



Used and Bound: A Dark Romance Anthology

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Category: Dark Erotica

Description: Driven by need, forced by desire.

Welcome to the dark and twisted world where these powerful men reside. With their black souls and insatiable needs, they know what they want and will do everything in their power to take it. Once they set their sights on a target, there's no holding back. Confined in a tangled web of deceit, these women must choose: surrender or fight.

UsedBound is a limited time collection of non-con, forced pregnancy dark romance stories from a variety of authors.

Total Pages (Source): 19

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Stepping off my private jet, I make my way to the waiting car. My driver holds the door open for me. “Albert,” I say by way of greeting.

“Mr Caldwell, good to see you, sir. I trust you had a good trip?”

“I did, Albert, thank you.”

He nods as I slide inside and onto the soft leather seats. I sigh, lean back, and squeeze my eyes closed. I have been in New York, finalizing my divorce. Don’t get me wrong; I am glad it’s over, but fuck, my ex-wife - even though we are on good terms - was demanding to say the least.

Me being British and her being an American we split our time between New York and London for the past eight years. My company, Caldwell Global Investments, allowed it having offices in both cities. It kept Katrina happy - until she decided she wanted to be by her family, in New York, full time, and I caught her fucking her personal trainer.

The guy did me a favour if I am honest. My ex-wife and me staying friends can attest to that. If I had any sort of romantic feelings towards her, then I would have made her suffer, would not have given in to her demands. But I don’t.

Truth is, I never really loved her, only married her because having an American Socialite wife with a good family name looked good when trying to gain wealthy clients to invest with my company and me.

Along with a shit tonne of money, another of her stipulations in the divorce was for

one of her nieces to intern at my company over the summer. She is attending Oxford University, and having a big corporate company like mine on her resume will look good for her. Apparently.

I had met Aspen once, six years ago, when she was a bridesmaid at our wedding. Now not only would she be spending a few months working for me, but she would also be staying in one of my apartments, in the building I owned and lived in.

Don't ask me how I ended up agreeing to this, but it seemed like a good idea at the time. How much trouble can a nineteen-year-old girl cause?

From what Katrina said, she is quiet, hardworking, and mature.

I can deal with it for a couple of months.

I have to.

"To the penthouse, sir?" Albert asks, breaking me from my thoughts.

"Yes, that would be great."

I pull out my phone, scrolling through emails as we make our way back to my apartment. The streets of London, like always, are busy making the journey a good hour before we pull up to my building.

The car comes to a stop; seconds later, Albert is out of the vehicle and opening my door. I step out. "Thank you, Albert. That will be all for tonight." I tell him before making my way to the open door; my doorman Cristoff holds it open.

"Mr Caldwell." He greets.

I smile with a nod. “Cristoff.” He returns my smile as I make my way through the door and to the elevator. I push the button for my penthouse before glancing at my phone when it beeps. I see my ex-wife’s name on the screen and sigh. What does she want now?

I open the message, smirking as my eyes move over the words.

Katrina: Thank you for making everything so easy today. Aspen will be moving in tomorrow and starting at Caldwell’s Monday. I know what an asshole you can be, but please be nice to her.

I click off the message without responding as I step into the elevator. Yes, I am an asshole. I wouldn’t be where I am today if I wasn’t. If Katrina thinks for one minute, I will take it easy on her niece; she has another thing coming. If Aspen is big enough to work for a company like mine, then she is big enough to take the shit I dole out to her. No one gets anywhere in life if they are constantly being handled with kid gloves. I will show little Aspen just what it’s like to be in the real world.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

The taxi pulls up to an impressive-looking building. Caldwell Tower. My home for the next three months while I intern for my aunt's ex-husband. Some may find it weird that I want to work for Ethan Caldwell, especially since he is well known for being a ruthless businessman, but if I want to be the best, I need to learn from the best. And Ethan Caldwell owns one of the best investment firms in the world.

"That will be ninety-one pounds, sweetheart." The taxi driver says, dragging me from my thoughts.

"Of course." I grab my purse and fish out the money I withdrew from a cash point in Oxford specifically for this. I count out the exact amount, adding on an extra five pounds for a tip. It might not seem like much, but I am a student, and no matter how much money my family has, I don't like taking any more than the allowance they give me each month. Pushing my purse on my shoulder, I grab my two suitcases and hop out of the vehicle. I walk towards the glass doors where a friendly-looking man is standing.

"Hello, I am a guest of Mr Caldwell's. I am moving into one of the apartments today."

The man smiles, instantly putting me at ease. "Ah, yes. Mr Caldwell made me aware. I am Cristoff. Make your way to the reception, and Beth will help you. Leave your bags; I will have concierge take them up for you."

I nod. "Thank you."

He opens the door, allowing me to step inside before he pulls my suitcases through.

He reaches into his pocket, taking out what looks like a cell phone, which I quickly realize is actually a radio, and hits a button. A male voice sounds, and Cristoff talks into the speaker, asking what I now know is the concierge to come and grab my luggage. I smile and make my way to the reception, where a girl who looks a few years older than me waits.

“Hi, I am Beth. How can I help you?” she chirps.

“Hey Beth, I’m Aspen Kincaid, a guest of Mr Caldwell’s. I should have been assigned an apartment?”

“Yes, Miss Kincaid, let me grab your keys.”

She turns away from me and opens a locker on the wall. It reveals rows of keychains with small plastic silver... somethings attached. She grabs one off a hook, shuts the locker, and hands them to me. I stare down at it. It’s not a key, but a little round disk, like a fob.

“You are on floor thirty-five, apartment four.”

“Thank you,” I mumble, still staring at the weird thing in my hand. She giggles. My head snaps up, eyes narrowing on her. She jerks her head to the disk in my hand and rolls her eyes.

“It’s not a key in the usual sense, but it’s what we use here. There is a panel outside your apartment, and you flash the fob across the sensor. It will let you in. Malcolm will bring your bags up.”

I smile, repeat my thanks, and head to the elevator. I hit the button for the thirty-fifth floor and wait for the doors to open. Suddenly my nerves kick in. This is it—my internship for Ethan Caldwell. I met him once when I was a bridesmaid at his

wedding to my aunt. I was only thirteen, but even then, I thought he was the most gorgeous man I had ever seen. With his piercing green eyes, dark hair, God-like face, and beautiful smile, he was surely every woman's dream?

It's only as I got older and saw his pictures in the tabloids that I could really appreciate the raw masculinity of Ethan Caldwell. I know now he is definitely every woman's dream. I sigh as the doors open and step inside. I know he will never see me as anything but an intern, his ex-wife's niece, but just the thought of him kissing me, making love to me, making me feel things I have never felt before, makes me want something I can never have.

I want him.

Jesus, I need to stop with the inappropriate thoughts. If my aunt knew I was obsessing over Ethan like this, she would have never agreed to push for this internship for me. She thinks I am just really into investments, but really, I wanted to be close to him, to get to know him, now that I am older...legal.

For my age, I am considered innocent. I have had one boyfriend, who I lost my virginity to in high school. We broke up when I came to England for college, and I haven't been with or even looked at another man. Well, apart from obsessing over my ex-uncle, that is. But he doesn't count. It is just a silly little secret crush that I have. It will never develop into anything else. Why would someone like him look at me when he can have any woman he wants?

My stomach turns. He wouldn't look at me, and that's the problem. I am just a delusional little girl that wishes he would.

The elevator climbs, eventually coming to a halt on my new floor. I step out when the doors open and stride down the hall towards apartment four. Coming to a stop outside, I find the panel and flash it at the sensor. The door clicks; I push it open and

step inside, only to stop. Jesus. The place is amazing. The floor-to-ceiling windows make it light and airy, with the most gorgeous views of London. I am sure tenants pay a pretty penny to live here. The view alone would be worth it. I move further inside, running my hands across the soft furnishings and high-end countertops. I grew up in luxury but having lived as a student for the last year in a dorm, I can appreciate this lavish apartment that I get to call home for the next three months.

I flop down on the couch, waiting for my luggage. I need it before I shower. And being the polite girl that I am, once I am all fresh and clean, I will go and introduce myself to Ethan. Beth said he lives in the penthouse on the floor above me, so I will go there when I get settled. I smile to myself.

I finally get to see Ethan Caldwell again.

* * *

After showering and dressing in some tight, cut-off denim shorts and a loose tank, I make my way up to the penthouse. Butterflies swim in my stomach at the thought of seeing him. I know I should probably wait until tomorrow when I go to his office, but I just can't stop myself. I want him to see me as the grown woman I am now, not the little girl at his wedding.

I walk with purpose to the elevator, pushing the button for the penthouse, and step inside when the doors open. I know I am playing a silly game; I know I should get over my infatuation with him, but I can't. I tried. No matter how many years have passed. He is the only man I see when I close my eyes. Even when I had my boyfriend in high school, I would fantasize that it was Ethan. I'm sick, I know, but I could never stop.

It was like seeing the sun when I met him; he blinded me, so he is all I see.

The elevator stops, the doors slide open, and I feel nervous. Pushing those feelings aside, I pad to his door and rap on it a couple of times. I wait for a long minute; when I hear footsteps striding towards me, even hidden behind the door, my heart pounds in my chest. The door swings open, revealing the man that stars in most of my fantasies, looking sexy as fuck with his bare chest and grey sweats. My mouth pops open; eyes widen as he grabs my wrist and drags me inside.

“Your late.” He barks as he pulls me further inside.

Late? What am I late for? I don’t start my internship until tomorrow. I don’t say this out loud. I can’t. My mouth is dry, and I have seemingly lost my voice.

“You were supposed to be here twenty minutes ago. I pay good money for punctuality.” He continues pulling me along, only glancing at me briefly before he kicks open a door to a...bedroom?

That snaps me out of my thoughts. “Wha...whattt are you doing?” I stutter. He stops and spins to face me with a glare before his brows furrow. He steps back, taking me in. His eyes scan me from head to toe, and he frowns.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Aspen. I wanted to come and introduce myself?” I ask it as a question why I’m not sure.

He smirks devilishly. The look sends a jolt of lust between my thighs. “Aspen? Katrina’s Niece?”

I nod. “Yes.”

His smirk deepens, and suddenly, I feel like I got caught in a trap.

Question is, do I want to escape it?

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Ismirk wider.

Little Aspen Kincaid grew up. Katrina's niece, my ex-wife's niece, is all kinds of sexy. In an innocent way.

I like it.

I want her.

This girl, with her wide innocent sapphire blue eyes and her flawless skin and... Fuck me. I don't think I have ever wanted anyone more. Ever had such a visceral reaction to any other woman before. My cock jerks in my sweats, and my body buzzes with excitement. I want to touch her.

Mark her.

Claim her.

I'm going to fuck her. That much I know. I don't care about the familial ties or that she is nearly twenty years younger than me. I don't give one tiny fuck.

She is mine.

She doesn't know the beast she just released by coming up here all na?ve and beautiful. She is like a little lamb to slaughter. I grin at my thoughts.

"Who did you think I was?" she asks so softly; I nearly miss it.

Well, there's a question. I thought she was the hooker I paid a lot of money for from a very discreet, very high-end agency. I needed a release, and using someone from Hush, was perfect. But not as perfect as the girl who just walked into the lion's den.

"No one." I wave her off. "Would you like a drink, little lamb?" I start dragging her back to the living area, her soft skin under my fingertips making me want to rip her clothes off right here and now and bury my cock so deep inside that my come leaks out of her mouth. I stifle a groan at the thought.

"Little lamb?" she questions, but I ignore her.

"What do you want to drink? I have wine?" I ask instead of answering her question. I pull out a stool, spin to face her, and push her down onto it. She glares at me. I smile. In these few minutes of knowing her, I can tell she is a spitfire.

She sighs. "Water is fine."

I nod, but I can't help the little bit of disappointment I feel that she won't be having an alcoholic drink. I would never take advantage, but I was hoping it would relax her. Turning to the fridge, I pull it open and grab a bottle of water. I hand it to her before pouring myself a whiskey. Grabbing my phone, I quickly shoot off a message to reception not to let my now very late guest up before focusing my attention back on the little lamb. Leaning against the counter, I eye her over the rim of the crystal tumbler. The way her delicate throat works as she swallows, the way her eyes move to me every so often, the way her cheeks pink to a delicious colour every time she finds my gaze already on her.

"So Aspen," I start. "Are you looking forward to working at Caldwell Global Investments?" I'm being polite. I couldn't give a shit if she is looking forward to it or not. I only have one goal where she is concerned now. And that is to make her mine. Fuck her so hard; I will imprint on her insides.

She squirms in her seat as if she can read my thoughts, then clears her throat. “I am. I have been looking forward to getting my teeth stuck into some real work.”

The only thing I want her teeth stuck into is me. My cock hardens at the thought. Fuck. I want to consume this little lamb whole devour her until it changes her as a person. Want to blow my seed so deep inside her, it takes root with my...child?

I shake my head.

What?

Where the fuck did that come from?

I have never wanted children. It’s never interested me. But for some reason, this girl, who just walked into my apartment, has brought this primal side out in me. The side that wants to breed her. Make her mine.

“Ethan?” her soft voice drags me from my depraved thoughts.

“Mmm?”

“How far from the office are we? And what time will I need to leave in the morning to arrive on time?”

“You will come with me,” I state, leaving no room for argument. I have this need coursing through me. This need to be around her no matter what. Jesus. I didn’t expect this when I agreed to Katrina’s demands. I smirk. I don’t think Katrina would have either. There is no way she would be happy with me obsessing over her niece. No matter how good of terms we ended on.

My eyes move to Aspen’s lap, where she wrings her hands before moving back to her

face. She chews at her full bottom lip, and I want nothing more than to go over there and nibble it myself.

“Are you sure that’s okay? I don’t want to intrude. I can make my own way there.”

I put a hand up to stop her mumbling. “It’s non-negotiable. You will travel with me to the office.”

“Okay,” she sighs before her lips curve into a breath-taking smile. It’s then I know with one hundred percent certainty that I don’t care if it’s a bad idea; I don’t care that she is Katrina’s niece.

I am going to make Aspen Kincaid mine in every way.

* * *

The next morning at seven-thirty on the dot, I make my way down to Aspen’s apartment to collect her. After she left last night, I decided that she would be working for me personally. Not Caldwell’s. Me. I want to know every minute of every day, what she is doing, and I can’t do that if she is in another department or on another floor, so the conclusion I came to is that she can be my PA. I will assign Dawn, my current PA, to someone else, and Aspen can take her position. It will certainly ruffle some feathers and may cause several arguments amongst senior management. But I don’t care. I own the fucking company. I can do what the hell I like.

I knock on the door, my mind racing with what my little lamb will be wearing today. I hope it’s a skirt. Easier access. I could bend her over my desk push it up to her hips as I pull her panties down. I could play with what I am sure is a sweet cunt, getting her wet enough to take my big cock. Then I could ram into her, stretching her, make her take me. I could- I’m cut off when the door swings open, revealing Aspen. Fresh-faced, with a lick of mascara on her long lashes. A coat of gloss on her plump pink

lips and her brown hair down in soft waves. My eyes drop down her body, my jaw clenches at the sexy but innocent dress she wears. I could definitely work with that.

Fuck. She is beautiful. I swear to God, if any other man in that building looks at her in a way I don't like, I will fire the fuckers.

My gaze moves back to her face to find her blushing. I love the colour on her skin and briefly wonder if her arse would look the same after I spank her. My dick hardens in my trousers at the thought.

"Morning Ethan," she says shyly, tucking a lock of hair behind her ear. I reach forward and take that lock between my fingers, rubbing the soft strands. Her breath hitches, and she stares at me.

I clear my throat. "Aspen," I say in greeting. "My driver is waiting downstairs. Let's go." I grab her elbow and pull her outside towards the elevator.

"I am quite capable of walking myself." She snaps, making me smirk. My little lamb has some fire.

I like it.

She will need that fire for what I have planned for her.

Hitting the button for the lobby, the doors open almost immediately. We step inside. She shifts nervously beside me. I watch as she swallows and wonder how far she could take me down her throat. I wonder If she could handle someone like me.

"What will I be doing today?" she asks softly, her blue eyes on me.

"You will be personally working for me."

Those gorgeous eyes of hers widen. “Wha-whatt?” she stutters. “I thought I would be working for someone... a bit lower down in the company.” She says cautiously.

I grin, flashing some teeth. “No, little lamb. I just decided that you will be mine.” by the look on her face, I think she misses the underlying meaning in what I say. That’s okay.

She will soon figure it out.

She lets out a long sigh as we come to a stop, and I bite back a smile. My little lamb doesn’t even know the half of what I am going to put her through. I am known for being brutal in the business world, and she will see that for herself. Just as she will see how ruthless I will be when I get her underneath me, taking my big cock in her tight little cunt.

I stride out, Aspen following close behind. Maurice, who is on the door, opens it with a smile and greeting.

“Good morning, Mr Caldwell. Have a great day.”

I nod before hopping into the waiting Mercedes, where Albert has the door open for me. My little lamb scrambles in beside me. Her sweet scent hits me again, making my blood pump through my body and my dick harden to stone. A primal need, the same one that happened last night, courses through me. Without thinking, my hand darts out and clamps down on her thigh. She gasps, her eyes widening. I lean in, my lips brushing hers. I smile when she moves closer. She wants this too. I pull back and cup her cheeks.

“I have high expectations for you, little lamb. I hope you can handle me.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

“I have high hopes for you, little lamb. I hope you can handle me.”

Somehow, I get the feeling he didn't mean in the office. Especially since we nearly kissed...well, he brushed his soft lips against mine. But in my head, we almost did.

I sit at my new desk outside Ethan's office, chewing my lip in thought. The way he touched me. The almost kiss. The bulge in his pants... I saw it with my own eyes. He was hard for me.

What does this all mean?

Does he want me like I want him?

The thought sends a thrill through me.

Maybe I can have Ethan in the ways I have dreamed about.

* * *

It's been a week of working at Caldwell Global Investments, and I thought I was being paranoid, that it was all in my head. I've come to the realization it's not. No one speaks to me. No one looks at me, well apart from Ethan, and I have just about had enough of it.

I push out of my seat and march towards his door. I knock and wait for his voice to confirm I can enter.

“Come in,” his thick drawl sends a jolt of lust straight to my core. Pushing the door open, I step inside. He sits at his big oak desk like the king he is, tracking my every move as I walk towards him. I swallow at the intense look in his eyes. I suddenly don’t feel so confident about what I am going to say.

“What’s wrong little lamb?”

I swallow before speaking. “Why does no one in this building apart from you talk to me? No one even looks at me. I don’t understand it.”

He smirks before pushing out of his chair and rounding his desk. He stands in front of me. My pulse kicks up at his proximity. Before I know what is happening, he cups my face and smashes his lips to mine. I gasp at the contact, which allows him access to my mouth. His tongue darts inside, tangling with my own. What the fuck is happening right now? Am I dreaming? No, I’m not. This is real. Ethan is kissing me.

My hands come up, landing on his chest. I try to push him away, but he is so big he doesn’t move. He groans into my mouth, and I feel his cock harden against my stomach. I gasp again. He feels huge. So much bigger than I am used to.

He pulls away. I stare at him as I try to catch my breath. He runs a finger across his bottom lip before doing the same to mine. He bops me on the nose, then leans in; his hot breath hits my ear, making me shiver.

“Because you are mine, little lamb. I don’t want anyone looking at you, let alone speaking to you.”

I snap out of whatever spell he had me under and take a step back. “You told them not to talk to me?” I ask incredulously.

He grins. “Yes. I want all your words. All your smiles. Every single one of your

facial expressions. I want you. You are mine. You were mine from the moment you stepped into my apartment, and there is nothing you can do to change that fact."

My eyes widen at his words. I know I wanted him, but this? This is too much. "I don't understand. You were married to my aunt." I blurt, even though that never stopped me from obsessing over the man.

He smirks wider as he cups my face. "Was, being the operative word. Now I am going to have you. Own you. I am going to fill you with my cum. Bury myself so deep in your tight little cunt that you will never get me out."

I bite back a moan at his dirty words, but he doesn't miss the way my thighs rub together. "Ethan, we can't." I shake my head, not because I am telling him no. But because I can't believe I am telling him no. This man, who I have secretly crushed on from the moment I met him, wants me, and I am rejecting him. Because now he has made it real, I am afraid of the consequences.

He steps into me again. "There is no such word as no when it comes to you and me. We are happening. This is happening. You have no say in the matter. I decided I want you, Aspen, and what I want...I get."

The arrogant bastard. How dare he think he can just tell me what's going to happen and expect me to go along with it. Before I can stop him, he grabs and spins me, bending me over his desk. My skirt flips up, and his fingers are there in my panties. He runs a thick finger along my slit as his tongue runs a line up my neck.

"Ethan," I pant.

"You can't tell me you don't want this. Look how wet you are for me. You are dripping all over my fingers." He groans before pushing a thick finger inside me. "Hmm. Tight, just as I suspected."

I should tell him to stop. Kick him in the balls. Push him away. I don't do any of that though. Because for the first time in my life, my body comes alive with a need I have never known. He pumps his finger into me, building me higher and higher. I feel an orgasm build in every single part of my body, from the tips of my toes to the top of my head. And then he withdraws his finger. I whimper. My body suddenly feeling empty, only to shudder when he drops to his knees behind me and runs his skillful tongue from my slit to my clit.

"Ethannn," I stutter moan. He spanks me. The fucker spanks me. My eyes fly open, and I am suddenly conscious of what we are doing. Yes, Ethan has tinted glass windows, and people can only see if they came to his door, but I am aware now of what we are doing and being caught.

"Ethan, stop. Anyone could catch us." I hiss.

He doesn't make any move to stop; he plunges his tongue into me, lapping at my arousal like it's the air he needs to breathe. I squirm, trying to get out of his hold. He grips my waist tighter, in a vice grip, so I can't move.

"Stay still, little lamb. Let me taste what's mine," he growls confidently – like me being his is a done deal, and I have no say - before thrusting his tongue back into me. The sensation is so out of this world I feel an orgasm barreling through me, and I cry out his name when it hits. I slump forward, falling on his desk. At that moment, I am glad it's there as I have no doubt I would have face-planted the floor. My legs are like jello, my body spent, but I have no time to recover. No. Ethan wraps his arms around me and scoops me into his arms. He takes a few steps then drops me down on the plush couch in the corner of his big office.

I stare up at him. He licks his full lips as he watches me. I must look a mess with my skirt wrapped around my middle and a just fucked look on my face. His hands move down, and I follow the movement to where he reaches his belt. He undoes it slowly,

seductively, then pulls down his zipper and pants in one swift move. I swallow. He is big. Really fucking big, and now I'm scared. There is no way that is going to fit in me. No way I am letting it near me.

I scoot up the couch, and he must sense my panic because he smirks. He removes his tie, his shirt and finally peels his briefs down his muscular thighs. His dick jumps free, and... holy shit. No. No way. He is too big. It's then that I jump into action, but I don't get far because he drops down on me and pins me to the couch.

"What's wrong little lamb? Never seen a cock this big?" he taunts in my ear.

I push at his chest, trying anything to get him to move. "Ethan, we can't. You just got divorced from my aunt; this is wrong."

He chuckles, the sound hitting me straight in my pussy, but I ignore it. "It's too late to grow a conscience now, Aspen. I've already had my tongue and fingers in you, and now I'm going to have my cock in you. I already told you that you are mine, and now I will claim your perfect, tight little cunt. Bury myself and my seed so far in you that you will never get me out." He pulls back to look at me, his eyes soften briefly, no doubt at the look of panic in mine. He cups my cheeks and kisses me so softly, so intimately it makes me want to cry. I feel rather than see him line his dick up to my entrance, and then he thrusts into me. I cry out at the intrusion, but he covers it, swallowing every little bit of my discomfort. He breaks the kiss and stares down at me.

"Fuck. You are so fucking tight, little lamb; I'm surprised I haven't split you in two." I don't miss the smugness in his voice.

"It hurts," I whimper as he starts thrusting. Every move stretches me wider, making me fit to his length.

“You will get used to it. We will be doing this a lot.” He says nonchalantly, confidently, like he isn’t fucking his ex-wife’s nineteen-year-old niece.

I freeze. Stare at him and the smirk on his gorgeous face. “What? No Ethan. This can’t happen again.” I shake my head on a moan as he hits me in a spot that makes me see stars. The pain has subsided, and the pleasure has officially taken over. I have never felt anything like this.

He pins my hands down beside me as he drops down. His mouth hits my ear; he nibbles before speaking. “It can and it will. This is not up for discussion. I have already told you several times that you are mine, little lamb. I don’t like repeating myself. The sooner you get used to the idea, the better it will be for all of us.” He pivots his hips as his thumb reaches down and plays with my clit. He knows exactly what he is doing, and before I know what’s happening, a second orgasm blows through me. He feels it and smashes his lips to mine as I moan his name. My pussy tightens around him, drawing out his own release. He stills as his cock jerks inside me, and his hot come fills me.

Fuck.

He didn’t use a condom.

I push at him again as panic courses through me. Yes, I am on the pill, but it’s not one hundred percent effective.

“You didn’t use protection.” My lips wobble as the enormity of what I have just done dawns on me. I fucked my aunt’s ex-husband. The man I have been obsessed with for the last six years. I could accept my obsession when it was all in my head, and as much as I wanted something like this to happen, I never expected it would.

He pulls back and looks at me with a frown before grinning. He doesn’t say anything,

just pulls out of me. I feel a surge of wetness between my thighs as his come leaks out of me. I've never had sex without a condom before, never had to deal with this. Ethan glances down at it, a proud look on his face. He reaches down, gathering it up between his fingers, and pushes it back inside of me. My eyes dart to his to find his gaze already on me, his lips tipping up into a smirk.

"What are you doing?" I snap. He is obviously not taking this seriously, and it's pissing me off.

"I want every bit of my seed inside you, little lamb. This," he holds up his finger where he has scooped up his cum. "Belongs to you. Inside you. We don't want to waste it now, do we?"

I moan as he pushes it back inside me, then snap out of it, remembering I am still angry. "You didn't use a condom," I state. Whether to Ethan or myself, I am not sure.

His gaze meets mine, and he shrugs. "Don't need to. I'm clean. You're clean. You're on the pill.

My eyes widen at his words. "How the hell do you know that?" I snap.

He smirks. "I have my ways."

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

I wasn't lying when I told my little lamb that I have my ways. I do. Money talks and I had an associate of mine run a background check on her and not just a basic one. I wanted every little bit of information on Aspen Kincaid he could find, and he didn't disappoint.

I found out she had one boyfriend back in high school in Boston. I found out she started taking birth control at the age of seventeen when they started a sexual relationship. I found out the brand of her little white pill. I found out he is the only boy she has been with. And I was glad about that. I already wanted to jump on my jet, fly to New York – where he was attending college – and murder the little fucker for taking something that should have been mine. For being my little lambs first.

I don't know why I felt so possessive over her, but I did, and I couldn't stop it. It was like a freight train barreling through me that would only come to a head once I made her entirely mine. My ring on her finger. My baby in her belly. My thoughts were insane. I knew that. I had never felt like this towards any woman. But Aspen was different. She was just...mine. And nothing or no one could change that. Not even Aspen herself.

I had pushed the thoughts of her first boyfriend aside and placated myself with the fact that I would be her last. She just didn't know that yet.

I drag her towards the elevator, deciding that I am over this day at work and want to get her back to my penthouse so I can fuck her some more in the privacy of my home. I want to hear her scream my name as she comes around my cock. Although the sex in my office was the best I have ever had, the feeling of her tight pussy squeezing me, the little noises she made, it wasn't enough. I needed more. I need to hear her moans,

her whimpers, as she takes my dick in her small tight cunt.

“Ethan,” she hisses as we step inside the lift. I glance down at her to find her glaring at me. “Everyone on this floor just witnessed you dragging me in here. They will all talk. I don’t want to be known as the office whore.”

“Not the office whore little lamb, but mine. I don’t care who saw what. I want them all to know you are off-limits.”

“You are insane. I don’t need rumors circulating around your company about me. What if it gets back to my family?”

I shrug. “Don’t care. The sooner they find out about us, the better it will be, and everyone can move forward.”

Her mouth drops open, eyes widening. “What? No. No Ethan. They can’t find out about us.”

“They can and they will,” I say with finality. Little lamb doesn’t know it yet. But I am going to make her mine in every way possible. Irrevocably. The thoughts I am having about this girl sound crazy even to my own mind, but I don’t care. I want her. I will have her.

“No, Ethan.” She snatches her arm out of my grip. “We are done. It was a one-off. I will admit I have had a thing for you ever since I met you, but this cannot go any further. It’s done.” She enunciates the last word. I hum in my throat. She sighs, in relief or triumph, I am not sure, and smiles taking my little noncommittal noise as me agreeing to her absurdity. Her mind is now telling her it is a done deal. We are over after that one little fuck. But fuck that. Whatever she has made up in her mind is just that—made up—a fantasy.

Now that I have had a taste of her. I will never let her go. Soon enough, she will realise that.

* * *

It has been a couple of weeks since I first had Aspen. After getting back to my penthouse, I fucked her again; although she protested, to begin with, she soon let me have my way with her once her pleasure overpowered any thoughts of her family. Of Katrina.

I knew it wouldn't take long to coax her into my way of thinking, and she quickly agreed to a relationship of sorts for the duration of her internship. Little did she know I had something up my sleeve that would tie her to me completely.

She has basically moved in with me at this point, and I loved having her in my space. Waking up and going to sleep with her. I wanted it every day for the rest of my life.

"Oh my God," my little lamb screams as I hit the spot that makes her see stars. I pound into her harder, pivoting my hips. I want her to come around my dick so I can fill her with my come.

"I prefer to go by the name Ethan, little lamb," I growl. Her eyes fly open, and she smirks at me. I grin. She is more comfortable with me now. I love it.

"You are my God." She purrs, thrusting up her hips to meet me halfway. I growl, pounding into her harder. I reach down to thumb her clit. Her head falls back, and she moans. I know she's close when her pussy starts tightening around me. I won't last long once she orgasms; she squeezes me so tight it always brings on my own release.

"Ethan," she screams as her orgasm barrels through her. I watch her as she slumps back in perfect bliss, her lips parted, eyes closed. She really is fucking beautiful. The

most exquisite thing I have ever seen. With that in mind, I come, releasing my seed inside her. Burying it so deep, she will never get me out.

I groan, rolling to the side so as not to squash her with my weight. She lays there, her chest heaving as she tries to come down from her high. I push up on my elbow and look between her parted thighs. My come leaks out of her. I frown.

We can't have that.

I reach down, scooping up the milky white liquid, and shove it back inside of her. She jerks.

"Why do you do that?" I glance at her; her blue eyes watch me with confusion and curiosity.

"We don't want to waste perfectly good semen, do we," it's not a question, but she answers anyway.

"Ethan, you are crazy. I am on birth control, and I always ask you to wear a condom. Not that you listen," she grumbles. "But anyway, it doesn't matter whether it is inside or outside of me. We are done once my internship ends."

I watch her for a long minute before jumping out the bed and heading to the en-suite to do what I am not sure. I just need to get away from her. I hate it when she says we are done.

A little white package catches my eye as I pace the bathroom, and I know then what I must do. A smirk curves my lips. She may think we are done when her job is over, but we will never be done. I grab the packet, glaring at it like it personally offends me.

It does.

Then it hits me like a lightbulb going off in my head—the perfect solution.

I will have my doctor give me a placebo. She won't be able to tell the difference. Everything down to the packaging, the shape of the little offensive white pill? It will all be the same, look exactly the same. She thinks she can just discard me like trash when summer is over. Not on my watch. My little lamb has no idea what's coming. As the plan forms in my head, my smirk gets bigger. My dick turns rock hard, throbbing with need, at just the thought of burying my seed so deep inside her it has no choice but to take root. Her rounded belly, growing with my child. I groan as the picture flashes in my head.

“What are you doing?” I'm startled from my devious thoughts and glance up to find Aspen lent against the door jamb, watching not me but her birth control in my hand. I drop them down on the counter and close the distance between us.

“Nothing. I was just thinking, maybe you don't need those anymore.” I say, wanting to give her a choice. If she says no, I will go ahead and do what I planned anyway, but at least I can rest easy in the knowledge I gave her the chance to choose this, us, first.

She laughs nervously and pushes me away as she shakes her head. “You really are insane. The birth control stays, and at this point, I am inclined to ask you to wear a condom, but I know it will do me no good. I don't want a baby right now, Ethan. Especially not with my aunt's ex-husband. Do you have any idea the hurt it would cause if my family ever found out about us?”

I do. But I am selfish enough not to care. Katrina will get over it. Aspen's family will get over it. I watch her intently. She doesn't realise just how crazy I am or the lengths I will go to keep her, to put my baby inside of her. But that's okay; she will find out

soon. The number of times I plan on fucking her, cum inside her, she will be pregnant by the time her internship is over.

I will make sure of it.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

After the talk with Ethan about birth control, he hasn't brought it up again. The implication was clear. He wanted a baby with me. I should have been ecstatic at the thought of him wanting me in that way, but there was another part, a bigger part of me, that overpowered it all. I didn't want to upset my family. Katrina.

Although I didn't see much of her, we had always gotten along. It felt like a betrayal what I was doing with Ethan. I know they are divorced, but I still didn't feel good about myself and what I was doing. It didn't stop me from doing it though. I can't get enough of Ethan, and it was obvious he felt the same way. He was insatiable. We fucked in the morning before work, in his office at work – sometimes twice a day – and then in the evening. I was so sore from all the sex, but I just couldn't stop. It was better than anything I had ever felt before.

I was now a month into my relationship with Ethan and six weeks into my internship with another six to go before I finished and returned to my normal life at Oxford college. It saddened me to think about it, to not be around Ethan, to not live with him, but it was our reality, and there was no way we could keep our relationship going once my contract at Caldwell Global Investments ended. I couldn't keep Ethan. No matter how much I wanted to. My family would never approve of us, and quite frankly, I couldn't even blame them. Was I sick for allowing this to happen? I didn't think I was. But I doubt other people would see it as normal given who his ex-wife was and the twenty-year age difference.

I sigh, wondering how the hell I got myself into this mess. But then I remember that the last month has been the best of my life. And it's not even just the sex, though that is amazing. It's him. The way he is possessive over me, the butterflies that swim in my tummy every time I see his gorgeous face, the way he looks after me and knows

what I need before I've even anticipated it. The way I... love him. My eyes widen.

Oh god.

No.

No. No. No.

I cannot love Ethan.

But I do.

Deep down, I know I do. I have fallen in love with Ethan Caldwell.

"Aspen?" a familiar drawl sounds, snapping me out of my dilemma. I look up to find Ethan hovering over my desk, a frown on his face.

"Hmm?"

"I called you several times. Come to my office." He turns without another word and saunters away.

I push out of my chair and follow him, quietly closing the door when I have stepped inside. He sits on his desk, thick thighs spread, looking good enough to eat. God, he makes my mouth water.

"Is everything okay? You seemed out of it just then."

I stride towards him, only stopping when I am close enough to touch him. "I'm fine. I was just thinking about my family." I don't tell him that I had come to the realization that I have, in fact, fallen in love with him. He searches my face, looking for any hint

that I am lying. Seemingly satisfied, he grabs my waist and pulls me to him.

“I already told you that I am happy to sit down with them and tell them about us.”

I shake my head. “No. We are only together for the duration of my internship. I don’t want to cause unnecessary upset for a fling.”

He makes a noise in his throat as a look I can’t quite decipher flashes in his eyes. It’s gone as quick as it came, and he plasters on a smile.

“Very well.” He spins me so quick, bending me over his desk. He flips up my skirt and rips my panties from my body.

I squirm as the cool air hits my wet folds. “Ethan, stop.” I hiss.

He spans me, making me yelp. “No,” that one word leaves no room for argument, and before I know what’s happening, I hear the tell-tale sign of his belt being undone and his zipper being pulled down. I jolt when he runs the tip of his cock down my slit. “You are always so fucking wet for me, little lamb.” He groans in my ear. “Does it turn you on, knowing I was your aunts’ husband? Does it turn you on knowing that I never filled her with my come, but I fill you, give you every little drop of me? Hmm?”

Jesus. His dirty words and talking about Katrina shouldn’t excite me, but it does. Dammit, it does.

“Ethan,” I moan. I feel him smile against my skin, and then he shoves into me. I cry out, still not used to the thickness of him, but he doesn’t give me time to recover. He pounds into me relentlessly. Mercilessly. Possessively.

He reaches round my front and thumbs my clit like his life depends on it, all the while

pounding me so hard, I am surprised the desk doesn't move.

"Come, little lamb. Come on my cock so I can fill you with my come, just how you like." Although I have requested him to wear condoms several times, some sick part of me likes how I am the only partner he has never used protection with. Likes how I am the exception.

He thrusts into me so deep now, hitting a spot that sets my orgasm off. It barrels through me, and I cry out his name as I clench around his dick, just as he asked me to.

"Fuck," he grits, going harder now. Then he stills, and I know he is coming when he jerks inside of me, his hot come filling me, just how he likes. I fall forward as he pulls out, tired from that little session, then feel his fingers at my entrance. I know what he's doing—shoving his seed back into me. He likes doing that. I don't know why. He scoops me up in his arms and stalks to the couch. He drops down, taking me with him, and cradles me in his lap like I am the most precious thing in the world. He strokes hair from my face so gently it makes me shiver. I feel him staring at me, but I don't open my eyes.

"Are you tired, little lamb?"

"Mmm, I am," I mumble.

"Why?"

I frown at the weird question but answer anyway. "Umm, because you fuck me for hours each day and night, and then I have to spend eight hours in an office, working, and you still find time to have your way with me. I'm exhausted."

He presses his lips to my head. "I am insatiable when it comes to you, baby. I can't get enough."

I smile. “Is that supposed to be an apology?”

“No. I will never apologise for wanting you so much.”

I open my eyes and stare at him. Ethan Caldwell.

A man off-limits.

The man I love.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

My little lamb is sick. She is in our joined bathroom vomiting into the toilet. Aspen is naive enough to think it was the salmon we ate last night. I wanted to inform her that I would also be ill if that were the case but didn't want to bother her while she had her head in the toilet.

I had already purchased the pregnancy tests and hidden them in my nightstand. They were waiting to be used. And I couldn't wait for her to pee on one. Couldn't wait to see the two lines confirming she was pregnant. Obviously, it was me guessing about that being the case. I wasn't a doctor, but deep down inside, I knew.

Call it gut feeling.

It's not.

It's my knowledge of her being unprotected. I should feel bad. I don't. Not an hour after holding that package of pills, I contacted my doctor. Twenty-four hours later, an exact replica of her birth control arrived at my penthouse with the placebo inside. I swapped out the packets and left them in the same state as the actual package. She has no idea what I have done. No idea, her being sick could be because my baby is growing inside her. I had been inside her that many times; it would be more of a surprise if she wasn't pregnant at this point. She better fucking be. I will not stop until she is.

"Ethan?" her weak voice calls out from the bathroom. I jump off the bed and make my way to her. Pushing open the door, I find her wiping her hands on a towel.

I close the distance between us and pull her into my arms. "Yes, little lamb?"

“I think I have food poisoning.” She cries. I want to scream at her that she doesn’t. That if she opens her mind, she will know exactly what it is. I don’t do that though. Instead, I scoop her up and carry her to the bed. Dropping her down, I pull the cover up and over her.

“Stay in bed and get some rest. The restaurant down the road does the best soup. I will order you some and get it delivered.” I drop a kiss on her forehead then leave the room. I make quick work of ordering from the restaurant and ask Albert to bring it up when it arrives.

Pacing my open plan living area, it only takes a few minutes to come to the decision that I will present Aspen with the pregnancy test. I know she will be mad. But I don’t care. All I care about is knowing for sure whether she is pregnant.

I stride to my bedroom with confidence. Entering, I find her in the foetal position, and her eyes closed. She peels them open, obviously sensing me. She cocks a brow in silent question, but I ignore her. Rounding the bed, I pull open the nightstand draw, smiling when my hand lands on the test. I hear rather than see her shuffling around and turn to face her with the box in my hand. Her eyes widen.

“What is that?” she asks the question, but she knows exactly what it is.

I drop down and prepare for the argument I know is coming. “You know what it is, little lamb,” I start softly.

She shakes her head, then shuffles up so she is leaning against the headboard. “No. No, no, no, no. I am on the pill. I have food poisoning. That’s all.” Her denial is adorable. I reach out with my free hand and run my thumb across her full bottom lip.

“I just want to be sure. It won’t do any harm, will it?”

Her lip wobbles, and I almost feel guilty for putting her in this position. Almost. I don't feel guilty. Not one bit. I knew what I was doing when I switched her pills. I wanted this. And I know as much as Aspen was against the idea, she will come to terms with our situation and want it just the same. I will never tell her what I did. No way. I don't want her hate. I just want her. She will never know the truth of this conception. Never.

"Why do you have a pregnancy test in your nightstand?" I don't miss the accusation in her voice.

I shrug. "Just happened to buy one the other day."

"Why?" she demands.

"It doesn't matter why little lamb. What matters is finding out if you are carrying my baby."

She rolls her eyes. "You are incorrigible. Even if I am pregnant doesn't mean I will keep it."

I see red. My hand tightens around the packet, crushing it. "Don't you dare say that. Ever again. If you are pregnant, you will keep it. There is no other choice."

"You don't get to make those decisions for me. You are not God, Ethan. What do you think my family will say? Katrina? Don't you care about any of that? I am too young for a child."

Over her dramatics and not acknowledging her words, I pull her into me. Pushing off the bed, I carry her to the toilet and drop her down on top of it. I hold out the box to her.

“Take the test.” My tone leaves no room for argument, and she huffs. I almost smile at her little tantrum, but I bite it down, wanting her to see how serious I am right now.

“A little privacy, please.”

I glare at her. “I have seen every inch of your body, Aspen; up close and personal, I might add. I have had my tongue, cock, and fingers in every one of your holes. I think I am good watching you take a pee.”

She shoots me a look but does as I say. Opening the test, she pulls it out and looks over it like it personally offends her.

“You just pee on that end.” I point to the end of the stick she needs to urinate on. By this point, I am an expert on how they work and have read the instructions repeatedly. Pulling her panties down, she sits on the toilet and holds the stick beneath her. I watch, fixated on what she is doing. In a few minutes, we will know if my seed has taken root. Excitement courses through me, and visions of her belly growing flash in my mind. My dick hardens in my pants at the thought of her swollen belly.

Just then, there is a knock at the door. Irritation courses through me that it dragged me out of my thoughts, but I bet it will be Aspen’s soup. “That will be your food.”

She nods, wiping herself as she finishes. I take the stick from her and lay it on the side before making my way to the door. I smile to myself as I think of the test and hopefully a positive result.

Grabbing the knob, I pull the door open, only to freeze. The smile drops off my face, and I scowl. Just what I fucking need. She would have to come here now and try to ruin things with my little lamb and me.

“Aren’t you going to invite me in?” Katrina purrs.

“No. I’m kind of busy right now, Katrina. What are you doing here?” I say impatiently, wanting to get back to Aspen.

Her smile falls as her eyes narrow on me. “I can’t find Aspen. I came to surprise her with a visit, and she isn’t in her apartment.”

Fuck. Why is she visiting her? Katrina has never been close to her niece in all the years I have known her. “And what makes...” I get cut off when Katrina’s gaze goes over my shoulder, her eyes narrowing further as her brows cinch in confusion. I turn to look at who I know is Aspen. She stumbles towards me, all disorientated, pregnancy test in hand. She hasn’t noticed her aunt; she is so out of it. I spin and rush towards her, grabbing her and the test before she falls.

“Ethan,” she whimpers. I glance at the test, finding the cause of her hysteria.

Positive.

A smile curves my lips. My little lamb is pregnant with my baby. I am so caught up in my happiness I forget about my ex-wife behind me.

“What the fuck?” Katrina screeches. Aspen freezes in my arms, her face paling as she realises who is here.

She pulls out of my arms and straightens. “Aunt Katrina?” she asks like she can’t quite believe it’s her and is making sure she is real.

Katrina’s eyes go from Aspen to me to the pregnancy test in my hand.

“You,” she points at me. “And Aspen.” She swallows, her face turning into disgust.

“Yes, Katrina. Aspen and I are together and are having a baby.” I say confidently. My

ex is not going to put a dampener on our happy news.

“What? No. Wait, aunt, I can explain.” Aspen blurts, the panic in her voice making my chest tighten.

Katrina holds up her hand, stopping her from speaking, and I want to rip the fucking hand from her wrist. “You are disgusting. Both of you. He is my ex-husband,” she spits. “And you, are you having some sort of mid-life crisis? She is nineteen.”

I pull Aspen into my arms. She struggles against me, but I grip her harder, stopping her. “Get out. I will not have you upsetting, Aspen. If you can’t accept us, then you don’t have to be in our lives, but we will be together regardless of what you or anyone else thinks.”

Her face blanches, and she moves her gaze to the girl beside me. “I did you a favor, and this is how you repay me? You are my family, Aspen. What do you think your parents will say?” Aspen sobs beside me, the sound making my chest tighten, but I don’t look at her. I shoot daggers at the woman in front of me.

“Enough.” I boom. “Get the fuck out of my apartment Katrina and don’t come back. I will not have you speaking to her in this way.”

Katrina shoots us both a look of disgust before turning on her heels and leaving, slamming the door behind her. I let out a breath and turn to my little lamb. I wipe the tears from under her eyes and pepper kisses over her beautiful face.

“Everything will be okay, baby. I promise.”

“How? My parents will hate me. Katrina hates me.”

I pull her closer. “They will come around, little lamb. And if they don’t, then that’s

on them. They won't get to see their grandchild grow up. They won't get to see you happy or how much I love you because I do, Aspen. I love you, and I love our baby growing inside you."

She gasps, sucking in a breath. Her teary eyes look up at me, and a small smile curves her lips despite what's just happened. And then she makes me the happiest man in the world and says the words I didn't know I needed to hear.

"I love you too, Ethan."

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

“Sshh darling. Daddy will be home soon.” I stand looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows at the city of London as I rock Ella against my chest to stop her crying. She has been restless recently, and I think it’s because she is teething.

Ella Annie Caldwell was born four months ago. To this day, I still wonder how I got pregnant. I mean, I know it happens even when on the pill but out of all the women on birth control in the world, why me? I wouldn’t change Ella, though, not for anything.

To say it has been a hard year would be an understatement. After Katrina caught us, she immediately told my parents. My father was appalled and refused to talk to me for a couple of months, and my mother - although she didn’t like the situation – tried her best to be understanding. She didn’t understand, though. Not to begin with. She cried and screamed at me about being with a man so much older, about being with her sister’s ex-husband. Things were fraught for a while, but we eventually found some middle ground.

Ethan being the amazing man he is, arranged for them to fly here on his private jet, and we all sat down together to talk. When they realized how in love we were and saw the reality of my bump, they started accepting us a little more. It will never be one hundred percent acceptance, but for the most part, we all get along, and they are involved in their granddaughter’s life.

As for Katrina, I have never seen or heard from her again, and she hasn’t responded to any of my emails or texts. I can’t blame her. I did sleep and get knocked up by her ex-husband. Ethan says it’s a good thing and that hopefully, she will move on and find what we have with someone else. It upsets me that my aunt won’t be a part of

my life, but I understand it.

I glance over my shoulder when I hear the door open, smiling when I see Ethan's gorgeous face. When we found out I was pregnant, I decided I wanted to continue with my studies, and Ethan supported me in that. As I got closer to my due date, we both sat down with my professors and came up with a plan so I could study from home. It was the perfect solution, and I am still on track to graduate with my fellow classmates and friends.

My heart beats faster as I watch him move towards us. He is the man of my dreams, the love of my life, and I will never get enough of him.

"How are my two girls?" he asks as he steps into me. I instantly calm when I smell his scent, all man and Ethan. He drops a kiss on my lips and then one on Ella's forehead. I swoon. I will never get over how this man is as a father. It's the most adorable thing I have ever seen.

"Good. How was your day?"

He grins. "Good. I missed you both, though, little lamb."

I roll my eyes at his pet's name but smile. "We missed you too."

He takes Ella out of my arms and pops her down in her bassinet now she has settled. He wraps his arms around me, and I lean into him, letting out a content sigh. Ethan Caldwell is my everything, and I can't believe he is mine.

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Run. It was all I could think, the word pinballing around in my head as my feet pounded the concrete. Run, run, run! Back to the wall, I slid to the ground, curling into a ball in the shadows as the blinding spotlight passed overhead.

Their pursuit was endless, making it clear they knew someone was hiding. No doubt their fancy heat-seeking equipment indicated my huddled form from the sky, though God knew how. I was so cold, I was surprised to still emit any heat. Gasping for breath, I dared to look into the black, hearing the helicopter's blades cutting through the gloom. As dark as the night, it was camouflaged from sight once the spotlight was cut, but the darkness didn't disguise its relentless noise. Sound was the last bastion of hope I had, the one sense they couldn't confuse.

"You are commanded to stop!"

The male voice thundered from all around, amplified to ensure everyone in a five-mile radius heard. Panic clawed at my insides. Sound was no longer my friend. They had taken that one remaining flicker of faith and used it against me.

"Stop running, citizen!"

Citizen? I shook my head, my teeth chattering as I huddled against the brickwork. That was a laugh when all these men wanted was to strip away my rights.

"Stop running, or we'll shoot."

On that point, I had no doubt. I'd heard more than five thousand women were culled last month alone, fleeing from the hordes of men crusading around the country, and

those were just the ones we knew about. The world had changed, the constitution torn up. There were no rules.

You have to run!

The familiar voice screeched in my mind, reminding me of my fate if I ceded, if I gave in to the oppression. Summary execution would be an improvement on the reports I'd heard from the warehouses. I shivered as memories from the few women who'd avoided the plight reverberated in my mind. Sketchy radio warnings blasted where we could hear them, conveying the insidious masterplan. Warehouses of women; catalogued and processed with only one function in mind. None had consented to be there. None given a choice. We had run out of places to hide and people who would conceal us. We had run out of time.

Women were being hunted, stalked until every female of childbearing age had been processed. Someone had decided there weren't enough of us having babies. Someone had taken stark action to turn things around, and the worst of it was they'd done so with the popular vote. The propaganda had done its job, brainwashing everyday people into believing catastrophe awaited if someone didn't act. Suspended in a fearful stupor, the people had stood by and allowed the machine to grow teeth, to snatch law-abiding citizens and force them into warehouses. I didn't know all the details. All I knew was the machine was out of control, spewing how they had no choice, how they had to act, how it was for the greater good.

I swallowed as the helicopter completed another circuit.

"Last chance!" The menacing tone resounded through the air. "Come out now or face the consequences."

Pulling in a shaky breath, I edged toward the hedgerows. If I could only make it to the foliage, I would have some cover, and there might be animals, something else

with a heat source that would throw them off track. This place had been a farm once, but like a lot of places, it was deserted, abandoned as women fled and men signed up to work for the machine. Everything had crumbled so fast. In the end, there had been no resistance.

I edged against the wall, only a couple of feet from the relative sanctuary of the undergrowth, when I heard them. Men on foot, their heavy boots audible despite their attempts at quiet. Shit! Fresh adrenaline flooded my system as I tried to ascertain where they approached from, but by the time I could decide, the noise was coming from all directions. They were everywhere!

“There.”

One gruff voice came from my left, and like a scene from a sci-fi horror, they came into view, the lights at the end of the weapons visible before their dark forms loomed.

“Grab her.”

Another voice, this time from the right, and suddenly, the place was littered with dark, moving shadows. Lurching to my feet, I narrowly avoided one grasping hand as I stumbled forward.

“Halt!”

It was futile to think I could outrun them, crazy to assume I could hide, but I couldn't stop. I had to run. Defiance to the menace was all I had, the last glimmer of my power in this dystopian nightmare.

“Take her out.”

The order echoed from behind me as I charged for the bushes, but I dared not look

back. I was committed. I fell as the bullet hit, the noise of the shot splintering the night as pain ruptured in my side.

“Fuck.”

Hitting the ground, I was aware I’d landed on earth rather than concrete. Glancing up, I realized the foliage was just ahead of me—I’d almost made it. Clutching my side, I expected to feel evidence of my life’s blood seeping away, but all I could feel was something hard penetrating my clothes and puncturing my skin.

“How much did you give her?”

My head clouded, I was vaguely conscious of two men towering over me.

“Enough to knock her out.”

“I preferred it when we could just fucking kill ‘em.” Dark laughter swirled, the only thing to permeate the fog except the sudden cold.

“Yeah, well, you know the new order. We’ll run out if we do. We have to bring them in instead.”

A bright light shone in my face, forcing me to recoil. Sprawled on the ground, there was nowhere to go.

“The bitch is still awake.”

“Not for long.”

Dimly, I noticed one rise over me.

“Once she’s out for the count, we can get something to eat.”

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

The first thing was the cold. Gripping at me with icy fingers, it forced me to curl into a ball and fight for body warmth. The next was the metal beneath me and the realization it was the source of the dilemma. Brows knitting, I tried to fathom why, but I couldn't think. My brain was misted, as if I had enjoyed too many drinks the night before, but that couldn't be right. I hadn't enjoyed anything since they'd started rounding women up, hadn't rested, hadn't bathed, hadn't relaxed.

It hit me then, the gnawing panic that slithered inside like a living thing. I was on the run—in hiding. There was only one logical reason I would wake up surrounded by metal, but I didn't want to believe it, couldn't face the reality of what had happened.

“Wake up, bitches.”

I tensed, my heart hammering, though my eyes remained shut. Somehow, I could fool myself into thinking this was only a dream while they were closed and convince myself it wasn't real.

“Time to wake up!” The voice was louder, the sound of metal hitting metal intensifying my alarm.

Reluctantly, my lids flickered open, my head aching as I tried to take stock of the row of cages. The place was dark, but as I roused, there was no denying what was obvious—five cages crammed with women were apparent in the gloom. My throat dried as my gaze traveled around my new prison, and it finally dawned—I was in a cage. My hand rose to my mouth in a vain attempt to hold back the rising spike of nausea.

Oh God. My heart threatened to leap into my throat. They got me. Oh God, oh God, oh God!

“Today is your lucky day, bitches.”

I couldn't see the man shouting obscenities, but as I hunched tighter, his muddy boots came into view. Passing down the line of caged women, he paused on the other side of the metal bars.

“Today, you finally get to be useful.”

Terror tore at my belly as I pulled in a shaky breath and locked eyes with the woman in the cage opposite, her brown gaze wide and petrified.

“You all know the score by now. You're to be taken and processed, and if you fail the tests, some lucky guys get to knock you all up.”

Trepidation bubbled inside, the hand at my mouth barely holding back my strangled gasp.

“No doubt that's why you all ran. It's fucking pathetic, thinking you could get away,” he scoffed, “but on behalf of me and the other guys, I want to thank you.”

“Oh my God.” The woman with the dirty face and brown eyes mouthed the words as his boots stalked away.

“Because you ran, we get to have a little fun with you first.” His chilling laughter echoed around wherever they were holding us. “Because you ran, we get first dibs. Turns out, they don't give a shit who fathers the new generation, so long as there is one, so we get to enjoy you first.”

My blood ran cold at his disgusting insinuation.

“Since it doesn’t matter how long it takes to impregnate you, we’re gonna give it a go before you reach the warehouse.”

“Well, you say that.” Another menacing voice floated from overhead. “It does matter, Matt. They won’t give these whores forever to come up with the goods.”

“True,” the first replied. “That’s true, Jim. Let me make a correction. You sluts have a couple months to prove yourself functional. If not, you’ll end up in a shallow grave.”

My throat dried as dread spread through my body, and for the first time, I noticed I was completely naked. Someone had stripped me before they’d flung me unconscious into a cage. If there had been any doubt about the depths the new regime would sink to, this confirmed all my worst fears. I was caught, exposed, and had never been more vulnerable.

“Anyway, that’s for the future,” he continued gleefully. “For now, your concern is pleasing us, and the first step toward that is getting you bitches cleaned up.” The brute snorted as he paced by. “You’re all dirty and not in a good way.”

“So, listen up.” The second one, Jim, raised his voice. “Here’s how it’s going to go. We’re taking you out one at a time, then hosing you down. Any protest will be met with a bullet through the head, and this time, it won’t be no sedative. We have enough of you to fulfill our quota and can afford to bleed a few. Once you’re in better shape, we’ll each choose one and get to work.” Disgust rose at his dry tone. It was almost as if he found this whole thing amusing.

How could men who once worked regular jobs have come to this? They were someone’s son, husband, and father—where was their humanity? That had been the

true cunning of the machine's propaganda. It had dehumanized us from the beginning, labeling those who didn't rush to volunteer as selfish and unfit to be a member of society. We needed to be compelled to do the right thing. We would never willingly be judged, which meant snatching us away in the darkness and violating our rights was somehow justifiable.

I guessed it was easier to do those things if you didn't see the victim as human, didn't recognize her frightened eyes like those of your own mother or sister. I assumed it helped them sleep at night.

"Right then."

I leapt at the sudden volume of his voice, and barely able to take a breath, I watched as one of them crouched in front of the brown-eyed woman. Dressed all in black, there was nothing identifiable about the aggressor.

"Might as well start with you, bitch."

Page 11

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Time protracted as she was ripped away. She hadn't tried to run, but the asshole manhandled her until the metal prison, which had once abhorred, looked like sanctuary. There were women cowering in the cages I could see, and the terrified gasps coming from my right suggested there were even more I couldn't see. Silence drenched the gray room as they dragged the brown-eyed woman from captivity, her fate unknown beyond the sickening words of the one they called Matt and the soul-shattering scream she let out from somewhere out of sight.

"This can't be happening, this can't be happening!" a frantic voice panted from down the line.

"Well, it is," whispered an olive-skinned woman beside the empty cage. "Shut the fuck up before you get us in even more trouble."

"More trouble?" The retort came from another crate I couldn't see. "How do you fathom that? We're fucked!"

I closed my eyes, trying to block out the turmoil, but it was impossible. The stranger was right. My worst-case scenario was playing out before my eyes.

"Next up!"

My body stiffened as my eyes flew open to find those grubby boots marching into view.

"You."

Shock reverberated as he fell to his haunches in front of me. I wanted to scream, cry, and resist, but in the distress of the moment, no protests came. What was the point of being a hero? He had all the cards stacked in his favor—authority, control, and guns. I didn't even have clothes.

“Out and don't try any funny business.” He unlocked the padlock securing the metal door, and it swung open, revealing the tiled floor and the long corridor to God knew where. “Move it.”

I pressed my palm into the cold floor, easing my weary body into the open.

“Don't bother getting up.” His tone was snide. “I reckon you bitches can crawl.”

A shudder ran along my back at his sinister command, but somehow, I was relieved. Better to crawl of my own volition than be shoved and thrown around like the brown-eyed girl.

“Faster,” he snarled, already striding down the narrow hall.

Fleeting, I lifted my head, meeting the gaze of the next woman in line.

“Faster, or I'll fucking drag you by the hair.”

I scrambled to obey, but it was difficult to move efficiently on my hands and knees, especially when he insisted on such long, unhelpful strides. Following behind as best I could, we rounded the corner to a small open courtyard.

“You took your time.” Another swine stood there, arms folded across his chest.

“Yeah, the bitch is taking forever.”

“You need to be a little more assertive, Jim.” Arms falling to his side, he marched in my direction, grabbing me by the hair and yanking me to my feet. Wincing, I clambered to my full height, hands rising to lessen the sting as he jerked me onto the freezing concrete. For one awful moment, I forgot I was naked, my only focus on halting the fire erupting at my scalp. Heart racing, I ignored the chill of the stone tiles, my feet wet as I was forced to walk through a puddle of water. It all happened in a matter of seconds.

“Here.” He spun me around, shoving me back against a wooden post. “Let me look at you.” Grasping my wrists, he held me against the wood. “This one’s not bad.”

I could scarcely catch my breath. His face contorted as he chuckled at my predicament.

“Nice tits.”

“Get on with it,” moaned the other one. “We’ve got ten of them to get through. Where are the others? We’re the only ones doing any work.”

“Dylan and Ryan should be around,” he replied before his attention flitted back to me. “Go find them while I get this one ready.” Pushing my arms back, his gaze narrowed. “Gonna be a good girl?”

“Wh-What are you going to do to me?”

His face twisted into an ugly sneer as he tugged my arm higher. The next thing I knew, there was a metal bracelet around my wrist. Glancing up, I was horrified to see him securing shackles around one, then the other arm. In less than a moment, I’d been strung up like a turkey at Christmas, naked and defenseless.

“Keep your mouth shut.” He leered as he stared at my helpless body. “You bitches

talk too much.”

“But please...” I couldn’t help pleading, though I instantly loathed myself for it. “I—”

My entreaty was cut short by the thug’s hand rising to my throat and squeezing.

“I said shut up.”

Immobilized as much by fear as his hand and the shackles, I gasped for air as his free palm slid to my chest.

“There,” he cooed, crushing my left nipple between his thumb and fingers. “That’s much better.”

Struggling for air and unable to get away, there was nothing I could do to resist his predatory advance.

“What are you doing?” An unknown voice distracted him, and his hand relaxed on my throat.

“Getting them washed, you asshole.” He released my teat as he spat at his colleague. “Why aren’t you helping?”

“You can cope with a few little girls, can’t you?”

I turned to see the newest ruffian’s brow rise. He was more attractive than the one pawing me, though clearly still lacking principles.

“Fuck you.” The first guy, Matt, shook his head as he turned and walked away. Crouching, he collected a hose from the concrete. “You deal with this one if you’re so bloody clever. Where’s Ryan?”

“Enjoying the one you cleaned up.” He laughed, his dark hair falling into his eyes as he moved to grab the hose. His gaze darted to me, his free hand sliding into his pocket.

“Already?” Matt complained. “We said we’d wait.”

“Apparently, he couldn’t,” sniggered the one wielding the hose. “Jim said we could each take one and leave the others ‘til later.”

“Fine.” Matt blew out a breath. “Then I’m going to choose one for myself.”

Without waiting for a reply, he stormed back toward the cages, leaving me shackled on the cold stone at the will of the stranger. As if it wanted to taunt me further, the breeze whipped up, goosing my skin as it rushed past.

“Who do we have here?” His eyebrow arched as he wandered in my direction. “Do you have a name?”

My name? In all the time I’d been on the run, he was the first man to have asked.

“Eloise.” My voice was hoarse after the recent attack.

“Very pretty,” he replied, drinking in my bound and exposed body. “I’m going to hose you down, Eloise.”

“Please...” I couldn’t take much more. All those days of fear and tension, the hours of hiding and slowly starving had taken their toll, had all been for nothing. They’d come for me in the end. There had been no escape.

“I suggest you keep your eyes and mouth closed.” Wedging the hosepipe between his thighs, he rolled up his black shirt sleeves. “This won’t take long.”

That was all the warning I got. By the time he gripped the hose again, the device had flickered on, water rushing from its spout onto the concrete. Widening his stance, he met my gaze, his blue eyes sparkling as he directed the flow onto me.

“Ow!” I screeched, my feet dancing as the torrent worked up and down my shins. The intensity of the water was so fierce, the impact was almost painful, and given its freezing temperature, my brain interpreted its power as pain. “Oh God, no!”

A small smile rose to his lips as he guided the current. Thankfully, he avoided my sex as there was little I could do to protect the sensitive area except press my thighs together, but the stream felt much tougher against my midriff. Panic spiraled as it rose to my breasts, my pleas increasing when the water hit my nipples. I’d never been so cold and susceptible, never felt so damn powerless. Tipping my head back as far as the post would allow, I squeezed my eyes closed as I dangled from the shackles. The surge went on, hitting my neck and soaking the bottom of my hair.

“Okay.”

Finally, the pressure of the current assuaged and shivering, I found the strength to open my eyes. He pointed the flow at me, shifting its focus from one nipple to the next as he drew nearer. He flicked the power off, dropping the hose as he stood regarding me.

“Matt’s right, they might be small, but you have great tits.”

Page 12

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

I couldn't help my chattering teeth or the involuntary way my limbs trembled. Torn between the fear of pneumonia, never leaving the walls of this terrible place, and whatever fate awaited me if he took me away, I was forced to wait and accept his unnerving scrutiny.

"Turn around." He signaled for me to spin, and not knowing what else to do, I complied. "Legs apart."

My head fell at the order, but there seemed little choice but to comply, and sniffing back a sob, I inched my feet wider.

"How old are you?"

He was closer than I recalled, and I leapt at his sudden proximity.

"Tw-Twenty-s-six."

"Sir." His hand cradled my ass cheek, and I tensed, though his touch was gentle. "You should call any man you meet, sir. Haven't they been through the rules with you yet?"

I turned my face toward him, my breath ragged as I took in his sky-blue eyes. In another time and place, I might have flirted with a man like him, though that idea was preposterous now.

"N-No, S-Sir." I didn't want to call any of them sir, but I was so cold, I'd have considered master of the universe if it meant he'd let me down and offer me a towel.

“Idiots,” he muttered. “Let’s try again. How old are you?” His lips twitched as his hand slid to my other cheek.

“T-Twenty-six, Sir.”

He met my gaze with an approving nod. “Good, Eloise. I think you and I are going to get along.”

My breath hitched at the certainty in his tone. I was all too aware of why I was here—the other men had made it more than clear—but I hadn’t reckoned on being handled by anyone with such appeal. My toes curled against the concrete as his warm breath washed over my face.

“Y-Yes, Sir.”

“I’ve chosen one.”

I gasped at the voice behind me, my head falling at the sound of footsteps in my direction.

“Looks like you have, too, Dylan.”

“Yeah.” Dylan’s smile widened, his palm possessively patting my damp ass. “I’m taking this one. You need my help with yours?”

“No way.”

I imagined the ugly sneer on Matt’s face, and gratitude resounded that I wouldn’t be left to him. God knew I didn’t want any of this, but if it must be endured, I would rather it was at the hands of the blue-eyed Dylan than the sneering wanker who’d woken us so unceremoniously. I tensed at the thought one of the remaining women

had been selected by him but was forced to dismiss the guilt. It was every woman for herself in this new order. There was no place for valor.

“Fine, go and get her, and we’ll leave you to it.”

I held my breath until I heard Matt’s heavy footsteps leaving.

“I’m going to let you down now,” Dylan whispered into my ear. “And when I do, I want you down on all fours, understand?”

My eyes widened. “P-Please can I dry myself first, Sir?”

“Not until we get inside.” He motioned to the door he’d arrived by.

My gaze followed his line of sight. It was a good few feet to the destination, and I would have to crawl them all. My insides clenched at the denigration.

“I don’t want any trouble.” His hand slid down my wet body before slipping to the weapon hanging at his side. “You’re lovely, but I have my orders about what to do with rogues.”

His gaze burned into mine, expectant yet disturbingly sexy. There should be nothing about this situation that allured me, nothing that aroused any excitement, yet this brooding stranger had come along and thrown the whole ordeal into chaos. I couldn’t think straight.

“Do we understand each other?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” His lips curled as his attention moved to the shackles at my wrists.

I waited as he opened the metal, my wrists falling free from the bondage. Fleeting, I considered kicking him in the nuts, stealing his gun, and making a run for it. I didn't know how likely the escape was, couldn't tell whether I'd be able to immobilize him for long enough, but as my pounding heart reminded me, even if I got past the stranger with the enticing eyes, there'd be another, less appealing monster waiting behind every door. I didn't know where I was, didn't know where to flee, and as of this moment, I didn't even have anything to wear.

Exhaling, I fell to my knees, accepting the truth. For the time being, this tempting stranger was my best bet. He wanted to do bad things to me, but the most peculiar thing was, maybe I wanted him to.

"This way."

I lifted my chin as his hand caught in my hair. Fingers tightening, he held my tresses, using them to guide me toward the door. Pressing my palms into the concrete, I crawled, grateful when we finally reached the boundary of the building, and I could move onto a more forgiving surface.

"Where you off to Dylan?"

I stilled at the unknown voice, breathing faster as a different set of boots strode in our direction.

"Taking this one to get started." Dylan tugged my head back, revealing my wide eyes to his imposing colleague. "Matt's about to do the same, and Jim is already at it somewhere. I suggest you get going."

"Nice." His grin was predatory. "Trust you to get a decent one."

"I didn't choose her," he replied. "She was there all chained up when I arrived."

“Some guys get all the luck, eh?” He snorted, already heading for the courtyard.
“Have fun.”

“Come on.” Dylan’s hand pushed my face down. “We don’t have all day.”

Dread resurfaced as he led me through the maze of the building on my hands and knees. I was nude and wet, but that was nothing compared to what was to come. I knew the fate of every woman locked in blasted cages up and down the country, and even though his face had reassured me when I’d been hosed down, I didn’t know the guy. All I knew about Dylan was he’d been recruited into the gangs of men herding captive women. Something about this job had enamored him, which didn’t bode well for me.

“Here.”

His fingers tightened as his feet paused, and pulling in ribbons of air through my nostrils, my gaze flitted to the ominous brown door. Reaching into his pocket, he yanked out a key and slid it into the lock. A moment later, he pushed the door, holding it open.

“In.”

His hand applied enough pressure to make me move, electricity firing at my scalp as he jerked me into the room. I swallowed as his digits finally relented, watching as the door closed, and he locked it behind him, sliding the key back into his pocket. Turning to a small chair in the corner of the room, he reached for a towel and threw it at me. I grabbed it gratefully, noticing it was surprisingly clean, considering the circumstances, but acknowledging I would have accepted it, regardless.

“Thank you.” I was warmer already, the towel removing the excess water at the same time the carpet under my knees soothed my skin.

“How did I tell you to address me?” He towered over me, his boots grazing my thighs, ensuring they splayed as one hand lowered to my chin.

“Sir.” My breath was ragged. “I’m sorry.”

“Yes.” His voice was stern. “Do it again, and you will be.”

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Dylan's fingers slid away, leaving me oddly bereft without his touch. I didn't like the way he thought he could ogle and caress me, but then I didn't enjoy the way all men seemed to think that way now. Just because I hadn't started a family, the state seemed to think I was fair game—their property. It was our new horrific reality. Any unmarried woman could be herded and judged, their fates not decided by their kindness or intelligence but by their cup size. Evidence conveniently supported the notion that only big-busted women made worthy wives and mothers. The rest of us were to be farmed out for breeding in the twisted new regime—it was why I had run.

I took a quick look around his room, taking in the bland décor and dirty cream walls. It was the color of an old-fashioned mental institution, the space undeniably dominated by the huge bed at the far end.

“I have some paperwork to complete.” Dylan's tone was matter of fact as if he'd brought me back to his place for a sexy one-night stand. Collapsing into the only comfortable-looking seat, he collected a clipboard from the nearby table before glancing at me.

“What's your full name?”

“Eloise Turner, Sir.”

I tried to compose my breathing as he scribbled it down, absorbing as much detail as I could. Maybe there was something that could help me escape, some small aspect that seemed irrelevant now but would be significant later?

“Date of birth?”

I rattled off the numbers as if they meant something. They didn't. Not anymore. Not since the world had gone insane and started farming women for forced procreation. An uncontrollable shiver raced down my spine. The only stats that mattered now were the size of my assets.

"Still cold?" He sounded irritated.

"A little, Sir."

He rose with a sigh, fiddling with the thermostat on the wall. "That should help."

My head lowered at the simple act of kindness. It was unexpected. "Thank you, Sir."

"When was your last period?"

"My last what?" My head rose, heat engulfing my face as he inquired about such a personal matter, although I don't know why I was surprised. I had been taken against my will and stripped, not only of my clothing but my rights as well. It was obvious they would want to know everything.

"You heard me." One dark eyebrow rose. "Don't make this even more painful."

Painful? That was an interesting concept coming from the guy dressed in black with the gun stashed on his person.

"About ten days ago, Sir." It pained me to confess I was probably ready to ovulate. My periods had been like clockwork since I was fifteen. If it was pregnancy these guys sought, I had a sickening feeling they might just get what they wanted.

My belly knotted, the reality playing in my head like an awful lullaby. They wanted babies—my future babies—though God only knew what they intended to do with

them. What sort of world would it be if children were produced like this, cultivated on-demand, mass produced for the state? What would it mean for women like me, compelled to breed because a group of men said so? I hadn't considered a family yet, and maybe one day I would want one with someone I loved, but not like this—never like this.

“I’m no expert, but that sounds good.” His eyebrow cocked as he put down the pen. “You ready?”

“Wait, I...” My words trailed away as I scuttled back toward the wall. “What are you going to do?”

“Nothing you won’t like.” He laughed dryly. “I’m not a monster.”

“Please...” I craned my neck as he approached.

“Onto the bed.” He pointed as if I didn’t know where it was.

Pulling in a shaky breath, I crawled toward it. Eye to eye with the beige covers, I gripped the sheets, making myself climb onto them.

This was really happening. Oh God, this was really happening.

“Some of the others are desperate to do the deed.” He chuckled as he walked to the small bedside table. “Whereas I prefer a more prolonged approach.”

Prolonged? What the fuck was that supposed to mean? Consciously trying to steady my breath, I watched him pull rope from the drawer.

“On to your belly.”

I was close to tears as I eased into position. It was one thing to convince myself he was a more appealing option than the others, but another to be here now and have to deal with the reality. He could do anything he liked, and I had no say, no right to refuse. The assault laws had been rolled away in one day, leaving the path open to any vile tormentor.

“Good.” He patted my backside as though I was a pet dog. Tension knotted at the crude analogy. These days, canines had better rights and protection than women like me.

“Arms behind your back.”

Terrified, I considered leaping to my feet and kicking him in the face. I could do it. I had the element of surprise, but then what? Where did you go when the whole world was against you, when every man and even some women were your enemy? The answer was nowhere—I couldn’t go anywhere and couldn’t trust anyone. My heart sank as my wrists slid into position.

“I’m only going to bind you loosely.” He wrapped the tethers around my wrists. “They’re not to hurt you, only to hold you in place.”

“Sir...” I could scarcely get the word out.

“It’s okay.”

His tone was amused, as if he always captured women from the streets and tied them up on his bed. Belly churning, I realized maybe he did. I may not be the first. I wouldn’t be the last.

I shook as he tackled my ankles, fettering them in the same way, then drawing the ropes together in a loose hogtie. I’d never even been tied up, and this was horrendous.

I could barely move, save for wiggling my fingers and toes.

“Okay.”

I heard him rustling in the drawer again, my muscles tensing. I’d seen enough to know nothing good was going to come out of that place.

“Let me warm you up.”

I panted as he climbed onto the bed behind me, not able to see what he was doing but aware of him nudging my thighs wider.

“Here.”

An odd buzzing sound sprang to life behind me, and I gasped as one of his huge hands lifted my hips, settling me back into position.

“Oh God.” I fought for air as I acknowledged what the peculiar noise was. Something hard and unyielding was vibrating at my sex, the edge of it grazing my clit, forcing it into life.

“Exactly,” he chuckled, patting my cheeks.

Another noise cut through the tension, the sound of tape being pulled and then ripped, and the next thing I knew, the vibrating object was pushed closer to my skin as he pressed the tape into place. I wiggled my hips, but there was no way to shake the thing off, its trembling whir already compelling my clit to acknowledge its persistence.

“There.” Glee radiated from his tone. “That should hold it.”

“Please, Sir.” Panic spiraled as I tried to adjust to the unrelenting pulse at my sex. I didn’t even know what I was pleading for, save release and protection, but that wasn’t likely.

“Relax.”

His hand stroked the back of my thigh in a strangely tender way. I shivered at the unnerving thought. This guy didn’t care about me, but he’d seen fit to set me up with some sort of vibrator before he took what he wanted. I supposed I should be grateful.

“You’ll feel better after a few orgasms.” Dylan crouched beside me, his blue eyes sparkling. “You look great this way.”

I was glad one of us thought so.

“I need to pop out, but I’ll be back to check on you soon.” He rose, and a fresh wave of terror surged through me. If it was daunting being here at his beck and call, the thought of being left, undefended like this, was debilitating.

“Please, Sir. No!”

“Shhh.” He sounded irritated as he crossed the floor to his bedside once more. “If you can’t be quiet, I’ll help you.”

My head pounded as he strode back into view, waving a black strap before my eyes. In the middle was a large plastic ball, my dread escalating as I realized its fate.

“Open up.”

“No, Sir, please!”

“Open!” He barked the order. “Or I’ll fucking make you.”

Heaving in a breath, I acknowledged he was right. In this state, I had even less power than usual. I swallowed, slowly parting my lips, and wasting no time, he shoved the ball inside, securing the straps behind my head.

“Oo od.” I groaned, the weight of my predicament landing on me like a ton of bricks.

“Don’t worry.” He shook his head at me with a smile. “I won’t be long and will lock the door behind me. None of the others will get their hands on you.”

With that twisted promise of consolation, he turned on his heel and stalked toward the door.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Strung up like a bird ready to be roasted, I jerked against the ropes as the pleasure mounted. The pulsing plastic taped to me insisted I give in and knew it would win. I had no choice but to succumb to its unyielding demands, just as I had no option but to drool around the hideous gag. I didn't know how long I'd been left this way or how many highs it had ripped from my reluctant body, but after the first climax subsided, it had pushed me right back to the brink. Over and over, it continued, my moans tapering into frantic mewls. I wanted to get out of the binds, wanted some decorum as I writhed on his bed, but damn it, there was no chance. Overstimulated and sore, my clit surrendered to numerous thundering orgasms, their effect no less shattering or denigrating as they rattled on.

If the whirring tormentor between my legs was here to get me ready for his cock, it had done its job. I could feel my sex slick as it vibrated, my juices seeping down my inner thighs.

I pressed my head onto the covers, beaten and humiliated. This wasn't how sex was meant to be, but this was what it had been reduced to—a functional act of propagation in the most humiliating circumstances. Hell, I was lucky he had let me come. Most of the women here would not be so fortunate.

Tensing at the key in the door, knowing it must be Dylan, I couldn't decide how I felt about the conclusion. I couldn't bear the thought of one of the others touching me, but could I really tolerate him? He was still a stranger, a thug who was paid to persecute. He was no friend of mine.

“Eloise.” He smirked, his gaze running over me before he secured the door. “I’m pleased to see you haven’t got up.” He laughed as if there was anything even slightly

amusing about my predicament.

My breathing accelerated at his approach.

“How are you doing?” Without a word of warning, his hand dropped to my clenching ass, easing past my cleft to my pussy. “Wow.”

I moaned as embarrassed heat engulfed my face. I was so fucking wet and couldn't remember being this aroused for ages, although nothing about the situation should have been stimulating, save for the vibrating menace at my clit.

And him. I pulled in hot ribbons of air through my nostrils, ignoring the snide comment in my head. He's alluring, and you know it.

“You really are ready.”

“Eeese.” I struggled around the ball shoved between my teeth, even more mortified by the noises coming from me, but they worked. His focus switched to my face.

“Had enough of the gag?” Dylan's tone was wry.

I nodded as he fell to his haunches at my side.

“Okay.” His hand moved to my mouth, and I squeezed my eyes shut. His finger tugged at the strap, easing the ball from my lips. I watched as he discarded it to the floor. “I'll remove it so long as you keep the volume down.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Wait, why was I pandering to the moron by addressing him the way he wanted? A shiver ran along my spine as he smiled, briefly distracting me from the answer. I

feared the consequences if I failed to please him. Yes, that was it. It had absolutely nothing to do with the way my sex tightened when I said it or the dark glint in his gaze.

“I like you like this.” He ran his palm along my back, grazing my exposed ass. “A lot.”

Relieved to be free of the gag, I didn’t know what to say. I couldn’t risk upsetting him and sure as hell didn’t want that ball back in my mouth.

“I can’t leave you tied like it for too long.” He sighed at the realization. “Fortunately, I have another solution.” Reaching into his pocket, his grin widened, and I watched, riveted as he pulled out a length of leather. “This means you won’t need to be so restricted.”

“What is it, Sir?” I gasped, but he was already stretching the leather around my neck, the dull reality dawning on me before he explained.

“A collar.” Once more, he laughed. “Apparently, we’re supposed to see you as animals now.”

My brows knitted at the cutting analogy as he fastened the thing in place, checking there was room for me to breathe. He wandered to the dreaded drawer, returning with a fresh piece of rope which he wrapped around the D-ring of the collar. Panic soared as he attached the rope to the end of his bed, effectively securing me to the thing.

“Now we can get down to it.” Dylan drew in a long breath, trailing an invisible line down my arm on his way to my wrists.

I panted as he released the binds, wiggling my fingers as he liberated my ankles.

“Up on all fours.”

This was it. This was what it had all boiled down to. All those days of running, of living in the dirt, the constant fear of capture—all led to this moment of capitulation. In the end, it hadn’t made a damned difference. Weary with resignation, my head fell as I clambered into position. If he was going to fuck me, just let it be over with.

“I think this has done its job.” Dylan ripped the tape from me, and I gasped at the sudden hurt, quivering at the abrupt loss of sensation. I loathed the buzzing offender, but at least it had prepared me for what was to come. I tensed at the unintended pun.

“Head up.” He moved to my face, my heart racing at the sound of his zipper. “I need you to get me in the mood. I haven’t had the luxury of multiple orgasms.”

My throat dried as he jerked out his cock. The organ already looked up for the job.

“Y-Yes, Sir.”

My gaze darted to his knowing eyes, my emotions warring inside me. Dylan was precisely the kind of guy I’d have wanted to bed under normal circumstances, but nothing about this was normal. Now he wasn’t some hot guy. He was my aggressor, the man who would take what he wanted, no matter what I wanted.

“What’s wrong?” His lips curled, his index finger beckoning me forward. “You want me, right?”

Christ, he was just like all the rest of them—so fucking arrogant and full of shit—yet he wasn’t. He had rescued me from the mitts of all the other heinous men here and ensured I was drenched with need. That didn’t sound like an oppressor.

“Yes, Sir,” I shifted in his direction. “I just...” My words dried up as I tried to

vocalize everything I had been through.

“Just for the record, I don’t approve of what’s going on.” His hand rose to my hair, his fingers tightening. “I don’t think it’s right.”

Yet still, you go along with it? The accusation was right on the tip of my tongue, but I didn’t dare articulate it.

“I think you’re an attractive woman, and I think you want me, too. We can help each other out in this shitshow.”

“What if I get pregnant?”

Eye to eye with his cock, I noticed the way it throbbed, suggesting he was enjoying himself rather more than he was letting on. Damn it, as I surveyed his arousal, I couldn’t deny he was right. I craved him and wanted to have great sex one more time before that too was taken from me, but the idea of having to rear a child—that was something else entirely. I couldn’t agree to that.

“Then our new masters will be happy.” His fist stiffened in my hair. “It’s gonna happen, whatever you do. If it’s not me, it’ll be some other guy.”

His verdict knotted the anxiety in my belly, his conviction reinforcing the gravity of what was happening.

It was going to happen.

Whatever I did, they had me. I was a prisoner of the state, and my sole duty was to breed.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

My head fogged as I crawled to him, lips parting. If this was to be the last time I actually wanted a guy, I might as well relish it. I didn't consent to this place, to the way I was being treated, or to the crippling inevitability of my fate, but perhaps this could be one last semblance of desire. My gaze flitted to his before I wrapped my mouth around his crown.

"Hell, yeah." Gripping the back of my head, he pushed me down to the base of his shaft, only releasing me when I gagged. Eyes watering, I gasped for air, but his fist shoved me back to where he wanted me.

"Swallow me down."

Tugging against the length of rope secured to my neck, I grasped his thighs and complied, breathing in the scent of him. I was pleased to find he was not only clean but smelled of an alluring, spicy cologne, a scent that made me giddy. Settling into position as a vessel he could fuck, I reveled in the act more than I'd thought I would. I wanted him to use me, to take his pleasure because bizarrely, I recognized a hedonism of my own. There was a satisfaction in yielding, in giving him what he craved because I desired it as well. My every sense was heightened by the idea. Dylan would be the last man I ever said yes to.

"Fuck." Holding my hair, he yanked me away, a trail of saliva falling between us as he stripped away his shirt. "That's too good. This will be over if I don't take a moment."

Catching my breath, I couldn't decide if that was a positive.

“Come here.”

He dragged me from the bed, turning me and pushing me over the covers. I went like a rag doll, conscious if he was going to garner gratification from the next round, so would I. I deserved it.

“Legs apart!” Dylan barked, slapping my ass as he fisted my hair. The rope at my neck tightened as I straightened and slid my feet wider, already aware of his cocktip at my sex. Closing my eyes, I waited, knowing what would happen next, knowing I had no choice but wanting him all the same.

He impaled me with one sharp lunge, filling me so fast, I gasped. I might have enjoyed the sensation more had his fingers not tightened, forcing my back to arch as he withdrew and slammed into me.

“Fuck!” He thrust harder, the motion jerking my breasts forward as he took his fill. “Do you like that, bitch?”

My brow creased, the insult not reconciling with the man who had turned up the thermostat and taped a vibrator to my clit, but I had to remember—every man here had volunteered for a reason, and Dylan was no different. More attractive perhaps, but that didn’t mean he wasn’t brutal, didn’t mean he wouldn’t tear through boundaries for gratification.

“Do you?” He yanked my tresses harder, fire lighting at my scalp.

“Yes,” I winced.

“What?” Withdrawing, he spanked my right ass cheek firmly.

“Yes, Sir.” Lost to his authority, I was caught between his palms, cock, and the

infernal fetters.

“Better,” he growled, sliding into my pussy again. “Don’t fucking forget it.”

Pushing me forward, he climbed onto the bed, cocooning my body. Flat against the covers, I was pinned in place as his length rammed me.

“Fuck.” I grasped the bedding, overwrought with the competing sensations.

“What was that, little girl?” He forced me to meet his gaze, his fingers relaxing as our eyes locked. “Got something to say?”

“N-No, Sir,” I just managed as he increased the pace, propelling his cock into me over and over.

Trembling, I absorbed his vigor, my toes curling as I took it all. His lids closed, body tensing as he reached orgasm, driving his cum into my sex. Panting, I tried not to overthink the act. Plenty of other guys had screwed me, sometimes without condoms. It didn’t mean anything. It didn’t mean I would be pregnant.

His hips stilled, cock still lodged deep within as his gaze drilled into me.

“Fuck, you feel good.” Lowering his face, his mouth brushed over mine. “Maybe I’ll have you again.”

For a long moment, time protracted, our bodies fused as he stared at me, then just as I thought I would implode with the intensity, he pulled away, leaving me panting over the bed.

“What’s next?”

I twisted to find him staring down at the pile of paperwork on the clipboard as he fastened his zipper, and for the first time, I could properly take in the sight of his body. Stripped to the waist, he looked like one of those male models I'd seen on the covers of magazines, his muscular chest tapering to washboard abs and honed obliques.

"You need to lie on the bed." He motioned for me to move, though his focus remained on the paperwork. "And wait a while."

My brow rose. Grateful to shift position, I clambered on top.

"Stretch out." He strode toward me, arms folding across his chest as I complied, although the bloody rope didn't leave me much freedom. "Good."

"Why do I need to do this, Sir?" Suddenly, I was vulnerable, conscious of how naked I was. It was absurd after everything I had been through, but I wanted to shield myself from his lingering gaze.

"It gives us the best chance of conception." He shook his head as he replied, sitting on the bed beside me. "I can't believe I just said that."

"If you don't agree, then why do this, Sir?" My heart pounded in recognition of how dangerous a question it was, but I had to know. Why use me if he was unconvinced of the motive?

Lifting his chin, his gaze slid to me. "Tell me you didn't just ask that."

"I..." My heart hammered so loudly, I could barely hear myself over the top of its incessant rhythm. "I'm sorry, I just—"

"You're just a whore who's here to get knocked up." He leaned closer, glaring at my

impertinence. “Don’t forget it.”

I recoiled from his vicious tone, wanting to curl up into a ball but afraid to move without permission.

“No, Sir.”

Turning from his cruel stare, I rolled to one side, fighting to hold back the torrent of emotion threatening to drown me. How could I have been so fucking stupid? I thought I’d seen a flicker of humanity in his eyes—a glimmer of something more than just sadism—but evidently, I’d only seen what I’d needed to see to get through the obvious. Dylan was no better than any of them, and now it was done. He’d fucked me, and for all I knew, it could have been enough—his sperm could be fertilizing inside me. I wouldn’t need to wait long to find out. Technology had been expedited by the machine, and the modern tests could detect the human chorionic gonadotropin hormone only hours after conception. There need never be a delay determining pregnancy again—a huge benefit to those who intended to farm women. I heaved in a shaky breath, wrapping my arms around myself.

“I was going to leave you here until we can test, but after that outburst, I think I’ll shove you back in the cage.” He rose from the bed, pulling on his shirt as I spun to face him.

“No, Sir, please!” However awful this was, the last thing I wanted was to be cast back inside the metal box at the mercy of the brutes frequenting the place. “I’m sorry I offended you.”

“Need that gag to go back in?” His brow rose as he fastened his shirt buttons. “Perhaps that’s how I need to keep you while we wait?”

I tensed, sensing it was a test. Neither scenario sounded fun, but if I had to endure the

awful ball again, I would rather do it here with him than cast into the crate in solitude.

“Yes, Sir.” I couldn’t believe I was saying it. My gaze lowered as I caught the first tear with the heel of my hand.

“I’m glad we agree.” Smiling, he collected the gag from the carpet and looked it over as he neared. “You’ll wear it while we wait, then if you prove to be useful, I’ll get you something to eat.” Flexing the straps in front of my face, his eyebrow arched. “Come here.”

Miserably, I crawled the short distance to where the gag waited.

“Open.”

Shuddering, I already knew there was no hope. The only way to avoid finding myself caged, or worse, was to submit to this ordeal again.

Page 16

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

Time passed. Long protracted minutes stretched into hours, or maybe it hadn't been so long? I had no way of checking. He'd fettered me again, binding my hands behind me and my ankles to the head of the bed. Then, he left me.

Swaggering in and out, Dylan came and went as he chose, leaving me bound and vulnerable. I had no way of knowing if the door was locked, if I was safe—but then safety was a relative concept. There was nowhere safe for a woman like me.

I supposed I had reason to be grateful. I could still be locked in the cages beyond his walls, be at the fate of the other men. Dylan had spared me that, but he'd made his feelings abundantly clear—I was here to screw and impregnate—any sentiment was attached only to the possibility I might conceive a child. My brow creased as I struggled to comprehend what made a man like him behave this way. He seemed reasonable in so many ways, likable even, but he was prepared to do this—to cage and force us.

My internal monologue was obliterated as the door opened again, and heart pounding, I turned my head to see him in the doorway. My body tensed as I noticed another man beside him, his ugly leer growing as he took in the sight of me.

“So, this is the one you've chosen?” He moved closer, and a strangled mewl escaped my throat as he squeezed my exposed backside.

“Yeah.” Dylan folded his arms over his chest, meeting my eyes.

I wanted to tell him to protect me, not to let this other brute touch me, but there was no point. He had no allegiance to me. My pleas would go unheard, and the oversized

ball strapped between my teeth made any such entreaty impossible, anyway.

“Nice.”

I yelped as the stranger slapped my ass.

“How much longer ‘til you know? If you don’t get a hit, I might give it a go.”

My eyes widened as he discussed me as if I was a piece of meat—a thing to be used and discarded. Oh God, I had to get out of here. Whatever happened, this couldn’t be my fate!

Dylan checked his watch. “Not long. I’ll shout if her cunt’s available.”

I buried my face in the cover, unable to process the sickening reality.

“Until then, sod off.” Dylan snorted. “She’s mine until you hear otherwise.”

“Fine.” The swine smacked my behind again, laughing as he slapped each cheek. “I’ll choose one of the others. We might as well screw them all while they’re here, and you never know, one of us might get lucky and pick up that bonus.”

My focus slid to the door, watching as the moron disappeared, but his words ricocheted in my head. Bonus? They were getting a bonus? Disgust gripped me as it suddenly all fell into place. That was the reason they were so keen to knock us up so fast. It wasn’t only the sex they were after, but the cash incentive. My hands balled into fists as that idea resonated. The state was paying these men to round us up and fuck us, and if they impregnated us, they got a cash prize? Anxiety tore at my belly. Oh Christ, it was worse than I thought!

Slamming the door closed with his foot, Dylan strode inside, his hands rising to his

hips.

“It’s nearly time.” His lips curled. “You get to piss on a stick, and we see if I win.”

Trepidation clutched at my heart until pain radiated from my chest. This was my lot—what my life had boiled down to.

Hands falling to his side, he closed the distance to the edge of the bed, lowering to his haunches. “How are you doing?”

What the hell did he expect me to say to that? I couldn’t even speak if I wanted to.

“You girls could become pretty important to us.” His eyebrow cocked as one hand slipped from my shoulder to my bare ass. “Especially if we can get you pregnant now. We’re on a two-grand bonus for every conception we deliver before you reach the factories.” His fingers glided between my cheeks, grazing my pussy lips, and God help me, but I was still wet. One digit slipped inside me as he continued.

“If it doesn’t work this time, I’ll do you again.” His finger curled, eliciting a groan from my lips. I loathed the power he had over me, despised everything he represented, but after so long bound and ignored, I couldn’t deny the thrum of need his attention inspired.

“I like you, Eloise.”

I squeezed my eyes closed at the twisted compliment, concentrating on fighting my accelerated breaths. Heat was building at my core again, and as a second finger swept around to budge my clit, I couldn’t resist my guttural whimper.

“Yeah.”

Tension mounted at his arrogant tone.

“You like me too, huh?” His fingers slid from me, and in one fell swoop, he rolled me onto my back.

Panting around the gag, my hands were now trapped beneath me. The ropes at my ankles crossed as my body turned, but he dragged me further toward his pillow, tightening the rope at my neck and compelling my knees to splay.

“That’s better.” He climbed onto the bed at my side, gazing down at me hungrily and one hand skimmed over my nipples, tugging both until they stood to attention. “Much better.”

My back arched at the stimulation, my brain struggling to rationalize how I could relish the stimulation after the way I’d been treated, but by the time his palm grazed my clit, I was forced to admit I was aroused. Dylan grinned, easing two fingers into me, and pumping them in and out of my sex as his wrist skimmed my clit. I moaned, wanting more despite myself. I was in the most torrid predicament, doomed to mate with whoever shot the winning goal first, so why not revel in some pleasure? I merited that much, didn’t I?

“Oh, yeah.” He chuckled darkly as his face lowered, and grasping my right teat between his lips, he sucked hard.

“Uuck!” I screeched around the gag, but all the while, my hips bucked, grinding against the stimulation he offered, frantic for more.

“Come on, you.” He shot me a smile before his free hand pinched my left nipple, crushing it between his thumb and finger. A surge of pain spiked, blooming into hedonism as my thighs parted to receive his fingers. “Come apart for me.”

His mouth returned to my breast as he helped himself, his digits teasing, playing my body like an instrument. I was completely ensnared in his ropes, at the mercy of his will, but I was so close—so close to detonation—maybe the last pleasure I would ever be allowed?

“Ooo!”

Fireworks erupted in my mind as he pushed me over the brink, my body releasing with every ounce of energy I had left. By the time he slipped from my sex, I was weak as well as helpless. I watched as he freed his cock. Dylan sported the type of smug expression I hated, easing my juices over his erect shaft before climbing between my thighs.

There was no commentary as he drove inside me. No thought to the ropes cutting off my blood supply at my wrists or whether or not I wanted him. Those things didn't matter. They'd never mattered to him. That's why he didn't ask, didn't even remove the atrocious gag silencing me. I was only a cunt to fill, a uterus to permeate.

I was no one.

Nothing.

Shuddering, he deposited his load before drawing away and climbing from the bed. Before he collapsed back into his chair, he rolled me unceremoniously back onto my belly, slapping my ass with a gleeful chuckle.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

The ordeal was neverending. I'd been braced for the brutality, for the sickening expectations of the men who seized us, but nothing had prepared me for the head fuck—the desperate sense of longing I experienced when Dylan was close, the heat furling at my core, the intensity of the climaxes, and the craving for more—all of which were dashed every time he got what he wanted and left me gagged, bound, and alone. It was as if my hopes were elevated with each meaningless caress, only to be crushed when I was abandoned.

It made no sense to feel this way. It was ridiculous to expect any salvation from a man as ruthless as him, but I couldn't resist the maelstrom. The gleam in his eyes had such potential. Maybe he would take pity on me? Have enough mercy to let me go?

I shook my head against the bedding, ignoring the brimming tears. Of course, he wouldn't do that. Dylan had been clear about his intentions. He was in this for the money—as well as the hassle-free sex. There was no way he was my savior. No way any man would save me.

“Right.”

I tilted my head, watching as he placed a washing-up bowl on the floor by the wall.

“It's time.”

Trepidation twisted in my tummy as he turned and headed in my direction. Tugging at the knots he'd secured at my wrists, he freed me from the bed, jerking me to the floor with the rope still attached to the leather at my neck. I landed on my knees, scrambling toward the bowl as he led me.

“Squat over it.” He pointed to the bowl. “I need urine to run the test.”

My breathing accelerated as I realized what he meant. Not only had he taken and used me, but now he intended to denigrate me further by making me relieve myself here, in front of him. I might have begged for clemency had the dreaded gag not prevented my plea. My head fell as I clambered into place.

Dylan relaxed in his comfortable chair, gripping the end of the rope as I got into position. Surely, this was the most miserable moment of my life. Being on the run had been desperate, but it had given me meaning, but this—what was this? I was only property, bound and expended, made to perform until my sole purpose had been achieved. I shivered, trying to relax as he glanced back at me.

“Come on.” He sounded irritated. “I don’t have all day.”

I eyed him wildly, humiliated as my lips stretched around the ball, and I tried to relax. It wasn’t easy to give him what he wanted when I was this exposed and het up, my muscles contracting rather than relaxing.

“What?” he demanded impatiently, leaning toward me as though I was being impertinent by not urinating on command.

Heaving in a breath, I closed my eyes, blocking out his glare as I tried to calm myself. Slowly, I ceded, the noise of the liquid filling the bowl mortifying.

“Finally,” he growled, pulling me back onto all fours. Securing the rope to the bedpost, he bound me before turning away. He collected the bowl and placed it on the table, fiddling with one of the new fancy pregnancy tests that would determine my fate. My breath hitched as he pulled one from the packaging, lifting it into the air. Its result would decide what became of me, whether I was fed and made to bear a child, who would become another pawn of the system or sent back to the metal bars to be

used by one of the others. It wasn't much of a choice. Tension tore at my insides as he dipped the strip into my urine.

"It only takes a minute. This little piece of plastic is so sensitive, it can detect even the faintest quantity of hCG."

I wasn't sure what the commentary was for. I'd heard all the propaganda before I ran—all about how wonderful the state's investment in the pharmaceutical company creating the tests was, about how it had revolutionized conception and was building a better world. My stomach churned at the memory of the old radio ads as I watched the side of Dylan's face. He didn't make eye contact with me, all his attention on the strip between his fingers while I huddled against the side of the bed. The blow-by-blow account was doing nothing to quell my nerves.

For a fleeting moment, I considered untying the knot he'd made and freeing myself, my heart racing at the idea of liberation before the thought was pulverized by a large dose of reality. Where was I going to go with my newfound freedom? Would I make it to the door before he noticed, and what would become of me when he did? That fear alone was enough to keep me in my place.

"Well, well..."

I couldn't decide if his tone was pleased or disappointed, the suspense scratching at my stomach until I couldn't pull in another breath.

"It looks like we did it." Dylan flashed me a grin, waving the strip of plastic in the air. "The line is weak, but it's there."

My belly tightened, panic pinballing as he placed it down and wandered toward me.

"Congratulations, Mum."

Oh God. Pressing my palms into the floor, I resisted the urge to rip the gag from my mouth and scream. Oh God, I was pregnant.

Striding past me, I barely noticed as he unfettered the rope, tugging it in his hand.

“Stand up.”

Overwrought, I climbed to my feet on shaky legs.

“Take my hand.”

He thrust out his palm, time protracting as I contemplated the gesture. What did this mean? Was he happy? Would I be rewarded? Or now that he had what he wanted from the bargain, would I just be flung over his shoulder and taken back to my cage? My hand trembled as I lifted it into his, every fiber of me unsure. Dylan was no hero, but he had offered me some solace in the confines of these four walls. He’d stopped the other bullies from getting their hands on me, and even though he’d treated me like shit, I had the distinct impression this was the best of a list of bad situations.

“Sit down.”

Guiding me to his chair, he shoved me on the seat before gripping the length of rope and running it behind me. I glanced over my shoulder to see him securing it to the seat fixture.

“Stay there.” His lips twitched as his gaze ran over my naked body. No doubt he was anxious to make sure his bonus stayed secure. “I’m going to get you something good to eat.”

“Ir.” It was the first time I’d tried to speak, my throat dry as I gestured to the gag.

“Can I trust you to be quiet this time?” One dark eyebrow arched at his wry tone, and I nodded my head wretchedly.

“Okay.”

He took a step in my direction, sighing as he reached for the strap and eased the ball from my lips. My jaw ached with relief as the object that had silenced me for so long fell to my collar.

“Better?”

“Thank you, Sir.”

I could hardly believe I was offering gratitude to the man who had gagged me, but there it was. I was grateful, appreciative in this batshit crazy world where I was obliged to procreate, it had been with him and not the brute who’d dragged me from the cage. Glad he’d at least given some thought to my pleasure in the process. I’d been around the block enough times to know it could have been much, much worse.

“Hey, you’re getting good at this.”

I tensed at his leering smirk, unable to meet his eyes, but the worst was he might be right. It was easier capitulating than I’d realized. I’d always assumed I would fight or die trying, but when push had come to shove, it had been better to cede. A wave of despondency washed over me as the thought registered. I had done this. I had yielded, and now I was pregnant. I wasn’t the only one who would have to live with consequences. There would be a life growing inside me who would be privy to this sickness—an innocent with no one to protect them once they had been ripped from my womb.

I inhaled a shaky breath, wishing he would just go—leave me to my misery. Head

bowed, I struggled with the rising emotion, watching his feet as they headed for the door. It wasn't until I heard the key turn in the lock that I allowed the tears to fall, their number coming hard and fast as my despair was laid bare. In this troubled land, my hopelessness was the only thing I had left to keep me strong.

Source Creation Date: July 23, 2025, 3:27 am

I was all cried out by the time he returned, my head heavy with resignation. No doubt my red eyes and puffy face conveyed my heartache. Not that I'd have guessed based on his nonchalant demeanor or the broad smile he offered as he lowered the tray.

"Here." He gestured to the food.

My belly growled as I inhaled the aroma of meat and potatoes. How long had it been since I'd had a decent hot meal? I couldn't even recall. Walking around me, he pushed my seat toward the table, drawing me closer to the steaming hot plate. My gaze surveyed the gravy and mashed potatoes hungrily. As far as I was concerned, it was a feast.

"Tuck in." He pushed a fork toward me. "It's important you eat properly."

Anxiety intensified at his implication, but my hunger was the loudest call. Reaching for the cutlery, I pushed it into the potatoes and lifted them to my mouth. My senses erupted as I swallowed the buttery mash.

"Good, huh?" His smirk should have riled, but I was too grateful to care. Leaning forward, he ruffled my hair in an almost tender way. "I knew you'd enjoy it."

I locked eyes with him while I chewed, trying to make sense of everything. I needed him in a very tangible way—for food, for protection from the grotesque mob outside that door—but the truth was, Dylan was as much a threat as any of them.

"You are beautiful, you know." His hand slid to my damp cheek, caressing my skin. "In another world, at another time, I'd have really liked you."

I pulled in a shaky breath. What the fuck was I supposed to say to that? This hardly seemed the time for a romantic interlude, but maybe I could use it to my advantage? Perhaps if he had a soft spot for me, he might let me go, sneak me out somehow, make an exception for me—for his child. I was carrying his child, for God's sake—that must mean something to him.

“Yes, Sir. Thank you.”

“No, thank you.” He leaned against the wall, watching me eat. “You’ve made my first full day on the job very satisfactory.”

A cold shudder of revulsion raced along my spine, my hand pausing by the plate.

“Don’t look at me like that!” He chuckled as though there was anything even vaguely funny about my predicament. He’d signed up to take women against their will, to knock them up for a fucking bonus! The man must have no ethics at all.

“I don’t know what to say.” I pressed the prongs of the fork into a piece of beef. It was succulent enough, but suddenly, the whole meal was less appealing.

“Then say nothing.” Dylan straightened, his tone terser. “That would be good advice for you, regardless.”

“What does that mean, Sir?” I put down the fork, my fingers gripping tighter around the handle.

“It means this is your lot now, woman.” Dylan’s dark laughter reverberated around the room. “If I can even call you that anymore. I heard the laws have already been changed. All those single girls of childbearing age whose tits don’t make the grade have lost all their automatic civic rights.”

I knew that much already.

“That barely makes you a woman at all.”

“Wh-What am I then?” I hardly dared to ask, but this was at the root of everything. When men like him stopped seeing me as a woman—a person—everything had gone to hell. “If I’m not a woman, then what?”

“A thing.” He offered me a twisted smile as he shrugged. “Property, a piece of meat, I don’t know.”

“Wh-What?”

Logically, I knew that was the new consensus, but it didn’t make sense. Not coming from another human being, not coming from the man who’d ensured I’d come before he impaled me. My brain couldn’t compute the vile words.

“What, Sir.” He moved so fast, I scarcely saw the motion, my first awareness his huge hand at my throat, pinning me back against the chair. “We’ve been through this.”

His fingers stiffened, making it more difficult to breathe.

“P-Please,” I stammered, panic exploding in my mind. This couldn’t be the way I died—no way. I had to live, had to survive for the baby.

“You’ve gotta learn your place, bitch,” he snarled. “You’re nothing but a glorified cow now. Cattle to be leashed and used.” His hand relaxed, an insidious grin stretching over his lips. “And you can be useful. I already know that.”

Air flooded my windpipe, and relieved, I snatched it in.

“That means a little less mouth and a little more deference.”

“I’m sorry,” I gasped, though I’d never been less sorry in my life. Dylan was the closest thing to an ally I had in this grim place, and although I loathed him, I needed him on my side. “I’ll do better, Sir.”

“I know you will, sweetie pie.” His hand rose, tapping my chin lightly. “You’re carrying the very first child this unit has produced. That’s quite an achievement.”

Pain throbbed in my head, goading the well of nausea churning in my stomach.

“Maybe I’ll even let you stay with me for a while. I’d like to see what the little bugger looks like.” He snorted. “See if he’s as handsome as his dad.”

I blew out a breath as his hand finally drew away, suppressing the urge to counter him, to query the fact it might not be a boy. What was the point? Modern man, it seemed, had little interest in girls until they were available to spawn the next generation. It was fucking horrendous.

“Th-Thank you, Sir.” It repulsed me to ingratiate myself to him, but there was no choice. This was my future, and bleak as it was, manipulating him to protect what glimmer of hope I had left was all I had.

“You’d like that, huh?” His lips curled. “Like to stay with me?”

I wanted to punch him in the nuts and gun down every man between here and the border, but sadly, that was not a viable alternative. The fork in my hand was looking more and more like a weapon as the seconds ticked by.

“Y-Yes, Sir.”

“Then behave yourself.” He rose, untying the ropes holding me to the chair. Running his fingers through his dark hair, he turned and strode away. “Eat your meal and keep your mouth closed, and maybe you’ll have a chance of getting what you want.”

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What I wanted? Was he fucking joking? Could he seriously think that being stripped, leashed, and impregnated by him was what I wanted? Only a few months ago, I'd been in a job I loved, having the time of my life. Now everything had been ripped away, and I was reduced to this. I glanced down at my plate, my stomach knotting at the prospect of having to eat more, and that's when it came to me—the only realistic shot of survival was to seduce him, to prove myself useful for more than just conception. I despised the logical conclusion, but it was cogent—and my best shot of surviving this shitshow.

“Can I help you with anything else, Sir?”

I employed the sexiest voice I could muster, conscious he'd literally just told me to be quiet. It was a gamble, playing this game, but it was the only hand I had left. No part of me really wanted him, but I was a pragmatist. It was better to stay here screwing Dylan than dumped God only knew where at the hands of some other evil bastard. Dylan was definitely the better devil.

“What did you have in mind?” His expression softened as he glanced back at me.

“Whatever you like, Sir.” Batting my lashes, I pushed the plate away before I slid to my knees. I ignored the gag rattling at my collar bone and tried not to overthink. The more he enjoyed my company, the less likely I was to end up back in one of those cages, deserted and alone. I had no hope of escape in a hole like that, and my heart went out to every one of the women still locked in them, but I had to concentrate on my opportunity. It was every woman for herself.

“The advice is we should avoid intercourse in these early weeks.” He sat on the edge

of the bed. “But there are other ways you can satisfy me.” Winking, he clicked his fingers, signaling for me to come to his feet. A surge of indignation spiked, the urge to tell him to go fuck himself loitering on the tip of my tongue. I wasn’t a doormat from the 1950s, a good little wife who would beg and crawl. An independent woman who’d never needed a man, I was naked and on my knees. I was out of choices, and submitting to Dylan was about the only option I had left.

“You can polish this for me.” His hand rose to his zipper, pulling it down and releasing his cock. “Prove you’re better than cattle.”

Falling to my palms, I inched closer to his feet, the rope that had secured me to the bed and chair falling between my knees. I could do this. I had to do this. I already knew how good the thing could feel inside me. I could pleasure Dylan and make myself indispensable if it meant it saved my skin.

“Yes, Sir.”

I swallowed him down, flicking my tongue over his crown before the tip lunged deep into my throat. His groan told me just how much he relished the sensation.

“Fuck, yeah.”

It didn’t take long for him to take control, his hands shifting to the back of my head and encouraging me up and down his shaft.

“Definitely better than any cow I’ve ever seen.”

My gaze flitted to his before the view was obscured as he pushed me back toward his balls.

“You’re gonna look great when you’re full term.” His palm pressed at my nape, holding me down. “With those titties finally big and filled with milk.”

Pulling hot ribbons of air through my nostrils, I tried to ignore his disrespect, but the image lingered. I couldn't imagine myself that way, let alone in this awful situation. If I ever contemplated motherhood, it hadn't been anything close to this nightmare. The thought of being farmed and ordered to produce children for this fucked-up system was nauseating, let alone the fact men like Dylan might actually be turned on by the prospect.

“God, yes.”

Fisting my hair, he compelled my head up and down at his pace, and obligingly, I complied. The sooner he came, the sooner he'd be satiated and willing to go easy on me. The scent of his arousal swirled, his precum coating the back of my throat as he used me roughly.

I refused to engage, denied the way my clit throbbed at being made to perform for him, just as I shut down thoughts of all the worst-case scenarios. Placating Dylan with sexual hedonism had to work. It was the only plan I had.

“Fuuck!” Wrenching me by the hair, he was back on his feet, pumping his hot seed over my face. “Very good.” His thumb stroked the side of my face. “You'll definitely be good to keep around.”

I worked hard to disregard the tears stinging in my eyes, parting my lips as he covered me in cum. It was fucking ridiculous, but I actually bloomed under his perverse praise, glad he wanted to keep me—like this. My gaze fell to the floor when he released me, though I wasn't sure if it was gravity or shame that held it there.

“You like the taste of my cum, huh?”

“Yes, Sir,” I answered, licking the remainder from my lips. That much wasn't a lie, at least. I'd always enjoyed giving head and had been complimented on my skills over the years.

“That’s good news.” His finger tipped up my chin to meet his stare. “We’ll always appreciate an excellent cocksucker around here.”

Time lengthened as our gazes locked, his blue eyes scanning over the semen drying on my face, and for one fleeting moment, I thought there was cause for optimism, sensed he was going to kiss me, that he’d take pity on me—that things would be okay.

“Lucky me.” His face neared, his mouth grazing my lips as his hand wrapped around the rope falling from my neck. “Finding such attractive cattle to breed with.”

“Sir.”

I didn’t belong to him, nor any man, but I had nothing left to lose. No possessions, no options. No dignity. I may as well play the dumb female and give him what he wanted. He’d already marked my card by inseminating me within hours.

“It’s not the normal procedure, but perhaps I can make an exception for you, Eloise. Maybe I’ll keep you bound in here for my own personal use.”

It wasn’t great, but his idea was considerably better than the only viable alternatives.

“Thank you, Sir.” My heart pounded at the eagerness of my tone.

“Yeah.” Dylan drew away, dragging me closer to his body. “I could work with that. My own personal fuck whore, and in the meantime, you grow my baby.” Dylan smiled, revealing a line of perfect teeth. “I’d like to fuck those tits when they’re filled with milk before I try some.”

I shivered at his menacing prophecy.

“I’ve heard it’s a real delicacy.”

Oh God. My stomach cramped at the horrendous thought, but I tried not to let the panic show.

“Y-Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” Chuckling, he pushed me away and rose to his full height. “That’s decided then. You stay for now.”

I couldn’t decide if I was relieved or terrified as he clutched the rope and dragged me to the door.

“S-Sir?” I scuttled behind him on my hands and knees, cold air hitting me in the face as the door opened.

“Shut it.” Scowling, he waited for me to crawl into the dark corridor before he reached down and hoisted me over his shoulder. “Didn’t I already tell you to be quiet?” He smacked my ass, the noise echoing around the hall as he strode away with me.

“I told you I’ll keep you, but I have other things to do.” His fingers delved between my cheeks. “Other whores to knock up. You’ll have to wait your turn.”

What? Headfirst over his shoulder, I could barely keep up, but I recognized the drop in temperature and the concrete as he stalked through the area he’d hosed me down in.

“Oh God.” I forced my lips together as the words escaped, knowing already where he was taking me. “Please, Sir, no!”

“I. Said. Shut. It.” He punctuated the words with a hard slap to both my cheeks before dumping me onto the cold, tiled floor.

Glancing in both directions, the rows of cages loomed.

“Please don’t put me back in there.” Any remaining dignity bled from me, my fear of incarceration in the tiny metal box outweighing all sense of pride and reason.

I couldn’t go back in there, couldn’t be that vulnerable again...

“For fuck’s sake.” He shook his head, clutching the rope separating us. “The gag goes back in.”

“No!” I pleaded, but he was already moving, swooping down with large hands to lift the ball and shove it back in place.

“Cooperate, and I won’t chain your hands in there.” He gestured toward the closest crate with an open door. “But the gag stays in.”

“Oooo,” I moaned, ceding to his will as he pushed it into place. In the end, the gag was like everything else—something I had no choice about.

“If I find you’ve removed it while I’m busy, I’ll invite the others to use your ass and mouth while you’re here.” A glimmer of fury glinted in his eyes. “We have cameras pointed on each cage, so I’ll know.”

Terror bloomed in my chest at his threat, his snarling tone convincing me he meant every word.

“In.” He pointed to the crate, holding the door open as he towered above.

Paralyzed with fear, I didn’t know what to do. I was doomed whichever direction I chose. I didn’t want to be back in that cage, but the thought of the others drooling over me or worse was truly repugnant. The only way to ensure I wasn’t fair game was to obey him, to proactively put myself into the oppressive prison.

“Don’t make me say it again, or you’ll pay the price.”

Heart racing, I shifted toward the suffocating isolation. I only had Dylan’s word—not much in the grand scheme—but the thought of the alternative route was too debilitating to contemplate. I crawled into the dark, cold space, mouth gagged as I turned in time to see him slam the door shut. Pressing my fingers between the bars, I eyed him imploringly as he padlocked it closed.

“It’s about time you showed some obedience.”

My head fell at his angry growl, the weight of my woe unbearable. By the time I peered up again, he was right there crouching on the other side, surveying me.

“Oh, and Eloise.” His eyes narrowed. “Disappoint me again, and I’ll make sure they ship you straight to the warehouse. There’ll be plenty of other pricks to put in your pussy once this baby’s out.”

I shivered at his predatory tone.

“Keep the gag in, and if you’re good, I’ll come back for you later.”

Pressing my face into the metal, I panted around the dreadful ball. I was back in the bloody cage, unable to cry out for help, and the worst of it was, this time, I had crawled into the damn thing. Alone and abandoned, it looked as if I was the only woman frequenting one, though I couldn’t decide if the thought was reassuring. Whatever was happening to the other women elsewhere, I hoped they had more strength than me, better judgment in the face of impossible choices.

I watched as his boots disappeared, their dull rhythmic march echoing around the barren space. The final thing I saw before they stalked out of sight was the door slamming closed behind him. Dylan had left me, and I had no way of knowing if he’d ever return.

The End.