



# Master A-0011 (Garden of the Gods #11)

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**Category:** Dark Erotica

**Description:** Lust...Blood...Bargaining.

Pearl thought becoming Ethan's slave would result in death far worse than her already mangled life, but death isn't the worst thing that can happen. The Master she fears is now one she can't escape. But Ethan is determined to set his hooks in, and he'll stop at nothing to get what he wants.

Even if he has to bring in the Main Master to do it.

Love is a delicious delicacy, best served with a side of revenge. -Elec

**Total Pages (Source):** 17

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

MASTER A-0011

The forbidden was never hidden in the pitch black. It was conceived in the light, right in front of the faces of those who so blindly turned away. I wasn't blind. I saw plenty, and no amount of white and gold could disguise the depravity that filled this dim auditorium. The highest-ranking members of society took their seating below, but I wouldn't join them. I watched from my private balcony seat, taking in their devilish smiles as they showed off their elaborate mythological God and Goddess costumes. I soaked in the way they tried to control their enthusiasm for the blood they were so desperate to spill. And I knew hours from now, screams and cries would fill more spaces in this underground city than any unexpected aboveground civilian tragedy. Tonight, thousands would die, and with each auction, our circle of killers grew.

The Main Master, Elec Wexler, walked onto the stage. The spotlight followed him to the center like the true God he was. With black hair, blue eyes, and at a few inches over six feet, he dominated his surroundings. But he wasn't dressed up like the majority of us were. Like me, he didn't need to wear a costume to assert his status. He was the Dark God of the Gardens, and it was obvious with every stride he took in his black suit. One word, and you were dead. One word, and he could make you wish you were.

"Masters and Mistresses, welcome to the third auction for the Garden of the Gods. This is our first themed event together, and I'm happy to see you all had fun with it. Very creative," he said, smiling and pointing to someone in the first few rows. "For those who didn't make it to the first two auctions, I'm going to recap this as quickly as possible."

He began a slow, confident walk down the length of the stage. There was an aura about him that felt...different. It was as if he was at the top of his game. Happier? Something was electric in his movements, and I couldn't help but look around and see how everyone who watched was in awe.

“Before you were permitted inside, you took classes to learn the rules. You underwent tests, and you’ve proven yourself worthy. Some of you are still in the Beta stage while others have moved up to become an Alpha. A lot of you have inquired why. I’ll sum it up right here. There can be many different reasons why I’ve advanced a select few. Perhaps the auctions aren’t new to them. Maybe they’re more experienced and accepting of who they really are than others. What it boils down to is: they’ve put in the time, and I trust them to be our foundation. It is not an easy rank to obtain. For some, it may take years. Only when I’m satisfied by your progress will I move you to Alpha.”

My mouth pulled back on the side at my own Alpha status. Elec stopped, scanning the large room. His eyes jumped to a private balcony in the vicinity of mine, stealing glances this way as he continued.

“Aside from the A and B attached to your name, there is a number. You are a number. Your outside status got you here, but that means nothing inside the Gardens. Your identity exists no more. Here, you have no power, nor will there be favoritism. This world is mine. If you follow the rules, your wildest, darkest dreams can come true. If not...” He scanned the room, shrugging. “You’re dead.”

I pulled my chair closer, moving to the edge. Again, the Main Master looked towards me. We were good friends. Closer than most we associated with, but I could tell it wasn't me he was looking at. I turned to my right, spotting a dark-haired woman resting her forearms on the balcony not feet away. Her hands were clasped, and she stared at the stage, a soft, if not confused, expression on her face. Dark hair cascaded down her bare back with curls, and the gold straps on her shoulders from the white

Goddess dress were so thin against her bare skin, they were barely noticeable. She was beyond beautiful, but no one I recognized which was surprising. I didn't get to look long before a dark-haired man leaned forward, glaring right at me. I turned back to the stage. I'd been so curious and taken aback by the woman, I hadn't even noticed him sitting beside her.

"For those joining us for the first time tonight." He stopped. "And there are quite a new number of us: new members, old members I'm giving a chance. Previous Main Masters ." This time he looked over to a higher private balcony seat a level above me. "I don't think I need to go much into how this place is not Whitlock? i . The rules are different. The location is different." Again, he glanced up. "I am not Bram Whitlock? ii . You cannot buy yourself out of trouble. You cannot buy me . I will die in this place, and I will never let the Garden of the Gods be taken over or fall. If you can accept that, welcome home . Just know, there is no special treatment nor any favors. I am no one's friend. We have rules, and every single one of you will follow them."

He turned, slowly heading in the opposite direction.

"Now that we're all clear, let's recap bidding. First, we have the white, or w? iii 's. These are the virgins. We also have the b's: or blue? iv . Not virgins. There are the d? v 's. These slaves are docile, trained, and good for those who are looking for a long-term slave. Lastly, come the black, or as we call them, the crows? vi . These are the convicts. The disfigured. The old. Repulsive ." He turned, making his way back to the middle. "In this category, you'll also find the breeders. These are through contract only and cannot be bid on unless you've already met with me. If you bid and you haven't followed the rules, your bid will be revoked, and I will fine you ten thousand dollars. Breeders are special and are for only those I approve of."

"For those looking for our programmable, 'blank slate' ? vii males and females, your auction is just through that door off to the right. These slaves are for those who want someone they can control. A bodyguard. A companion. A sex slave you can use or

defile by any means possible that will not fight back. They have had a portion of their memories erased. They're aware. They know who they are, but they only remember what we want them to. The best part is they obey every order. And I mean that. Every order."

Elec paused, taking in a few of the Masters and Mistresses in the first few rows of the crème luxury theater seating.

"For those who are new, pay attention. I've said this before, and I'll continue to repeat it. What you buy is yours. You can do whatever you want with it. Fuck it. Kill it. Share it. Marry it. Love it. Eat it. Destroy it." Hesitation. "I don't care so long as you follow the rules. Your business is your own. Keep it that way or you may come to regret it. I can't stress that enough."

"If you look down the arm of the chair, you will see a button. That is how you will bid. Do not press that button unless you are sure you have the money. There is no lay-a-way plan or loans. If the slave is too much for you to afford, don't bid. At the Gardens, there are no such thing as accidents. If you bid, you will buy. If you don't have the money, I will take my payment from you from the outside world, and you can stay here with me and the slave you so desperately wanted. This life can be simple if you just follow the rules. They're easy. Complete acceptance into the Garden of the Gods is not. Honor your contract, abide by it, and Alpha status will be yours."

Heads turned as lights ran the length of the room, but I didn't look to the back entrances to watch the slaves appear in line like everyone else did. My eyes stayed on the Main Master as he exited the stage. I had a dilemma, and only Elec could help me. Unfortunately, his gaze was transfixed back on the woman in the room next door, and something told me that's exactly where he was headed. If I wanted to get to him, I'd have to cut him off. With as determined as he appeared, I knew he wasn't going to be happy, but I didn't have a choice.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

For most in my circle, looks were their identity. If they held beauty, they used it like a tool. Manipulation was almost guaranteed, and their ego was certain to be overinflated. My life revolved around these sorts of people. I was one. In the outside world, there wasn't a soul who hadn't heard of Ethan O'Brien. My movies broke box office records. I was the epitome of male sex appeal, and there wasn't a day that went by when I wasn't reminded of it.

As one of the most famous people in Hollywood, my life should have been easy. And maybe that was the problem. Women threw themselves at me. They begged me to fuck them. I should have been living the dream. Had it not been for who I'd been born as, maybe I would have. Acting may have been my job, but I would have been famous regardless. That's what happened when you came from one of the richest and most elite families in the world.

I hated it. I hated everything about my life. From the earliest years, I could recall this thing inside of me. It started with a want. A simple craving. Touch. Love. Attention. I had always been a cute kid, but where the world doted on me even back then from modeling and my small movie roles, my home life was anything but picturesque. Affection was nonexistent. Happiness wasn't found. The O'Briens had secrets. Some so dark, they couldn't help but leak free. Maybe that's why for so long we were considered a risk to our circle. We were chastised. Berated by our own kind. We were a disgrace...until I took care of it.

"Look at the pretty boy. Pathetic. Weak," my father screamed in my face, spitting against my swollen cheek as he bent over my beaten body. "I can't even look at you. You make me sick. You might as well wear makeup and put on one of your mother's dresses. I bet you already do," he said, kicking me again. You sure as hell don't do

anything manly like sports or— a gust of air exploded from my lungs from the kick to the stomach —boy things. Should I grab a pair of heels too? Would you like her panties?”

I fought to catch my breath as clinking from his belt sounded. I could barely move from the new injuries to the two fractured ribs I had from the beating before. “Dad, stop.”

“I’ll stop when you do. No more shoots. No more prancing around and practicing for those stupid roles.”

“But Mom said—I told you ? —”

Laughing. It filled the space and so did the sound of piss as it began saturating and bouncing from the knight costume I’d had made to practice my role.

“Mommy’s boy. Fucking pansy. You’re almost twenty, but you’re no man. You’re a fucking girl.”

Maybe I hadn’t been a typical boy growing up, but I enjoyed being anyone but myself. I was good at acting. It was the epitome of my identity. Pretending. Smiling. Seething. My father had created me whether he wanted to admit it or not. And I was more like him than he knew. It didn’t take long after that day for him to see firsthand.

Murder came easy. Acting was my mask. It’s probably why he and my grandfather never saw it coming. How could they when to them it was a random Tuesday and their abuse was habit? The male side of my line had tried so hard to mold me into disaster and dysfunction. They thought because of my good looks, I wasn’t “tough” enough. Their jealousy and hate towards me knew no end, and when the beating began, I was ready. But not for what came from me.

That day, I destroyed them with an act that felt natural. For the first time, I felt at home. But I wasn't prepared for what it would mean. Neither were the leaders of our circle when they stepped forward to cover up my secret when parts of their bodies were...missing. That was years ago. That's when Elec took me in. That's when he started teaching me how one of our status should be. With more than a decade of his help, I found my blood wasn't as forgiving. The darkness lured me in, and the more I gave myself to it, the more it had to show me.

"I said stay out of my way, Melissa. I know what I'm doing. I'm fine ."

Red shoulder-length hair swayed as the Mistress glanced my way but turned back to the Main Master. Her face was as hard as his, but where Elec projected barely any emotion, the anger she held was evident. And I knew her, personally and from her role here. She was an elite and one of the Garden's therapists. I often saw her on my way to see my own doctor.

"That remains to be seen. Your appointment is in the morning. You've rescheduled enough. I will see you, then."

"I haven't forgotten. Nine o'clock, sharp."

The dismissal was immediate as he turned from her, heading for me.

"Master Eleven."

It was a greeting, but he wasn't stopping as he swept by.

"Main Master, I was actually headed to see you."

"Of course you were. Fuck, I told you I'd call. I forgot." He slowed, turning back to me. "What is it you need?"



Hard blue eyes bore into me suddenly making my needs feel not so important. He was busy running this shitshow. I knew that. The thing was, I couldn't go through this again. Not for the third time.

"I need a d? i . A housekeeper, cook, the works. I looked through all of them last time. Is there any...not so attractive?"

"Attractive? That's right."

My teeth bit into each other at his look of understanding. "You know I have routines. It helps the anger." I paused, reigning in the swirl of rage already building. I couldn't stand talking about my feelings. My issues. "I need someone I'm not going to kill."

"Of course. I take it men are out of the picture."

"They'll be dead faster than the women."

"I thought so." The Main Master pulled out his phone, pushing buttons and scanning through. "You've looked at all the d's available?"

"Every single one, multiple times. I was worried about this last time. I just...I need structure. Dr. Almer, my therapist, says it's important for me. I just can't find the right person, and you know how I feel about blank slates."

"Yes." He paused as he scanned. "The first auction you bought one b and a d . The second you bought two b's and a d . And...I see they were all picked up within days."

Nodding, I studied his face as he continued to go through the information on his phone.

"What about a crow ? ii ? Not a criminal but..." His finger swiped countless times,

and a few minutes passed. He immediately went rigid but smiled. “Wait a minute. I think... Yes . I might have someone for you.” He got quiet, pulling something up and nodding. “Exactly what I thought. Good scores. According to testing, her temperament is...excellent. She would have made a perfect candidate for the d program except, well, given the circumstances, was impossible.”

Elec turned the phone to face me, and my lips parted. For long moments, I couldn’t speak past taking in the deep scars that were visible over her skin. A thick line ran just over her temple to below her left eye. It was light pink and jagged reaching to the middle of her cheek. Another marred her lower neck, disappearing into the gown towards her chest. That one was thicker and a darker shade with one closely below. It was...intriguing. Mysterious. It had my stare jumping back to her face. Not a beautiful face, but not unattractive either. More... classic beauty , and I liked it.

“What happened to her?”

“Does it matter? You want her to clean and cook for you. Do you need her life story for that?”

“No.”

“Great. I’m going to enter her information into your cart. When you’re finished, let the guards downstairs know and they’ll retrieve her. You can take a look in person and?—”

“No.” I swallowed back the odd edge in my tone. It was interest and intrigue. Doom and deception. “She’ll work just fine. Charge me whatever you want. If you could have her delivered while I finish up, that would be great.”

More movements of his finger. “Done. This won’t happen again, Master. And you better believe this favor comes at a price far more than money. Next time, you’ll

know a different outlet if you kill her too.”

No favoritism. We were friends, but not concerning the auction. He was all Main Master, and not the man who saved my life in more ways than I could think about.

“Thank you.”

Elec threw me a nod but was already walking towards the hall at a fast pace. I turned back to follow and make my way to my private balcony, but I took my time, watching as he rapped against a door: the door to the Couple . Within seconds, he disappeared behind it.

Where moments ago I would have been curious who the couple was, all I wanted to do was get this other part of bidding over with. I had the d ...now for the b ? iii s . Their looks would have to be impeccable. What they were taken for would be their downfall. What they’d probably used to get their way in the outside world would come back to haunt them. Ethan O’Brien wasn’t a savior. He was about to become their worst nightmare.

Opening my door, I paused, waving over a male slave at the end of the hall waiting to offer assistance should anyone call.

“Master, how may I help you?”

“I am Master Eleven. This is important. I need you to listen carefully. The Six has my auction schedule. I need you to have them bring up my meal. Even though they’ve gotten it right the last two auctions, I need you to make sure they bring up my three o’clock meal. Not the six or the eight o’clock one. I need the three, and two bottles of water. I am on a very strict diet. It has to be right. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master Eleven. I will have them bring it right up.”

“Great.”

I headed inside, shutting the door behind me. Lights were already going crazy with increasing bids on the large screens above the stage. I glanced at the blonde, tempted to push my button to get it over with, but I wasn't looking for a w . Virgins weren't my thing. They were too innocent. They didn't ignite the rage I needed to release. And it was time... The slight shake in my hand drove my fingers to twitch at the thought.

Walking to my seat, I paused as female laughter had me looking to the wall that divided me from the couple. The hum of voices held a joyous tone, but it didn't last through the murmurs that continued. I remained standing, stepping closer to the wall. With the buzz from below, it was hard to hear, but the closer I got to the balcony, the clearer the conversation between the couple and the Main Master became.

“I have to admit, I was surprised when you called and cut your honeymoon short to return. And did I hear correctly that you both went back to Boston instead of Chicago? I thought Chicago was the plan?”

At the Main Master's question, the woman's soft voice answered.

“It was but...Rhett and I...”

The man, who must have been her husband, stepped in when she trailed off.

“June thinks she's forgetting something from her past. She thought maybe she could find it back in Boston. I told her there's nothing there. I think she needs your help again, Elec. The nightmares are getting worse. I can barely calm her when she wakes.” The anger from the man couldn't be mistaken. “Is it David, her ex? Is it what the stalker did to her? Both? She's so afraid, but she doesn't know why. She can't remember the dreams. Can you do what you did last time? You're the only one who

can make her better when she gets like this.”

Silence.

“Rhett, you did the right thing requesting that I come. Now, go sit in the chair and think about how much you love your wife. You hear nothing I say until I speak your name again. Nothing. June...come to me.”

A brunette in a blue, sheer slave robe walked to the stage, but I was more intrigued by what was going on to the one behind the divider. I mindlessly reached over, grabbing my button to bid, still listening as I waited for the Main Master to continue.

“June, June, June.” There was an edge of disapproval in his voice, yet it somehow seemed sad? “You didn’t call me. Not in your first week like I told you to, and not when you started having these nightmares. We talked about this.”

“I was going to. I really was, but I couldn’t. Calling you is all I think about when I’m not here. I swear I wanted to. I just.” She abruptly stopped. “My fingers wouldn’t stop shaking when I tried to dial. That’s why I made Rhett call you. I really tried. I think...I think I was just scared.”

“Of me?”

“...I don’t know.”

The Main Master’s tone dropped so low I couldn’t make out the foreign words that seemed to leave him. But I knew what it was. I knew Elec and what he was capable of doing to people’s minds.

“Look into my eyes, June. You don’t fear me. We’re friends. See. There we go,” he said lowly. “I believe you, and I forgive you. Come closer. There we go. Just like

that. Follow my finger and listen to me. You don't fear me. Everything I do for you is to make you stronger. You look up to me. You think of me as your best friend. We are friends," he practically growled under the smooth tone. "Best. Friends. The best. I helped you after the stalker. I did that. No one else. I will always protect you. You don't fear me. Say it. Believe it."

Seconds. Almost a minute.

"We are best friends. The best. Friends. Elec, my best friend."

"There we go." He let out a breath that almost sounded like a sigh of relief. "Just like that. Perfect. We are. See, your body is losing all tension. You're relaxed. That's right. You feel so happy to be at the Gardens. Happier now that you're with me. You love this place. You long to come back and watch your husband have his revenge towards men who hurt you. You can't wait to see me every time you're here...To help me." His tone softened as another minute passed. "One more breath. Slow. Deep. Isn't that so much better? No more fear. Good girl. Eyes back to mine. Perfect. I'm going to close out any fear you may have for good. I have a gift for you."

A snapping noise filled the space. Then two more.

"A gift?"

"You're my best friend. Of course I have a gift for you. Do you want to know what it is?"

"Yes."

"There's my June. So much better. I found David. I have him waiting for you."

"You found him?"

“I did, and after you kill him tonight, there will be no more nightmares. I forbid you have them. You don’t fear me. You need me. You can’t go a single day without me crossing your mind. That’s how it is with friends. That’s why you call me on Wednesdays and Saturdays when your husband is at his meetings.”

“I don’t...fear you.”

“No. And you don’t forget to call me either. You know I need you.” His volume dropped and there was an intoxicating pull as his words continued. I blinked through the slightly dazed feeling, not sure I should continue to listen. “What is your name?”

“June Vaughn-Rivera.”

“And?”

“I’m strong. I’m his.”

“Yes you are.” Another snap. More foreign words. Louder this time. “What do you think, Rhett? I have David here for you. Are you ready to have some fun?”

“You have that motherfucker here? Oh, hell yes. I want him.”

“Good. I’ll have them deliver David to your apartment. I want to hear all about your night over breakfast.” A pause. “June... you take the lead. Make the bastard pay for hurting you. You and your husband do this together.”

“Gladly.”

No soft tone from her anymore. No monotone response. I stepped back from the wall, gazing at it with a sense of pride in my friend, wonder...and curiosity. Laughter started up again and I managed to force my attention to the stage. But I never stopped

looking at the wall or wondering exactly what was going on between the three of them. Elec had his motives for everything, but they were always in our best interest. What was his interest in Rhett Rivera? He was an elite like me, but he'd turned his back on his family a decade ago. Apparently, he was back in our circle, and if I had to guess from what I just heard, maybe his return hadn't necessarily been by choice .



## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

“G od, how long do you think this one will last? A day? Two? It’s hideous.”

One of the guards laughed as I was pushed through the front door of an apartment.

“Two days? No way she’s living through the night. Master Eleven was only thinking of one thing when he hit the button and bought her.”

“Murder.”

The word sent chills down my spine, but the guard hadn’t said it in the form of a question. He said it matter-of-factly, as if my fate was cemented in stone. And maybe it was.

“What? Murder? You’re joking.” I turned seeing the taller, dark-haired guard push the other’s shoulder. “She wishes. Food, stupid.”

“Food? Look at her, she’s a freak. What the hell are you talking about, Moore?”

Brown eyes from the shorter, blonde guard narrowed as he took in Moore, whose stare came back to me. There was no amusement or even much emotion on his face.

“Food, Bettis. As in food .”

“Oh, I get it.... because he’s going to eat her alive.” The knowing smile dropped. “Eww, you don’t mean like eat her, sexually, right? That’s just gross. Or do you think he’s into that twisted shit?”

“Are you fucking twelve years old? How did you even make it down here?” The taller guard pointed to the door on the far side of the living room. “Get in the bedroom, crow ? i , and take your position at the back wall.”

“I bet he’s into fucking the slaves to death. I bet tonight he buys the most gorgeous slave there is. That’s who he wants. Not this one. Not for that. This crow must be his fun. Like a wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am sort of thing but not with sex. A quick, rage kill. I take back my previous statement. Not two days. Definitely tonight. Then he can have all the hot slaves he can dream of.”

“You’re such a moron, Bettis. You know nothing. Ethan O’Brien is not who you think he is.”

I stumbled at the name, barely catching myself as I continued through the living area. To say I was clueless of my fate was stupid. Even secluded for most of the time, I had had months to adjust to the stories whispered through the crow’s cells. Auctions. Torture. Stories that nightmares were made of. But Ethan O’Brien? Hollywood heartthrob, Ethan O’Brien? Hadn’t I seen all of his movies? Hadn’t I had the biggest crush on him, growing up? Ethan...really?

Of course, Ethan. It would make sense. He did have money, and if the rumors were true, the rich were paying to kill us off. But me? Why would he want to kill me?

“I’m not a Moore-on, you are.” The smaller guard laughed at his own joke, making another sound of disgust as I glanced back at them. “I want to go back to guarding the b’s. Look at this one. Her face is bad enough. Do you see the bottom of her neck by her shoulder? There’s a hole there. Or a dip, like a chunk. It’s all scarred up. Like...there’s a piece missing. How are you even still alive?”

I didn’t speak. I was too afraid I’d get beaten. The guard didn’t want my story, he wanted to humiliate me, and he was doing a perfect job. The tears appeared, but I

stopped at the cuffs on the ground by the back wall of the bedroom, holding my emotions in as I kept my gaze level with their chest area.

“Hurry up, Bettis, and lock her in. And stop talking. You talk too damn much.”

“Why do I have to do it? I don’t want to get close to it. We’re the same rank. I’m tired of you telling me what to do just because I’m new to the crows.”

“Jesus. Her. She’s a her.” Moore rolled his light eyes, kneeling as he snatched the cuffs from the floor. He latched onto my wrist roughly, flipping my hand over and pausing as he took in the deep scar over my palm. For the first time, his stare rose to mine. He searched my face and an uncertainty flashed. The longer he looked at me, his expression went from angry to...somber...to...unknown. I had no idea what that look was. “What happened to you?”

His movements were slower as he waited. He wrapped the cuff around, buckling it as he kept glancing up.

“Boating accident. I was twelve.”

Bettis leaned forward. “A fucking boat did that to you?”

“No, idiot. Did you not listen to her? A propeller did that. Not the actual boat.”

Bettis’ lip peeled back as Moore started on my other wrist. His agitation was clear as he peeked back up to me.

“Twelve? And you’re how old now? Twenty? Did I see your age right? I’m afraid I didn’t pay attention to your information. I’m just following transport orders.”

“It’s okay. You’re right. I’m twenty.”

“Sad. You should have died. I’m sorry you didn’t. It would have been a better way to go than this.”

My lips parted as he finished up, but he didn’t add any more sympathies as he withdrew a vial from his pocket. Both arms came up, and his finger trailed along my jaw as he softly held my head steady. I was so in tune with him rubbing oil over the expanse of my forehead that I wasn’t sure if I was imagining the touch or just craving something I had never really had in as long as I could remember.

“It’ll be over soon, slave. I hope that helps.”

The two guards turned, and Moore glanced back giving me that strange look just before they disappeared through the door. Attraction? It couldn’t be. As I let his words repeat, it didn’t take long before I felt as if I were floating in a dream. I sat on the floor, and I felt my eyelids grow heavy. My skin even tingled. Time passed as I drifted. So much time. I barely heard the door when it opened and closed again. If it wasn’t for the female giggle, I might have stayed in the blissful nothingness forever. As it was, I could barely get my body to sit up straight before two women around my age swept through the door in see-through blue robes. One had dark hair and tanned skin, with an exotic flare to her features, and the other woman had light brown hair like mine, but hers wasn’t just passed her shoulders or curly. Hers went to the middle of her back, and where I had gray-blue eyes, hers were a dark brown. Both looked like they’d been plucked from a magazine or some big screen movie. It had my face quickly dropping as they entered and stood, staring at me. My knees drew in and I hugged to them as they got closer.

“ Who’s this? ”

Had that been repulsion? Pity? They all sounded the same.

“Don’t worry about her. Both of you have clothes in the closet. Why don’t you grab

some and head for the shower.”

A sea of blue floated past as they swept by, but my eyes slowly lifted to the gorgeous man leaned against the frame of the bedroom door. His dark hair was slightly disheveled, and his dark green eyes he was famous for were intense. He had a small glass drink in hand, halfway full of amber liquid, and he was staring at me. My heart hit hard into my chest, and I quickly looked down, lowering my head even more so my hair could fall forward and cover the scar.

“Oh my God, did you see her face? What is she even doing here? He bought her too? Or do you think she’s always chained up like that?”

“I don’t know. She scares me.”

“Scares you? Why? She doesn’t scare me. I just don’t want to have to look at her.”

Heat burned my cheeks from the loud whispering in the closet. It shouldn’t have affected me. It wasn’t new, yet I’d never be immune. Years didn’t make it easier, and neither did the multiple surgeries that had helped me get this far, but they didn’t know that. They hadn’t lived my battle or nightmares I harbored inside. A nightmare...that would never end.

“What do you think happened? Could he have done that to her?”

“Ethan? No way. Stop thinking about the girl. Who cares about the scarface. We’re slaves to Ethan O’Brien. Ethan Fucking O’Brien. I can’t believe it’s him. I thought we were going to die tonight. Isn’t that what they said?”

“Die happy, maybe?”

Their giggling had my lips pursing.

Die. Yes. But not them. It would be me, and I was starting to shake so much it was making me sick. Or maybe that was the oil? I couldn't think straight. Was I their fun like the guard had mentioned? Were they going to kill the freak? Was I their entertainment?

The questions were endless as footsteps headed my way, but I didn't look up. My Master walked by as he lowered to sit at the bottom of the bed. A minute passed. He didn't speak. He didn't move, but I felt his eyes on me. I even lifted my head enough to look through my curls, and I was right. He was staring right at my face. What was he doing? ...Waiting to see the scars? Trying to get a good view of them when I lifted?

"Black is sexy but boring. The red will look good on you. Choose that one."

"Do you really think he'll like it?"

"He'll love it."

Almost immediately, the two women rushed by, still whispering and giggling. A blue robe drifted to the floor not inches from me, and I glanced up, my stare locking as Ethan sprung from the bed. The glass of liquor exploded against the wall at his throw, and he locked his fist in the dark-haired one's hair, jerking her back with brutal force so he could face her. A loud yelp filled the room, and her smile transitioned to horror as he lifted his hand higher, forcing her nude body to tiptoe through the pull.

"Master? Master!"

Her hands flew up as she tried to grab to the hand that held to her hair. She barely made contact with his wrist when his other hand shot out, gripping her throat. A deep blush flooded her face, spreading and webbing as his hold increased. Her mouth dropped open, and her toes scraped across the floor as he drew her in inches from his

glare. It was clear she wasn't getting oxygen as she raked her nails down the backs of his hands. Terrified eyes bulged as the exotic woman tried thrashing in his hold.

Time.

Flickers of disgust and rage transformed the actor's face, but they weren't fake. They were real . They were... terrifying.

"This didn't take long, did it? I knew by your walk. Not confidence, conceitedness. Entitlement. Vanity. I really, really hate that in a person."

The other woman scrambled into the bathroom, slamming the door shut, but the Master only had eyes for the woman whose face was turning a deep purple. Her mouth kept gaping through the torturous seconds, and her arms were barely moving to hit against our Master as he dragged it out even longer.

"For the record...I see no beauty in you. I grew up living this. Seeing it in the people I thought I loved. I didn't love them. I hated them . Every single one. My father. My mother. Girlfriends. Overinflated ego. You think because you're beautiful, the world owes you. My parents had that mindset too." His head shook. "It disgusts me. Enrages me ." He moved her closer as her arms tried to lift but couldn't. "Every part of you is ugly, and before you die, you're going to see it."

As fast as he had grabbed her, he dropped her.

The slave's body hit the ground hard, and she sucked in deep gulps of air, coughing and choking at the same time. It was only when my stare shot up to see Ethan's eyes back on me that I felt how truly hard I was pressing into the wall. His gaze didn't leave me as he reached down, dragging the slave by the hair and bringing her inches from my own face.

“Apologize.”

“I-I’m sorry,” I rushed out.

The Master’s brow drew in. “Not you.” He shook the woman. “Apologize!”

A scream came from the bathroom at Ethan’s roar, and I jumped as the slave burst into tears, sobbing in a raspy, hoarse tone.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“No you’re not. Uncuff her.”

Trembling fingers worked at the buckles, and the woman’s face drew in as her stare lifted to mine. She was crying so hard she could barely catch her breath. With the hysterics, her fingers fumbled, seeming to take forever until she got one cuff undone. When the Master brought his other hand back up to trace his fingertips along her throat, she stiffened and cringed, almost appearing not to breathe. The tears still flowed like a faucet, but she was more whimpering through her sobs now.

“Almost there. Focus, slave.”

“I-I’m try-ing.”

The second cuff fell free, and I grew even foggier as I watched him lower to sit behind her. The slave’s body shook through her cries as his arms eased around her biceps, gently pinning them to her side. His head lowered until his mouth was level with her ear, and Ethan’s gaze penetrated mine as he spoke.

“Look at her, slave. Tell me what you see.”



Was he talking to me? Her?

The slave broke down in silent sobs, but not me. I answered him.

“Beauty. Terror. A beautiful fear.”

Nothing. Not approval. Not anger. The Master was stoic as his gaze left my eyes and it swept over my face. His mouth pursed and he turned his face into hers.

“Now, you. What. Do. You. See? ”

Nothing. She just kept crying.

Ethan sunk his teeth into her neck, biting down as blood began to push past his lips. The exotic brunette screamed at the top of her lungs, trying her best to fight. Her legs kicked against me, but she wasn't able to get ground or break his hold.

“What.” He said, panting as he broke from her neck. “Do you see?”

A high squeal merged with her cries. Her lids opened and her stare jumped up to me quickly, jerking back down.

“I see a-a slave.”

Again, he dove to her neck, this time under the bleeding indentions he'd left behind the first time. His jaw flexed as he bit down even harder, jerking his head to tear her skin open. Blood was pouring from the wound and smeared over his chin. He chewed the chunk of flesh, wrinkling his nose as he spit it out on the floor not feet away.

“Help! Ahhhhhh! Help me!”

“Answer my question before I take my time tearing you apart. What do you see?”

One hand lifted and his fingers buried in her hair, tightening as he leveled her face, forcing her to look at me.

“A...s-slave...who’s scarred.”

“Is she ugly to you?”

Brown eyes came back to mine, and she quickly tried shaking her head.

“Not u-ugly. N-No. Not ugly at all. Pretty but scarred.”

“I think you’re lying.”

“N-No! I swear. I swear. She’s pretty.”

“Do you think she chose to look this way?”

The woman’s mouth opened, only to close as she genuinely took me in through her slightly swollen eyes. Whatever she saw had her breaking down and crying even harder.

“N-No.”

“No,” he repeated. “How long have you been here?”

She sniffled but the sob cut her off. “I’m not sure, Master. A f-few months?”

“And you learned nothing. You saw the gorgeous, famous Ethan O’Brien, and your true self returned as if you’d never been taken. As if you weren’t a slave sold to a

killer. Ego replaced rationality, and all you saw was an illusion. Do you see now?"

He hugged to her with one arm even tighter, closing his eyes as he dropped his head and rubbed his face against the opened wound that was close to her collarbone. The slave's body shook through her terrified cry. An elongated groan mixed with a whimper, and she kept trying to wiggle and pull from his hold.

"I'm sorry."

"You will be."

Ethan opened his eyes, looking back at me. Blood was covering half of his face, and still he went back nuzzling the wound and licking his lips, but his gaze never left me.

"What is your name?"

"Three-sixty-nine, Master."

He paused, his stare narrowing.

"Your real name."

"If I could ask. If I..."

My words tumbled all over themselves as I trembled harder. My ears were ringing from the screams. Almost as if the slave's had awoken my own. My name...No. I didn't want to say it.

"What?"

"Can you just call me slave?"

“No name?”

“Please, no.”

Moments passed and his head lifted from her neck as he studied my expressions.

“For now. Next time I ask, you will answer. Go into the kitchen, slave. Grab a knife and come back and take your place.”

“A knife?” The woman tried fighting against Ethan, but she didn’t stand a chance against his powerful hold. She was screaming again, trying to twist and thrash in his arms, and me...I was jumping up and running. I was obeying. It wasn’t me that was going to die tonight. It wasn’t me.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

No name. Why didn't she want me to know or call her by her name? It made no sense, but did it need to? I kept thinking about it in regards to myself. Her request wasn't about me, it was about her, and it was obvious that she wasn't holding on to her past. Why would she after whatever she'd gone through? It was obvious something traumatic happened. It didn't matter if it was done purposefully or by accident, the scars within my slave ran deeper than her skin. It was in the way she shook like a beaten puppy and hid her face. In the way she was so quick to apologize or obey. She jumped at my commands. That was about to come to a crashing halt, and I felt no pleasure in the thought of punishing her. It had to be done. My new slave was about to see her new life wasn't going to be any better than her last, and before it was over with, her name was going to be the last thing she'd want to forget.

"Master, your knife."

Different layers of frizzy curls bounced as she slowed to a stop. From her chin to just above her shoulders, the ringlets were just as wild as her eyes. But neither were that way by choice. It was the environment. My slave was scared and on edge despite her need to please, and it was showing as she let the mass amount of her curls hang forward from her tilted head.

"If you want to be on my good side, you'll stop hiding your face from me. Sit down like you were before."

Without hesitation, she took her place.

"Let me see."

Slowly, she lifted the large butcher knife. My brow crinkled as I took it in.

“That’s the one you decided on?”

Her eyes jerked over to the large blade.

“I...I wasn’t sure which to grab. I figured if you’re going to hurt someone, you’d need a large knife.”

My head shook, and I tightened my hold on the brunette, hooking my legs around hers as she fought harder. Her feet were planted down, and she pushed me back long enough for my own foot to sweep her legs out from under her and lock her in again.

“The size of the blade makes no difference. It’s what you do with it and where you stick it that denotes the damage. What you’re going to do won’t need a blade that big, but since you chose that particular one, I’m going to make you use it.”

Color drained from her face.

“ Me? ”

“She wasn’t hurting my feelings. It was you she was talking about, so it’ll be you that teaches her a lesson.”

“But.” Her gaze went to the woman’s, only to return to mine. “What do you want me to do?”

I searched her eyes, holding the brunette against me with one arm as I gestured for her to come closer with my free hand. My slave leaned in, but I could see her hesitancy.

“I want you to be strong. How well do you know your scars?”

Her gaze dropped. Seconds passed. When she lifted back up to meet me, the gray of her eyes had brightened to a vivid blue with the welling tears.

“I know them better than I know myself. They’ve defined me for as long as I can remember. They are me.”

I could have argued that. I could have tried to convince her otherwise. Thing was...scars didn’t have to be physical to cause pain. Most of the scars I held, the outside world couldn’t see. They were mental scars—traumatizing moments that carved hollow holes in my humanity. My slave may have held the proof of her past on her body, but we were both maimed from conditions beyond our control. I killed the cause of mine. Could I get her to kill too?

“Shh.” I said, holding the dark-haired slave against me so tightly she couldn’t move. “It’s useless fighting me. Embrace your ego. It got you right where you are. No point in having regrets now.”

“I said I’m sorry. I’m s-sorry.”

“I’m not. You’d already be dead if it wasn’t for your rude comments. I would have killed you in that shower. At least now my night won’t be as insignificant as it appeared only moments ago.”

“Please. Please, Master. Ethan, please .”

“Slave.” Big eyes were wide as my girl rose to her knees. “Give her your scars. Every single one of them. Do not go easy. Do not stop when she begs you for mercy. You get one chance. Show me you have what it takes to obey.”

Long lashes fluttered as if she were trying to push away thoughts she didn't want to see. As if there was a hell I couldn't imagine behind that dazed stare. The blade rose and so did the dark-haired woman's screams as she put everything she could into the fight. Not once did my slave stop as she neared. Her hand was trembling convulsively, but she didn't pause to connect the tip to the woman's temple. My slave's brow creased. Perfect, white teeth bit into a full lower lip. Lids narrowed. The pitch of the yell shifted to a higher tone, and blood raced and dripped from the woman's jaw onto my forearm as my slave drug the sharp edge around and down towards her cheekbone. I could see the movement in my peripheral, and I couldn't stand it.

Had I been holding my breath? Transfixed with concentration? In awe of emotions I couldn't begin to fathom? They played over her face in a flicker of micro-expressions and broken-up breaths, but I needed more. I needed to see all of it.

“Stop.”

Pants were starting to leave me, and I couldn't begin to explain it. I couldn't even understand why my cock was throbbing because of some twisted fucked-up relief for justice for a woman I didn't know.

“I'm sorry, Master. Did I do something wrong? Was it not deep enough? I'm pretty sure I scraped bone.”

My eyes searched the room, and I pushed to my feet, dragging the flailing woman up with me.

“You did great. I....” My eyes locked on the shut bathroom door. “We're moving.” I swallowed hard. “We're not stopping at this, and I have cuffs in a special shower off from my own. I want to watch. I want to see everything .”



The slave didn't get a chance to stand before I was barging through the bathroom door. Without a lock, the other woman's weight pushing against it was nothing. She flew back, racing from the door the moment I was inside. The b I held to was going crazy in my arms, tearing at my suit's jacket as I walked to the far side and jerked back the curtain. Just seeing the marble, hoist, and the cuffs and chains had my pulse beating against me. Movement behind me had me turning to take in the woman who barely came to the middle of my chest. Whether she held horror or curiosity, I wasn't sure. All I could see was how scars twisted with a beauty that would have rivaled any of the women who walked the stage. And maybe it wasn't even the stereotypical attractiveness, but there was...something. A lure of forbidden madness tweaking my thoughts, calling my attention to them as my new d walked forward with the bloody knife.

"Cuffs for the feet and arms? A strap to position and hold her head? That's." She stopped talking as she headed closer. "All those cuffs. It's like a clock against the back of the wall. They're at every position. A death clock. What do you do in here? Is it just to kill them?"

"Later." I gripped around the b , crushing her to me as I led us forward. My d was so innocent and soft-spoken. So different than the women I was used to being around. "How should I put her? What would work best for you?"

Full lips parted and the black see-through robe she wore stole my attention as her bare feet stepped to the edge of the shower. If I had thought to try to ignore her and keep her separate from this life, I was a fool. Housekeeper. Cook. Seeing the curves of her body had me cursing myself for even letting my gaze linger. To even let my mind go to fucking this woman was dangerous for both of us. I needed her to live for my own stability.

"If we're speaking in terms of a clock then ten and two is where I need her arms. Seven and five for her ankles."

I didn't answer, and I didn't miss how much her voice was trembling. Although intrigued by my setup, she didn't want to do this. She wanted no part of this horror show I was craving to watch. If I knew anything about the sound of voices, she was trying to please me, but my slave was on the verge of crying and breaking completely. Did that make me stop so I could try to salvage her sanity and bring her into my life in an easier way? No. I wrestled the woman in my arms, slamming her into the wall so hard she nearly passed out from the force. She could barely even fight back as I lifted, fastened her into her deathbed. As I strapped her head to the wall, I couldn't contain the excitement. This wasn't going to stop at a few deep lacerations. My slave had a job after she finished, and there was no sugarcoating her purpose.

"I'm s-sorry. I'll do anything. Help! Please. Slave. D-Don't... Please ." The b could barely speak she was crying so hard.

One step. Two.

I quickly grabbed a stepping stool, sliding it over so my slave wouldn't have to an issue with height. Even as I moved it in, her gaze never wavered from the b . It had my lips parting as I lifted the top of my body and watched with a longing awe as she got closer.

"You really are beautiful." She stepped onto the stool. Her shaky hand lifted just above the woman's jawline, and she swallowed hard. "It's heartbreaking for me to do this to you. Sad, really. I wouldn't wish this on anyone, but I guess you're dead anyway." She took a shuttering breath, her hand inching closer. "You can't see this one anymore, but I assure you the scar was there. Here," she said, pushing in the tip of the blade a good half an inch below the b's ear until the skin split and blood beaded. It ran faster as she added pressure, working her way just above the jawbone. "Just like that. It wasn't as long as most, and it was rather shallow. Just a brush with the blade." She stopped as she neared the area below her lips. "That was the first scar we were able to get rid of, but not the only one."

Had I not been so focused on watching my own slave's mouth move, I would have missed what she'd said. The screams were deafening. The pleas as the gorgeous woman broke were...satisfying.

“No m-more. I'm beg-ging you. Please! ”

My slave inched back on the stool, sucking in a deep breath as she swayed.

“Master, I...May I please have some water?”

“Water's for the weak.” My body was humming with more sensations than I could process as I put myself behind her and moved her closer. This wasn't normal. Nothing about what was happening was routine, and I lived for structure. A slave doing my work? Something I craved more than anything? And I was letting her? I couldn't even wrap myself around the realization as I grabbed the hand clutching the knife in mine, holding the back of it as I lifted it back to the b . “Where else?”

She collided against me as she tried to step back, but there was nowhere for her to go as I molded my body against hers.

“Where next?”

“I...Master—I”

“Where. Else?”

“Here.” The word was barely existent as she led our hands over the brunette's trapezius muscle, close to her neck. “I couldn't possibly cut her like I was. I've had multiple surgeries to correct mine. My entire shoulder...I was lucky to keep my arm. I?—”

Reaching over, I grabbed a hatchet, switching out the weapons in her hands.

“Allow me to help.”

I didn't give her time to process my words. I placed my hand back over hers, lifting the hatchet and slamming our hands forward, slicing through muscle and embedding in bone. The b gasped, not able to scream through the shock. Blood sprayed all over me and my new slave. And she was gone...My slave's legs gave out, and I barely managed to catch her as her body went limp and she passed out.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

Heat. Wetness. I was on fire as tingling prickled along my skin. I could feel the rise and fall of my chest, but I felt so far away. It was the wet pressure along my cheek, moving down over my chest that drew me from the dark emptiness I'd been barely existing in.

Color blurred as I opened my lids, only for them to fall. What I saw in the quick flash didn't make sense. Dark hair. A man. He was next to me, but...leaning over me. Pressure. Wetness. The sensations had my head shaking back and forth as my legs managed to scissor through the need that was suddenly taking over. I'd felt it before. Before...what?

Touch. A finger dipped into the missing part of the muscle on my shoulder, and I gasped, my eyes flying open as if I'd been doused with ice water. I was on the bed and my robe was completely opened. Ethan was rubbing a washcloth along the side of my face and neck while he traced my scars with his digit. For the life of me, I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe through the primal twisting in my core.

“What is your name?”

It took a moment to process the question through his hard tone. “...I have to say it?”

“I go through too many slaves to refer to you as one. I want your name.”

Tears. They came, but I managed to hold them in. I didn't want to say it. To say it made what happened real. It would make the screams return.

“Slave.”

“Pearl.”

Ethan’s lips parted. Expressions were unreadable as his eyes left me and he paused for a long moment. “Pearl. I didn’t expect that.”

“Did you expect something just as ugly as me?”

There was no sarcasm or even pity in my tone. Just mere curiosity.

“If you’re ugly then I’m blind.”

“I would say you’re just being nice but...” I trailed off, knowing he wouldn’t lie to me through the perplexity in his soft words. He had no reason to. “I’m sorry for passing out. That’s never happened before. I think it was just too much, too fast.” At the trail of the washcloth along my neck, again, my legs scissored. It drew attention to not only his other fingers running the length of the scar inches from my breast but also to the heat and prickling that was consuming me. My hands flew up and I quickly pulled the robe closed. “I’m better now. I’m ready to continue if you’ll let me sit up.”

Ethan’s lips pressed together, and he put down the washcloth, re-opening my robe. His other hand went back, continuing to move down the scar towards my cleavage.

“Master.”

“Yes, Pearl?”

“I’m ready to continue.”

“How did this happen?”

I swallowed hard, my head turning away just as my eyes rolled. My hips arched and I fisted the comforter, needing more. Needing...

“Boating accident,” I managed. “I was twelve.”

Fingers traced my jaw, bringing my face back towards him. The touch was so soft. So...unlike what I’d seen of him towards the other women.

“Tell me about it.”

“I...can’t.”

“You will.”

“No.” The word was breathless. “I really can’t. I don’t remember. I was sitting on the front of my father’s boat. Then, nothing. I...must have fallen in. I woke up in the hospital hours later. Barely. The first month is a blur. Doctors say I repressed the memories. They were too traumatic, I guess.”

Green eyes lowered to the scar he kept tracing back and forth above my breast.

“I see.”

“I can continue now.” As he reached the end of the scar, his palm brushed my nipple. A moan left me before I could stop it. Ethan’s eyes shot back to me, and my head turned again, this time in mortification. “Please, if you’ll let me get up?—”

Harder, he turned my face back to him.

“Stop looking away from me. Don’t make me tell you again.”

“I’m sorry. I just want you to stop.”

“I truly don’t care what you want. I’m the Master, not you. Do you understand what that means?”

“Yes.”

A look I wasn’t familiar with crossed his face, fading as his lids narrowed. The way his gaze lowered to my breasts had my legs drawing up so that my feet were flattened on the bed. Again, my hips arched, and I caught myself before I turned away. To see him taking in my body so freely had tears blinding me. I felt humiliated. Disgusted, just like he should have felt looking at me.

“Master, can I please get dressed?”

“Has anyone seen these?”

Not only did his index finger trace the scar, but his middle finger lowered to join. I was back to gripping the blanket underneath me.

“Only the doctors. No one else.”

Slowly, he made a path back over to my nipple, circling the hard nub.

“What about these.”

My small cry couldn’t be contained as he gave a slight pinch between his digits.

“No one. I was never around many people. I’ve...never.”

“Never,” he repeated, quietly. Almost disappointingly?



Something flashed on his face and his fingers drew back as if the heat coming from me had burned him. Maybe it did. I was on fire. Confliction drew in his features, and he grabbed a new glass of amber liquid from the bedside table, finishing it all off in one long gulp. Immediately, his lip peeled back.

“I don’t drink. Ever. Ever ,” he repeated again. “Not just because it’s not good for my diet or routine, but because I become uncontrollable. I like control. I haven’t had that lately. The last few months have been off. I’ve brought you in to make me better. Pearl, you’re going to make this work. That means no more passing out. No more being weak. You have to be strong to survive with me or you’re dead. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Good, because you’re going to go in there and you’re going to kill and quarter that b for me. Not every time. Killing is my thing, but for learning-sake, you’re going to do it tonight. Your job, and the reason I bought you, is to look after me. I have a very strict schedule and diet. I have an image to maintain for the outside world. That means you’ll clean. Cook. Most importantly, you’ll do all the preparing. That’s the quartering. The butchering, if you will. All the menus, which I will approve before you finalize.

“Butchering? To...prepare...it? The food?”

Ethan scanned my face, putting back down the glass.

“The b’s , Pearl. I’m sick of ordering out. I’m tired of not having the control to keep what I want within my own walls. You’re going to prepare and cook them like a five-star gourmet fucking chef. Not just for me. For us . You live here with me. You belong to me. You’ll eat what I do. Is that clear?”

“Eat?” My head lifted, turning to stare at the bathroom door in horror. But it wasn’t a horror I could feel yet. The oil was twisting that fear with a warped sense of lust. “You want me to...cut them apart? To.” I swallowed back the bile. “To prepare and cook the b’s for you? Into fancy meals?”

“Stop singling me out. For us . And I will bring in a chef to teach you everything you need to know. You will make this role I’ve provided you your life because frankly, it’s the only thing keeping you alive right now.”

Ethan scooped behind my knees, spinning me on the bed, helping me to sit. For seconds, he didn’t move. He just leaned down inches from my face. There were still dots of blood along his cheek, but his jacket was gone and his collared, button-up was untucked and completely open. His body was all hard, defined muscle. It was pure perfection, not marred like mine. And as much as I should have feared him, I couldn’t when he was looking at me like I was beautiful. Like I was...someone worth looking at. I’d never been this close to a man, and this wasn’t just anyone. He was one of the most gorgeous men on the planet, and my body knew what he wanted. That did things to me I’d never felt before. It left my mind in dangerous territory with the ‘what-ifs’. What if the accident never happened? What if I had never been taken and brought here? What if...this lust transitioned to a hunger that would have him killing me? Eating me?

“You’re okay? No dizziness?”

I shook my head. “No, Master.”

“You’re flushed.” His fingers went to my forehead. “You can’t sit still. Did they put anything here?”

“Oil.”

“So, you’re influenced as well.” It wasn’t a question as he got quiet. “But you’re not acting like the others who were on it. You don’t want me. It’s obvious you don’t, so why does that make me want you more? You’ve never,” he mumbled, cursing as he kept his position. “You’ve never been with a man? Never been kissed or touched?” His hand shot up. “Don’t answer that, although... fuck . Pearl. Pearl. Why does that sound so familiar? I don’t usually enjoy virgins. Maybe it would be different with you. Or. No. I should help you up so we can wake the b . I know I should but...”

But a change was happening in my Master as he mumbled, and I saw it as the green of his eyes darkened. Seconds passed. A minute. His jaw repeatedly tensed as his face searched mine. He was back to dipping his finger in the hollowness of my shoulder, and for the life of me, I couldn’t stop breathing out of my mouth. The tingling that covered my skin made me want to scream. To beg for things I couldn’t begin to imagine.

“I can wake her. If you could move. You said yourself. You know... I don’t want this. ”

I went to scramble when Ethan’s hand flattened on my chest, and he slammed me back to lay on the bed.

“You should have kept quiet.”

“Master, please. Not this. Not with me.”

“ I know what I want . I’m not going to be miserable, skirting around you, Pearl. If I.” He stopped. “If we just get this over with it’ll pass. I was never good with rejection. I’m worse with temptation. My life is restrictive. Strict. I deny myself too much. When I actually do want something.” His hands hooked behind my knees, jerking me closer to the edge as he fitted himself over me. “I take it. It’s been months since I’ve wanted anyone, and fuck if I don’t want you right now.”

My head shook. “You don’t. Not really. You’re drunk. You’re influenced, like you said. That’s what it is. You’ll wake up tomorrow and wish you never—You’ll be sick when you think back on the memories.”

Had my voice cracked? The tears were sure there, even if I didn’t understand them. This ache in my chest. How could a void need and want so much? How could it crave something so stupid? Ethan O’Brien? He was what women dreamed of. Worse, he was a fucking cannibal, and he wanted me . To eat me? I should have disappeared like the other b . I should be running, but all I was doing was trying to stop myself from rubbing against him as he pushed his weight forward.

“You don’t know me, Pearl.”

“I don’t have to. I know the truth. How could you want to do this? How could anyone? I can’t even understand how you’re looking at me. Order me to kill for you. To cook for you, and I will. Just... stop .”

“I don’t want to.”

“Please.”

The sob did leave me then, and I couldn’t stop the tears that exploded out like a broken faucet, but with them, frustration was building. Rejection was a sure thing come morning. That was hard enough. That it would be with a man I couldn’t escape; Ethan O’Brien, no less, made it harder. That he could eat me was the sugar on top.

“I’m going to kiss you, and you’re not going to stop me.”

“What happens if I try?”

A small laugh left him, and his hands came up to each side of my face. His thumb

mindlessly traced the scar along my cheekbone as his gaze stayed on my lips.

“If you try to stop me, I’ll take it anyway. Then you ruin any good memory of your first kiss. But you could kiss me back and make it something worth remembering. What if it’s great?”

“What if you bite my lip off?”

Ethan’s stare broke, and his gaze jumped to mine. The laugh that left him wasn’t what I’d been expecting. I had been serious, but for some reason he found it funny.

“I could, except I know I wouldn’t be able to stop, and then I’d be without another cook. I need you, Pearl. I need this to work. I’m losing my mind. You’re going to make me better.” His face lost all amusement, turning hard. “You’re going to do whatever you have to to stay alive. That means you’re going to kiss me, and you’re going to like it .”

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

It was a mistake to steal something so precious from a woman who'd already lost so much. I knew that in every part of my being. Fuck if I could get myself to stop. It was everything that was wrong. The lowest of the low. But wasn't that who I was? Wasn't that who I'd become? Him.

"Master, please."

Two words.

Two different meanings.

A need for relief.

Denial.

I couldn't begin to know what was going on in Pearl's mind. Was she afraid that I was going to hurt her, kill her, turn into a monster before her very eyes? Absolutely . If I had to guess, it was the rejection she feared the most, and she was right in needing to feel that. I was already rejecting this, and I hadn't even taken her virginity yet. How was that fair to her? Did I even care? She was mine, wasn't she? It's not like this was a one-night stand and I'd never call her after tomorrow. She'd be here...and she'd be mine to take any and every which way I wanted. Maybe I'd add my own scars to her curvy body. Make her even more mine. I could transition the way she saw them.

Not an accident... me .

Not ugly... me.

Not something to be ashamed of.... me .

The thought had my nose slightly rubbing against hers. The action, alone, had Pearl shaking worse. She was so innocent that I couldn't deny I was eating it up. I brought my lips down enough to brush hers for the briefest moment and felt my heart kick against my chest. We were both breathing hard, both looking into each other's eyes. Where she no doubt saw my need, all I saw was fear. It fed me. It brought my lips down in a kiss so full of passion, of need, no performance I'd done to date could match the intensity that radiated from me. I pushed into her mouth, slow yet demanding as I massaged my tongue into hers. And Pearl didn't jerk away or fight. She was hesitant, but she let me greedily take from her, moaning into my mouth as her hands eased underneath my opened shirt. Where I could have spent an hour kissing her, Pearl's head quickly turned, her face stopping right at my palm.

"What did I tell you?" I brought her back to me. "I want this. I want you."

"You can't."

"I do."

" Why? "

The softness of her tone had a level of hardness that I couldn't deny liking. It triggered my need to put her in her place even more and yet...make her believe me.

"Slaves don't question Masters."

"You want a d ? i . A butcher. A chef. I will be the best one you could ask for. This—You could have anyone. If you want a virgin, buy one. Don't take this from

me. It's all I have left. Don't?—”

I cut her off, kissing her even more demandingly. She tried turning away, but I wouldn't let her as I held her head steady. Nails embedded into my skin at my sides, digging in until I was sucking in a breath and pulling back with a hiss. Pearl's lids were so heavy her eyes were barely open.

“I'm begging you.”

“I bought you, you're mine . What you want doesn't exist anymore.” I let go of one side of her face, dipping back in to take her mouth. I cupped the back of one of her knees, drawing it up to my hip as I ground against her. Pearl's response was classic. The small cry was full of pleasure as she arched and pulled against me. As fast as it happened, she quickly added pressure along my ribs, trying to put distance between us. I shifted, moving my arm down to brush my fingertips over her slit. She was so wet and swollen.

“No. Wait! What if I did something for you. Like a favor or—” Pearl jerked hard, trying to find a way out from underneath me. “Master, please. There has to be something.”

“A favor? Don't be ridiculous.” I chuckled, nuzzling into her cheek as my fingers slipped between her folds, making a path to move over her entrance. A cry left her, but not one of alarm or pain. She was trying to fight her want. Even as I touched her, she was arching, positioning herself to move against my digits.

“Spread your legs wider.”

A groan sounded as she shook her head back and forth. Although it was denial, she obeyed. I eased one finger into her pussy, biting down through the tightness that hugged around me. When I eased in another, her lids flew open, and she gasped. Her



stare locked on mine, and I couldn't keep the cocky half-ass grin from my face.

“See, you like it.”

“The oil likes it. Not me. I swear I don't.”

“Your expression tells me differently.”

My thumb brushing her clit had her entire body jolting.

“None of this is real. Not me or you. Let's go prepare the b like you want. It'll be fun. You can show me what to do. You'll like that.” Pearl's legs spread wider, and she rocked against the slow thrusts of my fingers, only to quickly stop and start fighting again.

“I like this. So do you.”

“The oil. No.—”

I kissed her, cutting her off as her legs tried to clamp close against my hips. The pain flared back on my sides, digging in viciously with the aggravated sob that I drank in. The emotion had me pulling back to study the woman who didn't want this— who didn't want me.

“No! I said no, Master! No, no, no! ” Another sob had her trying to hide her face as she broke and let out an angry scream.

The realization hit as hard as her frustration. It shredded through my ego like the sharpest knife ever made. It was sobering, leaving me not just angry but...hurt? Offended? Aggravated?

I couldn't even wrap my mind around the absolute rejection. No leading me on with her body. No luring me in despite the pleas of me to stop. This answer was cemented with a truth I couldn't grasp. It didn't make any sense. Women loved me. All of them. They'd die for me, even knowing who and what I was. But not this one. Not Pearl. Her body was trembling with terror and rage, and the walls she had up to protect herself were impenetrable. She was smart to keep her true thoughts contained, but she couldn't mask what I so clearly saw. I was a master of disguise, and this woman not only saw my monster, but she also saw the real me I couldn't hide as I tried to process what the hell I was doing. I didn't like the questions that were starting to come. The guilt?

Horror.

Alarm.

Caution.

What I could only grasp as pity finally underlined gray-blue eyes, and the more tears that fell from her, the more something akin to shame grew inside of me.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

I didn't move through the banging. I couldn't when my brain wanted to deny the guilt.

"Master."

"I'm answering that door. You'd be smart to be in that bathroom waiting for me when I return. I make no promises how long I'll hold off from taking you. And I will Pearl. You're going to be bleeding one way or another tonight. This is far from over."

I was barely standing as Pearl scrambled off the far side of the bed. Her desperation to escape only fed the building, bubbling rage that was burning my stomach and chest. I turned, stomping to the front door. What the guards saw on my face as I swung the barrier open had one taking a step back regardless that he still held to my fighting b .

“Don’t leave me here. Please, I don’t want to be here!”

“Master Eleven, we found your slave trying to escape through the main doors. Would you like to leave her free to run or?—”

I grabbed the brunette by the neck, squeezing as I brought her towards me. Arms flailed. Nails tried to tear into my face. She was swinging with a strength fed by survival. I ignored the guards and turned us, kicking the door closed behind me as I trapped her in my arms and headed back for the bathroom. The other slave’s screams were already at full volume again, and the one trapped against me was making my ears ring.

Arms outstretched wildly as the brunette tried to grab to the door frame of the bedroom, but with my jerk, she couldn’t get a good grasp. When I made it to the bathroom door, her legs kicked out and she twisted. Her weight dropped, and I shoved the barrier open, throwing her through before I could process the sprays of blood she went sliding on. Even as I stepped inside, the scene took seconds to register. Blood. It was sprayed everywhere, puddled at Pearl’s feet as she quickly hacked away at the screaming, restrained b . Her swings were so quick and powerful, as if she were swinging for her very life. A nearly severed arm was mush at the wound, and she was connecting with a determination that didn’t match the shock registering in her speedy movements.

“Pearl.”

Whack!

Whack!

Whack!

The screams grew as the other slave raced right for me to escape the onslaught she was gaping at. My fingers embedded in her hair, and I drug her over, snatching the hatchet from Pearl before she could bury it back in the junction of the woman's arm and shoulder. Pearl spun, her pupils so big they dominated the light color surrounding them. Her body was nearly convulsing, and it didn't stop as I shook the slave I held to.

"Did I tell you to do that?"

"N-No, Master."

"You quarter her after she's dead." I pointed to the hoist. " After we've flipped her upside-down and drained her blood."

"I thought?—"

"Don't think. Obey. That's what you're going to fucking do." I reared back the hatchet, swinging and striking the slave I held to right in the chest. The crack and force reverberated through my body at the impact, and I jerked the blade free swinging right for her throat. The b's mouth opened to suck in a breath and scream, but blood was already spraying to cover my chin and mouth as I broke through the skin and hollow of her neck.

Gurgling sounded.

Crimson bubbled and squirted.

The slave's body jolted and pulled at all directions as I drew back and connected again. The thud filled every inch of me, and adrenaline soared as I took in the mutilated skin and butchered muscle of her throat. In that moment it was me and the young woman's horror. It was beautiful and mine. But it didn't last.

Turning, I took in Pearl's pale, stoic face. She swayed again, but she gave me nothing as she blinked robotically and turned to grab the hoist. My anger was back, and it grew with every one of her steps.

"You don't look strong right now, Pearl, you look like food. Look at me."

And she did. She jolted to a stop, trembling through the shakes that had a hold of her.

"I'm here, Master. Right here. I can do this."

"Maybe I don't believe you."

Her eyes hardened as she wheeled the hoist to rest over the drain on the floor.

"Should I tie up her feet? You want her upside down, correct? Tell me what to do."

I took a step closer to her, dragging the slave with me as my energy turned predatory.

"I can get you another drink if you want to take your time showing me," she rushed out. "I'm a quick learner. Or maybe you're hungry. Rope. I...I don't see any rope."

Had I thought she was shaking? Every inch of me was humming. My cock ached with every rise and fall of her soaked chest. Just seeing her hard nipples press into the sheer, bloody fabric was killing me.

The slave hit the ground with a thud, twitching and jerking in her dying state as I lunged grabbing the front of Pearl's robe, pulling her into me. Enlarged pupils swallowed me like a black hole as she gazed up. They had me, just like this strange need to have her.

"You're mumbling, and all over the damn place."

"It'll be a rope? I can get some. Do you have some here?"

"Stop with the rope," I growled, pulling her wet robe open to wrap my arm back around her waist and pull her deeper into me. "We'll hang her from her Achilles tendons. Stop asking questions about your job. I said I wasn't going to dance around you. I want you, and I don't give a shit if you don't want me. I'm the Master. You're the slave."

"And I said." Pearl's jaw chattered, tightening as she pushed the words free through clenched teeth. "You don't want me. If you need...t-that...do it...to t-them."

She said them, but she pointed to the dead slave behind me.

"You want me to fuck a corpse?"

"She's...n-not dead."

I followed her head as she gestured to the slave who was once again passed out on my death clock.

"So you want me to fuck her instead when I could just have you?"

Pearl's head turned and her face drew in, her eyes falling to the ground.

“She’s still prettier. Even like that.”

“Like what? Hacked up with a mangled arm? Pearl...Your idea of beautiful and mine are two different definitions.”

“Please let go.”

Had I drawn her up closer on my chest? Closer to my lips? I had, and all she wanted to do was be as far away from me as she could. Was it what I was doing that turned her off? What I ate? Who I was? It was fucking with my head!

Why did I even care? She was no one. No. One. A slave. Disposable. A fucking crow, meant to die. I was giving her a gift. A chance at life no one else would have given her, and she denies me? Rejects me?

“You want me to let you go?” I drug her backward, snatching a knife from the cart and leveling it at her jawline. “How bad do you want me not to touch you? Bad enough to have another scar? I told you you’d bleed tonight. Maybe it’ll be like this.”

Pearl’s lip quivered, twisting that shame inside me even more. An acidic film covered my tongue and a metallic taste had me swallowing back the bad names that were screaming in my mind.

Did I sound like him? My father? Had I become him?

“If that’s what my Master wants.”

“I do want it,” I exploded. “I want you covered with my marks, bleeding and cut open. And I’m going to do it. I’m going to leave you so transformed that you see nothing but me. No scars. No disfigurement. You’ll see your Master. You’ll see the man who you can’t stand touching you.”

Tears raced down her blood-splattered cheeks.

“If that’s what my Master wants.”

“Stop saying that.”

“What would my Master like me to say?”

“How about the truth.”

“Fine. You sound like a spoiled child.”

My head jerked back to better look at her.

“A child?”

“I had a stepsister who threw fits like this. There’s no winning. If you want to cut me up even more, fine. I’ve looked worse. I’ve looked like more of a monster than you ever will. If you want to rape me amongst dead slaves, then do it. I’ll fight and you’ll probably kill me too, but at least I died for something that was important. Maybe you’ve never felt that strongly about anything. I don’t know. That’s not my fault. There’s no winning for me. All that awaits is death. It can’t be worse than the life I’ve already led...unless it is. Either way, I have nothing left to lose. You have everything to lose if you have to try to find another d . I’m perfect for you, and you’ll never know that because you’re about to ruin it. For what? My virginity? Think rationally, Master. Is that really worth the sanity you’re barely holding on to?”

My eyes narrowed through the truth.

“I didn’t think so. Let’s start over. Show me what I need to do to be the perfect slave. Allow me to serve you so that you can get better. I can do that. Give me a chance.”



## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

He ate? Whatever was accompanying the anger in my Master's glare had enough power to destroy me if he released it. I had gone too far. I knew that, but there was nothing I could do now. It was too late. My words had left their impact, and at this point, what I said was the truth. I really had nothing left to lose. This man would kill me. If not today, then it was in my future. Did I really want to prolong that? Maybe I should stop begging for life and instead get on my knees and pray for death.

"You truly see me as a spoiled child?"

My mouth parted, and I swallowed hard. There was no point in lying now.

"All I want to do is what you bought me for. My answer towards you...for sex." I stopped, watching his gaze intensify as the flat side of the blade pressed harder into my jaw. "I will never change my mind. The fact that you can't accept my decision is why I mention the child. It's like no one has ever told you no. And maybe they haven't," I said, softly. "That wouldn't be your fault. How could they?"

"You seem to have no problem."

"At this point, I have no choice. You're going to kill me. That's inevitable. Why give away the only part of me not damaged?"

"Because I bought it. Your pussy belongs to me."

My head tilted at the response, and I sucked in a breath through the sting of pain. Intensity softened in his eyes, transitioning to something far more terrifying. Warmth trickled, itching my skin as it traveled to the edge of my jaw, and I knew I was

bleeding. The way Ethan's stare hungrily took it in left me scrambling for words. He was pushing more into me, turning the blade into my skin even more.

"Let's just finish the b . Show me what comes next." My pitch turned higher as I felt my skin separate even more at his pressure. "Master. If you could?—"

"I'll make this easy on you. Spread your legs and let me taste you, or I split you open from ear to lip and make you more beautiful. Your choice."

"More?" I cried out loudly as he rotated his wrist enough to deepen the wound. "I can't give that to you. I told you—Master!"

At my yell, the restrained slave's head lifted in my peripheral, only to fall. Monotone groans filled the space, joining my soft whimpers that wanted to turn to sobs. Ethan kicked my legs open wide, lifting the knife to lick down the blade. The euphoria that had his eyes rolling as he took in my blood was beyond me. It left me stiff and stunned as he lowered, opening my robe so that he could be level with my most private area. My legs went to clamp closed, but he was too fast. His arm shot through, placing my leg over his shoulder as his arm wrapped around my thigh. Hot air blew out against me as he pulled me in.

"You'd be wise not to fight, Pearl; I may not stop with just tasting you. I will destroy your pussy. I will be merciless. Once you start screaming, I won't be able to stop the decimation. It's a process and it's mine. I made my mark. Now, I'm taking what I can of you. If you don't want it to be with my cock, you'll enjoy my tongue and get over this violation as nothing more than a fucking gift. That's what it really is. I need you. We both know that. But I can't continue until I—You'll never understand. Consume... or be consumed . Control. You... in me . Never over me. Then, you're truly mine. I can move on and just...focus. Mine. No power over me. It's just...me. No one else. Me ."

Green eyes were back and forth through whatever racing thoughts were going through his mind. Although I couldn't think, myself, I found my fingers sliding through the front of his dark brown hair to try to calm him and gain some sort of balance. It had his gaze jerking up to mine. But that wasn't the only reason I held to him. His anxiety had me softening to gain my own control. Taste wasn't full violation. Not like before. But what if he wouldn't stop? I had to try to keep some of my own power any way I could. A small battle won was still a victory. He wasn't raping me. I had to compromise somewhere. I wasn't entitled to anything, and I was lucky for his restraint, even if it was limited.

I fisted my hold gently in his hair, and Ethan took it as permission, diving to bury his face between my legs. Where pain and fear had been in my tone before, uncertainty and overwhelming pleasure was dominating my cry as his tongue pushed through my folds. The suction was automatic, and his deep, rumbling moan had me holding to him for dear life. Where the feeling was foreign but welcomed, the way my Master's fingers dug painfully into my thigh showed he wasn't acting...normal.

I wasn't knowledgeable or processing thoughts good enough to know. Ecstasy merged with a sharp ache muddling my mind even more as he pushed his tongue into my entrance. At some point he'd spun us, but all I knew was my back was suddenly at the wall and I was pushing into it, moving my hips to ride along his face. His arm was so tight around my waist, trapping me to him, locking me in so I couldn't begin to try to escape. And that mouth. That tongue. He was licking. Sucking. Licking. Sucking. Biting.

I gasped, and my heart raced as he tugged against my fold. Maybe I wasn't experienced, but I knew this wasn't about me. He was rough. Focusing on the texture. The thickness of my skin between his teeth. Ethan was transfixed as he tested the way the flesh moved with the shift of his jaw. But it didn't last. He went back to sucking, and it was just a little too hard. If he had hoped to consume some part of me with this act, he was taking all I could give.

“Master.”

Could he hear my fear through the suction he added? I tried to hide it through the uncomfortable pain.

“Master.”

Pressure pulled at the robe. Combined with the positioning of his locked arm around my waist, he easily swung me down to the wet, sticky floor. He rotated, and his free large hand leveled at my chest, pushing me down as he widened my legs as far as they would go. Still, he kept hooked around me as his mouth once again settled over the sensitive nerves. Pleasure blossomed and spread as his frenzy eased. The soft teasing of his tongue had my body going lax and moving against him once again. With the need came the fogginess. I thought the effects of the oil had faded, but they were far from gone as he brought my body to life.

“That should be good, right, Master? A taste.” A moan pushed from my throat, and I couldn’t hide it. “That’s...” I trailed off as I looked down, seeing his eyes staring up at me.

Back and forth his tongue flicked over my clit, igniting a delicious burn. My palms flattened on the floor. For the life of me, I couldn’t break my gaze from the green eyes that wouldn’t leave me. Was this really the man I’d grown up watching on the television? The heart throb whose smile could hypnotize the entire population? I could almost forget I was a slave. I could almost forget that those movies were my only outlet for interaction because my rich, elite family was too embarrassed to take me out into public. I could almost forget...my father’s abandonment and betrayal to get rid of me. Burden. Lost cause. Yes...I’d been that. Those were some of the last words I’d heard him say before they started talking about a plan and price.

“Wait.”

A building in my core ripped me from heartbreaking memories. Ethan reached forward, grabbing my hand and putting it back to the top of his head as he traced his tongue down to my opening. My head shook back and forth, and I pushed through his hair, holding as my hips shifted for more. More of what, I didn't even know.

More.

More.

More.

Pressure from Ethan's tongue eased into my channel, and my head lifted higher as his free hand stopped at the top of my slit. His thumb flattened over the sensitive nerves, and I sucked in air, moving even faster as the building pleasure increased from the circular motions.

"I don't know...about this." Soft, little sounds left me, and I couldn't stop moving. "Master, the taste?—"

"What I really want to taste is almost here. Don't fight the feeling." My Master traced my opening. "Fuck. So... good. " His eyes held mine as he let go of my thigh and eased his hand between my legs. I stiffened, keeping still as he replaced his thumb with his tongue and circled my entrance with his finger. Time passed and I lost myself to the addicting sensations. They stole me from my fear, triggering my need for 'more'. The word looped as I began to try to take Ethan's finger deeper. I held tighter to his head as we kept eye contact. The oil sucked me into a blissful nothingness of motion and lust. With my Master mostly like a statue, I had no distraction to break our stare. I was a captive in every sense of the word, and the pleasure that left me holding on was increasing to a fevered pitch with the soft suction.

"This feels...good. Wrong but...God. We should really..."

Was I even talking?

My head fell back, and Ethan's hand shifted. Another finger stretched me wide, and the wave that crashed over me had my body jerking through the spasms that made me beg for things I didn't know. The shakes were so powerful that I couldn't control the way my legs were drawing together to trap Ethan's head between my thighs. And his fingers were gone, his tongue replacing the digits to push deep.

Moans.

Mine.

His.

They filled the room but so did screams. They belonged to the mangled slave mounted on the wall, and the sobering reality stole me from heaven and left me crashing right back down to hell.

"If you move..."

My Master watched me like a rabid animal. While he lapped and sucked, taking his time tasting me, he waited for me to try to flee. I wanted to. The screams were haunting, and they were because of me. Because of what I did to that woman.

I eased my head back, staring up at the ceiling. While I let the most gorgeous man on the planet consume my cum, I searched for better days. For a time where my life was normal and full of joy. Barely anything came. I always ended up back on the boat. Back to the memories that haunted me every single day. I may have not remembered how I fell, but I knew what happened. My stepmother had confessed that part, but not where she thought I could hear. I was supposed to be unconscious after the surgery. Her voice had pulled me out of the black, and right into a truth that broke me worse

than I already was.

“That’s exactly what I told Quincy. Pearl is ruined. No amount of surgery is ever going to fix the deformed mess she’s become. I could beat Sissy for pushing her off that boat. She says it was an accident, but those girls are always fighting. Now look what we have to deal with? What a waste of money. Do you think they’d know if I put a pillow over her face? She’s covered in bandages. Maybe they’ll think she suffocated from them.”

I wish I would have. Movement registered, and my Master’s face hardened, filling with rage at seeing the tears that left me. Before I could say anything, he stood, jerking me up.

“Am I so revolting to you? How hard that must have been for you to endure.”

“W-What? No. I?—”

He reached over, grabbing the hatchet and dragging me forward, towards the restrained b .

“Take notes, slave . First thing. Death .”

He let go of me, rearing back and embedding the square blade right across the length of her neck. Death was instant. Screams stopped. Blood sprayed out, splashing down over my bare feet. The room tilted. Ethan yanked back on the handle, immediately chopping into the flesh and bone again. And again. And again. Each swing to her throat was filled with more rage and force than the last.

A loud ping finally sounded, and I knew he’d connected with the wall behind her. The slave’s chest pitched forward right towards me, her head and arms staying in place from the restraints as the two pieces severed. Light wavered. Sound

disappeared. Nothing could stop my reaction. Flashes were fast, blinding me. I was suddenly peering over the front of the speeding boat. The break in the water was beautiful. I imagined dolphins breaking through the top of waves. I was...happy. And then my doll was ripped from my hand. Just as I turned...a hard shove from my sixteen-year-old stepsister. Suffocation. Gulps of water. Pain. Pain. Pain. It was so fast and forceful as it spun and hit against my small body. I was stumbling back. Living it. Seeing it.

Darkness.

Darkness.

Dark...ness.



## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

“ I don’t think you understand, Main Master. I appreciate you going out of your way to find her for me, but this is not going to work. She’s not cut out for this. Look at her, for fuck’s sake.” I gestured to the heap I had carefully placed on my bed. Carefully. On. My. Bed. Not the floor, which is where I should have left her after those tears of revulsion she’d shed. Fuck, what the hell was wrong with me? I should have given her a real reason to cry. I should have woken her up and forced her to continue to quarter that b . Did I do that? No. I finished both women by myself in record time. I paced. I went to her. I paced some more. Then...I’d called him to take her back, refund or not.

“Did you do that to her face?”

“Does it matter?”

My eyes moved to the laceration under her high cheekbones. My lips twisted, and the lust ramped up at seeing the shallow cut. She was lucky I’d stopped at a few inches in length and hadn’t pushed deeper. I wanted to.

Elec glanced over, his brow drawing in as he stepped closer to the bed to gaze down at her.

“Did she tell you what happened?”

“Boating accident at twelve. She doesn’t remember it though.”

He let out a sarcastic sound under his breath.

“That was no accident.”

“What do you mean?”

Silence.

“Elec.” I stopped, shifting on my feet. “How do you know it wasn’t an accident? What do you mean by that? Are you saying someone did that to her on purpose?”

More, he moved to the bed, tilting his head as he gazed down. For it being close to dawn, he showed no signs of fatigue. He was still alert, and I noticed he wasn’t in his auction suit anymore. But he was almost on edge or restless as his face drew in through his thoughts.

“Quincy Mallory was a good friend of my father’s. My father even tried to spark a deal with him when I was barely in high school. Pearl was a baby back then. I threw the biggest fit at overhearing the proposition, but it was for nothing. Pearl?—”

“Wait.” I closed the distance, looking between the Main Master and the slave on my bed. Her name did something to me. Just hearing Elec speak it was like a temptation I couldn’t run from. “Are you saying Pearl was almost your betrothed? She’s... one of us? ”

“Not anymore.” Elec turned to face me. “Any promising future she could have secured back then through marriage is gone. Had she had the schooling or connection.” He stopped, shrugging. “They never put in the effort to train her while she went through the surgeries. And they came far with those, but the road was longer than they were willing to travel. They hid her inside, away from everyone. They wouldn’t even see her, themselves.”

My eyes went to Pearl as he continued. “She was a stain on the Mallory name. A

burden. Quincy begged the uppers to take her. She sat alone in a room no bigger than her cell here until she eventually came to me. Pearl Mallory died in the outside world almost four years ago. An infection from a surgery gone wrong.”

“But...Four? She would have barely been sixteen. A kid .” My voice nearly cracked. “She was one of us. She...” I ran my hand down my face through emotions I couldn’t begin to process. Emotions...that shouldn’t exist. Emotions that hit too close to home. “Alone.” I could barely talk. “You said her scars weren’t an accident?”

“No. I have no proof, but from what I’ve heard, it was the stepsister who pushed her off the boat. They call her Sissy, but her real name is Susan. She’s a piece of work. Even today. Worse than most of the women of our status.”

I tore my eyes from Pearl. “Worse? Can I have her ?”

“The sister?” Elec’s head cocked to the side as he studied me, but all I could do was nod. “You know that’s not possible. I don’t even see why you’d care. You just wanted me to take Pearl, even though you know I can’t. You bought her. You’re responsible for killing the slave if you’re finished with her.”

“Do you hear yourself right now? She’s not a slave. She’s one of us who was abandoned because of something that wasn’t her fault. I want the sister.”

“You’re walking a very thin line turning on one of your own.”

“ Me? ” I exploded, pointing to Pearl. “What about her? She’s one of us, Elec! Did they not sentence her to death because of what that bitch did? You said stepsister. Is this Sissy even born of our blood? Pearl is elite. Is she? ”

More silence. Elec’s gaze returned to Pearl, and I followed his line of sight, stiffening as her eyes fluttered and she scrambled to sit. The fear that quickly took over her

expression at seeing Elec had me nearly cursing.

“Main Master? Master, I...” Her head immediately lowered at Elec’s gaze. She couldn’t hide the panic as her hands clasped in her lap and she let her wild curls cover her scars. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to pass out again. I swear I’m strong. I really am. The visions. The... I’m sorry . Don’t kill me or send me back to the cells.” Her voice gave out with the sob. “I can do better. You can show me what to do, and I’ll do it. I can do this.”

“I know you can.” I breathed out, tightening my lips through the anger.

“But?” Her eyes were so round and vulnerable as she looked between us. “Is this because I was crying? You’re mad at me because of that, but it wasn’t you .” Her head shook. “It’s not you, it’s me. It’s...always me. My mind. I-I can do better. Don’t return me to my cell. Don’t send me away.”

Away. Alone. Abandon her just like her own father? Her fucking traitor, piece of shit father?

My rage grew, shifting and changing to something new. Something...different and bigger than my own demons. I could fight mine. I killed those bastards. Who would fight hers? Pearl had no one. She was a crow . She wasn’t even entitled to revenge.

My voice lowered as I turned to Elec.

“I want the sister. I know better than to ask for that son of a bitch, Quincy, but Sissy...I need her.”

“How bad?”

“Name the price. I don’t care what it is. I’ll pay it.”

But the Main Master wasn't looking at me anymore. His stare was on Pearl. He sat on the edge of the bed, not talking but studying her in an expression I'd never seen on him before. A good minute passed before he withdrew his phone and began flipping through screens. When he finally stopped, I lowered, narrowing my eyes to take in the lines holding multiple names. Some spaces were full. Some were empty. Most of the names I recognized.

Elec glanced up, the blue of his eyes so light that it sent my pulse racing. It was cold. Dead. More... it was determined. He stood, walking us to the far end of the room and turning the screen to face me.

"I won't lie. I had doubts about you. I'm still having doubts. You want to know my price? This is my price. We've talked about your future before. A long time ago. Where does this line go, Ethan? Who's does it join? You're getting older. You're running out of time."

My lips parted, and my gaze slowly went to Pearl.

"There we go. You see now. Mull it over. Let it simmer." Elec's mouth tugged back on the side as if he'd solved all of our problems. "If you can think of someone you'd like to marry, I may be able to deliver more than the sister. We can make it a family affair. Daddy will love that."

"But you said she wasn't elite anymore."

"I lied. I had to see how far your feelings concerning her went."

"You've been playing these mind games with me a lot lately."

"They're not games. You know I wouldn't do that to you, Ethan. It only shows me what I need to know, and that's important."

“Are you sure you haven’t done more?”

“Define more.”

“Messed with my mind, Elec. Bent it to your will. Made me do things I can’t remember.”

“I don’t need to. I could, if you wanted.”

I saw his power. His truth and temptation. My jaw flexed. “Get back to Pearl. Are you saying she still has rank? She really is one of us.”

“Yes.”

“And you’d destroy what’s left of her line?”

“Do you object?”

“Hell no,” I half growled.

Elec smiled. “Both of your lines will be gone. Let’s begin fresh... Her and you . A new line worth more than either of yours alone.”

“As tempting as it is...you know I can’t.”

“You can. You don’t have a choice .”

He was right. I’d have to marry someone eventually. It was inevitable.

My fists clenched as I took in her terrified face. She was trying not to be afraid, but she was so worried I was sending her away. Even after what she saw and knew. And I

did want Quincy. I wanted to hear him scream and beg his apologies to Pearl. I wanted him to pay so fucking much I couldn't stop from licking my lips through the thought of his taste.

"I know you fear a repeat of your own past, but I can assure you that will not happen. I can make her into whatever you want, Ethan. I can promise you the perfect future. I can even make you want it more than anything."

The conversation with the couple from the auction came flooding back. Elec was a master at manipulating people's minds. He could make them believe whatever he wanted. Did I want that for Pearl? For myself? Would we turn into them? The Riveras?

"Picturesque," I whispered. "A movie marriage?"

"Whatever one would make you happiest. You wouldn't believe the requests I've come across. Nothing is out of reach or too much. I'd do that for you, Ethan. I'd give you a life you'd be proud of.

"What about Rhett and June Rivera? What life did they ask for? Or perhaps they didn't ask at all."

A hardness swept over Elec's stare.

"I heard you. You have them under your power, don't you?"

"And here I was trying to be nice. I'm going to pretend you weren't eavesdropping on my conversation with the Riveras. As a matter of fact, once I leave this apartment, you won't remember anything about them at all."

I blinked, shaking away the heaviness in my head. "My concern is Pearl, no one

else.”

Elec’s lips pursed the smallest amount as he took me in.

“Good. She’s my concern too. Marry her, Ethan.”

“How? She’s a crow. How would it benefit either one of our bloodlines? For one, she can’t return to the outside world. I need a wife. I need that . I’m too high profile. A surrogate won’t work. Two, she can’t give me heirs—I mean. Isn’t she fixed or something?”

At his look, my head shook.

“ She’s a crow. All slaves are sterilized. That’s our safety net. That’s promised to us. She’s.” I stopped at one of the Main Master’s eyebrows raising. A long breath left me, and my blood turned to ice, only to burst into an inferno of lust. Even slightly foggy, I was breathing heavier and shaking through a fate I almost didn’t get to choose.

“Elec...you kept her as a breeder. She’s not a crow because of being disfigured. You...You did this on purpose. Does she know what she is?”

“You were always quick at figuring things out.” A smile came to his face. “She knows nothing because I was unsure of her fate...until you. You were an option, but not one I settled on. But I think I chose right. Look at how perfect this is. She needs a husband, and she’s a woman you can’t kill. Her father’s line is everything. Her mother’s line...is special to me. Pearl would be a good match for you. Better than you could hope for. I always said I’d look out for you. I think this is your one, Ethan.”

“ I could have killed her. You could have trapped me. ”



“But here we are.”

“I could have killed her,” I repeated, more angrily.

“I knew you wouldn’t. You have a soft spot for the broken. It takes one to know one. Your family broke you. They tortured you . Who better for you than Pearl? She’s in an arena of suiters that would love nothing more than to fill her womb, lock her up and throw away the key, looks be damned. You know how this works. It’s her line they’ll want. Her father has the largest diamond mines there are. He has his hands in all natural resources, good and bad. I want you to step in with Pearl to control that. And it wouldn’t be much. More overseeing. I’ve already moved in the right people for an easy takeover for when the time comes. You deserve this .”

“You’d let her leave here? Marriage?”

The word got trapped in my throat.

“You’re special to me. I wouldn’t do this for anyone. You’re like a brother. You deserve to be happy after what you went through. Settle. Move into your real power as the O’Brien. Choose someone who sets your blood on fire. Does she not trigger something different in you?”

I took in Pearl’s face, not able to speak.

“It’s time, Ethan. Any worries you have are easily fixable. I know it makes you uneasy to hear, but her mind already belongs to me. It has to. We have no choice. It makes her safe, and that’s a must. It also makes it possible for me to make her into what you want. You’re going to need that for your happiness. As for the outside world, perhaps poor Pearl has been locked away and alive this entire time. Hidden away against her will because of her looks. The possibilities are limitless. Stories are easy to create. What do you want the masses that worship you to see? A savior? A

knight in shining armor?”

“A knight,” I mumbled as memories returned, seeing myself peel off the costume that was covered in piss.

“Imagine what a hero of men you’d become. They’d love you even more.” He paused as he took me in. “Like I said, think on it. I have to go. Give it a few weeks. See if she’s the one. If so, we’ll go over the contract. If not...I have a few potential buyers. That means you can’t fuck her in the meantime. If you take her virginity, I’ll leave you no choice on the match. Pearl is worth a fortune untouched. Let’s keep it that way.”

Untouched? Easier said than done. I could still taste her on my tongue. Every breath belonged to Pearl. The craving to have her again was already calling me back in. Begging me to continue. She said the reason I got mad at her wasn’t because of me, that it was her. So...she wasn’t repulsed at my true self. That changed everything. Even now I found myself stepping closer to her, but at this point it wouldn’t matter if she was sickened by who and what I was. Pearl could hate me, and I’d still kill her worthless family for what they did. It was principle, and I couldn’t let their cruelty to her go. I didn’t know this woman, but that didn’t matter. It was the circumstance, and our survival was our link. It’s what would keep her alive in my worst times, and that was a relief. Pearl was safe from my monster. At least from death. And now that I knew I could have her exactly as I wanted, a huge part of me suddenly wanted to keep her. If Elec owned her mind and she carried my secrets, she was still worth a lot more than some d that was stuck within these walls. I could make our union work in my favor. In both of our favors if I understood her correctly.

“Main Master.”

Elec stopped at the threshold of my bedroom door, turning to face me.

“Send over the contract. Restraint isn’t my friend. Neither is time. Especially not with her. Can you...” My lips tightened and I hated even saying the words out loud. “Is there anything that can be done to make her want me?”

Elec’s eyes flickered back to the bed, and he smiled. “I’m afraid there’s not much. She’s under my control, and I’m not ready to sway her in your favor. I want you to think about this to be sure. But if you were sure ...you could trigger promising reactions by saying her full name.”

“Her full name. Got it.”

“Give it time, Ethan. There’s no rush.”

“Of course.”

“Great. I’ll email over the contract when I feel it’s the right time. There’s one thing I won’t bend on. If you cut her, keep it below the neck. No more on her face. That’s already going to be quite the job. Let’s not keep adding to it.”

“Job? You just said—You’re going to fix it?” My head shook, angrily. “I don’t want her fixed.”

“I said they’d know about her, as in they’d hear about how she was scarred and hidden away, not that they’d get to see her like that. I get it, Master, but I’m not talking to you right now. I’m talking to Ethan O’Brien, heir of O’Brien Industries, and I’m saying Pearl needs work done if she’s going to take her rightful place next to you in society.”

“She can take her place just as she is.”

“This isn’t up for debate. As-is isn’t going to work. Her appointment is already set.”

“I don’t want her face fixed. I want it as it is right now.”

“Does she want that? Or do you think maybe she finally deserves some chance at a normal existence? One without whispers? One without stares? A marriage consists of two people, Ethan. We as men put our chosen first. We cater. We care and cherish. It’s not Master and slave with them; it’s husband and wife. You, of all people, should know that. I taught you better. Maybe I chose the wrong person for Pearl Mallory .”

At her name and his step towards her, my hand shot up. My heart raced. He’d take her without a second thought, and all I could see was how Pearl’s wide eyes were so fixed on us. How her beauty was twisted with pain. It only had the fury building for what her family had put her through. I knew she couldn’t hear everything we were saying in our hushed tones, but she wasn’t deaf either. She knew our conversation was about her.

“Wait.” My teeth ground against each other repeatedly as I took in the deep line that went from her temple to just below her eye. Then I took in the cut I made just below her cheekbone. One of us. One of us. Mine? A rumble left me. “Fuck,” I growled. “Will the large one be gone completely?”

“It doesn’t have to be if you choose to go through the contract. It just needs to be more concealable. There, but not taking away from her natural beauty. We can do that here and make it work, Ethan, but you have to bend just like I will.”

“And if I agree and sign the contract, you’ll let her keep it?”

He let time stretch as he scanned my face. “I will, just as I said. Existing, but not enough to dominate her features. There has to be some form of balance.”

“And you won’t touch any other part of her body? You’ll leave those alone?”

“If that’s what you want. Like I said, her face is the only part of her off-limits. Mark her up as much as she consents to. Cut her. Take pieces of her flesh and make your own special soup with it. I don’t care as long as the public can’t see your damage.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

I heard nothing else as my shoulder was gripped, but I knew the Main Master was departing. And her. All I saw was Pearl as she sat there more confused than ever. She could be more than a d . More than a crow . She could be Pearl O-Brien. She could be mine.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

Four days.

Eight.

Twelve.

More.

If I thought the minutes were long, it didn't compare to the silent days of routine and lessons. A butcher came. A chef. I learned the easiest way to remove limbs. I was shown how to peel back the skin. They took turns teaching me how my Master liked his meals. How to cook the different recipes and which body part was best for each one. The beginning was hard. Especially when I knew what I was handling, but eating was the hardest. I still couldn't stomach a quarter of my plate when I knew who I was eating. But I couldn't not eat. That was an insult. My Master was giving me a chance, and I couldn't screw this up now. Not when I knew how hard it was for Ethan to keep me around to begin with. He refused to talk to me. That didn't stop him from staring, but he hadn't touched me again. Maybe I was right and the alcohol was to blame for his behavior. That had to be it. He regretted what happened, and now that he'd tasted me like he wanted, it was done. So...why did that bother me? Why did his withdrawal hurt? It was a blessing, wasn't it? It was exactly what I had hoped for... wasn't it?

"No-no-no." Arms flew up in panic at my side, and my eyes widened as I froze. The herbs fell into the mixture for the roast, and pain webbed over the back of my hand from the thin cane the man hit me with. I jerked my hands to my chest, wincing through the throbbing pain and tears that welled in my eyes...again. From the warmth

under my palm, I knew he'd finally broken the skin. Was I ever going to learn? I couldn't think. Not about food.

“After the sauce. After . Three times now. Are you stupid, slave?”

“ Hey! ”

The roar from the front door had me jumping all over again. The rage on Ethan's face left me wanting to run and hide, but there was nowhere to go.

“Master Eleven, I apologize. We're almost finished. I'm afraid this slave ?—”

“Get the fuck out of my apartment before I shove that stick through your throat. You're released.”

“B-But Master.”

“It's my fault,” I rushed out as he walked closer. “He's a good teacher, I'm just messing everything up.”

The chef looked between us. The short span of time was all it took for Ethan to lunge forward and close the distance. He ripped the cane from the chef, rearing back and connecting right across the man's face. Not once. Twice. Three times.

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Wood exploded and screams had me torn on what to do. Compassion begged me to help, training left me rigid as I kept my place.

“If I ever see you again—” Ethan didn't finish as he drug the man forward. He grabbed the knife I'd been cutting with, turning back to the chef to flatten his hand on

the counter. The impact left a smacking sound as the blade connected with marble. I managed not to jump back as fingers rolled off the surface and onto the floor towards my feet. “You’re so lucky I don’t kill you. If you get near Pearl again, I will eat you alive. Literally! Touch her, and I’ll be the nightmare you can’t wake up from. Get it?”

Yells continued as the man tried to swipe his fingers. Ethan kicked him in his chest, sending the chef grunting and crashing to the ground.

“Those belong to Pearl now. Get the fuck out of our apartment.”

The chef scrambled to his feet, holding his bleeding hand at his chest as he raced for the door. It slammed behind him, kicking me into action as I dove down to pick up the fingers. Large hands grasped my sides before I could reach, lifting me to stand. My lips parted as my gaze met Ethan’s, but he seemed just as speechless as me.

“It was my fault,” I said, lowly. “I’m sorry.”

He still didn’t speak as he brought up my hand. His forehead crinkled and he let out a breath, shaking his head.

“You’re already so swollen and bruised. How many times did he hit you today?”

“Maybe four?”

He cursed, his jaw tightening as he continued to stare at my hand resting over his palm.

“This is my fault. I should have known not to leave you alone with him...or anyone. Not here. It could have been worse.” He stopped. “I’m going to have to think differently when it comes to you. I guess this will be a learning process.”



“I’ll make it easier, Master. I’m trying. I’ll try harder.” At his silence, I shifted, watching how he still stared down at our hands. “Are you still thinking of sending me back?”

Only then did his eyes lift to mine.

“I’m afraid there’s no going back anymore, Pearl.”

I almost smiled. Almost. I couldn’t think of anything worse than the solitude of the crow cells or the disgusting bullying of the guards, but it wasn’t easy here either. I was starving yet sick at the thought of eating, and there was nothing I could do about that.

“So, you’re giving me a chance to prove myself? A real chance?”

My happiness leaked through my words, but my Master didn’t seem relieved or even satisfied with my reaction. If anything, he looked uncertain.

“Pearl, we need to talk.”

“Alright.” I glanced to the food on the counter. “May I throw this roast in the oven first? I’m afraid it won’t be as good as the one you usually eat, but I promise to do better on the next one.”

He gestured, and I rushed over, trying to figure out what he wanted to talk to me about that was so important. What could possibly be making him appear...nervous? Was the Main Master finding me someone else? Is that why I wasn’t going back to the cells?

Putting the lid on and opening the oven, I slid in the large pan, turning to face the man who’d spent the last two weeks avoiding me like the plague. If I wanted to be

honest with myself, he still looked like he wanted to run. But it couldn't be fear. I didn't get that impression. No...regret.

I slowly walked back towards him.

Yes, I kept going back to that. Regret is what it must have been. It was the most plausible answer. He needed to keep me as a cook and housekeeper, but now he had to look at me. After what he'd done...it was probably too much.

"Master, before you begin."

"If this is another apology, Pearl, save it. You have nothing to apologize for."

I slowed just as I approached the sofa he pointed to.

"I think I know what this is about. I won't apologize. I warned you. I knew it would come to this, and I understand."

Ethan lowered to the sofa waiting for me to sit.

"I'm not following. I have no idea what you're talking about."

My fingers interlaced as I sat straight on the edge of the beige leather sofa, not a cushion away from him.

"What happened between us. I knew you'd regret it, and that's okay. Just please don't send me away or give me to someone else because of it. If it makes you uncomfortable to see me, you don't have to keep leaving. I spent years in a cell a little smaller than the bedroom. I can stay back there while you have your space up here. I don't mind."

“You think I regret what happened?”

My lips parted as I took in his sincere confusion.

“You’re gone a lot. You don’t talk to me. I assumed?—”

“You have to stop doing that.”

“But something’s wrong. You’re...different. You went from.” I paused. “Intense to dismissive. Are you giving me to someone else? Is that why the Main Master was here?”

Ethan’s knees turned more in my direction. He was wearing a pair of dark denim jeans and a shirt a shade darker than the green of his eyes. To say he was dreamy was an understatement. Especially with whatever dilemma was causing him to run his fingers through his dark hair.

“Pearl, I know who you are.”

Again, my mouth parted, but words were hard to come by at the unexpected statement.

“I told you who I was.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. I know who you are. I know your father is Quincy Mallory. I know he married a bitch of a woman name Vicki Fonteau. She has a daughter named Susan. They call her Sissy. She’s your stepsister.”

Was I standing? I barely recalled shooting to my feet.

“How do you know that?”

“Pearl, sit down. It’s okay.”

My fingers were back to twisting. Back to wringing as I clung to the pale-yellow dress I wore.

“Don’t mention their names again. I don’t want to hear about them. I don’t want to think about them. They’re not here, are they? They’re not coming for me .”

It wasn’t a question. More a statement as I tried to get myself to sit. I couldn’t.

“Calm. They’re not here. Not yet.”

Yet? Pounding erupted in my ears, a wish-wash thumping that I couldn’t hear past. I cleared my throat, turning my head and closing my eyes as I tried to swallow the sickness that had me wanting to gag. Pressure gripped my arm in a soft hold, and I opened my lips, gasping as I realized I had forgotten to breathe. I was shaking. I was more than angry. A mix of heartbreak and rage blew up like a bomb in my chest, rattling my insides like a live grenade. More explosions. More panic and gasps.

“Pearl, look at me. Pearl .”

My eyes lifted, taking in a blurry Ethan as he stepped closer. The tears wouldn’t be contained, and I didn’t even try to stop them. It was an impossible task as my past slapped me across the face. It was a past I couldn’t bear to think about. None of them. I never wanted to think of who I was back then ever again. I couldn’t. The pain. The hurt . The screams. The grew louder in the distance with every breath.

“Jesus, I’m going to enjoy what’s coming. Let’s not worry about them now. Keep looking at me.” His hands cupped my face, and he kept his stare level with mine. “They hurt you. They won’t ever again. No one is going to hurt you anymore, okay? Not them. Not some fucking chef.”

“What about you?”

At my question, Ethan got quiet.

“Maybe me. Not in a way you won’t consent to. Or...” Again, he went silent. “Maybe you won’t want this. Not that you have a choice anymore. I’m afraid I didn’t leave you one.”

At his phone ringing, Ethan paused, holding his hand up as he stood and pulled it from his jeans pocket.

“Shit. I have to take this. Give me a moment.” He hit the button before I could answer, pacing but staring at me as he did. “Main Master. Yeah. I was about to.” A pause. “I’ve already contacted them. They’re preparing. I want the transition to be a quick one. I see no point in wasting time.” Ethan made an abrupt stop, tearing his eyes from me as a glare appeared. “I’m not overly rushing; I’m just not procrastinating on the little things. We’ve met almost every day and talked about this. We have a plan; I’m just putting it into action now instead of later.” His head shook but his shoulders went lax as he seemed to relax a little. “Of course. I’ve given it a lot of thought. I have a movie coming up and we’ll be filming internationally. I want to take her. To do that—” He nodded, and my heart was in my throat. His eyes came back to me, and the floor seemed to fall out from under my feet. “Marry her, I know.”

I was lowering to sit on the sofa, not able to stop the sickness swelling in my stomach. He was getting rid of me. Marriage? He was getting married? He was serious with someone else? And he did that with me? It was merely taste, but...it was something to me .

It could have been worse.

The thought was a relief and a regret in one. I had no reason to feel rage or betrayal at

a stranger, but I did. I had no rights. No say. The fear of abandonment I harbored didn't care. I had always been quiet and passive, but the longer I stared at the man who fed me lies, the more the uncontrollable betrayal grew.

Had I really believed his looks of awe, his silent pleas of want, all those days he refused to talk to me? His display of want for me that first night?

Stupid, stupid girl.

I was the discarded.

The grotesque.

The epitome of embarrassment.

Cannibal, cheating, heart-killing liar!

My shoulders went back as I sat straighter. My head didn't go down. I didn't hide my scars as I stared coldly at Ethan. He saw my change. His lids flickered the moment I stuffed the pain down and let the anger win.

"Yeah. We will. I gotta go."

He hung up, licking his lips as he headed back to take his seat. Immediately, he swooped in, spinning my knees in his direction as he turned his to mirror mine. I didn't smile at the suddenly playful gesture or look down shyly. My expression was dry, and it had him looking more confused than ever. More...it was doing something to me. Feeding me. Making me stronger. Liar. Liar. Liar! I was nothing. Not pretty. Not special. No one.

"Pearl, what's wrong? You're clearly upset."

“You’re mistaken, Master. I’m fine.”

His head tilted, and he slowly shook back and forth.

“You’re lying.”

“How observant. I guess we’re even.” The flash of surprise had my armor growing.

“Just get it over with. When do I leave?”

Ethan crossed his arms over his chest. Seconds passed as bile built in my throat.

“It depends. A month. Maybe two.”

My chest cramped at the nonchalant tone. He truly didn’t care. Nothing. Nothing. Stupid, stupid.

I swallowed back the tears. I pushed away the hope that I’d finally found somewhere I could stay. With someone I didn’t have to hide from. That I had even found some sort of comfort with this monster only showed me how far gone I was. He made me believe. He ignited...hope. God, he’d dangled the most rotten, evil bait before me, and I had swallowed it down on command. Him...I wanted to stay here with him . Pathetic. Why, after what I knew?

“I’ll start packing, Master. I think it’s best that I wait out my time in the cells.”

“Cells?”

I shot to my feet, not waiting around to explain. I was shaking through the need to lash out. To do anything to cover the pain and shame.

Pressure grabbed my wrist as I shot by. Ethan stood, jerking me so hard that my body

crashed into his. His lips crushed to mine and for the briefest moment I met his tongue with every childish dream I'd ever let seep through my brokenness. It was his moan that burned the fantasy to the ground, triggering my body into action. I tore my head back, slapping his cheek with a force I didn't know I had inside me. The shock had both of us freezing. Tears raced down my cheeks, and Ethan let out a rumble that fed the burning flames inside. But not the ones of anger.

Fingers pushed roughly into my curls, fisting as he hungrily met my mouth again. The need to accept my status and submit did not exist in my moment. My teeth snapped down on his lip and blood washed over my tongue. It had him hissing and pulling back.

“God dammit, Pearl.”

He lifted me, carrying me into the bedroom. We hit the bed hard, bouncing at our fall, and I went wild.

“Marriage? Get off of me! I knew you'd give me away. I knew you were lying. Get. Off!”

But Ethan didn't. He restrained my arms, burying his face in my neck, sucking hard against my skin as he forced his weight to rest between my legs. He was moaning, pinning me, and tearing the straps of my dress down as his lips traveled to the hollow of my shoulder. I screamed, shaking my head back and forth, but he didn't stop as his teeth grazed the scars, sucking harder. His tongue dipped into the missing part of my shoulder and my sobs only grew. I was crying so hard I couldn't breathe. Disgust and shame wouldn't leave me, and my mind wouldn't grasp...how? How he could be doing this? Touching me. Tasting me. Kissing and sucking against my scars. How?

“Stop. Master, stop!”



“No.”

“Master.”

I tried wrestling my arms free from being trapped and surprisingly he let me. As he moved over the scar across my chest, running his tongue over the length, my hand shot to his hair. I held on tightly as he moved down, latching to my nipple. I cried out at the pleasure that nearly erased everything.

“I said stop.” I pulled back with almost all my strength. Hair broke free of his scalp, and still, it wasn’t enough. “You can’t do this. Ethan. Ethan O’Brien .”

His eyes lifted at his last name, and he broke the suction, but his tongue circled the hard nub as he looked at me almost contemplating some big secret.

“Stop, dammit. You’re getting married.”

“I am,” he smiled.

“Get the hell off me.”

The laugh had me pulling his hair harder. Slowly, he lifted, the smug smile only growing and feeding my new rage. I reared back, hitting my fist into his chest.

“Look at that. Quite brave of you, Pearl.”

“You’re getting rid of me anyway. Maybe I’ll die with my new Master. Maybe I’d rather just have you get it over with.”

The words fell easily. With them, a truth I couldn’t deny became exposed. Silence was an easy cover. You could lose your sense of self in the nothingness. To speak

took bravery, and it was all I had left. What it pointed to was an end. An end that I was suddenly more than ready for.

“Y ou want to die?”

“Why not?”

“I should flip you over and tear into your ass. I won’t. I gotta say, I think I like you like this. No apologies. No begging me to allow you to stay. I wasn’t sure if you had it in you.” I caught her wrist as she went to hit me again. I rotated her arm, running my tongue over the scar marring her skin. Pearl was breathing out of her mouth, deep and uneven breaths that exposed more pain than she’d ever admit out loud. “I’m going to kiss you again. I’d suggest not biting me this time.”

“I’ll do it.”

I lowered, getting closer to her mouth.

“You really don’t want to keep hurting me, Pearl.”

“Why not? You hurt me. You’re a liar. A cheat. Some beautiful woman out there thinks she’s found her perfect match, and look what you’re doing. Do you have any remorse? Do you even care that you’re breaking vows? Promises? Is it so easy for you to—” She stopped. “You’re an actor. Of course lying is easy. That’s beside the point,” she snapped. “When you say something, you’re supposed to mean it. Your word is supposed to be everything. No one gives a fuck about their word anymore. No one knows the true definition of loyalty or,” she sobbed, “truth. No one cares about anyone but themselves. I hate this life. I h-hate people.”

Words died off as I stroked back her hair, and she cried harder. She tried moving her

head away from me, but I followed.

“Are you done?”

“Are y-you done? Can you get off me now so I can pack? I don’t have much, but I’m taking my dresses with me. I don’t care that you bought them.”

I laughed, and the pout had me lowering to brush my lips to hers.

“I do think you’re beautiful.”

“What?”

The annoyance in the question had me laughing harder. She was adorable. Stunningly gorgeous as she cried. And the way she said my full name. Fuck. I could have come from her saying it alone. I was so hot for her. So desperate to really make her mine.

“You said some beautiful woman out there thinks she found the perfect match. I think you’re stunning, Pearl Mallory . More than some generic term of beautiful. Perfect match? I guess that remains to be seen. I’m not a liar, and I’m damn sure not a cheat. We have so much to learn about each other. What do we have if not time?”

Her eyebrows drew in, and she blinked heavily. An array of emotions flashed, and I felt her body soften against me.

“What are you talking about?”

Again, I kissed her, waiting...seeing. No teeth. No fight. As I lifted, the confusion was still there.

“Would you like to have dinner with me?”

She cringed.

“Not here. Not the roast. We can store it away for later. I want to take you to a restaurant. You can eat whatever you want.”

“Around people?”

Real fear. It won, and her body once again hardened.

“I want to have dinner with you. I won’t hide you in this apartment. Let’s go on a date. We’ll dress up. It’ll be fun.”

Still, she was confused, but the fear was winning. It left her turning her head, and me bringing her back to face me.

“You wanted to know about the Main Master. I’ll tell you why I was meeting with him. I signed a contract. On you . You’re one of us. Of elite blood. It’s time you took your place as the head of your line. You’re not a slave; you’re a Mallory. You’re mine now. For good.”

Gray eyes turned lavender as she scanned my face.

“Say something.”

Her head shook.

“Pearl, I’m keeping you forever. As mine.”

“Out there?”

Her pitch had turned higher at the end, and she mindlessly reached for the scar on her

face. My hand gripped hers, and I didn't break eye contact.

"Out there, for everyone to see. Not as my cook or housekeeper. I've made a deal with the Main Master. We'll marry in the next couple of months before we leave the country."

"No. Absolutely not."

I wasn't prepared for the strength that pushed against me. The top of my body swayed to the side, but I easily righted myself.

"Pearl, this is a new chance at a life stolen from you . You shouldn't even be here ."

"I like it here. I want to stay."

"Stay at the Gardens? And do what, butcher my meals? Cook for me?"

"Yes!"

"More than be with me?"

"Up there with everyone watching, yes . Do you know what they're going to say about you? Do you have any idea what they'll do? Your career will be ruined. No one will ever look at you the same. They'll call you names. They'll say you've lost your mind. Have you? God, you must have if you're jumping straight to marriage. Especially to me."

My jaw tightened through the protectiveness her words caused.

"It's soon. Unbelievable, really. I know that, but I don't give a shit. All elites are on the clock. You'd know this if your father wouldn't have hidden you from the world.

We do what we must for our line. Even marriage. Time is money. Time is power. It's what keeps us all moving forward. And you speak of names. Of opinions and thoughts. I don't give a shit what anyone thinks of me. But if you think I'd let anyone hurt you with words or anything else?—”

“Stop it, Ethan. Look at me . Really, look at who you want. It's not their fault how they react. They can't help but cringe or show their disgust. God, do your eyes even work?”

Time stopped as her hands firmly flattened to my cheeks. I saw nothing but desperation deep in her light-colored orbs. Desperation and survival for what sanity she had left. My life had been hard getting nearly beaten to death and constantly degraded by the males in my line, but I hadn't lived a single moment of what she must have gone through. The surgeries. The physical pain. Yes, I had been isolated and rejected by my family just like her, but not in a cell all alone for years on end. Those feelings or the looks I was given didn't exceed those close to me. Pearl got it every which way she turned. And that was when she was privileged enough to see people. She was a target, and I wasn't naïve about that either. My monster loved the challenge it would cause. The humanity left in me hated it. Hated them .

“I think you're beautiful. My eyes work just fine. Have dinner with me. Let go of all sanity and just fucking marry me. You speak of loyalty. What better display of devotion is there? Maybe I can make you happy. Maybe you'll want to kill me before it's over with. Our bond, our vows, are unbreakable. No divorce. No separation. Don't you at least want to see what happens? Let Pearl Mallory go. Leave your past back with your name. Become Pearl O'Brien. Be mine.”

The vulnerability was back, but so was something deeper. She wanted to believe this. She wanted to believe me. As crazy as the entire situation seemed, I could see how hard it was for her to trust anything I said. I could also see how she changed when I said her full name like Elec told me to, and I was going to use it every way I could to

make her want me.

“This can’t be real. It...No. This isn’t a very nice joke.”

“I killed two b’s for the way they treated you. I just cut off the fingers of a chef who hit you. This is no joke.” I grabbed the ringlet closest to her face, wrapping it around my finger as I continued to gaze down. “Dinner. You and me. Marriage. Babies. Not some apartment underground, hidden from the world. A real home. A yard. A dog or two. Pearl.” My lids closed as I processed words I couldn’t believe I was saying. When I opened them, she was hanging on my every expression. She was... mine . “I’ve never wanted those things. I hated the thought of family. Mine was a nightmare. It’s taken me years to get this far. The Main Master has helped but picturing myself with you, watching you the last two weeks...there’s no one better suited to have this with. God, we could grow to despise each other. I won’t lie, it happened with my own parents. I just can’t believe that would be me and you.”

“I need to think. I’m just not sure I can do it. Not like this.”

The last of her words were breathless as her attention turned away from me.

“Like this. You mean with the scars.” My mouth twisted with aggravation. “The Main Master won’t let you leave with the one that matters most.” She jerked her gaze back to me. “He said you have another surgery soon. In a day or two, actually. He wants the one on your face lightened to the point of almost being gone. He wanted it gone completely but I wouldn’t let him.

“Wouldn’t let him? Ethan .” I watched excitement and horror battle on her face. “He can fix me? He can make it go away?”

“The scar stays, Pearl. He’s lucky I’m allowing him to lighten it at all. I like it. It’s you. I don’t want it gone.”



“But...But what about what I want?”

“Pearl—”

“ No! I want it gone, Ethan. If he can make it go away, I can be normal. At least a little. Not pretty, but not hideous, either. Ethan, please. Please ,” she begged, pulling at my shirt in alarm. “Let him fix me. I’ll never ask you for anything ever again. I promise . Please .”

I couldn’t talk as she held to me with such exposed trauma. It was in the way she clung to me like the ultimate savior. It was her full, quivering lips ready to continue fighting for a cause she would have easily died for. One she did technically die from in the outside world. Maybe it wasn’t by her doing, but it condemned her just the same.

“You said just the face. You like the scars. You wanted to make more. Do it. Make as many as you want, but don’t force me to face the world as a monster. Don’t do that to me. That would be worse than any fate down here. At least I fit in in this hell. Out there...o-out-ou-t t-there.”

“Shh.” I lowered my forehead to rest against hers, closing my eyes and breathing her in. I could take a lot. I could commit the most unspeakable acts. Not this. Seeing Pearl break shifted parts of me on the inside that I hadn’t even known were there. I hurt for her. I was angry for her, and it was growing by the second as her name repeated in my mind. “You want the scar gone?”

Her arms wrapped around my neck, holding to me with all of her strength.

“I want it gone. Please make it go away. My body is yours. Give me my face back. It’s all I want. With a face, I have a life. No more laughing or pointing. No more disgust. If I don’t have a choice in going out there, I need this . There’s too many of

them. Too many.”

My head lifted, my heart racing through another part of me I couldn't hide. “Acknowledge right now that you're aware of what you're giving me. Your body...for your face. Is that what you're saying?”

She pulled back, loosening her hold around me.

Seconds.

A minute.

Longer.

Pearl was smart enough to weigh her thoughts. I may have appeared her savior, but her deal was with the devil in me. She knew that as tears once again appeared in her eyes.

“Yes, within reason. I will never be your meal. You can't take any of my limbs. No fingers or toes. You can cut me but not enough to kill me. And if you want me to be your wife...you have to be nice to me. You have to keep your vows. Every single one or there's no deal. You can't lock or send me away, ever. You can't put me in another cell. I can't t-take it. I c-can't?—”

“Pearl, I'd never lock you away.” My head shook as I grabbed her wrist, leveling her hand at my mouth. “After what you've seen, I know how I must appear to you, but this world only holds part of me. The darkest part. You know my demons. You've met them. That stays at the Gardens. Yes, you'll return here with me, and you know first-hand what happens, but you'll come to the outside world as my wife. As my best friend and support system. I need that for us. I need you to help me in both worlds. I know you don't love me. I don't love you either as one should, but I think given

enough time, we could be something great. You're the only woman I've been able to breathe around. The only one I know I'd never kill. God, I'd never be able to. And you're more than beautiful to me. We can make this work. I'm not all horrible."

More studying. More silence.

"That sounds nice. You said the surgery is in a day or two?"

I lowered, kissing against her lips.

"Yes. The Main Master assures me he has the best surgeon coming in. What they're going to do is cutting-edge technology. He says it'll be like nothing ever happened. From the face down," I rushed out, kissing her again. "Face only, Pearl Mallory . Fuck, I love saying your name. I love that you're mine."

Soft. So soft and welcoming this time.

"I'm going to be fixed. I'll be normal . Maybe not pretty but not a freak either."

"Don't ever call yourself that again. Ever ."

Arms tightened around my neck, and heat enflamed my body as she lifted, hesitating as she met my lips. Her...initiating...not me. The realization had me deepening the kiss she so freely gave. My tongue slid against hers, dueling as I sucked against her tip.

"Ethan, wait." A long pause. "Say it again. Say my name. I feel...I like the way it sounds when you say it."

" Pearl Mallory ."

Her mouth ravaged mine, and I shifted, pushing the dress up in my rush. Pearl's legs drew up to my hips as I rocked against her pussy.

"We're going to be so good together. Look at us." I moved to her exposed chest, raking my teeth over her shoulder before sucking against her skin. Pearl moaned, letting me pull the dress off. Her breasts weren't big or even full, but it didn't matter to me. I took my time, exploring her nipples. Going back and forth to suck. The soft sounds and whimpers fed me, making the rest of the world disappear as I lowered even further. Pearl knew what was coming, and she didn't fight it as I gripped to her panties, pulling them off. She even widened for me, spreading her legs as I lowered to circle my tongue around her clit.

"If this is part of marriage, I think I'll like it. This is..." her mouth shot open, and her head lifted as I sucked against the sensitive nerves. "I think this is my favorite thing. This is...God." Her head fell back to the bed, and she arched, moving her hips so that my tongue could push into her entrance. Pearl was moaning louder, moving faster as I tried to take my time. Thing was, her wanting me so much was torture. I wanted her too. I wanted to be inside her. Claiming her. Taking what no one else had ever gotten. It was all I'd been thinking about for two weeks, and it was killing me.

"I want this pussy." I lifted my head, watching as I slid my finger inside her. The rocking downward to take me deeper had me sliding another finger in to stretch her through the thrusts. " Pearl Mallory ."

"Take off your shirt, Ethan. Take it all off."

My teeth clenched. "That may be a request, but to me that's a finality. If I take my clothes off, there's no going back. It'll mean you agree to this. To all of it. I'm not taking your virginity and letting you go. I plan on coming all inside of what's mine and if that's the case...we begin our life together, consequences be damned."

“Didn’t you already sign the contract with the Main Master anyway? There’s already no going back. I may be someone in the outside world, but that doesn’t change the slave status that left me no choice in the matter. Do I care?” She smiled, shaking her head, so different than before. “Maybe I’ve lost my mind too. He’s fixing me. He’s giving me a life with you and letting me out of here. I don’t want to go back. I’m ready to begin.”

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It was the way he said my name. The care in each kiss. The attention Ethan gave when he focused on parts of my body that told me he wasn't lying about wanting to be with me. He catered to my scars instead of trying to pretend they didn't exist. I didn't know what I was doing, but I didn't care as I lost myself in the way he kept eye contact as he rose to meet my mouth, burying his fingers back inside of me. His nude body was shocking to see, but something in knowing it was mine only made me more impatient.

Impatient.

I had to hurry. We...had to hurry? Something was changing. Mallory. Pearl Mallory. My name. Who I was...

"I should ask if you really want this one more time, but I'm not letting you go even if you don't. Slave, wife. Wife ," he breathed out against my lips, stealing me from the screaming in my mind. "No more Pearl Mallory. Pearl O'Brien."

Screaming.

Screaming.

There was something back there. Something trying to warn me? Something?

My lids fluttered as his mouth moved to my neck. I was so wet. So ready to try to appease the 'more' sensation that was driving me crazy. Was that what those screams were? The 'more'? Or maybe I knew this could be bad in the long run. Was I really so excited to marry this man? This Master? This...murdering cannibal?

I buried my nails in his back, urging him to continue. Trying to get him to go faster. Faster. More. I was so close to that sensation he'd brought out in me before. I'd experienced orgasms on rare occasion in my past, but it wasn't something I got to enjoy. Not when there was constantly a camera on me or guards not far outside. Privacy didn't really exist, and I hadn't been able to ignore that. But here, now, I had nothing holding me back.

"Ethan, please."

He lifted from the hollow of my shoulder, his eyes a vibrant green as they met mine. A deep breath left him, and he nodded. Pressure leveled at my entrance, and I closed my eyes, trying to prepare for the unknown. For...more pain.

"Look at me, baby. Right here."

Weight shifted as Ethan lowered more against my body. He was rubbing the head of his cock along the outside wetness, barely sinking into my pussy, only to pull out and tease me again.

More.

More.

I drew my legs up higher, crying out in pleasure as he stretched me wide with the tip. A deep vibrating rumble left Ethan and he held in place, lowering to meet my mouth. And I was ready for his kiss. I could disappear in the happiness it suddenly made me feel. A promise to a new beginning. A life maybe worth living. And I wanted that. I wanted to be happy and normal more than anything in the world.

"Don't stop kissing me. This is gonna hurt."

But hadn't that been the story of my life to this point?

"All I know is pain. I can take it."

"I believe you can. Soon, you won't have to worry about it anymore. Hold on to me." He swept down, thrusting and breaking through my barrier as he drank in my cry. I gasped and tensed my body through the stinging fire that had me wanting to move. And I tried, shifting my hips as he grabbed hold, keeping me still as he paused to let me adjust.

"That's it, baby. Breathe. The worst is over. Now it's time for me to make you feel good."

Ethan kissed the wetness from the tears, but I hadn't even known any had fallen. I didn't have time to think on it as he inched out, lifting and sitting back to watch himself go deeper. The change in sensation had my mouth shooting open. The pain was still there, but so was something else as I took in his powerful body. The muscles flexed at his movements. People worshipped this man. Millions upon millions of people. They loved him. They adored him. But...

Something. Something.

My knees pulled back, and a loud moan left me as he took his time burying his cock. I could feel his length throbbing as he paused, holding securely to the side of my throat. He was still staring down at me but with more awe than I'd ever seen from him. Sweat was beginning to coat his chest and he bit his bottom lip, inching out and sliding back in. Slow. Steady. Slow.

My fingers went to my clit, adding pressure. The sight had him making sounds just as loud as me. I was already so close as he teased and built up the ecstasy I suddenly couldn't imagine being without. My mind was screaming again, and it was back to



the ‘more’, ‘more’, ‘more’.

Thrust.

Thrust.

Thrust.

More thrusts until I couldn’t help but plead to him.

“Yes. Ethan, more. Faster. Please. I need...faster. Ethan .”

Did it still hurt? Yes. Did I care? No.

My head was lifting, and my mouth was opened. Minutes stretched out. The thrusts increased, bouncing me back as he began to pound his cock into me. The slapping of our skin had me right on edge, and he kept me there until I wasn’t sure I could go another second. I rotated my fingers over my clit and screamed as the spasms sent my legs shaking.

I could barely hear. Barely see as I managed to bring Ethan’s dreamy face into focus.

“ Fuck. Fuck that was hot. Keep touching yourself. You’re so fucking gorgeous.”

And for the first time in as long as I could remember... I believed him . His eyes never left me. His wonder never ceased.

“Jesus. Fuck, Pearl. God, yes.”

Ethan grabbed my hips, lifting my ass from the bed and holding to me tightly as he pushed deep. The force of his cum had me crying out all over again as he shot into

me over and over.

He was panting. I was trying to catch my breath. And my smile. It was automatic. Even through the background screams, I was already celebrating.

Celebrating my new life.

Celebrating my upcoming future.

Celebrating...contemplating... something.

“How do you feel? How bad do you hurt?”

I glanced around the crowded restaurant on our floor, thanking God that soon I wouldn't have to force my head to stay high because Ethan wanted me to. I could do it because I wouldn't have to hide. I wouldn't have to worry what people thought.

“My body doesn't hurt nearly as bad as my ego does right now. Everyone is looking at me.”

“No they're not. They're looking at me.”

Ethan winked, throwing me a charming smile as he lifted his glass of water, taking a drink.

“They are looking at you too.” I shrugged. “Probably wondering how in the world you lost your mind, and what you're doing having dinner with someone like me.”

He put the glass down, reaching across the table to grab my hand. When he lifted it and kissed against my fingers, I stiffened, glancing around at the random person looking our way.

“I wish you would stop doing things like that.”

“Doing what? Enjoying our dinner together? Trying to woo my future wife? Wife. Who would have thought I liked that term so much?” His head shook. “Who cares what any of these people think. They’re fakes, all of them. I think I want you on my lap.”

I quickly jerked my hand back as heat burned my cheeks.

“I’d die. Literally. I’d drop dead, which I guess wouldn’t be that bad. At least I wouldn’t have to endure the staring anymore.”

“Who’s staring?” Ethan finally glanced around, his face immediately hardening as he slowly scanned the room and realized I wasn’t exaggerating.

“We don’t have to stay long, right?”

“Pearl.” His forearms flattened on the table as he leaned in. Again, he picked up my hands, kissing against them. “You’re taking it the wrong way. You concealed a lot of the scars with makeup. They’re just curious. It’s aggravating but not what you think. You look breathtaking. Focus on me. We’re here for us, not them.”

“Us.” Even as I said it, I shook my head through the fog that kept coming in waves.

“Wife.” Ethan smiled.

“This makes zero sense. I don’t even know you. You don’t know me.”

“I know enough. And you know more about me than anyone else. We’re off to a good start.”

I laughed and Ethan's smile was so big and genuine that I felt my heart leap in my chest. Butterflies were automatic and my body flushed with a new craving that begged for more of him.

"You eat people. Pretty people. I'm so glad I'm safe from that."

"They're not pretty, Pearl, they're fake. Ugly. That's the point of all of this. It's why I kill them. They're not real. They have no empathy. Everything about their life is a lie. It's superficial. A sham, and they love to be that way. I hate them on a level I can't even explain to you. They're like everyone I know. Like most of the elites. Like my own family . Eating them..." He stopped. "It's hard to explain. I haven't always been like this. One day, I just snapped. The details about that will come later. Now's not the time. But eating them...It's a feeling from deep inside. They can't hurt me or anyone else ever again. I own them . I'm erasing them. Overpowering them. Taking them in me allows me to have the control. I win. I have the last laugh."

My eyes dropped to stare at our hold of each other. Ethan's finger was traveling down mine. In that moment, it was everything. It made me feel safe. Wanted, despite the horror I knew that came with his compulsions.

"I guess I can see that." I pushed back the screams, barely managing to get the words to come. "Earlier you said my family wasn't here yet. What did you mean by that?"

A throat clearing had both of us looking over. My eyes flew open wide, and my face shot down.

"Main Master."

Ethan's tone remained happy if not slightly surprised.

"My best chef is missing three fingers. He says you did it. Do you want to explain?"

Ethan lifted my bruised hand, but I still didn't look up to see the Main Master's expression.

"I brought him in to teach her to cook, not to beat her. Pearl is not a slave. Even if she was, never once did I give my permission for him to discipline her. He's lucky he only lost fingers. I almost couldn't stop myself from killing him."

A pause.

My hand was taken, lifted higher by the Main Master.

"Hello, Pearl. It's been a few weeks since we've seen each other."

At the hypnotic tone, my eyes snapped to his like a magnet. The smoothness of my name smothered out the fear. It pushed it so far away that all I could do was look into the bright blue as I responded.

"Hello, Main Master."

"You look very pretty tonight. I almost didn't recognize you. You're radiant in that wine-colored dress."

"Thank you."

Embarrassment flooded through and I wanted to shift in my seat, but I couldn't.

"I saw you as I was walking up. You were positively glowing. Happiness suits you. Has Ethan told you the news yet?"

"About the contract?"

The Main Master smiled. The sight had my lips slightly mirroring them, and I wasn't sure why. I felt good as I gazed into his stare. Not judged. Not pressured.

“About your surgery.”

Thump-thump!

Excitement.

“Yes. Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you .”

He laughed. “You're very welcome. This is a long time coming. It took me almost six months to convince Dr. Wu to join us at the Gardens. I have you to thank for the motivation to acquire him. He'll be a good addition here.”

“You brought him here just for me?”

“Of course. You're Pearl Mallory .” At my full name, the fog intensified a million-fold. His eyes went to my Master but didn't stay long. “You're a perfect fit for Ethan O'Brien . He may be a movie star, but he has more responsibilities than most know. That's where you come in. He's going to take such good care of you, just like I expect you to take care of him. You both deserve the best. It's time for you to be happy and make sure your new line thrives. That is what is most important to both of you. A big, loving family. Lots of babies. Pearl, your focus is loving Ethan and embracing every part of his life. The good, the bad...the dark. You're both still allowed to disagree, it's even healthy, but you always resolve your issues. You're made for each other. You're both strong. You're brave. You're outgoing in our circle, and you're loving to those closest to you. Family . Pearl, you're going to create one with Ethan, and it'll be so unlike your own. It'll be everything to both of you. The foundation of your entire life. You're true legacy. We're the beginning of a new generation. New goals. A new mission. We're all going to rise up to do remarkable

things.” The Main Master smiled. “Have you met Mistress Zero?”

My lips parted and I tried to blink back the dazed sensation just to speak.

“I don’t believe so.”

“Her name is Kayla Princeton. She’s focused on her family too. Her husband passed not long ago and she’s having twins. She needs you. I’ll set up a meeting. You’re going to love her. I know the two of you will be such great friends. You, Vera Lemmons, and June Vaughn-Rivera. They’re your go-to when you need something or someone to talk to, and they’re so excited to meet you. And you know you can always reach out to me. I will from time-to-time check up on you. In the meantime, I want all your focus to be on that family you can’t wait to create. It’s what’s most important.”

“Of course, Main Master.”

He kissed my hand, releasing it and turning to Ethan.

“Master Eleven, just as you wanted her.”

Ethan blinked rapidly. “Thank you. Truly.”

“It’s for the greater good.” The Main Master snapped between me and Ethan, and I let out a deep breath, looking back to Ethan as the Main Master put his attention on him. “What do you think? Have you chosen a date to get married?”

Ethan’s head shook as he stared up. “Not yet. Soon. Before we leave the country. I already have my people spreading the word that I found someone. I’m on a romantic getaway with her now and supposedly we’ve been secretly dating for close to a year.” He lifted my hand, holding to it. “I’ve been so private and secluded. The spin will be

great. You know how that works. They're pushing it out quickly on how she's the one. I'm sure the outside world is already in a buzz."

Elec nodded. "Good work. I've already covered the bases needed on Quincy's side, and you'll be getting your gift any moment. The bastard loves his boat. Luckily for us, he practically lives on the thing. Did you hear about the storms that rolled through the other night?"

"Storms?"

I tried to get the words to make sense. Just hearing my father's name made my mind feel...heavy.

Elec winked at me. "This season has been an exceptionally stormy one. You just never know what'll happen. Boats...they're such a risk yet people can't get enough of them. Someday they'll learn." He turned back to Ethan, who was rubbing his mouth down the length of my index finger. I could barely sit still in my seat as the Main Master continued. "Focus, Master Eleven. I want you to start planning your wedding. Pearl will be in recovery, and we both want this done quickly. During the time of her recovery, I forbid you to see her. You have other things to focus on."

"But—"

"No seeing her. With Quincy's accident and Pearl's resurfacing, your ceremony needs to be public. That is what I want you to focus on. Make it perfect for her. Beautiful. Small, but known."

"Wait. Will you be there?" All of Ethan's attention went to Elec. He sat up straighter, his brow drawing in. "You have to be there, Elec. I know you don't do ceremonies, but who else would be my best man? There's no one I'm closer with than you. Besides, I can't get married without the man who brought me and Pearl



together.”

For the first time, I saw hesitation on the Main Master’s face.

“If that’s what you want.”

“Of course it’s what I want. Elec, you’ve taken care of me. You’ve helped me in ways no one would understand.” Ethan stood, wrapping his arms around the Main Master for a quick hug. Elec took a deep breath, forcing a smile as Ethan pulled back.

“I’ll be there for you. I’m truly excited about this match. Pearl will be everything you need. You’re both going to be happy.”

The Main Master’s smile was fading as he took a step back.

“I should go. Let’s get the ball rolling. Say your goodbyes tonight. Have Pearl checked in for her surgery at five AM sharp. The sooner we get this done, the sooner it’s over.”

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

I hadn't been able to keep my eyes off Pearl. She constantly shifted in her chair. There was a flush on her cheeks as I stroked my finger down hers. Even through dinner, she couldn't keep her eyes off me...and I had the Main Master to thank for that. For this added security for both of us.

I wanted Pearl to be happy. To be the focused wife and mother mine wasn't. To adore me as someone more than Ethan O'Brien, the famous actor. I wanted her to see me for me and love what she saw, and now we both would. We weren't as heavily influenced as the blank slates ? i the Garden's held, but Elec had assured me we would be at the perfect level to remain normal and happy. And I could see the big difference already as we left the restaurant. Pearl's arm was wrapped around my waist as I led her through the main doors, and her head rested at the bottom of my chest as I drew her in closer to walk next to me. It was like we'd known each other for years. It was perfect. Us, like this... was perfect. No care for what people thought. No uneasiness for public affection. We were just two people...in love. Me...I was in love, just like I wanted.

"Ethan?"

At the familiar voice, I turned, bringing Pearl around with me as Hazel Summerland approached with her slave. I'd seen my ex around from time to time, but we never talked. I truly didn't look twice. Dating Hazel had been fine enough, but her psychotic identical twin had put me through the wringer. I'd been younger back then and thought myself in love with Hazel, but it was a lesson learned, and one I didn't care repeating after we broke things off.

"Long time no see."

She smiled as she approached, glancing at Pearl curiously.

“Hey Ethan, I thought that was you. Is this your new slave?”

Pearl’s head lifted from my shoulder as she glanced up at me, and I didn’t miss the pause from Hazel or the way her lips parted as Pearl’s curls swayed back revealing her scar. It truly wasn’t as noticeable as it was without makeup, but up close it couldn’t be hidden either.

“This is Pearl.” I slipped my finger under her chin, smiling down at gray-blue eyes that stared up at me adoringly. I kissed her nose, turning my attention back to my ex. “She’s my chosen.”

Hazel’s eyes grew round.

“Chosen? You’re...getting married?”

“In a few weeks. The announcements will go out soon. We’re in the process of planning now. We’re still not set on a date.”

“Oh.” Back and forth Hazel’s eyes went between us. “How exciting. Congratulations.”

“Thank you. We can’t wait.” Pearl’s voice wasn’t shy or soft like I expected as she put her attention on my ex. There was excitement...maybe even a lining of power through the new bravery the Main Master had instilled with his words.

“You’re not wearing a ring. This must have just happened?”

Pearl’s hand lifted as her head lowered to take in the empty space. I grabbed it, lifting to kiss over where one would sit.

“Not really,” I offered. “We’ve been dating for close to a year now. We’ve kept it quiet, but we’re finished with that. We want the world to know how happy we are.” Pearl’s head came back to rest on me. “Her ring is being sized. It was just a little too big. She’ll have it back soon.”

“Great. Wow. Okay.” Hazel’s smile was forced as she stepped back, bumping into her slave. “I’m happy for you two. Congrats again.”

“Thanks. We appreciate it. Have a good night.” I led Pearl a few steps as Hazel nodded and headed for the restaurant door. We didn’t make it to the elevator before my Master number was called out. At the voice, my mood shifted for the worse.

“Great. For fucks sake. This is why I don’t like to go out. Better to get this over with I guess.”

I stopped, groaning as Pete Fitzgerald, a fellow actor, jogged forward. He was the son of a famous producer, and his mother had been an old Hollywood icon, but Pete’s fame ended in childhood, and his rise to stardom never happened. Not yet anyway, and if I had to guess, it never would. A beautiful woman tagged along with him. She appeared to be a slave, but...she didn’t appear normal with her overenthusiastic smile.

“Isn’t this a surprise. I didn’t expect to see you down here. Seems you’ve been hiding yourself the last few months.” Pete’s eyes jumped to Pearl, dismissing her immediately as his stare ate me alive. His jealousy couldn’t be hidden. Not even under the fake smile he forced as he waved his hand towards the woman stopping at his side. “This is my slave. She’s a blank slate. Isn’t she beautiful? Tara, tell our friends hello.”

The blonde-haired woman’s blue eyes sparkled as her head tipped forward the smallest amount.

“Hello friends, it’s so nice to meet you.”

“Hello, Tara.”

Pearl’s voice had Pete’s eyes lowering, but the moment he went to come back to me, his gaze snapped back down to Pearl’s face...right to her scar. The smile fell and his stare jerked between us, stopping at me.

“This is Pearl. She’s my reason for solitude. Meet my soon-to-be wife.”

“Wife?” Pete kept looking back between us. “Married? To her? ”

Pearl didn’t so much as take offense or try to hide her face. Her attention was on me. Her smile had me mirroring it as I wrapped my arm over her shoulder.

“Damn right.” I turned back to him, narrowing my lids with a threat that had Pete swallowing hard. “Is that a problem?”

“N-No. Of course not. I mean, congratulations. She, ah.” He pointed towards his face, level with his temple, cheek area. “Is that real?”

Pearl laughed, flattening her hand on my chest as the monster inside had me pitching forward the slightest amount.

“It’s real. It came from a boating accident from when I was twelve.” She shrugged. “Luckily for me, the Main Master has found the perfect person to fix it. I go in for surgery first thing in the morning.”

“Not that I want her to,” I snapped with a sharp tone. “I want and chose Pearl for Pearl . Not because of her face.”

“Of course,” Pete rushed out. “I didn’t mean to pry into your private matters. I just saw the two of you talking to Hazel and with her father being the inventor for that special costume makeup?—”

“You thought, what? That Pearl was faking her injuries?”

“I mean, you’re getting ready to start filming your new movie.”

“So you thought I was dressing her up for some part?”

Pete looked like a fish out of water as he repeatedly opened and closed his mouth. “I don’t know. I had no idea. I just thought you wouldn’t have?—”

“Wouldn’t have what?” I pushed out between clenched teeth.

The challenge and pressure for Pete to answer had him glancing to his slave, only to turn back to look at Pearl.

“I was mistaken. Your slaves. They’re always so...they’re...the best.”

It was my turn for my mouth to open, and with it, came an instant smile.

“You’re still bitter that I outbid you at the last auction.”

Uncomfortableness turned to rage in the blink of an eye.

“Slave one-twelve was the perfect slave for me. You could have had any of them, but you waited for me to bid, and the moment I did, you took it to an impossible price. You couldn’t just let me have her.”

“I can assure you my bid had nothing to do with you and everything to do with the

slave.”

“That’s not true. You’re always trying to one-up me.”

“Because I get the movie offers over you? That’s talent, Pete. Work.”

“I work hard too. I spent weeks studying that role. I deserved it, not you.”

No response. No arguing. At my hard stare, Pete shifted on his feet. He was a grenade waiting for someone to pull the pin, and he wouldn’t get that from me. Not with Pearl so close. I didn’t trust Pete. His dark side didn’t scare me, but a man, a future husband, didn’t put his chosen at risk. Ever.

“How about a truce? You wanted one-twelve. If she means that much to you, I don’t mind sharing.”

He stood a little taller, the anger melting.

“Really?” He glanced to Pearl only to take us in together. “You’d do that for me? You’d share her?”

“Absolutely. Which part of her do you want?”

His brow creased. “Part?” He paused. “You mean like her mouth or,” he stopped.

“Well, I believe I have a few steaks left. That would be parts of her back . Possibly a thigh. You’ll have to slow-cook that. Stew is a good choice. I think I’m out of ribs?—”

“You’re not.” Pearl beamed a smile between us. “The butcher and I went through the inventory not days ago. If I may suggest going with the loin. Lower to middle back

would be ideal. It's the best cut if you ask me."

Back and forth Pete's eyes danced between us in my peripheral, but I saw nothing but Pearl as I pulled her in, hungrily kissing her lips.

"You...eat them? You...it's true? No way? You..."

"Let's go home," I whispered.

"To work on babies?"

Just imagining my cum shooting inside her again had me fisting the back of her wine-colored dress, just above her ass.

"Babies. Lots of babies." I gave her one last kiss, meeting Pete's uneasy gaze with the deadness of mine. "You let me know if you decide on that steak. It'll melt in your mouth ." I winked. "You'll love it. Excuse us."

Turning, I led Pearl to the elevator, not even caring if the door was closed all the way before I had her pinned against the wall.

"Ethan ."

She gasped as I pulled over her panties, sliding my finger inside of her pussy. She was already so wet, but I didn't miss the wince that had her pulling back from my lips, either. She had to be sore from losing her virginity not hours ago, and here I was ravishing her in a fucking elevator.

"Oh. Excuse us, Master. We'll wait for the next."

I growled at the male voice behind me, righting Pearl as I turned to spot two guards



stepping back through the entrance. Both froze at seeing Pearl, and the short guard elbowed the taller one as they went to leave. Although the shocked look lit a fire inside me, it was the taller guard who stirred something I'd never felt before. Not just jealousy... it was beyond possessiveness. It was a combusting rage. His eyes were eating up Pearl's body, moving up until his stare locked on her face. There was no disgust. No pause or hesitation. He saw her. He saw her like I did, and by the way his lips parted, he thought her just as beautiful as me. Covered in the form fitting dress, she was radiant. Glowing and flushed from her arousal and happiness. I didn't like how transfixed he was. It riled the beast inside, twisting a knife in my core that I didn't know existed until this very moment.

"Are you leaving or are you going to continue mind-fucking what's mine?"

The taller guard's stare moved to me, but it was obvious that it hadn't been easy. "I'm sorry, Sir. I meant no offense."

"Do you know her?" At his hesitation, I glanced down to Pearl. "Do you recognize these guards?"

"I do. They're the ones who brought me to your apartment on auction night."

"Both of them?"

I glanced back and forth. The shorter of the two's face dropped a shade of color. Both appeared uneasy as the taller one stood in the doorway, stopping the door from closing. I could tell they wanted to be anywhere but in my presence.

"Yes. Both."

"And how would you say their delivery of you went?"

Pearl's lids blinked rapidly. Her expression changed from confident to a familiar I didn't like. Her head went down, and my top lip peeled back in anger as I glared their way. The shorter kept inching further away but he knew better than to go far.

"Back up, baby. Look at me."

"I would say it went as expected. I was laughed at. Called names. I knew it would happen. I'm assuming from their reactions they're just surprised that I'm alive. I believe their bet was that I'd be dead before the night was over."

My lips pressed together as I stepped from Pearl's side, closer to the men.

"You bet on my future wife?"

The tall guard's eyes shot to her, and I was stepping in his line of sight, prowling closer by the second.

"She's a slave, Sir. We had no idea. I apologize."

"Pearl, baby, did either of them ever touch you? Hurt you?"

She paused as the smaller guard squirmed just outside the doors.

"Hurt, no."

"Pearl, don't lie to me."

Small hands wrapped around my bicep, and I glanced down as she stepped around my side so that I could see her. Gray eyes were more blueish-lavender as her stare softened.

“They treated me no different than any of the other guards would have. They don’t see me like you. Take me home.” One of her hands came over and lifted to grab onto my shirt. I could see the taller guard shift in my peripheral as she moved in. “Babies,” she mouthed. “I leave for the surgery so early, and we’re going to have a long night. We’re running out of time.”

“You’re wrong. He sees you . But no one looks at you like that but me. No one .” My eyes cut over to meet with the taller guard’s. “I’m no fool. I’d advise you to keep your head down if you see her around. Let me catch you close to her again and more than your eyes are going to be missing.”

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

Ethan was gluttonous in his jealousy. Claiming as he blindly led us inside the apartment. How we made it home, I had no idea. The moment we were alone on the elevator, he hadn't stopped kissing me. His mouth and hands were everywhere. And me, I was so blissed out, I couldn't even get my mind to focus on the simplest task...like walking or speaking. My hands knew what to do. As one held around his neck, the other was desperately pulling at the bottom of the long-sleeve shirt he wore. Slipping underneath to make contact with the hard muscles of his stomach as he kept walking me backwards in our living room. But as for rationality, I had none. I had instinct and a mission. Nothing mattered more than that.

"You protected them."

Glass from the lamp shattered as the back of my legs connected with the end table and I pitched back. Ethan easily held to me, making more threatening sounds as he pulled me in against him tighter. He didn't let me answer. His kiss turned bruising as he walked us to the bedroom.

"He wanted you. I won't forget the way he looked at you. I won't forget him."

"Moore? The guard?"

Ethan's head jerked back. Green was so dark as he stared down.

"You remembered his name?"

"If it makes you feel better, I remember most names."

“Who’s the shorter one?”

I blinked through the question, not able to recall. It had a rumbling sound leaving Ethan as he swung me down, pinning me on the bed.

“He wasn’t important. But Moore...you remembered him.”

“He wasn’t mean to me. He was curious about my scars.”

“ Because he wanted you .” Ethan growled as he pushed up my dress. “He better take my threat to heart or else I’ll eat his right in front of you.”

“Stop it.” My tone was soft as I reached up to cup his angry face. “You have nothing to worry about. You have me, not him. Just you.”

“But he wanted you.”

“How do you think I’m going to feel? Everyone wants you, Ethan. I’m not going to be burning the world down because of it. I have you, and you’re mine now, aren’t you? Only mine?”

Ethan’s jaw flexed and he nodded.

“Show me. Be mine.”

A barely existent moan left him. Where I expected Ethan to lower back to me, he lifted, scooping me in his arms instead. All I could do was clutch onto his shirt as he swept us into the bathroom. Adrenaline spiked. A flash of sickness rolled. As quick as the reactions were, they faded just as fast when a part of me knew they shouldn’t have.

“You want me to show you what it’s like to be mine?”

He placed my feet on the ground, spinning me to unzip my dress. Merlot silk pooled at my feet and as he lowered pulling down my panties, all I could do was stare at the death clock ahead.

“Give me a time, baby. What’s it gonna be?”

“You want me up there?”

“Do you trust me?”

No thoughts. No answer.

Turning back to him, I could barely swallow back the terror that was breaking through the sludge that wouldn’t allow me to think or react rationally. I should have screamed. Ran. I could do nothing as my lips pulled back into a smile and I tiptoed to kiss Ethan’s lips.

“I trust you. Ten and two. Five and seven. No. Make it four and eight this time.”

Ethan’s arm barred under my ass. “You want your legs wider. I like that .” He lifted me and walked me back. He didn’t have to tell me what to do next. My arm rose, the other helping as he strapped me in. When he had both done and fastened my ankles, I could feel my weight pulling down. Even as he adjusted the restraints, lifting me higher on the wall, the tightness couldn’t stop the odd sense of sinking into a doom I wasn’t ready for.

“Fuck. Son of a bitch. I like you up here.”

Fingers brushed over the wetness on my innermost thigh, and something flashed on

Ethan's face. His other hand lifted to display crimson coated fingers. The same fingers he'd had buried inside of me in the elevator. Instantly, his lips tugged back at the side and a smile appeared that I'd never seen him wear before.

"I guess I was a little rough on the way here. You're bleeding again."

"Am I?"

Ethan didn't answer as he slid his digits into his mouth and sucked against them. He dipped in, moving back to my thigh that was level with his mouth. The suction was powerful, sending painful little zaps towards the one place that constantly craved him.

"Ethan, wait ."

He didn't listen to my plea. My head dropped lower, and my mouth parted as I tried pulling against the restraints. Even through the fog, the alarms couldn't be ignored. I couldn't think straight, but I knew you didn't feed blood to a shark. Not unless you wanted it to go into a frenzy and eat you alive.

"Ethan—"

I gasped as he sucked against one side of my slit, biting with enough strength to bring tears to my eyes. He moaned, and pleasure twisted with panic inside me as he let go, swirling his tongue to brush my clit. My mouth opened to continue but fingers dug into my outer thigh, stealing my words. Something told me to wait. To see...He spoke of trust. I had to trust, didn't I? A voice said I should, but it couldn't be the voice of reason. It couldn't be mine.

"This is hard for you." Ethan kissed my pussy and paused, rubbing his cheek along my thigh, glancing up at me. "I wish you could feel what I did so you'd understand the compulsion. It's addicting," he said between clenched teeth. "Have you ever cut

yourself and licked the wound? Or maybe had a cut in your mouth?"

"I...yeah. I bit my lip once, really hard. It split and was bleeding for a while.

"Do you remember the metallic taste when you ran the tip of your tongue over it? It's almost like...putting your tongue to a battery. It's wrong. You know it's wrong, but fuck if you don't want to try it again. That taste. The zapping tang. The strong metallic ping that takes you over. It's overwhelming yet...it's more."

I cried at the intense burn as he spread my pussy, sliding his tongue over an area where I was torn.

"I just can't stop, Pearl."

Again, he licked, tasting my wound that was no doubt still bleeding along with other parts of me.

"It hurts."

"Not as bad as my blade will, but I'll make it up to you."

"No." The word came from nowhere, yet every part of me. My fists clenched through the constant burning. "You're not my Master anymore."

Ethan stopped, his eyebrows lifting.

"I'm not taking your knife tonight. Cutting me is for special occasions only. I'll allow you a three-inch incision on our honeymoon. It's your choice on where you want to put it."

"You're telling me no?"



“I’m allowed to disagree with you. I know we made a deal but there has to be restrictions, or it won’t be special. Honeymoons, anniversaries...never while I’m pregnant. Only after the babies are born. That’s my terms.”

For seconds Ethan didn’t speak. Instead, he leaned in, tracing his tongue in a circle from my entrance to my clit. The fire had me jerking through the pain.

Circle.

Circle.

Circle.

The heat was turning into something different. Something more as he paused and flicked his tongue over the sensitive nerves.

“Honeymoon.”

“Honeymoon,” I repeated, moaning as he pushed his tongue into my channel.

“I think you’re just afraid.”

“ I am afraid , and you know I have good reason to be. But that’s not the reason for my terms and you know it. They’re plausible. They’re generous if you’re looking at this like I am.”

Ethan’s lids narrowed.

“Tell me.”

As his tongue dipped back in my pussy, I let my body soften to embrace the pleasure.

“You have me for a lifetime.” I paused, gasping as I stared down at Ethan, who was keeping his eyes on me as he continued to suck and lick. “I plan to live a long time. Sixty, seventy more years at least. Think how many cuts that is. I told you my body is yours. I’m trusting you with it.”

He buried his face in my pussy, pushing his tongue deep. For a good minute he thrust and compulsively swallowed. When he finally rose, I could see his impatience. I thought he would unfasten me. He didn’t. Ethan turned, grabbing a small knife from the cart not far away.

“You said special occasions. We’re engaged now. One inch.”

“You signed a contract. You never asked me to marry you.”

Ethan’s mouth opened only to close.

“But you’re marrying me. You want to marry me.”

I didn’t speak. I couldn’t. My mind was back expressing concerns but none I could quite put into words. Or maybe I knew I shouldn’t.

“You want to marry me, don’t you, Pearl? You didn’t want to at first, but you do now. You do want to marry me.”

Although he didn’t phrase it as a question, I could hear the uncertainty in the statement. And I couldn’t deny there were uncertainties in myself to, but nothing I could battle against. Nothing I had a choice over. I’d marry Ethan. Even a huge part of me wanted too. Why...I didn’t know, but with the knowledge came something else. Something deeper inside that made me strong. It gave me power.

“Pearl.”

“This is where you unfasten me and get on one knee, Ethan. Ask me to marry you, and then take me to get a ring. You lied to that woman, Hazel, and I allowed it, but I do need a ring. I deserve that.

“You do, but I won’t unfasten you. I can’t for this.” He eased back, lowering to one knee like I mentioned, but he didn’t put down the knife. If anything, he held to it tighter as he gazed up at me. “Pearl...marriage for elites is almost always a lie. It’s a business arrangement. It’s part of the foundation of every family in our circle. I never wanted any part of it... until you . I know I didn’t give you a choice in this decision, but I’m giving you one right now—here with us, just like this—no lies. No hiding what we’ll be. Me down here. You always above me. And I will put your wants first. I’m going to try to give you the best life. The happiest one you could dream of. Will you accept me as your husband so I can prove it to you? Will you marry me and spend the rest of your life with me?”

Ethan’s Master phone ringing had both of us looking over.

“You come first. I’m not getting up until you answer.”

Denials. Screaming. The two overpowered my mind as a smile appeared effortlessly on my face. But it wasn’t a happy smile. Not entirely. It was that new part of me emerging. The me I didn’t know.

“I’ll marry you on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

No anger. No impatience. Ethan’s attention was one hundred percent mine despite the constant ringing.

“I go first.”

“What do you mean?”

“Matching marks on a place of my choosing. A mutual promise.” I licked my lips and felt my body come alive as images of my cutting Ethan filtered through. I’d never been into anything like that before but suddenly I wanted to. Maybe even needed to.

“Matching marks.” Ethan stood, reaching over, lowering me so that my face was even with his. “I accept.” He leaned in, pressing his lips to mine. “Do you accept my proposal, Pearl? Will you marry me?”

At the phone starting to ring again, Ethan groaned.

“I will marry you.”

His lips met mine, and the passion behind the kiss had me leaning towards him as best as I could in the restraints. I could feel him unfastening me. I barely cared as I took charge and pushed my tongue into his mouth. Fingers fisted in my hair at the back of my head, angling me so that he could devour me whole. And he did. I felt myself falling...falling...My mind spun and the need for him to touch me and make me his left me desperate.

“Finish letting me out.”

“You want me?”

“Yes. Set me free. Take me to the bed.”

Knocking in the distance. It had Ethan cursing as his head gave a hard jerk. He reached up, unbuckling the other cuff. He barely had my last ankle undone when multiple heavy footsteps approaching outside the barrier had him jerking to the door so no one could open it.

“Hold on. Give us a minute.” His hand rose behind him to tell me not to move as he cracked it open. “We’ll talk in the living room. What the hell is this... Oh. Fuck.” He stopped and his lips parted as he looked between whoever was in the room and me. Back and forth. Back and forth. “Pearl... I’ll be out here. Get dressed and join us in the living room.”

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

If I had thought my night couldn't get any better, I was mistaken. Where my good side was elated from Pearl's acceptance of my marriage proposal, the demons in me were climbing the ceiling, stalking the meals that had been escorted inside the apartment. But I could see where the new me wasn't the same. The old me would have had a field day. I would have been hyper-focused planning and awaiting my attack. That wasn't the case this time. I wasn't the Master right now. I was the protector Elec had created with my approval. I was the fiancé, the future husband, and although I had been anticipating their arrival...this was about Pearl. Her emotional state came first, and I knew this wasn't going to be easy for her.

"I tried to warn you I was coming."

My eyes swept over to the Main Master only to shoot back to Quincy, Vicki, and Sissy.

"I was busy."

"I can see that. You have blood on your chin."

My hand ran down the length, but I kept my attention on the three people tied up on the far side of the room.

"I didn't cut her face if that's what you're wondering."

"I trust you not to disobey. Why didn't you answer the phone?"

I glanced back to the Main Master. "I couldn't. I was in the middle of a proposal. I

asked Pearl to marry me the right way. Well...she made me realize I needed to. She needs a ring. I wanted to take her to get one but.” I stopped, my brow creasing. “She’s not going to be so excited about it now.”

“You’re going to buy her a ring? Ethan...she’s a mining heiress. A diamond mining heiress, at that. Fuck buying her a ring. I’ll introduce you to Master Four. We’ll come up with the perfect customization. You need your new signet ring anyway.” Elec’s hand lifted as he flashed his.

“You keep saving my ass.”

“That’s what I do.”

He barely got the words out when the door opened. Pearl saw me immediately, slowly making her way through the threshold as she spotted me and the Main Master, who was standing at my side.

“Is everything ok—” Movement from the guards had her head turning. She jerked to a stop, jumping from fear as I reached around her waist, pulling her up against me so she couldn’t run away. “What are they doing here? I don’t want them here .”

“Shh. They can’t hurt you anymore.” I held to her tightly. Her face was buried in my chest and feeling her body tremble had the evil in me clawing at my insides to break free.

“Make them leave. I don’t want them to see me. I can’t ? — ”

“You will,” I lifted her chin, making her look up at me. “They will see you, and they will pay for what they did. Look at them, Pearl. They’re not our guests, they’re our marriage gift from the Main Master.”

“Gift?”

Pearl turned to face Elec, loosening her hold as she met his studious stare. When his hand eased out, Pearl made a whimpering sound, but reached out and held it. He eased her forward, and each step didn't appear easy.

“I know I'm supposed to be strong. I'm trying , but I don't want to face them. I have to. I know I do, it's just—” Her sob had me flattening my hand at the small of her back as I moved in. “ Main Master? ”

Elec's lids lowered as if his body was softening, but his expression held no compassion. I saw determination. Resolve. Whispering filled the space, directed at her. It was so low, even straining, I couldn't make out what he said.

“Pearl, sometimes people hurt us so deep that we never truly recover. Talking about it can help, but some scars can't be healed.” The Main Master reached up with his other hand, tracing along her temple and down her cheek. “In hours, I'm going to have you fixed. I'm doing that for you. But what needs to be fixed the most is in here,” he said, moving his hand down to push right over her heart. “Only you can face the trauma and win. Ethan had to do this too. It's your turn. Be ruthless. Be brave. You will feel no fear. Let your darkness guide you, no matter where it goes. The pain may not go away completely, but I promise, embracing your true self is a hell of a starting point. It's time for you to do that.”

Muffled yells came from Quincy. All three were gagged and looked sedated, but his appeared to be wearing off enough for him to make sounds and slightly move.

“Chin up. You're strong, Pearl. You're Ethan's. You can do this.”

“I'm strong. I'm Ethan's.”



“Good girl.” A string of foreign words left Elec, and I felt my own heart jump at his snap. Anger resurfaced, swirling as I moved closer into Pearl’s side. Her jaw was chattering as she reached for my arm, turning to face the family who destroyed and abandoned her years before. Tears still came, but not the sobs as she took them in and adjusted to the scene before her.

“I’m strong.”

“You are,” I assured.

“Ten and two. Seven and five.”

I leaned over, kissing Pearl’s head.

“Who do you want first?”

“Sissy. That bitch took my life away from me. It’s my turn.”

The Main Master placed his hand on Pearl’s shoulder, giving it a squeeze as he headed for the door.

“Don’t have too much fun. Five AM. Have her there, Ethan.”

“I will.”

The guards followed the Main Master out, but I wasn’t waiting. I walked over, grabbing Sissy’s half-unconscious body and throwing it over my shoulder as I took large steps back to the bathroom. Groans sounded, but she didn’t attempt to fight back.

Clinking from metal banged as I untied her and strapped her in. By the time I turned

around, Pearl already had a knife in her hand and was headed right for the woman who'd caused the accident.

“Wake up.”

The crack of the slap echoed off the walls. Pearl brought the tip of the knife up next to Sissy's eye. The woman's lids opened, and her eyes rolled, managing to stay focused on Pearl's face for a few seconds before her head bobbed to the side. I stepped in, fisting her hair as I restrained her head to the wall.

“Better, baby?”

Pearl nodded, breathing hard as she looked over at me.

“She hated me. I was so excited to have a new sister, and she was mean to me from the first time we met. I lost my mother. I tried—I really tried to be okay with having a new one. They never gave me a chance.”

A deep sob tore from Pearl. Whatever emotion that pulled it free was overpowered as she turned, slicing the blade down from Sissy's hairline. It wasn't anywhere near as straight as Pearls. She intentionally zigzagged this way and that, cutting so deep the skin and meat split open to sag in one area. Her sister's eyes flew open as Pearl made it below her cheekbone, but my girl didn't stop. The woman's agonizing muffled cry joined Pearl's and got louder as Pearl neared the top of her separated lips.

“Mmmmphhh! Mmmph!”

“I was alone. I came to you as a little girl. You were four years older than me. A teenager. I needed someone. No one was there. No one helped me! You were mean. Taunting. You hurt me .” This time she swung at an angle, cutting from the woman's shoulder to the far side of her ribs. The white shirt Sissy wore quickly saturated with

blood around the long laceration site, and Sissy went wild with terror as she took in the rage on Pearl's face, but there was nowhere for her to go.

"I bet you never thought you'd see me again. I bet you thought I was dead."

"Mmmmph-Mmmph!"

Pearl moved in inches from her face. The closer Pearl got, the louder Sissy screamed into the cloth gag.

"The first time you saw me, you said I was an abomination. That I was so sickeningly atrocious that you couldn't even look at me. How ironic. I'm your creation. Your masterpiece. You would think you'd want to keep me close and savor what you did." Pearl smiled, touching the tip of the blade to the opposite side of Sissy's hairline. "I won't be like you. I want you to know that I'm cherishing every second of seeing you suffer. And I take pride in disfiguring you. Tomorrow morning the Main Master is going to have me fixed. I'm going to be perfect, but you...not you. Not ever again. When I get done, there will be no surgeon skilled enough to put you back together. And I could kill you, Sissy. I could carve you alive and let you die slowly, but that's not good enough. You're going to hurt, just like I did. I'm keeping you as a slave. I'm going to make you perfect. Perfectly monstrous. Perfectly repulsive. It's not enough to destroy your body. I'm going to savor every second of breaking your soul. Your ego. Your spirit. I'm not just going to scar you. I'm going to feed you piece by piece to my husband until it's impossible for you to live from the prolonged damage I've done. You're going to love your new life."

My heart was racing as I looked in awe toward the woman who was quickly stealing mine. She was beautiful in her brutality as she began to add pressure to the weapon she so wonderfully wielded. Pearl was meant to torture. No one deserved retribution like her, and that made me even happier as the blood flowed from Sissy's jawline.

“Honey?” Pearl turned to me, serious at first, but a smile growing as she caught her words. “I like that: honey.”

I couldn't help but match her enthusiasm at the pet name.

“What would you like, baby?”

“Steak...for our special occasions. That's what we're going to do with them. Slaves are good for every day, but them...I want to remember their death when we're celebrating our wonderful life. It would only be right. If we eat people, we'll save the worst ones for the best times.”

I pulled her into me, grabbing her ass through the loose dress. My brain couldn't grasp the emotions I felt. Kissing wasn't enough. Having her be mine would never sate the overwhelming love that was growing in a heart I thought was dead.

“I love that idea. We have time. I know we only have a few hours before you leave, but we'll come up with the best plan of how to do it when you return.”

“For the plan, yes. But I don't want them to wait for me. They don't deserve to have a second of peace. I want them to hurt as bad as I did. Can you do that for me while I'm gone? Can you make them pay until I heal and come back?”

“Are you teasing me? You really want me to have fun without you?”

“I trust you to make it good. You'll make them pay.”

“You know I will. I'd do anything for you.”

“Anything?”

She bit her lip, tightening her arms around my neck as I lifted, holding her against me. The knife reflected in my peripheral, but I had no fear with her having it so close to my face.

“Tell me what you want.”

“What if I want two things?”

“What’s the first?”

Pearl drew her arm in that was holding the knife. “Our matching marks.”

“I didn’t forget. What are you thinking? Where would you like our marks?”

Her brow creased and her lips puckered for the smallest moment.

“I want a pretty mark.”

“Pretty?”

She smiled, dazzling me with her beauty and enthusiasm in a personality that was new. It was hypnotizing. Her cute glances through thick lashes were bait, and she was reeling me in. I knew it, and I allowed myself to fall even more.

“Hearts.”

“You want us to carve hearts into each other?”

“On our ring fingers.”

I lowered Pearl, leading her to the bathroom counter.

“I’ll do that for you. Give me a pretty heart.”

Seeing her in her element amongst the screams and revenge were what my darkest dreams were made of. Pearl lowered, angling the knife, only to pout and stand. She headed back to the cart, coming back with a smaller knife and an even bigger smile.

“Perfect.” The top half of her body went forward. I clenched my teeth as the pain registered, growing stronger as she pushed deeper, dragging the tip around in a slow arch. She let it glide back down, only to repeat the action as she sliced back up. Warm tickled along both sides of my finger, but my lids were closed, basking in our moment. “It’s beautiful.”

My hand lifted, and I opened my eyes just in time to see her lips encase the wound. Small tugs of suction had my fingers burying in her hair and keeping her in place.

“You’re making it impossible for me not to take you right here, baby. Fuck.” I pulled her up, pushing my tongue into her mouth, moaning at the traces of metallic bliss.

“Your turn.”

I didn’t have to be told twice. I grabbed the knife, lowering and taking glimpses of the small heart. Pretty, yes. Pearl... always .

A small gasp left Pearl as I broke the skin. Blood beaded, and I took my time making my heart just as flawless as hers. When I was bringing her finger to my mouth, I was lost in her. Lost in love. Love: an emotion I thought could never exist.

Love.

Love.

Love.

“You wanted something else.”

I took in a deep breath, trying to calm my breathing and lust.

“Yes. We were talking about rings. I’ve only ever wanted one, Ethan. Just one. The Mallory Diamond. It used to be my mother’s.” Her eyes glazed over with tears. “ He gave it to her . The ring Vicki wears is different from my mom’s, but the large diamond in the middle is the same. It’s all that’s left of my mother. Can I have that one? Can you take the diamond and make me a special ring? I don’t want just any diamond. I want the one my mom wore. I want to erase Vicki’s memory from ever having it.”

“Elec and I were just talking about making you one. The Mallory Diamond . I’ve heard of it. That would be the perfect engagement ring,” I breathed out. “That one. It’s like fate. Vicki has it on?” Pearl nodded, and I walked over, grabbing the hatchet from the cart. “Then let’s go get it.”

Pearl grabbed my hand, staying at my side as we headed into the living area. The large diamond wasn’t hard to miss, and neither were Quincy’s yells as he saw us enter the room. “This was meant to be, just like us. I’m going to put that diamond into the most stunning engagement band the world has ever seen. I want the world to know who I chose. After I finish making you the perfect set, engagement and wedding band, there will be no doubt.”

“And they’ll stay in our line? You promise?”

“Pearl, baby.” I drew her in. “That ring will not just be part of our legacy; it’ll be a symbol of what love can be. People will look at us and pray they find someone who cares for them just as much as we care for each other. I can’t wait to marry you .”

She hugged me tightly, and it was torture to pull back. I wanted to keep holding her. To try to prove my words, even though I knew only time could do that.

“I can’t wait to marry you too. Let’s get that ring.”

“Say no more.”

Pearl glanced at her father, showing none of the fear she’d held before. She glared at him, only breaking her stare as I stopped next to Vicki, flattening the semi-unconscious brunette woman’s hand on the ground next to her. At my grin, Pearl matched it, even biting against her bottom lip as I lifted the hatchet.

“Do it. It should never have been on her finger to begin with. I hate her .”

Whack!

I brought the blade down hard over all four fingers, just like I had with the butcher. The loud thud had Quincy yelling into his gag, rolling on the floor as he tried to push closer to the door. He was so weak he could barely move. Between Vicki and Sissy’s screams, the apartment was damn near deafening.

And I loved it.

Blood was pooling.

Fingers were rolling.

My future wife was smiling.

I picked up Vicki’s hand, pulling the large, clustered diamond ring from the nub she had left.



Pearl and I were everything , and our night was just beginning. Come morning, she'd be gone. Her scar would be gone. Although that made me sad, we had a lifetime of memories to create, and so long as marks and murder were on the menu, I'd be the luckiest man on earth.

“D on’t stop. Don’t stop.”

Every part of Ethan consumed me. From his kiss to his cock, I wanted nothing more than to show him how much I wanted this: wanted us and our future together. I breathed to pleasure him. I melted at his touch. For hours we lost ourselves in the blood and lust. So many orgasms. So much cum filling me up. And I had encouraged every drop. Hell, I’d begged for it right there on our bathroom floor as I stared up at Sissy’s unconscious, mangled mess of a body.

Had I done that?

Had that been real? Or had I dreamed it? Was I dreaming?

There was a hum mixing with the screams through the darkness. A voice that soothed a deep part of me that I couldn’t quite reach. The tone left me floating in the heaviness. I knew that voice, but for the life of me, I couldn’t force myself to think clearly enough to figure out who it must be. Was it still Ethan? Was I at our apartment?

“Pearl, you did amazing. Open your eyes. It’s time for you to wake up.”

Open my eyes? Light flashed as I tried to get my lids to obey.

“There we go. That’s it.”

I think she’s coming around, Main Master. We’ll continue to monitor her. It went beautifully. In a few weeks, no one will ever be able to tell she had a scar there at

all.”

“Excellent. I knew you could do it. Thank you, Dr. Wu.”

“My pleasure.”

Seconds.

A minute.

Longer.

Time went in and out just like I did. It was nausea that had me finally managing to open my eyes. When I did, I thought the room was empty. As the Main Master stood from a chair on the far side of the room, I realized that wasn't the case. My pulse raced on the monitor, speeding at some accelerating warning inside me, and he didn't miss it as his attention went between us.

“There you are. How do you feel?”

“Am I fixed?”

My voice sounded different. Far away and slightly slurring. Elec walked over, helping me to sit forward and take a sip of water before he spoke.

“You don't remember waking up a little earlier?”

My head shook. “No.”

“I had them show me your face when they came in to check on you. You came to, but you were still pretty groggy. It'll take a little time but...Pearl, it's perfect.”

Tears clouded my eyes. “No more scar?”

“You’ll have to heal, but that’ll be nothing. You’re done. It’ll be completely gone.”

A sob left me as I rested my head back against the reclined top of the bed.

“Thank you, Main Master. I can’t believe it. I...Can I see?”

“Not yet. Not until you’re healed. I want it to be a surprise for both you and Ethan. Lay back and rest. Your life is just beginning. There’s no point in rushing things now. Close your eyes, Pearl. Dream of your new life outside of these walls. Imagine being happy with Ethan and the big family you’re going to give him.”

“I do want that,” I managed, already obeying and closing my lids but snapping them back open. “He’s okay? Ethan?”

The Main Master smiled. “Better than okay. He misses you already.”

“My dad? Quincy,” I forced out. “He’s not dead, is he? I want to be there. I?”

“Calm. He’s not dead. None of them are. They’re suffering but still alive.”

“Good.” My heart was racing for reasons I couldn’t begin to decipher. “Ethan will make them pay. “Ethan will—Quincy will pay. I miss Ethan. I’m going to be his wife.”

“I know,” Elec laughed. “You’re going to be an amazing wife, Pearl. And a great mother.”

“The best. It’s all I want.”

I barely managed to get the words out. Words that didn't feel like my own. I was tired, but did I really want that? I felt like I did. I must. So what were those voices? The fight continuously raging inside me?

The questions ended as soon as I could even contemplate them. The wonder faded into the background, disappearing with dreams of happiness. Of having friends and being a mother. I wanted that. I...wanted it. I did. I always had.

Something.

Something.

Sleep.

More sleep.

A day.

More.

Time flew as I obeyed the Main Master's orders. I woke. I slept. I wasn't sure if the nurses who checked up on me were giving me medication to knock me out or I took Elec's words to heart. It was the morning of the third day that I awoke from the sound of that familiar voice. But it wasn't the Main Master's foreign words that had my lids shooting open. It was the sudden silence. The calm yet tidal wave of unexplainable panic that came with it. No screams. No distant voices.

"It's time to wake up, Pearl. How's your sleep been?"

I took in blue eyes, swallowing past the lump in my throat. My hands were trembling, and it only spread to my body as those odd words repeated in my head. I felt like I

was having convulsions as I searched for words.

“G-Good.”

“And your head? How’s that?”

Elec glanced back at the heart monitor, stopping next to my bed. Him being that close made me want to scream out in terror. I wanted to run. To hide. To attack if that’s the only option I had left. But I couldn’t do any of it. All I could manage was to try to calm the trembling controlling me.

“My head?”

“Let’s not play na?ve, Pearl.”

“Clear,” I managed. “It hurts. It’s too quiet. Almost to where my ears want to ring. P-Pressure.”

The Main Master nodded.

“It’s been quite a long time since you haven’t been... persuaded . It can be quite the jarring difference at first, but nothing you need to worry about. Soon, it’ll all feel like a dream. You’ll go back to your focus, and I’ll go back to helping Ethan plan your wedding.”

“Wedding?” I breathed out, momentarily confused. My eyes lowered, taking in the small, healing heart that was between my knuckles on my ring finger.

Memories came crashing through making me gag at the force. What I’d done to Sissy. At what was planned for my life, I gagged again.

Mother, yes. Wife, okay. But to him? To Ethan O'Brien, murdering cannibal? He was going to fillet my body alive. He'd already admitted to wanting to cut more of me. I had even agreed to allow it! Had I really done that? Had I eaten slaves? Had I cut them apart? Skinned them? Prepared and processed them for me and Ethan to eat in the future? Planned to eat my family? Even wanted it?

My hand shot to my mouth as I tried to catch my breath and swallow back the sensation to be sick. Elec waited, barely moving as I calmed enough to bring my attention back up.

"You wouldn't imagine how often I see that reaction. It's normal, and you won't have to endure it long. I just have a few questions, and then I can put you back together again."

"I don't want to go back."

A stoic expression stayed on the Main Master's face as he looked down at me. But something was different with him. Off. I could sense something was wrong, and I had a feeling it had nothing to do with me or the man I was supposed to marry.

"Ethan is curious where you want to go for your honeymoon. Since he can't see you yet, I told him I'd ask."

Tears rolled down my cheeks. "Please. I don't want to marry him. This was a mistake. I don't want this."

"If you didn't on some level, you would have given me more resistance. You didn't. You want it, even if you won't admit it to yourself. All I'm doing is erasing the doubt. Answer, Pearl."

Even as I tried to think, my eyes searched the room for an escape. There was only one

door and there was no way I was getting past Elec. I had to buy myself time. I had to...do something. But could I? I knew there was no escape from the Gardens. But maybe after? After.... nothing. There was no escape.

“Pearl.”

I jumped at the hard, impatient tone, trying to get my memories to make sense. Was it true? Did I really want this and just not know it? We had been...good together since we decided on this. Ethan worshipped me . That morning as he brought me in...he'd been so upset that we had to be apart. No one had ever wanted me around. Ethan did. We'd spend the last few hours making love. Kissing just to kiss. Staring into each other's eyes through foreplay. So many declarations. So many plans for our future. Had I really meant those things? Had he? Was that really what I wanted? Maybe it was my true self. The one who I never got to be? I was so confused. Nothing felt right. I was two people, but which one was really me?

“I can go anywhere?”

“Almost. You tell me where you want to go, and I'll say yes or no.”

“Paris?”

“Done.”

Finality. It gutted me. Gutted me just like I gutted slaves during training to cook for Ethan. That wasn't something I could justify or ignore.

“ Elec .”

“Don't do it, Pearl. Don't even think about anything other than your fate. You will be Ethan's wife and you will love him. You will make him happy, and I give you my



word, he will do the same for you. I've given you this new life. Don't try to betray me and make me take it away."

His arms came up, crossing over his wide chest.

"Next question. Your mother died when you were eight. Before she passed, you had a very close family. Would you say your life was good?"

The question was like whiplash. It was hard and clipped and confused me even more. I hadn't thought about my family in years. It was too painful. Too raw and devastating. If I had memories, they revolved around the accident. I was stuck there. Trapped in a nightmare. "Yes," I forced out.

"But when she died things changed?"

"They did."

His brows drew in as he blinked through thoughts. "Your mother had a sister."

"My aunt Carmela."

Elec gave an encouraging nod.

"Yes. Did she ever come to you? Try to take you in after your mom passed?"

Seconds went by as I waded through the sludge in my mind. "She came over a few times. I can barely remember. My father didn't allow me to see her. He told me she went crazy. That she wasn't to be trusted, and that I could never see her or my mother's side of the family again."

"Of course he'd try to keep you away from them."

“But...why? My father is with Ethan. He wouldn't even speak to me before I left.”

“He's speaking to Ethan just fine. Your father killed her Pearl. He killed your mother because of an affair she was having.”

“W-What?” Silence. I could barely see his face through the welling tears. My heart squeezed, and the ache was unbearable as I tried to search out words. Memories. Nothing. Nothing was there that would have shone guilt on my father's account. “I don't understand what's happening? This isn't making sense to me. She had an affair with who?”

“My father. But that's not important. Or maybe it is. That's what I'm trying to figure out. You had a cousin.”

More tears. They came with shock and pain. I sobbed, trying to hold in the heartbreak for my mother. I couldn't, but I couldn't keep crying either. Not at the new fear growing at the Main Master's intensity.

“Your cousin, Pearl.”

“Vivia.”

“ Yes .” He stepped closer. “Tell me what you remember of her death.”

“I feel like we've talked about her before?”

Elec's jaw flexed. “Never like this. Never with you so open. We had no reason to. Not until...Your father just confessed to your mother's murder. I didn't know that. No one did. If he killed her because of my father. If he...” His head shook and a wildness flared in his depths as his attention cut back up to me. “Vivia. What do you remember?”

Fear. It engulfed me at the expression the Main Master wore. “I was young. My mother was still alive. Aunt Carmela was...screaming.”

“You’ve told me that. Can you remember what she was saying? I need you to remember this time, Pearl. Remember .”

Color faded, blurring and warping as I tried to think back.

“ ‘ My baby’ ,” I whispered. “I could barely understand her. She was going between languages. I don’t even know which one it was.”

A momentary flash of encouragement twisted with desperation. “Think. Harder. Close your eyes. See yourself standing where you were that day.”

I bit into my bottom lip as I obeyed, closing my lids. Dark green and blue appeared at my feet. It was a carpet.

“I’m in my father’s study. He’s...standing from his desk. The screams.” Just hearing the pain in my aunt’s cry broke me. “She’s...calling out to my mother. She’s screaming. My baby. Claudia, my baby . She’s not stopping.”

“What do you see now? Push your mind further. When does she stop?”

A whoosh of air had me gasping as it shot by my small frame.

“My father. He’s rushing from the room. The door is open. I’m...walking to it. Standing in the doorway as he’s running through the hall.”

“Stop right there.”

Deep breaths left Elec, but I barely heard him as I soaked in the memories of my old

home. Once a happy home. Murder. My father murdered my mother? Murderer!

“Take a deep breath, Pearl. This next part is very important. You’re standing in the doorway listening to your aunt Carmela yell out. Your father has run from the room, and your mother is now in there with her sister. Carmela is screaming. What is she saying?”

I sobbed, twisting my hands so hard through the racing of my heart. Murderer! Murderer! I felt rage like never before at my father. It was mixing with who I was and who I was becoming. Betrayal and abandonment was one thing. But killing my mother? Taking her away from me? Condemning me into this life because of the new woman and daughter he’d chosen? I felt sick again, like I was going to gag and throw up through the overwhelming emotions.

“ Vivia is dead. He killed her. I knew he would. I told you he was no good for her. Vivia is dead. She’s...gone. Dead. Dead.” My head shook as I could feel my smaller self take steps closer. “ She’s...nothing. More language I don’t know but ...they say she’s...unrecognizable? Beaten? They’re getting further away. I can’t hear anything but the screams. The screams . They don’t end . ”

“ She said that? Carmela said unrecognizable? Beaten?”

Brightness returned as I opened my eyes. “Yes. I think so. That’s what I hear. Main Master.” My words got caught in my throat as I took in the pain and panic on his face. “Why are you so concerned with Vivia? Did you know her?”

His round eyes were blinking through thoughts, and he was running his fingers through his hair as he looked ahead. Seconds played out and his pale face slowly turned as he reached and grabbed the railing of my bed. “Know her? I think... no ... “ He stopped. “I was the one who killed her. I... I did. It’s the pattern. Her pattern. I killed Vivia. I really did.” He swallowed hard, once again going blank but staying

quiet. I was trembling. Back to shaking through the realization that my life was crawling with killers. My cries increased, and I reached for the gauze covering my throbbing cheek, stopping as Elec's hand shot up. "Don't touch it. This was too soon. I shouldn't have made you cry. I'll get the doctor."

And he was gone...

There was no pause in his stride. No sign of emotion anymore. What had been there was just as fleeting as any humanity he hid away inside himself. And me, I was more terrified than ever. It enveloped me like a noose, choking and stealing any air I could breathe in. The man who controlled my mind murdered my cousin. I had always heard whispers that she'd been killed by her lover. By a man she turned down, but I never knew his name or who he was. After my mother's death, I was raised by my nanny. That only lasted long enough for my father to meet Vicki. Then I had the accident. Socialization was few and far between after that.

"I hear we had some tears." Dr. Wu and a nurse swept through the door with the Main Master right behind them. I was doing my best to stop the sobs and catch my breath, but it was impossible as I took in Elec. He was so close, but I couldn't unsee what I'd glimpsed on his shocked face. He hadn't been sure he killed Vivia. Now...he was, and that was because of me. But...was it me? Was it...her? The screams. Mine? Carmela's? There was something I wasn't remembering. Something...wasn't quite right. That fed the panic. I wanted to attack the Main Master. Try to hurt him for hurting me with this truth. I couldn't. Not when I saw him hurting too. And I did see that, even if I didn't want to. It was all too much.

"I should have waited. I hope I didn't ruin your work." Elec's mouth tightened as his arms went back to cross over his chest. The doctor reached up, pausing to take in the monitor with my racing pulse.

"There we go. Something for the nerves."

I glanced over to tell the nurse thank you, pausing on her red hair. It was pulled back into a ponytail at the back of her neck, but the color.

Something.

Something.

Screams.

Screams.

“Red.” I was breathing heavier again. My heart hit against my chest so hard it stole the oxygen I was already having a hard time finding. “Red hair. Red.”

“What’s that, Ms. Mallory?”

I ignored the doctor, meeting the Main Master’s hard eyes.

“Long hair. Red. Lots of hair.” He stepped in as my gaze mindlessly went back and forth, trying to recall what my brain was so desperate for me to know. “A woman...I think. I’ve seen a woman. Long hair. A...woman. The screams. Screaming. A woman.”

“What woman, Pearl? Do you know her name? What about this woman?”

“I-I don’t know. There’s...something. I’m scared. But I’ve talked to her. A woman...”

The rail went down on the side of my bed and Elec quickly eased to sit. His tone turned smooth like satin.

“Look into my eyes, Pearl Mallory . This long-haired woman. Did she ever tell you her name?”

Blue sucked me in, and I felt my body turn just as calm as my mind was starting to.

“I don’t think so. But she came to me. Or...used to come? I think...I was with her? Lived with her? Or...saw her? I don’t know .”

“It’s okay.” He snapped his fingers next to my ear. “We’re going to go slow. I’m going to lift my hand, and I want you to follow my finger, okay?”

“She scares me. She...scares me.”

“Watch my finger, Pearl.”

I didn't look because I was obeying. I didn't have a choice. My eyes were stuck to his finger like a magnet. As it started to travel through the air. I couldn't turn away.

“Everything you tell me is very important. You’ll tell me nothing but the truth. How old were you when you saw this woman?”

“Thirteen...maybe? Young. No. Before that. Way before that. I don't know . I can't remember the first time she came to me. I think I was sleeping. But...something. I....”

“Do you remember the first thing you heard her say?”

“She didn’t come to me the first time I heard her. I just heard her voice. It was like yours. It...pulled. She was speaking to my father.”

“Your father?” Elec’s tone shifted to an emotion I couldn’t quite detect. “What did

she tell your father?”

“I...don’t...” Pain split in my head making me wince and cry out. “I don’t know. She...”

“You’re going to do it because I told you to. We all have our roles, Quincy. You made a promise. You have obligations.”

More, the pain in my head had me crying out.

“Main Master, her heart rate is at dangerous levels. As her doctor?—”

“A little more. Pearl, what do you hear her saying?”

“Roles,” I sobbed. “She’s talking to my father. We have roles. Obligations. She wants him to do something. To...” My hand shot to my head. “To...kill...kill. Her voice is...changing. Kill Claudia. Kill my mom.”

“Okay that’s enough. Shh. Okay. Pearl Mallory, back to Pearl O’Brien. Back to your place as a wife and mother. You’re better now. You’re at home. Happy. Be happy.” The snapping by my face had me retching on recognition. The Main Master’s eyes were big, and he was breathing just as hard as me. But he didn’t stick around. He was spinning for the door. Running. Racing. To what, I wasn’t sure. The fog was heavier than ever. The doctor was helping me lay back and I was tired. So tired. So...suddenly...happy.



## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

My teeth were still embedded in Vicki's cheek as my door flew open. I knew who it was, but I didn't stop. My jaw flexed and I sunk into her muscle even more, biting down with all my might as I ripped my head back, taking another chunk of her face. The metallic tang of her blood washed over my tongue, but it wasn't the taste or even the texture that had a rumbling sound leaving me. It was her fear as she screamed and fought against the restraints that bound her arms and legs. It was the muffled wails from Sissy and Quincy that kept me feverish to do more.

"God dammit, Ethan. You couldn't answer your phone?"

I spit out the chunk.

"It never rang."

"Yes it did. You didn't hear it? This is becoming a fucking habit with you."

"I never heard it ring."

Even though I answered, I didn't turn to the Main Master. I was memorizing the missing meat. I was following the indentions my teeth had left behind.

"I thought maybe you had already killed him." He let out a sound, trying to catch his breath. "Remind me to work on more cardio and not just weights. Fuck ."

"I'm keeping Quincy for Pearl. Otherwise, he'd have been my first." The Main Master moved in front of me as I panted through the demons that urged me to keep going. I didn't like distractions or interruptions. "What are you doing here, Elec? You

gave them to me. We had a deal. I'm not going to lie...you interrupting is pissing me off even more. It's really not the time."

"You'll get over it. This can't wait."

"You're not taking them back, are you? Sissy is Pearl's new slave. And this bitch. She allowed this to happen to Pearl."

"Which led her to you," he exploded. "You got her the exact way you needed. Had Pearl not been scarred, she wouldn't have been the Pearl you wanted. God dammit, Ethan. I'm not taking them. Just..." His hand sliced through the air, and he bent down, jerking the gag from Quincy's mouth. His face was already battered and swollen from the beating I'd given him not hours ago. He was crying, wiggling back and forth on my living room floor in the restraints.

"You admitted to killing Claudia. Why? Why did you really do it? And don't give me this bullshit excuse of an affair like you told Ethan. My father's no saint, but I don't believe Claudia would have given him the time of day, even if he had wanted her."

At the sobs and lack of response, Elec jerked him up, dragging him to sit against the wall.

"Answer me! Why did you kill Claudia."

"I already s-said."

Elec's arm crossed over his body, and he swung, catching Quincy's cheek with the back of his hand. The crack was so loud, it had Vicki and Sissy screaming louder in their gags.

"You have no idea what the fuck is happening here. You tell me right now."

“I swear. I swe?—”

Whack!

Quincy’s head snapped to the side at the blow, and blood poured from his nose as he sobbed harder.

“A woman came to you. Red hair. I know three elite families with women having red hair. Who was it? Speak!”

Quincy’s head shook as mumbling left him, but Elec was already rearing back, striking him again.

“Answer me! Red hair. Who was it? Who told you to kill Claudia?”

“I-I...I don’t know! I mean, no. She had an affair.”

Elec’s head was shaking back and forth. The look in the Main Master’s crazed eyes was one I hadn’t seen before. He was holding to the collar area of Quincy’s shirt, shaking the man.

“I’m going to take you further underground, into my special room. You think what you’ve gone through so far is bad? I’m about to show you the true definition of pain. You’ll have no skin or muscle remaining by the time I finish with you. I’m going to burn it off, Quincy. I’m going to pump you so full of electricity that you’ll be the light guiding the way to hell.”

“Wait a minute,” I snapped. “You just said—You’re going to take him? You gave him to me.”

“Ethan, not right now.”

“What the hell is going on, Elec?”

Red built in the Main Master’s face as he spun on me, roaring not inches from my face.

“ He knows about Vivian! He knows something.”

“Elec.... you killed Vivian. You did that. Everyone knows it. They found you covered in her blood. They found her right there with you.”

“It’s more than that!” He went back, jerking Quincy forward. “Confirm what I already know. Say it! Who’s the woman with the red hair? Pearl said...Pearl...the woman.” His head gave a hard jerk, only for it to happen again. Elec blinked rapidly, and the words that left him were not of our language. I’d heard it before, but never like this. It was a joining in sounds. Words slurring and almost...looping. His tone went dead to a level that made my hands fly up to my ears. It sounded...wrong. Terrifying. It went for a minute. Two. Longer and longer.

My eyes rolled as I pushed against my ears. It felt hard to breathe. Harder to focus. I began humming out loud, doing what I could to drown him out. It wasn’t until I managed to open my eyes that I realized the Main Master was standing.

“What color is the sky?”

“Blue.”

“What is your name?”

“Quincy Mallory.”

“You will tell me who this woman is with red hair.”

“Woman. Hair.”

Elec held his face, squeezing as he made Quincy meet his eyes.

“ A name. Quincy Mallory, you will tell me who this woman is with red hair.”

“Red. Claudia.”

“ Yes . She wanted you to kill Claudia.”

“Yes.”

I let my hands fall the rest of the way as I slowly walked closer to the men. Quincy was staring at Elec. He appeared to be in a daze, not crying anymore.

“Why did this woman want you to kill Claudia?”

“She...No. Didn't say.”

Elec appeared to squeeze tighter.

“Did you kill Vivian too?”

“Viv...no.”

“Take me back to the day you heard she died. You were in your study?—”

“No.”

Elec crouched, getting inches from his face.

“What do you mean, no? You were in your study with Pearl when Carmela showed up hysterical.”

“No. I was on my boat.”

Elec’s head shook.

“That can’t be right. Tell me about the woman with red hair. I know who she is. Pearl said something about her voice. A voice like mine. That can only be one person. Why did she want you to kill Claudia?”

“Affair.”

“No . That’s not true. Claudia was not having an affair with my father.”

“No. She was having one with me.”

For a moment Elec didn’t talk.

“Melissa was having an affair with you?”

“Not...Melissa. Not. Claudia. No.”

More silence from Elec. He let go and his hands ran down his face.

“ It has to be her. She’s the only one like me fitting that description. Did this woman have you kill Vivia?”

“No.”

“...Did I kill Vivia?”

Nothing.

“Quincy, who do you believe killed Vivian?”

“I don’t know.”

“Find out. Keep thinking .”

The Main Master let out a roar, turning to collapse to my sofa.

“Elec, are you okay?”

Blue eyes rose to mine.

“Nothing he says is reliable. Not even that he killed Claudia. Nothing. None of it. Both him and Pearl have been compromised at the deepest levels. Everything I need is gone.”

“Could you ask Pearl again?”

Elec shook his head. “She’s like him. If she knew something, it’s gone. What was left behind was a make-believe story and a fragment of a memory hidden behind the implants. She remembers red hair. Nothing else. It’s probably why she can’t remember the accident either. Her mind has already been tampered with. Her and Quincy saw something. They made sure him and Pearl didn’t remember what it was. Why they gave them two different stories though is beyond me. It makes no sense. None of this does. And not just with them. There’s been...inconsistencies.”

“With people?”

“ With me .”

“Elec.” I lowered to sit on the cushion at the far end. “Everything surrounding you has been done for you. Maybe they saw you kill her. Maybe?—”

“Ethan.”

The warning had my hand lifting. “You killed her, Elec. I know you don’t want to believe it. I know your mind has blocked it out, but she’s dead. You saw her?—”

“I saw something! I don’t know...” He took in a deep breath, calming himself. “I couldn’t tell if it was her.”

“Because you’re blocking it out. It was you. It couldn’t have been anyone else. You lost a child. She didn’t want to get married. You reacted in the worst way and your mind refuses to believe it. Elec.” I searched his eyes. “I’m sorry. You loved her, but you have to let her go.”

Slowly, he rose, glaring down at me.

“Easier said than done.”

“I know, and again, I’m sorry.” I glanced to Quincy, but turned back to Elec. “You said Melissa. You’re talking about Dr. Melissa LaRoe, aren’t you? You were arguing with her on auction night. You think she’s the one who had Quincy kill Claudia...and possibly Vivian?”

“She’s not who you think she is. She’s not who I thought she was.”

“But... why?” My head shook. “Jealousy? Anger? Quincy mentioned an affair. If she was having one with Quincy, it would give her motive.”

“But nothing came from the affair. Why would Melissa have Quincy kill Claudia if



she gained nothing from it?”

“Elec.” My head shook. “Why do you use electricity? Why do I eat people?”

“We enjoy it. It’s personal. It gives us power and control.”

“Exactly. Some people don’t need a weapon, Main Master. Some people are the weapon. Their games are the torture.” I stood. “Take for instance the two different stories between Quincy and Pearl. If nothing matches, nothing can be proven. What exactly do you know about Melissa? You’re both shrinks. You both obviously have the same ability to mindfuck people. What else do you know about her?”

His mouth opened, immediately closing.

“Not as much as I thought.” He blinked, his gaze going to the floor. When his head finally came up, his hand lifted with it.

“I have to go .”

Heavy footsteps stomped against the floor, but I flew forward.

“Elec, wait.”

He came back to me with a speed that almost had me crashing into him.

“I’m sorry about Pearl’s revenge, but I’m afraid I can’t risk Melissa finding what’s left of the Mallorys. Kill them all tonight.” His voice lowered even more. “There’s a lot going on right now that you don’t know, and Melissa is not stable. If she’s guilty of this, she’ll come to you. You’ll tell her nothing. Kill them before she knows I have them here. I’ll take care of her questions. I had the family before I delivered them to you. You know nothing.” The foreign words left him again and my eyes grew heavy

as I stared into blue. “Everything I’ve told you tonight. Everything you’ve heard from Quincy is gone. You’re going to shut this door behind me, Ethan O’Brien , and then you’re going to cover this apartment in blood. These people hurt Pearl, and that’s the only reason you need to tear them apart. Make me proud.”

## Page 17

*Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:16 am*

I wasn't going to cry. I wasn't. No tears. Not a single one. Deep breaths.

"Oh my God. Holy shit. Elec, are you seeing this? I knew before but seeing her in that dress with makeup. Oh...my God."

"Kayla, no, stop. I'm trying not to cry."

My lids squeezed tighter as I felt my new friend's hand settle on my shoulder. Elec was holding the mirror, but I couldn't get myself to open my lids to see how I looked. Mirrors had been forbidden during the healing process and that was over now.

"Open, Pearl. Look and see yourself."

"I don't know if I can. What if I'm still ugly?" I paused as emotions rolled through. Sadness. A little fear. Anxiety. Mostly it was the happiness that never left. The screams were still there, but they were so far away now. Not as far as the memories that were beginning to leak through, but I kept those to myself. No one wanted to hear about my accident or childhood, and me...I wanted to forget the trauma that had ruined my life for so many years.

"Open, Pearl. You're far from ugly. You're beautiful. So beautiful." Kayla made a small giggling noise, and I cracked my lids. Immediately, my eyes shot open as my breath caught in my throat.

Smooth skin. Perfect skin. My eyes. My lips and...cheeks.

"Oh." More broken breaths.

“I told you. You’re exquisite.” The Main Master’s lips tugged back at the side. “Just wait until Ethan?—”

I didn’t let Elec finish as I pitched forward, wrapping my arms around his neck. A laugh sounded, but it was almost just as hollow as he appeared these days. He wasn’t the same since he’d left my room all those weeks ago. I knew I had missed a lot, but I didn’t have the details on that yet. I would soon. Ethan would fill me in when I got to see him again. And I wanted to see him. Each day we were separated, my need to be with him grew to unmeasurable lengths. I was ready to be his wife. Dying to have his children. I wanted us to be together every minute of every day.

“Thank you, Main Master.” The tears filled my eyes, but I held them in. “Elec, you saved me. I really can’t thank you enough. You saved my life.”

“Maybe.” He laughed, pulling back. “How about we finally get you to the man who has made my life a living hell since you’ve been gone? He’s going crazy wanting to see you. He’s waiting now at The Six.”

I fanned my eyes so that the mascara wouldn’t run, and I couldn’t resist easing my hand out to Elec for the mirror again. “May I? Just real quick?”

“Of course.”

As I brought it up, I couldn’t stop the way my heart raced. My smile was automatic at the dream I never thought I’d have. It was just a face, but it was my face . It was the start of a life I could have never dreamed of. From monster to the wife of the most famous movie star in the world. We’d say our vows in less than a week. I’d be married to Ethan, and he’d be mine forever.

“Alright.”

I placed it on the bed, nodding as I took Elec’s arm he offered. The form-fitting,

black lace dress I wore swished with every step. It was high on the neck, covering most of my scars as it went down to three-quarter lace sleeves. Kayla stayed even with us, and she grabbed my hand, holding to it as she kept the other at her round belly. She was positively glowing, and it made me so excited to start our own journey.

“Your bloodline is supreme.” Elec glanced over. “You haven’t even started your classes and yet you walk with grace. Your hand is in perfect placement on mine. You were made for this life, Pearl.”

“And I have it, thanks to you.”

He hit the button for the elevator, leading us in. As we got inside, he immediately stepped before Kayla, lowering to crouch and stare at her belly. His hand lifted, molding around the side.

“What are we thinking for dinner?” His eyes rose to Kayla, but he went back to staring at the bump under the raspberry-colored dress she wore.

Her lips twisted. “Something with mashed potatoes. I’m craving them like crazy.”

“Then you’ll have as much as you can eat,” he added in, his hand slightly shifting. “And cake. Cheesecake.”

“Elec.” One of Kayla’s hand’s rose. “I can’t. Not yet. I ate half of the entire thing you had delivered yesterday for breakfast. You’re spoiling me.”

“Ice cream, then. With hot fudge.”

Her head cocked to the side.

“That does sound good.”

“See,” he whispered. “Uncle Elec will take care of you. Always . Now, let’s go eat.”

He stood again, taking his place at my side just as the doors opened. The buzz of voices had anxiety hitting but it faded as we left the elevator and neared the opened double doors. Masters and Mistresses called out in greeting to the Main Master. Elec was poised. His smile was charming. And me, I kept my spine straight and my head high as we swept through the threshold.

The tables were decently filled as we walked through the center of the room. People whispered to each other, their voices buzzing as they took us in. As we turned, I saw Ethan, and all of it stopped, fading away with the racing of my heart. He was at the very back table, talking to a waiter. He glanced over to us, doing a double-take and easing to his feet. The waiter was still talking, but Ethan seemed to hear none of it as his stare held mine.

“Look at him, Pearl. I don’t think I’ve ever seen him so in awe.” Elec slowed us to a stop, halfway through the room. When he turned me to face him, I couldn’t help but scan his conflicting gaze. Something was wrong with the Main Master. Different. I could feel it in the deepest recesses within me, and yet it made no sense as he portrayed a confident, if not slightly sad, protector. “Tonight will be unlike any other for you and Ethan. It’s your first night as a Mistress in Couple status. It marks a week until your marriage. And if we’re lucky, I timed this perfect enough that maybe your purpose will truly begin.”

“ A baby .”

Warmth appeared in his soft smile. “Let’s hope.” He glanced over. “Ethan’s waiting for you. Go show him how much you’ve missed him.”

I pushed on my toes, kissing the Main Master’s cheek. “I won’t forget this.”

“I know.”

My smile grew as I stepped back, turning to Ethan. With every step that brought me closer, I felt the screams increase a little more. I wasn't so worried about them as I gazed into adoring green eyes. I could have forgotten the world in our moment. And maybe a part of me did as he rushed forward, scooping me into his arms to kiss.

It was a kiss worthy of an Oscar. A kiss that stopped time itself. My heart had never been so consumed by bliss, yet so cold with abandon. Even as we held and lost ourselves in each other, the missing piece that lingered in the shadows always walked the razor's edge of my mind. Cutting a little here. Carving out a little there. What happened when it finally cut itself free?

Only time would tell. Maybe it never would.

"God, I missed you. Fuck. Let's never be apart again."

"Never."

"Let me look at you."

Ethan leaned his head back, cupping each side of my face. His thumb traced over where the scar used to be.

"Do you hate me this way? I know you liked the scar."

"Hate you?" His head shook. "The Main Master was right. Elec..." His lips pressed together. "He made me see that this wasn't about me. A husband is responsible for creating the happiest environment for his wife. And that's what I am, Pearl. I'm going to be your husband. I'm not your Master anymore. You needed this, and I'm just glad it's me that gets to be by your side while you embrace your new self."

As the waiter reapproached with a large tray, Ethan's eyes lit up. He led me over to the table, pulling my chair up almost right next to his.

“I have a very special night planned for us.”

“Really?”

I took my seat, letting him push the chair in for me. Before he came around, he dipped down, kissing my cheek. I could see his excitement and the pure elatedness to have me back. He took his place across from me as our plates were put down before us.

“Pearl, I want this to be a testament for our new life together.” He reached for my left hand, holding it as he pulled a ring from his pocket with his other. The Mallory Diamond had me gasping and tears blinding me. I took it in, surrounded by smaller, equally dazzling diamonds. As he continued, he slowly slid it up my finger. “I will never let anyone hurt you again. Not even me. I will love you. Protect you. Honor you. And I will do everything in my power to give you a life far superior than any other man can provide. My role as a future husband and father ” he rushed out, “will come before any other role I fill. Let me love you like you’re meant to be loved. I promise you won’t ever regret it. Say yes and be my wife, Pearl. For real this time. The right way .”

Screams. They won for the smallest moment as I gazed around the room, seeing eyes all on us. But I was already nodding, smiling with tear-filled eyes as the ring slid into place.

“Yes.” I laughed, using my free hand to quickly wipe away the tear that escaped.

“Yes, I will marry you.”

Ethan stood, leaning over the table to capture my mouth. His fingers buried in my hair, and for the briefest moment, the screams stopped. What I saw in the flash of my mind was red. So much red. What it meant, I didn’t know. I didn’t want to.

“I can’t wait to start this new life with you.”



He pulled back and the lids were lifted from our plates. The steak had my eyes shooting to Ethan's. The smirk left my pulse pounding.

"I couldn't see a more special occasion than this. Say hello to your father, baby. Like I said. No one will ever, ever hurt you again."

Was I seriously smiling back? Was there an evilness to that smile? I felt like there was. And I was lifting my utensils, using my knife to cut into the tender, juicy meat.

Father.

My father.

I brought the bite to my mouth, taking it from the fork and closing my eyes as I savored the flavors that burst over my tongue. More images. A warping of colors that didn't make sense. I quickly pushed it away, not wanting to know what it meant. When my eyes came back to connect with Ethan's he was licking his lips and adjusting the tie to the suit he wore. He wanted me, and I couldn't deny how much I wanted him.

Husband.

Husband.

"So good. As your future wife, I mirror your threat and bring a new one of my own. No one will hurt us again. Let them try. I really hope they do."

The End.