve, every movement. The heat in his gaze is almost as intense as the one building between my legs.

“You’re so beautiful like this,” he growls, his voice rough. “All flushed and desperate for me.”

I whimper again, my hips rocking involuntarily against the silk. It’s too much and not

enough, all at once. The sight of him pleasuring himself while commanding me is overwhelming. My body feels like it's on fire, every nerve alight with need.

"I'm gonna cum," I blurt out, the words spilling out before I can stop them. My voice is high and shaky, and I'm equal parts embarrassed and exhilarated by how much I've already given in.

"Not yet," he says, his tone sharp and commanding. His hand stops moving, and he leans forward in the chair, his massive frame looming. "Not without my permission."

Before I can protest, his hands are on my wrists, his scaled fingers wrapping around them with a grip that's firm but not painful. He pulls my hands away from my panties, cutting off the stimulation.

I let out a frustrated gasp, my body tense with the urge to keep going. My eyes meet his, and I'm sure I look petulant, but I don't care. I'm so close, and he's teasing me, and it's maddening.

But then I realize—this is the first time he's actually touching me. Warmth spreads through me, and my breath catches. His scaled hands are so much bigger than mine, and the heat of them seeps into my skin.

He stares at me, his violet eyes dark and intense, and I can see the moment he loses the battle with his own restraint. His grip on my wrists tightens, and then he's pulling me closer, his lips crashing against mine in a kiss that feels like a claim.

His hands slide down my arms and grip my hips, effortlessly lifting me. I gasp as he pulls me onto his lap, my body twisting instinctively to face him. His chest is a solid wall of scaled muscle, and his purple eyes burn into mine—a mix of primal intensity and something sharper, more controlled. I whimper, squirming against him. I've never been this close to the edge without being allowed to fall over it. It's maddening.

It's delicious.

"Now for your punishment," he rumbles, his voice deep enough to vibrate through my entire body. He leans back slightly, his gaze dropping to my waist. "But these are in the way."

His scaled fingers hook into the waistband of my panties, teasing the sensitive skin just below my belly button. I groan, arching into his touch. No one's ever touched me like this—so deliberate, so possessive. His fingertips are textured but smooth, and they radiate warmth that seeps into my skin. My body reacts instantly, a shiver running through me as his thumb brushes over my hipbone.

"Should we be doing this?" I say, my voice trembling. My mind is a whirlwind of need and doubt. We've barely met, and yet here I am, straddling him, barely able to think straight. "We just met."

He pauses, his hand stilling against my skin. I whimper again, this time in frustration. The lack of contact feels like a betrayal, like he's pulled the oxygen out of the room. My body is screaming for him to keep going, to touch me again, to push me over that edge.

He tilts his head, his violet eyes narrowing as he studies me. "Do you want to stop?"

I blink, caught off guard by the question. My gaze drops to his broad chest, the intricate patterns of crimson and gold scales gleaming in the firelight. He's massive, powerful, and I know he could take whatever he wants from me right now. I wouldn't—couldn't—stop him. But he's holding back. Barely. I can feel the tension in his muscles, the way he trembles like a coiled spring ready to snap. And then there's the thick length of him pressing against my belly, hot and hard, making it impossible to think clearly.

“Please...” I whisper, my voice breaking.

“Please what?” His tone is firm, demanding, but there’s a softness underneath, something that feels almost like concern.

My breath comes in shallow gasps, my body trembling with need. “Please don’t... stop.”

He growls, low and deep, like a predator savoring its prey. His hands tighten on my hips, I think he’s going to pull me closer, to finally give me what I’m begging for. But instead, he leans in, his lips brushing against my ear. His breath is warm, and the heat of it sends another shiver down my spine. “Very well. We have only met just now, Victoria, but I do not think I can deny you anything you ask of me.”

Before I can process the words, I’m twisting in his lap, my hands clutching at his shoulders as I try to kiss him. I need to feel him, to taste him, to lose myself in him completely. But he doesn’t let me. Instead, his hand comes down sharply on my ass, the impact echoing through the room. I cry out, more from surprise than pain, and for a split second, I think he’s going to stop. But then he does it again, firm and deliberate, and I feel my body responding, arching into his touch, craving more.

“I don’t hear you thanking me for disciplining you, Victoria,” he rumbles, his voice low and thick with authority. His scaled hand hovers over my ass, the heat radiating from it making my skin prickle.

I barely have time to process the words before his palm comes down again, firm and deliberate. The sharp sting sends a jolt through me, and I gasp, my body arching instinctively. “Thank you, Sir,” I manage to say, my voice trembling with need. The words feel foreign but right, like a puzzle piece sliding into place. I’ve spent my whole life in charge—of my siblings, of my parents, of myself. Not now, though. Not with him. And it’s... freeing.

He spanks me again, and I thank him again, my voice a little louder this time. Each smack sends a wave of pleasure through me, mixing with the sting in a way that makes my head spin. Slowly, his hand shifts from punishing to caressing, his fingers kneading the flesh he just disciplined. The contrast is electric, and I let out a shuddering breath, my body melting into his touch.

“How is that so interesting?” I gasp. My clit throbs with every press of his fingers, and I’m teetering on the edge of an orgasm.

“What was that?” he demands, his tone sharp and commanding. The sound of it makes me bite my lower lip, a moan escaping despite my best efforts.

“How is playing with my bottom so interesting, Sir?” I ask, forcing the words out. My cheeks burn with embarrassment, but there’s a thrill in it too, in giving him what he wants.

“Your ass, you mean,” he corrects, his voice firm and unyielding. There’s no room for argument, and I wouldn’t dare try. The way he commands me, it’s like he’s reaching into my very soul, pulling out things I never knew were there.

“How is playing with my... ass so interesting, Sir?” I say, swallowing hard. The word feels dirty coming out of my mouth, but it’s also exhilarating. My clit pulses with the admission, and I squirm in his lap, desperate for more.

“It’s a work of nature’s art, evidence of the Precursor’s blessing,” he replies, his voice softening slightly. His hand continues to stroke and knead, his touch reverent. “Why would I not find such a thing interesting?”

I pause, the question catching me off guard. My mind flashes back to all the times I’ve been told I’d be prettier if I lost weight, all the snide comments and backhanded compliments. “Because you’re the first man to touch me who hasn’t told me I’d be

prettier if I lost weight,” I blurt out before I can stop myself.

The moment the words leave my mouth, I want to pull them back, to stuff them back into the dark corner of my mind where they belong. My face burns with humiliation, and I can’t bring myself to look at him.

But then his hand stops moving, and he tilts my chin up with one finger, forcing me to meet his gaze. His violet eyes are fierce, and there’s no trace of pity in them—only certainty. “Victoria, you are perfect the way you are,” he says, his voice steady and unyielding. “Any who would suggest otherwise are fools.”

I gasp, the words washing over me like a balm. I believe it. This man—this massive, scaled alien warrior—wants me. And he’s not afraid to show it. My relief is palpable, and it mingles with the mounting desire threatening to consume me. My body trembles, caught between the two emotions, and I feel like I’m about to shatter.

“I must taste you,” he growls, the urgency in his voice sending a jolt through me. His hands grip my hips, and for a split second, I think he’s going to devour me like some fairytale monster. My heart skips a beat, and I barely have time to process the thought before he flips me upside down like I weigh nothing. I gasp, my hands instinctively reaching out to steady myself, but he’s already got me—one arm wrapped tightly around my waist, my legs draping over his shoulders. My pussy is right in his face, and I feel his hot breath against my inner thighs.

“T-taste me?” I manage to stammer, my voice trembling. His sharp teeth graze my skin, and I freeze, the sensation both terrifying and electrifying. But then he bites down—not on me, but on my panties. With a single, deliberate tug, he tears them off with his teeth. The sound of fabric ripping sends a shiver through me, and my core tightens in response.

His lips find me next, and I feel his tongue—long, ridged, and impossibly

skilled—slide through my folds. I gasp, my hands gripping his shoulders for dear life. He is going to eat me, but not in the way I feared. This is something else entirely. His tongue is relentless, exploring every inch of me, and I can feel myself unraveling under his touch. My hips buck instinctively, and he lets out a low, approving growl that vibrates through me.

But then I notice something else—his cock, thick and throbbing, is pressed against my cheek. I can feel the heat radiating from it, and the sheer size of him makes my breath hitch. Without thinking, I squirm, adjusting my position until my lips can reach him. My tongue darts out, tasting the salty bead of precum that's already gathered at the tip. He groans, his grip on me tightening, and I take that as permission to continue.

I lick and suck at him, my mouth working in rhythm with his tongue. It's messy and uncoordinated, but he doesn't seem to care. His cock fills my mouth, the ridged texture of it sending a thrill through me. I've never done this before, but the way he's reacting tells me I'm doing something right. His growls grow louder, his tongue pressing deeper into me, and I can feel myself teetering on the edge of orgasm.

But then he pulls back, his tongue stilling. "Not yet," he commands, his voice rough with need. "You don't cum unless I say so."

I let out a frustrated whine, my body trembling with the effort of holding back. It's maddening, but it's also the hottest thing I've ever experienced. I've spent my whole life being the one in charge, the caretaker, the decision-maker. But here, he's in control, and it's the most freeing feeling in the world.

I focus on him instead, my mouth and tongue working him until he groans, his body tensing. "Good girl," he breathes, his grip on me tightening. Then he's cumming, his release filling my mouth. The taste is unlike anything I've ever experienced—sweet, almost like strawberry cream, but more intense. It's as if the rush of testosterone from

his alien sperm is flooding my system, making my head spin and my body tingle with warmth.

He pulls me upright then, settling me onto his lap like I'm something precious. His arms wrap around me, holding me close as we catch our breath. His lips find mine in a slow, deep kiss, and I melt into him, my body still trembling from the intensity of it all.

It's not that I have to sleep with him, I think hazily as we cuddle and kiss in the chair. It's that I get to. Tomorrow, I might regret this—the contract, the money, everything. But right now, in this moment, it's heaven. I'm not thinking about tomorrow.

CHAPTER 5

VICKI

O ur lips finally part, both of us gasping for air like we've been drowning in each other. My hands rest on his neck, feeling the smooth, warm scales beneath my fingertips. His purple eyes lock onto mine, and for a moment, the world dissolves around us. There's no mansion, no contract, no million-dollar deal—just him and me. His gaze is intense, almost consuming, and I feel like I'm falling into it, deeper and deeper, until I'm not just looking into his eyes—I'm in them.

Images flash through my mind, vivid and overwhelming. I'm standing in a ruined building, the air thick with the stench of smoke and something metallic. My hands are small, trembling as I clutch at a toy. In front of me, two charred skeletons lie tangled in the rubble. My chest tightens, and I realize these were his parents. My throat burns with a scream that won't come. The grief is unbearable, raw and unfiltered. It's not just a memory—it's his memory, and I'm living it.

Then, I'm somewhere else. A sterile, harsh-looking training ground. My body feels different—stronger, taller. I'm standing at attention, my heart pounding with excitement and determination. A massive, grizzled Vakutan barks at me, his voice like a crack of thunder, "Drop and give me... infinity!"

I hit the ground without hesitation, pushing my body to its limits with this strange, unrelenting drive. Every pushup is a battle, and I'm determined to win. It's not just physical—it's a test of will, and I refuse to fail.

The scene shifts again. I'm looking at... me. But it's not me—it's how he sees me. I'm standing in a limo, blonde hair catching the light, my cheeks flushed. There's a softness in his gaze as he watches me, something I've never seen in my own reflection. To him, I'm not just pretty—I'm radiant, almost ethereal. And when I smile, it's like the sun breaking through the clouds. His chest tightens with something I don't have a word for, but it feels like... hope.

The connection snaps, and I'm back in the present, staring at him with wide eyes. My heart is racing, and my mind is spinning. "What just happened?" I whisper, my voice trembling. I already know the answer, but I need to hear him say it. I need him to make it real.

His expression shifts, that intense gaze softening as he hesitates. He looks almost... vulnerable. It's a side of him I haven't seen before, and it makes my chest ache. "Vicki..." he starts, his voice low and hesitant. He stops, as if the words are stuck in his throat.

"Please," I beg, tears welling in my eyes. "Tell me. I need to know." My voice breaks, and I feel like I might shatter if he doesn't answer.

He pulls me into his embrace, his arms wrapping around me like a fortress. The warmth of his scales seeps into my skin, soothing the tremors running through me. "It was the jalshagar bond," he says softly, his voice a low rumble against my ear. "Eyes meet eyes, and souls mingle. Memories merge, and raw feelings exposed."

I bury my face in his chest, my voice muffled. "Was I... seeing your memories?"

He nods, his chin brushing the top of my head. "Yes, Victoria. You were."

I pull back just enough to look up at him, my heart pounding. "Those bodies... were they your parents?"

His jaw tightens. I think he might not answer. But then he turns his face away, his expression haunted. “Yes,” he says, his voice clipped. “But I do not wish to discuss it further.”

I bite my lip, torn between wanting to comfort him and not wanting to push him. He’s a warrior, after all. He’s probably buried that pain deep, and prying it open now might only hurt him more. Still, I can’t help but feel like he needs to talk about it.

“Did you see my memories too?” I ask, trying to lighten the mood.

He looks back at me, a faint smirk tugging at the corner of his mouth. “Yes.”

My curiosity is instantly piqued. “What did you see?” I demand, my fingers brushing against his chest. When he hesitates, I smirk and slide my hand lower, tracing a path down his stomach until I reach his cock.

He lets out a low growl, his eyes narrowing. “You’re fighting dirty, Victoria.”

I grin, stroking him slowly. “It’s your fault. You pulled it out of me. I’m not like this normally.”

He laughs, a deep, rumbling sound. “That’s not what your memories suggest.”

“Now you have to tell me what you saw,” I insist, my fingers curling around him.

He groans, his hips shifting slightly. “I saw you in a treehouse. Using a... vibrator on yourself.”

I burst out laughing, my cheeks burning. “It was the only place I could go for privacy! What else did you see?”

His expression softens, and for a moment, he looks almost... tender. "I saw you cleaning up after your parents when they drank themselves sick. You've borne a terrible burden for too long, Victoria. It's long overdue that someone takes care of you."

My laughter fades, and I stare at him, my heart pounding. "How can you mean all of this when we've only just met?"

He cups my face in his massive hands, his purple eyes boring into mine. "You are my fated mate. The missing half of my soul. I would do anything for you."

The weight of his words hits me like a tidal wave. Fated mates. Missing half of his soul. It's too much, too fast. I pull away from him, hugging myself tightly. My mind is spinning, my chest tight with a mix of emotions I can't even begin to untangle.

Rokkon rises from the couch, his movements smooth and deliberate. He grabs a soft velvet robe from the back of a chair and drapes it over my shoulders. The fabric is luxurious, soothing against my skin, but it doesn't ease the turmoil inside me.

"Let me show you to your bedroom, Victoria," he says, his voice full of longing, affection, and... disappointment. It's clear he wanted me to stay with him tonight, but I'm too overwhelmed, too raw.

I nod, letting him guide me down a dimly lit hallway. His hand rests on the small of my back, warm and reassuring, but I can't shake the feeling that I've just stumbled into something much bigger than myself.

"I'm sorry if I rushed you, Victoria," Rokkon says, his voice softer now, almost uncertain. "It was not my intention to make you feel upset."

I look up at him, his massive red-scaled frame towering over me, those piercing

purple eyes so full of concern it makes my chest ache. “You’ve been wonderful,” I say quickly, suddenly not wanting to be alone. “I’m just... this is a lot! This morning, I was signing a contract to escape turning into my parents. Now, I’ve met this amazing guy, and he’s super into me, but... he’s also an alien. And my Soul Mate ? How am I supposed to feel right now, Rokkon? Or should I call you Rocky Anderson? Christ, I’m dating Batman!”

I laugh helplessly, the absurdity of it all bubbling over like a shaken soda can. The roller coaster of emotions finally crests, leaving me breathless and dizzy. Rokkon stands there, patient and stalwart, his expression a mix of hurt and need. Needing me . Wanting me .

Am I fucking stupid? I silently ask myself.

“I would never deign to tell you how you feel, Victoria,” Rokkon says, his voice steady but tinged with something I can’t quite place. “Jalshagar bonds are powerful enigmas. My people do not fully understand them, no one truly does. You are justified in your need to adjust.”

“Stop it,” I groan, slamming my fists into his meaty chest. “Stop being so perfect.”

He laughs, the sound deep and warm, like it’s been trapped in his chest for years and only now found its way out. “I’m far from perfect, Victoria. I have made... mistakes.”

I can sense the memory he’s struggling to hide, lurking just beneath the surface. It’s close, so close, and I can almost taste it. But when I try to find it in his gaze, he turns away. I’m not so much hurt as I feel sorry for him. He’s afraid to be vulnerable. I can relate.

I step closer and wrap my arms around him, pressing my cheek against his scaled

chest. He stiffens for a moment, startled, but then his arms come around me, pulling me tight against him. The warmth of his body seeps into mine, and I let out a long breath I didn't realize I was holding.

"This is crazy, and it makes no sense," I mumble into his chest, the words muffled but honest. "But I know you're a good man, Rokkon. Er, good alien. Vakutan. You know what I mean."

"I know you are a good woman, Victoria," he says, his voice soft but firm. "You sacrificed much to take care of your family."

"But I ran out on them," I insist, my throat tightening.

"Even the most finely crafted engine will not run if it runs out of fuel," he says, his tone gentle but unwavering. "You emptied yourself out, like the giving tree. You gave all your leaves, your fruit, your limbs, selflessly. Now you need time to grow back. It is not ignoble."

Tears spill over, hot and unbidden, and I bury my face in his chest, letting go of the guilt that's been clawing at me for years. His arms tighten around me, steady and unshakable like the man himself.

"Come," he says after a moment, scooping me up effortlessly. "Let us rest now."

I don't argue. I don't have to be strong. I can just... let go. And for now, that's enough.

Rokkon carries me through the mansion like I weigh nothing, his arms solid and unyielding. My head rests against his chest, the steady rhythm of his hearts lulling me into a strange calm. The opulence of the place still hasn't fully sunk in—every corner seems to gleam with wealth, from the polished marble floors to the intricate

chandeliers dripping with crystals. But it's not the grandeur that catches my attention. It's the door.

We pass by it, and I notice the heavy padlock and the medieval-looking bars over the lone, square window. It's out of place in this otherwise pristine mansion, like a secret it's trying too hard to keep. I tilt my head, curiosity piqued.

"What's in there? Your pet dragon?" I ask with a chuckle, trying to lighten the mood. My voice echoes slightly in the hallway, and I feel Rokkon's chest rumble with a low laugh.

"Oh, you're not ready for what's in there, Victoria," he says, his tone sweet but with a hint of something else—condescension, maybe? It's subtle, but it's there, and it pricks at me.

"I'm a big girl," I say, miffed. "You sure treated me like one earlier."

He chuckles again, but it's softer this time, almost indulgent. "First you must learn to walk," he says, his voice carrying that same patronizing edge. "Then I will teach you to fly. But only when you are ready."

"I'm ready now," I insist, my tone petulant. I don't like being talked down to, even if it's coming from a seven-foot-tall alien who could probably bench press a car. But before I can argue further, he silences me with a kiss. It's deep and commanding. I forget all about the mysterious door.

When he pulls away, I'm breathless, my cheeks flushed. He doesn't say anything, just continues carrying me down the hall. I don't fight it. I'm too tired, too overwhelmed, and honestly, too curious about what's behind that door to push him further. For now, I let it go.

He carries me into the master bedroom, and I'm struck by how luxurious it is. The bed is massive, draped in soft silk sheets that shimmer in the dim light. He lays me down gently, the fabric cool against my skin, and pulls the covers over me, tucking me in like a child.

"Sleep now," he says, his voice firm but gentle.

"Don't wanna," I mutter, even as I stifle a yawn. My body feels heavy, my eyelids drooping despite my protests.

He leans over me, his massive frame blocking out the light. "Go to sleep, sweet one," he says, his hand coming to rest on my throat. He doesn't squeeze, but I can feel the strength in his grip, the unspoken command in his touch. "That's an order."

"Yes, Sir," I whisper, my voice barely audible. His hand stays there, pinning me in place, and I feel a strange sense of comfort in the weight of it. My eyes drift shut, and I'm asleep before I even realize it.

CHAPTER 6

ROKKON

The glow from the compad on my desk casts a faint purple light across the room. My claws click against the screen as I swipe through a dozen messages, each more urgent than the last. Managing a human business empire while juggling Veritas duties isn't for the faint-hearted, but I've never been one to shy away from a challenge. Still, I'd rather be out there, tearing through Grolgath nests, than stuck in this leather chair. The quiet hum of the manor's systems is a poor substitute for the roar of battle.

A ping pulls my attention. It's from a Veritas field agent in St. Louis.

"Potential Grolgath sighting in the Gateway City," I mutter to myself, scanning the report. "Five witnesses report a man with 'unusual eyes' seen entering an abandoned warehouse in the industrial district."

I tap the compad, activating the secure channel. "This is Rokkon. Deploy Surveillance Team Delta to St. Louis. Grid search the area. If it's a Grolgath, I want it neutralized before it can burrow deeper."

A crisp reply comes through. "Understood, Commander. Delta is en route."

I lean back, the chair creaking under my weight. The Grolgath are getting bolder. Or maybe they're just getting desperate. Either way, their presence is a threat to the timeline—and to Vicki. The thought of her soft, human form sleeping upstairs tugs at something deep inside me. She's fragile, yes, but there's a strength in her I hadn't

expected. The jalshagar bond only deepens that connection, though I'm not ready to admit just how much.

Another ping. This time, it's the financial portfolio of Jim and Debbie Sloane. I scan the numbers, my lips curling into a frown. Their mortgage is drowning them, and their credit is a trainwreck. I don't understand humans' obsession with paper money, but I understand debt—it's a prison just as surely as chains.

I grab a stylus and a sheet of heavy vellum, the kind humans use for formal correspondence. My claws make the handwriting jagged, but the message is clear.

"My Sweetness,

I must depart to deal with urgent business matters. Until my return, please indulge yourself with my manor's many facilities and the fully stocked kitchen. You may also order any food or merchandise you wish and charge it to me.

You may touch yourself if you wish, but you're not allowed to cum without my permission. And don't go trifling with that door even though the key is hanging on a hook by my nightstand."

I smirk as I set the note on the nightstand. She'll rage at the tease, but she'll obey. I've seen it in her, that need to submit, to let someone else take control. It's not weakness—it's trust. And trust is something I don't give lightly.

Next stop: Veritas Base Alpha. I activate my image inducer, the human disguise settling over me like a second skin. "Rocky Anderson" stares back at me from the mirror—red hair, purple eyes, all sharp edges and human arrogance. I hate it, but it's necessary. The Grolgath won't see me coming until it's too late.

The holo-projector on my desk flickers to life, casting a bluish glow across the room.

A 3D map of Ohio materializes, with the Sloane residence marked in red. I'm not just going to settle their debts. I'm going to make sure they never jeopardize Vicki's life again. If they're smart, they'll take the deal. If they're not... well, I'm not known for my patience.

I grab my coat and head for the door. The manor feels too quiet without her.

The Jaguar purrs to life as I slide into the driver's seat, the leather creaking under my weight. To the untrained eye, it's a luxury car—sleek, black, and dripping with human opulence. But under the hood, it's a Vakutan shuttle, complete with a cloaking device and enough firepower to level a city block. I tap the dashboard, and the car hums with energy, the holographic interface lighting up in shades of blue and purple.

“Engage cloaking,” I mutter, and the world outside the windshield shimmers as the car vanishes from sight. The engine roars, and we're airborne in seconds, the ground falling away beneath us. The sky stretches out, endless and inviting, but I don't have time to admire the view. Veritas Base Alpha awaits.

The flight is smooth, the shuttle cutting through the atmosphere like a blade. In minutes, the Atlantic Ocean sprawls below, its surface glittering under the sun. I descend, the cloaking device masking my approach as the water parts to reveal the base. It's a marvel of engineering—a translucent dome housing a city of light and steel, a testament to what my people can achieve even in this primitive era.

I land in the hangar bay, the shuttle's engines whining as they power down. The air smells of ozone and salt, a familiar scent that grounds me. I stride through the corridors, my boots clicking against the polished floor. The base is alive with activity—Vakutan soldiers, human operatives, and mechanicals moving with purpose. I nod to a few familiar faces but don't stop to chat. I'm here for one thing.

Jareth's lab is tucked away in a quieter corner of the base, its door marked with a

holographic emblem of a gear and a lightning bolt. I step inside, and the scent of oil and ozone hits me. The lab is a chaotic mess of wires, tools, and half-finished projects, but Jareth thrives in the chaos. He's hunched over a workbench, his yellow scales gleaming under the harsh light, a pair of magnifying lenses perched on his snout.

"Rokkon!" he exclaims, looking up as I enter. "I guess you're here for this?" He holds up a thermos-sized glass canister filled with a shiny black liquid, its surface rippling like oil.

I take the canister, turning it over in my hands. "I'm not here for this," I say, stowing it in my coat. "But thank you."

"The instructions are included," Jareth blabbers, barely pausing for breath. "You'll find that I was able to increase the contextual rigidity by over forty percent, and the sync rate with the remote is, dare I say, perfect?—"

"Jareth," I interrupt, my voice firm. "I'm not here for this. Though I thank you and look forward to testing out your engineering genius. I'm here for Compound X."

Jareth freezes, his eyes widening. "Compound X? Rokkon, that's for specific cases only. It's not something to be handed out lightly."

"This is a specific case," I say, my tone leaving no room for argument.

He hesitates, then sighs, rummaging through a drawer. He pulls out a small, lipstick-sized vial of amber fluid and hands it to me. "Remember, it only works once," he warns.

I pocket the vial, then reach into my coat and pull out a paper bag. "Here. A St. Louis-style barbecue rib sandwich. Your favorite."

Jareth's face lights up, his earlier concern forgotten. "You're a true friend, Rokkon."

"Don't mention it," I say, turning to leave. The vial feels heavy in my pocket, a reminder of what's at stake. I'll use it if I have to, but I hope it doesn't come to that. For now, I've got a timeline to protect—and a jalshagar waiting for me back at the manor.

The shuttle hums beneath my hands as I steer it toward Ohio. The Catskill Mountains are a distant memory now, replaced by the flat, endless fields of the Midwest. The cloaked vessel glides over the landscape, invisible to human eyes but still tangible enough that I can feel the wind resistance against the hull. I check the coordinates on the holo-display. Vicki's childhood home. A patchwork of tar paper, trailers, and rusting cars.

I activate the image inducer, the human disguise settling over my scales. My red hair and purple eyes stare back at me from the reflection in the windshield. Rocky Anderson, billionaire playboy. The thought almost makes me snort. I'd rather be in my true form, but today, subtlety is key.

The shuttle touches down gently on the dirt road leading to the house, the cloaking field masking the landing. I step out, the crunch of gravel under my boots the only sound. The air smells of oil and overgrown grass, the kind of earthy scent that humans seem to thrive in. I walk up to the front door, my shadow stretching long in the late afternoon sun.

The knock is firm, the kind that demands attention. I wait, listening to the muffled sounds of movement inside. A shuffling of feet, a muttered curse. The door creaks open, revealing a man who looks like he's been through the ringer and lost. Jim Sloane, Vicki's father. His eyes are bloodshot, his face pale beneath the stubble. The smell of stale beer and cheap whiskey wafts out.

“Yeah?” he slurs, squinting at me. “Who’re you?”

“Rocky Anderson,” I say. “I’ve just purchased the debt on this property from the bank. I’m your new landlord.”

Jim blinks, processing the words slowly. “What, are you kicking us out?” His tone is flat, resigned, like he’s been expecting this. There’s no anger, just a tired acceptance that makes my chest tighten.

“No,” I say, shaking my head. “In fact, I’m reducing your mortgage payments to one dollar a month. In perpetuity.”

Jim’s eyes narrow, suspicion flickering in their depths. “Why the hell would you do that?”

“Because it’s a favor for Victoria,” I say, keeping my tone even. “She’s a friend of mine. And that’s the only reason.”

He stares at me, uncomprehending. “So... you’re not evicting us?”

“No. But there’s a condition.” I lean in slightly, my voice dropping. “You don’t tell Vicki about this arrangement. If you do, the payments go back to their original levels.”

Jim nods slowly, still processing. “Okay. Okay, sure. I won’t tell her.” He pauses, then looks at me with a mixture of hope and guilt. “Are you... are you her boyfriend?”

“Just her friend,” I say, though the words feel hollow. Her jalshagar is all I want to be.

“Well,” Jim says, his voice quiet, “I sure wish you’d fall in love with her. She deserves so much better than pieces of shit like me and her mother.”

The words hit me like a punch. I’ve seen this kind of despair before—on the battlefield, in the eyes of soldiers who’ve lost everything. But this... this is different. This is a father who’s given up on himself, and it’s crushing to witness.

“Mr. Sloane,” I say, softening my tone, “I have something else for you.”

I reach into my coat and pull out the vial of Compound X, holding it up so the amber liquid catches the sunlight. Jim squints at it, his brow furrowed like he’s trying to solve a math problem that’s just a little too hard for him.

“What’s that?” he asks, his words still slow and slurred, but with a spark of curiosity.

“This,” I say, rolling the vial between my fingers, “is something my pharmaceutical company has been developing. A treatment for addiction. One dose, and you’ll be free of the physical dependency on alcohol. No more withdrawal symptoms. No shakes, no sweats, no delirium tremens. It’s a clean slate.”

Jim’s eyes widen, and I see a flicker of hope in them. “So, I just drink that, and I’m not a drunk anymore?”

I chuckle, but there’s no humor in it. “If only it were that simple. The Compound will remove the physical cravings, but it won’t touch the mental ones. It won’t fix whatever’s inside you that makes you reach for the bottle in the first place. That part’s on you. And Deb.”

He hesitates, his gaze dropping to the ground. “I’ve tried to sober up before. Always failed.”

I step closer, lowering my voice. “That’s why I’m offering more than just the Compound. I’ve arranged for you and Deb to attend therapy sessions with one of the best psychiatrists in the world. Free of charge. If you’re willing to put in the work, this could be your chance. But it’s not going to be easy.”

Jim looks up at me, his expression a mix of confusion and frustration. “Why are you doing this? Why us?”

I hold his gaze, unflinching. “Because Vicki deserves better than this. She’s spent her life cleaning up your messes, taking care of her siblings, and worrying about you two. I’m not letting you drag her down anymore. But if you’re willing to change—if you’re willing to prove you’re worthy—then maybe, just maybe, you can be part of her life again.”

He blinks, his mouth opening and closing like a fish out of water. “Worthy of what?”

“Worthy of being in the life of the magnificent daughter you created,” I say, my tone sharp enough to cut glass. “Because right now, Jim, you’re not even close.”

I place the vial in his hand and step back, my eyes never leaving his. “The choice is yours. Take the Compound, go to therapy, and fight for the chance to be better. Or don’t. But if you choose the latter, don’t expect to see Victoria again.”

I turn on my heel and walk away, the crunch of gravel under my boots the only sound in the heavy silence. I don’t look back. I don’t need to. The weight of my words will linger long after I’m gone.

Let him chew on that.

CHAPTER 7

VICKI

I wake up in the master bedroom, the memory of last night slamming into me like a freight train. I sit bolt upright, my heart racing, the sheets pooling around my waist. The jalshagar bond, his alien form, the way he commanded me—it all comes rushing back. But now, in the light of day, it feels less overwhelming, almost exhilarating.

"Get a grip, Vicki," I mutter to myself, swinging my legs over the edge of the bed. The floor is cool under my feet, and I stretch, feeling the pleasant ache in my muscles from last night's... activities.

I pad through the mansion, still naked, my skin tingling with every step. The grandeur of this place still boggles me—marble floors, towering windows, chandeliers that probably cost more than my parents' house. I find the kitchen, and there's a spread waiting for me. A charcuterie board with cheeses I can't pronounce, cured meats, and a pitcher of orange mimosa. Beside it, a note in bold, precise handwriting.

"My Sweetness," I read aloud, my voice soft. I laugh at the part about the locked door. "Oh, Rocky—or Rokkon, whatever. You think a padlock's going to stop me?"

I nibble on a piece of brie, the creamy richness melting on my tongue. The cracker crunches as I bite into it, the flavors mingling perfectly with the bright, bubbly mimosa. I finish my breakfast, the alcohol warming my insides but not enough to cloud my head.

Naked and unashamed, I explore the mansion. Every room feels like a discovery—the home gym with its sleek machines, the entertainment room with its massive TV, the library with walls lined with leather-bound books. But my mind keeps drifting back to that locked door. The one he told me not to trifle with.

I stop in front of it, the padlock gleaming in the soft light, the bars on the window casting shadows on the carpet. I think about my siblings and all the times they broke into places they weren't supposed to go. Breaking into the piggy bank to get the rent money, sneaking into Dad's liquor cabinet, raiding Mom's secret stash of chocolates.

"I've earned this," I say under my breath, turning on my heel. I head back to the bedroom, my steps quickening. The key hangs on the hook by the nightstand, right where he said it would.

"You're really going to do this, aren't you?" I mutter to myself, grabbing the key. The metal is cool in my hand, the weight of it making my pulse quicken.

I walk back to the door, the key slipping into the padlock with a satisfying click. The lock falls open, and I push the door wide.

Red velvet walls, a carpet so plush it feels like walking on clouds, and... devices. A lot of devices. A saddle-thing mounted to the floor, a swing hanging from the ceiling, a cage that looks like it belongs in a sci-fi movie.

"Well," I say, my voice trembling with a mix of shock and curiosity, "this is... something."

I step inside, the door creaking shut behind me. The room swallows me whole, and I feel like I'm about to get myself into so much trouble.

The cage stands in the corner, its stainless steel bars gleaming under the soft red light

of the room. I can't stop staring at it, my fingers grazing the cold metal. The idea of being locked inside, completely at Rokkon's mercy, sends electricity shooting through my nerves—but not the bad kind. The kind that makes my breath quicken and my knees feel weak.

I crouch down and open the door, the hinges squeaking softly. My heart pounds as I climb inside, the metal floor cool against my bare skin. I pull my knees to my chest, imagining Rokkon towering over me, locking me in, leaving me utterly helpless.

"What am I doing?" I whisper, shaking my head. I scramble back out, shutting the door with a loud clang. "I shouldn't touch things that don't belong to me. I might break it or something."

I step back, my eyes wandering to the wall lined with devices. My curiosity gets the better of me. I reach out and touch a fur-lined blindfold, the soft material brushing against my fingertips. I picture Rokkon slipping it over my eyes, taking away my sight, my control. The thought makes my stomach flutter.

"Okay, that's... intriguing," I admit, my voice trembling just a little. I set the blindfold back on its hook and move to the next item—a velvet-padded spanking paddle. I lift it off the wall, testing its weight in my hand. The handle feels sturdy, the surface smooth against my palm.

I glance over my shoulder at the mirror on the wall. My reflection stares back, wide-eyed and flushed. Slowly, I raise the paddle and bring it down on my ass with a sharp smack. The sound echoes in the room, and I yelp, more from surprise than pain.

"I could get into this," I say, a little breathless. I try it again, harder this time, and a low moan escapes my lips. My ass tingles, and I giggle, the sound nervous and giddy.

Next, I spot the ball gag. I pick it up, turning it over in my hands. At first, I'm

confused. It looks like some kind of strap-on, but the leather straps are too long, and the ball is too small.

"Does this go on my head or...?" I mutter, holding it up to my waist. It's clearly not meant to fit there. Then it hits me. "Oh. Oh no. It goes in my mouth, doesn't it?"

I stare at the ball gag like it's a snake about to strike. The idea of Rokkon silencing me, deciding when I can speak, when I can kiss him, when I can... I swallow hard, my throat suddenly dry.

"I might could get into this, too," I murmur. I run my fingers over the smooth silicone ball, imagining it in my mouth, the leather straps tightening around my head.

My cheeks burn, and I quickly hang the ball gag back on the wall. My heart races, and I lean against the cool velvet padding, trying to catch my breath. This room, these devices, everything about it is overwhelming—but in the best way possible.

"I'm in so much trouble," I say, laughing nervously. But deep down, I know I want this. I want Rokkon to take control, to push me, to make me feel things I've only ever dreamed of.

I glance back at the cage, then at the blindfold, the paddle, the ball gag. Every part of me tingles with anticipation.

The sound of the front door clicking shut sends a jolt through me. My heart skips a beat, and I freeze for a second, weighing my options. Close the door, clean up the mess, and pretend none of this happened? Or let him catch me? A wicked grin spreads across my face as I make my choice.

I yank the cage door open, grab the paddle, blindfold, and ball gag, and arrange them neatly on top of the cage like a little exhibit. Then I bolt back to the master bedroom,

my bare feet slapping against the cool marble floor. I dive under the covers, pulling them up to my chin, and try to stifle my laughter. My chest heaves as I force my breathing to slow, pretending to be asleep.

Rokkon's footsteps echo down the hallway, heavy and deliberate. They pause outside the pleasure room, and I hear a low chuckle rumble through the air. My stomach twists with a mix of nerves and excitement. The sound of metal and leather clinking together follows—he's picking up the toys I so thoughtfully left out.

The bedroom door creaks open, and I squeeze my eyes shut, biting my lip to keep from giggling. The mattress dips as his weight settles beside me. I feel his warmth, the faint scent of something citrusy and sharp—his cologne?—filling the air. Before I can react, he's on top of me, pinning me to the bed. The sheet between us does nothing to hide the hard press of his cock against my hip.

"Someone's been a very naughty girl," he growls, his voice low and rough. His breath brushes my ear, sending a shiver down my spine. "You could've put my toys away, and perhaps I wouldn't have to punish you."

My lips curve into a smirk, despite myself. "Where's the fun in that?" I quip, my voice a little breathless.

He laughs, a deep, rich sound that makes my pulse quicken. His lips find my neck, kissing and nibbling in a way that makes me squirm. I groan softly, arching into him as his teeth graze my shoulder. His hands slide down my arms, and I'm so caught up in the sensation that I barely notice him pulling my wrists behind my back.

The leather cuffs click into place, snug but not too tight. He's using the Vakutan love harness—the Reaper's lingerie, as he calls it. My arms are locked behind me, leaving me completely at his mercy. I can feel the padded collar around my neck, soft but unyielding.

"Now," he says, his voice a mix of amusement and command, "since you left these things out of their proper place, I think it's only fair you learn how each of them functions."

The thrill of anticipation shoots through me. "Yes, Sir," I gasp, my voice trembling.

He kisses me hard, his lips claiming mine with a possessiveness that makes my toes curl. When he pulls back, he slips the ball gag into my mouth, the silicone ball pressing against my tongue. The straps tighten around my head, and I feel a strange sense of relief as they secure the gag in place. No more decisions, no more control—just him.

"Do you have any idea how irresistible you are when you're this helpless?" he murmurs, his eyes glowing with that deep purple hue. His fingers trace the edge of the gag, and I moan around it, the sound muffled but unmistakable.

He scoops me up like I weigh nothing, throwing me over his shoulder. The room spins as he carries me back to the pleasure room, my heart racing with every step. The red velvet walls seem to close in around us, and I feel like I'm floating, suspended in a dream.

"Tomorrow," I think to myself, my mind hazy with desire, "I'll start regretting this. But not today."

Today is heaven.

He sets me down on my feet, and I feel like a child standing next to him—tiny, fragile, completely dwarfed by his immense size. My heart hammers in my chest as he starts to strip out of his suit, revealing the gleaming red scales and rippling muscles underneath. The transformation is almost palpable; the polished billionaire facade falls away, and what's left is raw, primal, and terrifyingly beautiful.

Andromeda chained to the rocks , I think, staring up at him. Waiting for the Kraken to claim me.

A whimper escapes my gagged mouth before I can stop it. The sound is small, almost pathetic, and it makes his purple eyes flicker with something dark and hungry. But then his hand is on my cheek, the scales surprisingly smooth against my skin. His touch is gentle, almost tender, and I press my face into his palm, breathing in the scent of him—citrus and something metallic, like the air after a lightning strike.

But the moment of tenderness doesn't last. His hand slides back, tangling in my hair near the scalp, and then he's pulling my neck back, exposing my throat. I've never felt so vulnerable in my life, so utterly helpless. My knees shake, but I don't fight him. Something deeper than fear, deeper than reason, tells me I'm safe with him. Maybe it's the jalshagar bond, that strange, inexplicable connection between us. Maybe it's just the way his eyes burn into mine, possessive and protective all at once.

His teeth sink into my neck, hard enough to leave marks but not enough to break the skin. I groan into the gag, the sound muffled but raw. One of his hands kneads my breast roughly, the other still gripping my hair, holding me in place. The mix of pleasure and pain is intoxicating, pulling me out of my head and into my body, where there's no room for thought, only feeling. Only him.

"On the floor, Honeypot," he growls, his voice low and commanding.

He shoves me down, and I land face-first on the plush carpet. His massive body pins me instantly, his weight pressing me into the floor. His cock throbs against my ass, and I can love the heat of him, the readiness. His hand covers most of my head, holding me down as he positions himself. The first thrust is brutal, driving the air from my lungs. I can't move, can't even twitch. I'm completely at his mercy, and the realization sends a shudder through me.

His hips snap forward again, and again, each thrust deeper, harder, more animalistic. The sounds he makes—growls, snarls, grunts—are almost feral, and they send sparks of electricity racing through me. My body responds in kind, tightening around him, pulling him deeper. The pleasure builds, a coiled spring ready to snap.

When he's close, he sinks his teeth into my shoulder, a claiming bite that makes me cry out around the gag. His cock pulses inside me, filling me with his warmth, his essence. I feel it everywhere, a flood of sensation that drags me under, until I'm floating, untethered, lost in the waves of pleasure.

I'm not Vicki Sloane, the responsible older sister, the caretaker, the dreamer. I'm just his , and it's the most freeing feeling in the world.

The ball gag slips out of my mouth with a soft pop , and before I can catch my breath, Rokkon's lips crash into mine. His kiss is a storm, all heat and hunger, but there's something tender in it too, like he's trying to tell me something without words. I kiss him back, my fingers tangling in the soft, red scales on the back of his neck, pulling him closer until there's no space between us. His growl vibrates against my lips, and I smile.

He breaks the kiss, his breath ragged, and pulls me into his lap. My legs straddle him, and I feel the warmth of his body seeping into mine. His hands, so rough and commanding moments ago, are gentle now, smoothing my hair back from my face. His touch is almost reverent, like he's handling something fragile, something precious.

“Now you've seen the other side of me,” he says, rough, but there's a vulnerability in it that I didn't expect. His purple eyes search mine, waiting for something—judgment, maybe. Fear.

I laugh. The sound bursts out of me, incredulous and loud, and his eyebrows shoot

up.

“Afraid? Afraid ?” I say, leaning back in his lap so I can look him full in the face. “Rokkon, I’m sitting here trying to figure out how to make your ‘other side’ come back on a regular basis.”

His expression shifts, something like wonder flickering across his features. For a moment, he just stares at me, like he’s trying to figure out if I’m serious. And then his lips curve into a slow, wicked smile.

“You’re full of surprises, you know that?” he says, his hands sliding down to rest on my lower back, pulling me closer.

“So are you,” I shoot back, grinning. I reach up and trace the edge of one of his scales with my fingertip, marveling at the texture—smooth but so alive, like touching warm metal. “I’m happy, Rokkon.”

His gaze softens, and he brushes a strand of blond hair from my face. “Even with a bite mark on your shoulder?” he asks, his thumb grazing the tender skin he’d claimed just minutes ago.

I shiver at the touch, then nestle into him, resting my head on his chest. His heartbeat is steady and strong beneath my ear, a rhythm I could get used to. “Especially with a bite mark on my shoulder,” I murmur, closing my eyes.

His arms tighten around me, and I feel him press a kiss to the top of my head. His breath warms my scalp, and I sigh.

"Good," he says simply, his voice rumbling through me. "Because I'm not letting you go."

I smile against his chest, my fingers playing with the edge of one of his scales.
"Good," I echo. "Because I'm not going anywhere."

I don't have to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders. I can just be . And
with Rokkon, that's enough. More than enough.

CHAPTER 8

ROKKON

The soft hum of the jet's engines is a steady backdrop as I sit at my computer kiosk, my eyes scanning the financial data for GEHI. My fingers tap lightly on the screen, pulling up projections and budgets, but my attention keeps drifting to the other side of the aisle.

Vicki's curled up in her seat, my jacket draped over her like a makeshift blanket. Her head rests on that ridiculous stuffed unicorn I bought her last week—bright pink with a glittery horn—and her blonde hair spills over the armrest. She's out cold, her lips slightly parted, and every now and then, she lets out the softest sigh. I can't help the smile that tugs at my mouth. She's never been this far from home before, and I'm already planning to make this trip more than just business for her.

My compad buzzes, cutting through the quiet. I glance at the screen—Veritas secure channel. I flick on the sonic barrier to keep the sound from waking her and accept the call.

The holographic display flickers to life, and Fela's Vakutan form appears. Her black scales shimmer faintly under the light, those chromatic eyes narrowing as she looks at me.

"Rokkon," she says, her tone clipped. "I need to talk to you."

"Fela," I nod, leaning back in my chair. "What's so urgent it couldn't wait until I

landed?”

“It’s about Vicki.”

My brow ridges lower. “What about her?”

“How is she?” Fela crosses her arms, her posture stiff. “Is she adjusting well? Is she... happy?”

I frown. “Why are you asking me this? Your job was done the moment you introduced us.”

She hesitates, her gaze flicking away for a moment before returning to mine. “I’m just... concerned. She’s young, Rokkon. Inexperienced. And you’re... well, you.”

I bristle at that. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You’re Vakutan,” she says sharply. “You’re intense, demanding, and you don’t exactly have a gentle touch. Vicki’s not like us. She’s not used to this kind of life—or to someone like you.”

I clench my jaw, the scales along my neck tightening. “I would never hurt her.”

“I’m not saying you would,” Fela counters, her tone softening just a fraction. “But you need to be careful with her. She’s vulnerable.”

I glance over at Vicki again, her peaceful expression tugging at something deep in my chest. “I know she is. And I’m not taking that lightly.”

Fela sighs, her shoulders dropping. “Just... make sure she’s okay, Rokkon. Don’t push her too hard. She needs time to figure this out.”

“I’m not pushing her,” I say, though the words feel heavy in my mouth. “She’s... she’s my jalshagar. I’d sooner tear out my own heart than see her hurt.”

Fela studies me for a long moment, then nods. “Good. That’s what I needed to hear.”

The call ends, and I sit there for a moment, staring at the blank screen. Fela’s words echo in my mind, and for the first time, I wonder if I’ve been too much for Vicki. Too demanding. Too... Vakutan.

I look over at her again, my chest tightening. She’s still asleep, oblivious to the weight of the conversation. I stand and walk over to her, crouching beside her seat. My hand brushes her hair back from her face, and she stirs slightly, murmuring something incoherent.

“Sleep, sweetness,” I whisper, my voice low. “You’re safe with me.”

But as I sit back down at my kiosk, Fela’s words linger, a quiet unease settling in my gut.

The jet touches down with a smooth glide, the hum of the engines easing into silence. I feel the slight jolt as the wheels hit the tarmac, and I glance over at Vicki. She’s still asleep, her head resting on that ridiculous pink unicorn. Her lips are slightly parted, and her blonde hair spills over the armrest like a golden waterfall. I reach over, brushing a strand away from her face, and she stirs, her eyes fluttering open.

“We’re here,” I say softly, my voice low. I don’t want to startle her.

She blinks up at me, her blue eyes still foggy with sleep, then a slow, warm smile spreads across her face. “Morocco?” she asks, her voice groggy but tinged with excitement.

“Morocco,” I confirm, standing and offering her my hand. She takes it, letting me pull her to her feet. For a moment, she sways slightly, still half-asleep, then she throws her arms around my neck, pressing herself against me.

“Thank you for bringing me,” she murmurs into my chest, her voice muffled. Then she tilts her head up, her lips finding mine in a soft, lingering kiss.

I wrap my arms around her, pulling her closer, and for a moment, the world fades away. Her fingers trail down my chest, slipping lower, and I feel her hand brushing against the front of my pants. I don’t stop her at first—how could I?—but then Fela’s words echo in my mind, and I gently catch her wrist, pulling her hand away.

“Not now, sweetness,” I say, my voice firm but gentle. “We’ve got a schedule to keep.”

Her face falls, just for a second, and I see the hurt flash in her eyes. She doesn’t say anything, but she steps back, smoothing her hair and avoiding my gaze. I’ve never rebuffed her before, not even gently, and I can tell it stings.

“Vicki,” I start, but she shakes her head, forcing a smile.

“It’s fine,” she says quickly, her voice a little too bright. “Let’s go see Morocco.”

I don’t push it. Instead, I take her hand, leading her off the jet and into the warm, golden sunlight. The air is thick with the scent of spices and the distant murmur of a bustling market. Vicki’s mood lifts almost instantly as she takes it all in, her eyes wide with wonder.

“It’s so beautiful,” she breathes, her hand tightening around mine. “I’ve always wanted to see this place.”

“I thought you might like it,” I say, a small smile tugging at my lips. I watch her as she takes in the sights—the vibrant colors, the intricate architecture, the way the sunlight dances off the cobblestone streets. She’s radiant, her excitement contagious.

We stroll through the city, and I let her lead, content to watch her explore. She surprises me when she starts talking about the literary giants who once called this place home—Tennessee Williams, William S. Burroughs. Her voice is animated, her eyes sparkling as she speaks.

“I tried reading *Naked Lunch* once,” I admit, breaking into her monologue. “Couldn’t make it through the whole thing.”

She laughs, the sound light and musical. “It’s not exactly an easy read,” she says, grinning up at me. “But that’s part of the fun, you know? It’s a challenge, and I like challenges.”

Her tone shifts slightly, and I catch the edge in her words. She stops walking, turning to face me, and her blue eyes lock onto mine. They’re steely, determined, and , I’m caught off guard.

“I like expanding my horizons,” she says, her voice steady, her gaze unwavering. “And I’m perfectly capable of standing up for myself.”

It’s a statement, a declaration, and I feel the weight of it. For a moment, I wonder if she somehow overheard my conversation with Fela, despite the sonic muffler. But then she giggles, the intensity fading, and she steps closer, wrapping her arms around my waist.

“But I still like it when you take care of me,” she adds, her cheek pressing against my sleeve. Her voice is soft now, teasing, and I feel my heart soften in response.

I pull her closer, my hand resting on the small of her back. “Good,” I say, my voice low. “Because I plan to do just that.”

She looks up at me, her eyes warm, and I count myself lucky to have her. Fela’s words still linger in my mind, but for now, I push them aside. Vicki’s here, in my arms, and for the moment, that’s all that matters.

The boutique is a symphony of soft lighting and gleaming surfaces, racks of designer clothing arranged like works of art. Vicki drifts ahead of me, her fingers brushing over fabric, her eyes wide with a mix of awe and nervousness. She stops in front of a dress, her breath catching as she reaches out to touch the lace. I don’t need to see her face to know she’s transfixed.

“Do you want it?” I ask, stepping up behind her.

She flinches, pulling her hand back as if she’s been caught doing something wrong. “No,” she says quickly, her cheeks flushing that perfect shade of pink I’ve come to adore. “I could never wear a dress like that.”

“Why not?” I tilt my head, studying her. Her body language screams desire, but her words are all hesitation.

“It’s just... not for me,” she mumbles, avoiding my gaze.

I step closer, my voice softening. “Explain.”

She sighs, her shoulders slumping. “Rocky, that dress is for some gorgeous actress accepting an Oscar, not for some hick from the Midwest. Can you even imagine me in that thing?”

“Yes,” I say without missing a beat. “I am imagining how gorgeous you would look.”

Her eyes flick up to mine, and for a moment, she's speechless. The flush on her cheeks deepens, but there's a spark of something else there—pleasure, maybe even hope. Still, she hesitates.

“Come on, Rocky,” she says, using my human name since we're in public. “The sides of the dress are see-through . I wouldn't be able to wear underwear.”

I shrug, keeping my tone casual. “I fail to see the problem. Try on the dress, Sweet One.”

She's biting her lower lip, fidgeting with the hem of her shirt. The air between us hums with tension, and I can tell the command has done its work. She's aroused, conflicted, and I wait.

“Yes, Sir,” she finally says, her voice barely above a whisper. She takes the dress from the rack and heads toward the changing booth.

I take a seat on a nearby velvet bench, my arms resting on my knees, my eyes fixed on the door. When she steps out a few minutes later, I'm on my feet before I even realize I've moved.

The dress clings to her curves like it was made for her, the black lace and satin a striking contrast against her fair skin. The semi-transparent sides reveal just enough to be tantalizing, and the way she carries herself—shy but defiant—makes my pulse quicken.

“Victoria,” I say, my voice low, “you look like a nebula.”

Her brow furrows, and she glances down at herself. “A nebula?”

I step closer, my hand brushing her shoulder. “Yes. Glowing, ethereal, and

impossible to look away from. You're starlight caught in fabric."

She blinks up at me, her lips curving into a hesitant smile. "You're just saying that."

"I don't say things I don't mean," I reply firmly. "You're breathtaking."

Her smile widens, and for a moment, she looks like she might argue. But then she steps closer, her fingers brushing mine. "You really think so?"

"I know so," I say, my voice steady. "You're not some hick from the Midwest, Vicki. You're my jalshagar. And in this dress, you're unstoppable."

She leans into me, her head resting against my chest. "Thank you," she murmurs.

"For what?"

"For seeing me," she says quietly. "Really seeing me."

I wrap my arms around her, holding her close. "Always, Sweetness."

CHAPTER 9

VICKI

The skyscraper's glass facade catches the sun, splintering it into a thousand shards of light as we step inside. My fingers lace with Rokkon's, his hand warm and reassuring. The dress clings to me—black lace and satin that feels both daring and elegant. The semi-transparent sides leave just enough to the imagination, but not so much that people aren't staring. My cheeks burn under the weight of their gazes.

"Everyone's staring," I mutter, tugging at my hair with my free hand.

"With good reason," Rokkon says without missing a beat. "You're stunning."

His voice is low, confident, and it makes me smile despite myself. I glance up at him, his human disguise flawless—red hair, piercing purple eyes, towering over everyone in the room. He moves like he owns the place, and apparently, he does.

The lobby is a cavern of polished marble and steel, with a massive banner hanging from the vaulted ceiling: Global End Hunger Initiative. Staff members dart around, bowing slightly as we pass, their smiles so wide they look painful. One woman practically sprints to hold the elevator door open for us.

"Are they going to offer to chew our food?" I ask under my breath.

Rokkon chuckles, the sound rich and smooth. "They're just eager to please the boss."

“You’ve got a way of making people do what you want,” I say, glancing at him sideways.

He hesitates, his grip on my hand tightening slightly. “It’s not about making them do anything. It’s about respect.”

I open my mouth to push further, but before I can, a voice booms across the lobby.

“Rocky! There you are! And who’s this radiant vision beside you?”

Ned Turner strides toward us, his gray mustache twitching with every word. He’s dressed in a tailored suit that probably costs more than my parents’ house, and he’s already talking faster than I can process.

“Ned,” Rokkon says, his tone polite but distant.

“And you must be Victoria,” Ned says, turning to me with a grin that feels like it could power a small city. “I’ve heard so much about you. Rocky here hasn’t stopped talking about you. Well, actually, he doesn’t talk much at all, but when he does, it’s about you. Isn’t that something?”

“It’s nice to meet you,” I say, managing to get a word in.

“Nice to meet you too, my dear. Now, let me tell you about the agenda for today’s meeting. It’s packed, absolutely packed. We’ve got updates on the Sub-Saharan initiative, the Southeast Asia campaign, and?—”

He keeps talking, barely pausing for breath as he leads us toward the elevator. Rokkon shoots me a look that says, Stay strong, and I bite back a laugh.

The elevator doors slide open, and Ned ushers us inside. He’s still talking, his voice

filling the small space like a radio that no one knows how to turn off.

“And then there’s the budget report. Now, I know what you’re thinking, Rocky. It’s a lot of numbers, but trust me, we’ve got it under control. I’ve been crunching the figures, and?—”

Rokkon cuts him off with a sharp nod. “We’ll go over it in the meeting.”

“Right, right, of course,” Ned says, nodding vigorously. “But I just wanted to give you a heads-up. You know how I like to keep things transparent. Transparency is key in these situations. I always say?—”

The elevator dings, and the doors open. Ned steps out, still talking, and I exchange a glance with Rokkon.

“He’s... enthusiastic,” I whisper.

“That’s one way to put it,” Rokkon mutters.

We step into the boardroom, a sleek space with floor-to-ceiling windows that overlook the city. The table is long and polished, surrounded by high-backed chairs. Ned immediately starts introducing me to the other board members, his voice carrying like a megaphone.

“Everyone, this is Victoria Sloane. Rocky’s special guest. Isn’t she just a delight?”

I smile awkwardly, my hand still in Rokkon’s. He gives it a reassuring squeeze, and for a moment, I forget about the stares, the fuss, and Ned’s endless chatter. All I feel is the warmth of his skin against mine.

The boardroom is all muted tones and polished surfaces, the kind of place that smells

like money and decisions that ripple across continents. I'm sitting next to Rokkon, trying to look like I belong here, but my palms are slick with sweat, and I'm pretty sure everyone can tell I'm out of my depth. Ned's still going on about something—budgets, maybe—but I'm zoning out, my attention drifting to the view outside the windows. The city sprawls beneath us, a maze of ambition and chaos.

Then, a sharp voice cuts through the hum.

“Ms. Sloane, what do you do for a living?”

I freeze. The question comes from a woman at the end of the table—sleek black hair, pearl earrings, a smile that doesn't reach her eyes. My heart stutters. What do I do? I can't exactly say, “Oh, I pump gas and babysit my drunk parents while being groomed as my billionaire alien soulmate's jalshagar.” That's not going to fly.

Rokkon leans forward before I can fumble out a reply. “Ms. Sloane is a literary expert,” he says, his voice steady and commanding. “She's quite intelligent, constantly surprising me and everyone else.”

The room goes quiet for a moment, and I feel the weight of their stares shifting from curiosity to something softer—respect, maybe. My cheeks warm, but I can't help the small smile that tugs at my lips. Rokkon's praise settles over me like a warm blanket, and for the first time since I walked into this room, I feel like I might actually belong here.

He pulls out my chair for me as we sit down, a gesture so old-fashioned it makes me laugh inside. The pearl-clad woman raises an eyebrow but says nothing.

The meeting starts up again, and I try to focus. They're talking about food distribution networks in Sub-Saharan Africa, the logistics of getting supplies to remote villages, the bureaucratic hurdles they have to jump through. It's fascinating

in a way—this is how the world gets changed, after all—but it’s also... dry.

I glance at Rokkon. He’s leaned back in his chair, arms crossed, his expression unreadable. He catches my eye and gives me the slightest nod, as if to say, Hang in there.

“I’m just saying,” Ned cuts in, his voice booming, “we need to think bigger. Why stop at hunger? Let’s tackle literacy, healthcare, the whole nine yards.”

The woman with the pearls rolls her eyes. “Because we’re the Global End Hunger Initiative, Ned, not the Global Fix Everything Initiative.”

“Details,” Ned says, waving a hand.

I stifle a laugh, pressing my lips together to keep it from escaping. Rokkon notices, and I see the corner of his mouth twitch.

The meeting drags on, and I’m fighting to stay awake. My hand brushes against Rokkon’s under the table, and he threads his fingers through mine, his grip firm and reassuring.

“You’re doing well,” he murmurs, so low only I can hear.

“I’m mostly just trying not to fall asleep,” I whisper back.

His thumb traces circles on the back of my hand. “You’re doing that too.”

I smile, feeling the tension in my shoulders ease. Whatever happens in this room, I know he’s got my back.

The café is quiet, tucked away from the city’s chaos, with a balcony that spills over

the edge of the cliff. The ocean stretches out below, waves rolling in like they're trying to whisper secrets to the shore. The moon hangs heavy in the sky, its light spilling across the water like liquid silver. It's the kind of view that makes you think, This is it. This is the moment everyone writes poems about.

But Rokkon's silence is louder than the waves.

I stir my coffee, the spoon clinking softly against the delicate porcelain cup. He's been quiet since the meeting ended, his gaze fixed on the horizon like he's waiting for something to appear. It's unsettling. The man who's usually so in control, so commanding, feels distant. Like he's pulled back into himself, and I'm not sure how to reach him.

"You've been quiet," I say, breaking the silence. "Did I say something wrong earlier? When I mentioned you making people obey you—I didn't mean it like that."

He glances at me, his purple eyes shadowed in the moonlight. "You didn't say anything wrong."

"Then what is it?"

He sighs, a sound deep enough to rumble through the table. "There's a gulf between us, Vicki. Centuries of it. You're young. I'm... not."

"I know you're old," I say, trying to lighten the mood. "But you've got a killer skincare routine for someone who's lived through the Renaissance."

The corner of his mouth twitches, but it's fleeting. "It's more than age. It's experience. Life. I've lived through things you couldn't imagine."

"So tell me," I say, reaching across the table to take his hand. His skin is warm, rough

with scars I'll probably never know the story of. "I trust you to take care of me, Rokkon. But you need to trust me to take care of you too."

He tenses, his fingers tightening around mine for a moment before he pulls his hand away. "That's not how this works."

"Why not?"

"Because it's my job to protect you," he says, his voice sharp now, the edge of a blade. "Not the other way around."

"That's not fair," I say, standing as he does. He walks to the balcony railing, his back to me, his shoulders stiff. I follow him, the ocean breeze tangling in my hair. "You don't get to decide that. If we're partners, if we're..." I hesitate, the word *jalshagar* hanging between us like a burning star. "Then we're supposed to take care of each other."

"The last time I allowed someone to take care of me, they—" His voice cracks, and he doesn't finish. He just stares out at the water, his jaw tight.

I swallow the lump in my throat and step closer, slipping my arm through his. "You don't have to tell me. Not yet. But you don't get to shut me out either."

He looks down at me, his eyes softening. For a moment, I think he might say something, might tell me the story lurking behind that pain. Instead, he leans down and presses a kiss to the top of my head, his lips warm against my skin.

"Let's go back to the table," he says quietly. "We'll enjoy the rest of dinner."

I nod, letting him lead me back to our seats. The ocean hums below us, a constant reminder of how vast the world is—and how much there is still to learn about the

man sitting across from me.

I excuse myself from the table with a polite smile, muttering something about needing to powder my nose. Rokkon nods, his gaze lingering on me a moment too long, but I'm already weaving through the crowded café, my heels clicking against the polished floor. The restroom is tucked away at the end of a narrow hallway, and there's already a line. Great.

I lean against the wall, pulling my phone out of my clutch and switching it off airplane mode. The second it connects, my screen lights up with a flood of notifications—missed calls, voicemails, and a string of increasingly frantic texts from Chad. My stomach knots as I start reading.

Chad: Vicki, what the hell? What were you thinking?

Chad: Did you really tell your rich boyfriend to buy the house and cut the mortgage?

Chad: Mom and Dad went nuts. They blew everything on booze and gambling.

Chad: Dad's in the hospital. Alcohol poisoning.

Chad: Mom owes some shady people a ton of money.

Chad: Call me. Now.

I press the phone to my ear before I've even fully processed the last message. "Chad, what's going on? I didn't tell Rocky to do any of this."

"Yeah, sure," he snaps, his voice tinny through the speaker. "Like he just decided to play landlord out of the goodness of his heart."

“I swear, I had no idea,” I say, my voice rising. A woman in front of me shoots me a dirty look, but I barely notice. “I wouldn’t do that. You know I wouldn’t.”

“Do I?” Chad fires back. “Because from where I’m sitting, it looks like you cut a deal with your sugar daddy and left the rest of us to clean up your mess.”

“That’s not fair,” I snap, my throat tightening. “I’m not the one who got Dad drunk or Mom gambling. I’m not the one who?”

“Yeah, well, you’re the one who brought Rocky into this,” he interrupts. “And now we’re paying the price. Fix it, Vicki. Fix it like you always do.”

The line goes dead. I stare at my phone, my hands trembling. Fix it. Right. Like that’s not the story of my life. I take a deep breath, shoving my phone back into my clutch, and storm back to the table.

Rokkon’s still sitting there, sipping his wine like he doesn’t have a care in the world. I slam my hands down on the table, rattling the silverware. “What the hell did you do?”

He looks up, his eyebrows lifting in mild surprise. “Excuse me?”

“My parents. My brother. The house. Did you really think you could just waltz in and ‘fix’ everything without talking to me first?”

He sets his glass down slowly, his expression unreadable. “I thought you’d appreciate it. You’ve been carrying that burden for too long.”

“Appreciate it?” My voice shakes with anger. “You made it worse. Dad’s in the hospital, Mom’s in debt to god knows who, and Chad’s convinced I’m some kind of sellout.”

“I didn’t anticipate they’d misuse the opportunity,” he says, his tone calm, infuriatingly calm.

“Of course you didn’t,” I snap. “Because you didn’t ask me . You just decided you knew better.”

“I was trying to help,” he says, his voice rising slightly. “You’ve spent your entire life taking care of them. I thought?—”

“You thought wrong,” I cut in, my hands balling into fists. “You don’t get to make decisions about my family without me. They’re my mess to deal with, not yours.”

“Your mess?” He stands, his chair scraping against the floor. Somewhere, someone lets out a nervous laugh, but the rest of the café has gone quiet, watching us. “They’re your family, Vicki. They’re not your mess. You’re not responsible for their choices.”

“I am,” I say, my voice breaking. “Because no one else will be. That’s how it’s always been.”

He steps closer, his towering frame looming over me, but I don’t back down. His purple eyes bore into mine. I think he’s going to argue, going to tell me I’m wrong. Instead, he sighs, his shoulders slumping. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to overstep.”

“You did,” I say, but some of the fight has left me. My hands unclench, and I rub my temples, trying to stave off the headache brewing behind my eyes. “Just... don’t do that again. Talk to me. Please.”

“I will,” he says quietly. He reaches out, brushing his thumb across my cheek. “I’m still learning how to do this.”

“Me too,” I mutter, leaning into his touch, even though I’m still mad. “But we’re in

this together, right?"

"Right," he says, and for the first time, I think he actually means it.

I take a deep, shuddering breath and turn to Rokkon, my eyes brimming with tears. "Rocky, you... you're going to help my family?"

He nods, his expression grave. "Yes, Vicki. I made this mess, and I'm going to help clean it up. We're going to Belleville."

I let out a sob, the tension and worry of the past hours finally catching up to me. Without thinking, I throw my arms around him, burying my face in his chest. His strong arms wrap around me, holding me close.

"Thank you," I whisper, my voice muffled against the soft fabric of his shirt. "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

He strokes my hair gently, a low rumble of comfort vibrating in his chest. "Shh, it's going to be alright. I'm here now."

I pull back slightly, looking up at him with red-rimmed eyes. "But... what about the GEHI meeting? Aren't you needed there?"

"The meeting can wait," he says firmly. "Your family needs us more right now."

I shake my head in disbelief. "I can't believe you're doing this. No one has ever..." My voice trails off, the words catching in my throat.

Rokkon cups my face in his large hands, his thumbs brushing away the tears on my cheeks. "You're not alone anymore, Vicki. I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere."

I lean into his touch, letting the warmth of his skin seep into me. "I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything," he murmurs. "Just let me take care of you. Of all of you."

I nod, unable to form the words that are swirling in my mind. This man, this alien warrior who I barely know, is willing to drop everything to help my broken family. It's more than I ever could have imagined.

Rokkon presses a gentle kiss to my forehead, then steps back, pulling out his phone. "I'll call my pilot and have him ready the jet. We'll be in Belleville before you know it."

As he steps away to make the call, I watch him, a strange mix of awe and disbelief filling my chest. This is all happening so fast. I feel like I might not have to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders alone.

Rokkon returns a few minutes later, a determined glint in his eye. "The jet will be ready in an hour. Are you ready to go home?"

I nod, my lips curving into a tentative smile. "Yes. Let's go."

CHAPTER 10

ROKKON

We roll up the gravel driveway, the Escalade's tires crunching over the uneven ground. Vicki's eyes dart toward the porch where her mother sits, rocking back and forth in that old rickety chair. Beside her stands a man in a crisp white suit, the kind that screams I own this town . Fester N. Boyle.

“Why didn't you just take the limo?” Vicki asks, her voice tight.

“I didn't want to be too ostentatious,” I reply, keeping my tone light.

She bursts into laughter, the sound sharp and edged with nerves. “You think this SUV is subtle or something? It's a brand-new Caddy. It's going to stand out.”

I grin, but inside, I'm calculating. Veritas rules hang over my head like a guillotine. I can't just rip Fester's head off, as satisfying as that would be. I need to play this smart, human smart.

“Who's the guy with your mom?” I ask, already knowing but wanting her to say it.

“That's Fester N. Boyle,” she says, her voice dropping to a whisper. “He runs the MSP—the Mean Street Posse. They're into everything illegal. Drugs, gambling, you name it.”

“And he's here because...?”

“My mom’s got a gambling problem. She probably owes him money.” She chews her lower lip, her hands clutching the edge of her seat. “He’s not the kind of guy you mess with, Rocky. He’s got the whole town in his pocket.”

I scoff, pulling the Escalade to a stop a few feet from the porch. “Is that all? This’ll be easy, then.”

She shoots me a look, half terrified, half incredulous. “Easy? Rocky, you don’t know Fester.”

I step out of the car, the gravel crunching under my boots. Fester turns toward me, his smile wide and greasy, like he’s already won something.

“Afternoon,” he drawls, tipping his hat toward me. “You must be the new landlord. Heard you’ve been making some changes around here.”

Debbie glances up at me, her eyes glassy and unfocused. “He’s not here to collect rent, is he, Fess?”

“No, ma’am,” Fester says, his voice smooth as butter. “Just came to check on you, make sure you’re doing alright. But now that Mr. Anderson’s here, it seems like a good time to discuss some... outstanding matters.”

I stride up the porch steps, my seven-foot frame towering over both of them. Fester doesn’t flinch, but I catch the way his eyes flicker, sizing me up.

“Outstanding matters?” I repeat, my voice calm but firm. “Let’s hear it.”

He adjusts the lapel of his suit, still smiling. “Well, you see, Mrs. Sloane here’s been running up quite the tab at my establishment. I’d hate to see her... inconvenienced. So I’ve come to collect.”

Vicki steps up beside me, her face pale. “How much does she owe?”

Fester’s smile widens. “Oh, just a friendly ten grand. Pocket change for a man like Mr. Anderson, I’m sure.”

I glance at Debbie, who’s staring at her feet, her hands twisting in her lap. Then I look back at Fester, my purple eyes locking onto his.

“Ten grand, huh?” I say, my tone casual. “That’s it?”

He nods, still smiling. “That’s it.”

I reach into my jacket pocket and pull out a checkbook, scrawling out the amount without hesitation. I tear off the check and hand it to him.

“Here you go. Paid in full.”

Fester takes the check, his smile faltering for just a second. “Well, that’s mighty generous of you, Mr. Anderson.”

“Generous? No. A favor? Not at all.” I step closer, my voice dropping low enough for only him to hear. “This is a warning. Stay away from her. Stay away from this family.”

For the first time, I see a flicker of unease in his eyes. But he recovers quickly, slipping the check into his breast pocket. “We’ll see how long that lasts,” he says, his smile returning. He tips his hat to Vicki. “Miss Sloane. Always a pleasure.”

He saunters back to his car.

Vicki’s grip on my arm tightens, her nails digging into my scales through the fabric

of my suit. “You just handed him ten grand like it was nothing. Do you know what he’s going to do with that money?”

I look down at her, my purple eyes locking onto hers. “Something nefarious, no doubt.”

Her jaw tightens, and she steps closer, her voice dropping to a hiss. “This isn’t just about money, Rocky. This is my family . My mom’s a wreck, my dad’s in the hospital, and now Fester’s got his claws in them. You can’t just throw cash at this and hope it goes away.”

I inhale deeply, forcing myself to stay calm. “Vicki, I must be very careful here. If I act hastily, and cause too many ripples, it might disrupt the sacred timeline.”

Her eyes narrow, and she crosses her arms over her chest. “Yes, and humanity might not join the Vakutan and help them win the Centuries War in the future. I know the stakes, Rocky. But this isn’t galactic politics, this is my family.”

Debbie, still rocking back and forth in her chair, perks up at that. “What about a centuries war?”

Vicki doesn’t miss a beat. “We’re talking about a book, mother.” Her tone is clipped, and she turns back to me, her frustration boiling over. “You can’t just sit back and do nothing.”

“I’m not doing nothing, Victoria,” I say, my voice firm. “I am going to help. But I must do so with the minimal disruption to the timeline. I must be...” I pause, the word almost foreign on my tongue. “Subtle. And avoid violence.”

Her eyes widen, and she lets out a disbelieving laugh. “So no ripping off Fester’s arms and legs, then?”

I smirk, the corner of my mouth tugging upward. “I’m not taking the option off the table. But no, I hope to beat Boyle at his own game. For now.”

She steps closer, her voice softening even as her eyes remain fierce. “Please, Rocky. Be careful. Fester’s not just some small-town thug. He’s dangerous. And if he figures out you’re not just another rich guy... I don’t even want to think about what he’ll do.”

I reach out, placing a hand on her shoulder. Her tension eases slightly under my touch. “I’ll be careful, Victoria. I promise. But I’m not leaving your family to his machinations. Not while I’m here.”

She nods, her shoulders slumping in relief, but her eyes are still wary. “Good. Because if anything happens to you... I don’t know what I’d do.”

I squeeze her shoulder gently, my voice low and steady. “Nothing’s going to happen to me. Or to your family. Fester Boyle might think he’s untouchable, but he’s never dealt with someone like me.”

Her lips quirk into a small smile, though it doesn’t quite reach her eyes. “Just... don’t underestimate him, okay?”

“I won’t,” I promise, my gaze shifting toward the road where Fester’s car disappeared. “But he’s about to find out he’s playing against someone who doesn’t lose.”

The hospital looms ahead, its sterile walls a stark contrast to the chaos brewing in Belleville. I pull the Escalade up to the entrance, the engine idling as Vicki and her mother prepare to step out. Debbie’s hands fumble with the seatbelt, her movements sluggish, while Vicki shoots me a look that’s equal parts gratitude and suspicion.

“You’re not going to start problems with Fester, are you?” she asks, her voice low but steady.

I glance at her, my purple eyes gleaming under the fluorescent lights of the hospital’s awning. “There are already problems with Fester,” I reply, my tone even. “I’m going to solve them.”

Her lips press into a thin line, and she leans closer, her voice dropping to a whisper. “Just... be careful. I don’t know what he’s capable of.”

“I know you’re stronger and faster than humans,” she adds, glancing at her mother to make sure she’s not listening, “but?—”

“You don’t appreciate just how much stronger and faster I am,” I say, my voice rumbling like distant thunder. “Conventional weaponry on Earth in this era has little chance of harming me.”

She snorts, a sharp, disbelieving laugh. “Are you trying to say you’re bulletproof?”

I turn to her, my expression dead serious. “No, Victoria. I’m saying I took an anti-tank round once... and it fixed the crick in my neck.”

Her mouth falls open, her blue eyes wide with shock. I can see the wheels turning in her head, the realization sinking in. “Now you’re beginning to understand,” I say with a grin. “But I hope to avoid violence.”

Her hand grips the door handle, but she hesitates, her eyes searching mine. “Promise me you’ll be careful.”

“I’m always careful,” I reply, though the smirk tugging at my lips betrays the gravity of the situation.

She shakes her head, her blonde curls bouncing, but there's a faint smile on her face now. "Vakutan arrogance," she mutters under her breath as she steps out of the car.

I lean across the seat, catching her hand before she can shut the door. She looks back, surprised, and I pull her in for a quick but firm kiss. Her lips are warm, soft, and for a moment, the tension in her body melts away.

"Go," I say, releasing her. "Take care of your father. I'll handle Fester."

She nods, her cheeks flushed as she helps her mother out of the car. I watch them walk into the hospital, Vicki's shoulders straight, her head held high despite everything. She's stronger than she gives herself credit for.

I pull away from the curb, the Escalade's tires crunching over the gravel. The local watering hole, the Dew Drop Inn, is my next stop. It's a seedy little place on the outskirts of town, the kind of dive where the MSP's lower ranks might gather to blow off steam or brag about their latest heist. Perfect for gathering intel.

The neon sign flickers weakly as I pull into the parking lot, the words "Dew Drop Inn" barely legible. I step out, the gravel crunching under my boots, and make my way to the entrance. The air smells faintly of stale beer and cigarette smoke, and the low hum of conversation drifts through the door.

I push it open, stepping into the dimly lit bar. The decor hasn't been updated since the '70s, and the walls are lined with taxidermy animal heads, including a massive rhino that glares down at the patrons. Behind the bar, a one-eyed man polishes a glass, his gaze flicking toward me as I approach.

"What'll it be?" he asks, his voice gruff.

"Whiskey," I say, sliding onto a stool. "Neat."

He pours the drink and sets it in front of me, his one eye narrowing as he studies me. “You’re not from around here.”

“Passing through,” I reply, taking a sip of the whiskey. It’s cheap, but it burns the way I need it to. “Looking for someone. Name’s Fester Boyle. You know him?”

The bartender’s eye narrows further, and he sets the glass down with a little more force than necessary. “Everyone knows Fester. Why you asking?”

I lean back, my seven-foot frame towering even while seated. “Business. He owes me something.”

The bartender’s expression hardens, and he glances toward a couple of burly men in the corner who’ve been nursing beers. “You ask a lot of questions for a guy just passing through.”

“Call it professional curiosity,” I say. “I’m the kind of guy who doesn’t like loose ends.”

The two men in the corner stand, their chairs scraping against the floor. They’re big, but compared to me, they might as well be children. I don’t even bother standing as they approach, their hands clenching into fists.

“You got a problem?” the taller one asks, his voice slurred with alcohol.

I turn to him, my purple eyes locking onto his. “Not yet.”

He swings without warning, but I catch his fist mid-air, my grip like a vice. His eyes widen in shock, and I stand, pulling him off balance. With a quick twist, I have him on the ground, his arm pinned behind his back.

“Let’s try this again,” I say, as I look down at his companion. “I’m here for information, not a fight. But if you insist, I’ll make it one.”

The man hesitates, his eyes darting between me and his friend on the floor. Finally, he nods, raising his hands in surrender. “Alright, alright. You’re crazy enough to take on Fester, that’s for damn sure.”

I release the man on the floor, who scrambles to his feet, rubbing his arm. “Good. Now, let’s talk.”

I sit at the corner table with the two men, who introduce themselves as Jake and Mike, their faces still flushed from the embarrassment of trying to take me on. A platter of wings sits between us, the spicy aroma mingling with the stale beer smell of the bar. I push the plate toward them, my purple eyes glinting in the dim light.

“Eat,” I say, leaning back in the chair, my massive frame barely fitting. “And talk. I need to know everything about Fester Boyle.”

Jake tears into a wing, his grease-slicked fingers fumbling as he speaks. “Fester? He’s the king of Belleville. Owns half the town, the other half’s scared of him. Drugs, gambling, protection rackets—you name it, he’s got his fingers in it.”

Mike nods, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “But he’s smart, man. Real smart. None of it sticks to him. He’s got the sheriff in his pocket—his brother-in-law, by the way—and the mayor’s his cousin. State cops? They stay outta Belleville. Word is Fester’s got them on payroll too.”

Sal slides a fresh round of beers onto the table, his one eye narrowing as he leans in. “He’s untouchable. Everyone knows it. You can’t fight Fester Boyle and win. Not unless you’ve got an army or something.”

I take a sip of my whiskey, the burn sharp and familiar. “I don’t need an army. Just information.”

Jake snorts, tossing a cleaned bone onto the plate. “Good luck, man. Fester’s got eyes and ears everywhere. You start poking around, he’ll know. And when he knows, people disappear.”

Mike leans forward, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “But you’re not wrong about one thing—there’s a lot of people who hate him. Everyone in this town’s been screwed over by Fester and his crew, the Mean Street Posse. They bleed us dry, but what can we do? He’s got the law on his side.”

Sal crosses his arms, his gaze steady. “There’s a meth lab, just outside of town. Abandoned factory. MSP runs it. That’s where they cook their product. If you’re serious about taking Fester down, that’s where you start.”

I raise an eyebrow, setting my glass down. “You’re giving me a lot of information for a guy who just told me Fester’s untouchable.”

Sal shrugs, a grim smile tugging at his lips. “Like I said, everyone’s been hurt by him. If you’ve got the guts to take him on, I’ll point you in the right direction. Just don’t come crying to me when it all goes sideways.”

I reach into my pocket, pulling out a wad of cash. I peel off a few bills, sliding them across the table. “For your trouble.”

Sal shakes his head, pushing the money back toward me. “Keep it. If you’re serious about taking Fester down, that’s payment enough. Just don’t mess it up.”

I pocket the cash, standing up from the table. My shadow looms over the three of them, their expressions a mix of hope and skepticism. “I don’t mess things up, but if I

do, Fester won't be the only one who knows about it."

They exchange glances, but no one says anything as I turn and head for the door. The night air is crisp as I step outside, the sound of the bar fading behind me. I glance toward the abandoned factory on the edge of town, my jaw tightening. Fester Boyle might think he's untouchable, but he's never dealt with someone like me.

And he's about to find out.

CHAPTER 11

VICKI

The hospital room reeks of antiseptic and despair. My father, Jim, lies on the bed, pale and fragile, tubes snaking in and out of him like he's some kind of broken machine. He's awake now, and the shame on his face is heavier than the IV bag hanging above him.

"Why didn't you take the compound?" I ask, my voice sharper than I mean it to be. But I'm tired. Tired of all the excuses, the promises, the cycle of messing up and pretending it'll get better. "It was right there. You could've been better. You could've tried."

He looks at me with red-rimmed eyes, his hands fidgeting with the edge of the blanket. "Even with that stuff, Vic," he says, his voice scratchy, "I'd still have to want to stop. And I'm just... I'm not strong enough. I never have been."

The words hit me like a punch. He's always been the one to crack jokes, to stumble around and pretend everything's fine, even when it's not. Hearing him admit it out loud—it's like something inside him has finally snapped.

"You're my dad," I say, my voice breaking. "You're supposed to be strong. You're supposed to be there for us."

He shakes his head, tears spilling down his cheeks. "I'm sorry," he whispers. "I'm so sorry. You deserved better than me. You all did."

Debbie, my mom, sits silently in the corner, her hands clasped tightly in her lap. She's staring at the floor, her face as blank as a canvas. She doesn't say anything. She doesn't need to. We've been here before, all of us, in this same damn dance.

I can't take it anymore. I turn on my heel and walk out, my chest so tight it feels like I can't breathe. The hospital hallway is cold and sterile, but it's better than that room. I push through the double doors and step outside into the late afternoon sun. The air is crisp, but it doesn't help. I sit on a bench, my hands trembling, and stare at the cracked pavement.

Belleville. I thought I'd left this place behind. I thought I'd finally escaped. But here I am again, right back in the middle of my parents' mess.

The bench shifts under someone's weight as they sit down next to me. I don't look up. I'm not in the mood for company.

"Hi, Vic," comes a voice that's both familiar and irritatingly cheerful.

I freeze. That voice—I know that voice. I look up, and there he is. Saucerhead Brown. My ex-boyfriend from high school. Bald, tattooed, and grinning like he's just won the lottery.

"Long time no see!" he says, his tone as goofy and clueless as ever. "I heard ya moved away."

I stare at him, my brain catching up to the moment. "Saucy," I say flatly. "What the hell are you doing here?"

I stare at Saucerhead—Daryl—with a mix of disbelief and irritation. His grin doesn't falter, but the words he just dropped hang in the air like a foul stench.

“What do you mean, you heard I moved away?” I snap, crossing my arms. “You’re here because of my mom, aren’t you? What does Fester want now?”

He chuckles, scratching the back of his bald head like he’s trying to remember the script. “Oh, you know how it is, Vic. Deb owes Uncle Fester a chunk of change. Interest and stuff. It’s just business.”

“Business?” My voice rises, and a passing nurse shoots me a glare. I lower it, but the venom doesn’t leave my tone. “My mom paid him back. Every last cent. What’s he trying to pull?”

Daryl shrugs, his massive shoulders rolling like boulders. “Interest adds up, Vic. You know how Uncle Fester is. He’s got his rules.”

“Rules?” I scoff. “Fester’s just using you, Daryl. He’s always wanted our land, and now he’s got an excuse to take it. You’re his muscle, but you’re still just a pawn to him.”

His grin falters for a moment, but it’s back as quick as it left. “Aw, come on, Vic. Don’t be like that. I’m just doing my job. Besides, Fester takes care of me.”

“By making you threaten people?” I lean in, lowering my voice. “You’re better than this, Daryl. You always were. Fester’s going to get you killed, or worse, arrested. And for what? A meth lab on our land?”

He blinks, surprised. “How’d you know about the?—”

“Doesn’t matter,” I cut him off. “What matters is you walking away before it’s too late. You don’t have to do this.”

Daryl sighs, his cheerful demeanor cracking a little. “Vic, you’re sweet. You always

were. That's why I wanted to talk to you, to apologize. 'Cause I might have to hurt your dad or Chad real bad."

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

He shrugs again, but this time it's not as casual. "It's business, Vic. I don't like it, but it's the job. Uncle Fester's got his rules."

I shake my head, my fists clenching. "You're kidding yourself, Daryl. Fester's a snake, and you're letting him use you. You think he won't turn on you the second it's convenient?"

He doesn't answer. Instead, he stands, towering over me on the bench. "You be careful, Vic. Uncle Fester doesn't take kindly to people sticking their nose in his business."

"Funny," I say, standing to meet his gaze. "Neither does my boyfriend."

Daryl's brow furrows. "You mean that rich guy? Fester's rich too, you know. What's he gonna do against Uncle Fester?"

I laugh—a sharp, bitter sound that surprises even me. "Oh, Daryl. You have no idea who you're dealing with. I'm telling you this for your own good: walk away."

He gives me a sad smile, like he's looking at a puppy he's about to put down. "I gotta do what I gotta do. Take care of yourself."

With that, he turns and walks away, his boots crunching on the gravel. I watch him go, my stomach churning. One way or another, Fester's going to have to be stopped. But for now, I need to figure out how to keep my family out of his crosshairs.

I push open the heavy hospital doors and step back into the sterile hallway, my thoughts still tangled with Saucerhead's warning. The buzz of fluorescent lights and the faint hum of medical equipment follow me as I head toward my father's room. But before I get there, I hear a familiar voice—soft but clear—coming from the nurse's station.

“Are you sure it's not too late to sign up?” my mom is saying, her voice trembling slightly. “I mean, I know I've messed up a lot, but I'm ready now. I really am.”

I freeze mid-step, my heart skipping a beat. Deb? My mom? Asking about rehab? I haven't seen her this lucid in years. Her curly hair is a mess, and her tie-dye shirt looks like it's seen better days, but there's a determination in her eyes that I haven't seen since before the drugs took hold.

The nurse gives her a warm smile. “It's never too late, Mrs. Sloane. We can get you started as soon as you're ready.”

Deb spots me hovering in the hallway and waves me over. “Vicki! There you are. You ready to grab some lunch? I need to get out of this place for a bit.”

“Uh, sure,” I say, still processing what I just heard. “How about the cafeteria?”

She wrinkles her nose. “Only if we're feeling masochistic.”

The cafeteria is as grim as I remember it—fluorescent lights, plastic trays, and the faint smell of overcooked green beans. We grab a couple of sandwiches that look like they've been sitting out since the early 2000s and find a table near the window.

“So,” I say, picking at the limp bread of my sandwich. “Rehab, huh? That's... new.”

She takes a bite of her sandwich and grimaces. “God, this is awful. But yeah, rehab.

I've been thinking about it for a while. Your dad's... well, he's not the only one who's hit rock bottom."

I set my sandwich down and lean forward. "Mom, that's... amazing. But what about Dad? Is there any way we can help him want to get better too?"

She sighs, stirring her iced tea with a plastic straw. "I don't know, honey. There's been so much damage. So much pain. Some days, it's hard just to get out of bed, let alone face everything we've done to each other."

"But you can't just give up on him," I say, my voice cracking. "You're his wife. He loves you. I know he does. Maybe if you go first, he'll follow."

She gives me a sad smile. "I'd like to believe that. But your dad's stubborn. Always has been. And I'm not sure he's ready to face what he's become."

I glance down at my hands, the weight of everything pressing down on me. "Mom, what if we just... left? Let Fester have the land. Rocky could help us. We could start over somewhere else."

Her face hardens, and for a moment, she looks like the fierce woman she used to be. "No," she says firmly. "Our family has been on that land for four generations. I'm not letting Fester Boyle chase us off like a bunch of scared rabbits."

I open my mouth to argue, but the look in her eyes stops me. It's the same stubbornness I've inherited, the same refusal to back down when it matters most. For the first time in years, I feel a flicker of hope. Maybe, just maybe, she's not as broken as I thought. Maybe there's still something worth fighting for.

"Okay," I say softly. "But promise me one thing."

“What’s that?”

“Promise me you’ll fight for yourself too. Not just the land or Dad or me. You. ”

She reaches across the table and takes my hand, her grip surprisingly strong. “I promise.”

We sit there for a while, laughing about how terrible the food is and reminiscing about the good old days—or the days that weren’t as bad, at least. It’s the most normal we’ve been in years, and for a moment, I let myself believe that maybe, just maybe, things can get better.

CHAPTER 12

ROKKON

The woods are thick, the air damp and heavy with the scent of pine and decaying leaves. My boots crunch softly against the underbrush, the sound swallowed by the night. The image inducer is off, my scales hidden beneath black clothing, a ski mask pulled tight over my face. Humans might call this overkill, but I'm not here to blend in—I'm here to end things. Quietly, if possible. Brutally, if not.

A faint buzz of Vicki's unease pulses through the jalshagar bond, warm but distant. She's upset, but not in immediate danger. I push it aside for now. Focus on the mission. Focus on the factory up ahead, its silhouette jagged against the moonlit sky. The meth lab.

Four guards. Idiots. They're clustered near the entrance, crouched around a small fire, laughing and passing around a bottle. Their voices carry through the night, snippets of bravado and nonsense.

“—so I told her, ‘Babe, if I wanted to hear you whine, I’d call your mom.’”

“Shut up, Dave. You’ve never been within ten feet of a woman who wasn’t paid to?—”

I’m on them before they can finish. Two heads smash together with a satisfying crack. They crumple like sacks of grain before the other two even realize I’m there. One reaches for his gun, but I’m faster—my hand closes around his wrist, twisting

until bone snaps. His scream dies in his throat as my other hand silences him. The last one drops the bottle, fumbling for his weapon, but I kick his legs out from under him. He hits the ground hard, and I plant a boot on his chest, pinning him.

“Where’s Fester?” I growl, my voice low, guttural. He doesn’t answer, just stares up at me wide-eyed, gasping for breath. I lean in, my weight pressing down. “I’ll ask once more. Where’s Fester.”

“H-he ain’t here, man!” he chokes out. “He’s at the Dew Drop! What the hell are you?”

I don’t bother answering. A quick tap to his temple and he’s unconscious. I leave them lying there, four bodies in the dirt, and move toward the factory. The door creaks open, and I step inside, my eyes adjusting to the dim light. Two more guards—this time, they’re alert.

“Hey! Who the?—”

I don’t let them finish. The first one goes down with a knee to the stomach, the second with a punch to the jaw. They’re out before they hit the ground. I step over them, climbing the stairs to the second floor. The meth lab.

The smell hits me first—chemicals, sharp and acrid, burning my nostrils. The lab is a mess of glassware and tubing, the air thick with fumes. Three people: a man in a stained apron, two women in nothing but rubber gloves and clear masks. They freeze when they see me.

The man—Julio, I’m guessing—takes a step back, his hands raised. “Whoa, whoa, man! We’re just cooking! We don’t want no trouble!”

I glance at the women. Their eyes are wide, terrified, but not of me. Of him. “You

two. Out. Now.”

They don’t need to be told twice. They bolt, their bare feet slapping against the floor as they disappear down the stairs. Julio watches them go, then turns back to me, his hands still up. “Look, man, I’m just the cook. Fester’s the one you want.”

“Where is he?” I step closer, my voice a low growl. “And don’t say the Dew Drop. I already know that.”

“He’s—he’s at the Dew Drop, I swear!” Julio stammers, backing up until he hits a table. “He’s got a private room there! What do you want with him?”

I grab him by the front of his apron, lifting him off the ground. He squirms, his feet dangling uselessly. “I want him to stop threatening my jalshagar’s family. Tell me how to find him.”

“I can’t! He’ll kill me!”

I slam him against the table, glassware clattering to the floor. He winces, his face pale. “So will I. Choose.”

He hesitates, then nods frantically. “Okay, okay! He’s got a basement in the Dew Drop, behind the bar. There’s a hidden door. Code’s 4488. That’s all I know, I swear!”

I drop him, and he collapses onto the table, gasping. I turn away, heading for the stairs. One more stop tonight. Fester’s about to learn what happens when you cross a Vakutan and his mate.

The Dew Drop Inn is quiet, the lights off. Through the window, I see Sal slumped in a chair, snoring loud enough to wake the dead. The old man’s one eye is shut, his

chin resting on his chest. Good. No distractions.

I move around the back, the image inducer off, my scales catching the faint moonlight. The lock on the door gives way with a soft click, and I step inside, the smell of stale beer and cigarette smoke hitting me like a punch. I scan the room—nothing out of place. Just a shithole bar like any other.

Behind the bar, I find what I'm looking for. A hidden door, barely noticeable unless you're looking for it. I punch in the code Julio gave me— 4488 . The door hisses open, revealing a steep staircase leading down into darkness. My lips curl into a grin. Too easy.

Still, something feels off. Fester's a man who fancies himself a gentleman, a kingpin who drinks whiskey and wears suits. This? A dingy basement under a dive bar? Doesn't fit. But I'm not exactly in the mood to second-guess myself. Humans can't hurt me. What's the worst that could happen?

I descend the stairs, the air growing colder, damper. The basement is bare—concrete walls, concrete floor. No furniture, no signs of life. Just emptiness. My instincts prickle, but I dismiss them. Maybe Fester's smarter than I gave him credit for. Maybe he's paranoid enough to hole up in a place like this.

Then the door slams shut above me.

I whirl around, my body tensing. A voice crackles over an unseen intercom, smooth and mocking.

“Whoever you are, congratulations. You made one of my people talk and give up my location. Bravo.” Fester's voice, dripping with sarcasm. “One problem—I would never be so stupid as to tell any of my underlings where I hang my hat, so to speak. I've needed to fill in the foundation of the Dew Drop for years now. You get to be

part of that foundation—forever.”

Before I can react, the sound of machinery fills the room. Wet cement begins pouring from a hole in the ceiling, thick and heavy, splattering against the floor. I move toward the stairs, but as soon as my foot hits the bottom rung, there’s a sharp crack . The explosive charge sends me flying back, my body slamming into the wall. My vision blurs, the air knocked from my lungs.

I shake it off quickly—Vakutan healing already mending the damage—but by the time I’m on my feet, the cement is rising fast. It’s up to my ankles, then my knees. I lunge for the stairs again, but the charge has warped the metal, making them impassable. I try the door, slamming my fists against it, but it’s reinforced. No give.

The cement reaches my waist, then my chest. I tilt my head back, trying to keep my mouth and nose clear, but the stuff splatters up from below, and I inhale some of it. It’s gritty, choking, filling my lungs. I struggle, thrashing, but the weight of it pins me in place. The room’s almost full by the time I go under, the world disappearing into gray.

Not how I thought this night would end. But Fester? He’s got another thing coming if he thinks wet cement can take me out.

The cement encases me, crushing and suffocating, but I don’t panic. Panic is for humans. I’m Vakutan. I’ve survived worse. The weight presses down, pinning me, but I draw on my reserves, on the fire in my veins that humans could never understand. My muscles strain, my scales rippling with the effort. And then, with a roar that shakes the walls, I punch upward—once, twice, three times—until the cement fractures.

The floor above me shatters, wood splintering as I burst through, coughing up a lungful of wet cement. It’s gritty, vile, clinging to my throat as I spit it out. My lungs

burn, but I'm alive. Fester's little trap didn't work. The bar reeks of stale beer and cheap whiskey, and in the dim light, I see Sal, the one-eyed bartender, staring at me like I've just crawled out of hell.

"What in the name of—" Sal starts, but I don't let him finish. A bar stool flies across the room, catching him square in the head. He crumples like a paper doll, out cold before he hits the floor. No time for questions. No time for backup.

I drag myself to my feet, cement cracking and falling from my body in chunks. My boots are a lost cause, so I kick them off, along with my ruined pants and shirt. The cool night air hits my skin as I stumble out the door, leaving a trail of wet cement behind me like some kind of deranged breadcrumb trail.

The woods are dark, the moon a pale sliver overhead. I move fast, my bare feet slapping against the damp earth. The jalshagar bond hums faintly in the back of my mind—Vicki's worry, her unease, like a faint whisper. She's safe for now, and that's all that matters.

I reach the edge of Vicki's childhood home, the shambolic trailer surrounded by rusted cars and junk. A clothesline sags under the weight of a few sheets, and I grab one, wrapping it around my waist like a toga. It's ridiculous, but it's better than running around naked. Besides, Fester's men won't care what I'm wearing when I come for them.

Crouching in the shadows, I take a moment to steady myself. My lungs still ache, my skin raw where the cement clung to it. But the fire in my chest isn't just from the fight—it's rage. Cold, seething rage. Fester thought he could trap me, bury me alive, and walk away. He thought wrong.

"Fester," I mutter to myself, my voice a low growl. "You're going to regret this."

And as I stand there, the makeshift toga fluttering in the breeze, I make a silent promise: Fester N. Boyle will be broken.

CHAPTER 13

VICKI

I peer out the window, my heart pounding in my chest. Fester and his goons surround the poor night nurse, their faces twisted into menacing sneers. Saucerhead stands there too, that dumb oaf, cracking his knuckles like he's about to pound someone into paste.

The nurse fumbles for her phone, probably trying to call security. But Fester is too quick. He whips out a hammer from his belt and brings it down hard on her hand. The sickening crunch of shattering bones makes me wince.

The nurse crumples to the ground, cradling her mangled hand and screaming in agony. Fester just laughs, that deep belly laugh of his that makes my skin crawl. I remember him laughing like that when he used to come over to our place, drinking beers with Dad.

The thugs join in the laughter, like a pack of hyenas. Saucy looks away, clenching his fists and looking miserable. He does nothing to help the nurse, though. I want to look away but I can't. It's like a horrific accident - I can't tear my eyes from the carnage unfolding outside.

Part of me wants to run out there, to try and help the poor woman. But the sensible part of my brain kicks in. What can I do against Fester and his entire crew? I'm just one woman. They'd crush me like a bug if I tried to intervene.

So I stay frozen at the window, bile rising in my throat as I watch them kick at the writhing nurse. Please, someone call the cops. This can't be happening...

The brave nurse tries for her phone with her unbroken hand. Fester sighs and raises the hammer again.

"Some folks are always trying to ice skate up hill," Fester says with a sigh.

The crash of metal on bone turns my stomach. The nurse's scream pierces my ears as Fester brings the hammer down on her hand. My fingers press against my lips, stifling my own cry.

"Now darlin', I truly hate to cause you discomfort." Fester's honeyed drawl drips with false concern. "Just tell me where to find Jim Sloane."

The fluorescent lights cast harsh shadows across Fester's face. His smile never wavers, even as the nurse cradles her mangled hand against her chest.

"Fourth floor. Room 412." The nurse's voice breaks between sobs.

My heart pounds. That's nowhere near Dad's room. This brave woman is trying to protect us, risking herself for strangers.

Saucy shifts his weight, uncomfortable. His massive shoulders bunch under his leather jacket. The other goons crack their knuckles, eager for more violence.

"Well now, that's mighty kind of you." Fester tucks the bloodied hammer into his belt. "But if you're lying..." He gestures to the thug with platinum teeth. "Show the lady your knife, friend."

The blade gleams under the hospital lights. The nurse whimpers.

"If my associate here gets a text from me, well..." Fester's smile widens. "Let's just say you'll have a very bad evening."

The elevator doors close on Fester, Saucy, and the others. Only Platinum Teeth remains, leering at the nurse as he toys with his knife.

My hands shake. This woman put herself in danger for us. I can't let her suffer for her bravery.

I grip the cold metal bedpan. The nurse's whimpers echo in the hallway, and my stomach churns with a mix of fear and rage. This is it, I think. No more hiding. I step out of the room, my heart hammering in my chest.

"Hey, asshole!" I shout, my voice shaking but loud enough to echo down the corridor. "Looking for me?"

The thug with platinum teeth spins around, his knife glinting under the fluorescent lights. His eyes flicker between me and the nurse, torn between guarding his captive and coming after me. I don't give him time to decide. With a grunt, I hurl the bedpan at him, praying it distracts him long enough for the nurse to get away.

What I didn't realize is the bedpan wasn't empty.

The metal clatters against his chest, and a splash of human waste sprays across his face and shirt. He freezes, his jaw tightening, and for a moment, the hallway is eerily silent. Then he wipes the filth from his eyes, his expression twisting into a snarl.

"You're dead, bitch," he growls, lunging toward me.

I scramble backward, grabbing anything I can find—a coffee mug, a stapler, a wet floor sign. I hurl them at him like missiles, but they barely slow him down. The mug

shatters against his shoulder, the stapler bounces off his chest, and the wet floor sign clatters to the ground. He's relentless, his eyes locked on me like a predator stalking its prey.

My fingers brush against something cold and sharp—an empty syringe. I snatch it up, my breath coming in shallow gasps. The thug is on me in an instant, his hand closing around my throat. He lifts me off the ground, his knife raised high, ready to slash me open.

“Should’ve stayed hidden, sweetheart,” he sneers.

I jab the syringe into his neck and press the plunger. His eyes widen in shock, and he drops me, stumbling back as he pulls the syringe out. He glares at me, his hand clutching his neck, I think it’s not going to work.

Then his smile falters. His hands fly to his chest, his face contorting in pain. He gasps, his eyes wide with terror, and he collapses to the floor, his body twitching before going still.

I stare at his lifeless body, my hands shaking. The syringe falls from my fingers, clattering to the floor. I just killed a man. My stomach lurches, and I clutch the wall for support, trying to steady my breathing. The nurse stares at me, her eyes wide with shock.

“I... I didn’t mean to...” I whisper, but the words feel hollow. I meant to survive, and I did. But at what cost?

The nurse’s whimpers snap me out of my daze. I crouch down beside her, my hands trembling as I help her sit up. Her broken hand is a mess, fingers bent at unnatural angles, and my stomach churns.

“Come on,” I say, my voice shaky but firm. “We need to get you to the ER.”

She nods, tears streaming down her face as I loop an arm around her waist. She leans on me, her weight heavy against my side, and together we hobble toward the elevator. The fluorescent lights buzz overhead, casting everything in a harsh, sterile glare.

The elevator doors slide open, and my heart sinks.

Saucerhead stands there, his massive frame filling the space. His eyes dart to the nurse, then to the dead goon sprawled on the floor behind us. He sucks in a breath through his teeth, his brow furrowing like a kid who just dropped his ice cream cone.

“Aww, man,” he groans, his voice low and gravelly. “Why’d you have to go and do that, Vicki? Now Fester’s gonna do bad stuff to you.”

I glare at him, my fear morphing into anger. “How can you work for him, Daryl? You’re not stupid. You used to be kind. Decent.”

His face flickers, and for a moment, he looks like the boy I dated in high school—the one who cried when we watched *Old Yeller*. His shoulders slump, and he looks down at his boots, scuffing the toe against the floor.

“Vic,” he says, his voice barely above a whisper. “Am I... am I evil now?”

I let out a sharp exhale, my chest tight. “No, you’re not evil. Evil is a choice, just like doing good is a choice. You can still choose to do good things.”

The nurse lets out a pained sob, clutching her mangled hand to her chest. Saucy’s head snaps up, his eyes narrowing as he takes in her injuries. His jaw clenches, and I see something click behind his eyes—something hard and determined.

“Well, I’m not gonna choose to be the bad guy no more,” he says, his voice firm.

The elevator dings again, and my stomach drops as the doors slide open. Fester steps out, flanked by three of his thugs. His smile is wide and easy, like he’s just walked into a church potluck.

“Are we too late to join the party?” he asks cheerfully, his voice dripping with that Southern charm that makes my skin crawl.

The nurse whimpers, and I tighten my arm around her, my pulse racing. Saucy steps in front of us, his massive frame blocking Fester’s view.

“Party’s over, Fess,” he says, his voice steady. “You’re done.”

Fester’s smile falters, his eyes narrowing as he takes in the scene. The thugs behind him shift, their hands twitching toward their weapons.

“Now, Daryl,” Fester says, his tone light but with an edge of steel. “You know I don’t take kindly to insubordination.”

Saucy doesn’t budge. His fists clench at his sides, and I can see the tension in his shoulders.

“Not this time,” he growls. “Not anymore.”

The air in the hallway crackles with tension, and I grip the nurse tighter, ready to bolt if things go south. Fester’s smile fades completely, his eyes cold and calculating.

“You’re making a mistake, Daryl,” he says softly, his voice like a knife in the dark.

“Maybe,” Saucy says, his voice steady. “But it’s mine to make.”

"Run!" Daryl shouts, his massive frame tensing like a spring. "Get her out of here!"

Before I can protest, he launches himself at Fester's thugs. His fists fly in devastating arcs, catching the first goon in the jaw with a sickening crunch. The second thug pulls a knife, but Daryl grabs his wrist and twists until bones snap.

I half-drag, half-carry the nurse into the elevator. Her broken hands tremble against my side as I slam the ground floor button. Through the closing gap, I see Fester reach into his jacket.

The metallic gleam of the gun catches the fluorescent light.

"Daryl!" I scream, but it's too late.

The doors seal shut just as the gunshot cracks through the air. My knees buckle, and tears blur my vision. The nurse sobs quietly beside me as we descend.

The ER staff swarm around us when the doors open. They whisk the nurse away on a gurney, leaving me alone in the sterile brightness. My hands shake as I wipe my eyes.

I take one step toward the exit, then freeze.

Dad.

He's still up there, helpless in his hospital bed. Right outside his room, Fester and his goons are probably still standing over Daryl's body. My stomach churns at the thought.

I can't leave Dad alone with those monsters. But what can I do against armed thugs? My fingers curl into fists as I stare at the elevator buttons, torn between running and staying to help.

I shoot off a text to Rokkon. No time for anything fancy.

Hospital. 911. Fester.

Then I'm off, running back into certain danger because even if my father is weak willed, he's still my Dad.

"I didn't bust my ass taking care of you for all those years to let you die now, Dad," I growl under my breath as I run through the lobby.

CHAPTER 14

ROKKON

I stride up to the hospital, the megaphone in my hand feeling like a weapon in its own right. The Armani suit clings to my frame, but the disguise does nothing to dull the fire in my veins. My human face is a mask, but my Vakutan soul is ready to erupt. Fester Boyle has made his last mistake.

“Fester N. Boyle,” I bark into the megaphone, my voice sharp enough to cut through the chaos. “Come out and face me, you coward.”

The ER doors swing open, and there he is—Fester, his grin as oily as the hog fat his family used to peddle. He’s got Vicki in front of him, a gun pressed to her temple. She’s scared, but her eyes lock with mine, and I see the defiance there. She trusts me. Good.

“Well, well, well,” Fester drawls, his voice dripping with faux politeness. “If it ain’t the big city billionaire come to save the day. Let me tell you somethin’, Mr. Anderson. I own this town. I own the people in it. I could shoot this girl right here in broad daylight, and nothin’ would happen to me. Nothin’.”

I tilt my head, my lips curling into a cold smile. “How many bullets in that gun, Fester?”

He chuckles, the sound like gravel in a tin can. “All right, I’ll indulge you. I’ve got six shots left—but trust me, I only need one to perforate the town skank’s head.” He

presses the barrel harder against Vicki's temple, and I feel my pulse quicken. Not fear. Anticipation.

"I don't think you have enough bullets for everyone," I say.

I raise the megaphone again. "Now."

The street erupts. People pour out from alleys, from cars, from the shadows. They're not cops or politicians. They're the people of Belleville—shopkeepers, mechanics, bartenders, mothers. Sal and his barfly crew are among them, their faces hard with resolve. The crowd spreads out, surrounding the hospital, and Fester's grin falters.

"You've hurt a lot of people over the years, Fester," I say, my voice carrying over the murmurs of the crowd. "A lot of people who have friends, families. Your enemies list has finally caught up with you."

Fester's eyes dart around, his confidence slipping. He tosses the gun to the ground, but his sneer returns, desperate and ugly. "You think you've won? I still own ninety-five percent of this city! All of you have to sleep sometime!" He jabs a finger at the crowd, his voice rising to a shout. "I never forgive and I never forget! Each and every one of you will pay. This will never be over as long as Fester N. Boyle draws breath?—"

The gunshot cuts him off, sharp and final. Fester looks down at the crimson stain spreading across his chest, his mouth hanging open in shock. He stumbles, then collapses to the ground. The crowd goes silent, the air thick with the weight of what just happened.

Vicki runs to me, and I wrap an arm around her, pulling her close. She's trembling, but her eyes are fierce. "Who—" she starts, but I shake my head.

I step forward, the crowd parting like water around me, my eyes locked on Jim. He's slumped against the hospital wall, the IV pole he dragged along with him rattling as his hands shake. The gun's still smoking in his grip, and his face is pale, like he's just realized what he's done.

"Dad!" Vicki's voice cracks as she rushes toward him, her heels clicking against the pavement. She's at his side in seconds, her hands fluttering over him, unsure where to land. "You—you're hurt, we need to get you back inside?—"

"I'm sorry," Jim rasps, coughing hard enough to make his shoulders shake. His bloodshot eyes flick to me, then back to Vicki. "It was the only way to keep my baby girl safe."

"Dad, stop talking," Vicki snaps, but her voice wobbles. She tries to pull him up, but he's dead weight, his legs buckling under him. I stride over, hooking an arm under his shoulders, and hoist him up like he's nothing.

"Let's get him inside," I say.. Vicki nods, her lips pressed into a thin line, and she grabs the IV pole, dragging it along behind us.

Sal steps forward, his arms crossed over his barrel chest. He glances down at Fester's body, then back up at the crowd, his voice carrying like a judge pronouncing sentence. "It sure is a shame," he says, loud enough for everyone to hear. "About Fester shooting himself, that is. I guess he just couldn't stand the idea of facing justice so he killed himself."

The silence stretches for a beat too long. Then, from the back of the crowd, an old woman's voice cuts through. "Open and shut case of suicide," she says, her tone matter-of-fact. "We all saw it, didn't we?"

"I saw it," says a man in a plaid shirt, his voice steady.

“I saw it,” a woman echoes, her arms crossed over her chest.

One by one, the crowd starts chanting, voices overlapping until it’s a single, unified chorus. “I saw it. I saw it. I saw it.”

I glance at Vicki, and she’s staring at the crowd, her eyes wide. She’s shaking, but not from fear. From relief. From hope. We’ve won. Fester’s gone, and Belleville’s finally free.

“Let’s get him inside,” I repeat, and this time, Vicki doesn’t argue. We move toward the hospital doors, the crowd parting to let us through. The chanting follows us, a promise, a vow.

As we cross the threshold, I smirk. The Mean Street Posse’s done for. And Fester? He’s just another corpse in a town riddled with them.

Mom's eyes glisten as she hugs me tight. The faint scent of lavender replaces the usual whiskey breath. "Call me when you land, baby."

"I will." The words catch in my throat. A week ago, I'd given up hope. Now here they stand - both my parents clear-eyed and present.

Dad shuffles forward, his new cane clicking on the porch boards. His skin has lost that sickly yellow tinge. "We're gonna make it this time, Vick. I promise."

"I know you will." The faith in my voice surprises me. Maybe it's the compound X working its magic, or maybe it's seeing them both actually try for once.

Rokkon extends his hand to Dad. "You're a brave man, Jim. And you raised an incredible daughter."

Dad's weathered face cracks into a genuine smile. "Take care of my little girl."

The Mercedes purrs to life as we pull away from the old homestead. Through the rear window, I watch them grow smaller - two figures waving from the sagging porch of my childhood home.

"What happens now?"

"The hunt for the Grolgath continues." Rokkon's purple eyes flash with predatory gleam.

"No, I mean..." I trace the scales on his forearm. "What happens with us?"

His laugh rumbles deep in his chest. "Isn't it obvious?" He takes my hand, his grip warm and sure. "We live happily ever after together. I love you, Victoria."

She snuffles and smiles through her tears.

"I love you, too, Rokkon."

The setting sun paints the sky in shades of amber and rose. I lean my head against his shoulder, finally at peace.

CHAPTER 15

VICKI

"This one?" I twirl in the black silk dress that barely covers my ass. The fabric whispers against my thighs.

"Perhaps." Rocky's purple eyes darken. His gaze travels up my legs, lingering.

I bend down to adjust the strappy heel, making sure he gets a peek of my lace panties. The saleswoman busies herself with reorganizing a rack of dresses, pretending not to notice.

"The neckline could be lower." I run my fingers along the edge of the fabric.

"Try the red one." His voice carries that commanding edge that makes my knees weak.

I grab the scarlet dress and sashay toward the changing room, adding an extra swing to my hips. The mirror reflects his hungry stare following me.

The silk slides cool against my skin as I change. This one's even shorter, with a plunging neckline that leaves little to imagination.

"What do you think?" I step out, giving him my best bedroom eyes.

His nostrils flare. The muscle in his jaw ticks.

I pretend to drop my clutch, bending slowly to retrieve it. When I straighten, his hand closes around my arm. Heat radiates through his fingers into my skin.

"Inside. Now." He practically growls the words, steering me toward the changing room.

The door clicks shut behind us. My heart pounds against my ribs as he crowds me against the mirror.

"You're playing with fire, little one."

The changing room is small, but Rokkon's presence fills it, his heat radiating against me. He pulls me further into the corner, his hand still clamped over my mouth. His breath is hot on my neck, his voice low and thick with need.

"That little black dress," he growls, his lips brushing my ear. "You've been teasing me since the moment you stepped into it."

I muffle a laugh against his palm, my hips arching as his other hand slides over my ass. His fingers snake between my legs, stroking me through the thin silk of my panties. Every touch sends sparks through my body, and I moan too loudly.

"You think this is funny?" he whispers, his tone darkening. "You've been flashing those pretty thighs, bending over just enough to give me a glimpse. You knew exactly what you were doing."

I nod, unable to speak with his hand still covering my mouth. His fingers press harder, circling my clit in slow, deliberate motions. My knees wobble, and I grab onto his arm for support.

"Good girl," he murmurs. "You wanted this, didn't you? Wanted me to lose control,

to take you right here where anyone could hear."

Another nod, my breath hitching as his fingers slip beneath the waistband of my panties. He tears them off with a single, sharp motion, and I gasp at the sudden exposure. Before I can protest, he shoves the panties into my mouth, the fabric muffling any sound I might make.

"Silence," he commands, tying a silk stocking around my head to hold the makeshift gag in place. His hands move to my wrists, binding them behind my back with another pair of stockings. The strands dig into my skin just enough to remind me of my helplessness, and I shiver with anticipation.

Rokkon sinks to his knees, his broad shoulders framing my thighs. His tongue flicks out, teasing me with soft, languid strokes. I whimper, my hips bucking involuntarily as he deepens the pressure. His hands grip my ass, holding me in place as he devours me, his tongue exploring every inch of my pussy with a precision that leaves me trembling.

The sensations overwhelm me, my legs shaking so badly I'm not sure how much longer I can stand. Rokkon growls against me, his hands moving to my hips to steady me. His tongue plunges deeper, his lips sealing around my clit as he sucks hard. My vision blurs, and I bite down on the panties in my mouth to stifle a scream.

"Look at me," he orders, pulling away just enough to meet my gaze. His purple eyes burn with intensity, and I can't look away. His tongue returns to my clit, flicking it rapidly as his fingers slide inside me. The combination sends me spiraling, my body clenching around his fingers as I come undone.

Rokkon doesn't stop, drawing out my orgasm until I'm a trembling mess, my knees buckling beneath me. He catches me before I fall, his arms wrapping around me as he kisses my neck.

His hand grips the back of my neck, and suddenly my face is shoved against his crotch. The heat of him radiates through the fabric of his dress pants, the hardness beneath it pressing insistently against my lips. I can't help but breathe him in—the faint musk of his alien skin, mixed with the sharp tang of his arousal.

"See what you've done to me?" His voice is a low growl, vibrating through my body like a shockwave. His grip tightens, keeping me in place as I struggle to process the sheer intensity of the moment. "What are you going to do about it?"

I manage to fumble my bound hands around, the silk stockings cutting into my wrists as I reach for the waistband of his pants. My fingers tremble as I undo his fly, and then I'm pulling his cock free. It's hot and heavy in my hand, the ridges of his alien shaft pressing against my palm. I nuzzle my gagged face against it, the silken feel of his skin against my cheek.

"Oh no, sweet one," he murmurs, his voice dripping with dark amusement. He grabs a fistful of my hair, yanking my head back so I'm forced to look up at him. His purple eyes burn with desire. "Only your—that is, my —magnificent pussy will do."

The way he claims me sends a jolt of electricity straight to my core, and I cum instantly, my body shuddering against him. My muffled moans escape past the panties stuffed in my mouth, and Rokkon clamps a hand over my lips to silence me further. His grip is firm, unyielding, and it only makes me wetter.

There's a knock on the dressing room door, and the saleswoman's voice cuts through the haze of pleasure. "Is everything all right in there?"

Rokkon pulls the gag from my mouth, his lips curling into a smirk as I try to steady my breathing. "I'm fine," I manage, my voice trembling and breathless. "I just... I stumbled and fell. I'm okay."

"Do you need me to come in and assist you?" Her tone is polite but tinged with concern.

"No, no, I'm just fine," I say through clenched teeth, biting back a moan as Rokkon's mouth finds my breasts, his tongue teasing my nipple through the thin fabric of the dress. His teeth graze the sensitive skin, and I have to squirm to avoid crying out. "I'll call if I need you."

"Okay," she replies, though she still sounds skeptical. Her footsteps retreat, and Rokkon shoves the panties back into my mouth, tying the gag even tighter this time. The fabric presses down on my tongue, and I whimper.

He spins me around, shoving my face against the cool mirror of the dressing room wall. His body presses against my back, and I feel the heat of him, the raw power radiating from every inch of his alien form. His hands grip my hips, and then he's inside me in one swift, brutal thrust, filling me completely.

I cry out against the gag, my body trembling as he takes me, his movements rough and unrelenting. My bound hands press against the mirror, and I can see my reflection—wild-eyed, flushed, completely at his mercy. Rokkon leans over me, his breath hot against my ear.

"You're mine," he growls, his voice rough with possession. "Every inch of you."

Rokkon's thrusts are relentless, each one driving deeper into me, stealing my breath and my thoughts. I'm pinned between his body and the dressing room wall, my bound hands pressing against the cool mirror, my reflection a blur of flushed skin and wide, wild eyes. The muffled sounds I make are swallowed by the panties stuffed in my mouth, but they only seem to egg him on.

"You're mine," he growls again, his voice rough with ownership, and I feel it, down

to my very soul. The jalshagar bond pulses between us, amplifying every sensation until I'm trembling on the edge of another orgasm. My hips grind back against his, meeting him thrust for thrust, and the friction is almost too much to bear.

"I'm—" I try to say through the gag, but Rokkon's hand clamps over my mouth, silencing me. He can feel it coming, just as I can feel the way his cock throbs inside me. We're so close, so?—

We cum together, his release hot and flooding as it fills me, and mine crashing over me in waves that leave me gasping and shaking. My legs buckle, and if not for the hand fisted in my hair, I'd collapse. He holds me up effortlessly, his breath ragged against my neck.

"Coast is clear," he murmurs, peeking out the dressing room door. I squeal behind the gag as he drags me out, my body still limp and trembling from the intensity of our shared climax. The store is quiet, but I'm hyper-aware of every sound, every possibility of being caught.

He doesn't let go of my hair, guiding me with a firm hand toward a secluded stairwell. The door clicks shut behind us, and I shiver at the sudden isolation.

"Up," he commands, delivering a sharp smack to my ass that makes me yelp. I obey, scrambling up the steps as he spanks me with each one, the sting only adding to the heady mix of pleasure and submission. My problems, my past—it all fades away, swallowed by the sheer intensity of this moment, of him .

At the top of the stairs, we emerge onto a small gallery overlooking the store. People are shopping just ten feet below us, completely unaware of what's happening above. Rokkon bends me over the railing, his hands gripping my hips possessively.

"Relax," he murmurs, and I feel the slickness of his arousal as he presses against my

ass. I whimper behind the gag, but I don't resist. I want this, want him, want the daring audacity of it all.

He eases into me slowly, his alien cock stretching me in a way that's both foreign and exhilarating. My body adjusts, and soon he's thrusting, each movement careful but deliberate. The new sensation sends sparks through me, and I'm cumming again, my body clenching around him as he fills me completely.

Rokkon's breathing intensifies, and I feel the moment he loses control, his rhythm faltering as he spills into me. His grip on my hips tightens, holding me in place as we ride out the waves of pleasure together.

"The best part of shopping," he muses, his voice low and teasing. I giggle, the sound muffled by the gag, and he unties it, letting it fall to the floor. "You're perfect," he says, helping me stand as he pulls me into a kiss that's tender despite the ferocity of what we just did.

I lean into him, my body still quivering, but my heart and soul are alight. "Let's see if they have a matching set," I whisper, and his laugh rumbles through me like a promise.

I'm still giggling like an idiot, my legs wobbling as Rokkon steers me back toward the fitting room area. My new little black dress clings to me, the silk whispering against my skin with every step. Rokkon's arm is around my waist, his grip possessive but steady, like he's afraid I might float away if he lets go. He's laughing too, his deep, rumbling chuckle vibrating against my side.

"I think we broke the mirror," I whisper, glancing up at him with a grin.

He smirks, his purple eyes gleaming. "Worth it."

The saleswoman is waiting for us, her expression a mix of professional politeness and thinly veiled curiosity. Rokkon doesn't miss a beat. He pulls out a wad of cash—way more than necessary—and hands it over without a word.

“For the mirror,” he says, his tone casual, like he's tipping for a cup of coffee.

Her eyes widen as she counts the bills, but she doesn't argue. “Thank you, sir.”

“And she'll be wearing this out,” he adds, nodding at me.

I blush, but I don't argue either. The way he says it—like it's already decided—makes my body quake.

We head toward the exit, my arm looped through his, and that's when I feel it. The silk stocking. Still around my neck, like some twisted accessory. My hand flies to it, fingers scrambling to untie it, but Rokkon's voice stops me.

“Leave it.”

I freeze, my face burning. “But?—”

“Leave it,” he repeats, his tone brooking no argument.

I swallow hard, my fingers trembling as I lower my hand. My cheeks are on fire, but I obey. The thought of walking out like this, with everyone staring, makes my stomach churn. But Rokkon's grip on my arm is firm, grounding me, and I trust him.

The second we're outside, the limo pulls up. Rokkon opens the door and practically drags me inside. The door barely shuts before he's on me, his lips crashing into mine. His hands are everywhere, tearing at the hem of my dress as I struggle to keep up.

“Wait—wait!” I manage to gasp, pushing him back just enough to squirm out of the dress. “Don’t ruin it!”

He growls in frustration but lets me slip the dress off, tossing it onto the opposite seat. Then he’s on me again, his hands tangling in my hair as he kisses me like he’s starving.

“Rokkon,” I breathe, pulling back just enough to meet his gaze. His purple eyes are dark with need.

“What do you think you’re doing, little one?” he murmurs, his voice low and teasing.

I don’t answer. Instead, I slide down the seat, my knees hitting the limo floor as I reach for his belt. His breath catches as I undo it, my fingers fumbling with the zipper.

“Eager, are we?” he asks, his tone dripping with amusement.

“Shut up,” I mutter, pulling his pants down just enough to free his cock. My hands wrap around the base, the ridges of his alien shaft sending a jolt of excitement through me.

He groans as I take him into my mouth, my tongue swirling around the heart-shaped crown. His hand tangles in my hair, guiding me as I work him, my head bobbing with a fervor that surprises even me.

“Fuck, Vicki,” he growls, his hips bucking involuntarily.

I glance up at him, my lips wrapped around him, and the look on his face—pure, unbridled pleasure—makes me melt.

“Good girl,” he murmurs, his voice rough.

I hum in response, the vibration making him curse under his breath. My hands slide up his thighs as I take him deeper, my throat relaxing as I swallow him whole.

He doesn’t last long. With a roar, he spills into my mouth, his fingers tightening in my hair as his body jerks. I swallow every drop, the taste of him—sweet and tangy—filling my senses.

When I pull back, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand, he’s staring at me like I’m the only thing in the world.

“You’re incredible,” he says, his voice hoarse.

I smile, my heart racing as I climb back onto the seat beside him. “You’re not so bad yourself.”

He laughs, pulling me into his arms as the limo speeds through the city, the world outside a blur.

CHAPTER 16

VICKI

I pace the grand living room, my bare feet padding across the cool marble floor. The ticking of the ornate grandfather clock echoes through the mansion, each second stretching longer than the last. Days. It's been days since Rokkon left for his overseas trip, and the emptiness of the mansion feels like a gaping hole in my chest. I know it's ridiculous—he's texted me constantly, called me every night—but it's not the same. I miss his scent, his touch, the way his voice rumbles deep in his chest when he growls my name.

My phone buzzes on the coffee table, and I nearly trip over myself lunging for it. Rokkon. I answer before the second ring.

"Where are you?" I demand, my voice sharper than I intend. "You were supposed to be back hours ago. Do you have any idea how many times I've checked the driveway?"

His laughter rolls through the phone, rich and warm, and I can practically see the way his purple eyes crinkle at the corners. "Someone's forgotten her place, I see."

I huff, crossing my arms even though he can't see me. "Don't 'someone' me. You promised. "

"Plane just touched down," he says, his tone smooth and infuriatingly calm. "I'll be in the limo soon. And then I'll be home. With you."

The way he says home makes me giddy. But I'm not letting him off that easy. "You'd better be. I've missed you. A lot. Especially... you know. My pussy misses you."

There's a pause on the other end of the line, and then his voice drops, deep and dark. "Oh, little one. You're going to pay for that."

A shiver races down my spine, and I bite my lip to keep from grinning too wide. "I hope so. It's been days since my last punishment. I'm starting to think you're going soft on me."

His growl sends heat pooling low in my belly. "Take off your clothes. Now."

I don't hesitate, tugging my shirt over my head and dropping it to the floor. "Done."

"Good. Now, open the drawer in the nightstand. You'll find the twin remote vibrators. Insert one in your ass, one in your pussy."

I hurry to the bedroom, my heart pounding as I yank open the drawer. The sleek, silicone eggs gleam under the light, and my breath comes quicker just looking at them. I set the phone on speaker and place it on the bed before positioning myself over the edge. "Can I... can I cum while I'm doing this?"

"No."

I groan, my fingers trembling as I guide the first egg to my entrance. "You're evil."

"And you're mine," he says, his voice a low purr. "Now, do as you're told."

The stretch as I press the egg inside makes me gasp, my knees going weak. I switch to the other, my body already throbbing with need. When both are nestled deep inside me, I sink to the floor, my legs splayed, my breathing ragged.

“Good girl,” he murmurs. “Remember, I control these. And they’ll tell me if you cum without permission.”

“Yes, Sir,” I whisper, my voice trembling.

The sudden buzz of the vibrators makes me cry out, my hips jerking involuntarily. The dual sensations—one in my ass, one in my pussy—are overwhelming, and I claw at the carpet to keep from thrashing.

“Rokkon—oh God —please?—”

“Not yet,” he says, his voice a commanding growl. “Not until I say.”

I whimper, my entire body trembling as pleasure spirals tighter and tighter. The vibrators hum relentlessly, driving me closer to the edge, but I cling to his words, desperate not to disobey. My thighs quiver, my toes curl, and I squeeze my eyes shut, trying to focus on anything but the unbearable need building inside me.

“Good girl,” he says again, and I can hear the smile in his voice. “Hold on, little one. I’m almost home.”

The sound of the front door creaking open makes my heart leap into my throat. I’m on my knees in the living room, trembling, the twin vibrators still humming inside me, my body slick with sweat and desperation. When I hear his footsteps, steady and deliberate, I can’t help the whimper that escapes my lips.

“Crawl,” Rokkon commands, his voice a deep growl that reverberates through the room. “Show me how much you missed me.”

I don’t hesitate, my palms sliding across the cool marble floor as I move toward him. My body feels like it’s on fire, every inch of me hyper-aware of the vibrations deep

inside, but I keep going. I reach him just as he steps into the room, his towering frame casting a shadow over me. My hands find his polished shoes, and I press my forehead to the floor in silent submission.

“Look at me,” he says, his tone softer now, almost tender.

I tilt my head up, my breath catching at the sight of him. His red scales glint in the light, his purple eyes burning with a mix of heat and something deeper—something that makes my chest ache. He reaches down, his claws brushing through my hair, and I lean into his touch like a starved thing.

“Good girl,” he murmurs, his thumb tracing my bottom lip. “Now, take what’s yours.”

My hands are shaking as I undo his fly, the fabric falling away to reveal his cock, thick and already hard. The sight of it makes my mouth water, and I take him slowly, savoring the taste of him, the way he hisses through his teeth as my tongue swirls around the heart-shaped crown. His hand tightens in my hair, guiding me, and I lose myself in the rhythm, the vibrations inside me growing more intense with every stroke of his hand.

When he finally comes, I swallow every drop, his praises washing over me like a balm. “Good girl,” he growls. “Such a good girl.”

But then I feel it—the pressure inside me building, twisting, and I can’t stop it. My back arches, a scream tearing from my throat as my orgasm crashes over me, violent and consuming. The eggs pop out, landing on the floor with a soft thud, and I collapse in a shivering heap.

Rokkon laughs, the sound warm and amused. “Maybe not such a good girl after all.”

Before I can catch my breath, he's scooping me up, carrying me down the hall to the pleasure room. He replaces the eggs with a firm hand, my body still twitching from the aftershocks, and then he's tying me up, the silk rope between my legs holding everything in place.

When he straps me to the top of the cage and slides the ball gag into my mouth, I can't help the muffled laugh that escapes me. The vibrating clamps on my nipples send a jolt through me, and I groan behind the gag, my hips bucking involuntarily.

"We're going to play a game," Rokkon says, his voice low and teasing. "You're not allowed to cum until I allow it. I'm going to play with the settings on your vibrators. If it gets to be too much, ask for mercy, and I'll turn them down to the minimum setting—but you'll get the candle wax instead."

His fingers trail down my thigh, and I shiver, anticipation and dread warring in my chest. The first flick of the vibrators makes me jerk against the restraints, my muffled moans echoing through the room.

"Ready?" he asks, his grin feral.

I nod, my heart pounding. Ready or not, here we go.

The vibrations inside me are relentless, a deep, shuddering hum that shakes me to my core. My hips jerk against the restraints, my body taut like a bowstring. It's too much, too fast, and I'm teetering on the edge, my breath coming in ragged gasps behind the ball gag. My fingers claw at the air, my toes curling as the pressure builds, threatening to shatter me.

I can't stop it. I'm going to cum. My muffled scream escapes as I frantically shake my head, my eyes locking with Rokkon's. He's watching me like a predator, his purple gaze sharp and unyielding, a smirk playing on his lips.

“Mercy?” he asks, his voice low and teasing. “Is that what you’re asking for, little one?”

I nod desperately, my body trembling as I fight the inevitable. He reaches for the remote and turns the vibrators off. Instantly, the room feels too quiet, too still, save for the pounding of my heart. But before I can catch my breath, I hear the scrape of a match, the hiss of a flame. My eyes widen as Rokkon lights the candle, the wax already beginning to pool.

The first drop hits my collarbone, and I jerk against the ropes, a strangled gasp escaping me. It’s hot, almost too hot, but then... it’s not. It’s like fire and ice all at once, a searing heat that settles into a warm, lingering ache. My skin tingles where the wax hardens, and I can’t help the moan that slips past the gag.

Rokkon’s smirk deepens as he drips another drop, this time on the curve of my breast. “You like that, don’t you?” he growls, his voice dripping with amusement. “I can see it in your eyes. You’re just as turned on by this as you were by the vibrators.”

I can’t deny it. My body is still trembling, my core clenching with need. I nod again, my gaze pleading. More. More.

He chuckles, a low, rumbling sound that sends shivers down my spine. “You’re insatiable,” he says, but he doesn’t stop. The wax falls in a slow, deliberate rhythm, each drop sending a jolt of pleasure-pain through me. My back arches, my breath hitching as the heat spreads across my skin.

But it’s not enough. The ache between my legs is unbearable, the vibrators’ absence only making it worse. I whimper behind the gag, my hips bucking uselessly against nothing. Rokkon’s eyes darken as he watches me struggle, his expression a mixture of satisfaction and hunger.

“You want them back, don’t you?” he asks, his tone silky smooth.

I nod frantically, my pleading muffled by the gag. He steps closer, his claws brushing against my cheek as he tilts my chin up. “You have to ask nicely.”

The sound I make is half-groan, half-whimper, but it’s enough. He chuckles and turns the vibrators back on, the sudden intensity making me cry out. I’m on the edge again almost instantly, my body writhing as the vibrations coil tighter and tighter.

“Don’t cum,” he warns, his voice a growl that sends a thrill through me. “Not until I say.”

I fight it, I really do, but it’s impossible. My body is wound too tight, the pleasure too intense. Just as I feel the first wave cresting, he turns the vibrators off again, leaving me gasping and trembling on the edge. My muffled scream of frustration makes him laugh, and he reaches for the candle once more.

The cycle repeats, over and over, until I’ve lost count. The wax hardens in intricate patterns across my skin, a mosaic of heat and pleasure. Each time the vibrators come back on, the intensity is higher, the edge closer, until I’m a trembling, whimpering mess, my body slick with sweat and desperation.

Finally, Rokkon steps back, his gaze raking over me. “Cum,” he commands, his voice a low, guttural growl.

I don’t need to be told twice. The vibrators roar to life, and I shatter, my scream muffled by the gag as my body convulses. It’s like nothing I’ve ever felt before, a tidal wave of pleasure that crashes over me, leaving me gasping and trembling in its wake. My hips jerk uncontrollably, the ropes the only thing keeping me upright as I squirt around the crotch rope, the vibrators still humming relentlessly.

Rokkon's claws are gentle as he unties the rope, his touch almost soothing. "Good girl," he murmurs, his voice thick with satisfaction. "You've earned my cock."

Oh no, I think, my body still twitching with aftershocks. This is going to be so much worse—or better. I can't tell anymore. All I know is I'm not ready, but I'm also not stopping him. Not now. Not ever.

The swollen head of Rokkon's cock brushes against my clit, and I jerk against the restraints, my muffled whimper echoing through the room. It's maddening, the way he teases me—just enough pressure to make me ache, but not enough to give me release. My hips buck instinctively, but the straps hold me tight, leaving me helpless to do anything but writhe and take it.

Rokkon's claws grip my thighs, spreading me open as he leans in to inspect me with that predatory gaze of his. "Beautiful," he growls, his voice low and rough. "Absolutely perfect. Every inch of you is mine, Victoria."

I groan around the ball gag, my body trembling as he trails a claw down the length of my slit. The sensation is electric, and I squirm, my pussy clenching around nothing, desperate for more. He chuckles, the sound dark and amused, and then I feel him reposition himself, the thick head of his cock pressing against my entrance.

"Relax, little one," he murmurs, his claws kneading my hips. "Let me show you how much I missed you."

I steady myself as he pushes in, inch by agonizing inch. The ridge running down the top of his shaft brushes against my clit with every movement, sending sparks of pleasure shooting through me. My back arches, my hands clenching into fists as I'm filled so completely, so perfectly. It's overwhelming, the way he stretches me, the way he owns me, and I can feel the jalshagar bond flaring between us, his soul mingling with mine.

“You feel that, don’t you?” he growls, his voice trembling with restraint. “Our souls, binding together. You’re mine, Victoria. Now and always.”

I nod frantically, my muffled moans filling the room as he begins to move, his thrusts slow and deliberate. His clawed hands roam over my wax-covered breasts, kneading and teasing, and I’m lost in the sensation of it all—his touch, his cock, the way he makes my body sing. I’ve never felt so wanted, so desired, and it’s intoxicating.

But it’s not enough. I need more. I need him to take me over the edge.

I whimper around the gag, my eyes pleading as I meet his gaze. He chuckles, his thrusts becoming harder, deeper. “You want to cum, don’t you?” he purrs, his claws digging into my hips. “You’re going to have to beg for it.”

I groan, my body trembling as I try to form the words around the gag. “P-please,” I manage, the sound muffled but desperate. “Please, Sir.”

He smirks, his pace quickening, and the pressure building, coiling tighter and tighter inside me. “Whose pussy is this?” he demands, his voice a low growl.

“Yours,” I mumble around the gag, my voice trembling with need.

“Good girl,” he growls, his thrusts becoming relentless. “Don’t forget it. You’re mine, Victoria. Mine to protect, mine to pleasure, mine to claim.”

My breath hitches as I feel the first wave cresting, my body clenching around him. “Please,” I beg, my voice breaking. “Please, let me cum.”

He groans, his claws tightening on my hips as he slams into me, his cock throbbing inside me. “Cum for me, little one,” he growls, with need. “Now.”

The command sends me over the edge, my body convulsing as pleasure explodes through me. I clamp down on him, my world narrowing to nothing but the feeling of his cock inside me, the way he fills me so completely. He groans, his claws digging into my skin as he follows me over, his seed pumping into me in hot, pulsing waves.

For a moment, everything is still, the only sound in the room our ragged breathing. Then he leans down, his claws brushing my cheek as he releases the gag from my mouth. "Mine," he murmurs, his voice tender. "Always."

I nod, my body still trembling with aftershocks. "Always," I whisper, my voice hoarse. And I mean it. Every word.

CHAPTER 17

ROKKON

We pull up to the house, and I can feel Vicki's tension radiating off her like a low hum. She's braced for the worst—the sagging trailer, the rusted storage container, the tar paper shack that always looked like it was one strong breeze away from collapse. But when the house comes into view, she freezes.

“What the hell?” she breathes, staring out the window. The trailer's been replaced with a sleek modular home, the storage container is gone, and the shack has been transformed into a quaint little greenhouse. Solar panels glint on the roof, and the yard, once a graveyard for broken cars, is now a tidy garden.

“Did you—did you do this?” she asks, turning to me.

“No,” I say, honestly surprised. “I didn't even know it was happening.”

Her eyes narrow. “Really? Because this feels like something you'd do.”

“I'm not that controlling,” I say, smirking.

She snorts but doesn't argue. Her gaze lands on the man on the roof, hammering in the last of the solar panels. He's shirtless, his muscles glistening under the sun. “Wow,” she says, leaning closer to the window. “Guess you can hire really fit contractors these days.”

I grin. “Vicki, that’s your dad.”

She jerks back, her eyes wide. “What? No. No way. That guy’s ripped. My dad’s... not ripped.”

I roll down the window and wave. “Jim!” I call out.

He turns, shielding his eyes with his hand. “Hey, Rocky!” he shouts back, his voice strong and clear. He climbs down the ladder with a fluidity that’s almost unnerving.

Vicki stares, her jaw slack. “Holy shit.”

Deb steps out of the house, her curly hair bouncing, wearing a dress that’s actually clean and intact. She’s holding a tray of what smells like fresh-baked bread. “Vicki!” she calls, waving enthusiastically.

“Okay, I’m officially in the Twilight Zone,” Vicki mutters.

We get out of the car, and Jim strides over, wiping his hands on a rag. “Good to see you two,” he says, pulling Vicki into a hug. She stiffens at first, but then hugs him back, her arms tentative.

“Dad, you look... amazing,” she says, pulling back to study him.

He grins, his teeth white and straight. “Thanks, kiddo. Been working hard. Turns out, sober Jim’s got a lot of energy.”

Deb ushers us inside, and the interior is just as transformed. The air smells like herbs and citrus, not stale beer and cigarettes. The kitchen is spotless, and the table is set with mismatched but clean plates.

We sit down to a meal of kale, brown rice, and tofu stir-fry. Vicki picks at her food, her brow furrowed. “So, uh, when did you two start eating like this?” she asks.

“About a month ago,” Deb says, beaming. “Turns out, when you’re not drunk or stoned all the time, you actually want to take care of yourself.”

Vicki blinks. “Wow. That’s... wow.”

Jim nods. “We’ve been going to therapy, too. Talking about stuff we should’ve talked about years ago.”

Vicki sets her fork down. “I... I need a second.” She stands abruptly and heads outside.

I wait a beat, then follow. I find her leaning against the car, her arms crossed, tears streaming down her face.

“Hey,” I say softly.

She shakes her head, wiping at her cheeks. “I just... I didn’t think they could change. I didn’t think they’d want to.”

I step closer, brushing a tear away with my thumb. “People surprise you.”

She looks up at me, her blue eyes wet but fierce. “Did you do this? Did you make them do this?”

“No,” I say firmly. “They chose this. I just gave them the tools.”

She stares at me for a long moment, then flings her arms around me, burying her face in my chest. “Thank you,” she whispers, her voice cracking.

I hold her tight, feeling the weight of her relief. “You’re welcome.”

We sit on the edge of the bed, the air between us heavy with unspoken words. Vicki leans into me, her warmth seeping into my scales, grounding me. I let the weight of centuries settle on my shoulders before I speak.

“Thank you,” I say, the words rough, like I’m dragging them out of a deep, dark place.

She tilts her head, her blue eyes searching mine. “For what?”

“For being you,” I say. “For having the courage to face your pain. Seeing you fight, seeing you heal ... it made me realize I’ve been hiding from my own for too long.”

She sits up straight, her spine rigid, her attention laser-focused on me. “Tell me,” she says softly, but there’s no mistaking the command in her tone. She’s been waiting for this, and she’s not letting me off the hook now.

I close my eyes, and the images come unbidden—Horus IV, the ash-filled sky, the stench of burning flesh. “I was a lieutenant,” I begin, my voice a gravelly whisper. “Commanded an elite squad of Vakutan commandos. Our mission was simple: gather intel on Grolgath movements. Simple. Until it wasn’t.”

Vicki’s hands find mine, her grip tight, anchoring me as I plunge into the memories. “The planet... it turned into a hellscape. Fires everywhere, no supplies, no reinforcements. I tried to keep them alive. I tried.” My voice cracks, and I swallow hard. “But one by one, they fell. Some in battle, some to disease. The worst... the worst were the ones I watched starve to death. I couldn’t save them. I failed them.”

Her breath halts, but she doesn’t interrupt. Her thumb strokes the back of my hand, a small, steady rhythm.

“After that,” I continue, “I buried that pain so deep, I thought I’d never have to face it again. I didn’t think I deserved to. Not after what I let happen. That’s why I never looked for my jalshagar. I didn’t think I deserved happiness, not after I couldn’t give it to them.”

Vicki’s eyes glisten with unshed tears, but she doesn’t look away. “And then you met me,” she says.

I nod, a slow, heavy motion. “From the moment I heard your voice, I knew you were going to change everything. I just didn’t know how much. ”

Her hands slide up to cup my face, her touch gentle but insistent. “Rokkon, you don’t have to carry this guilt anymore. Your squad... they wouldn’t want this for you. They wouldn’t want you to punish yourself forever.”

I laugh, a raw, broken sound. “No, they wouldn’t. They’re probably up there now, drinking, feasting, and fighting in what passes for Vakutan heaven. They’d smack me upside the head if they saw me moping like this.”

The weight on my chest shifts, lightens. I feel like I can breathe. Vicki throws her arms around me, her hug fierce, her tears wet against my neck. “Thank you for telling me,” she whispers. “Thank you for trusting me.”

I hold her tight, my arms wrapping around her like she’s the only thing keeping me grounded. And maybe she is. The memories don’t feel like they’re crushing me. They’re just... memories. Painful, yes. But not all-consuming. Not anymore.

“I love you,” I say, my voice steady but deeper than usual, like I’m carving the words into the universe itself. “Now and forever. Until the stars lose their shine.”

Vicki’s eyes soften, those ocean blues pulling me in like a tide I can’t resist. She

smiles, a wicked little curve of her lips that says she's about to outdo me. "I love you back," she says, her voice light but no less sure. "Until the stars lose their shine... and even longer. After all, new stars are being born all the time, so the stars will never lose their shine."

I chuckle, low and rumbling, and pull her into my chest. Her body molds against mine, warm and soft in all the right places. "Of course," I say, my lips brushing the top of her head. "This means that we have much time to fill. I'll have to get truly creative to satiate such a wild, passionate, and sexy creature as my sweet little jalshagar."

She tilts her head up, her grin turning playful. "Are you trying to scare me or make me climb on top of you?"

"A little of both," I admit, laughing as she shoves me back onto the bed. She straddles me, her hands braced on my chest. I'm struck by how perfectly she fits here, like she was made for this. Like she was made for me.

We fall asleep tangled together, her head on my shoulder, her breath steady and warm against my scales. The rhythm of her heartbeat is a lullaby. I don't dream of Horus IV. I don't dream at all.

The next morning, we sit down to breakfast with Deb and Jim. The table is a mess of pancakes, eggs, and coffee, and for once, it feels like a real family meal. Deb chatters about the wedding plans—flowers, seating charts, and something about a dessert table shaped like a camel. Jim nods along, his hands wrapped around a mug of coffee, his eyes clear and focused.

"You'll be there, right?" Vicki asks, her fork hovering over her plate.

Jim grins, that same easy smile he's always had, but now it's backed by something

real. “Wouldn’t miss it for the world, kiddo.”

Deb squeezes Vicki’s hand. “Two weeks,” she says. “Then we’ll see you in Morocco.”

We say our goodbyes, the kind that linger a little too long but don’t feel awkward for it. Jim claps me on the shoulder, his grip firm and sure, and Deb pulls me into a hug that smells like lavender and freshly baked bread.

As we drive to the airfield, Vicki laughs, her head tipped back against the seat. “You don’t do anything small, do you?” she asks, gesturing at the sprawling complex ahead of us.

The airfield is a beast of steel and concrete, my private jet gleaming on the tarmac like a jewel in the sun. “No,” I say, glancing at her. “And that’s just the way you like it.”

She grins, her hand finding mine on the gearshift. “Damn right.”

The jet’s cabin is quiet, the hum of the engines a low, steady backdrop as the door seals shut behind us. Vicki’s bouncing on her toes, her energy practically crackling in the air. I lean back against the polished wood paneling, arms crossed, watching her with a smirk.

“Hike up your skirt,” I say, my voice calm but firm, the kind of tone that brooks no argument.

She freezes mid-step, her lips curling into a sly grin. “Yes, sir,” she purrs, dragging out the words like she’s savoring them. She pivots slowly, her hips swaying with deliberate provocation, and reaches for the hem of her skirt. She makes a whole production out of it, lifting the fabric inch by inch, her movements exaggerated,

almost theatrical.

“Oh, and Rokkon?” she says, her tone dripping with mock innocence. “You can’t rip my panties off.” She pauses, eyes gleaming with mischief. “Because I’m not wearing any.”

I chuckle, low and deep, as she finally reveals herself. The sight of her, bare and unashamed, is enough to make my scales prickle with heat. She’s perfection, every curve, every line, and I let myself drink it in, knowing it’s the last time I’ll see her like this until the wedding.

“Are you just going to stand there and stare?” she asks, her voice trembling with amusement. “Or are you going to do something about it?”

I close the distance between us in two strides, my hands on her hips before she can so much as blink. My mouth crashes into hers, hungry and demanding, and she melts into me, her fingers tangling in the ridges of my scales. I slide my hands down, gripping her ass, and she gasps into my mouth as I pry her cheeks apart, my fingers finding her wet and ready.

She moans, her body arching into mine, her hands fumbling for the waistband of my pants. “Rokkon,” she breathes, her voice shaky. “Please.”

I nip at her lower lip, then pull back, my hands still firmly gripping her ass.

“No,” I say. “Not yet.”

Her eyes widen, confusion and frustration warring in her expression. “What do you mean, not yet ?”

I step back, reaching for the chastity belt I’d stashed in the cabin earlier. Her eyes

follow the movement, her mouth falling open as she realizes what I'm holding. "Rokkon," she says, her voice a mix of disbelief and outrage. "You wouldn't."

"Oh, I would," I say, snapping the belt into place around her waist with practiced ease. The lock clicks into place, and I tuck the key into a hidden pocket in my jacket.

"What are you doing to me?" she demands, her hands flying to the metal contraption now locked firmly around her hips.

"Making sure you have a fantastic wedding night," I reply, my voice calm despite the way my own body is protesting the decision. "Though it means I must also torment myself. You won't have access to my pussy until the wedding night, either."

She lets out a startled gasp, her blue eyes wide with a mixture of indignation and arousal. "You wouldn't dare," she says, her voice low and dangerous.

"The tailor's already been notified," I say, leaning back against the wall again, my arms crossed. "The wedding dress will account for the belt."

"Rokkon!" she shouts, grabbing my arm and shaking it. "That's a long, long time to go without sex!"

"Didn't you go years without it after Buford?" I ask, my tone light, teasing.

"You're the devil!" she snaps, her cheeks flushing red. "We'll just see if you can hold out. I bet you'll be unlocking this before the end of the day."

I grin, my teeth sharp and gleaming. "You underestimate Vakutan patience. Simmer and baste in your own desires, sweet one."

She huffs, crossing her arms over her chest, but I can see the way her body trembles,

the way her arousal is already driving her to the edge. She's going to be fun to torment—and even more fun to claim when the time comes.

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I adjust the veil, the diamonds catching the light like tiny stars trapped in the fabric. My reflection stares back at me—blonde hair curled into soft waves, lips painted a deep red, and a dress that feels like it was spun from moonlight and stardust. The Moroccan sunset pours through the window, dyeing the sky in hues of crimson and gold, colors that remind me of Rokkon's scales. I smile. Even in disguise as Rocky Anderson, he's the most breathtaking man I've ever seen.

A knock at the door pulls me from my thoughts. "It's time, Ms. Sloane," the wedding planner calls, her voice teetering on the edge of excitement and panic.

"Be right there," I reply, smoothing my hands over the gown one last time. The chastity belt beneath it feels like a cruel joke at this point, a reminder of the past two weeks of teasing and denial. Rokkon's been relentless—groping me in the kitchen, pinning me against the wall in the hallway, whispering all the things he's going to do to me after the wedding. Every touch, every word, has left me aching and desperate. But tonight, the belt comes off. Finally. I've been counting the minutes.

The door creaks open, and my father steps in, dressed in a sharp black suit. He looks sober, healthy, and proud. The transformation still takes my breath away.

"You look stunning, kid," he says, his voice thick with emotion.

"Thanks, Dad." I swallow the lump in my throat. "You clean up pretty nice yourself."

He chuckles, his eyes glistening. "Never thought I'd live to see this day. You're marrying a good man, Vicki. Hell, he's more than a good man. He's..." He trails off, shaking his head. "I'm just glad I got my act together enough to walk you down the

aisle.”

“Me too,” I say, squeezing his arm. The bond between us feels stronger now, mended by Rokkon’s intervention. My parents have been sober for weeks, and it’s like I’ve gotten them back after years of losing them to addiction.

The wedding planner pokes her head in again. “We’re ready when you are.”

I gap, the weight of the moment settling over me. This is it. The start of a life I never dared to dream of. I loop my arm through my father’s and let him lead me out of the room. The hallway stretches before us, lined with white roses and flickering candles. The faint strains of a violin drift through the air, and my heart pounds in rhythm with the music.

“You nervous?” my dad asks, glancing at me.

“Not about marrying Rokkon,” I say with a smirk. “Just about surviving the reception. I’m pretty sure he’s been planning something elaborate.”

He chuckles. “That man’s full of surprises, that’s for sure.”

“You have no idea,” I mutter, thinking of the belt still locked snugly around my hips.

We reach the entrance to the chapel, and the double doors swing open. The guests rise as one, their faces turning toward me. But all I see is Rokkon—or rather, Rocky—standing at the altar in a tailored tuxedo, his red hair catching the light, those piercing purple eyes fixed on me with an intensity that makes my knees weak.

He grins, and I can see the mischief in it. Two weeks of teasing, and now it’s his turn to deliver. I feel a shiver of anticipation. Tonight, the wait is over. And something tells me he’s got a lot more than just a key planned.

I barely hear the minister. My eyes are locked on Rokkon—no, Rocky now, in his human disguise—his purple gaze swallowing me whole like a black hole that only my soul could escape. His voice is low and steady as he says his vows, and the sound of it sends a shiver down my spine. When he slides the ring onto my finger, I gasp. It's a monstrosity of a diamond surrounded by smaller gems, glittering like a miniature galaxy. No one will ever top this. They'd have to strap a boulder to their hand to even try.

The minister barely gets out the words "You may—" before I'm on him. I grab Rokkon by the lapels and yank him down to me, my lips crashing against his. He laughs into my mouth, a deep, rumbling sound, and then he's kissing me back with equal fervor, his hands sliding around my waist to pull me closer. The crowd erupts into laughter, but it fades into the background, drowned out by the pounding of my heart and the way he feels against me.

"Get a room!" someone shouts—Chad, probably. I recognize the tone, the usual mix of crassness and awkwardness that my brother brings to every situation.

Rokkon and I finally break apart, breathless and grinning. The minister looks like he's about to have a stroke, but Rokkon just winks at him, and then we're walking down the aisle, hand in hand, as husband and wife.

The reception hall is a marvel—modern, sleek, and filled with soft golden light. The centerpiece is a massive glass sphere, shimmering like a soap bubble, filled with envelopes and checks.

"What's that?" I ask, gesturing to the sphere.

"Donations," Rokkon says, his voice brimming with pride. "To GEHI. I told everyone we didn't need gifts, but we'd gladly accept contributions to the cause."

I smile, warmth spreading through my chest. Of course he'd turn our wedding into a

fundraiser.

We make the rounds, stopping first to talk to Captain Pyke and his wife, Taylor. Pyke's in his human disguise, but his eyes still have that sharp, reptilian glint.

"Congratulations," Pyke says, shaking Rokkon's hand with a firm grip. "You two make a charming couple. Almost makes me believe in love again."

"Almost?" I raise an eyebrow.

"Oh, don't get me wrong," Pyke says with a grin. "I'm a romantic at heart. But let's just say I've seen enough interstellar battles to know love doesn't always win."

Taylor swats his arm playfully. "Ignore him. He's just bitter because I won't let him name our next kid after a Star Trek character."

Rokkon chuckles, and the sound is warm and genuine. "I'd offer advice, but I'm still working on keeping this one in line." He gives me a sly look, and I roll my eyes, though my cheeks heat up.

Next, we're cornered by Ned Turner, who's already halfway through a glass of champagne and talking a mile a minute.

"Rocky, my boy, you've outdone yourself," Ned says, clapping Rokkon on the shoulder with a little too much enthusiasm. "And Vicki, my dear, you look absolutely radiant. Truly, a credit to the institution of marriage."

"Thanks... I think?" I say, exchanging a look with Rokkon.

Ned doesn't seem to notice. "You know, I've been telling Rocky for years that he needed to settle down. Too much time in the boardroom, not enough time in the bedroom, if you catch my drift."

I choke on my drink, and Rokkon's hand tightens around my waist. "Ned," he says, his voice edged with warning.

"What? I'm just saying!" Ned laughs, oblivious. "Anyway, you two are the poster couple for modern philanthropy. I mean, this GEHI initiative? Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant."

"Glad you think so," Rokkon says, his tone dry.

I nudge him subtly, trying not to laugh. Ned means well, but he's the kind of guy who could talk your ear off about the benefits of kale smoothies while simultaneously spilling one down his shirt.

We manage to extract ourselves after a few more minutes, and I sigh relief.

"He's... something," I say, glancing back at Ned, who's now animatedly explaining something to a group of bewildered guests.

"That's one way to put it," Rokkon mutters, his lips twitching into a smirk.

I lean into him, my hand finding his. "Think we can sneak out yet?"

He looks down at me, his eyes darkening with promise. "Patience, Mrs. Anderson. The night's still young."

I pout, earning a low chuckle from him. Two weeks of waiting, and now he's the one telling me to be patient. But the look in his eyes tells me it'll be worth it. Every damned second.

The moment the door to the honeymoon manor shuts behind us, Rokkon sweeps me off my feet, his arms strong and sure around me. He carries me across the threshold like some kind of old-world romantic, and I laugh, the sound bubbling up from my

chest as he sets me down gently in the foyer.

“Champagne?” he offers, his voice smooth and teasing, his purple eyes glinting with mischief.

I grab him by the lapels of his tuxedo and give him a firm shake. “Get this thing off and fuck me!” I demand, my voice rising in frustration.

Rokkon arches his brow ridges, that infuriating smirk playing on his lips. “You’re making demands like you’re in charge or something, my sweet one,” he says, his tone dripping with mock seriousness. “I was going to take the belt off of you, but obviously you need to be taught a lesson about who you belong to.”

I groan, rolling my eyes, but before I can protest, he’s already stripping me out of my wedding dress. The fabric falls away in a whisper, leaving me in just the ivory satin corset, white stockings, heels, and the damn chastity belt. I try to grab him, to pull him into a kiss, but he’s too quick. He pushes me into a sturdy chair with leather seat cushions, the coolness of the material biting into my skin as he ties my wrists securely to the arms.

“You’re Satan incarnate,” I groan, my frustration mounting.

“Close enough,” he replies, slipping a ball gag into my mouth before I can say another word. The straps tighten behind my head, and I’m left with nothing but muffled sounds of protest. Then he blindfolds me, and the world goes dark.

“If you’re good, maybe I’ll let you cum before sunrise,” he says, his voice a low purr in my ear. I squirm, but the restraints hold firm.

His hands are everywhere yet nowhere, his breath hot against my skin as he moves around me. I can feel him close, but he’s not touching me—not yet. My nipples harden under the corset, aching for contact, and my breathing quickens. Every inch of

me is on fire, desperate for his touch.

“You’re so beautiful like this,” he murmurs, his lips brushing against my neck. “Helpless. Desperate. Mine. ”

I strain against the restraints, my muffled moans echoing in the room. He’s toying with me, and it’s driving me insane. His lips ghost over my nipple, and I shudder, a whimper escaping me. He’s so close, but it’s not enough. I need more.

Finally, he leans in, his breath warm against my ear. “You’ve been so patient, my sweetness. Let’s see if you can handle what comes next.”

The sound of metal clicking makes my heart leap. The locks on the chastity belt are coming undone, one by one. Each click feels like an eternity, and by the time the final lock releases, I’m trembling with anticipation.

Rokkon’s tongue—long, prehensile, and alien —slides over my swollen clitoris, and I scream into the gag, my back arching as the pleasure crashes over me. My body convulses, and I’m lost in the sensation, my world reduced to nothing but him and the fiery ecstasy coursing through me.

He doesn’t let up, his tongue plunging into me, coaxing out another wave of pleasure until I’m a trembling, gasping mess. He’s relentless, and I’m completely at his mercy.

Rokkon was right—this is going to be a fantastic wedding night. And it’s just getting started.

The moment Rokkon’s tongue touches my skin, I’m a goner. There’s no other word for it. His growls rumble through me, low and primal, vibrating against my thighs as he works his way up, kissing, licking, and sucking every inch of me. His clawed hands knead my breasts, rough but controlled, and I arch into him, moaning around the gag still stuffed in my mouth.

“Perfect,” he murmurs against my hip, his breath hot. “Every curve, every freckle, every sigh— perfect .” His tongue drags up my side, and I shiver, my skin prickling with goosebumps.

He pauses, pulling back just enough to lock those violet eyes with mine. “Do you know how long I’ve waited to taste you like this? To have you completely mine?” His voice is a mix of hunger and reverence that makes my chest tighten.

I nod as much as I can with the gag, a muffled sound escaping me. He chuckles, a dark, satisfied sound, and his hands slide down to grip my hips, his claws digging just enough to remind me who’s in charge.

“You’re mine, Vicki,” he says, leaning in again, his lips brushing against my ear. “My wife. My sweetness. My everything .” The words send a jolt of heat straight to my core, and I whimper, writhing under him.

He pulls back with a smirk, his tongue flicking out to trace the line of my jaw. “And I’m going to take such good care of you.” The promise in his voice makes me melt, and I let out a muffled “Yes, Sir,” the words garbled but earnest.

Rokkon’s smirk widens, and he reaches behind my head to unbuckle the gag, his fingers brushing against my cheek as he pulls it free. Before I can say anything, his lips are on mine, crushing and claiming. I kiss him back with everything I have, my hands tugging at the restraints like I can somehow pull him closer.

One of his hands slips between my thighs, his fingers expertly finding the spot that makes me gasp into his mouth. He knows my body better than I do, and he uses that knowledge to drive me wild, his fingers working in slow, deliberate circles that have me whimpering and pleading.

“Rokkon—” I manage to choke out, my voice shaking.

“Shh,” he murmurs against my lips. “Let me take care of you.” His fingers press harder, and I’m gone, a sharp cry tearing from my throat as waves of pleasure crash over me.

When I come back to myself, Rokkon’s already untying my wrists, his hands gentle but firm. He scoops me up like I weigh nothing and carries me to the bed, his gaze never leaving mine. He lays me down and slides in behind me, his hands gripping my hips as he pushes into me, filling me in one smooth stroke.

I gasp, arching back against him, and he growls, his hands tightening as he starts to move. His pace is relentless, each thrust driving me closer to the edge again. I move with him, my body instinctively matching his rhythm, and when I finally tip over, it’s with a sob, my entire body shaking with the force of it.

Rokkon follows me a moment later, his growl turning into a groan as he collapses on top of me, his body heavy and warm. He shifts after a moment, pulling me against his chest as he spoons me, his arms wrapping around me like a protective shield.

“I love you,” he murmurs into my hair, his voice soft but fierce.

“I love you too,” I whisper back, my eyes already drifting shut. As I drift off to sleep, I feel him press a kiss to the top of my head, and I smile, knowing that when I wake up, he’ll still be there. Always.