



Eat Slay Love

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Category: Romance

Description: One night of indulgence.

As a sought-after film intimacy coordinator, Rae has spent years choreographing passion on screen while her own love life has faded into the background. This year, she's planning to change things. And it starts with taking herself out on a solo date at New York's most exclusive, \$5,000-a-plate restaurant, where every bite is a masterpiece and every sip of champagne tastes like wealth.

But she never expected him. A devastatingly handsome, French enigma, watching her with unfiltered hunger. Dangerous in the way powerful men are. Possessive in the way that ruins lives and makes women drip with hunger.

As Rae surrenders to a world of culinary pleasure, she's left wondering will this only be a fun solo date or will she become a delicious course on his menu?

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Sex Choreography

Rae

Tension buzzed throughout the movie set as we all prepared for the film's first sex scene.

Okay. Let's make sure everything is on point.

The set was an absolute masterpiece, designed to mirror the opulent and dangerous world of *Blood and Vows* —the viral mafia romance novel that had captivated millions of women and sparked fanfics, memes, and even custom playlists.

Expecting this to be a blockbuster hit, the production team had spared no expense, pouring what felt like half the movie's enormous budget into this one room to ensure it would look as breathtakingly seductive as fans had imagined.

Just another day making two impossibly gorgeous humans pretend to have the kind of sex regular people can only dream about.

I grinned.

Totally normal.

The bedroom was drenched in decadence.

Rich, dark velvet covered the walls.

The centerpiece of the space was this massive bed, draped in blood-red silk sheets that shimmered under this massive chandelier.

A fireplace dominated one wall, its flames simulated for safety but no less mesmerizing.

Above it hung a painting of a dark, stormy ocean, the kind of thing you'd expect to find in a villain's lair. On the mantle, gold chalices and an antique pistol sat side by side, little touches that felt ripped straight from the book.

To the left of the bed was a small table set for two, complete with crystal glasses and a decanter of what looked like whiskey.

And not just any whiskey—there was a label I couldn't quite make out, but I'd overheard the props team gushing about it being some insanely rare vintage that had cost a ridiculous amount of money, even though no one would ever actually drink it.

But it was the little details that really made the set sing. A knife glinted on the bedside table, encrusted with tiny rubies. Next to it was a single, wilting white rose, its petals blackened at the edges.

This scene is going to be insane.

I didn't even want to know how much they spent to make the room smell perfect, but it worked. It felt like stepping into the pages of the book itself—a place where passion and violence intertwined.

“Let's see.” I walked around, checking everything one last time. “Anything else?”

My assistant, Gisselle followed behind me. “I believe we have everything double checked, Rae.”

“Perfect.”

She looked at me. “What time do you leave for your trip?”

I checked my watch. “I’m out of here in four hours.”

“Rae, I hope you have an amazing time.”

“Me too.” My eyes landed on the ropes coiled neatly on the side table.

They looked innocuous enough—soft, silk-blend ropes dyed a deep crimson to match the set’s color palette—but I knew better than to trust appearances. This wasn’t my first time working on a scene that involved restraints, and I’d learned early in my career that safety always had to come first.

The last thing anyone needed was for Ava Laurent, the biggest star on the planet, to pass out—or worse—because someone didn’t test the equipment properly.

Picking up the ropes, I ran my fingers along their length, and gave them a few experimental tugs, testing their strength and flexibility.

Next, I tied a simple loop around my wrist, snug but not tight, to see how it felt.

No pinching.

No constriction.

Good.

I undid the knot. “Gisselle, do we have a pair of scissors in my kit for just in case?”

“We do, and I added another pair just in case.”

“Excellent.”

Having my career-defining project remembered as "Actress Dies Filming Mafia Romance Sex Scene" wasn't exactly what I had in mind for today.

I scanned the space, super excited.

We were about to film the infamous scene where the hero had just killed the heroine's kidnappers and carried her—still trembling and bloody—back to this very room.

The scene fans had dissected a thousand times, theorizing over every line, every breath.

This wasn't just a scene.

This was the moment .

And if we didn't nail it, the internet was going to tear us apart.

I took my coffee from Gisselle. “Let Marco know that we're ready.”

With a nod from Gisselle, the director Marco rose from his chair with the script clutched tightly in his hand.

Gripping my coffee, I headed off to the side.

The cameras hummed steadily.

The main camera guy, Santana rolled the dolly into position with a soft creak, muttering something about the “magic angle” for the perfect shot.

I took a sip of my coffee, wishing I’d told Gissele to add an extra pump of caramel syrup.

And right on cue, Ava Laurent strolled in.

The moment I spotted Ava, I was reminded of how impossibly perfect she looked. The kind of perfect that didn’t just come from youth but from being crafted by the European gods themselves.

Even though the make-up artist had splattered her with fake drops of blood and a few strategic smudges on her face, her long, platinum-blond hair cascaded down her back like liquid sunlight, and those icy blue eyes were so sharp they could probably cut glass.

She moved with a natural grace, her tall, slender frame gliding across the set like she owned the space.

Well. . .she kind of. . .did.

At just twenty-three, she was the new It Girl of Hollywood, and everyone knew it, including her.

I, on the other hand, was. . .well, let’s just say, not the kind of woman who turned heads in a room.

My dark brown skin naturally shimmered and. . .I thought, was downright stunning, even if the rest of the world rarely noticed.

Today, my medium-length kinky hair was twisted into a simple updo, practical for the long hours on set but with just enough flair to make me feel, dare I say, cute.

It wasn't the kind of beauty that stopped people in their tracks, not the kind that graced magazine covers or had men stumbling over themselves to hold open doors.

But it was mine, and in my quieter moments, I took pride in it.

But where Ava was all angles and sleek lines, I was curves—full, unapologetic, holy hell, that's a lot of CURVES .

I was working on loving those curves, though.

Had even started therapy about that and more.

Either way, my big bust was a lot, even on a good day, and my hips?

Well, let's just say that finding jeans that fit properly was a workout in itself.

My ex used to love those curves—at least until he didn't. And for the past ten years, since the divorce, I'd been wondering if anyone else ever would love my curves again.

But the thing was. . .I was also getting to a place where maybe. . .finding love didn't matter so much anymore.

Ava's melodic chuckle rose in the air, tying around Marco like a velvet ribbon. As usual, the director was completely enthralled, gesturing animatedly, clearly enjoying her attention.

She had him—and, honestly, every other man on set—wrapped around her perfectly

manicured finger.

But how could I blame her?

In an industry like this, a woman either learned to use the tools she had, or got chewed up and spat out.

And Ava?

She wasn't just surviving.

She was thriving.

Swallowing, I adjusted my blazer, shielding my tummy as it pushed against my dress's fabric.

You are worthy. You are deserving.

My therapist—bless her determined soul—had given me that mantra to say to myself anytime insecurity snaked up into my heart.

She'd also given me homework for Valentine's Day this year.

"Take yourself out," Her tone left no room for debate. "Love yourself the way you want to be loved, Rae. That's where it starts."

I hadn't argued, though I'd rolled my eyes at her suggestion of dressing up and taking myself out on a romantic fancy trip.

I checked my watch.

Soon.

I barely had time to refocus before Liam Grayson strolled in, wearing only a robe loosely tied around his waist.

My first thought—same as always—was that it truly wasn't fair for one man to look like that.

Sculpted like a god, Liam was the kind of man who didn't just turn heads; he left entire rooms gaping. Broad shoulders, chiseled jawline, deep-set hazel eyes that looked like they held secrets—everything about him screamed leading man .

But what set him apart—what made him stand out in an industry overrun by self-obsessed, narcissistic pretty boys—was his personality.

He was sweet .

Genuine, even.

He was the only person besides my assistant who asked me how my day was and actually waited for the answer.

At thirty-eight, Liam was still very much in his prime.

I, on the other hand, was forty-seven.

A decade older than him and worlds apart from the early-twenties models and starlets he was always photographed with. His type was women with flawless skin and tiny waists, who looked like they'd just stepped out of a fashion campaign.

It was probably why I hadn't had sex in ten years, pretty much giving up with

competing with those types of women in California.

I wasn't bitter about it.

I knew my place—both in life and on this set.

I was the behind-the-scenes woman, the one who made sure everything ran smoothly so that men like Liam could shine.

You are worthy. You are deserving.

I put my view back on the set and sipped more of my coffee.

The studio lights blazed down on that massive bed.

I hope everything goes smoothly today.

A second later, Marco barked through his megaphone, "Rae! We need you on Liam's patch!"

What?

I froze mid-sip, coffee hovering dangerously close to my mouth.

Liam, what did you and your cock do today?

For women, the modesty patch was straightforward enough—a discreet thong-like covering, flesh-colored and adhesive, designed to cling to the actress's treasure like a second layer.

It stayed secure even during the most vigorous choreography.

Simple, functional, and, dare I say, almost boring.

But men's patches?

Oh, those were an entirely different beast.

They weren't just discreet.

They weren't sleek.

No, they were. . . inventive .

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Essentially, it was a sock—yes, an actual sock—for that part, complete with a drawstring, like a tiny, fabric sleeping bag cinched around the crown jewels. Because apparently, the modesty gods decided that men needed a touch of whimsy with their dignity.

A literal drawstring.

I always imagined some pervy inventor came up with the idea as he laughed in his lab.

Of course Liam can't get all that cock in there. Had me up all night searching for the biggest one.

Sighing, I handed my coffee to my assistant, Gissele. "I'll be right back."

"Uh. . ." She blinked a few times. "I could do it for you, Rae."

I knew how big of a Liam fan Gissele was. If she had to adjust his modesty patch, there might be a serious lawsuit triggered with her as the clear aggressor.

"I've got it, Gissele." I smirked. "Just keep my coffee warm and my notes ready."

Being an intimacy coordinator was equal parts choreography, therapist, and mediator—though nobody ever warned me about the weird in-between moments.

One minute, I'd be explaining the exact angle a kiss should land to look good on camera, and the next, I'd be crouched under a satin sheet, making sure a strategically

placed modesty patch didn't peel off mid-take.

Let's see what's up with Mr. Sexy.

Just as I started walking, he got in my way and towered over me. "Morning, sunshine."

"Morning to you, Liam." I chuckled. "You stay giving me trouble."

"I swear I'm not trying to, Rae."

Liam greeted me with his signature devilish grin, the kind that had half of Hollywood's population (and all of its gossip blogs) under his spell.

I crossed my arms over my chest. "Alright. Let's see what you did."

It wasn't every day I had to secure a modesty patch on the man People magazine had twice named the Sexiest Man Alive .

Ava sashayed over and pulled her phone out. "Let's get this scene going, Liam. I have an interview during lunch and it's going to take forever to get all this blood off me. Plus, it's Valentine's Day."

"Never rush greatness," Liam replied.

Ava walked off.

Liam undid his robe, letting it slip off his shoulders like he was starring in an Old Spice commercial.

Oh. . .that's what God gave you?

The rumors were true. His fans would absolutely not be disappointed. In fact, they'd probably cry tears of joy.

Warmth hit me, but I shoved that away.

I was not here to ogle his cock. My job was to keep Liam's very large assets hidden from the world.

Alright. Let's fix this.

I leaned my head to the side.

The modesty patch's fabric was stretched thin, straining under the sheer size of his cock, barely covering anything it was supposed to.

The thick length sat lopsided, the adhesive edges curling slightly, as if it had given up halfway through the job.

Wrinkles bunched along one side, only emphasizing how inadequate it was for the task at hand.

Ummm.

There was no hiding the sheer mass of his cock. Every ridge and vein pressed against the fabric, outlining him with such clarity that the patch seemed almost pointless—a flimsy, laughable attempt to contain something that clearly refused to be contained.

“Okay. I know what to do.” I glanced over my shoulder to call over Gissele and was shocked to see that my assistant was already right by me. “When did you get over here?”

A lusty blush spread across her face. “I. . .uh. . .figured you would need my assistance.”

I bet your horny ass did. . .

I rolled my eyes. “Get the backup modesty patches for me, please.”

“Are you sure you don’t want me to take this modesty patch off first?” She pointed to Liam’s cock. “I could do that. I don’t mind.”

I scowled. “Go get the backups.”

“Of course.” She cleared her throat and hurried away.

Liam—none the wiser to how he had all the women on set close to combusting—hummed a tune and winked at me. “You think you could fix this?”

“Yeah. I’ll hook you up. You kind of. . .put it on wrong and perhaps that one is too small.”

“Cool.” He gave me a nervous smile. “You know in all my years of filming, this is my first sex scene.”

“No way.”

“Yeah. It’s always been action stuff, jumping from exploding buildings or taking down a villain in a river of blood.” Then, he lowered his voice. “I’m. . .actually a bit worried this is going to be a disaster.”

“Are you trying to say I can’t do my job?”

“You’re perfect. I’m the one that may mess this up.”

“Breathe. You are ready to kill this moment and make movie-goers worldwide go crazy in the theater.”

He sighed.

“And do you want to know something that might make this easier for you?”

He looked skeptical but nodded hesitantly. “Yeah?”

“Filming an action scene is actually a lot like filming a sex scene.”

That caught his attention.

He quirked his brows. “How?”

“Both are about creating intimacy—just in different ways. With an action scene, you’re building tension between the characters, the stakes are high, and every move has to feel deliberate, like it matters.

With a sex scene, it’s the same thing—except the stakes are emotional , not physical.

Either way, you’re telling a story through movement. ”

He blinked at me. “Story through movement.”

“Yep.” I gave him a thumbs up. “We’ve already choreographed your moves days ago, so now your biggest job is to show the new connection that has come from all you both have gone through. And in your eyes. . .”

He leaned in closer.

“Make sure there is desire. Vulnerability. Every touch, every look, every pause. . . make the audience feel what the hero is feeling.”

“Ooo. I like that a lot.” He ran his fingers through his hair. “I feel better too.”

“Perfect. The more confident you feel, the hotter the scene will be. And if something ever feels off, just stop and call for me when you need me.”

“Oh God. Rae, you are so perfect. I’m so glad you’re here.”

“Thanks.”

Gissele returned in record time, clutching not one but four backup modesty patches like she was offering me holy relics.

Her cheeks were still flushed, and she couldn’t quite meet my eyes or Liam’s, but she managed to hand them over without saying something that would end up as Exhibit A in a future lawsuit.

“Thanks.” I shooed her off before she could get any ideas about ‘helping’ again.

Liam, bless his beautiful and clueless heart, began humming some old-school R&B song while I crouched down with the new patches.

Just another day at work.

The situation required creativity. I’d never had to combine two modesty patches before, but Liam’s, um, dimensions left me no other choice. Using one patch as a base, I strategically layered a second patch for extra coverage.

It was like erotic arts and crafts.

“There,” I secured the final piece and tugged at the drawstring lightly, making sure everything was snug but not uncomfortable. “That should hold.”

“Thanks, Rae.” He winked. “You’re my fairy godmother.”

I snorted. “Well. . .let’s get this scene happening before Marco or Ava kills us.”

“Good point.”

With him properly patched up, it was time to get the actors in position on the bed set. The crew got busy tweaking lighting and adjusting cameras which gave me a few moments to check in with Ava and Liam.

With all modesty patches in the appropriate places, they both got on the bed in the center of the set.

“Alright.” I clapped my hands to get their attention. “Let’s talk through the scene one more time to make sure we’re all comfortable. Ava, how are you feeling about the choreography?”

“Fine.” She looked up from her phone. “It’s just another day at work.”

“And Liam?” I turned to him. “Any concerns? Questions?”

“No. Just don’t forget.” He flashed me that million-dollar smile. “I want to have everyone watching going crazy, so tell me when it is bad.”

I winked at him. “I’ve got you. I already taught you the right moves for this scene.”

“And I practiced all night.”

A heavenly sigh loudly sounded behind us, and without seeing who did it, I knew that was my assistant imagining Liam thrusting those hips in perfect rhythmic fashion all night.

“Okay.” I pointed to them. “Let’s get in position.”

They did with no problem—gorgeous, tanned bodies uniting in perfect harmony.

Pure visual poetry.

This will be the hottest scene of the year.

I double-checked the placement of everything, making sure their angles were flattering to the camera but not too revealing.

“Excellent.” I gave them a thumbs up, got to the side, and signaled Marco.

“Looking good, people!” he shouted through the megaphone and went over to the main cameraman. “Let’s get this shot!”

I exhaled a long breath, grateful that everything was finally in place.

The set fell into a hushed silence as the camera began to roll.

Liam and Ava fell into their characters, easily slipping new invisible masks on their faces.

It wasn’t just acting—it was alchemy .

“You’re mine. Forever.” Liam’s fingers grazed Ava’s cheek, and his touch was the kind that spoke of longing, devotion, and something just shy of obsession.

Ava’s bottom lip quivered as if so overtaken with passion.

Good job, guys.

Liam leaned in, and their lips brushed together in a kiss so hot and tender that it made the air on set feel charged, electric.

Damn.

They began the movement of making love.

Just. . .perfect. . .

I swallowed hard, telling myself it was just a scene, that it was my job to create this moment.

And yet, there was something so hauntingly beautiful about the way they moved together, like two parts of the same soul finally colliding.

Wow.

The firelight flickered in the background, casting a golden glow over their skin.

“Oh.” Ava arched her back as Liam’s hands roamed her waist.

The blood-red sheets beneath them shifted.

I smiled.

Every kiss, every touch was carefully choreographed, yet it didn't feel staged.

It felt real.

Too real.

I bit the inside of my cheek, trying to focus on the technicalities—the angle of Liam's hand, the fall of Ava's hair, the timing of her gasp.

But instead, my mind drifted to places it shouldn't.

To the hollow ache in my chest.

They looked so perfect together, like a living, breathing fantasy brought to life. It was easy to see why the director knew fans would be obsessed with this pairing.

But watching them now, I felt something I hadn't expected—a sting of loneliness that burned sharper than I'd care to admit.

I wasn't envious of Ava, not exactly. She was beautiful, yes, and talented beyond measure, but it wasn't her looks or her fame that made my heart twist.

It was the way Liam looked at her.

Even though it was all pretend, there was an intensity in his gaze that felt like it could shatter the world.

Like she was the only thing that mattered.

And I?

Well. . .

I'd never been looked at like that.

Not even during my marriage.

Not even during the times I'd thought love was enough to hold two people together.

I took a deep breath, willing the emotions away.

Concentrate.

This wasn't about me.

This was about them.

About the scene.

About making something beautiful, something that would make people feel.

But wasn't that the problem?

This scene would hit theaters, and millions of women would watch it, aching for something they might never have. They'd see this moment—the passion, the connection, the devotion—and it would remind them of all the things missing in their own lives.

And here I was, helping create that heart-shattering ache.

That thought settled heavy in my chest.

I forced my gaze back to the set.

Ava let out a soft sigh as Liam pressed his forehead against hers, their breaths mingling, their movements slow and deliberate.

Liam whispered, “I love you.”

My heart ached some more.

“I love you too.”

The camera zoomed in.

It was mesmerizing.

And it was devastating.

I shifted my weight, my blazer suddenly feeling too tight, my skin too warm.

My mind wandered to my upcoming trip, the one I’d been planning for months.

A solo romantic trip for Valentine’s Day.

Just me.

The thought had thrilled me when I first booked it. I’d secured a reservation at one of the most exclusive restaurants on the planet, Alchemy—a culinary temple so revered that just getting on the waitlist was considered an accomplishment.

It had one Stellar star.

Thankfully, Liam had hooked me up and got my name on there.

This wasn't just dinner.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Twenty courses.

All flawless masterpieces presented like art on a plate with hidden mysterious experiences.

And the price?

\$5,000.

I sighed.

But now, watching this scene—watching two people create a moment so intimate, so connected—I couldn't help but wonder if the trip would be enough.

Could this amazing experience in New York truly fill the emptiness currently creeping into my chest?

Or would I sit there, surrounded by strangers, and feel more alone than ever in my life?

Tension gathered in my shoulders.

Maybe. . .I shouldn't do it.

My throat tightened as the thought pressed against me, threatening to unravel

everything I'd built myself up to feel tonight.

Rae. . .we're better than that.

I swallowed.

You are worthy. You are deserving.

And with that, something snapped in my heart—not in a way that hurt, but in a way that broke chains.

You're going to have an amazing trip.

I fisted my hands, not in anger or frustration but in resolve.

No, I wasn't going to sit in some Stellar-starred restaurant feeling sorry for myself. I wasn't going to shrink into my chair, avoiding eye contact, hiding behind my phone, or letting loneliness creep into a night I had planned with so much care.

No, ma'am. Not tonight.

This Valentine's evening, I was going to be the goddess I deserved to be.

Liam and Ava's fake moans rose in the air, and I stood up straighter, tilting my chin higher as I finally realized that every inch of me was worthy of love, admiration, and indulgence—and if the world didn't see that, I damn sure would.

You are worthy. You are deserving. You are goddamn amazing.

I was going to put every ounce of my energy into having the best trip of my life, no matter what.

Let's do this.

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Chapter one

The Queen Arrives

Rae

"Girl, enjoy your date tonight, and I hope you get lucky—with yourself!" My bestie, Laila teased. As always her laughter was contagious, lighting up the other end of the phone and reaching across the distance between us.

"I'm most definitely going to be lucky with myself tonight."

"I know that's right, Rae. That picture you sent me." She whistled. "Girl, you are looking GOOD! You got to post it on the Gram. Hell, post it everywhere—Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, LinkedIn."

"Not LinkedIn though!"

"Let these men know you're a full-course meal, not some microwave dinner."

"But LinkedIn?" Chuckling, I stepped out of the elevator into the Four Seasons' lobby.

My six-inch heels clicked sharply against the polished marble floor.

"You put it on LinkedIn and some hot CEO might creep into your DMs trying to give you a position ." She laughed. "And the position is not a job, baby. It's your legs up

in the air, girl!”

Keeping the phone to my ear, I did my best to keep my chuckling down, but I knew I looked a hot cackling mess as I breezed past the concierge desk.

The Four Seasons’ lobby was a masterpiece of extravagance—towering columns, dangling chandeliers, plush velvet chairs in deep jewel tones, and massive floral arrangements in every corner.

The scent of fresh roses and lilies filled the entire building.

Everything about this space screamed indulgence, and for once, I felt like I belonged here.

Not because I was here for work.

No.

This moment was mine.

The high-level suite I’d splurged on?

Mine.

The black fur coat that gave me a very classic Hollywood look.

Mine.

The shimmering hot pink gown that hugged every curve—hips, thighs, belly, bust—like a second skin?

Mine.

The confidence simmering in my chest?

All mine.

Laila pulled my attention back to her. "Promise me you'll have the time of your life tonight."

"I promise."

"No matter how the night goes, okay? Remember, you're a queen."

"I am a queen." I strode forward.

Heads turned as I moved through the lobby—men and women alike. Some glanced discreetly, their gazes darting to me and then away, while others lingered, openly watching.

I couldn't tell if their attention was because I looked fucking amazing tonight or because they weren't used to seeing a plus-sized woman unapologetically owning her space in a shimmering, bright pink gown that was anything but subtle.

In fact, a lesser version of me might have shrunk under their gaze, might have smoothed her hands over her hips or tugged at the hem of her dress in an effort to disappear.

But tonight?

Tonight, I was done with hiding.

Done with blending into the background.

Done with playing small to make other people feel comfortable.

BBW women were always told to wear black. Always encouraged to hide their bodies in shapeless, flattering silhouettes that promised invisibility.

The world didn't want us to stand out—not too much, not like this.

But tonight, I was saying to hell with all of that.

You are worthy. You are deserving. You are goddamn beautiful.

I made those words my mantra, repeating them from the moment I left the movie set, throughout the entire plane ride, and even as I unpacked and got ready in New York.

I didn't just let them float through my mind—I clung to them like a lifeline, letting them echo in every corner of my thoughts.

Over and over, they looped: You are worthy. You are deserving. You are enough.

And then something shifted.

For the first time in a long time, I felt those words take root deep within me, anchoring themselves in places I hadn't realized were still hollow.

I wasn't just repeating them to convince myself anymore.

I wasn't just hoping they'd stick.

I believed them.

Every single word.

I said them until they began to drown out the noise of my self-doubt. Until they weren't just words but truths I carried with me everywhere I went.

My bestie brought me back to the phone conversation. "You've got this, Rae."

I could feel the warmth of Laila's encouragement wrapping around me like a shield.

I smiled. "Laila?"

"Yes."

"What the hell would I do without you?"

"Girl, you would do what anyone would do when they've lost me, lay in a fetal position in some corner and cry."

I laughed. "Well. . .I'm so thankful for you. I love you, girl."

"And I love you more."

I continued toward the entrance. "Now when are you going to send me a sexy picture of you in that red dress?"

"I haven't squeezed into it yet."

"Why not?"

"I'm enjoying my ability to breathe for as long as I can."

I smirked. “It is not that bad.”

“I should have went a size up, but such is life. I’m wearing that damn dress, even if it burst open on the sides by the end of the night.”

I chuckled. “Bring your fur to cover it up.”

“You know I will.”

“What do you think Jerry has planned for you tonight for Valentine’s?”

“That bastard didn’t plan anything.” She huffed, a blend of irritation and humor in her voice. “I reserved it all. He better be on his best behavior too, or I swear, I’m taking a page out of your book next Valentine’s Day and taking myself out instead.”

“Hey, don’t you talk bad about Jerry.” The grin on my face softened into something warmer.

Laila let out a dramatic sigh. “Alright, alright. I won’t throw him under the bus entirely. He has been pulling his weight, especially with the twins.”

“Yep.” I slowed my stride as I reached the entrance of the Four Seasons.

The doorman smiled warmly at me and held open the door.

As I stepped outside, the cool Manhattan air kissed my skin.

I returned to my conversation with my bestie. “You’re doing amazing as a new mom, Laila. Seriously, to me you’re a superhero.”

“And what are superheroes without a sidekick?” Laila quipped, though her voice had

relaxed, and I could hear the affection underneath the joke.

“Jerry’s been my sidekick for sure. He works all day in that dentist office, dealing with people’s raggedy ass teeth to only come home and stay up with the babies all night so I can get at least a couple of hours of sleep.

He’s running on fumes, but he’s still doing it. ”

My heart warmed. “That’s love, Laila. Real love. He gets it.”

“True.” Her tone grew thoughtful. “It’s funny because sometimes I feel guilty, like I should be the one staying up all night since I’m home during the day.

But he always tells me, ‘Laila, your job is keeping this house running and making sure the kids are happy and healthy. That’s not just important—it’s everything . ’”

“Le sigh.” A soft ache bloomed in my chest. “This is why. . .not too much on Jerry. I told him he could call me anytime if you’re bothering him, and I’ll come down there and beat you up.”

“And he likes to threaten me with you too.”

“You better act right. That’s big bro.” And then I saw it.

Pulling up to the front of the hotel was my ride for the evening—a sleek, jet-black Rolls-Royce Phantom.

You are worthy. You are deserving.

It looked more like a work of art than a vehicle. The iconic Spirit of Ecstasy hood ornament was perched proudly at the front.

The chauffeur stepped out, unfolding his tall, lean frame from the front seat with the kind of effortless grace that could stop traffic. His crisp black suit hugged his broad shoulders and tapered perfectly down his athletic build, every inch of him dripped with sex.

His dark brown skin gleamed with a healthy sheen like he'd been kissed by the sun and polished by the gods.

A neatly groomed beard framed his strong jawline, perfectly accentuating high cheekbones and a mouth that looked like it could charm the soul out of anyone.

Mmmhmm.

And those eyes—deep, dark, brown, and endlessly captivating—held a glint of something playful beneath the professionalism.

He looked my way, and I almost melted right there.

“Girl.” Grinning, I lowered my voice. “My ride is here and the driver is finneeee.”

“Now that’s a good sign for the theme of the evening.” She snapped her fingers on the other end. “May every man you see look like he’s sculpted from God.”

“Amen.” I strolled over.

He gave me a panty-wetting smile, and his voice rolled out low and smooth, like honey warmed over a fire. “Good evening, Ms. Harris. I’m Dalvin. I’ll be your driver for this evening.”

The way he said it made the simple greeting sound almost sinful, like he could turn this holiday into something far more intriguing.

I nodded. “Nice to meet you.”

With a practiced efficiency, he moved to open the back door for me, bowing slightly as he gestured for me to enter.

I spoke into the phone, “Alright, missy. Have fun tonight.”

“I will, but you better send me a picture of this fine ass chauffeur.”

I climbed into the back of the Phantom. “Girl, how am I supposed to do that?”

“A proper lady finds a way.”

“Girl, I am getting off this phone.”

He closed the door.

“Wait, Rae. Don’t forget to post that picture on LinkedIn like I said. You never know—some tech billionaire could see it and slide into your DMs, offering to fly you to his private island.”

“Oh my God.” I chuckled. “Bye, Laila.”

“Post the picture, Rae! I’m serious!” Laila’s laughter was the last thing I heard before the call ended.

She is too crazy.

I scanned the space.

The interior of the car was nothing short of a dream. The seats were upholstered in

the softest black leather. Ambient lighting glowed from hidden fixtures. There was even a starry ceiling of tiny pinpoints of LED light twinkling overhead like the night sky.

I leaned back into the plush seat.

The chauffeur, Dalvin slid into the driver's seat and glanced at me in the rearview mirror. "Is the temperature to your liking, Ms. Harris?"

"It is perfect."

"Would you care for some music?"

"That sounds great." Smiling, I turned to the right and caught my reflection in the window.

For a second, I barely recognized myself. The shimmering pink gown, the radiant skin, the spark of confidence in my eyes—it was all me, but it felt like a new me.

Wow.

Dalvin pressed a button.

Next, jazz rose within the car, enveloping me. A saxophone wailed alongside melodious drums.

"Next stop. . .Alchemy." Dalvin nodded and pulled us away from the curb. "Happy Valentine's Day."

"Thank you."

As we glided through the city streets, I couldn't help but let out a small laugh, my excitement spilling over.

Manhattan on Valentine's Day was a sight to behold. Couples strolled hand in hand down bustling sidewalks, their faces illuminated by the glow of shop windows displaying everything from glittering diamonds to bouquets of red roses.

Taxis honked impatiently, weaving through traffic like yellow bullets.

Above it all, the Empire State Building glowed pink and red which must have been a tribute to the love-struck holiday.

"Will you be meeting your husband at Alchemy?" Dalvin's tone was casual yet curious.

"No."

"Then, boyfriend."

"Oh no—"

"Oh. I'm sorry. Girlfriend?"

I smirked. "No. I'm solo this evening. My therapist told me I should spoil myself, so here we are."

He chuckled, and his laugh was deep and rich. "That's good advice. More people should do that."

"And what about you?" I met his gaze in the mirror. "I know you are working this evening, but did you spoil anyone this Valentine's day?"

“Well. . .do you promise not to judge?”

“Of course.”

He frowned. “I made sure to work tonight since I’ve got a wife and a girlfriend, and I didn’t want to have to choose who to take out this evening.”

I blinked, caught off guard. “Excuse me?”

He shrugged. “It’s complicated.”

“Uh. That’s one way to look at it.”

“You said you wouldn’t judge.”

“Hey. . .to each’s own.”

For some reason, he beamed. “Anyway, Alchemy is a big deal for a solo date. I’ve driven celebrities there—actors, musicians, even a couple of politicians. You’re in for a treat.”

I got more excited. “Cool. Now I’m getting even more hyped.”

We continued our journey, the rhythmic humming of the Phantom's engine and the soft jazz music almost lulling me into a dreamlike state.

I watched as the cityscape shifted and changed, from the glow of Times Square to the less ostentatious but just as beautiful brownstones that lined the side streets.

Our conversation ebbed and flowed into a comfortable chatter between strangers sharing a unique moment.

The whole time Dalvin guided the car through the pulse of Manhattan's streets, weaving between steel giants and glass reflections until we arrived at a place that felt like it existed outside of this reality.

Oh wow. Is this it?

Looming before us, bathed in the amber glow of NYC's heartbeat, was an imposing building—an architectural paradox of old-world grandeur and modern elegance.

And then, the doors.

Two massive black monoliths, each twenty feet high and five feet wide, stood like guards at the threshold of something sacred.

Like. . .seriously. . .the doors didn't need to be that big—no earthly function required them to be—but that was the point.

They were theatrical.

An enticing declaration.

An endearing invitation.

They looked like they would swing open to reveal an enchanted kingdom—a realm where unseen forces wove possibility into reality.

Where the lost could be found.

Where the ordinary could be touched by the extraordinary.

Dalvin parked in front and got out.

When he came over to me and opened the door, I hesitated for a moment.

Not out of fear, but out of awe.

Above those doors, a single word shimmered in gold, carved with the confidence of something eternal:

Alchemy.

I let out a long sigh and left the car, saying the name in my head.

Alchemy.

This was a word steeped in ancient longing, in the dreams of those who once sought to transmute lead into gold.

Mortality into immortality.

Darkness into light.

Alchemy was the art of becoming.

Of refining.

Of emerging anew.

And as I stood there, heart hammering like an alchemist's chisel against stone, I realized that I, too, had come here with a transformation in mind.

Not of metal.

Not of matter.

But of self.

I was here to forge something more valuable than gold.

I was here to rebuild my worth.

Reshape my radiance.

To step across this threshold and into the truth I had carried in the quiet corners of my soul all my life—that I was meant to be seen.

To be loved.

To take up space as the queen I had always known myself to be, even in the moments I had doubted it.

Even when I'd been treated like the opposite.

Dalvin smiled at me. "Make sure you have the time of your life, beautiful ."

A blushing smile spread across my face. "I will."

Then, I exhaled and strolled forward.

Alright. Here we go.

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Chapter two

The Unholy Hunger in His Eyes

Rae

I stepped inside, and the world shifted.

The first thing I noticed wasn't the people standing in the dimly lit room but the way the space itself breathed.

The ceiling stretched high above, painted in the deepest black, scattered with tiny glimmering silver lights like an endless midnight sky.

Starlit and infinite.

There was no telling where the black walls ended, as if we had stepped into some celestial void—a place where time unraveled, and the ordinary no longer applied.

This is just. . .amazing.

A soft mist curled along the floor, delicate as silk, swirling around my ankles with each step.

The scent of something exquisite and decadent filled the air—amber, vanilla, and a hint of spicy smoke—like the lingering memory of a passionate night.

I exhaled, letting it settle into my skin.

Alright. This place is going to blow my mind.

There were others in the space too. Around seven couples, each of them beautiful, privileged, and exuding the kind of effortless wealth that didn't need to be flaunted—it simply existed in the way they moved, the way they carried themselves.

Elegant.

Poised.

Men in tailored suits, women in dazzling gowns, furs draped over shoulders, diamonds sparkling.

Their hushed conversations spilled between soft laughter and murmured flirtations.

An older man with a sharp jawline whispered something to his much younger companion, his Patek Philippe glinting as he brushed his knuckles along the pearls at her throat.

Another woman adjusted her Cartier bracelet, leaning into her date as if he were the most fascinating man in the world.

The air crackled with intimacy and indulgence.

I inhaled slowly, steadying myself, trying not to feel like the outsider in my shimmering pink gown.

Then, I felt it.

That feeling.

The unmistakable weight of being watched.

I turned my head, pulse kicking up, and found him , standing ten feet away.

Tall.

Dark.

Ridiculously handsome.

Like. . .panty-wetting.

A man built for Hollywood camera lenses and self-touching fantasies.

Leading man fine—razor-sharp cheekbones, a chiseled jaw, lips that looked sinful even when at rest.

Yet he stood there, six feet tall and in the flesh, boldly watching me without the slightest hint of shame.

Oh damn.

His eyes—unholy green, the color of emeralds held up to candlelight—burned into me as if they saw something deeper than what I had let the world see.

I bet when he first walked in here, the very space sighed.

His black hair was dark and effortlessly tousled.

His body was slim, but toned like he worked out weekly not for strength, but for control.

And he was dressed in a sleek tuxedo that must have been intended to trigger visual orgasms.

Yet. . .there was something foreign about him too. Something too elegantly refined about him to say that he was American.

His very stance screamed that he was a man who had grown up on luxury.

On art.

On passion.

Is he looking at. . .me?

I slyly turned away, knowing I'd already gawked over him long enough. I did a quick check around me and only saw the black wall.

However, I could still feel his bold gaze on me.

Why is he staring like that? Have you never seen a Black woman before?

A little bit of anxiety seized me.

Relax.

I breathed in and out.

You're just. . .freaking out because he's fine as hell and watching YOU.

For God's sake, he was the type of man I'd want to intimacy coordinate on a set. Someone so devastatingly gorgeous that I wouldn't hesitate to adjust his modesty patch, to smooth my hands over his cock in a perfectly professional manner—while swallowing the heat curling at the edges of my composure.

Keep it cool. Hey. . .you do look gorgeous as well. If I were a man, I would stare at me too. . .right?

If Laila had been here, she would have made a damn scene.

She wouldn't have let me stand here overthinking this moment, wouldn't have let me drown in the quicksand of my own self-doubt while a man that fine was burning holes into my soul with his gaze.

No way.

Laila would have let the entire room know that I was single.

Loudly.

She would have waved him over like she was conducting air traffic control at JFK, grinning from ear to ear, snapping her fingers like a damn Cupid in designer heels.

"Eh, you! Yes, you! She's single! Come get her number!"

Hell, she might not have even bothered waiting for him. She probably would have just started yelling my number out herself, or even worse, gotten it directly from my phone and handed it over like a gift-wrapped invitation to my thighs.

That thought alone almost made me laugh out loud.

Instead, my clutch buzzed in my hand.

I reached inside, fishing for my phone, knowing it could only be one person.

Laila.

And I was correct.

I read the text.

Laila: I checked your LinkedIn and didn't see the picture. Give me your username and password so I can hook you up.

I grinned.

You are relentless.

I typed back quickly.

Me: Never mind that. You better have your ass in that gown and ready to go. Don't have my big bro waiting for his hot date night.

I hit send and tucked the phone back into my clutch, shaking my head.

Laila was the perfect wing woman, even from miles away.

Alright. So. . .I'm sure his date is back or whatever. I'll just. . .you know. . .glance that way to confirm.

I slipped my gaze along the walls like I was so into their blackness and then. . .slyly. . .I turned to the left and checked him again.

Fuck.

He was **STILL** staring at me.

Not glancing.

Not casually looking.

But **BOLDY** staring.

And that stare wasn't polite.

It wasn't casual.

It was the kind of gaze that should've been illegal in public spaces—hungry, unfiltered, dark with something that sent a flush down my spine.

Alright now, handsome. I kidnap fine men so. . .be careful.

As if he heard me, the line of his jaw twitched.

Mmmm.

I blinked, heart hammering, and turned away sharply, not used to that kind of attention.

That level of enthusiastic intensity from any man.

Maybe. . .he would like me to kidnap him.

I swallowed, exhaling slowly.

Okay. Listen. You're daydreaming.

There was no way he was alone. No man that looked like that would be by himself on Valentine's Day. His model lover was probably in the bathroom, powdering her nose, or fixing a gown that had cost more than my entire trip.

Still. . .

I glanced back one more time.

Eh. . .this is crazy.

He was still watching me.

And this time, his mouth curved with a hint of wicked knowing.

Heat curled in my belly—low and slow—unexpected but impossible to ignore.

Well damn. I stand. . .corrected. . .maybe. . .

Before I could fully process everything, a soft, refined voice interrupted my thoughts.

"Ms. Harris?"

I turned to the right and spotted a tall, slim man in a perfectly tailored velvet tuxedo. He was Asian, with delicate features that sharpened at the edges. His jet-black hair was slicked back.

On each of his fingers sat a gleaming red diamond ring.

I gathered myself. "Yes. I'm Ms. Harris."

He smiled. "Ahh. You have arrived. Excellent. My name is Cosmo. And yes"—he chuckled—"my parents actually named me that."

I smirked. "I like the name."

"My grandparents didn't." He gave an exaggerated shrug. "But what can you do? Anyway, we will begin in a few minutes."

"Awesome."

"Can I take your coat?"

"Oh, yes." I slowly slid it off.

The luxurious fur slipped away, and soon I was handing it to him.

Cosmo widened his eyes. "This is a lovely fur. Russian sable?"

"Yes."

"Breathtaking." He sighed like he was looking at a lover. "I'll do my best not to drool over it."

I laughed softly. "A little drool won't hurt it."

Grinning, he headed away, pressed at the bud in his ear, and murmured something into it.

I scanned the space again, noting how most of the couples were lost in quiet, intimate conversations.

Only a few people had noticed me.

But one pair of eyes hadn't left me.

I turned again.

He was still watching me like a man who had no plans to eat anything at Alchemy but me.

Alright. I am not imagining anything.

A breath lodged in my throat.

Then, a soft, melodic chime rang through the room.

I put my view in that direction.

Cosmo stood at the front with a crystal bell in his hand. He lifted it in the air and rang it again.

The soft, melodic chime sounded.

Cosmo took us all in. "Good evening, Alchemists."

Excitement flared in my chest.

"We will now begin our experience where magic meets food in the most alluring ways." Cosmo lowered the bell to his side. "There will be some small travel and moments before you are actually seated."

A woman giggled, clearly giddy with the possibilities of tonight, and I felt the same

energy rush through me.

Cosmo's grin widened. "But, before we enter the first course, does anyone have any questions?"

To my surprise, a hand lifted.

I turned and saw it was the man who'd been watching me.

Aww. He wants us to wait on his sexy date to get out of the bathroom. I bet \$100 that's the case.

He parted his lovely, full lips, and before a single word left them, I knew—I just knew—that whatever sound came out of that mouth would do unspeakable things to me.

And then, he spoke.

Dark.

Deep.

A voice made for sin.

No.

It wasn't just a voice.

It was a caress .

A slow drag of seductive fingertips down my back.

A dirty, lustful murmur in the dark.

The kind of sound that belonged in low-lit hotel rooms.

And my poor, starved pussy?

She fucking JUMPED like a puppy at the door when its owner comes home.

Like she had her own set of ears and had been waiting—ten years—to hear a voice like that again.

At this point, my pussy was basically feral.

A neglected houseplant desperately reaching for sunlight.

A parched desert praying for rain.

A dry-ass biscuit begging for honey and butter.

Alright. Calm down.

I clenched my thighs before she embarrassed me further.

Because this man?

This six-foot-something, foreign, green-eyed temptation?

He sounded like he could make a woman forget her own damn name.

“Cosmo,” he said. “I have one question, before we begin.”

There was this accent to each word, something smooth, deliberate, and just a little indulgent, like the way melted chocolate draped over a spoon before it slipped onto your tongue.

Is he. . .French or at least, French-adjacent?

It wasn't the thick, cartoonish accent that actors fake in bad romance movies, but the real thing. It was subtle, refined, rolling through his syllables like each one had been carefully selected for seduction.

There was rhythm to it.

Oh, I know this man isn't actually French, because if he is. . .

Just like that, I saw myself rushing out to get rope and duct tape to actually kidnap him. Of course I would need to send Laila a large sum of money so she could eventually bail me out of jail for the crime I was destined to commit.

I smirked.

Cosmo raised his eyebrows. "Yes, Mr. Lyon [Lee-yon]. What is your question?"

And to my utter shock, Mr. Lyon—the man with the unholy green eyes gestured toward me. "Will we be waiting on her guest?"

What?!

I parted my lips.

Heat crawled up my neck.

Heads turned.

Suddenly, I felt the collective weight of everyone's attention shift to me.

What the hell?

Cosmo, to my horror, smiled wickedly. "Thank you, Mr. Lyon, for your. . .concern, but like you. . .Ms. Harris is dining solo."

Oh, fuck.

I blinked.

He's alone too?

I barely had time to react before Mr. Lyon turned those sinful green eyes back on me.

And he wore that look again.

That I want to ruin you look.

Cosmo's soft chuckle broke the moment. "Perhaps. . .love is in the air."

A few couples snickered.

I widened my eyes, and even more heat flashed across my cheeks.

"Now." Cosmo clapped his hands together. "Let's begin with the first course."

I swallowed.

And Mr. Lyon?

Well. . .he did not stop looking at me .

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Chapter three

Tunnel of Desire

Rae

Cosmo rang the bell again, and a low mechanical hum vibrated through the space.

Next, the black wall behind him began to rise, inch by inch, unveiling a tunnel bathed in a deep, shimmering red light. It wasn't just red—it was liquid, alive, moving like molten rubies in the air.

The glow pulsed, stretching along the length of the passage.

Magical.

A ripple of excitement swept through the guests. Murmurs of anticipation, soft gasps of delight. A woman giggled in that giddy, oh-my-God-this-is-about-to-be-an-experience kind of way.

This place wasn't just about luxury—it was about alchemy in the truest sense.

Transformation.

“Follow me, please.” Cosmo turned around and strolled into the shimmering tunnel.

One by one, the couples followed, stepping into the tunnel.

I took a slow breath and prepared to follow.

But then. . .I realized Mr. Lyon hadn't moved.

What is he waiting for?

He stood there, unbothered, unrushed, watching the others disappear ahead.

I eyed him.

He turned and met my gaze. Then, ever so casually, he extended a hand toward the glowing entrance. "After you."

That damn voice made my pussy jump again.

I swallowed. "Thank you."

Girl, you need to calm down.

I stepped forward, conscious of my gown gliding along my skin and the click of my heels against the glossy floor.

And then—oh.

I passed close enough to him that I caught the scent of his cologne. Something expensive, dark, and devastatingly male.

Mmmm. I love a good-smelling man.

His cologne wasn't just a scent.

It was a damned experience all by itself. Warm spice and smoked woods, a soft hum of bergamot with a deeper earthy note that wrapped around my senses like a lover's hands on my waist.

I wouldn't have minded just standing next to him and inhaling his scent for the rest of the night.

Focus, girl. You are on a date with YOURSELF and you're over there checking on someone else. So naughty.

Chuckling, I entered the tunnel and took it all in.

The walls weren't solid—they shimmered, moved, pulsed. As if made of light itself.

Tiny, suspended particles of reddish gold dust floated around us, catching in my kinky curls and kissing my bare arms.

Music rose from nowhere and everywhere, a sensual mix of jazz and deep, throbbing bass.

Alright now.

The music made me want to dance, but I kept it chill and simply walked forward. That was when I caught the sound of Mr. Lyon keeping a smooth pace behind me.

He must have been barely three feet away.

Next. . .I felt it again.

His gaze.

Not just on me.

But, directly on my ass.

Oh. Really, Mr. Lyon?

Every woman with a big ass had this super power—a built-in, factory-installed feature, like a sixth sense.

And currently, every single sensor in my ass was going off.

Mr. Lyon wasn't just looking.

He was locked onto my ass.

Not just noticing.

It was a he-would-sell-his-soul-to-bite-my-ass kind of stare.

It was a weighted presence, like a hand hovering just above my skin.

Like an invisible grip on my curves.

Like he was measuring.

Memorizing.

Devouring.

Worshipping.

And my ass?

My ass had the nerve to love the attention.

I kept walking, trying to act completely unfazed, but inside?

Inside, I was absolutely giddy.

Next, a low, rough, guttural sound came from deep in his chest.

Oh.

A sound a man makes when he wants something.

Badly.

I bit my lip to keep from grinning.

Well. . .let's have some fun.

I adjusted my posture, shoulders back, spine straight, chin up, and decided—fuck it. If he was going to stare at my ass like it was a five-course meal, then I was going to give him a damn show.

I put just a little more sway into my hips.

Not much.

Just enough to create a sinful jiggle.

Another dark groan left him, so low and guttural I nearly stumbled.

Will I need to call the police on this man?

The thought made me want to laugh, but I held it in, loving this feeling of being wanted.

No.

Not just wanted.

Desired.

And then, boldly, deliberately, I reminded myself of the most important thing before any self-doubt could rise.

I am worthy. I am deserving.

Within this tunnel, heat lingered in the air—not stifling, but intoxicating.

Every step I took made the floor glow slightly beneath my feet, fading as I moved forward, as if the tunnel were responding to me.

And through it all—I still felt him.

His presence right behind me as well as the weight of his gaze.

The knowing that if I slowed down, even slightly, he'd be right there.

Too close.

Too much.

Too overwhelming.

And I fucking LOVED it.

I swallowed, trying to steady my breath. But my skin felt warm, my heart wouldn't settle, my body was so hyper-aware of his presence it was maddening.

Then, his sexy voice curled through the air, low and direct, cutting through the haze of heat like a blade of silk. "I must confess something."

I glanced at him over my shoulder, heat still thrumming through me. "Yes?"

Then, just like that, he got beside me, and it was so damn smooth.

So fluid.

He slipped his gaze down my curvy body, and that French accent coated his words. "I was waiting for your foolish date to arrive."

I quirked my brows. "Foolish?"

His green eyes flickered with something unreadable. "What man would let someone as gorgeous as you walk into any space by herself? Surely he would know that a man like me would be waiting on the side, waiting to. . ."

His voice dipped with wickedness.

I swallowed.

His gaze darkened. "And I was waiting."

My breath caught.

He raised a brow. "So now. . .I imagine that your boyfriend is a surgeon of some sorts with a career-heightening schedule for tonight."

A surprised chuckle escaped me. "What?"

He studied me. "Is that why your boyfriend didn't show?"

"No."

"Not a surgeon?"

"Absolutely not."

"Then, a highly decorated detective who just minutes before leaving for dinner, just found a pertinent clue for a case involving a deadly serial killer. He wanted to come, but he had to sacrifice this moment for the greater good."

I laughed—loud, unrestrained.

A couple ahead of us glanced over their shoulders.

I quieted, turned toward him, and whispered. "I don't have a boyfriend."

He actually parted his lips in shock.

Then, he gave me a slow blink. The kind of blink that looked like a system reboot of some sorts.

His voice came out quieter, but somehow heavier. "No boyfriend?"

"None." I shrugged. "Tonight. . .I am taking myself out on a date."

A slow smirk spread across his lips. "Aww."

I narrowed my eyes. "What?"

"How very American."

I scoffed. "Are you mocking America?"

"Unfortunately, mocking America is a fun hobby of mine."

I rolled my eyes, but I was smiling.

He tilted his head slightly. "Taking yourself out?"

"Yes."

"That's very nice." A beat passed. Then, a shift in his tone happened, and so goddamn smoothly he licked his lips and said, "However, tonight, I propose a plan."

"O-kay?"

"Take yourself out another time."

I blinked.

He hit me with a look that should have been illegal. Low-lidded, heavy with erotic promise look.

"Tonight," he whispered, "spend this exquisite dinner with me."

And the way he said it. . .it didn't sound like he would take any answer but yes.

Oh my.

I had been jokingly talking about kidnapping this man in my head earlier, but right now? He looked to be the true one about that kidnapping life.

A soft sliding noise sounded behind me.

I turned, heart skipping, and realized that the entrance behind us had sealed shut.

The only way was forward.

I swallowed, pulse unsteady, and turned back. . .only to find him watching me again.

Not just watching.

Lustfully staring.

And his gaze?

Dead-set on my voluptuous breasts.

I stumbled slightly, turned away, and fixed myself.

Girl. . .

But I felt him step closer.

Subtle.

Deliberate.

His presence too big, too strong, too much.

And I loved it.

Oh fuck. Should I spend this night with him?

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Chapter four

The Answer

Rae

Keeping my pace with me, he lifted his gaze to my eyes. "What's your answer, Ms. Harris?"

If Laila had been here, she would have screamed, "Bitch!!! Of course you are going to spend this date with him!"

However, tonight was supposed to be about owning myself. At least that was the excuse I was giving my shivering heart as I walked forward.

Mr. Lyon kept my pace and remained patient, but I could also tell that he was thinking of possible counterarguments just in case I said no.

Girl. . .you're scared. Aren't you? Just admit it.

I had spent my entire life not being chosen.

Especially not by men like him—one that looked like sin in a suit and watched me like I was something they'd been waiting for their entire life.

Not by men who had the power to make any woman in the world melt at their feet.

And here I was with one of those men standing next to me, waiting for my answer like I was the only one who mattered.

And even crazier, now that I was being chosen, my mind still struggled to believe it.

My heart knew I was worthy. I had spent these past months convincing my heart that I was deserving of love, of romance, of being seen.

But my mind?

Unfortunately, I think my mind was still lagging behind.

It was still the younger version of me—the dark chubby girl with barrette plaits—who had spent her childhood watching smaller girls get picked first, who had overheard adults murmur about her weight when they thought she couldn't hear them, who had trained herself to believe that love—real, thrilling, all-consuming love—was for other people.

But never for her.

Not for girls who took up space.

Not for girls who had been told to shrink their entire lives.

And now here I was, no longer that girl.

I was a grown-ass woman who was currently fighting to love herself, who had walked into this night knowing she deserved magic, romance, something unforgettable.

And yet, in this one moment of being truly seen, I still had to convince my own damn

mind to let me have it.

Shit.

Because if I said no right now. . .it wouldn't be because I didn't want him.

It wouldn't be because of society's beauty standards.

It wouldn't be because of my weight.

It wouldn't be because men like Mr. Lyon didn't want women like me.

It would be ME.

Me holding myself back.

Me blocking myself from joy.

If I said no, I wouldn't be able to blame a thousand things—magazine covers, dating apps, men who made cruel jokes, childhood wounds that still stung in my quietest moments.

Tonight, the only thing standing between me and a night of possibility was my own self-doubt.

My fear.

My hesitation to believe that I could step into the kind of life I had always wanted.

I shivered, and my therapist's words came rushing back.

"At young ages, we are programmed with negative self-talk. We don't come into this world believing we are too much.

We are taught to believe it. And your path to success isn't waiting for that voice to disappear—it's pushing through it.

It's breaking it away, piece by piece. It's realizing that fear doesn't have to be a stop sign.

It can just be a mile marker on the way to something great. "

I breathed in deep, feeling the heaviness of that truth settle into my bones.

I had two choices.

I could say no, walk away, and spend my entire life wondering what would have happened if I had just let myself step into the magic waiting for me.

Or I could say yes.

Yes, to him.

Yes, to this night.

Yes, to the version of me who wasn't afraid to take up space, to be seen, to be wanted.

Yes, to the woman I had spent so many years becoming.

Alright then. . .that's settled.

So I straightened my spine, turned to him, and tilted my head. A wicked smirk teased the corners of my lips. "If I say yes. . .what happens next?"

He exhaled slowly, like I'd just handed him a wrapped gift and he wanted to savor the moment before he tore it open.

Then, he leaned in.

Not enough to touch, but enough to fill every inch of space between us with his heat, his presence, his scent.

His voice was low, deep, sinful. "You'll find out."

My pulse skipped.

"But I promise, Ms. Harris, you won't regret it."

Mmmm.

I wet my lips, mouth suddenly dry, body suddenly too warm.

A decision sat on the tip of my tongue, one I had already made before I even asked the damn question.

I lifted my chin and met his gaze head-on. "Then, yes. Let's enjoy this dinner together."

And in that moment, something shifted. His entire body visibly relaxed, but somehow, his intensity doubled and his eyes darkened, glimmering with something a little unholy.

"Good," he murmured.

And then. . .the tunnel ahead of us began to open.

A new space, glowing with golden light, unfolding like a secret being revealed.

And just like that, the experience truly began.

I stepped into pure decadence.

This dining space was stunning, as if someone had plucked it straight from a fantasy.

Golden candlelight flickered from massive crystal chandeliers, casting a soft glow over plush velvet seating and towering floral arrangements.

The scent of roses, vanilla, and spices curled through the air, warm and intoxicating.

And the tables—only ten of them in the entire space—were arranged for intimacy.

One couple per table.

No excess.

No distractions.

Only the person in front of you.

I should have expected it, but still, my stomach flipped when I saw our table.

The other couples were already seated.

Cosmo appeared in front of us.

“Here you go.” He walked off, and we followed.

Soon, Cosmo stopped us at one table, as if he’d already heard our conversation or at least sensed the inevitable outcome of this moment.

I turned my gaze to the table and my breath caught in my throat.

It wasn’t just a table. Beneath the sleek glass surface, an entire living world thrived.

An aquarium.

Soft, ethereal light pulsed from within, illuminating a vibrant underwater landscape of coral, delicate anemones, and slow-moving, hypnotic fish that shimmered in deep blues, golds, and iridescent pinks.

The water was impossibly clear, giving the illusion that the creatures inside were floating in air rather than water.

Suspended in an infinite dream.

A school of tiny turquoise fish darted across the center.

A pair of butterflyfish—one the color of burning embers, the other as white as moonlight—circled each other in an intimate dance.

And at the very center, a single betta fish, dark crimson with a sweeping tail like fine silk, glided slowly through the water.

The entire thing was mesmerizing, surreal, and quietly breathtaking.

But then I noticed something else.

Two seats.

Positioned right next to each other.

Super close.

A deliberate lack of distance.

At first, I hesitated, taken aback by this unexpected arrangement.

But then I saw Mr. Lyon's eyes, dancing with mischief, and I swallowed the nervous lump in my throat.

My heart pounded with the exhilaration of stepping outside my comfort zone.

Mr. Lyon gestured toward the chairs. "Shall we?"

With a deep breath, I nodded and we moved towards our seats together.

He pulled out the chair for me—a classic gesture that had my heart fluttering in my chest.

"Thank you." I took my seat next to him, close enough to feel the warmth from his body radiating against mine.

All around us were couples—entranced by each other, oblivious to everything else.

Yet, the intimacy of our positions made everything else fade away.

Suddenly it was just me and him.

In this shared dream, nothing else mattered; no one else existed.

He turned to me, and his green eyes reflected the vibrant colors from the aquarium below. They were a world unto themselves, and I found myself entranced by their depths.

He gestured to our table. “Do you like this?”

“It’s incredible.”

“It is.”

The waitress approached our table with two glasses, tall and elegant, encased in swirling smoke that curled around the rims like a spell being cast.

I sat forward, intrigued, watching the way the light caught the mist, shifting it into soft ribbons of white.

“Good evening.” She set the glasses down in front of us.

I took her in.

She was stunning—deep brown skin, high cheekbones, and a confident smirk that said she’d seen it all. Her sleek black uniform fit like a second skin, and her short, coiled curls framed her face like a halo.

I liked her already.

"This is our first-course pairing, an exclusive cocktail that only exists within these

walls.

" She held her hands out. "It's called The Golden Mirage. Infused with aged Louis XIII cognac, saffron honey, Tahitian vanilla, and just a hint of smoked cinnamon, it's meant to awaken the senses—warmth, depth, a little bit of magic. "

I blinked. "Did you say Louis XIII?"

She smirked. "Oh yeah. That's about five grand a bottle. So, don't waste a drop."

My eyes widened. "Oh, I wasn't planning on it."

She chuckled. "It also has edible gold flakes, a hint of passionfruit puree, and a little touch of bergamot to round out the experience. Stir it gently before you sip. Let it coat your tongue."

Mr. Lyon nodded. "Very impressive."

She gave him a look. "I know, right? You're about to drink a car payment."

I laughed, and she winked before giving us both a little nod. "Enjoy, you two."

And with that, she sauntered off, leaving me staring at the ridiculously expensive drink in front of me.

He reached for his first, picking up the stem between two fingers before swirling it lightly. The golden flakes inside caught the candlelight, swirling like tiny stars suspended in amber.

Next, he lifted the glass to his lips, took a slow sip, and then gave a single approving nod. "Impressive."

I lifted my own glass, watching the smoke curl away as I brought it to my lips.

And then. . .

Oh.

Warmth.

Depth.

A perfect balance of rich, golden honey and smooth vanilla, kissed with the faintest whisper of spice.

Damn.

It rolled over my tongue like liquid silk, coating every inch of my mouth in something so decadent, so indulgent, that I nearly moaned.

I lowered the glass and exhaled. "That is dangerous ."

His lips curled. "Good dangerous?"

"I'm not sure." I laughed softly. "It's. . .luxury in a glass. It tastes like a stack of money and reckless decisions."

He chuckled, swirling his drink again. "And which one of those do you plan to have tonight?"

I smirked. "A little of both, maybe."

Lust blazed in his gaze before he leaned back in his chair, studying me over the rim

of his glass. "You're not from New York."

I smirked. "Neither are you."

"I'm from Paris."

"I figured."

"And where are you from?"

"I'm a Southern California girl."

"Aww. Very interesting."

I snorted. "Is it?"

"Very much." His gaze swept lazily over me. "That's where the glow is coming from on your breathtaking skin. It must be all the sun."

Heat licked at my cheeks, but I rolled my eyes playfully. "Are you always this smooth?"

He winked. "It's a French thing."

"Aww."

"Sorry, that your American men lack it."

"Wow. At least the French are humble."

"I don't think that word is even in our dictionary."

I chuckled.

He took another sip and then casually asked, "Are you a surfer?"

I actually laughed out loud. "Is that what you think of all California girls?"

"Of course." He playfully shrugged. "Fun in the sun, roller skates, beaches, and perfect tans."

I snickered. "Wow. So. . .you've never been to California?"

"Never. But now, I have an interesting reason to visit."

My heart warmed. "Yeah. . .you do."

For a moment, we just looked at each other.

I took another slow sip of my drink, my mind wandering—not just to the way he looked, or the way he watched me, but to the mystery of him.

Why was a man like this here, alone?

Why did it feel like he had a secret tucked between every breath, every gaze, every careful word?

Before I could ask, he set his glass down and lifted his eyes to mine. "What is your first name, Ms. Harris?"

"Rae." I watched him. "What's yours?"

He paused, then exhaled, as if considering his answer. Then, smoothly, he lowered

his voice like it was a huge secret, "Fabien."

I tested it in my head—Fah-BYEN.

It fit him.

But then he lifted a single finger. "Please, do not tell anyone here that is my name."

I blinked. "Why not?"

"It is a secret."

I frowned. "A secret?"

"Yes. As far as this restaurant knows. . .my name is Hugo Lyon."

"But. . .it's not?"

"It's not."

What the fuck?

I set the glass down. "So. . .what's your real last name?"

"LaCrocq."

The pronunciation rolled off his tongue with a lazy, velvety richness—Lah-KROH.

My pulse jumped.

That sounded very old-money French.

But. . .why does he have a fake name?

And suddenly, something in my gut twisted.

I had no idea who I was actually sitting with.

My heart thumped as I leaned back just slightly, the realization washing over me like ice water.

Was this man crazy?

Or worse. . .

Was he married?

Because it was all too good to be true.

A devastatingly gorgeous Frenchman, alone on Valentine's Day in the most exclusive restaurant in New York, choosing to spend his time with me ?

My inner alarms started buzzing.

And Fabien must have sensed it because he smiled—a slow, knowing, devastatingly amused smile.

I swallowed. "So then. . .why did you give the restaurant a different name?"

He leaned my way, coming too dangerously close in a way that set my body on fire. And that lush cologne of his wrapped around my senses. "Rae."

The way he said my name. . .well. . .it freaking made my pussy jump for the third

time tonight.

Girl, you need to calm down. This man might be crazy.

I kept my gaze on him, even though he was so close I could fucking kiss him. In fact.
. .I desperately wanted to kiss him. "Yes, Fabien?"

"Do you promise to keep a secret?"

I hesitated.

Then, slowly, I nodded. "Yes."

A flicker of mischief passed through his gaze.

And then, without another word, he slipped a hand into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and slowly opened it.

My stomach twisted, and anticipation crackled through my body.

And all I could think was. . .

What the hell is he about to show me?

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Chapter five

Top Secret and Tempting

Rae

What could he be hiding?

I tried not to let my anticipation show, but my fingers curled subtly into my lap as I watched him pull the wallet open.

My nerves buzzed with an unexplainable energy.

And then—I saw it.

A sleek black ID card, crisp white lettering at the top and his sexy picture.

Then, I read the words.

Stellar Star Inspector.

My jaw damn near unhinged.

“No way.” My voice wasn’t a whisper, but it wasn’t loud either.

Still, my shock was palpable .

He didn't move, didn't react—just let me stare, let me process, let me marinate in this revelation.

My knowledge of the Stellar Star process wasn't vast , but it was enough.

Enough to know that no one ever knew who these inspectors were—not the restaurant owners, not the chefs, not the staff, not even the guests who unknowingly sat around them.

And that secrecy was everything.

Because Stellar stars weren't just awards. They were golden fucking tickets in the culinary world.

One Stellar star?

You had an absolutely great restaurant that was better than the rest in your area and definitely worth stopping by.

Two Stellar stars?

Exceptional .

A place worth altering all travel plans to experience this once in a lifetime dining adventure.

Three Stellar stars?

A masterpiece .

The kind of dining that made grown men and women cry.

The kind of place where reservations were booked years in advance and chefs became legends.

I looked at Fabien again, this man who had effortlessly made my body betray me multiple times tonight.

“You—” I blinked. “You’re a Stellar Star inspector.”

He nodded.

Then, with the same smoothness that had been testing my self-control all night, he slid the wallet back into his pocket.

I sat there, stunned.

I had known he was wealthy—that much was obvious. The suit, the watch, the entire aura of someone who was used to being catered to.

But this?

This was power.

Real power.

A serious wealth flex.

Because a single review from him could change the entire fate of this restaurant. A good one would mean sold-out tables, worldwide recognition, and a seat at the industry’s most coveted table.

A bad one?

Could be a death sentence.

I swallowed, leaned in slightly, and kept my voice low. “So. . .Alchemy already has one Stellar star. Is this like a yearly review to see if they keep it? Or. . .are you about to give them a new one?”

His lips twitched. “You know this is classified information?”

I smirked. “Yet, you’re going to tell me.”

His green eyes flickered with amusement. “And why is that?”

“Because. . .” I leaned in even closer. His naughty gaze went to my breasts then lifted back to my eyes.

I winked. “Because, I’m nosy and awesome.”

And then he smiled.

Not the smirk, not the polite curl of lips he had been teasing me with all night.

A real smile.

A knee-weakening, gut-punching, full-on heartbreaker of a smile.

I almost reached for my drink just to cool the hell down.

“Yes. I will tell you because you’re awesome for sure.

” He let out a peaceful sigh like he was absolutely enjoying himself.

“And yes, Alchemy has one Stellar star. But the prior inspector believes it should now be at two . Under Stellar policy, a second inspector must confirm if the change is deserved.”

I let out a low, impressed breath. “Wow. So this could be a big night for the chef and staff, but they have no idea.”

“Exactly.” His gaze dipped to my breasts again, before lifting back up to my face. “Not that I’m going to be. . .truly paying attention to the dishes as much as I had initially intended.”

Oh.

Warmth flushed through me like champagne bubbles.

I picked up my drink and took a sip, because this man was going to ruin me.

Lust laced his next words. “I have suddenly become distracted from my mission tonight. Let’s hope the food can somehow wow me as much as you.”

Damn.

I cleared my throat. “How long have you been doing this?”

“Twenty years.”

“Wow. Is it fun?”

He tilted his head slightly, as if considering his answer. “Many would think so. I spend three weeks every month, daily, eating two full meals at various high-end restaurants all over the world. Basically, I don’t have a lot to complain about.”

“And how does one even get this job? Like. . .I’m probably going to apply.”

He chuckled. “Well. . .I went to culinary school. After graduation, I worked as a chef in a Stellar-starred restaurant for a few years. Had tons of articles written about me. Made my parents proud. Felt good. Then, I got bored with being a chef, quit, and became a food critic. I found that it was much more fun to be at the table, than in the hustle and bustle of the kitchen.”

He shrugged. “Eventually, I was approached by Stellar to be an inspector.”

I tried to do the math in my head. “So you’re. . .in your forties?”

“I’ll be hitting fifty this year.”

My brows lifted. “Really? Well. . .you look more like you’re about to hit forty.”

“Oh no, I’m not as young as you.”

I nearly choked on my drink.

He continued, completely unfazed by my near-death experience. “In fact, here’s some advice, young one , enjoy your thirties as much as possible.”

“Thirties?” I set my drink down, shaking my head. “Fabien, I am forty-seven.”

For the first time, his smooth seducing mask cracked.

Genuine shock flickered across his features. “Really?”

“Yes.”

His head tilted slightly as he assessed me. Then, with a slow, indulgent glance, he murmured, “Remarkable. Skating around the beach and surfing all day must really keep the youth in one’s skin.”

I rolled my eyes. “I can’t with you.”

His lips curled. “And what do you do, Rae, my California girl?”

The way he said my . . .it sent something warm curling low in my belly.

I cleared my throat. “I’m an intimacy coordinator in Hollywood.”

His brows lifted slightly. “An intimacy coordinator?”

“Yep. I choreograph sex scenes in films.”

He blinked.

Then, blinked again. “Oh my.”

I snorted. “Yeah. I’ve got a dope job too.”

He let out a slow breath, as if recalculating everything he thought he knew about me.

“Oh no. Your job beats mine.”

“No way.”

“It really does. What’s a film you’ve done?”

“Have you ever seen Seven Days ?”

“I believe the entire world has seen that movie and I’m sure a lot of babies were made after that.”

I chuckled.

His eyes darkened immediately. “Very steamy.”

I lifted my glass, pretending not to notice how his voice dropped a full octave. “Well, I coordinated all four sex scenes. So. . .you’re welcome.”

He stared at me like he wanted me naked.

I nervously finished my drink.

Then, suddenly, he exhaled and said, “I have so many questions, but none of them are appropriate.”

I raised a brow. “Oh really?”

“Oh yes.”

“Tell me them.”

“No.” His smirk was almost devastating. “I’m a gentleman.”

“Are you?”

He placed a hand over his heart. “Absolutely.”

“I feel like that’s a lie.”

He leaned in slightly and his voice shifted to a low purr. “Perhaps in a few weeks or months, I’ll ask you those very ungentlemanly questions.”

Weeks. Months. Oh he’s trying to put in some serious time with me. God yes.

“You’ll ask me later because. . .” I swallowed. “I’m going to give you my phone number?”

He didn’t even hesitate. “If you do not give me your phone number, I know people who can get it.”

I snorted. “That sounds very spy-like.”

“I’m basically an international spy.”

I laughed, but the anticipation in my veins buzzed.

Because this man—this French, sinfully smooth, dangerously confident man—was already planning to see me again.

And I wanted him to, but before I could respond, Cosmo reappeared, smiling as he presented the first course to the whole room and tons of waiters began to bring the plates over.

I checked out the one that our waitress placed in front of us.

Interesting.

It was a glistening, indulgent plate of something rich, sauced, and sensual.

"Hello, Alchemists," Cosmo said. "For this course, we have a special rule from the

chef on this Valentine's Day evening."

He scanned the room with a mischievous smile. "No utensils allowed. You must use your hands and you also must absolutely feed each other."

A ripple of laughter and hushed excitement spread through the space.

And just like that, he was gone, leaving us with a plate of food and nothing but our fingers.

Fabien exhaled, slow and amused.

"This should be fun." And with that, he lifted a single ball from the plate. Something warm, drippy, and decadent.

"I have no idea what this is, but I am absolutely amused." He turned it slowly in his fingers, letting the sauce glide over his skin.

Then, he looked at me and slowly brought it toward my lips. "Chef's rule."

I leaned forward, let my lips just barely brush his fingertips as I took the bite.

The way his fingers glistened with sauce.

The way his emerald eyes locked on my mouth, waiting.

It all made me wet.

Slowly, I opened my lips wider and he tenderly fed me.

The entire moment was pure foreplay.

Mmmm.

I swallowed.

The bite was warm, savory, rich, and sinful, but the food was the last thing on my mind.

Because Fabien hadn't moved those fingers from my lips and his gaze remained on my mouth too.

Oh my.

Then, with excruciatingly sexy deliberation and his piercing gaze fully on me, he lifted his hand to his mouth and licked the sauce off his fingers.

Mmmm.

I couldn't have coordinated a better intimate moment.

I clenched my thighs, suddenly realizing how big of a mistake my saying yes to enjoying the evening with him was because. . .I was in deep trouble with this man.

And the night had only just begun.

Chapter six

Fingers, Lips, and Everything In Between

Rae

As the minutes passed, we indulged in a sensuous dance of feeding. Our exchange of bites and sips felt more like a seduction than a mere meal.

Every time I reached for a bite to place near his full lips, the act shifted to a divine ritual, like offering something precious to an intoxicating man who knew exactly how to savor.

His lips—plush, sensual, the kind of mouth that was made for slow kisses and filthy promises—would part just enough, accepting the food with a kind of quiet indulgence.

And then, just as I would compose myself from him being so sexy, he would tilt his head and passionately swipe along my fingertips with his tongue in the most tantalizing ways, sending heat straight to my core.

Mmmm. He's doing that on purpose.

That much was clear.

And every time it happened, my breath hitched just a little more.

And my pussy kept on jumping, trying to get his attention.

She was already so wet.

So ready for him.

And trust me, I desperately wanted to act unaffected.

To keep the game light, to pretend that this was just playful teasing.

But every decadent slide of his tongue against my fingers, every flicker of his endearing gaze locking onto my mouth afterward, chipped away at my composure.

I was unraveling, and he fucking knew it.

Because Fabien—this too-damn-smooth Frenchman with a voice like silk and tongue that could probably ruin me—wasn't just eating.

No.

He was devouring me in ways that had nothing to do with food.

Oh fuck.

The way he held my gaze, the way he exhaled just slightly after each taste, the way his fingers lingered against my mouth for a second too long—it was all a promise.

A sensual preview.

A slow, torturous build toward something inevitable.

And God, I wanted it.

Wanted him.

Desperately.

Because sure, the dish was good—perfectly balanced, rich with flavor, worthy of its Stellar-starred kitchen.

But Fabien?

He was everything.

Every smooth glance.

Every hushed chuckle.

Every deep murmur of "Mmm, delicious" that he sent my way in that velvety accent had me clenching my thighs and barely holding myself together.

And the worst part?

I knew.

I fucking knew!

A man who could eat like this, with such unhurried indulgence, with such aching attention to every bite, was a man who could absolutely eat pussy like it was a religion.

Mmmm.

And in that moment, there was nothing I wanted more than to be the next thing he tasted.

My bestie's voice screamed in my head, "I double dare your ass to take him to bed tonight!"

I blushed, and hoped that he didn't catch it.

As the last morsel of the previous dish vanished from our plates, the staff glided in with seamless precision, whisking the dishes away.

Next, our waitress returned with the kind of effortless grace that suggested she had mastered the art of fine dining service.

In her hands, she cradled an elegant bottle of wine and presented the label—Chateau Margaux 2000—a vintage so rare and revered that even I, a casual wine drinker, recognized its prestige.

"This," she said with a knowing smile, "is one of the finest Bordeaux wines in existence. A Premier Grand Cru Classé, aged to perfection, with layers of blackcurrant, truffle, and the faintest whisper of violets."

I could already taste the fine liquid on my tongue.

She continued, "It has a velvety texture, a finish that lingers like a lover's touch, and was once served at royal banquets."

With that, she poured a measured stream into Fabien's glass first, then mine.

The deep ruby liquid caught the light. "Take your time with it. Each sip should be an experience."

“Amazing.” Fabien leaned back in his chair, watching me with that same slow-burning intensity that had been unraveling me since we met. His gaze, heavy with interest, traced the line of my lips before lifting to meet my eyes.

I picked up my glass, tilting it slightly to let the deep ruby liquid swirl and watching as it clung to the sides. "Do you live in New York?"

"God no." He shook his head, looking genuinely horrified. "If I did, I would need to be on suicide watch."

I let out a surprised laugh. "I swear, if you keep dissing America like this, I'm putting in a complaint with the French embassy."

"Ah, but then you would have to deal with French bureaucracy, and that is an entirely different kind of torture."

"Fair point." I smirked. "So where do you live?"

"Paris," Fabien picked up his glass, lifted it to his nose, and deeply inhaled.

Then, he took a quick sip and nodded in enjoyment.

"My condo is in the 7th arrondissement, home to the Eiffel Tower.

In fact, my terrace has a perfect view. And.

. .my neighbors are famous artists, top diplomats, and old-money aristocrats. "

I snapped my fingers. "Talk that shit."

He laughed, deep and rich. "Well. . .that is my humble way of trying to entice you to

visit me."

"There was nothing humble about that."

"As I said before, the French can be out of practice with being humble." His smirk was devastating.

My heart was drumming in my chest, this pull between us growing tighter.

I took a slow sip of my wine, and it coated my tongue like silk, impossibly smooth, rich with an almost sinful depth. Heat curled low in my belly as the flavors expanded

Fabien sipped his wine too. His throat moved as he swallowed, and I had no business finding that as erotic as I did.

Once he set the glass down, he quirked his brows. "So no boyfriend or lover for me to compete with?"

"No. I'm completely single. What about you? Are you dating?"

Fabien exhaled. "Until now. . .I had not been able to find someone to even spark my interest."

I scoffed. "I find that hard to believe."

"Why?"

"You're in the city of love. Surely, there are elegant women all over the place."

He leaned forward, just slightly, just enough that his presence seemed to wrap around me. "Elegant women are plentiful in any city across the world. In fact, I've yet to ever

see a woman that isn't stunning in some way. Every woman on this Earth is beautiful.”

He raised one finger. “But a woman that makes me freeze. One who just. . .causes my heart to pulse fast. Makes my head spin and my mind want to know more and more about. . .well. . .”

He exhaled again. "That happened tonight , and it's been a good ten years since that has occurred."

Those words hit deep within me. "And. . .ten years ago?"

His expression shifted, the teasing light in his eyes dimmed slightly. "That was when I met my ex-wife. Obviously, we're now divorced. The marriage lasted for four years.”

He paused, glancing up at me, searching my face for something—maybe judgment, maybe curiosity.

I stayed silent, giving him space.

His jaw flexed before he let out a soft, self-deprecating chuckle. “I was wrong back then,” he admitted, tapping his fingers lightly against the base of his glass. “I thought love was supposed to be about perfection, yet effortless too. Like it wouldn’t take so much work.”

He shook his head. “But love isn’t effortless. People aren’t effortless. And I. . .I didn’t know how to be patient. How to listen . How to meet someone where they were instead of where I wanted them to be.”

His voice dipped, and when his eyes lifted to mine again, they were softer than

before, open in a way that made my chest tighten.

“But she was wrong too,” he said, almost hesitant, like it pained him to admit it.

“She also demanded a version of me that didn’t exist. A man who never second-guessed, never faltered, never needed time to figure himself out.

And I let her believe that was who I was, thinking maybe I could become that man if I tried hard enough.

But in the end, we were just. . .two people loving ghosts of each other instead of who we really were. ”

He picked his glass up, took a long sip, and then set it back down with a quiet thud. “That’s why I don’t rush things now because love—real love—deserves honesty and time. And I won’t make the mistake of giving someone a mirage of me ever again. They must know me and all my imperfections.”

I didn’t realize I was holding my breath until I finally let it out, something deep and aching twisting in my stomach.

Because damn.

That was a confession.

A real one.

No bravado.

No arrogance.

Just a man admitting that he had been wrong, that he had learned, and that he refused to repeat those mistakes again.

“The other lesson I took away from my past marriage. . .”

I hung on the edge of my seat.

“I lost a woman from not being a good enough man.”

I blinked.

“I vowed to never do that again in my second marriage. It’s now been six years of my being single.”

“Oh.”

“My friends say I closed myself off, but I don’t like to rush the possibility of love. I always believe that the right woman will show up when I’m the right man to love her.”

I stared at him, stunned into silence. It wasn’t just the words—it was the way he said them.

The quiet conviction.

The raw honesty.

The surprising vulnerability.

I knew Fabien was cultured, refined in a way that made charm second nature. A man like him—wealthy, effortlessly smooth, steeped in the kind of confidence that only

came from privilege and experience—could probably seduce any woman with a well-placed compliment and a well-aged bottle of wine.

And yet, what struck me wasn't just the elegance of his words, the practiced cadence of a man who knew how to keep a conversation dripping with intrigue.

No.

It was the fact that he wasn't hiding behind those things.

He wasn't just leaning on charm or mystery to keep me interested—he was giving me something far more valuable.

Honesty.

He'd cracked himself open, just slightly, letting me peek into the corners of his past, his wounds, his healing.

A typical playboy would never.

A man just looking to fuck would never either.

This?

This was different.

Because for all his flirtation, for all his seductive teasing, he had just done something far rarer—he had made himself vulnerable .

And that made me feel like maybe, just maybe, I wasn't a passing amusement to him.

Maybe I was something more.

Someone he actually wanted to know, not just seduce.

And God, that was dangerous.

Because for the first time in a long time, I felt the ground shift beneath me.

I swallowed. "And now you think you are the right man?"

Fabien's lips curved into something faint and thoughtful. "I've been working on myself, doing the things people do to heal. Therapy. Meditation. Even did a trip with my friend to try Ayahuasca."

My eyes widened. "Oh my God. How did that Ayahuasca trip work out?"

He chuckled, shaking his head. "It was thrilling and terrifying. I think. . .I might have had a conversation with God."

I leaned in, intrigued. "And what did God say?"

Fabien exhaled slowly, like he was reliving the moment.

"God told me that love isn't something we chase.

It's something we become . That when we learn to love ourselves without condition, when we are whole in our solitude, then love will walk toward us naturally.

And it won't feel like we're grasping at something just out of reach. It will feel. . .like breathing."

A shiver ran down my spine.

I wasn't sure if it was his words or the way he looked at me as he said them.

I took another sip of my wine, letting the rich velvet of it coat my tongue, buying myself a few extra seconds before I spoke. "I, uh. . .I'm also divorced."

Fabien's expression remained unreadable, but his focus on me sharpened. His green eyes—already deep with interest—darkened as if urging me to continue.

Oh God. Do I tell him everything?

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Chapter seven

Stripped of Pretense

Rae

He wanted to know about my past, and I was nervous.

Fuck.

I hesitated, my fingers tightening around the stem of my glass.

How much should I say?

How much could I say without looking like a damn fool?

Because the truth was—I hadn't always been smart when it came to love. Back then, I had ignored the warning signs, swallowed the hurt, and let myself shrink just to keep the peace.

And now, sitting across from a man like Fabien—who exuded power, self-awareness, and the kind of confidence that came from real growth—I didn't want to look weak.

I didn't want him to see me as a woman who had once let someone chip away at her piece by piece.

I wanted him to see me as strong.

But if I wasn't honest, then wasn't I just playing a role, the same way I had back then?

I exhaled slowly, bracing myself.

Fuck it. If he was bold enough to give me his truth, I could do the same.

I exhaled softly. "I divorced ten years ago."

A flicker of something—understanding, maybe—crossed his face, but he stayed silent, letting me set the pace of my own story.

"I married too soon without truly knowing him," I tapped the side of my glass. "And at the time, I thought I had everything I was supposed to want. A husband. Stability. A life that made sense on paper."

I let out a small, humorless chuckle. "And I was smaller back then. Not thin, exactly—I've never been thin. I was always just a little chubby, even as a kid. But when I got married, I was probably the smallest I've ever been."

Although Fabien did not speak, I could feel the intensity of his focus on me.

I took another breath. "Then, after about a year, I started gaining a little weight. Not a lot—ten pounds, maybe. But the way my ex saw it, I might as well have gained a hundred. He started calling me, his sweet little. . .Butter Ball."

The line of Fabien's jaw twitched.

I gave a small, nervous smile, though it didn't quite reach my eyes. "He used to. . .playfully threaten to chain me to the back of his car and drive around the block so I could run the pounds off."

Fabien's entire expression hardened. His easy, flirtatious demeanor disappeared in an instant, replaced with something that looked an awful lot like restrained fury. . .as if he were struggling to hold himself back from loudly cursing.

My stomach twisted. "I would laugh it off because, you know, if you don't laugh, you cry. And. . .besides, it wasn't like he meant it, right? That's what I would say to myself."

My voice softened. "And the funny part? He had gained weight too. A whole lot more than I did. And I think. . .no. . .I know that's where all the focus on me came from. His own hate for himself. He needed something to project it onto, someone to feel worse than him, someone to take the hit."

Fabien exhaled sharply, his grip tightening around the stem of his glass.

"But because I didn't love myself enough either, I stayed in the marriage. Even when his words got sharper. Even when his jokes turned into real disappointment, real disgust. Even when I started eating more and more just to cope with it all."

The silence between us stretched thick and heavy.

Fabien's voice, when it finally came, was quiet but firm. "You deserved better than that."

"I know that now." I forced a small smile. "But it took me a long time after the divorce to figure it out. Years of therapy. A lot of exercise, but not because I wanted to be thin—just because I want to feel good in my own body and be healthy. Also meditation. EFT tapping—"

"What is that?"

I blinked, surprised. “You’ve never heard of EFT?”

He smirked. “French men don’t exactly sit around discussing healing methods over wine and cheese.”

That made me chuckle. “It’s called the Emotional Freedom Technique.

It’s kind of like acupuncture but without the needles.

You tap your finger on meridian points of your body—like your face, collarbone, hands—while saying affirmations or processing emotions.

It helps rewire negative beliefs, ease anxiety. I do it all the time.”

Fabien’s gaze flickered with intrigue. “You’ll have to show me.”

I grinned, arching a brow. “You? Mr. Broody Parisian Playboy? You’re willing to tap on your face for emotional healing?”

His lips curved in amusement. “For you, chérie , I’ll try anything once.”

The way he said it sent a shiver down my spine.

I cleared my throat, needing to ground myself before I completely melted in my seat. “Anyway. . .I’ve been divorced for ten years now. And. . .”

“And?”

“Celibate too.”

His brows shot up, and something unmistakable flickered across his face.

Hunger.

Interest.

A deep, predatory sort of intrigue.

His voice was lower now, like he didn't quite believe it. "No sex for ten years?"

"None."

His gaze scanned me like he was seeing me in an entirely new light. "Do you miss it?"

"Of course." I shrugged. "But I won't let any man into my bed again unless he deserves to be there."

Those green eyes went wild and I wondered what was on his mind. "Mmmm."

Cosmo reappeared, smiling that foxlike grin of his as he lifted a delicate golden pitcher. "Now, we begin the true essence of alchemy!"

We both turned Cosmo's way.

Waiters began placing dishes onto our table.

Cosmo raised his hands in the air. "This is the first of three transformations tonight. We call it Chrysopoeia —the transmutation of the ordinary into gold."

Before me, a sleek, obsidian-black bar sat in the center of the table.

Next, our waitress placed a small, crystalline carafe filled with a shimmering liquid

that rippled between bronze and silver as if caught between worlds.

Cosmo gestured grandly. “Alchemy is about change—about taking what is and seeing what it could become. So, I would like you to do this. Please, pour your elixir over that bar on your plate, and witness the impossible.”

Oh this is so much fun.

I lifted my carafe, the weight of it cool in my palm, and tilted it over the black surface.

The moment the liquid touched the bar, it bled outward like veins of molten metal, shifting from dark obsidian to a radiant, gleaming gold.

Oh shit.

The transformation was instant, mesmerizing, and I couldn’t help myself—I chuckled, giddy with delight.

Fabien didn’t pour his immediately. Instead, he turned toward me, his emerald eyes devouring the way I smiled, the way my joy lit up the space between us.

In fact, he looked enthralled —like he’d rather watch me than the miracle happening on the table.

The loveliness of his attention sent a delicious thrill down my spine.

After a long moment, he finally poured his elixir, but his gaze never left me.

“Don’t eat that just yet.” Cosmo, seemingly pleased by the reactions in the room, pressed forward. “Next, we move to the Elixir of Life —the legendary drink said to

grant immortality, to defy time itself.”

Cosmo lifted his hand, and the waitstaff flowed in, placing before each of us a delicate glass filled with a glowing pink liquid.

Wisps of smoke curled up from its surface, spiraling like a living thing, the scent of something exotic and decadent filling the air.

Cosmo winked. “Try the elixir.”

I lifted my glass, hesitant but intrigued, and took a sip.

Oh.

The moment it hit my tongue, it was as if the drink exploded inside me—bright, floral, citrus, and honeyed warmth unfolding in waves that lingered, stretching out the moment into something infinite.

Just. . .wow.

I pressed my lips together and let out a shuddering breath, stunned by the sheer pleasure of it.

“Holy shit,” I whispered, setting the glass down carefully, because I needed a damn moment to process what was happening in my mouth. “I think I might actually live forever.”

Fabien still hadn’t touched his. He just watched me, his expression dark and amused, like he was savoring my reaction more than the drink itself.

“You really enjoy pleasure, don’t you?” he murmured.

I looked at him, heat rising to my cheeks. “Is that a bad thing?”

His lips curled at the corners. “Not at all.”

Before I could think too much about the way his voice sent a pulse of warmth through me, Cosmo clapped his hands. “And finally, we have Alkahest —the universal solvent. The great dissolver of barriers, the final key in unlocking the philosopher’s stone.”

The waiters set down the last dish, and I almost gasped at the sight of it. An impossibly delicate tower of crisped pastry sat in the center of the plate, layered with what looked like rich, golden crème.

But the real decadence was the caviar — mountains of it, tiny black pearls glistening under the golden light, cascading down the dish like some extravagant luxury only whispered about in secret societies.

Cosmo bowed. “Enjoy, Alchemists.”

Then, he left.

I am absolutely going to enjoy this.

Fabien took the first bite, scooping a perfect portion with the edge of his spoon and bringing it to his lips.

The moment it hit his tongue, he let out a low, deep groan of pleasure.

Damn. That sounded good.

I swallowed hard, my mind immediately spiraling to places it had no business going.

That groan—it was pure sin , rich and thick like molten chocolate, like the kind of sound a man makes when his cock is buried deep inside you, losing himself completely.

I clenched my thighs, suddenly hyper-aware of the heat pooling in my belly.

Fabien, oblivious to the war he was waging on my self-control, tilted his head slightly, considering. “Hmmm. Sometimes caviar can be an unnecessary flashy ingredient for a dish, but this?”

He took another bite. “This works. I can taste the magic of the sea.”

I finally gathered myself enough to try a bite, and oh damn . It was creamy, salty, buttery, the crisped pastry adding the perfect contrast. It melted on my tongue like an erotic promise.

“I am truly enjoying this.” I tried the first dish—the black bar that shifted to gold—and tasted succulent lamb. “This is definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

“I agree.” Fabien nodded, but the way he looked at me, the way his eyes dipped from my lips to my throat, then lower, made it clear he wasn’t just talking about the food.

The moment stretched between us, thick with unspoken words, heavy with the weight of something unnamed. As I took another bite, the rich, buttery layers of pastry dissolved on my tongue, mingling with the salty burst of caviar.

I let my eyes flutter shut for a brief second, just long enough to savor it—to let the pleasure unfurl through me like silk slipping over bare skin.

When I opened my eyes again, Fabien was still watching me, his expression dark and knowing, like he was committing every reaction, every sigh of enjoyment, to

memory.

His spoon hovered just above his plate, forgotten, as if he were more interested in my pleasure than his own.

Yeah. . .I just might take him to bed tonight. Fuck. Would that be too soon?

I swallowed hard and glanced around the room, trying to ground myself, to remind myself that we weren't alone.

Every table shimmered under the golden glow of the Chandelier light.

The air was thick with laughter, hushed voices, and the occasional clink of glasses.

Couples leaned into each other, hands brushing, fingers tracing over bare skin, mouths moving in whispers that I knew carried sexy invitations meant for later.

A woman near the far end of the room lifted her flute of champagne to her lips, her partner watching her with the same kind of intensity Fabien had given me all night.

Another pair sat closer to us, the man's hand resting on the inside of his date's thigh beneath the table, her lips parting slightly as he murmured something in her ear.

Every moment in this space felt decadent, intimate, like the entire restaurant existed in its own private universe—separate from the rest of the world.

And here I was, caught in the middle of it, with a man who made me feel like I was the most indulgent course of the evening.

I cleared my throat and returned my view to Fabien, suddenly needing something solid to hold onto. "This menu is like a portal into a magical world."

“And that,” Fabien nodded, “is what fine dining should be. Not stuffy or snobby, but fun, creative, and even. . .inspiring.”

I shivered at the way his voice slipped along my skin.

Then, the lights brightened slightly, and Cosmo reappeared, beaming. “Now that everyone is done. My dear alchemists, I must ask you to rise.”

I blinked, startled. “What?”

Cosmo only grinned. “For our next set of courses we must take a journey.”

Behind him, a massive section of the wall slid away , revealing yet another tunnel—this one glowing bright white.

What the fuck?

A hushed murmur swept through the room.

The couples around us glanced at each other, clearly just as surprised as I was.

I had assumed we’d remain at our table for the entire evening, that this was the experience.

But apparently, we were just getting started.

Alright. Now I see why this cost so much.

“Alchemists!” Cosmo turned and stepped toward the entrance. “Come with me!”

Where the hell are we going next? And—more terrifyingly obvious—what would

happen once we got there?

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Chapter eight

More to Come

Rae

Fabien rose from his seat, got right next to me, and extended his hand.

I gave him my hand.

Soon, those fingers—long, strong, elegant—curled around mine with a warmth that sent a slow, languid heat through my entire body.

It was a small gesture.

Simple.

Sweet.

But it wrecked me.

Because he didn't just offer his hand to help me up—he tenderly held it.

His touch wasn't hurried, wasn't dismissive, wasn't the kind of fleeting contact I had grown used to.

No.

This was romantic.

Sensually intentional.

And the moment I rose to my feet, I expected him to let my hand go.

But he didn't.

Instead, his grip stayed firm, his thumb absentmindedly gliding across my knuckles as he led me forward, guiding me like I was precious.

Like he wanted me close.

And Lord help me, I loved it.

God this is a perfect night.

I couldn't wait to tell my therapist and even Laila. They both would scream with joy.

What were the odds that I would meet him? Well. . .I am worthy. I am deserving. So. . .he came to me.

The tunnel ahead was bathed in an ethereal white glow, stretching forward like a path into another world.

The other couples moved through it in hushed awe, their steps slow, as if crossing some invisible threshold into magic.

Fabien and I walked together, fingers laced, his presence an anchor beside me.

And for once, I didn't overthink the way I fit next to him.

I didn't shrink.

Didn't second-guess.

Didn't let the old doubts whisper their cruel nonsense in my ear.

I belonged here.

With him.

And when we reached the end of the tunnel, my breath hitched.

Because—holy shit.

What greeted my eyes wasn't another dining room, or even a secret chamber.

It was an underground subway station.

What the hell?!

And it wasn't just any subway station.

The entire thing gleamed—polished marble stretching high and wide, chandeliers dripping light from above, gold inlay shimmering like veins running through the walls.

Unlike a typical New York train system, the tracks were pristine, without a hint of grime or vermin. And the walls had no graffiti.

Now they are just blowing my damn mind!

In front of us stood the most exquisite subway train I had ever seen.

It wasn't some battered MTA deathtrap—it looked like a train pulled from a billionaire's fever dream.

Polished steel.

Gilded doors.

Black-tinted windows that concealed whatever awaited inside.

Alright. This might be the dopest restaurant I've ever been to.

The other couples were already being led to their private cars by their waiters, disappearing into their own pocket-sized realms of whatever lavish experience was waiting beyond those doors.

And our waitress—the Black woman who had been effortlessly smooth all evening—stood by the last car, smiling knowingly as she gestured us forward.

My pulse pounded with excitement.

This was the kind of experience that rewired a person's brain chemistry.

I turned to Fabien, barely able to contain my glee, and whispered, "It's not my job, but I think this alone would confirm the second star."

Fabien exhaled a quiet laugh, and his thumb traced along my skin. "I absolutely agree."

Then, with a gentle tug, he led me inside.

And oh. . .the inside of the subway car looked nothing like a subway car.

Instead of rows of cramped seats and metal poles, there was a single, intimate table, positioned near the center, two plush chairs set impossibly close together.

Soft candlelight flickered from sconces along the walls, casting everything in a warm, golden haze.

The air smelled of something decadent, a lingering mix of aged wine and fresh herbs.

And to my shock, a man stood at the head of the car, draped in shadow and mystery.

His long, black leather coat fit snugly over his form, cinched at the waist.

But it was the mask that stole my breath—the long, beaked visage, smooth and expressionless, covering his entire face in an ominous display of old-world intrigue.

A full plague doctor ensemble.

Damn.

Why were masked men so hot?

Maybe it was the anonymity, the way the face—normally a person's most telling feature—was stripped away, leaving only the mystique, the power, the presence. Maybe it was the sheer drama of it, the way a mask forced us to focus on the body, the gestures.

Either way, I had to absolutely acknowledge that a man in a plague doctor mask was unnervingly attractive.

Still.

I was damn glad I wasn't doing this part of the experience alone. Because while the luxury, the elegance, the plague doctor, the theater of it all had been dazzling up until now, stepping into a subway car with a faceless man waiting in the shadows?

Yeah. That might have been freaky as hell if I didn't have Fabien beside me.

Anyway, we both sank into our new plush seats.

Fabien arched a brow at the plague doctor. "Well. This is unexpected."

The plague doctor gave a deep, theatrical bow, then gracefully lifted the silver dome from the cart before him.

Beneath it was an array of cheeses—delicately cut, perfectly arranged, each one a masterpiece in its own right.

He plated them in silence like some kind of alchemist conjuring gold from the mundane.

Then, without a word, he rolled the cart away, leaving me and Fabien in the hushed stillness of our own private world.

The doors slid shut.

And then—the train began to move with a slow, smooth glide.

This is insane.

As the outside world blurred past the tinted windows, my heart raced in time with the

rhythm of the train.

The plush chairs under our bodies were so close that our thighs brushed against each other. Each lingering contact sent a ripple of electricity through me.

And still Fabien held my hand.

The motion of the train was so fluid, so seamless, it felt like we were floating through time itself.

I turned to Fabien. “I’ve never had an experience like this. I feel like a kid in a toy store.”

His lips quirked at the corners, but his gaze remained fixed on me.

Not the train.

Not the luxury.

Not the impossible setting.

Just me.

“This is quite the experience.” He nodded. “But honestly. . .I’m more blown away by you .”

My body heated.

Not just my face.

Not just a polite little blush.

No.

I felt him everywhere.

His words wrapped around me like silk, like the caress of a slow, teasing fingertip running down my spine.

Damn. I want him so bad.

“Well, I guess we should focus on the food too. . .” Frowning, he let go of my hand and went to his plate. “I keep forgetting my actual mission tonight.”

I grinned.

“Rae, you are too enticing.”

My body heated.

I picked up a slice of cheese and slipped it between my lips.

Instead of eating his own cheese, Fabien’s gaze darkened as he watched the way my mouth closed around it.

My stomach tightened, but I forced myself to focus, picking up another piece and setting it onto my tongue.

“Rae,” his voice was low, edged with something I couldn't quite place. “How long will you be in New York this weekend?”

I swallowed the bite, already knowing he wasn’t going to like my answer. “I leave tomorrow. Right at noon.”

His expression shifted, the easy seduction flickering into something closer to frustration. “Tomorrow.”

I nodded, setting my fork down. “Yes.”

He exhaled sharply, lowering his hand onto the table, fingers tapping against the surface. “Why did you decide to make the trip so short?”

“This was just about me splurging on myself for one night.” I shrugged. “Plus, I have another scene to coordinate on Monday, and I like to have a day or two, to refresh and relax before work.”

“Hmmm.”

I arched a brow. “What?”

His jaw flexed slightly before he admitted, “Upon seeing you , I had already planned on canceling my Paris flight for tomorrow.”

I smirked, trying to lighten the mood. “Because you’re starting to love New York that much?”

There was no humor in his face. His green eyes locked onto mine. “So. . .we only have tonight ?”

The weight of those words settled over me.

My pulse skittered. “Yes.”

Fabien exhaled, his frustration restrained, but palpable. Then, after a pause, he straightened. “What were your plans after Alchemy?”

“Well. . .” I tucked a curl behind my ear. “I figured I would just head back to my hotel and pass out.”

“Are you tired?”

“No.”

His lips curved slightly, his eyes running over me with indulgence. “Then. . .spend the rest of the evening with me. Is there something you want to see in New York? Something you’ve always wanted to do?”

I tried to scan my brain for some kind of bucket-list activity, but all I could think about was how badly I wanted him to keep looking at me the way he was now.

My body burned with awareness, but I forced myself to think.

Where should we go?

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Chapter nine

Plans

Rae

I swallowed, my brain short-circuiting under the weight of what I really wanted to say.

Because the truth of what I wanted to do after this dinner. . .

The truth was reckless .

The truth was heat pooling between my thighs , my body already humming with the certainty of what I wanted to do.

I wanted to go back to his suite.

I wanted to see just how much of that quiet intensity would translate into touch, into movement, into the kind of pleasure that had been nothing more than a distant memory.

Ten years . Should I end my celibacy tonight?

But I also knew better.

I knew how easy it was to confuse attraction with something deeper, how temptation

could masquerade as fate.

And despite how wildly my body disagreed, my mind whispered. . .

Be smart. Be patient. Learn him first.

Therefore, I scrambled for an alternative activity, my thoughts running through possible things we could do—things that weren't him pressing me against a penthouse window, his hands on my thighs, his mouth on my skin, his cock pounding into me.

Museums?

Closed.

Rooftop bars?

Maybe, but I didn't want to be surrounded by a crowd.

Jazz club?

That could be intimate, but I didn't want to hear music, I wanted to hear him .

I chewed on my lip, debating my options, when Fabien leaned in slightly, his voice low and amused. "Tell me what you're thinking."

I hesitated, but his gaze held me there, steady, patient. "The things that keep coming up in my mind are probably closed or are going to close soon."

"Tell me anyway."

“I’ve always wanted to see The Metropolitan Museum of Art.” I exhaled. “But it’s closed.”

A slow smirk touched his lips. “The Met?”

“Yes, but it’s closed.”

“That doesn’t matter.”

I blinked. “What?”

“Hold on.” Fabien pulled out his phone and began typing something with casual confidence.

I let out a breathy laugh. “What are you doing?”

“I know people.”

I rolled my eyes. “Of course, you do.”

Seconds later, a soft buzz from his phone filled the air.

He read the responding message and then nodded. “Good.”

My brows furrowed. “Good?”

“My friend says we can visit this evening, but we are not to touch any of the exhibits.”

My mouth opened, but nothing came out. “Your friend?”

“Jonas,” he said smoothly, slipping his phone back into his pocket. “He’s an Austrian art historian and the current CEO and Director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.”

I stared at him in shock. “Oh.”

Fabien tilted his head slightly, watching my reaction with amusement. “I just told him that I had a very gorgeous woman that I wanted to utterly impress and asked if he could do me a favor and let me give her a personal evening tour of The Met.”

Once again, all I could say was, “Oh.”

He leaned forward, and his voice was warm with mischief. “Will you let me take you there?”

My breath hitched. “Yeah.”

“Perfect.” His smirk deepened. “I’ll make sure to grab a bottle of Chateau d’Yquem—perfect for viewing art with.”

“So. . .we’re just going to go to The Met tonight, after hours?” I asked, half-laughing, half-in shock.

“Of course.” He winked. “I told you. I’m basically an international spy.”

I laughed, shaking my head. But excitement coiled through me, wrapping around my ribs and tightening in the best way.

And suddenly, I saw it. . .

The two of us, walking hand in hand through dimly lit hallways, glasses of expensive wine in our hands. The soft echo of our voices filling the vast empty museum, our

laughter mingling with the silence, bouncing off marble and shadow.

Sometimes, his hand would be at the small of my back as we moved through halls of priceless exhibits.

It was intoxicating.

It was romantic.

And God... I never wanted to wake up from this dream.

The train slowed, pulling into a station carved from marble and gold, but I barely noticed.

I was too lost in him.

Our cars' doors slid open.

Cosmo's voice rang out through the speakers within our car. "This next course is all about transformation."

The waitress entered our car, placing the dish before us.

I looked down—and my breath caught.

The plate was art.

A culinary masterpiece mirroring the metamorphosis of a butterfly.

At the base of the dish, a velvety swirl of dark truffle mousse represented the egg, rich and earthy, its texture impossibly smooth.

Resting just above it, a delicate arrangement of herbs and microgreens cradled a caterpillar—a tender roulade of lobster wrapped in a thin veil of saffron-infused pasta, its shape mimicking the gentle curve of a larva inching forward.

The buttery scent of the dish was intoxicating, promising indulgence with every bite.

Higher up, a perfectly crisped crostini—golden, airy, its surface glistening with the lightest brush of truffle oil—formed the chrysalis.

And at the very top, the butterfly—a breathtaking creation of spun sugar and edible gold.

Those wings shimmered.

Cosmo's voice filled the space again. "Transformation is the heart of alchemy. The shedding of what was. The rebirth into something new. This dish is a tribute to that—to the cycles we move through, to the beauty of change."

I swallowed hard, something about his words struck a chord deep within me.

Fabien picked up his fork. "Let's see what transformation tastes like."

I mirrored his movements, lifting my utensil. My fingers brushed his for the briefest moment.

Then—I took a bite.

Pleasure.

Pure, unadulterated pleasure.

I continued on trying everything with absolute enjoyment.

So many different flavors danced on my tongue—rich, decadent, surprising. The mousse melted into the crisp bread, the perfect savoriness of the lobster, the layers unfolding with depth, the sweetness of the sugar butterfly dissolving into something almost otherworldly.

When I took a bite of the chrysalis, I realized the interior was whipped brie and wildflower honey.

After that, time just swept by and the subway train glided forward, carrying us through a journey of flavors, mystery, and seduction.

With every course that arrived at a new station that we stopped at, I felt myself slipping deeper into the surreal magic of this night.

First came the Black Mirror , a dish so mesmerizing I barely wanted to touch it. A small, shimmering sphere sat atop a bed of crushed hazelnuts and saffron-infused foam.

Cosmo's voice crackled over the speakers, explaining the dish.

One bite, and the delicate shell cracked, spilling molten chocolate infused with truffle and aged cognac onto my tongue.

“Damn.” I licked a drop from my lip. “That tastes like forbidden knowledge.”

Fabien smirked. “Then you must be the wisest woman on this train.”

Next was the Magnum Opus , a celebration of the four classical elements.

A slate platter held four precise bites—fire, water, air, and earth. Fire was a seared wagyu tartare with a hint of ghost pepper. Water shimmered with an oyster crowned with citrus pearls. Air floated in the form of a delicate, barely-there meringue, infused with lavender smoke.

And earth ?

A tiny mushroom soufflé, rich and umami-laden, the essence of the forest captured in a single bite.

Fabien moaned at the taste of the wagyu, shaking his head in pleasure. “Every meal should have a moment like this.”

We sampled another dish called Celestial Harmony .

Cosmo explained that this dish was inspired by planetary alignment—a duo of lobster and black truffle pasta, plated in a spiral like the Milky Way.

Then came the Elixir of the Sun —a citrus and saffron sorbet, served in a crystal goblet emitting a fine mist of liquid nitrogen. The burst of cold, the sharp kiss of citrus, the undercurrent of warm saffron—it was a palate cleanser and a spell in itself.

Throughout the journey, Fabien and I laughed.

We talked.

We let the ride of the train lull us into a shared rhythm, our conversations flowing as seamlessly as the movement of the subway beneath us.

And I swore it felt like I’d known him forever.

How was that possible?

I had never been one of those hopeless romantics who believed in love at first sight.

Hell, even lust at first sight was something I tended to side-eye.

Connections took time.

Trust had to be earned.

But sitting across from Fabien, his green eyes glinting with intrigue, his deep voice twisting around me like the softest velvet, I couldn't deny the way my soul seemed to recognize him.

It was ridiculous.

Impossible.

But what if it wasn't?

What if soulmates weren't just an overused trope in romance novels, but real, flesh-and-blood beings walking the earth, waiting to collide with you in the most unexpected of places?

Because wasn't this what I had always imagined that feeling would be?

Not fireworks or grand declarations, but this —the easy pull, the magnetic draw of another person's presence. The way every word, every glance, every shared breath felt inevitable.

The way I wasn't just intrigued by him, but comfortable, like my spirit had simply

slotted into place beside his.

God, I felt silly even entertaining the thought.

I didn't know him.

Not really.

But my body, my heart, my soul?

They were all whispering something else.

And that terrified me.

Because what if I had actually met my soulmate?

I tried not to think of it all too much, and just enjoy the moment for now.

But, soon. . .the journey came to an end.

As the train slowed, I noticed the shift in our surroundings.

Gone were the marble and gold.

Instead, the final station was something out of a dream—a meadow stretching out before us, softly illuminated by hidden lights designed to mimic the glow of dawn.

Delicate sculptures of butterflies lined the space, as if frozen in mid-flight, poised for release.

Cosmo's voice rang through the station one last time. "And with that, my dear

alchemists, our journey together concludes. Transformation, indulgence, and magic—may you carry this night with you long after you leave these doors. Thank you for allowing us to take you beyond the ordinary.”

I exhaled, my heart still racing from the night’s enchantment. “So. . .what will your review be?”

“I plan to send in the confirmation for the second Stellar star.” Fabien rose from his seat, and before I could even think about moving, his hand was already on mine, helping me up with that same tenderness, that same quiet possession that had sent a slow burn through my body all evening.

This time, I didn’t expect him to let go.

And he didn’t.

As we stepped onto the platform, Cosmo was already waiting, my fur coat draped neatly over his arm. “Here you go, Ms. Harris.”

I wish I could tell Cosmo that the restaurant is about to get even more popular.

As Cosmo moved to hand my fur coat to me, Fabien stepped in smoothly, taking the coat with a possessive ease. “Thank you, but I’ve got it.”

Alright now.

Cosmo arched a brow, before handing it over without a word.

Fabien turned to me, lifting the coat gently. His hands brushed against my shoulders as he helped me slip into it, the contact so brief yet so intimate that my breath caught.

“That’s what I’m talking about.” Cosmo smirked knowingly, winking at me before disappearing into the shifting crowd of couples bidding their goodbyes.

Wow.

Fabien placed his hand at the small of my back and guided me toward the exit, stepping through the large white doors of Alchemy’s side entrance.

The cold night air kissed my cheeks, and we emerged into the quiet street.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you.” I turned to him. “I have a driver waiting for me.”

“I have one too,” he said casually, then looked at me with quiet intent. “But we can take yours if that makes you more comfortable.”

I bit my lip, warmth spreading in my chest. “I’d like that.”

He nodded. “I’ll just text my driver and have him follow us.”

“Perfect.”

We stepped forward.

My heart drummed.

Then, I spotted my car.

The sleek black Phantom sat idling at the curb, and just outside, Dalvin stood waiting, the back door already open.

But as Dalvin’s gaze flicked toward me—and more importantly, toward the fact that I

was holding Fabien's hand—his expression shifted.

Shock.

Pure, unfiltered shock.

I fought the urge to laugh.

I know, Dalvin. I'm shocked too.

As Fabien led me toward the car, I couldn't help but wonder—what else would happen tonight?

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Chapter ten

So Fucking Perfect

Rae

Manhattan shimmered around us, neon and glass blurring into a dreamscape of movement and light.

The Phantom journeyed through the streets, floating effortlessly over the pavement.

I glanced over my shoulder, curiosity tugging at me. Behind us, Fabien's driver was in a black Bentley Continental following us at a respectable distance.

I turned back to Fabien, only to find him watching me like I was the most fascinating thing in this city of wonders. His gaze was a weight, a touch without contact, something that made my breath shallow and my skin warm.

Dalvin, ever the professional, had lowered the jazz to a whisper, letting the night itself fill the space between us.

And all I could think was— am I really doing this?

My clutch buzzed against my thigh, dragging me out of the haze.

I wanted to ignore it, but I already knew—if I didn't confirm to Laila that I was still breathing, she'd have the entire NYPD scouring the city for my lifeless body.

I sighed and held up a finger to Fabien, mouthing one sec. He arched a brow but nodded, amused.

I pulled out my phone, and my thumbs flew over the screen.

Me: I'm fine. The dinner was amazing. I met a guy. He's in the car with me now. We're going to the Met.

Laila's response came instantly.

Laila: ?????????????? BITCH!!

Me: Girl. . .

Laila: TELL ME EVERYTHING.

Me: We're together. I can't.

Laila: SEND ME A PIC!!!

I smothered a laugh, shaking my head.

Me: I gotta go, but I love you so much. Hope you had a great night.

Another buzz came through, but I ignored it, slipping my phone back into my clutch.

When I leaned back, I found myself pulled into warmth—Fabien's arm, draped behind me, his fingers grazing my shoulder, gathering me into him as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

“Oh.” I blinked.

“Is this okay?”

“Yes.” I smirked. “But, I must admit that you are so smooth.”

He tilted his head, studying me with a lazy sort of appreciation. “Not smooth enough.”

“Oh?” I arched a brow. “Why do you say that?”

“Your clothes are still on.”

My nipples stiffened. “Mmm.”

His grip on my shoulder tightened slightly. “Don’t make that noise.”

“Why not?”

His jaw clenched. “Because I’ve been battling with not kissing you.”

I exhaled sharply, the entire car shrinking down to just us . “That’s a battle you’re definitely going to lose tonight.”

A dark, primal sound left his throat—a grunt, a growl, something deep, male, and hungry .

And then he was on me.

His soft mouth crushed against mine, heat, dominance, and need pouring into the kiss like he had been holding it back for hours, days, lifetimes. His tongue slid into my mouth, stroking, claiming, and I moaned into him, my fingers threading through his hair, pulling him closer, needing more .

Holy fuck!!

Not even in my wildest scenarios as an intimacy coordinator could I have dreamed up something this HOT.

The Phantom's leather seat molded beneath me as I shifted, pressing into him, the swell of my breasts molding against his solid chest.

He took that arm away from the backseat and he went to town.

First of all, not every man could kiss.

Some treated it like a messy obligation—too wet, too fast, too careless, as if the goal were just to get through it rather than savor it.

Others were timid, hesitant, all nerves and uncertainty, as if they were waiting for direction instead of leading with intention.

But Fabien?

Good God!!

Fabien kissed like he had studied the art of seduction in some secret, elite academy.

Like he had memorized every detail of a woman's pleasure and then refined it with meticulous precision.

He kissed like a man who didn't just enjoy it—he worshipped it, pouring erotic heat into every slow, silky stroke of his tongue and every firm yet teasing press of his lips.

And God help me, I wanted to give him a Stellar star for that damn kiss because it

was a five-course, fine-dining experience of a kiss.

The kind that lingered, that made you sit back afterward—dazed and reeling—already craving more before you’d even fully processed what had just happened.

He played with pressure, teasing one second, deepening the next, making my body arch toward him instinctively.

Mindlessly.

I felt weightless and fevered all at once, like I was dissolving into the heat of him.

Damn it.

I had gone years— years —without sex, and this was the man I decided to finally let touch me?

I was DOOMED!!!

Groaning, he moved his hands—one cupping my face, the other sliding down, grazing my throat, skimming lower. His fingertips traced the tops of my breasts, featherlight, a tease.

And finally, he lifted his mouth from mine, giving me a few seconds to catch my breath.

That sexy voice left his lips. “I want to ask you a very dirty question.”

My pulse skittered. “Please.”

“What cup size are these?” He gestured to my breasts. “DD. Right?”

A wicked laugh slipped from me. “Baby. . .these are well out of the D section.”

His eyes darkened, his grip on me tightening. “Mmmm.”

“These are H cups.”

A reverent curse left him. “Dear God. I have now realized that I love the letter H.”

“Oh really?” I teased, licking my lips.

His gaze tracked the movement of my tongue. Dirty lust flared in his eyes. “So many lovely things start with H.”

“Like?”

His fingers brushed the underside of my breast. His lips hovered just above mine as he whispered, “Heat. Hunger. Horny hands.”

His palm flattened over my chest, fingers splaying over lace. “ Heaven. ”

A shiver ran through me, but before I could react, he caught my lip between his teeth, a sharp tug before he plunged his tongue back in, kissing me so thoroughly, so devastatingly, that I forgot how to breathe.

Shit. I could die right here.

The temperature in the Phantom soared and I doubted that Dalvin had raised the heat.

It was all Fabien.

His kisses trailed lower, his mouth dragging along my jaw, my neck, down. . .

“Mmmm.” I moaned, unable to help myself.

I closed my eyes and let my head fall back against the seat.

Hell yes. Kiss me everywhere.

Another pleasurable sigh slipped from me just as his lips ghosted over the tops of my breasts.

Oh God yes.

Then. . .

The car jerked a little.

I opened my eyes and my gaze went to the rearview mirror—where Dalvin’s wide gaze locked with mine.

Oh. My. God.

Dalvin was watching us.

Fabien’s mouth was still on my neck, his lips dragging lower, slow and devastating, like he had all the time in the world to devour me.

My body ached.

And God—where I wanted him to go next was right to my breasts.

And then there was Dalvin.

His wide gaze heating up the rearview mirror, his pupils blown with horniness, his throat bobbing as he swallowed hard.

Oh my God.

A dark, forbidden thrill curled inside me.

Dalvin wasn't supposed to be watching. He was supposed to be focused on the road, on getting us safely to our destination.

But instead. . .he was captivated.

Still, he probably thought I didn't notice. Maybe he even thought he was being discreet.

But I saw the way his grip tightened on the wheel, the way he shifted in his seat like his pants were getting too tight.

And that knowledge sent a wild pulse of arousal through me.

Of course, Fabien was completely unaware of the extra set of eyes on us.

And for the first time in a long time, I held the power in the space.

I was the one making a man fall apart behind the wheel.

I was the one being devoured by another man in the backseat.

And I was the one who could decide just how far this moment would go with the both of them.

A slow, wicked smile curled my lips. “Mmm.”

If Dalvin wanted to watch. . .then let him watch.

“Fabien.” My voice was barely a whisper as I threaded my fingers into his hair.

He hummed against my throat, distracted, caught up in the taste of me.

I leaned down, brushing my lips over the shell of his ear, and whispered, “Suck on my nipples.”

The sound that left him was brutally primal. A low, rough groan that vibrated through my entire body, sending liquid fire between my thighs.

His grip on me tightened, his breath a heavy drag against my skin. “You’re killing me, chérie .”

But he didn’t hesitate.

His fingers dipped to the neckline of my gown, tugging it down with agonizing slowness, revealing the sinful hot pink lace beneath.

Fabien groaned.

Dalvin parted his lips in hunger.

Fuck.

And then—Fabien pulled my lace cup down, just enough to expose the stiff peak of my nipple.

The car swerved a little again, telling me that Dalvin could see that stiff nipple too.

Oh God my pussy is getting so wet.

But all my attention remained on Fabien as he damn near drooled over my nipple.

“ Tu es parfaite. ” A sharp inhale left him as he took me in, his hands smoothing over my full curves, worshipfully.

I shivered. “What does that mean?”

“You are perfect.”

All my life, I had wanted a man to look at me like this.

To touch me like this and see me as perfect just the way I was.

Not like I was something to tolerate or hide, not like my body was a problem to be solved or a compromise to be made.

But like I was something to be devoured .

And here he was.

Fabien.

A man I had only just met, yet who looked at me like he had been searching for me for years. Like he had finally found what he never even knew he was missing.

His words echoed in my mind, sinking deep into places I had long protected.

"Tu es parfaite."

A shiver ran through me, and suddenly, it wasn't just arousal I was feeling—it was something deeper, something more profound.

For so many years, I had fought against the voice in my head that told me otherwise.

That whispered cruel, insidious lies.

That told me I had to shrink, to mold myself into something smaller, something more palatable, something less in order to be worthy of love.

But that voice was silent now.

Drowned out by the weight of Fabien's touch, the hunger in his gaze, the raw conviction in his voice.

I was perfect .

I was worthy .

I was deserving .

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And as Fabien lowered his mouth to my breast, his tongue flicking over my aching nipple, I let that truth settle into my bones.

I let it consume me. “Oh.”

He murmured, “So fucking perfect.”

The second his mouth closed back over my nipple, my head dropped back, a gasp leaving my lips.

Oh fuck.

His tongue swirled—hot and wet—teasing the sensitive bud before sucking it into his mouth.

Damn!

I arched into him, my hands clutching his shoulders, my breath ragged. Pleasure shot straight through me, a tight, pulsing erotic heat settling between my legs.

And then I felt it once again—the car swerving slightly.

I opened my eyes.

Dalvin barely pulled us up to another red light and was definitely watching and . . .biting his bottom lip as if he were holding in a moan.

If Fabien knew Dalvin was watching, would he stop?

Or would Fabien make a bigger show of it—turning that dark, possessive edge on full display, letting Dalvin know exactly who I belonged to?

A shiver ran through me, part fear, part reckless excitement.

Right then, Fabien groaned against my breast, his grip flexing over my hip as he lavished attention on my nipple, his teeth grazing, his tongue soothing, over and over.

Fuck!

And Jesus, the sounds—his deep, satisfied hums, the wet, obscene noises of his mouth on me—it was all too much, too fucking erotic.

I glanced up again, and there was Dalvin, squeezing the wheel, his body stirring in the seat, his jaw tight, his nostrils flaring.

God, this is so hot.

Fabien fucking devoured me so badly that my panties were SOAKING wet.

My body quaked with pleasure.

Suddenly, Dalvin ran a hand over his face, dragging his fingers down like he was trying to pull himself back from the brink of insanity.

But the second his palm dropped, his gaze lifted, meeting mine in the mirror.

Heat.

Raw, unfiltered heat passed between us.

Dalvin knew I saw him.

And he knew I knew.

And that sent something electric through me—something intoxicating, something dangerously thrilling.

Being even more bold, I slipped my hand down between Fabien and me, and my fingertips grazed his hard, thick length straining against those designer slacks.

Oh. My. God.

Fabien let out a delirious groan, and I moaned too.

Heat flushed through my body as I traced the rigid outline of his cock, my palm pressing, stroking, feeling the sheer size of him.

Fabien was so damned hard, hot even through the expensive fabric, and the knowledge that I had done this to him—that my body, my moans, my scent had unraveled him to this point—made me dizzy with need.

My breath stuttered, my thighs clenched, and my mind spun with the only thought that mattered. . .

I need this cock inside me.

I wanted to feel that thick, pulsing cock stretch me open, bury itself deep into my pussy and claim me in the way his kisses already had.

Just the idea of his big cock had me clenching, a helpless, aching pulse building between my legs, spiraling into something close to desperation.

Fuck.

I was delirious with it, trembling, wanting, starving.

Fabien was still lost in me, his lips and tongue working me over with pure, mind-numbing expertise, but I could barely think, barely function, barely hold onto the remnants of my self-control.

And I didn't want to anymore.

Not when I could have more.

Not when I could have all of him.

"Fabien. . ." I moved my hand from his cock, lifted it up, and curled my fingers under Fabien's chin and I tilted his head up.

When he looked at me, his eyes were heavy-lidded.

His lips were wet, his breath uneven.

I shivered. "Forget the Met, Fabien."

His brow furrowed slightly. "Forget it?"

I swallowed hard, but there was no hesitation, no second-guessing, only certainty.

Only raw, aching need.

I gathered up the courage and simply said it, "Let's go to your hotel."

Silence stretched between us, thick, charged.

And then. . .a deep, growling sound left Fabien, his fingers flexing against my waist like he was restraining himself from ripping my dress apart right there in the backseat.

He licked his lips. "Are you sure?"

I leaned in, brushing my lips over his. "I am."

The light turned green, yet Dalvin didn't even drive.

Was he waiting for my answer too?

Fabien exhaled sharply, his hand lingering against my skin for one last indulgent moment before he slowly lifted my gown back over my breasts.

I swallowed, trying to steady myself, but my body still thrummed with the heat he had ignited.

With my breast put away, Dalvin had us moving again.

Fabien shifted slightly and lifted his gaze toward the rearview mirror. "Excuse me."

Dalvin's voice was hoarse, rough, like gravel scraping against velvet. "Yes, sir?"

"Change of plans. Take us to Aman New York."

A beat of silence.

Then Dalvin cleared his throat, gripping the wheel tighter. "Yes, sir."

I let out a slow breath, my pulse still erratic, my skin still tingling from the way Fabien had touched me.

The way he had looked at me.

The way he had made me feel.

Fabien leaned back my way and brushed his lips against the shell of my ear. His breath was warm and teasing. "I want you, Rae."

I shuddered.

"I want you badly. But. . ."

I eyed him. "But?"

He licked his lips. "If you find that when we get to my suite. . .you realize that you're not ready, I will understand. I mean. . ."

He chuckled. "I may run into the bathroom and splash my body with cold water, but I will understand."

The tension I hadn't even realized I was holding melted away at his words.

My stomach tightened, but this time, it wasn't just lust. It was this rising affection for him.

Fabien wasn't just trying to get me into bed. He was careful with me, reading me, making sure I felt safe in this moment of reckless indulgence.

I turned my head slightly, meeting his gaze. "Thank you."

His lips quirked. "You waited ten years. You're not the sort of woman who jumps into one-night stands."

"True."

He sighed. "However. . ."

I raised a brow. "However?"

His lips brushed against my temple. "You'll find that once I have you in my bed. . .that ten-year wait will make a lot of sense."

"Mmmm."

"Let's just hope that I don't kidnap you in the morning and sneak you into Paris."

A laugh bubbled from my throat, further keeping me comfortable.

Yet, there was still a tiny bit of nervousness from what could come next.

Holy shit. I'm really about to do this.

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Chapter eleven

The Art of Worship

Fabien

In France, we have a saying— l’instant décisif —the decisive moment.

It is the moment where it all matters, where fate balances on the edge of a blade, where time slows, and you either seize the opportunity or watch it slip through your fingers.

Henri Cartier-Bresson, a French photographer, coined the phrase, believing that in every story, in every life, there is one moment that shapes everything after it.

A single second where everything aligns—light, emotion, motion—and if you capture it, you own something timeless.

I never thought I would have a moment like that.

Not in my line of work.

Not in my life.

Yet tonight, this is my moment.

And what’s more unbelievable. . .it refuses to end.

Because I have stumbled upon a goddess.

An American goddess with dark brown eyes that threaten to unravel me, full lips I could worship for years, and curves that could have toppled kingdoms in centuries past.

And what do the men in this country do with such a woman?

They let her roam free.

Unclaimed.

Unworshipped.

Ridiculous.

In France, she wouldn't have lasted a week in celibacy.

Not untouched.

Not sleeping alone.

In fact, if I had met her in Paris, I would have had her pressed against my sheets before she could even finish her glass of wine.

Well. . .I have her now, and I'll make up for lost time.

My cock was aching, throbbing in my slacks like a beast caged too long, desperate to break free.

My self-control—the careful restraint I prided myself on—had been unraveling by

the second, and now, with her in my arms, her scent thick in my lungs, the taste of her still on my tongue—I was losing it.

The way she touched my cock while I was kissing her—I nearly lost my fucking mind.

If it had been any other night, if I weren't trying to pace myself, I would have had her bent over the seat, pulled her panties to the side, and buried my cock deep inside her pussy, fucking her until she forgot how to say her own name.

And the way she moaned when I kissed her?

Like she was already picturing it.

A dark groan left me.

She turned to me, looking all innocent like she didn't know what was going on in my mind.

I exhaled sharply, dragging a hand through my hair.

My jaw went tight with restraint.

I had tried— fuck , I had tried —to be a gentleman, to take my time, to give her the slow seduction she deserved.

But now?

Now that my cock was aching, throbbing against my slacks with every needy pulse of her body against mine?

Now, I couldn't help it.

I brushed my lips against her ear. " Désolé, ma belle, mais je ne peux plus me retenir."
"

She licked her lips. "What did you say?"

"Sorry, my beautiful, but I can't hold back anymore."

"Maybe, I don't want you to hold back."

My hand tightened on her thigh, sliding higher. "I was trying to be good for you. But now that I'm this fucking hard, I don't think the words coming out of my mouth will be particularly gentlemanly."

I pulled back just enough to meet her gaze—searching for hesitation, for doubt—only to find fire.

She smirked. "Bring it on."

I breathed her in. "First, I should give you some form of a disclaimer."

"Oh really?"

"Yes."

"And what is the disclaimer?"

"I want to fuck you senseless. I want to wreck you."

She blinked.

“And unfortunately. . .my cock doesn’t know what compromise means.”

“Mmmm.”

“There will be no half-measures once I’m deep inside your pussy.”

She shivered against me. “Fuck.”

I groaned, watching the way she clenched her thighs, her body already reacting to my words.

The city lights flickered through the car, painting golden patterns over her dark brown skin, illuminating every dip, every curve.

She was a masterpiece in motion—glowing, breathless, soon to be mine.

I dragged the backs of my fingers down her arm, watching the way goosebumps rose in my wake. “Do you like it when a man takes his time with you?”

“That depends.”

I raised a brow. “On what?”

She licked her lips. “On whether or not he knows what he’s doing.”

A growl of challenge rumbled deep in my chest.

“Oh, I know what I’m doing, chérie .” I leaned closer, my breath hot against her ear. “I know how to take my time. How to spread you open, how to taste you until you lose your mind.”

A soft gasp slipped from her lips, and my cock jerked painfully against my zipper.

“You like that, don’t you?” I murmured, dragging my fingers along the curve of her hip, feeling the heat radiating from her skin. “You like knowing that I’m going to devour you. That I’m going to lick you so slow, so deep, you’ll be trembling before I even fuck you.”

Her head tipped back against the seat, her big, beautiful breasts rose and fell with her shallow breaths. “Yes.”

“Yes?”

“I like that.”

A wicked grin spread across my face. “Do you like your pussy licked?”

She moaned.

I didn’t mean to, but my voice shifted to a deep, possessive rumble. “Answer me.”

She swallowed hard. “ Yes. ”

I traced my knuckles over her jaw, tilting her chin toward me so I could watch the way her lips parted, the way her lashes fluttered. “I can’t wait to lick your pussy.”

A whimper escaped her throat, and my cock throbbed violently.

“Because I plan to make you purr, chérie . Just the way you deserve.”

She exhaled a shuddering breath.

Fuck.

I was losing it.

My body blazed with lust. “Are you sensitive to touch?”

“Yes.”

“Good. That means you’ll cum easy for me. Therefore, I plan to make you cum a lot tonight.”

She widened her eyes.

I growled, grabbing her wrist, bringing it over to me, and pressing her fingers against my cock. “Do you feel how hard I am for you?”

“God yes.”

I groaned, grinding against her palm, desperate for any relief.

She moaned, and curled her fingers around my length through my slacks. “So fucking big.”

I chuckled darkly. “Mmm. And you’re going to take every inch, aren’t you, chérie ?”

That bottom lip quivered. “Yes.”

I exhaled sharply, barely holding myself together. “Tonight. . .I’m going to make you cum on my tongue first. Next will be my cock. Then, after that. . .we’ll get creative.”

I hope to God she isn’t planning on getting any sleep tonight. Even more important.

How much time do we have RIGHT NOW?

I glanced out the window.

Lots of traffic. Perfect.

This Valentine's evening, the streets of Manhattan were decently congested—a mess of glowing lights and impatient horns.

It would take time to reach the hotel.

I smirked.

Perfect.

Unable to help myself, I moved my hand down to her gown and slipped my fingers beneath the shimmering pink fabric, feeling the heat of her body before I even touched her.

She parted her thighs for me, slow, hesitant at first, but when my fingers brushed against her skin, a soft shudder ran through her, and she spread them wider.

Mon dieu.

I swallowed hard, taking my time, savoring the feel of her—soft, thick, perfect thighs. My fingers traced along the plush curve of her inner thigh, reveling in the warmth, the way her body seemed made for touch.

For worship.

And how fucking dare any man ever make her feel otherwise?

Her ex-husband.

The imbécile who had broken something sacred inside her, who had taken one of the most beautiful, sensual women I had ever laid eyes on and made her question her worth.

The thought made my jaw clench, my fingers pausing against her skin.

I wished I could find that misérable batard and beat him until he understood what he had done.

Until he understood that he had never deserved a woman like her.

He had spoken down to her.

He had made her question her body.

Her beauty.

Her power.

And I wanted so badly to tell Rae how much of an idiot he had been.

I wanted her to hear it from my mouth, from my soul—that there was not one fucking thing wrong with her.

She was everything.

And I would show her.

I exhaled slowly, loosening my jaw, forcing my focus back where it belonged—on

her.

On the way she shifted under my touch, her thighs parting further, giving herself to me piece by piece.

I dragged my fingers higher, tracing the delicate lace of her panties .

She gasped, her thighs parting instinctively.

It was a silent invitation.

Delirious with lust, I traced the edge of her panties with my fingertips, teasing her, feeling the damp heat already soaking through the lace.

Mon dieu.

She was wet.

Soaked.

Dripping.

My cock throbbed at the realization that she had been sitting here, in this car, getting wetter for me with every suck of her nipple, with every filthy word I whispered into her ear.

I leaned in, pressing my lips to her temple, my voice dark and full of promise. “You’re already dripping for me.”

“How could I not?” She let out a shaky breath. Soon she gripped my wrist with her hand, but she didn’t stop me.

No.

She only held on—like she knew she was about to fall.

I leaned forward and brushed my lips against her ear. “You are divine.”

Her breath hitched.

I whispered, “You know that, don’t you?”

“Y-yes.”

I slid my hand higher, my grip firm, possessive. “Don’t ever doubt that.”

Her body trembled.

I pressed my mouth to her jaw, tracing kisses down the column of her throat as I slid my fingers lower, pushing the panty’s lace to the side.

And there she was.

Soft.

Slick.

So fucking ready for me.

I groaned, dragging my fingers through the heat of her folds, gathering her arousal and circling her clit, slow, deliberate.

She whimpered.

My gorgeous, wet, fucking perfect woman.

My breath was hot against her skin. “Look how you open for me.”

She whimpered.

Her thighs shook as my fingers brushed against her slick pussy folds.

“Do you feel that?” I whispered against her throat, sliding my fingers through her wetness and spreading the moisture along her clit. “That’s how badly you need me.”

She moaned, and her hips shifted toward my touch, desperate for more.

I smirked against her skin, slipping one thick finger inside her pussy, slow, deep.

She gasped, and her hands flew to my arm, clutching, holding on.

I stilled.

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Letting her feel my finger.

Letting her understand.

“My sweet Rae, how could any man ever tell you that you were not enough?”

She shivered.

“You are more than enough. You are everything .”

She whimpered, and her pussy tightened around my fingers.

I pushed another inch inside, loving the way she felt lush, decadent, and ripe in my hands.

“You should have been worshipped,” I growled, furious for her. Furious for every moment of doubt that waste of a man had made her feel. “You should have been touched like this every fucking day.”

Her breath came in uneven pants, her body bowing beneath my touch.

“Tell me.” I slipped my lips over her jaw and down her throat, “Did he ever touch you like this?”

“N-no.”

I slid my other fingers lower, teasing her entrance, feeling the way she clenched, her

body already begging for something deeper.

“You’re so fucking wet. All this, for me?”

“Yes, Fabien. All for you.”

I pulled my finger out and then added another pushing them inside her pussy—slow and deep—savoring the way she stretched for me, how her body welcomed me.

She shuddered against my fingers. “Oh, fuck.”

I growled, thrusting my fingers in and out of her pussy, curling them just right a tiny bit, rubbing against that perfect spot that made her whimper like a woman being thoroughly ruined.

I loved watching her writhe and go crazy. “Did he ever take his time with your pussy like this?”

She arched into me. “No.”

Slowly, I removed my fingers, lifted them to my mouth, and then sucked her taste from my fingers as I locked eyes with her. “Then let me show you how you were supposed to be treated.”

Her breath was uneven as she quirked her brows.

We had traffic outside and more than enough time to get to my hotel, and even more.
. I could not let only my fingers have all the fun.

Enough with trying to be a gentleman.

Too eager for my own good, I moved, sliding off the seat and sinking down to my knees in front of her.

She muttered, “Oh shit.”

Oh shit is right. I’m going to eat that pussy right here.

I would be damned if I let New York’s pesky traffic delay the pleasure that I wanted to give her.

The city could wait, and the world could watch .

Also, I didn’t care at all if the driver heard her moans either.

If anything, I wanted him to.

Let the driver hear my sweet Rae lose control. Let him hear every desperate, breathless shuddering sound she made as I buried my mouth between her thighs.

Let him know that right now, in the back seat of his car, I was giving her a pleasure so raw, so visceral, so utterly consuming that it would ruin her for any man who came after me.

Not that I would ever fucking allow another man to have her now.

From the moment she walked into Alchemy, I knew I would make Rae mine. I’d just been waiting for whatever loser to walk in for me to replace.

Thank God none ever did or it would have been a tough Valentine’s night for him.

And her ex-husband?

That miserable fucking excuse of a man who had never known what to do with her?

I wished he could hear the sounds I was about to make her moan.

I wished he could sit right there, eyes forced open, and watch me worship her the way she deserved.

Let him see what it looked like when a woman was truly cherished.

Truly devoured.

Truly satisfied.

Because he had failed her .

He had let her slip through his fingers.

And now, I would make sure she never doubted herself again.

On my knees and in front of her, I traced my hands up the those thick, gorgeous curves of her thighs, spreading them wide, owning them, feeling the soft, luscious give of her flesh beneath my palms.

And she just stared down at me like I was insane.

Aww. She's never had a French man before.

I smirked.

She'll see.

I leaned forward and pressed a slow, sensual kiss to the inside of one thigh, then the other, inhaling her scent, letting the lustful anticipation build, loving how her hips shifted, how her body moved toward my mouth.

She was aching for it.

And I would take my time, breaking her down and rebuilding her, one orgasm at a time.

I spread those thighs wide open and her dress rose up further.

Fuck yes.

Leaning toward her until my mouth was so close to her pussy, I exhaled against her folds, sending my warm breath to tease that wet tender flesh.

She whimpered. “Oh.”

And then—I tasted her.

MMMM!!!

My cock spilled pre-cum from the taste alone, and she moaned so loud.

Her cry was music to my ears.

I sucked her clit into my mouth, groaning as her thighs trembled around my head and she gave in.

I licked her, slow and deep, claiming that pussy.

Her moan—fuck. It was sinful, a melody of pleasure that echoed in the small space of the car.

I groaned, pressing my tongue against her clit, feeling the way her body shuddered at the contact.

"Fabien—" she gasped, her hands flying to my hair, clutching, holding on.

I smirked against her pussy, flicking my tongue over that sensitive bundle of nerves, making her squirm.

God, you are truly sensitive. Delicious.

I let my tongue dip lower, tasting the slick heat of her folds, drinking her in.

Her scent—thick and intoxicating—filled the air, wrapping around me like the finest aphrodisiac.

I thought I had tasted heaven before—but I'd been wrong because this was it.

I let my breath drag over her slick, swollen folds, teasing her with the promise of what was to come. Her hips shifted, a helpless little roll toward my mouth, a plea without words.

I flicked my tongue out, dragging it slowly along her center, feeling the way she quivered.

And then I got more daring—I sucked on each perfect, glistening fold.

One. By. One.

My lips sealed around them, suckling gently, then harder, until she was gasping.

I took my time, worshipping her pussy with my mouth, pulling her into my lips, letting her feel the heat, the devotion, the hunger.

And when I sucked on those folds, the sound was deliciously obscene.

A wet, filthy noise that sent a violent tremor through her body.

“Oh—Fabien—fuck!” Her voice was high and uncontrolled.

She was dripping even more now.

Her slickness coated my lips, my chin, my fingers that gripped her thighs, keeping her open, keeping her at my mercy.

And I had no doubt that I was making her pussy messy.

Uninhibited.

Utterly wrecked.

And I wasn't fucking done.

I moved my mouth to her clit, my fingers spreading her wider, exposing every inch of her to me.

I sucked hard.

Her body jerked violently. “Fuck! Fuck! Oh my God!”

Her thighs snapped close around my head.

My tongue lashed over her swollen clit.

Licking.

Sucking.

Flicking.

Torturing her.

Savoring too.

Long, slow, wet drags.

Her body convulsed just how I intended.

She was teetering on the edge.

Dangling over oblivion.

Sucking on her clit, I slipped two fingers inside her pussy, curling them just right, pressing against the spot that would end her.

“Oh!” Her back bowed off the seat, her mouth falling open, a silent scream hanging in the air.

“Cum for me.” I growled against her pussy.

And then. . .she shattered.

Her moan—long, broken, filthy—filled the air, bouncing off the glass of the car, echoing in the tight, charged space.

The driver surely heard.

In fact, there was no way he had not spilled pre-cum into his pants. Any normal man with a reasonable libido would have gone crazy to that.

Rae moaned even louder as I sucked that clit and finger-fucked her through that orgasm.

She was gone.

Falling.

Spiraling.

Crumbling beneath me.

And I loved every bit of it.

I guided her through the orgasm, my tongue working her through every single pulse, my fingers moving so fast they got sore, but I would not stop until she went limp.

Moments later, she did.

Panting, she stilled, completely destroyed in the best way possible.

My sweet American girl.

I licked my lips, tasting the proof of her surrender.

This is your future.

Then, with a satisfied smirk, I dragged my fingers through her wetness one last time, bringing them to my mouth, sucking them clean.

Perfection.

Her chest was still heaving, her lashes fluttering, her body completely undone.

I tenderly put her soaked panties back over her pussy and gently pulled the gown down.

Then, I got up and back into my seat.

A quick glance at the driver and I knew that he'd heard her.

Sweat dripped down the side of his face and his eyes were wide open like he was damn near close to exploding.

I could see it in the mirror, the way his hands flexed on the steering wheel and the way his throat bobbed as he swallowed very fucking hard.

Good.

Let him suffer.

Let him sit there—hard and frustrated—after the way I made her scream.

It's too late for you, my friend. You should have tried to grab her for yourself.

Had I been her driver and she walked up to me in that sexy bright pink dress, hugging

every lush curve. . .I would have never driven her to the restaurant like she wanted.

I would have taken her somewhere else, somewhere secluded and private where I could take my time exploring her body.

Silly American men.

But alas, he and others had missed their opportunity and now she was mine.

All mine. Whether she understands this fact or not.

Satisfied, I leaned back in the seat, adjusting my trousers to accommodate my pulsing hard cock who wanted to join the fun.

My fingers traced over my lips, still wet from her. "You taste divine."

She was still panting and at a loss of words. Her curly hair was wild around her face. Those cheeks were flushed from pleasure, and her beautiful eyes were still hazed with the aftermath of her orgasm.

Aww. She had no idea who she met.

I stifled my chuckle.

I wonder if she knows now.

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Chapter twelve

Mine to Adore

Fabien

Minutes later, the car pulled to a smooth stop in front of the hotel's entrance.

My pulse was still pounding from the taste of Rae, from the way she had come apart in my hands, beneath my tongue, in my control.

Finally, we're here.

For the hundredth time during this ride, I adjusted my slacks, trying to ease my throbbing cock.

As soon as get her alone, I'm burying myself in that wet pussy.

I glanced at Rae.

She was a vision. Her dark brown skin still flushed from pleasure, her breath just beginning to steady, her lips parted in that way that made me want to lick her pussy all over again.

Later.

The driver exited, walked around, and opened the door.

Crisp night air rushed in, cooling the lingering heat between us.

I stepped out first and slipped a folded thousand-dollar bill into the driver's palm before he could speak.

I even caught the way he tried to place his suit jacket in front of his erection.

Shocked, he looked down at the money, then back to me, and cleared his throat.
“Thank you, sir.”

“No problem.”

Still, the driver's fingers twitched as if unsure whether to hold it or hand it back.

I smirked. “That's for your. . .patience.”

And erection. Surely, that must have been torture with how delicious she sounded.

As if he heard me, the driver's mouth parted slightly, and then he nodded.

I was sure he hadn't expected a tip from me, but he damn well earned it.

After all, I had no doubt he was sitting in his own agony for the past twenty minutes, rock hard and suffering from everything he had witnessed—and more importantly, everything he could never have.

Still, he recovered quickly, clearing his throat once again.

Next, he turned toward Rae who was still in the car.

Soon, I'll have you in my bed.

A dark grunt left me.

The driver watched her. "Ms. Harris, you still have me for twenty-four hours."

His voice was even.

Professional.

But his eyes?

They blazed with lust.

I smirked, not caring.

Rae was so intoxicatingly beautiful that many men would want her. And honestly, I looked forward to my future where I would be showing many men like this how she was mine.

Still, the driver continued, "I'll be outside and waiting in the parking lot, just in case—"

"That won't be necessary." I cut him off, smooth and final.

The driver blinked, and his mouth snapped shut at my interruption.

I stepped to the side, offering my hand to Rae.

When she placed her palm in mine, a thrill ran through me.

Warmth.

Softness.

Submission and power in a single touch.

Mon dieu.

I curled my fingers around hers, helping her out of the car, and I knew—I would never let her go.

As she straightened, adjusting the fur coat around her shoulders, I noticed the way her driver hornily took her in.

Her gown shimmered under the city lights, evidence of our earlier sins still clinging to her skin, all the way down to even her thick thighs.

Mon dieu, I want her pussy back in my mouth.

“She won’t need you.” With reluctance, I tore my eyes away from Rae and turned back to the driver. “My driver can take her anywhere she needs to go tomorrow.”

Tomorrow. . .

As if I would allow her to leave even then.

As if I didn’t already have a dozen wicked, persuasive orgasmic ways to make her cancel that flight back to LA.

But I waited.

The driver waited.

And then, Rae looked at him.

Not at me.

Not at the lavish hotel.

Not at the entrance where the hotel's doormen stood at attention, ready to usher her into a world of private luxury.

No.

Rae looked at him.

And I saw the moment she realized.

That she had control.

That she had the power.

That no one—not me, not this driver, not any man in this city—could make the choice for her.

She could walk into that hotel with me.

Or she could step away, get back into that car, and leave.

She could hold me captive in uncertainty, force me to chase her down, convince her, plead if I had to.

Hmmm. My sweet American girl.

My stomach tightened.

Would she leave right now?

Would she make me hunt her down tomorrow, drag her to my bed, and ruin any plans she thought she had?

A slow, knowing smile curled on her lips. "Thank you for offering to wait, Dalvin. I appreciate that."

I pursed my lips.

He let out a relieved sigh. "Of course. I would do. . . anything for you."

Careful.

However, she stepped closer to me.

Oh.

I felt it before she even spoke.

The weight of her decision.

Her voice was sultry, filled with promise. "But I won't be needing a ride from you tomorrow. I'll use Fabien's driver."

The relief.

The triumph.

The sheer victory that surged through me—it was almost too much.

I grinned.

The driver gave a small, respectful nod, averting his gaze as if he already knew what was coming next.

Good man.

Without another word, he climbed back into the Phantom and pulled away, disappearing into the night.

Leaving us alone.

And leaving me with her.

Exactly where she was meant to be.

I turned to Rae, tugging her flush against me. My voice grew thick with satisfaction. “That was a very smart decision, chérie .”

She smirked. “Oh? And why is that?”

I brushed my lips against her ear, whispering, “Because now I have all night to ruin you.”

And then, I kissed her.

Not gently.

Not sweetly.

But with possession.

With intent.

With the kind of hunger that a man only felt once in his lifetime—when he knew he had found something rare, something that no other man had the right to worship properly.

My lips crashed against hers.

Demanding.

Devouring.

She gasped softly, her hands flying up to my chest, gripping the fabric of my suit as if she needed something to hold onto—because she did.

Because I intended to steal every last ounce of oxygen from her lungs.

Manhattan pulsed around us, alive with its ceaseless energy—horns blaring in the distance, voices spilling out from bars and restaurants, the sound of the city's heartbeat thundering beneath our feet.

But we were in our own world.

The golden glow of the hotel entrance bathed us in its warm light, while the moon above cast its silver blessing over her dark brown skin.

She was glowing.

Or maybe that was just how I saw her.

How I would always see her.

I angled my head, deepening the kiss, swallowing the small, desperate sound that escaped her lips. My tongue slid against hers, slow and thorough, savoring every flick.

Every moan.

Her every surrender.

She melted into me, her curves molding perfectly against my body, her nails digging into my shoulders like she needed more.

And I would give her everything.

I moved one hand to the small of her back, guiding her even closer, until there wasn't a breath of space left between us.

My other hand tangled in her curls, tugging just enough to tilt her head back, forcing her to let me kiss her deeper.

God. . .come back to Paris with me.

She sighed into the deepening kiss, her body arching, pressing against the rigid length of my hard cock, still throbbing, still demanding to be inside of her pussy.

I groaned, my fingers tightening on her curvy waist, aching to throw her over my shoulder and take her straight upstairs.

But I wasn't done kissing her.

Not here.

Not in the moonlight.

Not when she tasted like desire and submission and something dangerously close to fate.

I slowed the kiss, taking my time, letting my lips trace over hers in soft, sensual drags, letting her feel the way my mouth would worship every inch of her body once again before this night was over.

Her breath was ragged when I finally pulled back, just enough to stare down at her.

Her lips were swollen, wet, utterly wrecked.

And fuck if that wasn't the best thing I'd ever seen. "Cancel your flight."

She blinked. "You know I can't."

"Mmm." I lifted her hand to my lips, pressing a kiss to her wrist, then laced my fingers with hers as I led her inside. "Then let's stop wasting time, chérie."

Tonight, Manhattan could keep its noise, its chaos, its endless distractions.

Because I was taking my goddess upstairs.

And I wouldn't be letting her go.

We'll see about your making that damn flight.

Chapter thirteen

French Laws of Possession

Fabien

Seconds later, we stepped into the hotel, and the lobby—with all its chandeliers and excess—barely registered with me.

The doormen nodded in respect.

The staff moved swiftly, but I barely saw any of it.

Rae walked beside me, unaware of the way she commanded the space.

We got to the elevator and entered.

It was an exquisite space—gold-paneled, spacious, the kind of luxury people killed for.

Yet it was empty of everything that mattered except her.

The doors closed, and I pressed the top button and then turned to Rae, gathering her into my arms. “Come here, mon amour .”

She gasped and then chuckled.

And my God. . .

Her scent.

Her warmth.

It all cracked my last bit of restraint.

I kissed her again.

Slow.

Deep.

Purposeful.

She moaned.

When I finally pulled back, her breath was uneven.

Sighing, I pressed my forehead to hers. “ J’adore tes lèvres. Parfaites, comme du velours. ”

“What does that mean?”

“I adore your lips. Perfect, like velvet.”

She shivered. “Say something else.”

A slow smile spread across my face. “ Tu es plus précieuse que l’or. Tu es la plus belle femme que j’ai jamais vue. ”

“And that?”

“You are more precious than gold. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.”

“So sexy.”

My cock rock-hard, pressed against the zipper of my slacks, throbbing in time with my heartbeat.

Once the elevator finally glided to a stop, I placed a final kiss to her lips before the doors slide open.

Thank God. I almost fucked her in the elevator.

I took her hand and guided her toward my suite.

The door unlocked with a quiet beep, and we stepped inside.

The wealth of the space was all there—shimmering chandelier, soft lighting, luxury linens, floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked a glittery Manhattan.

Yet, none of it mattered.

Only Rae.

Is she ready for what’s about to happen?

I grabbed her hand, pulling her deeper into my suite without hesitation.

The second the door shut behind us, I had Rae against the wall, my hands on her hips,

my body caging hers in. “Do you know how fucking hard it was to stop myself from slamming my cock into you, when we were in the car?”

“Your tongue was. . .everything.”

I exhaled sharply, trying to think, trying to remind myself that this was our first night together, that I should take my time with her.

But patience was a thin, frayed thread now, stretched to its limit.

“But, I wanted to do this right.” I licked my lips. “Because you’re not some quick fuck in the back of a car. You’re a goddamn meal. And I want to feast. ”

“Fabien, you can feast all you want to.”

And that was that.

I had that fur off her so fast, she gasped.

It fell to the floor with my coat.

Then, I grabbed the front of her shimmering pink gown and pulled it down in one very rough motion, exposing her.

Mon dieu.

Her breasts.

Full .

Heavy.

Perfect.

Mine.

I had always considered myself a man of refined tastes, drawn to the finer things in life—art, luxury, a perfect meal, a well-aged wine.

But this?

This was something beyond indulgence.

Her H-cup breasts, full and luscious, spilled from the delicate pink lace of her bra, the intricate embroidery barely containing the sheer magnificence of her curves.

My cock throbbed painfully at the sight, stiffening so hard it nearly made me dizzy.

The biggest.

The most beautiful.

I had never seen, never touched, never even imagined anything like them.

And now that I had her in front of me, standing there with that rich dark brown skin wrapped in silk and lace, those breasts plush and heavy, the dusky peaks teasing me through the lace—I would never let them go.

My jaw tightened as I fought the primal, animalistic urge to claim them with my mouth, my hands, my tongue—all at once.

I reached out, almost reverent, tracing my fingers along the scalloped lace, feeling the decadent weight of her breasts beneath my touch.

Soft.

So impossibly soft, yet so firm, so full, as if they had been sculpted for the sole purpose of filling my hands, my mouth, my obsession.

" Mon amour . . ." My voice came out low, guttural, thick with pure, unfiltered desire.

She shifted as if she could feel the madness she had ignited in me.

I cupped them fully, both hands barely able to contain the sheer, overwhelming size of her.

My thumbs dragged over the lace-covered peaks, feeling the way she trembled under my touch.

Perfect.

Fucking perfect.

I wanted everything.

To peel the lace away with my teeth.

To press my tongue against the deep valley between them, kissing, tasting, marking.

To bury my face in them, to savor their warmth, their weight, the way they spilled over my hands like a feast made for a starving man.

I growled, squeezing just enough to make her gasp.

"You were made for this, chérie ." My lips curled into a smirk, and my thumbs

flicked against her nipples.

She let out the softest moan, and fuck, I nearly lost it.

The things I plan to do with these.

I could already see it.

A future moment, a night where I would take my time, strip her bare, and watch those perfect, big soft mounds bounce as she rode me.

Or better yet, I would have her on her back. Her lips parted, her big, dark brown eyes looking up at me with that delicious mixture of surrender and mischief, her breasts pressed together, forming the most perfect, tight, wet heat.

I could see myself there, kneeling before her, guiding my cock between those breasts, slick with oil, or perhaps the mess we had already made.

My hands would slide under the heavy curves, pressing them together, trapping me in their warmth.

I would thrust between those breasts, slow at first, letting her feel every thick inch of my cock dragging along her skin, teasing the sensitive peaks, watching as her dark nipples hardened from the friction.

She would moan for me, that pretty mouth open, her tongue flicking out just barely as if she knew exactly how to drive me insane.

My pace would quicken, my breath ragged, the sound of wet, obscene pleasure filling the space around us.

My cock would glide between them, hot, swollen, desperate, the tip brushing against her lips each time I thrust forward.

And then—that final moment.

When I would growl her name, fists tightening around her breasts, body locking up as hot, thick ropes of white cum spilled onto her throat, her chin, her beautiful, flushed cheeks.

FUCK!!!

Pre-cum spilled into my pants.

I exhaled sharply, forcing myself back to the present, to the way she shivered under my hands, completely unaware of how close I was to losing it right here, right now.

Not yet.

But soon.

And when I finally had her like that, she wouldn't just feel worshiped.

She would feel owned.

Groaning, I leaned down toward her breasts and let my mouth hover over the lace, inhaling the sweet, intoxicating scent of her skin.

"Tell me. . .has any man ever truly worshipped these?"

Her breath caught. "No."

A dark, wicked satisfaction burned through me. "Then let me be the first. And the last."

And with that, I lowered my head, sinking into pure heaven.

My cock twitched violently against my slacks, demanding to be freed, but I needed to taste her first.

I needed my mouth on her breasts again.

I couldn't wait another second.

The lace had to go.

It was an insult to her beauty, to my hunger, to the worship she was about to receive.

I slipped my fingers under the delicate straps and yanked them down her arms, making her gasp.

My other hand slid to her back, fumbling with the clasp for only a moment before I tore it apart, the small hooks snapping under the force of my need.

And then—perfection.

Her full, heavy breasts spilled free, dark, aching nipples pebbled tight from hungered desire, begging for my mouth.

My cock pulsed, the sight of her so devastating that another drop of pre-cum smeared against my boxer briefs, thick and hot.

I let out a slow, guttural groan.

She was going to ruin me.

I traced my fingers down the soft, supple curve of her breasts, spreading my hands over them, reveling in their sheer size, the way they molded to my palms.

Too big to let go.

Too fucking perfect to ever let another man lay eyes on them again.

“You are a masterpiece, chérie .” My voice was thick, hoarse, and wrecked.

She shuddered.

I took my time, rubbing slow, teasing circles over her nipples, feeling the way they hardened further beneath my touch.

A soft moan left her.

“You like that?”

“Y-yes.”

“Mmmm.” I rolled those nipples between my fingers, pinching just enough to make her moan. “I can do this for the rest of my life.

She whimpered, “Fabien.”

I tightened my grip, twisting just a little, watching as her lips parted, her body arching toward me, her thighs pressing together.

My cock twitched.

I flicked one nipple, then the other, my hands alternating between slow, lazy caresses and rough, possessive tugs.

“Shit.” She was losing it.

Her hands flew to my suit jacket, tugging at the fabric, desperate.

Smirking, I leaned in, letting my hot breath drag over the sensitive peaks before finally flicking my tongue over one tight bud.

She gasped and dug her nails into my shoulders.

I licked the nipple—slow and teasing—circling the peak before closing my lips around it.

And then I sucked.

Hard.

Her body jerked, her head falling back against the wall. “Oh, fuck.”

That was what I wanted.

I flicked my tongue against the bud while I sucked, alternating between gentle and firm, feeling the way her body melted into me.

Then, I released her nipple with a slow pop and moved to the other, giving it the same thorough, sinful attention.

My tongue swirled, my teeth grazing just slightly before I sucked her nipple deep into my mouth.

“Oh my God.” She whimpered, her hips shifting, searching for friction.

My cock pulsed.

And then to my shock, her hands were on my cock.

Oh yes.

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My breath caught as she slid one palm over my belt, quickly working it open with a sensual ease that made my entire body go tight.

Oh my sweet American girl.

Fast, her fingers unzipped my slacks, slipping inside, finding the rigid, throbbing length of my cock.

And then—skin to skin.

I groaned, my forehead dropping against her breast, my body going tight with need.

God, I love the way she takes control.

Her palm wrapped around my cock, warm, soft, her fingers stroking slow, teasing.

I was supposed to unravel Rae some more, but she is destroying me. . .

More pre-cum spilled immediately, thick and hot, smearing across her fingers.

Rae moaned. “I love how big you are.”

I growled. “You’re teetering on the edge of danger, chérie .”

“Am I?”

“Fuck.” Playing with her nipples, I thrust my cock into her hand, unable to help

myself, desperate for more, desperate for her.

Rae stroked again, her grip firmer, dragging her palm down the length of me, spreading my slick arousal over my shaft.

“Fuck yes.” I hissed, my lips returning to her breasts, my mouth working her nipples as I thrust into her grip.

Soft moans slipped from her lips, her fingers tightening, her strokes becoming sensually slow.

Groaning, I latched onto her nipple again, sucking harder this time, my tongue flicking wildly as I groaned into her skin.

She moaned, her hips shifting, rubbing against me, teasing me with her heat, with the promise of where I needed to be.

I pulled back, breath ragged, my cock twitching violently in her hand.

I could feel it.

That tight, aching pull.

That desperate, uncontrollable need to cum all over her.

And she fucking knew it.

She looked at me, her lips parted, her hand still stroking my swollen cock, still teasing. Her breasts, wet and glistening from my mouth, rose and fell with every heavy breath.

I was so close to losing it.

So close to spilling for her.

But not yet.

Not before I was buried inside her.

Not before I fucked her senseless.

Not before I made her mine.

I lowered my head, taking one of her stiff, aching nipples into my mouth, sucking hard, groaning at the way she gasped, her fingers tangling in my hair.

Then, I stepped back and growled, “Turn around.”

She blinked up at me, dazed, still lost in the pleasure I had just given her. “What?”

“Turn around,” I growled again. “Then, put your hands on the wall.”

A dark, lusty chuckle left Rae. “Am I getting arrested?”

“Fuck yes. You have violated several French laws. You’ll have to come back to Paris for a life sentence of my cock.”

“Mmmm. Then, take me, officer.” Rae obeyed, pressing her palms flat against the surface, her ass perfectly presented to me, her body still trembling.

I yanked that shimmering gown up.

She shrieked.

I exhaled sharply, my hands tightening on her hips as I took in the sight before me.

Mon dieu!! She has been wearing a pink lace thong this whole time?

And not just any thong.

It was delicate, barely there, sinful against the rich expanse of her dark brown skin, cutting low over the lush curve of her hips and disappearing between the full swell of her big, juicy ass.

I ran a hand down the smooth expanse of her back, watching as her muscles tensed beneath my touch.

Her skin, warm and soft, shivered under my palm.

Her ass was divine. Full, round, thick in a way that made my mouth water, my cock twitch, my little bit of control shatter.

I'd always had a weakness for beautiful things—fine art, rare sculptures, the kind of luxury that took years of meticulous craftsmanship to create.

But this?

This was the kind of perfection that was entirely natural. The kind that no artist could ever replicate, no sculptor could ever mold, no painter could ever do justice.

And she was mine to worship.

My fingers traced the dimples on her lower back, lingering over the small, shadowed

indentations that made her ass even more hypnotizing.

“Look at you, chérie ,” I murmured, dragging my thumb along the dip where her back met her ass. “How did I get so fucking lucky?”

She squirmed slightly, shifting her weight from foot to foot.

“Rae.”

“Yes?”

“You need to cancel that flight.”

She chuckled.

I frowned. “I’m not laughing.”

She glanced over her shoulder. “I have a sexy scene in my film to prepare for—”

“You have all of my sexy scenes to be the leading lady in for the rest of this year.”

She blinked in horror. “Year?”

“What do you think this is? A fling? You’re mine now. I’m taking you to Paris.”

She chuckled.

Completely serious, I stared at her. “I’m not joking.”

And as much as I wanted to just forget about the conversating and stuff my aching cock into her, I knew that we needed to get this settled, because when I slipped into

her pussy. . .I knew I would be completely hers.

Damn it. We must. . .talk. . .

A sudden surge of unknown darkness pierced my chest like a blade, slicing through the very core of my being. The rawness and intensity of fear consumed me, twisting and contorting every nerve in my body until I was almost paralyzed with terror.

It was the sort of horror that rushed in when a man realized he was standing at the edge of something dangerous, something he could not control.

I was already falling, already sinking too deep into her, and if she wasn't serious about me—if this was nothing more than a fling to her—then I was walking straight into devastation.

Because the moment we sat down in Alchemy and began talking, I had seen it all too clearly in my mind, the way our lives would unfold.

A slow, inevitable path from dating to engagement to marriage.

A future that I had never cared to imagine before, not with any woman, not until now.

And if she weren't serious, if I were the only one seeing it—then I would have to find a way to pull myself back before she ruined me completely.

Before she became the first and only woman to ever break me truly.

I stepped back. "Rae. . .we should talk."

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Chapter fourteen

Wet, Wrecked, Worshipped

Fabien

Instantly, she stopped laughing and looked at me over her shoulder. “Fabien. . .what do you mean we have to talk?”

“Is your passport up to date?”

“Uh. . .yes but—”

“Is it here in New York?”

“Would you calm down?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Will I need to call the police?”

“It’s too late you’re already arrested by an international spy.”

She laughed.

Oh. She thinks I’m playing.

I lifted my hand and brought it down hard on her lush ass.

The sharp smack echoed through the suite.

“Oh!” She gasped, her spine arching, her ass jiggling beneath the impact in a way that made my vision blur for a second. “Holy fuck.”

Think.

I stilled, my palm resting against the curve of her ass, feeling the lingering heat from the smack. Her body was still trembling, her breath unsteady, but something in her laughter, in the teasing lilt of her voice, gnawed at me.

I’m missing something.

She wasn’t afraid of me.

She wasn’t holding back because she didn’t want this.

She was holding back because she still saw an exit.

And maybe that was my fucking fault.

Maybe the problem wasn’t that she was hesitating—it was that I was trying to force her into a decision she wasn’t ready to make.

I was asking her to drop everything, to rework her life, to abandon whatever plans she had for the sake of me— a man that she had just met.

But wasn’t I the one who could move?

Wasn't I the one with endless resources?

I had spent the last few hours trying to claim her.

Trying to own her.

Trying to bend her to my will.

But was that the mistake?

Was the real answer not making her come to me, but going to her?

The thought lodged in my chest like a blade.

Well. . .this is interesting. I don't think. . .I know how to do this. . .

I had never chased a woman in my life. Never restructured my world around someone else. But fuck. . .wasn't that exactly what I wanted from her?

I wanted her to choose me, to see a future in me, to trust that I wasn't just some passing storm in her life.

So maybe it wasn't about making her stay.

Maybe it was about showing her that I would go anywhere.

That I would follow her.

Even to California.

Even to the ends of the earth.

But even as that realization settled in, a deeper, darker fear curled at the edges of my thoughts.

What if that wasn't the problem?

What if it weren't about logistics, about control, about where we lived or how we could make this work?

What if she just. . didn't feel the same?

The idea cracked something in me.

So fast, I had gone all in, no hesitation.

I had seen the future so clearly—dating, engagement, marriage. A life where I worshiped her body for decades, where I woke up every morning knowing she was mine.

But what if I was the only one who saw it?

What if I was the only one falling?

I exhaled sharply, my grip tightening on her hip.

For the first time since I met her, I felt uncertain.

And I fucking hated it.

But for Rae, I would wait.

She blinked at me. "Fabien. . I just can't. . stay in New York. . but I do like you. .

.so much it. . .scares me.”

My heart warmed. “You do?”

“Yes.”

“So. . .” I did my best to not grumble. “Don’t tell me that I’ll need to go to California.”

Suddenly, she turned away from me, put her face forward toward the wall, and I could tell without seeing her expression that she was nervous. Her voice came out shaky. “Would you really come to California for me ? You barely know me.”

"I would follow you to the ends of the earth, chérie ." I gently massaged the ass cheek that I'd smacked. “Is that what you want—me on the plane with you heading to California tomorrow?”

She shivered under my touch. “You wouldn’t. . .”

“That’s not an answer.” I traced the curve of her hip and leaned my head over her shoulder to get a side view of her face.

She was biting her lower lip anxiously, and her eyes were filled with worry. “This is happening fast.”

“It is.”

“I don’t want to rush this.”

“Yet, you’re mine.”

She parted her lips in shock.

I had never once in my life wanted to set foot in California.

Too sunny.

Too cheerful.

Too many beaches.

Too many perfect fake bodies.

Too much endless summer.

It was the opposite of what I thrived in—the shadows, the decadence, the rich grittiness of Paris.

But for her?

I would go anywhere.

Antarctica, if necessary.

“Rae. . .”

She closed her eyes.

“If you told me you were leaving tomorrow for the Arctic Circle, I would be on the next flight, wrapped in fur, ready to seduce you under the Northern Lights.”

She snapped her eyes open.

I let out a slow breath, forcing myself to ease my grip on her hips before I did something irreversible, something that would have us missing her flight because she was too weak to move.

Instead, I reached for her wrist, guiding her to turn toward me.

She looked up at my face, her big brown eyes searching, as if she were still processing the weight of my words.

“I’ve never wanted to go to California.” I ran my thumb over her wrist, feeling her pulse, feeling her warmth. “But I’d go for you.”

She swallowed. “Fabien—”

“It would be a simple phone call,” I continued, voice even, steady, as if I weren’t absolutely wrecked by how much I needed her. “I would just need to change my inspection region from France to California. Nothing more. No big deal.”

Her lips parted slightly. “You would really do that for me?”

I smirked, brushing my knuckles along her jaw, tilting her chin just slightly. “Chérie, I would. I would even learn how to skate along the beach and surf like a true, annoying Californian.”

I expected her to laugh.

Expected some snarky, sarcastic quip.

But instead. . .she shivered.

My heart stopped.

Her breath came out uneven, her hands trembling just slightly against my chest.

I felt it before she even said the words.

The shift.

The surrender.

Yes. She is falling for me too. Thank God.

I ran my hands down her side, settling on the soft curve of her hips. “You know you want me there.”

Her breath hitched. “I do. . .I’m just not. . .used to a man going to this level to be with me.”

Aww. That’s what the problem was. Now, I understand.

She was used to being left behind.

Used to men making her feel like she was too much, or not enough, or something in between that was never quite right.

“I am not them. I would follow you anywhere. I’d be a menace, Rae. Imagine me in California. I’d start drinking green juices. Running on the beach at sunrise.”

She let out a breathy laugh, but it was unsteady, as if she were still fighting whatever war was happening inside her chest.

I tightened my grip, grounding her. “Rae, let me come with you. I’ll have my assistant find me a nice place to settle in. That wouldn’t be a problem. However, we

need time to get to know each other. . .not just this one night. It can't just be this one night."

She exhaled sharply, as if I had just stolen whatever final resistance she had left.

And then. . .she nodded.

"Yes?"

She let out a slow breath. "Yes. Come to California with me."

The second the words left her lips, something inside me snapped.

Not in rage.

Not in desperation.

But in relief .

Yes. Yes.

She was mine.

Not just in this moment, not just in the heat of the night, but beyond. A future had just been cemented between us, one she might not even fully understand yet.

But I did.

California.

Paris.

The Arctic.

Hell itself—I would follow her anywhere.

And now she knew it.

I swallowed the rush of possessiveness, let it coil low in my gut, let it fuel me, because fuck—she had no idea what she'd just unleashed.

I cupped her jaw, tilting her head up, memorizing the look in her eyes.

Wide.

Heated.

Soft with something dangerously close to devotion.

Mon dieu.

I could drown in her.

But not yet.

Not before I gave her something to remember before we ever set foot on that plane tomorrow.

I smirked and ran my thumb over her lips, pressing just enough to feel the heat of her breath. “Turn back around.”

Her breath hitched. “Fabien—”

“Now.”

Something flickered in her gaze—hesitation, desire, something caught between the two—but then, with a slow, measured movement, she obeyed.

God, I loved that about her.

She had no idea what it did to me when she listened.

When she trusted me.

When she surrendered to the things she didn’t even realize she needed .

She pressed her palms flat against the wall again, her back arching just enough to send my mind spiraling into every filthy thought I’d ever had about her.

That perfect ass, round and high, barely covered by that fucking pink lace thong.

A growl rumbled from deep in my chest as I slid my hands down her sides, slow, deliberate, savoring the way she shivered under my touch.

“So beautiful, chérie ,” I traced the dimples above her ass. “Every inch of you.”

She let out a shaky breath. “Fuck, Fabien.”

I smacked her ass again, harder this time.

She gasped, her fingers flexing against the wall, her body jolting forward before she rocked back into me.

Oh yes. She fucking likes that.

I smirked, running my palm over the heated skin, feeling the way she clenched beneath my touch. “That’s right. Tell me this.”

“Yes?”

“Have you ever fucked on the beach?”

“No.”

“Then, I’ll make sure my assistant gets me a private spot on the beach.”

“Mmmm.” Her breath was uneven, her legs shifting.

I gave her another smack.

A soft moan slipped from her lips.

Fuck.

I squeezed her ass, watching the way it molded against my palm, then reached for her hips, yanking them back until she had no choice but to bend for me.

A strangled sound left her throat as she braced herself against the wall, her spine curving, presenting herself to me like the perfect gift that she was .

I let out a ragged breath, my control slipping by the second. “Do you feel that, chérie ?”

She swallowed hard. “Y-yes.”

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My fingers dug into her hips, my cock pressing against the curve of her ass, thick, hard, aching to be buried inside of her. “You know what’s coming, don’t you?”

She nodded, but that wasn’t enough.

“Say it.”

Her voice grew breathless and wrecked. “You’re going to fuck me.”

“Very hard.”

“Please.”

A growl ripped through my chest, and before she could say anything else, I grabbed the thin band of her thong and yanked it down, letting the delicate lace slide down her thighs before pooling at her feet.

Mon dieu. Bare. Perfect. Mine.

I ran my fingers over her slick folds, groaning at the sheer wetness of her. “You’re soaked for me.”

“Fabien, please.”

I smirked. “Please what, chérie ?”

She whimpered, pressing back into me, her breath coming faster. “I need you to fuck

me right now. I'm losing my mind."

"Are you sure?"

"God yes."

I wrapped my fingers around my cock, dragging the tip through her arousal, teasing her entrance, making her shudder.

"Need me?" I whispered, pressing just barely inside, enough to feel the tight, pulsing heat of her. "Then take me."

She let out a desperate moan as I thrust my cock inside, slow, stretching her, filling her in a way no other man ever would again.

"Fuck yes." I groaned, my hands gripping her hips, holding her in place as I sank into her, inch by inch, until I was completely buried. "That's it, my sweet American girl. Take all of me."

Her pussy clenched around me, her body shuddering, her forehead dropping against the wall as she gasped. "Oh God. It's so deep."

I grinned, pulling back just enough before slamming forward, making her cry out. "You like that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Now that I'm forced to go to California, you're going to get my cock every damn day to make it up to me."

"Please!"

I thrust again, slower this time, dragging every thick inch along her walls, savoring the way her body gripped me, refusing to let go. “Fuck, you feel so good.”

Whimpering, she moved forward a little.

I groaned. “No, no. Don’t you inch away. Take all of this cock . ”

She let out a choked moan, and her body trembled beneath me.

That pussy was perfect.

Five Stellar stars for sure.

Tight.

Hot.

Fucking heaven.

A guttural groan ripped from my chest as I kept pulling back and then sinking back into her.

Those pussy walls squeezed my cock like a fucking vice.

She cried out , gripping the wall, her back arching, taking me deep .

And that was it, I maintained the grip on her hips and fucked her like I should have in the car.

Raw.

Unrestrained.

Hungry.

Her moans turned to cries, her legs shaking.

I drove into her, deep and unrelenting. “You feel this, chérie ? This is your fucking future. Wrapped around my cock, taking every inch.”

Her breathless cries echoed in the suite, each desperate sound fueling the hunger clawing through me.

Her pussy was silk and fire wrapped around my cock, gripping me.

Milking me.

Pulling me in deeper with every thrust.

Her walls clenched tight, her body taking me in as if it had been made for this, for me.

“And anytime you try to run from my love, remember this—how I stretch you open, how I own this fucking body.” I gritted my teeth, my muscles tensing as I set a brutal pace, snapping my hips forward, slamming her into the wall with every thrust.

The force of it made the framed artwork rattle.

“Tell me you love it.”

She loudly moaned. “I love it!”

“Tell me you fucking need it.”

“I need it!”

The air ran thick with the scent of our sweat and lust, our bodies moving in a rhythm that neither of us could control anymore.

“Damn it!” I couldn’t believe how amazing her pussy was.

It was in that moment when I realized I would probably end up being an American—getting citizenship in this godforsaken country just to have her pussy.

It made me so lustful and angry, I sneered, “I’ll fuck you on every wall of every city I take you to. Paris, Manhattan, LA, London, fucking Moscow—you’re mine in all of them.”

Her fingers curled into fists against the wall. “Oh! Oh!”

“Yes. I like that.”

"Oh God!"

“Are you close to cumming?”

“Yes.”

“Then, beg for it.”

“Please!”

“Beg me to fuck you harder.”

“H-harder!!”

The plea was desperate, rippling from her throat like a fallen angel's prayer.

I growled, my need to satisfy her overpowering anything else.

I pounded my cock into her.

"Oh God, Fabien!"

"Say it again."

"Fabien!"

"That's it, chérie . Cum for me.”

And she fell apart.

And then, I lost it too.

We came together.

Hot.

Wet.

Vibrating.

We screamed together.

A guttural groan ripped through me as my cock swelled inside of her, my release

tearing through me like a violent storm.

I buried myself to the hilt, holding her there, forcing her to take every hot, pulsing white drop as I filled her, marking her, claiming her in the only way I could in that moment.

But it wasn't enough.

The need to brand her, to make sure she never forgot this, never forgot me, clawed at me like an obsession.

Pulling out, I groaned at the sight of her—legs shaking, skin damp with sweat.

I gripped my cock, still hard, still leaking, and ran the thick head over her ass, her lower back, watching as my cum spilled onto her rich dark brown skin, dripping in thick white ropes down her lush curves, onto even the plush carpet beneath us.

There we go.

I let out a slow breath, savoring the sight, the ownership of it. “Perrrrfectttt.”

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First Class to Forever

Rae

Laila laughed so hard, I had to pull my phone away from my ear before she got me kicked off this flight.

“So hold up now!” she gasped between giggles. “You mean to tell me that he is sitting right next to you on the plane ?!”

I kept my voice low. “Yes.”

“How the hell did he manage that?!”

“At the sight of my original seat, he huffed in dismay and bought two first-class tickets for a new flight. He’s a little snobby.”

Fabien’s deep, accented voice rumbled beside me. “I heard that.”

I glanced over at him and chuckled.

Currently, he was flipping through the menu like we were at some three Stellar star restaurant instead of sitting on a commercial airline.

I rolled my eyes, but deep down?

Yeah, I liked it.

This man wasn't playing with me.

Not even a little bit.

“Girllllll!” On the phone, Laila dragged the word out. “So. . .I’m going to meet your new boo?”

“Yes.”

“Like. . .today?”

“Yes.”

“Girl, your therapist is going to pass out.”

I did my best not to burst into laughter. “I know, right?”

“She told you to take yourself out on a date, and you came back with a rich man.”

“Girl. . .”

The pilot’s voice crackled through the intercom, announcing our departure.

“Okay, Laila, I gotta go.”

“Fine, fine. But call me when you land. And take lots of pictures because I need to see if this man is actually real or if you had some sort of Parisian fever dream.”

I smirked. “Bye, Laila.”

She hung up, and I slid my phone into my bag.

Beside me, Fabien was unbothered.

He lounged back in his seat, still inspecting the menu like the fate of the entire French culinary world depended on his breakfast selection.

We hadn't grabbed breakfast or lunch at his hotel.

We'd been too busy fucking.

My pussy was so sore, but I knew that once we hit California we would be fucking some more.

How did I get so lucky?

His long fingers drummed against the armrest, and I hated how much I wanted to touch them.

Scratch that.

I didn't hate it.

I was just getting used to the fact that my life had taken a full-blown romance novel turn in the span of 24 hours.

One moment, I was in New York for a much-needed solo trip, rediscovering my confidence after years of putting myself last. The next, I was tangled in the sheets with him—a man who moved like he owned the world and yet looked at me like I was the most exquisite thing he'd ever seen.

And now?

Now, I was flying back to California with him.

Not only was Fabien coming with me, but his assistant had already locked down a beach house for him ten minutes from mine.

Ten. Minutes.

This man wasn't even pretending to take it slow.

I should've been freaked out.

I should've had several questions about what the hell I was doing.

But instead, when I looked at him—at that sharp jaw, those full lips, that completely ridiculous head of tousled French perfection—I felt something foreign and wonderful settle in my chest.

Peace.

Because I wanted this too.

Fabien's deep, velvety voice broke through my thoughts. "Why are you staring at me, mon amour?"

Heat flooded my face. "I wasn't staring."

He smirked, that sexy, devastatingly arrogant smirk. "Liar."

I huffed. "Have you decided on what we will have to eat?"

"Mon dieu, this menu is a tragedy. Where is the foie gras? The truffle butter? The duck confit? The fresh-baked brioche with fig compote? What is this. . .mediocrity?"

Chuckling, I glanced down at my own menu, scanning the options. "Babe, they have

filet mignon, lobster ravioli, and an actual cheese plate. I think you'll survive."

He leveled me with a look. "You think this is acceptable?"

"Considering I would've been back there eating pretzels in coach? Yes."

He pointed at me. "Never will I allow you to fly coach again."

"Alright."

"Never."

"I got it." I did my best to not laugh since his face was so serious.

He glanced out of the window. "I am about to spend half of my time in a country that considers Cheese Whiz a part of an actual food group. I must prepare myself."

I snorted. "You do realize California has some of the best fine dining in the country, right?"

He looked back at me and waved a dismissive hand. "I will be the judge of that."

Actually, he would.

Because apparently, once he notified the company this morning, they gave him an assignment that would start in two weeks.

He would need to inspect a restaurant in Los Angeles for a Stellar Star.

And because he wasn't subtle at all, he had already asked me to go with him.

So now, in addition to having the best sex of my life, I would also be experiencing

fine dining in L.A., eating food prepared by chefs whose plates probably cost more than my rent.

This is my life now.

I exhaled and reached for the seatbelt strap, but Fabien's hands were faster.

He took the belt from me and buckled me in, his fingers brushing against my stomach a little too slowly, like he wanted me to feel him.

My breath caught.

It was such a small thing, but the deliberate way he touched me had me pressing my thighs together.

He gazed at me. "Thank God, I will have you, Rae. In the end that is all that will ever matter."

I swallowed.

Hard.

The way he said that.

Like he had already been thinking of what ring he would buy me to propose.

I cleared my throat. "I'm so happy you're coming with me. I plan to help you fall in love with California."

He smirked. "Just be naked and that will be enough."

"Then. . .once the movie is done within another month—"

“I can show you the beauty of France, and perhaps introduce you to some of my film director friends that may need an intimacy coordinator on their next films.”

“Just coincidentally they will need one?”

“Of course. No ulterior motive at all. Not even calling in favors or anything.”

“Liar.”

We laughed together.

The flight attendant walked up to us, and we gave her our orders.

When the plane finally began its ascent, I took a deep breath and looked down at myself, especially my stomach that pushed out against my dress’s fabric.

You are worthy. You are deserving.

I was comfortable in my body—I had worked hard to get here.

But I wasn’t used to this.

Wasn’t used to men looking at me like Fabien did.

I didn’t have the Instagram model curves or the Hollywood standard of beauty.

I was soft, thick, natural, and very much a real woman.

And Fabien?

He was drop-dead gorgeous, rich, and powerful—a man who could have anyone.

Yet here he was.

With me.

My fingers brushed over my stomach, and just as self-doubt started to creep in, Fabien caught my wrist.

He kissed the back of my hand, his lips warm and soft against my skin.

My eyes flicked to his, and my heart flipped at the heat I saw there.

He kissed it again. “You are the most beautiful woman in this entire country. No. This world.”

I swooned.

I was in real, deep, dangerous trouble.

I knew it without a doubt.

Because this man wasn’t just following me to California. He was following me into forever.

It hit me all at once, warm, terrifying, and wonderful.

I squeezed his hand and whispered, “Thank you for coming with me.”

His thumb brushed my knuckles, gentle, knowing, promising. “I would follow you anywhere.”

Then, before I could overthink it, before I could stop myself, I leaned in and pressed my lips against his, sealing something between us that neither of us fully understood

yet.

But we would.

Because this was the first day of forever.

And I couldn't wait to experience every minute of it.

Check out more KW Romances!