



KAIZER WOLF

Innocent Devil's



Harem 1

Innocent Devil's Harem 1

Innocent Devil's Harem Book 1

K AIZER W OLF

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Originally Published on Patreon: August 12, 2020

Originally Published on Smashwords: April 18, 2021

Smashwords ISBN-13: 978-1005935986

Copyright Year: 2020

Revised: July 7, 2021

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NOTICE

This story contains adult content that may not be suitable for all audiences, including explicit sexual relations, as well as unconventional social dynamics (including a harem).

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CHAPTER 1: RESCUE

I got home from school, parking my silver used car in its usual spot, and went inside to begin making dinner for myself and my...

Well, essentially, *my housemate* .

The girl I lived with was five years older than me, and had practically been a part of my life since I was two-years-old, our families having always been super close.

However, due to an extremely unfortunate car accident, involving all of our parents, the two of us had been living together by ourselves for five years now.

Serenity had been eighteen at the time when it happened, still in her Senior year of high school, causing me to be sent to a foster home for almost a month while she attempted to gain custody of her almost thirteen-year-old childhood friend.

Unfortunately, they didn't exactly allow regular custody, but I was allowed to live with her, since she was automatically designated as the conservator to the trust fund I'd been left, with a court-assigned guardian checking in on us once a month until I turned eighteen.

Honestly, in hindsight, I was surprised it had only taken a month for her to bring me home, since I wasn't at all related to her in any way, and there wasn't even paperwork on file of my adoption with my adoptive parents, only a Delayed Birth Certificate with fabricated dates...

Yeah, I was adopted to begin with, with my adoptive mom and dad having set up a trust fund that specified Serenity's parents were to be my godparents, and be the point-of-contact for the fund.

Meaning, they were to be the conservator, or guardian for my property and assets.

Or rather, I supposed 'god-family' was more accurate, since it was specified that anyone legally an adult could take care of my assets. Which meant Serenity legally became the conservator and point-of-contact for a fund that contained a two-and-a-half million life insurance policy, all of

which was money meant to help take care of me in the event of their untimely death.

And oddly enough, her parents had done the exact same thing, leaving her with three million in life insurance money, though she didn't need a legal representative due to her age.

I was sure none of them ever anticipated dying at the same time, considering my adoptive parents were likewise supposed to be her godparents, but the unthinkable truly happened.

Unfortunately, the missing adoption paperwork did cause a bit of a problem, but ultimately the trust funds were what helped the most, in her saving me from the foster home.

Eventually the court decided that a clerical error must have been made somewhere along the line, and assigned a legal guardian for regular visits while also allowing Serenity's legal right to be the conservator of my trust fund to proceed, with the judge seeing no reason to put a kid who'd just lost his parents through hell, over a few technicalities.

Never mind the stress it put on Serenity, who was also going through hell after losing her own mom and dad.

But now we lived together, my court-assigned guardian having no problem allowing Serenity to take care of my living arrangements, with court approval of course. Although, I wasn't sure how me turning eighteen a couple weeks ago affected the status of her being in control of the trust fund, not that she ever really used money from my fund anyway. She'd always used her own money, which meant the actual value in my account had grown beyond the two and a half million, due to investment income.

Still, I had no idea if emancipation was automatic or if I had to file for it. I at least knew that I was already emancipated from the court's oversight, since I wouldn't be receiving any more visits from my legal guardian, but wasn't entirely sure how the trust fund part worked.

Not that it really mattered, since I still had to finish my last year of high school either way, and would probably still continue living at home while I worked on some college credits.

But at the very least, we wouldn't have to worry about those random visits from the court-assigned guardian, although I had to admit it was only a minor inconvenience, since the older woman knew that Serenity had things covered at home and was responsible for our finances anyway.

The only problem was, the lady liked to talk, and would often occupy several hours of our time, once a month, as she talked Serenity's ear off while I pretended like I was doing homework.

Initially, after everything was resolved and the courts allowed Serenity to be responsible for my living arrangements, we tried living in her parent's old house for a while, but it was too painful for us, both of us having a ton of memories tied to that location. And of course, she wouldn't move me into my old home for the same reason.

Thus, within the first six months, we'd moved into a much smaller house, hidden away in the trees on the edge of the city, with her having purchased it with a portion of her insurance money.

Honestly, seeing the pain in her eyes, I couldn't help wishing that at least hers had survived the ordeal. Because, even though Serenity's parents weren't mine biologically, I still grew up around them, and it still felt like I was losing loved ones either way.

Of course, a selfish part of me wished mine were alive too, but if I had to choose, I would have chosen to take the sadness away from *her*, instead of me.

It was agonizing to lose all of them, especially at the same time. Horrible for our world to be normal one day, and turned upside-down the next, with all our parents gone in the blink of an eye.

For the first year, Serenity trembled whenever she got in a car.

She tried to hide it, but I noticed.

It was a reminder for both of us, and yet we couldn't exactly go without transportation.

And even though I was adopted, and theoretically had other parents out there, I had no idea who my real mom and dad were, so finding them wasn't really an option.

The official story was that my mom found me on the doorstep, as crazy as that sounded, but honestly not even Serenity knew for sure where I actually came from.

Not that my biological parents would have been a replacement for the people who raised us. Certainly, not for Serenity, considering it was her real mom and dad who died.

But as far as where I came from, my older friend just remembered me showing up one night when she was about to turn seven.

Her childish mind had thought God answered her prayer for a playmate as a birthday present, often wishing either her parents, or mine, would have a baby.

And to this day she occasionally teased me about being ‘her gift from God.’

But I doubted it was God, or a god, that had been the one to answer her prayer, given what I knew about myself. Granted, I would never dare tell Serenity why. She was the only person I truly loved, and I could never betray her by revealing that I’d discovered at a young age that I wasn’t like her...

That I wasn’t human.

Our new house, which we’d lived in for over four years now, had a large spacious kitchen that also served as a dining room. Despite the fact that it was only the two of us, we’d kept a lot of the furniture from her old house, unable to part with everything. Thus, the dining room table could seat six people comfortably – two on each side and one person at each end, with plenty of room in between. Really, the table was large enough that eight people could probably be squished together if an extra chair was added to each side.

However, as it was, only two chairs were used with any frequency, even if we had six at the table.

Sighing, I glanced at the clock, and then sat down at the table, leaving the hot ‘*cheddar, potato, and bacon soup*’ I’d made on low heat on the stove to prevent it from getting cold.

On a good day, Serenity would arrive home a little after 5 PM from her job as a police detective.

However, as it neared 5:45 PM, I began to suspect this might not be a good day. She had been working on a case recently that was causing her a lot of stress, but she hadn’t brought home any of the files yet, so I didn’t know what it was about.

Yes, I sometimes snooped through her casework files. I snooped through a lot of her things, if I was being honest, though I’d never share that with her. She’d probably be mortified if she knew I’d been through her underwear on numerous occasions.

Sometimes, although very rarely, if the work situation was bad enough, I would intervene myself to stop the criminals. However, I also knew that it might raise suspicion if someone made the connection that all the incidents

when I'd helped happened to be *her* cases. Thus, to avoid that outcome, I only got involved in the situations that were exceptionally upsetting for my unconventional roommate, usually involving abuse against women.

And by abuse, I meant serial killer cases where the victims wouldn't survive without intervention.

Serenity didn't technically have to work, since we had enough money to last us for an extremely long time, possibly all our lives, but she'd initially wanted to make sure no one doubted she was responsible enough to raise me.

Still, I didn't know why she'd chosen to pursue a career as a detective.

Prior to getting the position, she'd held another job almost full-time while attending the police academy, and yet soon found herself with some of the best scores in the state. I'd asked her 'why' once, but she only gave the allusive answer that she enjoyed solving mysteries – allusive, because I didn't feel like her answer explained her intense drive.

Or maybe her intense drive was just to prove she could take care of me.

Glancing at the clock again, I got up to grab my backpack, deciding to get to work on my homework while I waited for her to get home.

It was near the end of the spring semester, toward the end of April, my graduation only about a month away, so it was already warm outside on most days. I really enjoyed the warmer weather, mainly because I liked it when there were leaves on the trees. But I was also glad school was almost over in general, eager to get that part of my life behind me.

I was an adult now and wanted to feel like an adult, instead of a kid or dependent.

Honestly, I didn't mind school itself, so much as I was tired of dealing with my shallow human peers. As I'd gotten older, my body became lean and muscular, sparking a lot of interest among my female classmates, as well as attempts made by the guys to win my friendship. However, my memory was a lot better than theirs, and I wasn't one to forgive easily.

I could still remember all the jokes and teasing they'd done just after everything happened, coming from both the boys and girls. It hadn't taken long for the whole school to find out I'd lost my parents, and I quickly discovered just how hateful middle school kids could be, with them beginning to harass me about living alone with my 'hot' older friend, who was barely out of high school at that point.

Not just suggestive comments, but true harassment.

True *hate* , making it seem like it was really a big deal, and I was a huge pervert.

Apparently, one of the kids had overheard a couple of teachers discussing the whole thing about her becoming responsible for my living arrangements at such a young age, and even overheard about the trust fund, and I didn't hear the end of it after that for a solid semester.

Funny how kids that age could always turn something into harassment, because if that happened now, I wouldn't be nearly as bothered by it.

But honestly, in hindsight, it was only about three months of torment. Still, it felt like an eternity to my crushed thirteen-year-old self. At the very least, it slowly taught me to not let words bother me – otherwise, I might not have survived the regular onslaught of bullying.

Nevertheless, I still hated them all. Or maybe 'hate' wasn't the right word. It was more like I couldn't consider trusting them again, even though I'd never had much trust to begin with.

When I finally heard Serenity's car pull up, I glanced at the clock to see that it was almost 6:45 PM, indicating that it might have just been a really busy day. However, my powerful senses told me differently.

Even over the noise of the car engine, with its familiar clanking sound from a loose bolt, I could hear her fast heartbeat. And even despite the smell of bacon, I could smell her salty tears, as well as the scent humans gave off when they were grieved – something that shouldn't even be possible for a wild animal.

The only predators who had a comparable sense of smell were the shark, which could detect a drop of blood from about a quarter of a mile away, as well as the bear, which could smell a food source almost twenty miles away. However, my supernatural nose could home in on a scent from much further if I concentrated hard enough.

When Serenity didn't come inside after turning off the engine, I realized she must not want me to see her crying. Granted, it's not like she would be able to hide the fact that she *had been* crying. I knew her face would be red and puffy, especially around her deep brown eyes, even if she managed to get ahold of herself anytime soon.

Sighing again, I got up to go bring her inside.

The kitchen was connected to the rest of the house by the foyer area, where the door, stairs, and hallway to the living room all met. The wide entrance to the living room was only about halfway down the hall –

someone coming down the stairs could easily see into it – but the hallway continued on to the laundry room and backdoor.

Underneath the stairs was a small bathroom with only a toilet and sink. Upstairs, above the kitchen, was Serenity's room, along with a spacious closet, whereas on the other side of the house was my room and the bathroom we both shared. It was only a two-bedroom house, but all the rooms were extremely spacious, providing more than enough living space for just the two of us.

Opening the front door, I saw Serenity resting her head against the steering wheel, her dark brown hair disheveled, trying to control her breathing like she was on the verge of having a panic attack. Her blue car was parked at the edge of the long gravel driveway, in its usual spot next to my silver one.

Tall trees lined each side of the drive, including all around the house, giving us a sense of privacy since we were about a tenth of a mile off the road. Even though we lived on three acres of land, I only had to mow roughly half an acre in total, including the two strips of grass along the driveway.

Not wanting to startle her, I tried to be noisy as I walked over and then gently tapped on the window, rather than just opening it. However, despite her not looking up at me, I knew she'd heard me. Keeping her forehead on the steering wheel, she moved her hand to unlock the door, only to open it up herself. The moment I was able to, I knelt down and reached out to pull her into a hug.

Serenity immediately accepted the offered gesture, returning my embrace as she began to sob.

"Can you tell me about it?" I whispered after about a minute of her crying on my shoulder.

She immediately shook her head no, before answering. "Not officially..." She then told me anyway. "It's a s-serial killer case, Kai. And it looks like h-he targets only women." She sighed heavily, trying to speak clearly despite her sobbing. "And what he d-does to them is...horrible."

"How many?" I wondered, already considering intervening, since this predator had made her so upset. This was by far the worst I'd seen her.

She tried sucking in a deep breath. "T-Technically, he's only killed two so far. But a new girl was just kidnapped..." Her voice trailed off as a whine escaped her throat, a sob then erupting from her chest as she began

falling apart again. Her face was twisted in anguish. “And if w-we don’t find her soon...”

“What’s the timeline?” I asked, speaking in a way I knew would help her mind shift into detective-mode.

It worked – not perfectly, but it worked.

Serenity took a shaky breath and began speaking more clearly, as if a switch had flipped in her brain. “If his two victims are indication of a pattern, then she’ll be dead by midnight. He leaves a spray paint symbol, along with a token from his previous victim – that’s how we know who kidnapped her. Previous evidence suggests that the first two were tortured in the most inhumane ways possible, before he killed them while sexually assaulting them in the woods.”

“The woods?” I repeated in surprise, feeling that was odd if it was really the pattern.

“Yes...” She pulled away to look at me then, her deep brown eyes hesitant, knowing she shouldn’t be sharing information about this, but deciding to do it anyway. “We think he enjoys the chase. He wants them to run, probably so they have a sense of hope – that they might find freedom after being tormented.” She paused. “Only for him to catch them and finish it off horribly.” A pained expression crossed her face again as she barely managed to maintain her composure.

Suddenly, I realized I’d missed a fundamental question – something to explain why she was upset to *this* extreme. Because her reaction was far beyond what I’d ever seen before.

“Serenity...do you know her? The girl he took?”

Her composure broke, and she lost it again.

I waited patiently for her to gather herself, not wanting to seem too pushy. After all, I could never let my ‘technically a cop’ older friend find out I might get involved in this situation. She could never know my secret.

While I waited, my mind began going through the people she knew, wondering who it might be. Honestly, my housemate didn’t have very many friends – the only close friend she had was a girl named Gabriella who she met only a few months ago. Serenity also had a few coworkers who she was friendly with, including Jessica and Abby, but otherwise the list was pretty short.

Granted, it could also just be a random acquaintance from high school or the police academy. Simply knowing the person could make a case feel a

lot more personal. All it would take was just seeing a familiar face, coupled with knowing what might happen to the girl if they didn't catch the guy in time.

After a few minutes of holding onto her, I was about to prompt her again, but then she finally responded to my question on her own.

"Kai," she said in a strained voice. "It's my friend. It's Gabriella." She sobbed again, her words coming out in a whine. "And they removed me from the case when they realized my connection."

Fuck.

Suddenly, I found myself holding my breath. Because it *wasn't* just someone she knew more casually. It was the worst person it could possibly be. And not just for her.

For me, too.

Gabriella was twenty, only three years younger than Serenity, and when they'd both noticed they frequented the same coffee shop regularly, they struck up a conversation over a book that quickly turned into a friendship. It also helped that Serenity occasionally had lunch at the Chinese restaurant next to the nail salon where Gabriella worked, giving them an easy way to hang out almost daily.

Even when my older housemate wasn't in the mood for Chinese, she went anyway to socialize, and before long they were having lunch together every day at one of the many restaurants in the area.

From what I understood about Gabriella, she was extremely kind, although somewhat shy. She didn't have many friends of her own, largely because she wasn't interested in the stuff most of her peers liked to do, like partying. Instead, Gabriella loved to read, with the book she'd been carrying being what prompted Serenity to talk to her.

I'd only met her once briefly when she visited our house a handful of weeks ago, but I quickly excused myself after being around her for only a handful of seconds, because I'd never reacted to anyone like I was reacting to her. And it threatened to expose my secret.

Gabriella had red hair, green eyes, and was exceptionally attractive. However, unlike other redheads I'd known, her hair was so red that it almost looked dyed, and she kept it fairly short at just a couple of inches above her shoulders. She was about four inches shorter than me, two inches shorter than Serenity, and had a massive rack large enough to make any guy's head turn and most girls jealous.

But the biggest attraction was actually her scent. Everything about her aroused me, but her natural smell was nearly overwhelming. I had no idea what caused it, wondering if the fact she was vegetarian, which I'd learned by eavesdropping, was the reason.

Technically, it wasn't dangerous for me to be fully aroused, and it was actually something I allowed to happen on a regular basis when I was alone in my room...sometimes in Serenity's room, when she wasn't home.

But the problem was I couldn't avoid revealing the fact that I wasn't human.

I'd learned at a very young age that strong emotions and desires caused my body to begin uncontrollably transforming into my more devilish form, my hair turning white, my skin turning dark gray, my irises transitioning to a glowing gold while my sclera turned pitch-black. At the very least, if I hadn't run upstairs when I did, then I doubted Gabriella would have ever returned, never mind Serenity's reaction.

I was sincerely afraid of my older housemate's rejection, in particular. She was the only support I had, and honestly my only friend, since I felt like I could sincerely consider her a true friend at this point, even despite the five-year age difference.

So I couldn't afford to lose her. I couldn't take that risk.

However, the attraction I felt toward Gabriella was so strong that just thinking about her was making me aroused now. And *pissed*, when combined with the knowledge that she was probably being tortured at that very moment. Between the two emotions, I could feel my body threatening to turn gray underneath my clothing, my chest definitely darker now, as well as the back of my neck and the skin along my spine.

I took a deep breath in an effort to clear my mind, knowing there was nothing I could do right away, without Serenity suspecting something was wrong.

Yet, I didn't want Gabriella to suffer either. While I'd never been tortured myself, I knew that even minutes of something unpleasant could feel like hours, depending on the severity of the situation.

Taking another deep breath, I sighed heavily and spoke up again, using my affectionate pet-name for her. "Let's go inside, Ren."

She nodded in agreement, her hands and legs trembling as she grabbed her purse and attempted to stand up. I offered my support, since it was obvious she was struggling on her own, helping her walk up to the house.

The front porch was only about five feet wide and two feet deep, from door to stairs, the overhanging roof just big enough to allow someone to be comfortably out of the rain if they were waiting outside. The window on the right side of the door peeked into the kitchen, whereas the left one looked into the living room.

Granted, the front windows had sheer white curtains hanging over them, preventing anyone from seeing inside during the day, and allowing them to only see shadows at night. The only other way to see into the house from the front was through the door, which had a decorative half-circle window near the top.

Although, it would take a taller person, standing on their tiptoes, to actually see into the house.

I carefully escorted Serenity inside, keeping my thoughts controlled, and helped her sit down at the kitchen table. Realizing from the scent that the soup was beginning to burn slightly, I went ahead and turned off the stove entirely, glancing at the clock as I did so.

It was just after 7 PM, which meant it would be dark soon, given the time of the year.

In a way, I was almost glad the victim was Gabriella...

Or rather, I was thankful I'd been given the opportunity to meet her at least once. It could be difficult for me to help in a situation when I didn't have much to go on, but coming into close proximity to her allowed me to nail down the most important thing that would help me find her.

Her scent.

Just thinking about it was enough to almost expose me again. I could feel the base of my hairs rise slightly, being well familiar with the sensation, knowing my hair would begin rapidly turning white if I wasn't careful with my thoughts.

"Do you feel like eating?" I asked gently, trying to distract myself.

I began preparing a bowl even if she said no, since I hadn't eaten yet myself. When she mumbled that she wasn't hungry, I added a few extra scoops, considering I ate a ton more than her. I then sat down at the table and began working on my dinner while Serenity stared into space.

I suspected she was beginning to feel numb as it settled in that there wasn't any hope for her friend – her *best* friend. It was actually kind of amazing how close two people could become in such a short amount of time, but they really hit it off. If it wasn't for the fact that they looked so

different, someone might even think they were sisters by how comfortable they were with each other. As it was, most people would probably be shocked to discover they weren't childhood friends or something similar.

Unexpectedly, Serenity bolted from her seat, almost knocking over her chair. "I'm going to try to find her," she announced, not waiting for a reply. "I know I probably won't be able to, but I have to try. I can't just sit here and do nothing."

I nodded to indicate I understood, not about to suggest she do anything different. This case wasn't at all like the others. Plus, this was good for me too. It meant I could go searching for her sooner without having to worry about Serenity wondering where I'd disappeared to.

"Okay," I said in agreement. "Just be careful..." My voice trailed off. I hoped she wouldn't be upset that I wasn't offering to go. On the one hand, I was still in high school, but on the other hand, I was legally an adult now, so it wasn't like she'd be bringing a kid along.

Serenity seemed surprised by my response though, looking like she didn't expect me to agree so easily. She then dashed around the edge of the table and nearly tackled me in my chair with a hug. "I will, I promise. I'll have my gun and mace. I love you."

"I love you too," I whispered simply, holding her thin athletic form in my arms, knowing there was a small part of me that meant that more deeply than I probably should.

She gave me a quick kiss on the temple, and then grabbed her things to head out the door.

I ate more quickly when I heard her car engine start and the tires began kicking up gravel in her rush to get on the road.

"Now," I said to myself, taking my last bite and standing up. "Time to hunt."

Heading to the backdoor, I allowed myself to fully transform as I stepped outside, my softly glowing yellow irises allowing me to see as clearly in the twilight as if it was the middle of the day. I then took off my shirt in preparation for what would soon come from my rapidly restructuring back muscles.

A second later, and a pair of lightweight bat-like wings, spanning a good twenty feet if I stretched them out to the sides, burst from my upper back and I instantly leapt into the air to take flight. I had no idea where to even begin looking, beyond the forest, so I just focused on my senses of

smell and hearing while flying as fast as I could around the edge of the city where there were still a lot of trees. I was glad my ability to home in on a scent was so powerful, because within a matter of minutes I'd captured Gabriella's aroma, even despite the plethora of other odors vying for my attention.

She was at least ten miles away, and I could smell that the chase was already on. Her sweet scent was stronger than usual from her sweating, ironically making it easier for me to pick up on it, and it was also tainted with terror.

Just like other emotions, fear had a distinct scent.

"I'm coming for you," I whispered, quickly changing my trajectory in the air.

While flying was much faster than running, it still took me a few minutes to find the general location of her whereabouts. However, once I was close enough, I could hear her too. She was running as fast as she could, although oddly, as if she didn't have arms.

I doubted she was sincerely lacking them though, because I didn't smell any blood. But her breathing was panicked, and I knew her mind was probably escalated beyond words as she literally ran for her life. There was someone chasing her too, running smoothly like they were holding themselves back. I suspected the predator had great endurance, significantly more than his prey.

Quickly dropping into the trees below, I slammed into the ground, dropping onto one knee from the impact before rising again to continue the chase on foot. However, I didn't have to go far before I was already almost on her location.

Just as she was about to come into sight, I heard her trip and fall hard on her front, coughing and gasping from having the wind knocked out of her. She then abruptly screamed as her assailant caught up to her, crouching down and flipping her over while laughing, like he was having the time of his life.

Enraged, I silently burst through the foliage just in time to see that the serial killer had the tip of a knife just beginning to draw blood on her partially exposed breast. I realized the reason why she couldn't defend herself was because she had her arms bound behind her back with a series of leather straps, like some kind of weird bondage fetish.

However, between the panicked look in her eyes, the terror as she screamed, the vulnerability of her body – I caught a glimpse of why this bastard was aroused by torturing his victims. It was everything that excited a predator, and I felt ashamed that her vulnerability even excited me a little...minus the panic and terror.

It was time to end this. *Now* .

Rapidly, in one swift motion, I closed the distance between me and my prey, grabbing him by the throat and yanking him off his feet into the air. In his shock, he reflexively tried to stab me with his blade, but I instead snagged the back of his hand like lightning and shoved the knife straight into his heart with my inhuman strength.

He didn't even have time to scream before the life was rapidly fading from his panicked eyes, not that he would have been able to make much noise anyway with my grip around his neck. A few seconds later, and I tossed him to the side, his body strewn awkwardly on the ground.

I then focused on the vulnerable girl lying before me, her short red hair strewn against the dirt in chaotic strands. My attack happened fast enough that I watched as her emerald eyes visibly registered that the monster who had been torturing her had unexpectedly been replaced with another. However, instead of screaming, she began crying in devastation.

I could smell it.

I could smell the brief hope she experienced leave her body as she accepted that she was going to die one way or another. She closed her eyes and turned her head away, her beautiful face twisted in grief as she sobbed.

Moved by her tears, I slowly knelt down, positioning myself so that my legs were straddling her thighs, though I wasn't actually touching her. I then reached out with a clawed hand, my black fingernails dangerously sharp, and gently touched the top of her torn blue shirt.

She flinched from the contact, sensing my fingers. "Please," she whimpered. "Please don't."

Realizing what she must think my intentions were, I gently grabbed her shirt at the chest and pulled it up to prevent her from being exposed any more than she already was. Her bra was missing, likely removed by the perp, but her torn shirt still mostly covered her up. The next biggest exposure was around her waist. She had white jeans on, but they were unbuttoned, revealing her pale pink underwear, held up only by their tightness around her butt and thighs.

The visible skin I could see on her arms and torso was already heavily bruised in most spots, except for her face surprisingly, yet I still didn't smell any blood on her other than the small cut on her chest.

Deciding to respond, I spoke quietly.

"I'm not going to hurt you," I whispered.

However, despite my words, she began crying even harder, and I could smell that there was just a hint of hope lingering around her again – just a hint, since she knew I might be lying.

To emphasize my point, I concentrated hard in order to force my black fingernails to return to a normal shape. I then slowly reached down and buttoned her pants back up, carefully pulling the zipper to the top. I could smell the hope strengthen, although her fierce sobbing didn't let up.

I then carefully moved to her side, sitting beside her and cautiously placing my hand beneath her neck, gently pulling her up into a sitting position. Gabriella was still a complete mess emotionally, unable to see through her tear-filled eyes, so I lifted her into my lap and rested her head against my bare chest while I began working on freeing her arms from their bonds.

As the last strap fell to the ground, she slowly pulled her arms in front of herself and let them lay limp in her lap.

I wasn't sure why I was staying at this point. I really couldn't afford for her to find out who I was, but something about her vulnerability did more than just entice me.

I was beginning to feel an emotion I had only previously felt for Serenity, although it was obviously a little different since there wasn't a complicated set of emotions hidden behind it. But as I held her, I slowly began to realize that I wasn't going to be able to leave her side unless she asked me to.

Because I *wanted* to feel that emotion, without the extra shameful stuff associated with feeling it for the wrong person.

Technically, there was no reason why I couldn't love Serenity, but with her being so much older than me, and with all the teasing I endured in middle school, it felt like I shouldn't even think that way.

But then again, with our families being so close, under different circumstances it was possible we might have become more than friends one day anyway...

‘No ,’ I silently chastised myself. ‘*She can’t know my secret. No one can.*’

Without warning, I slipped my hand underneath the girl’s knees and abruptly stood, causing her to gasp. Her entire body was trembling as I began moving, but I ignored it, instead focusing on walking back the way she and her attacker had come. I could smell gasoline in the air, and after walking almost half a mile I found a white box-van parked at the edge of an abandoned street.

Identifying a more feminine smell amongst the others, my nose picked out the scent of lip gloss in the van – I suspected it might mean her purse was there too. With my wing, which was very much like a large bony hand with webbed fingers, I reached out and opened the side door, before reaching inside and hooking the purse’s strap with the tip of my wing’s finger.

I then held it open with both wings in front of us, carefully sticking my hand inside while continuing to support her legs in the crook of my arm. She was still trembling, her eyes closed with her arms wrapped tightly around herself now.

Finding her phone, which had been turned off, I powered it on and waited for it to load. The sudden bright screen caused my pupils to shift their shape slightly, and I noticed from the corner of my eye that the light prompted her to open hers as well, to see what I was doing.

I quickly dialed the number to call the police the moment I could. However, I then hesitated just as I was about to start the call, deciding to speak to Gabriella for the second time. I glanced at her as I began, seeing that she had been eyeing me, before abruptly looking away when I made eye contact.

“Just to get our story straight. Obviously, someone rescued you, killing your would-be murderer, but you didn’t see who it was...” I paused. “Or *what* it was. Understood?”

She nodded quickly, still looking away.

Satisfied, I gestured with my hand. “Take the phone,” I instructed.

She slowly complied, and then upon seeing the number on the screen, she hit the appropriate button and held it up to her ear, still averting her gaze. The call barely rang once.

“What’s your emergency?” a female voice asked abruptly.

Gabriella hesitated as she tried to speak clearly. “Umm...I need help. I’m...I was...kidnapped.”

“Do you know where you are?” the woman asked in a quieter tone.

Gabriella shook her head, as if forgetting that the person on the other line couldn’t actually see her. “No. I’m outside.”

“Can I use your phone’s GPS to find you?” she requested.

Gabriella looked up at me then, as if she wasn’t sure if she needed my permission, so I nodded in response. She replied slowly. “Umm, yes.”

After a few seconds, the dispatcher spoke again. “Okay, sweetie. The police are on their way.” She then lowered her voice. “Is your kidnapper near you?”

Gabriella shook her head a second time, prompting me to smirk at her for gesturing again as if the woman could actually see her nonverbal responses. Her face flushed when she realized why I was suddenly grinning.

Sounding embarrassed, she tried to focus on answering the dispatcher. “N-No. He’s dead.”

There was a brief pause on the phone, before the woman finally responded. “How did he die?” she asked cautiously.

Gabriella glanced at me again as she replied. “Umm, someone saved me.”

The woman’s voice sounded urgent again. “Is that person with you now?”

I quickly shook my head, even though she should know the right answer, not wanting to even chance Gabriella giving them any indication that she’d spent any time with me.

Nevertheless, she hesitated in her response. “N-No...I’m by myself.”

“Okay, sweetie. The police should be there soon. I’m going to stay on the phone with you until they arrive, alright?”

Gabriella glanced at me again, as if wondering what she should say, but I had turned my head away from her.

In the distance, I could hear a rapidly approaching vehicle speeding down the road. I doubted it was a police car, because it didn’t have any sirens running. However, I could hear a scanner in the vehicle spouting out police codes.

There was also something familiar about the sound of the engine – a clanking sound, as if one of the bolts holding the engine was loose.

Snapping my head to look at Gabriella, I held out my hand for her to give me the phone, her knees still in the crook of my arm. She complied immediately, and I hung up on the dispatcher. I then slowly lowered her to her feet, but when her knees buckled underneath her, I lowered her to the ground instead.

I quickly replied to her confused expression. "Like I said. *No one* . Don't even tell your friend. Understand?"

She nodded slowly, just as confused as before, but then she heard the car approaching too. As she looked away, I used the opportunity to silently disappear into the trees. The sudden headlights on Gabriella's face caused her to shield her eyes, and she then looked back toward where I had been standing. When she realized I was gone, she quickly looked all around, seeming to search for me urgently as the car slammed on its breaks.

I watched as Serenity jumped out of the vehicle, gun in hand, and began running up to Gabriella with it pointed at the ground to the side. "Where is he?" she demanded.

"W-Who?" Gabriella asked, sounding scared.

Serenity looked at her in confusion for a second, before clarifying. "The serial killer."

"He's dead," she replied quickly.

It took Serenity a second to register her words, visibly relaxing a little. "Are you sure?"

Gabriella nodded in response, and Serenity hesitantly holstered her gun, glancing around one last time before kneeling down and wrapping her arms around her friend. They both began crying again.

"Oh Gabriella! I was so worried! I'm so glad you're safe!"

I could finally hear sirens in the distance and decided to get ready to leave before a ton of police showed up. I waited a few more minutes while she and Gabriella sobbed together, before finally dashing further into the forest.

Finding a good spot where the canopy above was thinner, I quickly climbed to the top of a tree, as far as the branches would support me, and then leapt high into the air to take flight.

Once I was high above the forest below, I continued to scan the area for a while longer for any signs of danger, before finally heading home. On my way, I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket, only to pull it out and see that

Serenity was calling. Of course, I couldn't exactly answer it while flying, so I let it ring until the call dropped.

Later on, I would just tell her I was in the shower or something.

Speaking of which, I sincerely did need to take a shower. Something about killing people always made me feel really dirty, even when no blood got on me. Certainly, slaughtering this serial killer hadn't been my first time, although I had never taken the life of someone innocent. Thus far, I'd only killed people who had committed murder at least once, viewing it as an eye for an eye.

And I never felt remorse for slaughtering a murderer, although I did always feel filthy afterward.

Dropping into our secluded backyard, I allowed my body to quickly deconstruct my wings and turn back into my human form. I was glad our house was surrounded by trees without any close neighbors. Otherwise, it would be difficult for me to come and go in this manner.

I then dashed inside and quickly got in the shower to begin rinsing off, in order to get rid of the sensation that was beginning to plague my mind. Unexpectedly, it was washing my hands thoroughly and roughly that seemed to help.

Satisfied that they were clean – and that my conscience felt clean – I let the water cascade down the back of my neck and along my spine. After a moment, a deep sigh escaped my chest and I felt my muscles finally relax.

I was glad Gabriella was safe, and that she would probably recover without any physical scarring. However, I knew she might be mentally scarred for life, depending on what she had endured prior to me rescuing her.

Sighing again, I sat down in the shower and tried to clear my thoughts of her, because thinking about the hot redhead was both arousing me and making me pissed again. For one, part of me just felt wrong about jerking off right now, but then I was sincerely pissed at the dead man who might have taken advantage of her, beyond just touching her.

I wanted to stab him in the heart again. I almost wished I had killed him more slowly. Made him suffer more before he died.

'Stop ,' I chastised myself in my thoughts. *'She's not yours. And she never will be. Just stop it. She's alive. You did a good thing. Now move on.'*

I cleared my mind again, and remained like that for a long time, letting the sensation of the water running over me be my only thought. This was

the fourth time I had killed someone, with the last three times all happening within the last three years – because that’s about how long Serenity had been a detective. Prior to that, the first and only other time that I’d killed someone, it had been truly an accident when I stumbled upon the scene. At least, an accident in the sense that I hadn’t gone looking for it, knowing what I would find.

Although, me killing the murderer certainly wasn’t an accident. It was also the only time I’d been too late to save the victim, and thus the only time I’d killed out of revenge instead of defense.

At the time, I’d only been nine years old, with the incident happening nine years ago. There had been a full moon that night, which meant I was struggling to sleep, as usual – that always seemed to happen once a month, as if the moon wanted me to come out to play. Or, at least, that’s what my nine-year-old self thought.

I snuck out of the house at about 2 AM, only to have my nose catch the trail of some weird smells that confused me. Within thirty minutes of running on foot, I’d discovered the source, shocked by the scene I stumbled upon.

I’d never been a fan of scary movies, since being afraid or startled could make me transform, so it had been especially traumatizing to discover a horror scene in real life.

Except that was the difference – it was *real life*. It wasn’t a movie, it wasn’t pretend, and I wasn’t helpless to change the plot unfolding before me. Nevertheless, even though I prevented the monster from dealing the finishing blow, the pregnant woman still died in my small arms just before the paramedics arrived.

Traumatizing indeed, for a nine-year-old, human or not. I didn’t return home that night for almost three hours, and even then, I didn’t act normal for months. Everyone knew something was wrong, but I wasn’t willing to share with any of them what I’d experienced. Nevertheless, the extra affection I got from my mom, as well as Serenity and her mom, were what helped me eventually recover.

Unexpectedly, I heard Serenity’s car pull up to the house, which snapped me out of my trance, prompting me to realize the water had long since gotten cold. Extreme temperatures didn’t bother me as much as it seemed to bother normal people, so it wasn’t unusual for me to not notice the cold water. I certainly could tell that there was a temperature difference

when I was paying attention, so I preferred hot showers like anyone else. But, whether scalding hot or freezing cold, the extremes were easily bearable.

I quickly turned the water off and jumped out.

After drying off, I glanced at my phone to see that I'd showered for over an hour and a half.

I grimaced, as I mumbled to myself. "Well, hopefully she won't be too pissed I used up all the hot water." Although, I knew it should be warm again within an hour, so it wasn't like it was the end of the world.

Quickly brushing my short hair, I then got dressed in black gym shorts and a dark gray t-shirt, before exiting the bathroom to head downstairs when I heard the front door crack open.

However, just as I took the first step, I realized there was a second heartbeat with my housemate – a heartbeat that was pounding rather quickly. Serenity appeared in the doorway, catching sight of me frozen at the top of the stairs.

"Oh, hey! I tried calling you. They found her!" she announced.

I only nodded, trying to smile as Gabriella stepped into sight, looking straight down, her face actively turning red. Serenity noticed my odd reaction, but continued with her statement anyway.

"She's been through a lot, so she's going to stay with us tonight."

Despite Gabriella's embarrassed reaction, I honestly wasn't sure if she knew who saved her. After all, she'd only met me once, although my face still looked the same when I was transformed – the only difference was the coloring. I was glad it was dark when I found her, because that meant it was possible she might not realize it was me. However, I still didn't want to hang around too long and give her the chance to figure it out.

After all, I'd spoken to her too, so even just talking too much might tip her off.

"Right..." I said hesitantly, looking away. "She can sleep in my bed."

"Kai!" Serenity exclaimed.

Suddenly confused, I looked back at her, noticing that Gabriella's face was now even more flushed too, almost matching her red hair. Which was so red that I would have thought was dyed were it not for the fact that I could detect the difference in smell between natural hair, extensions, and dyed hair.

And then it finally dawned on me what it sounded like I was saying.

I quickly held up my hands in shock. “No, no, no! I didn’t mean it like that. I’ll sleep on the couch, *obviously*. Jeez, way to make things awkward.”

But I knew it wasn’t just Serenity. Gabriella had misinterpreted what I meant too – that much was obvious just from the color of her face. Was it because of how I’d said it? Maybe my tone was off?

Sighing, I ignored Serenity’s apology and headed back up the one step to grab myself a blanket and make sure my room was presentable enough. I could hear Serenity now apologizing on my behalf, since I’d left so abruptly.

“Sorry, Gabriella. I’m not sure why he’s so rude around you. He’s normally not like that.”

“It’s alright,” she replied quietly. “I don’t think he’s trying to be rude.”

Serenity scoffed. “Disappearing whenever you’re around seems pretty intentional to me. I’m sure he will warm up to you though. He was bullied pretty bad after our parents passed away. I think he developed trust issues from it, because he still doesn’t really have any friends.”

“What did they bully him about?” Gabriella asked softly, her voice a little more distant now that they’d moved into the kitchen. It sounded like Serenity was heating up some of the potato and bacon soup I’d made.

Had my housemate forgotten her friend was a vegetarian?

“Well, obviously we aren’t related,” Serenity began explaining. “Some of the kids found out about our situation, and they actually teased him about us living alone together.”

“You’re kidding, right?” Gabriella said in disbelief.

“I know it’s ridiculous,” she replied. “I really wish they hadn’t found out to begin with. But when everything first happened, he was sent to a foster home for about a month, because he’s actually adopted, and the missing adoption paperwork caused a bit of a snag with me being able to take care of him.” She paused. “I’m not sure if it’s because they wanted to try to find his real parents, or why it even mattered, but some of the teachers found out about the issue with his unexpected change in living situation, and I guess it spread to his classmates that way.”

“He’s adopted?” Gabriella repeated, clearly choosing to focus on that aspect, sounding surprised. “At what age?”

“His parents adopted him when he was about two years old,” she replied, before returning to the bullying topic. “But you know what’s

interesting? Even though he doesn't really talk to anyone, I think he still cares about them. For example, there was a fight at school a couple of years back – both of the guys involved were kids who had bullied him in middle school – yet he stopped the fight without hurting anyone, defending the kid who was getting beat up.” She paused. “He’s also always doing nice things for strangers, just little stuff even, like opening the door for people when we go out. I’m really proud of the man he’s becoming.”

Honestly, I had conflicting feelings about my older friend’s statement, especially the last part. Because a big reason why I did stuff like that was *because* I wanted to make her proud. I needed her approval, probably more than she’d ever know, and in a way she’d likely never be able to give me, since I had no intention on ever telling her my secret.

The risk of rejection and losing her forever wasn’t worth it to me. However, I didn’t linger on those thoughts long, since I heard her place a bowl down on the table in front of Gabriella.

Sighing again, I quietly dashed to the stairs and called out to her. “Serenity, that has bacon in it!”

She immediately apologized. “Oh, I’m sorry Gabriella! I forgot!”

“No, it’s fine!” she exclaimed. “I’m not religious about it. I’ve just grown up as a vegetarian because both my parents are. Although, I have to admit I’ve never eaten bacon. Only chicken a few times.”

“Are you sure?” Serenity asked. “I can get you something else.”

I heard Gabriella take a big bite in response, causing my housemate to chuckle. I then heard her shift in her chair in surprise. “Wow, this is really good! You’re a really good cook!” she exclaimed.

Serenity laughed again, sitting down at the table with her own bowl. “I’m horrible at cooking. Kai made this.”

It was quiet then, which only made me wish I could see Gabriella’s face, desperately wondering what her expression was like.

“He...he did?” she finally managed.

“Yep,” Serenity confirmed. “He does basically all the cooking around here. One day when he was fourteen, he officially banned me from using the stove for anything other than boiling water.” She laughed again. “He was kidding of course, but I think I’ve only cooked a handful of meals since then.”

“Oh...” Gabriella said quietly. “So...he eats potatoes?”

I could tell Serenity was confused by the question. “Well, yeah. Why?”

“No reason,” she said quickly, shoving another spoonful in her mouth.

Of course, that only confirmed my worst fears. Gabriella must have recognized me after all, because her heart rate picked up significantly. Not to mention the weird question about my diet.

What did she think I ate? People?

I wondered if I could still somehow convince her that it wasn't me, in the event she asked about it, or if that was a lost cause. *'I can just play dumb,'* I thought to myself. *'Act like I don't know anything.'* I wasn't sure if it would work, but it was my last chance at this point.

Serenity was still talking about me, whispering now. “I don't know how he does that.”

“Does what?” Gabriella whispered back.

“Know I was about to give you this soup.”

Gabriella paused for a moment before responding. “Well, it *does* have bacon in it, which is a pretty strong scent. Maybe he smelled it when you were heating it up and just assumed?”

“Yeah, maybe,” she agreed. “But he's always done things like that. Like when I came home earlier, I was crying. And somehow, he seemed to know. Normally, he just waits for me to come inside, but as soon as I pulled up, he came out to get me.”

“Maybe he saw you from the window?” Gabriella offered.

I groaned internally, suddenly realizing what she was doing. She was covering for me. She *did* know it was me, and now that she realized my housemate didn't know my secret, she was helping me hide it.

Dammit! I already liked her a lot, at least physically. Why did she have to start covering for me? I mean, it was what I both wanted and needed, but now it was like we had our own little secret. I groaned again at the thought.

'Dammit, dammit, dammit. You can't be with her,' I chastised myself. *'She'll make you transform every two seconds for the rest of your life!'*

I'd already long since realized that being with someone wouldn't be an option for me, but it wasn't like I was lonely. I had Serenity after all, and as far as I was concerned that was all I needed. Granted, there were a lot of complications that came with that arrangement.

For one, what was I supposed to do if she ever finally got a boyfriend?

I'd been lucky that she'd put it off for so long, despite the fact that she was twenty-three and objectively hot, with her instead focusing on making sure that life was stable for us by not having random men in the house. But

I knew it might happen eventually, especially when she realized she didn't *have* to bring them home, and could instead go to their place.

Just the idea made me feel conflicted in so many ways.

Being completely honest, I would probably end up feeling jealous if she dated, though I knew I had no right to, especially with the age gap.

However, it was much more complicated than that, with a strange desire in me almost wishing she *would* date.

Why?

Honestly, because there was a shameful part of me that wanted to hear her fuck. And then there was an even more shameful part of me that wanted to be the one fucking her. Obviously, if I could really choose, then I'd pick the second option, but I knew that was never going to happen in a million years.

Or at least, it felt like it would be a miracle to have my significantly older friend actually be able to view me as more than that, *more* than a friend, considering we'd known each other for so long and we'd gone through so much in the last five years.

The platonic way she felt about me was probably already set-in-stone, and would likely never change. If anything, she'd probably be sincerely weirded out if she knew how I felt deep down.

Which meant I could almost live vicariously if she dated, especially with my heightened senses.

At the very least, I felt like listening to her fuck was definitely better than nothing, although I was aware of the fact that I'd probably feel miserable and jealous once I'd jerked off.

But I knew I shouldn't even want that, or even think about it. And with Gabriella? I couldn't have her either, even if she somehow decided she was okay with the fact that I wasn't human. I shouldn't even hope for such a thing, because the devastation that would come, when things didn't work out, would be unbearable.

Feeling annoyed and defeated now from my own dejecting thoughts, I ran back to my room to grab my earbuds, so that I could try to ignore their conversation. Technically, I could still hear what they were saying if I concentrated, but I had gotten fairly decent at ignoring all the external stimuli bombarding my mind every day. I then gathered the large blanket I planned on using and headed down the stairs.

Both Serenity and Gabriella stopped talking when they heard me, and my housemate called out my name, but I ignored her.

Turning on the lamp sitting on the small table on one side of the couch, I plopped down on the soft cushions and got comfortable. Getting my earbuds in, I then turned up the volume as loud as I could tolerate with my sensitive ears and tried to settle in for the night. I was able to successfully ignore them for about ten or fifteen minutes, but then I heard someone walk up to me from behind the couch.

Quickly sniffing the air, I relaxed when I caught Serenity's comforting scent.

"Kai," she said. "I'm going to take a shower, and then head to bed. Can you please be nice to Gabriella? She's been through a lot."

Without turning down the volume, I waved my hand to acknowledge her. "I used up all the hot water. Sorry," I said sincerely. "It might be warm enough now for a few minutes of heat, but you may have to wait another half hour."

"Oh." She paused, not seeming upset. "Then, I'll just make sure Gabriella can rinse off first. I can take one in the morning."

'No, no, no! Don't tell me that, Ren!' Suddenly, all I could see in my mind's eye was Gabriella naked in the shower, imagining her heavy unsupported breasts as water ran across her large nipples, her otherwise thin body exposed, vulnerable, wet...

Shit! I was a virgin if I'd ever known one!

I quickly covered my head with the blanket as I felt my hair begin to turn white. "Sure," I replied quickly, wanting to get rid of her now. "I really am sorry about the hot water. I put plenty of blankets and pillows on my bed for her. Please make sure she feels at home."

I could tell Serenity was surprised by my sudden hospitality, but I already regretted my own words. My hair was definitely white now, since I finally registered that Gabriella was going to be spending the night in *my* blankets, cuddling with *my* pillow. I knew the scent she left behind wouldn't leave my bed for at least a week...hopefully longer.

Dammit! I was cutting it way too close! My housemate was right *there*, and I was actively transforming!

I pulled the blanket more tightly against my head. I knew she probably wanted to ask about my odd behavior, feeling like her deep brown eyes

were watching me carefully, but she finally sighed and then wished me goodnight.

I then heard two sets of footsteps walk up the stairs and found myself unable to ignore them any longer. Serenity took Gabriella to her bedroom and let her pick out a set of pajamas to wear – I realized they must not have stopped by Gabriella's apartment, instead coming straight here after being questioned by the police.

I wondered what Serenity's boss thought when they found out she had been the first one at the scene. Granted, who could blame her? Still, I wouldn't be surprised if she got reprimanded for it, which was likely a small price to pay in Serenity's eyes.

She'd lose her job entirely if it meant saving someone she cared about.

Gabriella picked out a set of pajamas and then was led to the bathroom, so she could take a shower. Serenity warned her about the hot water, to which Gabriella offered to let her friend shower instead. But Serenity politely declined, lying by saying that she normally took showers in the morning anyway. Gabriella thanked her, closed the door, and then quickly undressed while the water warmed up.

I tried to focus on the music again, attempting to pick out all the subtle differences in the beat, only to sit up abruptly when I realized Gabriella was crying. I pulled out my earbuds entirely to listen to her carefully over the sound of the running water. She was sobbing quietly, although she didn't seem to be out of control like she had been in the woods. I wondered if the warm water was just helping her relieve some of her stress...

I hoped it wasn't because of me. Had I been too rude after all?

Carefully homing in on her scent, I sifted through the smell of bacon, potatoes, wood, carpet, paint, cotton, water, shampoo...happy. She was happy, or least significantly relaxed. Similar to fear, I'd looked it up once, wanting to understand why people had a certain scent when they were happy. It was most likely due to a hormone called oxytocin, as well as another few creating the right combination. The higher the level, the stronger the scent, and it was exceptionally strong from her right now. I realized she was likely getting a rush of it in her blood, now that she was safe behind a locked door away from anything dangerous.

Deciding I couldn't resist listening anymore, I pulled the blanket over the top of my head to hide my re-whitening hair and remained sitting up on the couch. I then pulled my knees up to my chest, resting my chin on them,

and wrapped the blanket around so that only my face and bare toes were showing.

I'd been right about the hot water. After a few minutes, I could smell that the moisture in the air had cooled slightly – oddly enough, water smelt a little different depending on the temperature – and then I could hear Gabriella pick up the pace. Barely a minute later, and she turned the water off and got out, quickly drying off. I then heard her stand still for a few minutes, and began wondering what she was doing.

Thinking about it from her point of view, I suspected she might be examining her bruised body in the mirror.

I heard her make a few odd noises, sounding pained, and wondered if she was touching her darkening skin to see how sensitive it was in various spots. She then began getting dressed, and I was unexpectedly shocked by the sound the fabric made as it slid over her skin.

Suddenly, I was very concerned about what she had picked out from my housemate's selection. Most of Serenity's pajamas were made of cotton or something else soft – she liked to be comfortable. And since she hadn't ever really gotten serious with anyone, I knew she didn't have anything to impress a boyfriend...especially since I'd snooped plenty of times.

Yet, I was confident Gabriella was putting on something made of silk or satin. Had it been pajamas that Serenity only bought recently? And if so, *why*? I couldn't imagine that she'd had them for a while.

Either way, the skin down my neck and spine had already turned dark gray, and I felt myself blushing as I listened to Gabriella make her way to my room above me – the unmistakable soft *swishing* sound accompanying her every move. I was so conflicted again, partially because I wanted to see Serenity in those pajamas.

Dammit, when did she get them?

I sighed heavily as Gabriella began readjusting the blankets and pillows on my bed. I was glad at least the shower part was over. I kind of felt like a creep listening in on her, but it was extremely difficult to help it when my senses were so sensitive. I would have to go out of my way to avoid it, and even then it could be difficult.

Trying not to think again about her being wrapped up in my blankets, in my bed, clothed in silky pajamas, I focused on the other noises outside of the house, listening to an owl far off in the distance. Slowly my graying skin turned back to normal.

However, just as my hair was beginning to return to its normal color, I noticed footsteps at the top of the stairs. They hesitated, before quietly making their way down, step-by-step, the unmistakable *swooshing* accompanying them.

I wondered if Gabriella was still hungry, coming down to raid the kitchen, although that thought didn't stop my hair from shifting back to snow white. I rested my forehead on my knees to hide my flushed face as I listened to the footsteps reach the last step.

She hesitated again, and I listened carefully to see what direction she went.

Her heart was racing.

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CHAPTER 2: REVEALED

After a few long minutes, Gabriella finally stepped down off the last step and began slowly walking in my direction, toward the couch. I was facing away from her, but I knew she could see that I was sitting up.

She carefully walked around the corner and then stopped when she saw that my face was completely hidden against my knees. Suddenly, I wondered if any of my white hair was showing out of the blanket.

Was that the real reason she stopped so abruptly?

Her heart was still racing as she tried to speak. "I..." She immediately stopped as her pulse burst into an even faster gallop, finding herself unable to talk.

Sighing heavily, I lifted my head up to look at her. She immediately turned her head away, clutching her hand in front of her chest. Of course, the first thing I did was confirm that she was wearing silky pajamas – dark purple ones, that highlighted her damp red hair and green eyes. Of all the things that Gabriella could have picked, she chose those, never mind the fact that my housemate must have gotten them only recently.

Seeing her in them, and thinking about Serenity in them, had my face turning red, even as the skin on my torso turned dark gray. I immediately slammed my forehead back down on my knees before my face became darker, prompting Gabriella to gasp in surprise.

"Are you okay?" she asked urgently, her concern breaking through her nervousness briefly.

I grunted in response, but didn't say anything. The gray had crept up my neck and was climbing my jawline now. I had to get a grip!

Taking advantage of the opportunity of her slowed pulse, Gabriella finally managed to say what was on her mind. "I just wanted to thank you. I didn't get a chance earlier..." Her voice trailed off.

'Just play dumb. Just play dumb.'

"You're welcome."

'Dammit, you idiot! You fucking idiot!'

I sighed heavily, annoyed at myself now. So much for that plan. But then again, would she have really believed me if I denied it at this point? Honestly, I should have just left after stabbing the serial killer, although I knew that I wouldn't have actually done things differently if given a second chance.

It was quiet for a few minutes, both of us silent, prompting me to slowly lift my head again to see what she was doing. She had been watching me intently, but looked away the moment I made eye contact, her face flushed.

"Is that all?" I wondered, confused why she hadn't left yet. I couldn't imagine what else she'd want.

Still looking away, she cleared her throat. "Can..." She hesitated. "Can I sit down?"

I was briefly both glad and annoyed by the fact that the couch was the only seating available in the living room. Technically, she could sit on the low coffee table a couple of feet away, but I would never ask her to do that. Granted, I might have considered it myself, were it not for the fact that I was literally trapped by my slowly transforming body, afraid to move for fear that it might scare her if she saw.

Serenity and I had a flat screen TV in the corner of the room, but it was at an odd angle from the couch, since neither of us watched it with any frequency. Instead, the furniture faced a decorated stone fireplace set into the wall, which we actually used occasionally in the winter. It was more for nostalgia though, rather than practicality, since it wasn't great at heating upstairs on really cold nights.

However, I sincerely enjoyed the nights when we'd light it up and sit on the couch together with hot chocolate. It would definitely be considered romantic, by anyone's standard, were it not for the fact that she was so much older than me and probably would never view me as an option for a romantic partner.

I also enjoyed the excuse to chop firewood. It gave me something kind of fun to do, even though I was aware I only liked it because it wasn't a daily chore.

Sighing again, I nodded in response to Gabriella's question, and she slowly plopped down at the other end of the couch, leaving an empty spot between us. She then brought her knees up to her chest and mimicked my

sitting position, resting her chin on her knees. The silky purple bottoms fit her well, but the silk top wasn't as great of a fit.

Gabriella was just as thin as Serenity, but her chest was significantly larger, threatening to reveal skin between the buttons in the front. I was glad she was unintentionally hiding it with her legs. I also began to wonder if they had stopped at her apartment after all, since she was wearing a bra now. She may have just forgotten pajamas due to being in a hurry. If she was anything like Serenity, then underwear and a fresh shirt would have been her top priority.

Gabriella remained silent for a few seconds, allowing her heart to calm down, before speaking again. "Are you mad at me?" she wondered.

I glanced at her, seeing that she was looking away, thereby forcing me to respond verbally. I sighed and averted my gaze too. "No."

"Oh," she replied, tightening her embrace on her knees. "I wondered if that was why your hair is white right now..."

Dammit!

I quickly reached up and pulled the blanket further over my forehead, trying to cover it up, only to notice that my fingernails were black now too. Sighing, I realized that my being coy was futile at this point, especially since I was failing so miserably at it. I just needed to accept that we'd already crossed the line.

She knew my secret and there was no hiding it.

"Well, strong emotions do force it to happen," I admitted quietly. "So anger could be one reason."

She hesitated before responding, her heart rate picking up again. When she finally spoke, it was barely a whisper. "Am I the reason your hair is white right now?"

Not wanting to give a direct answer, I quickly changed the subject. "You didn't say anything to Serenity, right?"

"No, of course not," she reassured me. "You asked me not to."

Taking a deep breath, I realized that might mean she hadn't figured it out recently. "So, you recognized me earlier, didn't you?"

I saw her tighten her grip on her knees again from the corner of my eye. "I didn't realize it was you until the light from my phone let me get a better look at your face." She then paused, briefly glancing at me, before looking away. "I admit, I was surprised to realize Serenity's younger...err, *roommate*, saved me."

I immediately didn't like that she included the word 'younger,' scoffing in response. "I'm only two years younger than you," I retorted. "And technically an adult."

Her eyes widened in surprise from my sudden annoyance. "Oh..." She gave me an apologetic look. "I didn't mean it like that."

"Sorry," I replied sincerely, already regretting my tone. "I don't know why that bothered me. You've been through enough without me making you feel bad."

She shook her head, speaking in a whisper. "No, I'm sorry."

I tried to keep my voice gentle. "Why are *you* sorry?" I wondered, confused by her apology.

"Well..." She hesitated, seeming uncertain. "I mean, even Serenity doesn't know, right? Does anyone know?"

I shook my head, not wanting to meet her gaze. "Just you," I admitted, only to be surprised when I suddenly smelt her scent become tainted with a new emotion.

Guilt.

I spoke with more empathy this time. "Hey," I said softly, turning to look at her fully. She glanced at me, only to blush and avert her gaze. "Don't feel guilty. If anything, it's my fault. I didn't *have* to stick around so long."

"I'm glad you did," she admitted quietly. "But...why did you?"

I shrugged in response, focusing on the fireplace. "I guess I was just worried about you. I didn't want to leave you all alone after what happened. I knew you were scared..." My voice trailed off.

"I still am," she admitted.

My tone was full of shame. "Sorry." I rested my forehead against my knees again, hiding my eyes. In response, I heard her lean toward me abruptly, causing me to flinch.

"N-No, not of you," she exclaimed. She then pulled back when she realized she'd almost reached out to touch me. She lowered her voice as she continued. "You make me feel safe. I was glad Serenity invited me to stay the night. I would have asked anyway."

"Oh." I looked back up at her, and for the first time she met my gaze for several long seconds before looking away, her face flushed. "You're not afraid of me?" I wondered.

She shook her head. "I mean, you saved my life. And you live with Serenity, so that means you're safe, right?"

"If I wasn't safe, do you really think I'd tell you?"

"Well, I guess maybe not," she replied, only to fall silent before switching subjects slightly. "What all do you eat?" she asked.

I pursed my lips, wondering why she was inquiring about my diet a second time after she'd already asked my friend. "Same stuff as you? Although, I have to admit, I really like meat."

"Oh, well, I mean..." She paused as her face turned even more red. "Do you, like, drink blood or anything?"

I just stared at her for a second, before laughing, trying to stop myself from being too loud.

"Why is that funny?" she asked seriously, completely baffled by my reaction.

"I'm not a vampire," I replied, continuing to chuckle. "I don't drink blood, and I wasn't bitten. As far as I know, I was born this way."

"Oh, sorry." Her expression dropped. "I didn't know."

"Does that disappoint you?" I wondered seriously. "That I'm not dangerous?"

"N-No," she stuttered. "I'm glad you're safe. That's actually preferable."

"Wait." Now I was confused. "*Preferable*? Are you saying it doesn't matter to you if I'm safe or not?"

"No..." She suddenly looked away again, her cheeks turning even more red as she tried to explain herself. She then began to speak, only to stop abruptly, placing her hands over her face and remaining quiet for a few minutes before continuing. Finally, she worked up the courage to say what was on her mind. "I just...kind of like you. A lot."

I was honestly shocked to hear her admit she liked me, prompting my spine and chest to instantly turn dark gray, but I tried to remain skeptical that her interest was sincere. "Because I saved you?" I assumed.

She shook her head with her hands still covering her face. "No, I thought that before..." She sucked in a deep breath. "When we first met..." Still in disbelief, I scoffed. "But you don't even know me."

A part of me was already kicking myself in the ass for blurting that out, because I really kind of just wanted to take advantage of this situation. But the problem was that Gabriella knowing my secret meant she could betray

me if things didn't work out. Which thus meant, I couldn't afford to start something with her when she was only interested because I'd saved her from something horrible.

Gabriella abruptly looked at me. "That's not true," she retorted, regarding her not knowing me. However, upon meeting my gaze, she hid her face a second time as she leaned away slightly. "I mean, okay, yes. You're sort of right. But after we met briefly that first time, I asked Serenity more about you – asked what you were like. Although I didn't know you cooked or were adopted until just a little bit ago." She took a deep breath. "But, assuming she was telling me the truth, then I do really like you, and..." She paused for another few seconds, her heart rate picking up again. "And...I can tell you like me too."

"What?" I said in surprise. "How can you tell?"

"I mean..." she started, her pulse throbbing harder as she glanced at me. "Well, I mean...don't you?" She seemed vulnerable again, like she was afraid of being rejected, wondering if she was misinterpreting my body language.

I supposed it was stupid of me to think that my attraction to her was anything but obvious. I took a deep breath, letting it out slowly, and then just decided to tell her the truth. "When we first met, I disappeared right away because I was really attracted to you. I almost transformed right in front of you both."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I'm sorry!"

Instead of chastising her for apologizing again for something that really wasn't her fault, I instead just put my forehead back down on my knees, unable to believe I'd really said it.

After I was silent for a few seconds, she continued. "Is that what's happening right now? I'm making you...transform?"

Knowing that her eyes were on me, I simply nodded in response.

"Does it hurt?" she wondered.

I lifted my head again, surprised by the question. I was pretty confident the sides of my face were showing signs of graying, but she didn't seem fazed by it. "No, actually it feels really good."

"Then why hold back now?" she asked. "I think Serenity is asleep."

I shook my head. "No, she's in bed, but still awake. Granted, she probably will be asleep really soon."

"Oh!" Gabriella's emerald eyes widened. "How do you know?"

I hesitated again, uncertain if I should really disclose all my secrets, especially since what I was capable of was kind of invasive to people's privacy. "Well..." I began slowly. "My senses are a lot stronger than most people. That's how I found you. I remembered what you smell like."

She suddenly seemed concerned. "Do I smell okay?" she whispered.

"Yes," I quickly agreed. "You smell amazing, actually. I'm pretty sure it's because you're a vegetarian."

"That's good," she replied in relief. She then paused as she contemplated her next question. "So, do you know how far away I was when you, umm, found my scent?"

I nodded. "Probably about ten miles, more or less."

Gabriella's green eyes widened in surprise. "Ten *miles* ? You can smell me from that far away?"

I nodded again, still feeling kind of hesitant to explain just how heightened my senses were, but realizing it probably couldn't hurt at this point. "I can smell the lip balm on your lips," I said, only to blush when I focused on them, quickly moving on. "As well as the container in your purse upstairs. I can smell the dinner I made in the fridge. I can smell the gasoline in the two cars outside. I can both hear and smell an owl that's probably a little over a mile away. And if I concentrate really hard..." I closed my eyes, paying close attention to what my nose and ears were telling me before continuing. "I can smell someone smoking, parked in a running car off the side of the main road about five miles away. All from sitting right here."

Gabriella stared at me in disbelief for a moment. "That's...well, that's amazing." She looked away, seeming pensive, beginning to sound like she was speaking to herself. "Although, I'm not sure how that's even possible, because the nose needs odorants in the air to detect a scent. It would mean that faint traces of the cigarette smoke were here in the house..." Her voice trailed off.

My eyes widened in surprise. "How do you know so much about the nose?"

She blushed, focusing down at the carpet. "Well, I just remember it from biology class in high school. I also took an anatomy and physiology class."

"Oh. I'm in a second year of chemistry instead. I'm not a fan of looking at the details of the human body."

Except in private. Only in private.

“Because you might transform?” she assumed.

“Maybe,” I hedged with a shrug. “Just didn’t seem like a good idea.”

She didn’t respond, and it was quiet for a few more minutes as I listened to her racing heart. She was hugging her knees tightly again, making me wonder if she was afraid to ask something in particular.

Finally, she spoke. “Is Serenity asleep yet?” she asked.

Her unexpected question, and the potential implications of it, pushed me over the edge, and I felt my face rapidly turn dark gray while my eyes transition to yellow irises set within black pools.

Stuttering, I responded. “Y-Yes, w-why?” But I already had an idea of what she was thinking, because I could smell her arousal. She was just as turned on as I was.

She blushed when she saw my face change, knowing exactly why. Her own face was so red it was almost darker than her hair now.

“I...I just...” She hid her face again by resting her forehead on her knees as she tried to collect her thoughts. “I just wondered if I could move closer...”

“But why?” I asked seriously, still wondering what she planned on doing once she was. Obviously, I had ideas, but my housemate was upstairs right now. And even if she was asleep, I couldn’t chance her waking up and catching me doing something with her best friend!

However, Gabriella didn’t respond, her face still hidden, and suddenly I could smell the saltiness of her tears as she began to silently cry. Had I offended her? Did she feel rejected?

Unsure of what to say, I quickly reached over to the space between us and patted the cushion. She looked up in surprise, her expression turning apologetic.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered as she scooted over.

I wasn’t sure if she was apologizing for crying, or possibly feeling like she was being manipulative with her tears. However, my cock went from ‘slightly stiff’ to ‘hard as a rock’ when I noticed the way the lamp’s light reflected off her shiny purple pajamas as she moved. It aroused me way more than I even anticipated, and I was suddenly glad my housemate had never worn these after all.

I mean, on the one hand, I definitely wanted to see Serenity in them, but on the other hand, I couldn’t exactly afford to accidentally pop a boner and

turn gray in front of her either.

Even if it weren't for the change in appearance, she'd probably be disgusted to know I was aroused by her.

Once Gabriella got settled, she ended up being only a couple of inches away from me, but it already felt like she was touching me – as if there was an invisible arc of electricity spanning the gap between our bodies. I wanted to reach out and touch her so badly, though I knew that would be a mistake. She'd just been through so much, and here I felt like I was in danger of climbing on top of her and forcing her to help her get rid of my virginity right then and there.

Would she stop me? Was it right for me to take advantage of this situation?

Horny or not, I couldn't imagine that was what she wanted right now.

Resting my chin on my knees again, I hugged my legs tightly, my cock throbbing between my thighs as I angled my face away from her. I wasn't sure if my dark gray skin would show that my face was flushed, but I couldn't help but feel like I needed to hide my reaction anyway. Granted, now that I was fully transformed, minus my wings, there was no way she couldn't know how she was affecting me.

She was quiet for a few more minutes, mimicking my posture again, before she finally asked her next question.

"Is it alright...if I touch your hair?" Gabriella wondered.

Without looking, I replied simply. "Yes."

She hesitated only briefly before I felt her hand gently grab the blanket and pull it off my head, revealing my pure white hair. She then reached up and, with trembling fingers, began stroking the top. Almost immediately she sighed heavily, and I could actually sense her muscles relax. She let the leg closest to me slowly slide down until her foot was just barely touching the floor, with her other knee still at her chest.

"Why?" I whispered.

"Why what?" she replied immediately, seeming a lot calmer. I could still smell that she was aroused, but everything about her body appeared to relax the moment she began touching me.

"Why is this helping you?" I clarified.

She was pensive for a moment as she considered the question, beginning to run her fingers more firmly through my hair against my scalp. I shivered from the sensation, tilting my head forward as goosebumps

appeared all over my neck and arms, resting my forehead on my knees again.

Shit, I'd *pay her* to do this, all night and day. It felt *amazing* .

Granted, now that I was thinking about it, I'd totally pay her for sex too, though I felt horrible for even thinking that. Especially when I considered where the money I would use came from.

"Well," she began. "This is really healing for me." She then paused, working up the courage to talk about what happened to her earlier that day. "That man...he beat me. And he touched me. Although, you saved me from the worst of it." She sighed. "But I still feel...dirty. Even after a shower." She took a deep breath. "But when I touch you, it makes me feel cleaner. If that makes any sense."

I nodded, understanding exactly what she meant. I hadn't been physically dirty either, after killing the bastard, but still felt like I needed to wash off. "That's why I took a shower for over an hour," I admitted. "I sort of felt like that after killing him."

"I'm sorry," she replied quietly. I could smell guilt tainting her scent a second time.

"I'd do it again," I said quickly. "Without hesitation." I was still hiding my face against my knees, even though she'd stopped running her fingers through my hair. "So, don't be sorry. I'm sorry I didn't get there sooner. It looked like it was a close one..." My voice trailed off.

Gabriella resumed running her fingertips through my hair. "Well, sort of. He wasn't planning on killing me for another few hours. He..." She stopped abruptly, and I could feel her hand begin to tremble again, but it wasn't from nervousness this time. "He...wanted to break me. He wanted me to get to the point where I'd ask for it. Ask him to kill me..."

Without thinking, I immediately reached out my hand and rested it on her silky thigh. She jumped at the sudden touch, but I knew from her scent that it wasn't from fear. I'd made her even more aroused, immediately dispelling the horror she had just been feeling.

"Is that alright?" I asked anyway, second-guessing myself as my own fingers began to tremble against her leg. I'd never touched anyone like this before, so I couldn't help but feel anxious.

"Yes," she whispered softly. She was then thoughtful. "I think that's what it is. Touch. The most recent time someone touched me, I didn't want

it. So, I think it helps to replace it with someone touching me who I want to.”

I felt selfish for asking my next question, but I couldn't help but wonder. “What would you have done if it wasn't me who saved you?”

Her hand stopped stroking my hair briefly, as she seemed to try to understand my meaning. “Oh, well I probably still would have come here and tried to talk to you.”

“You would?” I asked in surprise, turning my head slightly to glance at her. “You wouldn't have wanted to find the person who saved you?”

Fully understanding what I was getting at now, she shook her head. “No. I mean, I would have been thankful, but I already liked *you*. I'm not here because you saved me. I mean...” She hesitated. “Like, this isn't a ‘thank you’ or something. I would never thank someone by offering myself to them.”

I immediately forced my head between my knees, suddenly overwhelmed by the implications. This couldn't be happening. This had to be a dream. My entire body was trembling, I was so nervous. Her words were now echoing in my head like a physical presence haunting me.

‘By offering myself to them.’

I yanked my hand off her thigh and hugged my legs tightly with both arms.

“Are you alright?” she whispered, sounding confused.

I wasn't able to answer right away, but she waited patiently. She had stopped stroking my hair, probably afraid that she'd done something to upset me, instead of realizing that I was just pathetic when it came to women, because I had zero experience in that department.

Finally, I managed to respond. “You...you have to understand. I've never had anyone touch me like this. I mean, obviously. I'd look like *this* if I had.”

She resumed running her fingers through my hair, *firmly*, when she realized it was alright, sending shivers down my spine.

I continued. “And, obviously, having you suggest...” I struggled to repeat what she'd said. “Well, it makes me really nervous.”

“I think you're very handsome like this,” she said reassuringly. She then lowered her other leg and reached over to grasp my hand, pulling it onto her silky thigh again, graciously ignoring my trembling. “And I think it's cute you're so nervous,” she admitted with a small giggle.

“You do?” I asked in shock, a little surprised that her admission actually made me feel more confident. Before I even waited for her to respond, I began gently rubbing the smooth material over her warm thigh, only to give it a small squeeze. It felt like the heat from her leg was seeping into my hand, warming my entire arm.

“Yeah,” she affirmed. “It’s adorable. Although, it’s not like I have a ton of experience either. The most I’ve ever done is kiss.”

I found that hard to believe. “So, you’re still a virgin then?” I wondered, only to feel a little embarrassed that I’d asked so bluntly. Thankfully, she didn’t seem offended.

“Does that surprise you?” she asked curiously, her tone filled with amusement.

“Well, I mean...you’re just so pretty.” More like, so fucking hot!

She giggled again. “Yeah, well, I have to admit I get hit on a lot. It started happening when I was about fourteen, as soon as my, um, chest... got this big. But yeah, thanks to you I still am.”

Dread crept into my chest as I thought about that. I quickly looked up at her, suddenly feeling somber and serious. “I don’t think *that* would have counted,” I said seriously, knowing she was talking about what I’d stopped the serial killer from doing.

“You don’t?” she asked in surprise, blushing from the sudden eye contact and looking away.

“I don’t,” I repeated. “I mean, think about it. Is virginity really just physical? If that were true, then what about when gays and lesbians do stuff? Especially lesbians. So then, a guy and girl can definitely lose their virginity without actually having...you know. Normal sex. Even someone who has only done oral really isn’t a virgin anymore.” I paused to collect my thoughts. “And likewise, just because a guy forces himself on you, doesn’t mean you’ve lost your virginity. I think it’s more of a mental thing, rather than physical. If you don’t have an orgasm, and if you didn’t do it willingly, then it’s hard to say that you’ve really had sex. Sure, you would have been violated, but I’d still feel like you were a virgin.”

“Oh.” She considered that. “I guess that makes sense. I actually know a girl who’s never had sex with a man, but she’s definitely not a virgin.” She then focused on me again for a moment, before looking over at the fireplace. “And, I guess, even under that criteria, I’d still say I’m a virgin. It wasn’t even heavy kissing.”

I glanced at the coffee table as I responded, lowering my voice. “Well, it wouldn’t matter to me if you weren’t. I’d still like you. But, that is kind of nice to hear.”

“I’m glad I waited,” she admitted.

I felt my heart jump into my throat, prompting me to remove my hand as I slammed my forehead into my knees again. My face was burning up.

The quick movement of my head left Gabriella’s hand behind in the air. “Are you okay?” she asked urgently. “Was it something I said?”

I was trembling all over again, just from the idea of fucking her – the idea that I’d be her first time too. But it was more than that. Much more. Her words implied so many things. I tried to take a deep breath, but when it came out in a ragged gasp, she rested both hands on my shoulders and leaned into me as if she was trying to comfort me. However, the physical touch only made my reaction worse, which she noticed, prompting her to let go.

I tried to focus my thoughts so I could calm down, attempting to get a hold of my own breathing.

Finally, after a few minutes, I managed a response. “I’m sorry. It’s just that...” I took another deep breath, uncertain of how to explain. “I don’t understand,” I admitted. “You barely know me, and yet it sounds like you’ve already decided...”

I couldn’t finish my statement. She was fucking hot as hell, yet she barely knew me, and suddenly it was as if...

“That I’m yours now?” she asked, trying to finish my sentence.

I hugged my legs tightly, my cock hurting it was throbbing so hard. “Yeah, basically.”

Gabriella slowly rested her fingers on my hair, sending another wave of shivers down my spine, and resumed running her fingertips through it. “I think it’s because you are what I’ve always wanted,” she explained. “You’re kind, and responsible. You take care of Serenity in many ways, even though she’s a lot older than you. And I like it that you’re so innocent.” She hesitated. “Well, at least when it comes to this kind of stuff...” She paused.

I didn’t respond.

After a few seconds, she continued. “I mean, you *did* just kill someone to protect me, so I know you’re not innocent in every way. But you’re innocent in the ways that count to me.” She took another deep breath. “And I know you have a lot of self-control, because obviously you can’t get angry

without showing this version of yourself. But even if you weren't like this, Serenity told me you've always been exceptionally kind, even as a little kid. She said you never went through a stage where you were disobedient or overly fussy, even as a toddler. And she always loved playing games with you when you both were younger."

I continued to remain silent.

Gabriella was thoughtful for a moment. "Serenity also told me that she really thought God sent her an angel for a friend and playmate, since you had none of the normal qualities a normal baby would have. And even as you've gotten older – even when you've been standoffish to others, you still go out of your way to help people in need. Granted, I doubt Serenity has any idea to what extent you do that, but that's still *you*, even in the simpler ways like opening the door for strangers."

I let out a deep sigh as I allowed myself to relax a little. Slowly, I loosened my grip on my knees and placed my hand on her thigh again, just letting it rest there.

After a moment, Gabriella spoke again. "Am I what *you* want?" she asked seriously.

"Well..." I began, not really sure I'd thought much about it. "I've never been so attracted to anyone before, but I'm not convinced it isn't just physical. I don't know very much about you..." Which was true, though a big part of the appeal was her natural scent. In terms of raw hotness, my older housemate was a huge contender, but I'd never met anyone who smelled as amazing as Gabriella.

But that was kind of the problem. I loved my friend – like, really loved her – whereas right now I just wanted to fuck Gabriella like a wild animal in heat.

"That's another reason why I like you," she admitted. "You're actually concerned about the fact that you only want me physically right now. Most guys, that's all they care about. They don't care who I am, they just want my body."

"Sorry," I whispered. I felt bad, because I sincerely didn't think I was much different from those guys, despite the fact that she thought so. Plain and simple, I just wanted to fuck her, though it was true I was holding myself back for similar reasons as what she thought.

However, what would she think if she knew I had the hots for my older friend? Would she think it was weird? Or think I was a pervert? Not that I'd

ever share that secret with her in a million years.

“Don’t be sorry,” she replied gently. “It just means I need to tell you more about myself, so you can like that too.”

Thinking about it, I realized I wasn’t as uninformed about her as I initially thought. “Well, I guess I do know a little about you,” I admitted. “There are certain things you can assume just from looking at people.”

“Like what?” she prompted curiously.

I gently began rubbing her thigh again. “Well, like I know you take care of yourself. You’re well-groomed, but not to the point where I’d think you were conceited. It’s more like you just have really good self-hygiene. And you obviously have good self-esteem too, but not to the point of arrogance. I’d feel confident in saying that you seem fairly mentally stable, especially considering what you’ve just been through. And you aren’t shallow. You sincerely care about knowing people on a deeper level, like Serenity, for instance.”

“Huh, wow,” she replied. “And yet another reason why I really like you.” She grinned at me. “So then, you do like me beyond just the physical.”

Sighing, I turned my head slightly to glance at her, even as she ran her fingers across my scalp again. She met my gaze and held it this time.

“I guess...maybe...” I was surprised when she didn’t avert her eyes, so I continued to stare at her, falling silent.

“You really are beautiful,” she unexpectedly whispered.

“I...I am?” I said in surprise, with that being the last thing I expected her to say.

Her cheeks flushed, but she didn’t look away. “I mean the colors. You’re very *handsome*, but the colors of your eyes and hair are really pretty.”

“You too,” I replied softly. “I really like your green eyes and red hair. I’ve never seen anyone with hair so naturally red.”

“Thanks.” She blushed again, continuing to stare. She then looked down at my mouth, as she considered her next question. “Umm, is it alright if I sleep with you down here?” she wondered. Her eyes then jerked up again as she clarified. “Like, actually sleep. I’m afraid I’ll have nightmares if I sleep alone.”

Fuck. Of course, she had no interest in actually doing anything, not that I could afford to anyway, with Serenity just upstairs. I was already risking a

lot by letting myself be transformed out in the open like this.

“Oh, umm...” I focused on the fireplace as I considered it. “We would just have to wake up before my friend is all. Otherwise, she’ll see me like this.”

“Okay,” she nodded eagerly, beginning to get up. “I’ll go get my phone, so I can set an alarm.”

The moment she stood, my hand flashed out before I even knew what I was doing, and I grabbed her wrist. She froze solid from the touch, with it feeling like an electric current was suddenly running down my arm. I had no idea what I was experiencing right now, but I could sense that she was experiencing it too.

I focused on her plumb juicy ass for a few seconds, just staring at the shiny purple material that was taut in all the right places from its own weight, each cheek perfectly defined, before glancing up when she slowly looked over her shoulder to meet my gaze. Her face was flushed, her emerald eyes longing and passionate.

I tried to remember why I’d stopped her, desperately trying to come up with a reason for why she didn’t have to leave. “I, umm, I have my phone,” I said hesitantly.

She nodded slowly, but didn’t budge an inch. It was as if I was in complete control now, just from barely touching her wrist. My hand was an unbreakable shackle – not just because I was strong, but because she chose it to be.

Gently tugging on her wrist, I lowered my legs at the same time, and she willingly fell into my lap right on my throbbing cock, still facing away from me. Trembling again, I wrapped my arms around her waist and buried my head underneath her armpit, forcing her arm to wrap around my neck. She twisted her upper body around in response, the silk running across my cheek, and wrapped both arms around my head, pressing her heavy tits against my face.

My cock throbbed against her ass, actively leaking precum, while my whole body felt like it was burning with passion. The thick aroma coming from her was intoxicating, making me wish I could figure out what was so seductive about it. But there was no fragrance I could think to compare it to. It was definitely sweet like candy, but unlike anything I’d ever smelt from flowers or food, or anything else. I supposed maple syrup might be a

somewhat close comparison, but it was still far from being as enticing as *this* .

After a moment of intense arousal, my mind began catching up with me. “I’m...I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“Why?” she asked softly, holding my head tight.

“Well, I don’t know,” I answered honestly. “I guess, I just feel like I’m taking advantage of you, given what you’ve just been through.”

She laughed at that. “More like I’m taking advantage of *you* . You’re the younger one here.”

I abruptly pulled away to look up at her. “You’re only two years older than me!” I exclaimed.

She grinned. “And you’re still technically in high school,” she said playfully, only to clarify that she was truly joking, due to my grimace. “I’m just teasing you, cutie.” Her expression then became more intense. “Lucky for you, I like younger guys.”

“You do?” I asked seriously. I wasn’t sure if she was still teasing or being for real. However, I realized that the sudden intimacy between us had completely broken down our barriers, since it was now openly obvious that we both desperately wanted each other. At least for her, I was sure that my cock throbbing against her ass made that pretty clear.

Gabriella nodded slowly, looking at me passionately. “Yes, your innocence and inexperience are hot.” She paused. “Although, the one guy I did seriously date was older, so it might be more accurate to say that I like it that you, specifically, are younger than me.” She then glanced away, seeming pensive. “Maybe this is shallow, but I think it’s because you’re sort of supernatural. I’m just a normal person, so being older than you makes me feel like I’m your equal in a way. Like, you can obviously do things I can’t, so if I was younger too, then...” Her voice trailed off.

“You’d feel inferior?” I guessed.

She focused on me, only for her emerald gaze to become longing again. “No, not inferior exactly. More like, I’d feel like a kid – like a dependent, because you were ahead of me in every way possible, with no chance for me to catch up.” She paused. “Does that make sense? Basically, with you being younger, I instead feel more like the adult – like there is a way in which I can take care of you, instead of you always taking care of me.” She then stopped to examine my expression. “That doesn’t sound creepy, does it?”

I shook my head. “No, I think I get it. I was just trying to imagine it from your point of view, if the roles were flipped. Although, I think I *would* feel inferior if I was both younger *and* normal, like I’d always just be a burden to you.”

She nodded. “That’s sort of what I mean, actually. I’d feel guilty, I think, always feeling like I couldn’t really contribute to the relationship. Instead, I feel like being older and having more experience with life, especially as an adult, allows me to be able to benefit you...take care of you...be the superior one, essentially, since there are ways in which I’ll never measure up to you.”

I buried my face against her chest again, as I realized that I’d probably feel like she was superior no matter what. “I’ll always feel like you’re over me,” I admitted out loud.

“Why is that?” she asked curiously.

Sighing, I replied. “Because there’s one way in which I’m extremely vulnerable – one thing you have complete control of.”

“The fact I can make you transform?” she wondered quietly.

“Oh...” I paused. “I guess there’s that too.”

“I’m sorry,” she replied. “I should have just let you finish. What were you going to say?”

I shook my head against her heavy breasts, trying to swallow the lump in my throat as I prepared myself for what I was about to blurt out. I knew my hormones and throbbing cock were significantly affecting my thoughts right now, but that didn’t stop me from telling her how I felt in the moment.

“It’s fine. What I was referring to is *you*,” I admitted. “I desperately want you, but I can only have you if you allow me to. So, it’s in that way that I’ll always feel like you’re over me. Because you control the fulfillment of that vulnerable desire within me...”

“Oh!” she exclaimed in surprise, apparently not expecting that to be what I meant. She then immediately hugged my head more tightly. “Kai, sorry if this is too soon, but...” She took a deep breath. “I really love you.”

“I love you too, Gabriella,” I whispered back, wanting to shove my cock in her pussy so bad. Instead, I just tightened my embrace a little. I could hear my own heartbeat pounding in my ears.

I felt like all of this was happening way too fast, wondering if Gabriella’s traumatic experience was causing her to latch onto me faster than a normal person would. Granted, I couldn’t deny that she’d apparently

been interested for a while now, nor could I deny that my own feelings might be based on more than her physical appearance, even despite my level of arousal right now.

At the very least, even if I only wanted to fuck her hot body, I felt like I could still say I loved her. It might not be as meaningful as when I said it to Serenity, or when a married couple said it to each other, but my infatuation and lust had to be called something.

So why not love?

And I could honestly say that I liked her. Still, I couldn't help but wonder if I really was taking advantage of her, considering she'd been through so much in the last twelve hours. Would she really feel the same way in the morning?

As much as I wanted her right now, I didn't want to have my heart ripped out when she realized she overreacted in the heat of the moment, even if her supposed love was more established than my own. Granted, it wasn't like we could do anything anyway. No way in hell was I going to fuck Gabriella with my older housemate right upstairs.

Shit, if Serenity saw a monster with gray skin, white hair, and yellow eyes fucking her best friend, she might shoot me! Like, actually shoot me with her gun!

And even if she didn't, my life would probably fall apart in so many ways.

Sighing, I pulled out the blanket from behind me, letting it fall to the floor. Gabriella leaned away slightly, wondering what I was doing. However, before she could ask, I scooped her up in my arms and twisted around on the couch, lying her down.

I then reached up to turn off the lamp, before lying down next to her, pressing against her tightly, so that we could both fit. I then gently moved my arm underneath her head for her to use as a pillow. My mouth was now barely a couple inches away from her full lips, a slight shine on them from her lip gloss, and I could feel the entirety of her silk-covered body pressed against my own. Within a matter of seconds, we had our legs intertwined with each other, forcing my rock-hard cock against her pelvis tightly.

At first, I watched as her eyes searched for my face in the dark, trying desperately to see me. I was glad there was a light on in the kitchen, because once her eyes slowly adjusted she began eyeing me with renewed passion.

After a moment, I finally reached behind me to grab the blanket off the floor and throw it over us.

Satisfied, I met her gaze. The passion in her emerald eyes was intense, and I wondered what she was thinking. I was about to ask, when she blurted her thoughts out loud.

“I really want to kiss you,” she admitted. “But...”

“But what?” I wondered, my stomach suddenly in knots, as I found my heart galloping again.

“But...” She bit her lip gently, catching my attention. “I’m afraid I won’t be able to stop there.”

Oh shit! If only!

If only, if only!

Sighing, I closed my eyes. “Yeah, maybe we should wait to kiss.”

“Wow,” she said emphatically, prompting my eyes to pop open again. “That’s a first for me – hearing a guy agree to wait.”

My face felt hot. “It’s not really that special. It’s almost harder to do it, than not to, since I never have before. I might not be so restrained if I’d already had this type of experience.”

Or if my friend wasn’t right upstairs, I added in my thoughts.

“Hmm, yeah,” she agreed, focusing past me into the dark room as she thought about it. “I had a friend in high school who was fairly reserved with guys. However, she ended up in a really serious relationship...” She paused. “And after he broke her heart, she pretty much had sex with every guy she dated after that, on the first date. Although, she changed in a lot of other ways too. I don’t really talk to her much anymore.”

“Oh. Sorry to hear that.”

Gabriella shrugged slightly. “No big deal. Serenity is great. And now I have you too.”

I blushed, feeling conflicted all over again for so many reasons. I reached up with my hand to hide my embarrassment.

“What?” she said with a smirk, sounding playful.

“I just feel embarrassed whenever you say stuff like that,” I admitted.

“That I’ve claimed you, and you’re mine?” she teased.

“Or, that you’ve given yourself to me,” I added.

Gabriella slowly reached up to grab my hand and carefully moved it to the side of her face. I began gently caressing her soft cheek with my

fingertips, before moving down to touch her shoulder, feeling the smooth silk over her toned arms.

When I went a little lower to her ribs, she flinched and cringed. “Oh! I’m sorry!” I exclaimed. “The bruising?”

She nodded. “It’s alright. Nothing’s broken – thankfully. It’s more sensitive in certain spots than others.” She then grabbed my hand and placed it on her hip. “Right here is fine.”

Feeling a little out of control, I tugged on her waist, shoving my cock against her harder, but was careful to leave my hand where it was for fear of accidentally touching another unseen bruise and hurting her again. I then closed my eyes, my mind overwhelmed with the sensation of her body touching every inch of my front.

I wanted to fuck her so bad, but I couldn’t imagine the horror of my friend catching us, never mind seeing me in my devilish form.

“Can you open your eyes again?” Gabriella whispered.

I did, wondering why.

She stared at me briefly before explaining herself. “I just wanted to look at them again. I like it that they glow.” She then hesitated for a second before continuing. “When I saw your eyes in the woods, I admit it really freaked me out. But now that I know who they belong to, I feel mesmerized by them, like I could just stare at them forever.”

I wasn’t sure how to respond, but as I continued watching her expression deepen with passion, I realized I probably *shouldn’t* respond.

Just as I saw her desire – no, her *hunger* for me – begin to tip over the edge, I quickly closed my eyes, afraid of what she was about to do to me. Even despite my reservations, it wouldn’t take much for her to tip *me* over the edge too, and we couldn’t afford that right now.

Taking a shaky breath, I quickly whispered to her. “We should probably get some sleep.”

I could feel her tense body hesitate before sensing her nodding slowly in agreement. Granted, there was no way in hell I was going to be able to fall asleep anytime soon. My body felt wide awake and wired, desperate to take advantage of the sexy older girl lying in my arms. Every fiber of my being wanted to just flip her on her stomach, pull down her silky pajama bottoms, and fuck her from behind.

I couldn’t help but fantasize about fucking her in the ass – or probably fucking her pussy first and then fucking her in the ass once I was wet with

her juices. I also wanted to stick my cock in her mouth, which meant I'd probably have to start with that, wondering if she'd let me shove it down her throat and make her gag on it.

Certainly, I knew real life probably wouldn't be even close to as vulgar as what I was thinking in my head, but I felt overwhelmed with the *need* to fuck her in every way possible.

To fill her every orifice with my cum, as if that would be somehow claiming her.

Unfortunately, even after agreeing to go to sleep, neither her heart rate nor her level of arousal lessened. By the time Gabriella made a move, I already knew it was coming.

With my eyes still closed, she abruptly leaned forward and pressed her hot lips against my forehead, kissing me softly for several long seconds before sighing in contentment and laying her head back down on my bicep. I kept my eyes closed tight the whole time, knowing what would happen if I opened them and met her gaze.

After that, she remained awake for at least another twenty minutes, but slowly her pulse began to slow down and her breathing became more regular.

Finally confident she was out, I peeked at her through my eyelashes, focusing on her slightly parted lips. I then reached up to my forehead to wipe off the lip gloss she'd left behind, only to watch her quietly for almost an hour before I began calming down a little too. I supposed that denying my body long enough allowed it to give up and focus on more realistic needs – like sleep.

Still, I just couldn't believe how such a normal day could have ended up in such an extraordinary way. Certainly, things might be different tomorrow, but I never would have foreseen myself lying so close to such a beautiful woman. And if someone told me such a thing would happen, then I would have guessed it was with Serenity in a solely platonic way, and that I was doing a much better job at keeping my cool while being so close to her.

As I finally began to feel my own mind drift off to sleep, I realized I felt extremely content, and possibly the happiest I'd been in a long time.

It was nice. Really, really nice.

CHAPTER 3:

RELATIONSHIP

I woke up startled, my heart racing when I realized Serenity was awake in her room and getting ready to come downstairs. My eyes focused on Gabriella's face just an inch away from mine, seeing her peaceful expression, her full lips slightly parted, prompting me to carefully separate myself from her.

Kneeling on the floor next to the couch, I looked down at my hands to confirm that I looked normal right now – being unconscious allowed me to transition back, and the abrupt wakeup wasn't enough to make it happen again. It was a miracle that I'd been able to fall asleep at all, considering I'd been lying next to a fucking hot goddess all night.

I grabbed my phone and checked to see why it hadn't gone off, only to groan in annoyance for being such an idiot. Not only had I never set an earlier alarm last night, but it was dead anyway, so even my normal alarms hadn't gone off.

'Stupid phone ,' I thought to myself, knowing full well that it was my fault. I should have plugged it in last night, but was too preoccupied to even think about it.

Rising to my feet, I dashed into the kitchen to try to get some breakfast together for Serenity, only to hear her run urgently from my room to the top of the stairs. "Kai!" she cried out in a near panic. "Where's Gabriella?"

I quickly appeared at the bottom to reply. "Shh!" I hissed. "She's down here."

Serenity hesitated, and then began making her way down the stairs. She was already dressed for the day, wearing black slacks and a nice white blouse, which was pretty much the dress code for her job. I knew I'd have to avoid looking at her ass, because those pants in particular really emphasized one of her best assets. I'd have to avoid staring at her neck and

collar bones too, since the partially opened top of her blouse felt like it was begging me to lean in for a kiss.

“She slept down here?” Serenity wondered, seeming concerned. “Like, with you?” she clarified.

“I, umm, slept on the floor, of course,” I lied.

My friend stopped a step above me, putting her hands on her hips as she gave me a look. “Kai, I’m not stupid!”

I held my hands up defensively. “Nothing happened, so chill out! She was afraid she’d have nightmares if she slept alone.”

That got her attention, causing her to calm down a little as she was forced to think about what happened yesterday. She began speaking under her breath. “She could have slept with me if that was the case...” Her voice then trailed off as her deep brown eyes widened slightly. “Wait...you like her, don’t you?” she realized. “That’s why you’ve been acting so weird.” She laughed then, a big grin crossing her face. “You didn’t know what to do with yourself! So, you just kept running away!” She continued to chuckle.

“It’s not funny,” I snapped, feeling sincerely embarrassed now. And a little depressed too, since her amused reaction told me what I already knew – that she and I would never be anything more than friends. Of course, I was aware of that unfortunate truth already, but it almost hurt a little that she wasn’t jealous. Especially since I knew for a fact that I’d be jealous if the roles were flipped.

“Aww, come here,” she replied with mock sympathy, reaching out to pull me into a hug, forcing my head against her shoulder. “I’m only playing with you. I just can’t believe you’re actually interested in someone. I was beginning to wonder if you’d ever date.”

“And what about you?” I retorted, immediately regretting the question as I pulled away. However, before I gave her a chance to respond, something obvious hit me. “Wait, you’re really okay if I like her?”

“Well...” Serenity blushed. “When I first started talking with her, I was excited to have made a new friend, but as I got to know her better, I started thinking she’d make a great girlfriend for you.”

Holy shit. She set me up? In a weird way, that was both hot and depressing. “W-What?” I exclaimed, echoing my thoughts. “You set us up?”

“No!” Her face turned even more red. “I mean, not really. I just let you meet is all...” She paused, her thin brown eyebrows knitting together. “And I was sure it would never happen after the way you disappeared the first

time. But then, she started asking questions about you, and I realized you'd caught her interest. Although, I honestly wasn't really sure *what* to think, because I tried to invite her over again, but she kept giving me excuses."

I hadn't doubted that Gabriella was telling me the truth last night, but it was still kind of surprising to hear it coming from Serenity. Granted, finding out that she'd been avoiding me too was a little confusing – even I wasn't sure what to think of that. Still, it was nice to confirm that Gabriella had sincerely taken an interest in me right away, even before she discovered my secret.

Realizing that my thoughts were threatening to turn my hair white again, I quickly changed the subject. "I'm going to start making breakfast. Do you want anything in particular?"

Serenity put her hands on her bony hips again. "Umm, excuse me? Aren't you going to get ready for school? It's Friday, not Saturday."

I looked at her in surprise. "And what? Leave her here alone? You're not serious, right? I can take a sick day – I have perfect attendance."

She gave me a critical look. "I can't leave you two here alone! You really do think I'm stupid, don't you?"

I held my hands up again, trying to physically block the thoughts attempting to invade my mind. "We aren't going to do anything," I hissed. "And besides, she has her own place! It's not like you could stop it from happening if we really wanted to."

And with that, I'd gone too far. I abruptly spun around and dashed into the kitchen, suddenly focusing my entire being into making something – *anything* – for breakfast.

"Hey!" she called after me, clearly shocked. "Are you okay?"

I was pulling out a bag of flour from the pantry to start making pancakes, my head empty now. "Yeah, why?" I said casually, keeping my thoughts focused on what I was doing.

"Don't give me that," she replied. "You just took off like a bat out of hell, not to mention..." Her voice trailed off.

"What?" I wondered, sounding uninterested.

She was quiet for a minute before finally answering. "Nothing. Your hair just looked a little gray for a second there."

I paused, trying to act concerned. "It does?" I reached up and tried to pull a strand of it far enough away to look at it, though it was too short to really see it. "I sure *hope* I'm not getting gray hair. I'm only eighteen!"

Serenity sighed. "I must have just imagined it. It looks fine."

"Oh, good." I went back to working on breakfast, measuring out the ingredients to make the pancake batter. "Hey, does Gabriella eat dairy?"

Serenity nodded. "She's not vegan. She just generally doesn't eat meat. At least, not normally."

"R-Right. Thanks," I agreed.

After a long minute, Serenity abruptly closed the gap between us, hissing under her breath. "Okay, seriously Kai, if I find out you and her... especially in this house..."

I quickly shook my head while leaning away, trying to physically rid myself of the thoughts popping into my head. "Of course, of course."

She then snapped at me again. "And if you do, you better use protection!"

I jumped away from her in shock, rapidly shaking my head. '*Don't turn white, don't turn white, don't turn white!*' The skin along my spine was definitely dark gray now, but I was pretty confident I'd managed to keep my hair a normal color. I could usually do that – control where it happened, if I concentrated. It was one of the only reasons I hadn't been found out yet, especially in school where some of the girls wore thongs, or otherwise provided undesired stimulation. Of course, my biggest defense was to just make sure I didn't look, as well as making sure I masturbated at least once a day at home.

"Everything alright in here?" a voice suddenly asked from the kitchen entrance.

We both turned to look at Gabriella, although I immediately had to look away when I focused on the shiny purple silk pulled tight over her heavy breasts. Serenity immediately crossed her arms, causing Gabriella to lower her gaze, feeling a scolding coming on. It was suddenly as if she was a kid, and my friend was the adult.

However, instead of yelling at her, Serenity just sighed. "How'd you sleep?" she asked, sounding only slightly annoyed. I quickly went back to working on breakfast.

Gabriella hesitated briefly before responding. "Umm, really good, considering."

Serenity sighed again and unfolded her arms. "I assume you're staying here today too."

“Too ?” Gabriella repeated in confusion, but then realized what she was implying, with me seeing her glance in my direction from the corner of my eye. “Oh, I mean, my cars not here...” She paused. “And obviously I’m not going to work today after what happened last night.” She hesitated. “So, is that alright? If I camp out here?”

Serenity took a deep breath, and then walked over to the fridge. Opening it, she pulled out a yogurt and turned to walk out of the kitchen. “I’m going to run late if I wait for the pancakes, so I’m just going to stop for some coffee and eat at work. I’ll see you two later.” She then stopped when she reached Gabriella, whispering to her. “You’re still my friend, but I’m responsible for him. Don’t forget I’m a cop, and he’s still in high school. So, no funny business, alright?”

I heard Gabriella gulp in embarrassment and nod, before Serenity headed out the door. Once her car pulled away, Gabriella slowly walked up to me as I began scooping batter onto the skillet.

“Well ,” she said emphatically. “That wasn’t so bad.”

Sighing, I nodded. “She wouldn’t really arrest you,” I reassured her. “She’s just torn between being my childhood friend, and acting like my mom. It’s been rough playing both roles for her.”

“Oh, I know she wouldn’t arrest me,” Gabriella agreed. “And she can’t anyway. I looked it up after we first met. Even if you were still a minor, I can take advantage of you all I want as long as you’re consenting. It’s called the Romeo and Juliet law, or something like that.” She giggled when my hair flashed white, shifting in an instant. “Okay, I have to admit. That’s really satisfying seeing the effect my words have on you.”

I groaned in response. “Please don’t tease me like that. What if she comes back?”

Gabriella suddenly leaned closer, her tone surprisingly seductive and drawn out. “But I wasn’t teasing. I get you all to myself for the rest of the day.”

I shivered in response, feeling the sides of my face begin to gray. Scoffing at her, I retorted. “Jeez, I thought you were shy!”

She leaned away, blinking at me. “Well, I am a little shy with strangers. But I warm up to people I like. That’s actually why I got a cosmetology license – guaranteed to only have to work with one or two people at the same time. And the pay’s decent with the tips I get. I could never be a waitress – talking to more than two or three people at once is kind of scary.

Oh!” Gabriella quickly looked at me apologetically. “I’m sorry. I’ll be right back. I need to grab my phone and call work to let them know I won’t be coming in. Although, I wouldn’t be surprised if they already know.”

I hadn’t even thought about that – the fact that people would know. She probably was on the news after what happened.

As soon as she went upstairs, I dashed to the window to look outside, just to double-check there weren’t news crews by the road or something crazy like that. I sure hoped the news stations didn’t find out she was staying here, or otherwise we might get bombarded with attempts for an interview.

Gabriella was only gone for a few seconds, before she quickly came rushing down the stairs with her phone in hand. It was evident she didn’t want to spend any time away from me, even just to make a phone call.

When she called her boss, I found out they hadn’t been expecting her to come in, considering that’s where she’d been kidnapped at the start of her shift. Her car was still there in the parking lot, not to mention the police had been there earlier yesterday, so her boss was at least aware she was missing.

As Gabriella explained the gist of what happened, it sounded like her boss pulled the news up on the internet – not necessarily because the woman didn’t believe that she’d gone missing due to a serial killer, but just because it was one of those things you had to see for yourself.

“Oh my God,” the woman said. “You can take off as much time as you need, sweetie. I’m so sorry. I’m glad to hear you’re safe though.”

“Thanks, Darla,” Gabriella replied. “I think I just need a couple of days is all. It was pretty...horrible.”

“Do you need me to bring you anything?” her boss asked seriously.

Gabriella shook her head, causing me to grin at her for giving nonverbal cues again, as if the person on the other end could see it. She stuck her tongue out at me, giving me the unexpected urge to suck on it, before replying verbally.

“No, I’m alright. I’m staying with a couple of friends. They’re taking good care of me.” She gave me a meaningful look that made my face flush, prompting me to get back to the sizzling pancakes I had on the skillet.

“Alright, dear. If you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask.”

Gabriella thanked her and then hung up, immediately explaining her relationship with her boss. “She’s really nice. I used to do people’s hair, but

now I work at a nail salon – the environment is a lot different and my boss is much more friendly and relaxed.”

“Cool,” I replied simply, still feeling awkward about her look when she said we were taking good care of her. I then glanced at her when I noticed that she was slowly approaching me in a provocative manner, almost like a cat about to pounce. “Umm, have a seat please. Your breakfast is ready.”

“Aww, you’re no fun,” she teased, only to obey and turn around to go sit at the table. She watched me stack a couple pancakes on her plate and grab the syrup. “You said it feels good, right?” she wondered after a second, continuing when I nodded cautiously. “Then what’s the harm?”

I paused as I set the plate in front of her, suddenly wanting to remain this close. “I...” My voice caught in my throat, with me feeling uncertain of how to answer. “I guess there’s no harm in it,” I admitted. “I’ve just lived my entire life being very careful not to do it around others.”

Gabriella slowly reached out and wrapped her hand around my wrist, causing my partially whitened hair to fully transition again. “It’s just you and me here,” she whispered.

Shit, I could feel the blood rushing to my cock. Sighing, I gently pulled away. “Well, at least eat first, then I’ll let you do whatever you want afterward.”

Her emerald eyes lit up, her expression mischievous. “Promise?” she said excitedly.

I gulped, quickly returning to the stove while making an attempt to collect my thoughts. I just couldn’t believe this was real. Were we really going to fuck? Or did she have more tame things in mind? Either way, I was both excited and extremely anxious.

Excited, since it sounded as if she intended on taking control and fucking *me*, rather than the other way around. And anxious, because it would be my first time and my body just felt like it was going to explode at the idea of being naked and intimate with her.

After a second, I cleared my throat. “Y-Yeah,” I agreed. “Promise.”

I could hear her heartbeat quicken in anticipation, before she abruptly announced her plans. “Then, I’m going to make it my goal to keep you transformed all day!” she said cheerfully.

“W-Why?” I wondered with a furrowed brow as I focused on the pancakes, hoping her intentions weren’t actually more tame. I mean, I’d take anything from her, but if we started doing stuff, then I wasn’t sure I’d

be satisfied with just kissing or something. I wanted to fuck. I wanted to fuck passionately and roughly like wild animals.

“Well,” she began as she took a bite. “I want to see if we can build up a tolerance for you. Sort of like coffee.”

“Wait. What?” I grabbed my plate, stacked with four pancakes, and went over to sit across from her at the table.

She pouted at my choice of seating, but then explained herself. “Well, if you drink it daily, like Serenity and I both do, then it actually loses some of its potency. If you want to have the same effect as the first time you drink it, then you’d have to keep drinking more and more. Basically, I want to see if you can get used to me, like I’m used to coffee.” She grinned at me again.

“Oh, okay.” I nodded. “Yeah, that would probably make this easier.”

“Exactly!” she said cheerfully, only for her tone to become more serious. “Although, with coffee, the more you get used to it, the more dependent your body becomes...” She winked at me suggestively, forcing another rush of blood to my face.

And to my cock.

Taking a bite, I focused on chewing and swallowing, before clearing my throat. “But you know, I can also transform at will, right?” I replied, quickly doing so to illustrate.

My skin fully transitioned to dark gray, even while my hair turned snow white, and my eyes shifted to gold and black.

She wasn’t even fazed. “Yeah, but that takes the fun out of it! I want you to try to resist!” She grinned. “If you are transformed, I want it to be because you can’t help it. That way we can work on you getting more used to me touching you.”

I gulped at the thought and took another hasty bite.

As I allowed myself to turn back into my human form, I unexpectedly almost shifted again when she reached out with her bare foot underneath the table to touch mine. I quickly jerked it away, my heart racing just from the simple touch. Her skin was so soft, even on her feet, and I suddenly had the craving for her to jerk me off with them.

Which was strange. I absolutely did not have any kind of weird fetish for feet, but it felt like every part of Gabriella’s body was erotic and enticing. Damn, was she really a normal person? It felt more like she was a naughty angel sent from heaven, or maybe a seductive succubus sent from hell...

Of course, I assumed such creatures didn't actually exist, even despite the fact that I wasn't human, nor did I think that heaven and hell existed. But, at the very least, I believed her when she said she was a normal person.

"Hey!" she complained with another pout when I yanked my foot away. "I thought you said I could do what I wanted to you."

"*After* we eat," I reminded her. Shit. She was really going to do things to me.

She didn't respond, her cheeks flushed now, her heart racing. I suspected that she was just as nervous as I was, but was doing a better job of hiding it most of the time. We continued to eat in silence, rather than striking up another conversation, with her watching me the whole time with a passionate gaze, while I did my best to look anywhere except at her.

Finishing my four pancakes long before she finished her two, I got up to rinse my plate off. I then cleaned up the rest of the mess I'd made while making them, before finally turning around to look at her. She'd stopped eating entirely and was just watching me.

I knew, of course, being very attentive to every sound she made.

"What?" I wondered when she didn't say anything.

She shook her head, blushing while she took another bite. After she swallowed it, she whispered a response. "I just really like you."

"I *really* like you too," I admitted, averting my gaze.

She took a few more bites, and then set her fork down on her plate. "I think that's about all I can eat. Sorry. It was really amazing."

"What?" I said in surprise. "No, that's alright. You don't have to finish it." I turned to open one of the cabinets and pulled out a plastic container to put the rest in the fridge – even if she didn't want it for later, I wouldn't hesitate to eat it. Food certainly didn't go to waste in our house, because I was like a bottomless pit.

Seeing what I was doing, Gabriella got up and brought her plate over.

Once I had the leftover food in the fridge, I turned to see that she was leaning against the counter, watching me again. Sighing, I focused more closely on her face first, noticing that her lips still had a slight shine from her lip gloss. I then looked down at her body, taking it all in. The heavy purple silk was hanging provocatively on her curves, pulled tight at her busty chest and hips.

My body uncontrollably shivered slightly as I let my hormones surge, my cock rapidly straining against my black gym shorts while my body

shifted.

“Wow, that’s all it took, huh?” she asked playfully, her expression curious. “You just had to look at me and that was it?”

My face felt hot. “I wasn’t exaggerating when I said I almost transformed when I first met you. It was all I could do to not shift immediately. I barely ran away in time.”

A smirk appeared on her face, as she slowly walked over and wrapped her fingers around my wrist for the second time. Even though I knew I could easily break away from her grip, it still felt like she had me in an unbreakable shackle. As if there was something about her intensity that bound me far more tightly than her hand could ever hope to do.

I suddenly felt trapped in a cage with a predator, although not unwillingly so.

“I’m going to have some fun with you,” she whispered seductively. She then gently tugged on me, leading me out of the kitchen and back to the living room.

Once we reached the couch, she pushed on my chest harder than I anticipated, probably knowing that I was stronger than I looked, though I kept my balance.

“Sit,” she demanded quietly.

I obeyed, sinking into the cushion as I watched her come closer, slowly climbing onto the couch and straddling my lap. Gabriella then sat down firmly on my throbbing cock, shifting her weight as she got more comfortable. I sucked in a sharp breath as she grabbed my face in both her thin hands.

“Hold still,” she whispered. “I’m going to kiss you.”

I held my breath as she took her time leaning forward, her emerald gaze passionate, her cheeks flushed, her pale skin framed by her bright red hair. She then gently rested her lips against mine, rubbing her lip gloss into my skin, before pressing more firmly and forcing her tongue between my lips.

Shit, I felt like she was fucking my mouth as her hot tongue began exploring, searching for mine.

Uncontrollably, before I could stop myself, I roughly grabbed her hips and shoved my cock upward, grinding against her hot silk-covered snatch before I realized what I was doing. I immediately broke away from the kiss. “Oh, I’m sorry,” I said. “That was too rough.”

She shook her head, her eyes overwhelmed with lust. “No,” she purred. “That wasn’t rough enough.” She then tried kissing me again, but suddenly all I could think about was touching her ribs last night and causing her pain.

“But what about your bruises?” I asked seriously, leaning my head away.

Gabriella sighed heavily and pulled away, hopping off my lap. I immediately regretted bringing it up. Had I offended her? Did I ruin the mood?

“S-Sorry,” I quickly said. “I just don’t want to hurt you.”

She shook her head, and began lifting up her silky shirt to just below her heavy tits, exposing her bruised body.

As a reflex, I blushed and looked away.

“No, look. I’m showing you,” she explained. “So you can see where they are. That way you won’t accidentally touch them, if it can be avoided.”

“Oh.” I forced myself to look at her, trying not to be distracted too much by her toned stomach. Once I nodded, she then turned around so I could see the few bruises on her back. There was one spot in particular that looked really nasty.

She saw me focusing on it, and explained. “That’s where he got me with the taser. I was opening up yesterday morning for work, and he tased me behind the building when I was taking some trash out.” I nodded with a grimace, prompting her to drop her shiny shirt, sticking her thumbs at the top of her pajama bottoms.

My eyes widened in shock. “Wait!” I said urgently, averting my gaze.

“What?” she said in surprise.

“I just...I just need a second. To prepare myself.” It was true. I was about to see her exposed hips and thighs, and possibly ass too. I wasn’t sure if I could control myself, because at that point there wasn’t much between me and her wet pussy. Clothes felt like an impenetrable barrier, and she was about to remove that obstacle.

She looked at me curiously. “I’m wearing underwear underneath.”

I glanced up at her again, partially covering my face with my hand. “Well, yeah. I assumed that much. It’s just...”

“Just what?” she asked softly.

“I don’t know,” I admitted, deciding to be honest. “Just the idea of seeing you only in your underwear, right in front of me...I feel like I might reach out and take you.”

“You can, if you want,” she replied quietly. “I’m yours.”

I quickly shook my head, knowing she didn’t understand. I was very strong, and had the capacity to be *very* rough. Too rough. “It’s too much right now. I don’t like feeling like I’m going to lose control of myself.”

She nodded. “That’s alright, but can I still show you the bruises?”

I took a deep breath and then nodded too, looking at her from between my fingers. She let the silky pajama bottoms slip down her waist and fall to the floor, revealing her toned legs. Her panties were white and kind of sheer, with lacy edges. Once she had turned around, so I got a chance to see it all, I quickly averted my eyes while she pulled her pants back up.

“Do you exercise?” I wondered, trying to distract myself.

“I jog a mile almost every day,” she explained. “And I do sit-ups. Generally, I do it in the evening before I shower and go to bed. I used to use the treadmills at the small gym my apartment complex has, but I had too many creeps hitting on me, so I decided to spend a few hundred dollars to buy my own.” She then paused to examine my expression. “Why do you ask?”

I gulped as I thought about her toned body underneath the purple silk. “Well, I can tell you do *something*. No one looks like that without some effort.”

She shrugged. “Honestly, it only takes me like 15 to 20 minutes, which you probably wouldn’t think is a lot, but it makes a big difference when you do it every day. That’s the key – to just be consistent with it. I never go longer than a day without running.” She then paused as she examined me again. “What about you?” she wondered. “I didn’t get a good look last night, but I’ve felt your chest and stomach. What do you do to stay in such great shape?”

“Oh, umm.” I thought about it. “I mean, I fly occasionally, and I guess I do run too, but that’s about it. I’m not nearly as consistent as you.”

Her emerald eyes widened. “Oh! I forgot about that! You had wings last night in the woods. Where did they go?”

“I’ll show you,” I replied, reaching for the collar of my shirt to pull it off, revealing my toned muscles covered in dark gray skin. I then looked up at her, surprised to see her audibly gulp as she looked me over with wide eyes. Suddenly, *she* was the one trembling slightly.

“Ready?” I asked to get her attention.

She nodded, still seeming mesmerized by my body, so I allowed my muscles in my back to reconstruct themselves and rapidly push out bat-like wings. I then reached them around in front of me, surrounding her with them so she could have a better look.

Without hesitation, Gabriella reached out and grazed the soft membrane with her fingertips. “Wow, this is amazing,” she whispered. “How is this even possible?”

I shrugged, causing my wings to move slightly as well. “I don’t know how it works. It just does.”

She focused on me then, her expression now pensive as she seemed to search for a logical explanation. “Have you ever been hurt before?”

I gave her a confused look. “Well, no. Not really. I’ve never even been sick.”

“Really?” she asked in disbelief. “Not even a cold?”

I shrugged again. “Nope. Not that I can remember at least. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, well, I just wondered what would happen if you got hurt. Like, how fast you would heal. If your body can create wings this fast, then it makes me think you would also heal almost instantly too.”

“Maybe. I really don’t know,” I admitted. “Although, I do weigh more than you might expect,” I added, watching her continue to feel them as she nodded. After a few seconds, I spoke again. “Do you want me to take you flying sometime?”

She looked at me in alarm, and immediately shook her head. “I think I’ll pass on that one. That sounds terrifying.”

“Well, you *would* probably think it’s cold, at least,” I realized, both of us falling silent again. I waited another few minutes, before speaking up, kind of wanting to get back to what we’d been doing. “Are you okay if I put them away now? I don’t really like having them out unless I’m going to use them.” She agreed, so I allowed my body to reabsorb the ancillary appendages.

I was hoping that she would resume kissing me, but instead she just stood there, still seeming mesmerized by my chiseled torso.

“Do you want to touch me?” I wondered out loud.

She glanced at my face, her expression shy now, and nodded once.

I couldn’t help but grin, finding it weird how the tables had suddenly turned. I reached out and grabbed her forearms, tugging her gently into my

lap a second time. She sat down sideways on my cock, and carefully placed her trembling fingers on my stomach, gradually tracing the curves created by my abs.

I could smell her actively becoming more aroused as she ran her hand across my chest, switching between tracing my hardening nipples and collar bones.

My muscles weren't massive by any means, but I was certainly well-defined.

After a few minutes of feeling me up, she leaned into me, wrapping her arms around my head and pulling my face against her massive tits. I wrapped my arms around her in return, my face growing hotter and hotter as I listened to her heartbeat through the smooth clothing.

"This is really nice," I said quietly, wanting to do so much more, but also feeling content right now.

She nodded in agreement, briefly giving my head a tight squeeze. We continued to sit like that for a while, content just to hold each other even while my cock throbbed against her ass, before Gabriella spoke up again.

"Thank you, by the way."

"For what?" I wondered, still listening to her heartbeat, not wanting to budge from my current position. She had already thanked me for pretty much everything I'd done for her, so I sincerely wasn't sure why she was thanking me now.

"For last night. For not pretending like you weren't the one who saved me. I was afraid you were going to do that – play dumb. I was surprised when you didn't. It made me really happy."

I grimaced. "Honestly, I was planning to do that. But then I just couldn't bring myself to lie to you. I guess deep down I knew it would hurt you, and I didn't want to see any more pain in your eyes."

Gabriella hugged my head tighter against her chest. "I wouldn't have been mad if you had – I was expecting it after all. But, I was still really glad you didn't."

I squeezed her gently in response. "Well, I guess you're welcome then."

We were both quiet for a few more minutes, when unexpectedly her phone started ringing in the kitchen. It was still on the table where she'd left it. I assumed we would just ignore the phone call, but she quickly pulled away.

"Oh! That's the ringtone I set for Serenity."

Gabriella immediately hopped out of my lap and ran to grab her phone. "Hello?" she asked as she began walking back.

I could easily hear Serenity's voice on the other end, sounding upset. "Hey, Gabriella. I'm really sorry, but they want me to come get you for some more questioning."

"Right now?" she asked in surprise, stopping at the edge of the couch.

"Well, yeah..."

"But why?" the redhead demanded, clearly annoyed. It was actually the first time I'd seen her frustrated.

Serenity sighed briefly, before answering. "I can't say a lot, of course, but it has to do with the situation last night. I guess they are concerned with..." Her voice trailed off. "Well, with how the serial killer died. They want to ask you more about the guy who saved you."

"Seriously?" she said in disbelief, glancing at me. "I already told them everything I know. What is so weird about being stabbed in the chest?"

I heard Serenity bite her lip over the phone, something I knew she did when she was uncomfortable and didn't want to say something. My friend continued after a second. "It's because the knife was shoved straight through the sternum. Like, at a perfect ninety-degree angle. And..." She paused. "Well, they think this guy has been involved in a few other cases, where he killed the suspect."

Gabriella's eyes widened, fear suddenly tainting her scent as she looked at me in alarm. I couldn't help but glance away in shame. She immediately seemed apologetic as she responded firmly. "Well, I've already told them everything I know. Can't I refuse?"

Serenity sighed. "Well, yes. Actually, you can. Is that what you want me to tell them?"

"Yes, it is," Gabriella said more assertively. "Tell them I've already shared everything I know, and I've been through enough. I just want to move on."

"Okay," my friend agreed hesitantly. "And I'm really sorry, Gabriella. I wasn't trying to make you upset. The guy they're worried about has only killed known murderers, all of whom were about to kill someone. They had hoped you might be the first witness who could actually identify the guy. Honestly, most of my coworkers don't want to get involved in this because he's saving people's lives." She took a deep breath. "But the law is still the law."

Gabriella's expression was even more guilty and apologetic toward me, as she continued speaking to Serenity. "Well, honestly, I don't disagree with them. I'd be dead right now if it wasn't for him. I mean, what was the guy supposed to do? Ask the serial killer nicely to stop killing me? He literally had a knife to my chest! You saw the cut!"

"I know, I know," she agreed. "Really, that's the only thing preventing this from becoming a full-blown case – because it's possible this person could have just stumbled upon these instances and intervened. It's not like he tracked the perps down after the fact. So, if that's the case, then it can be ruled as self-defense."

Gabriella sighed. "Why do they even think it's the same guy anyway?"

"Oh! It's because the cases have the same MO. Each victim was stabbed through the chest, straight into the heart with meticulous accuracy..." She hesitated. "And the object wasn't always sharp, like a knife. One serial killer had his gun barrel shoved through his chest, which doesn't even seem possible for a normal person to do."

"Yeah, that does sound strange," Gabriella agreed, probably knowing that denying it would seem suspicious. "But like I said, I already told them everything I know."

"Right," Serenity replied. "I'm sorry for bothering you about it. Is Kai doing alright?"

"Yes." She then looked at my expression, seeing that I was still averting my gaze. "He's upstairs right now. I was just hanging out in the kitchen."

My friend paused. "Well, maybe ask him to take you out to the mall or something...if you feel up to going out."

Gabriella blushed, since it sounded like she was suggesting we go on a date – or at least, trying to get us out of the house and around other people so we weren't home alone together. Gabriella cleared her throat. "Umm, well, maybe. I'm kind of afraid to go out, honestly. I might wait until tomorrow before I try venturing outside again."

"Right, okay," Serenity responded. "Well, I need to get back to work. I'll see you this evening."

"Hey," Gabriella said, her tone sounding more meaningful. "Thanks Serenity. Seriously. I'm really glad you're my friend."

"Aww! You're going to make me start crying again! Just take it easy today, alright?"

Gabriella agreed that she would, and then hung up. I still couldn't bring myself to meet her gaze, because knowing she'd been afraid of me, even for a second, made me feel miserable.

She tried to lighten the mood by speaking casually about it. "Looks like you need to change it up a little," she teased, only to look apologetic again when I grimaced. "I'm just kidding. Are you mad at me?"

Sighing heavily, I shook my head. "No, I just sensed your fear when she told you."

"Hey, I'm not afraid," she retorted, placing her hands on her hips.

I sighed again. "I smelt it," I said simply.

She let her hands fall to her side. "Okay, maybe I felt a little scared for a second, but she made it sound like the 'victims'..." She did air quotes for emphasis. "Weren't murderers themselves. At least, when she first mentioned it."

When I still wouldn't look at her, she slowly walked up and stood close enough so that her knees were touching mine. I focused on her silk-covered thighs for a moment, before raising my chin to meet her gaze, seeing that her expression was now somber. Taking a deep breath, I reached out and placed my hands on her silky hips, pulling her gently forward.

She quickly brought her knee up to get back onto the couch, straddling my waist again. She then plopped down gently and wrapped my head in her embrace, squeezing me tightly both with her legs and arms at the same time. I was sure she could feel that my cock wasn't hard anymore.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

I shook my head against her chest. "You don't need to be sorry. I just feel ashamed that I made you afraid. I would never hurt you." And I meant that. I needed to make sure I was fully in control, because I couldn't afford to hurt her. Even just being too rough one time might make her not trust me again.

"I know," she said quietly. "That's why I'm sorry. I know you'd never hurt me, so there should have been no reason for me to feel afraid." She continued to hold me for a while longer, before leaning away slightly. I looked up at her, blushing when I saw that the desire in her green eyes had returned.

Gabriella slowly lowered her face, focusing on my lips, until she abruptly closed the gap and kissed me passionately.

When her tongue slipped between my lips, feeling like she was fucking my mouth roughly again, it had the same effect as last time. I immediately pulled hard on her waist, forcing her down on my stiffening cock while I shoved my own tongue into her mouth.

She moaned again, but this time I didn't stop. She gasped in surprise when I pulled away just enough to gently bite her juicy bottom lip. She immediately bit mine in return, a playful look in her emerald eyes as she sank her teeth into my flesh much harder.

However, she then had the same reaction I'd experienced, pulling away in alarm. "Sorry, that wasn't too hard, was it?"

I shook my head and reached up behind the base of her neck, feeling her bright red hair cover my hand as I forced her lips onto mine again. Her hands began exploring my chest as we kissed, before she returned her fingers to my jawline to hold my face. We were both beginning to breathe harder through our noses, the sound becoming ragged and heavy, when I unexpectedly heard a concerning sound in the distance.

Yanking my head away, I listened closely.

"What's wrong?" she asked in alarm, seeing my serious expression.

We had a fairly long driveway, and no close neighbors, so no one ever came near the house except me and my friend. However, currently a car was slowing down on the road, as if it was going to pull in. I suspected that maybe they were just turning around, but I wanted to make sure, considering someone like a reporter might have found out where Gabriella was staying.

However, when the vehicle pulled in, it didn't stop and turn around. Instead, it began driving toward the house.

Shit. We had company.

CHAPTER 4: REACTION

Dammit. “Someone’s here,” I explained, extremely annoyed. But it was obvious from her expression that she already knew now – the vehicle was close enough for her to hear too.

“It couldn’t be Serenity, could it?” she wondered. “Maybe she was already on her way to pick me up?”

I shook my head. “I would recognize the sound of her car. This is someone else. They’re a smoker too...” I paused as I began picking up their scent. “And there’s something familiar about how they smell, but I’m not sure why.”

“What do we do?” she whispered. “You’re still transformed.”

I met her worried gaze. “Well, we don’t have to answer the door. We can just ignore them and wait for them to leave.”

“Oh, of course.” She blushed, seeming embarrassed she hadn’t thought of that.

Knowing we could be visible from the half-circle window at the top of the doorway, if the person was tall enough and decided to peek, I held onto her and shifted my weight, lying down on my back with her on top of me. She gasped in surprise from the movement, but I knew from her scent that I’d made her excited and sparked her arousal again.

The person outside – a man, by the sound of the weight in his footsteps – got out of the still-running vehicle and threw a cigarette bud on the ground. I was trying to figure out why his scent was familiar, wondering if I’d just randomly come across it at some point, while he walked up to the front door and began knocking loudly.

My gaze focused on Gabriella’s just above mine, both of us staring at each other in surprise at how aggressive he was about it.

The man knocked a second time, even harder, and then it sounded as if he was trying to peer inside – the skin on the sides of his hands leaned against the glass. Finally, when there was no answer, the man tried the door handle...

The hairs on the back of my neck stood on end when it opened, realizing I'd never locked it after Serenity left.

Shit!

Gabriella knew I couldn't be seen right now, so she immediately jumped up and burst into action, running to the front door and yelling at the intruder. "Hey! You can't just come in here! I don't want company right now!"

Surprisingly, the guy didn't even seem fazed by her outburst. "Gabriella Watson, you're under arrest. We're taking you in for questioning."

Clearly, the man's words caught her off guard, as the smell of surprise and anxiety radiated from her body. Of course, due to my friend being a cop, I was familiar with the basic rules of arrest, but everything about this situation seemed weird. I wanted to jump out and protect her, but I couldn't afford to be seen like this by a cop.

Especially not by a cop.

Gabriella was dumbfounded. "I'm...I'm what? But I didn't do anything!" she exclaimed, her tone sounding defeated.

I could hear the man grab her wrist and slam a handcuff roughly on it, instructing her to turn around.

Fuck! What should I do?! What should I do?!

I couldn't transition back to normal when I was under this much stress, and even if I *did* look normal, I couldn't *make* the police officer stop! At least, not without getting myself arrested too! And in the end, that wouldn't help her out, which meant there was no way for me to really prevent this from happening.

Who in the hell was this guy? One of my friend's coworkers? Why was his scent familiar?

Suddenly, just as the man secured Gabriella's other wrist behind her back, it hit me like a ton of bricks. All my muscles locked up, as if I was a tightly wound spring about to explode.

The man's scent...it was the person stopped on the side of the road last night – the person I'd noticed when telling Gabriella how sensitive my nose was. The man who had been smoking...

Just as my muscles unleashed with the force of a cannon ball being fired, I heard the man whispering in her ear.

"You're under arrest, so I can finish the job my accomplice failed last night."

Pure terror erupted from Gabriella's pores as I exploded over the couch and toward the front entrance, body slamming the guy straight out of the door. Shockingly, the man really was a cop, or at least dressed like one.

He flew through the air over six feet before his back slammed into the ground, flipping backward once before flopping onto his stomach. But he recovered quicker than I expected, coughing as he looked up to see who attacked him.

I watched his eyes widen in true horror as he saw me, quickly jerking his hand down for his gun.

In a flash, I dashed out of the doorway to intercept him, reaching for the gun as the man fired. My hand just barely grabbed the barrel as I felt the bullet pierce my palm, burying itself into my shoulder. I *roared* in pain as I ripped the gun out of my assailant's hand and tossed it, yanking my fist back to smash his face in.

However, unexpectedly, I hesitated and held my strike back as the throbbing pain in my hand and shoulder awakened a hidden need deep within me.

For a split second, I lost myself.

My teeth were suddenly at his throat, grabbing the back of his neck with my hand and instantly crushing it in my jaws as I took a large gulp of the blood that rushed out, followed by another. However, the moment I began taking my third gulp, I realized what I was doing and shoved the man's body away from me, horrified at myself.

I was in complete shock, unable to believe this was real, but then the bullet in my shoulder caught my attention as it was violently shoved out of my muscle and fell to the ground. I focused down on my hand just in time to see the bullet wound finish closing up, as if it'd never even existed.

There wasn't even a scar.

Disgusted at myself, I fell to my knees and covered my face with my hands.

My victim was still alive, struggling to breathe despite the fact that his throat had been nearly ripped out. Blood was squirting out of his neck onto the ground with each heartbeat, the pulse slowing down until it stopped altogether.

Just like that, he was dead.

And the world around me was completely silent.

It felt like nothing moved for an eternity, but I knew better. In reality, it was only mere seconds before Gabriella reacted. I heard her hesitantly take a step toward me, followed slowly by another. I could smell her fear – I was sincerely afraid too, having no idea I was truly a monster, even despite my appearance. However, she continued to slowly walk up to me, before she dropped to her knees, her wrists still handcuffed behind her back.

I didn't budge an inch, all my muscles locked up, afraid of how she'd react if I moved.

She then leaned forward slightly, resting her forehead between my shoulders against my bare skin. I flinched from the touch, my anxiety spiking.

Neither of us said anything for a painfully long few minutes, before she finally whispered against my back. "Are you alright?"

I shook my head, my words finally coming out in a rush. "I didn't know that would happen," I said urgently, afraid she wouldn't believe me. "I've... I've never been hurt before. There have been a few times I accidentally ran a knife over my finger, but it didn't even break the skin." I sucked in a sharp breath as my eyes began to sting – because I *wasn't* safe. It wasn't safe to be around me. "I guess a gun is different," I whispered. "I'm so sorry, Gabriella. I really am...a monster."

She didn't try to deny it, instead asking a different question. "Do you think...you could control it? If you got hurt again?"

I was quiet as I thought about it. "M-Maybe," I admitted in a shaky voice. "I think it just took me by surprise. Getting hurt like that, getting *shot*, and then the urge that came with it..." My voice trailed off.

"And your body has already healed itself?" she wondered quietly.

"Y-Yes," I managed. "I'm pretty sure that drinking..." I couldn't say it.

I lifted my head a little and peeked through my fingers at the pool of blood on the ground next to the dead body. Unlike just a few minutes ago, I didn't have the urge to drink it anymore, which I assumed meant that I'd been satisfied the moment I consumed enough to heal myself.

However, the sensation of drinking blood had been unlike anything I'd experienced before – the dark crimson fluid never made it to my stomach. Instead, the moment I swallowed it, it felt like my body absorbed it directly into my tissues, creating an overwhelming warmth that spread all throughout my insides.

I removed a hand to wipe my mouth, discovering that there didn't appear to be any blood on my face either, even though I was certain I should be covered in it – drinking blood from a gaping wound wasn't like drinking from a straw. It was more like drinking from a water fountain or watering hose.

Gabriella must have realized I was looking at the body, because she lifted her head off my back and whispered to me again. "Can you turn around, please?" she asked politely.

I turned my head to glance at her from the corner of my yellow and black eyes, before slowly complying, shuffling on my knees so that I was sideways compared to her. I then sat on my heels and averted my gaze.

She was now physically above me, since I'd sat down, while she remained on her knees. She seemed disapproving of the fact that I wouldn't look at her, but I couldn't be sure. At least, not until she commented on it.

"No, look at me," she demanded.

Slowly, I focused up at her, sincerely feeling ashamed. Because I was no different than the man who I just killed. My eyes widened in shock when I realized her emerald gaze was endearing.

"You saved my life," she whispered. "*Again*. Thank you. You have no idea how terrified I was when I realized it was going to happen again." Her face scrunched up a little as tears appeared in her eyes. "So thank you."

"I know," I whispered, referring to her fear. "I could smell it." I then sighed heavily. "I really am sorry."

In response to my words, she abruptly sat down on her heels and leaned toward my chest, twisting as she did so. Shocked to have her suddenly falling in front of me, I quickly reached out and collected her in my arms, pulling her face against my bare chest.

She looked up at me shyly, her cheek pressed against my dark gray skin. "Thanks for catching me," she whispered.

"Are you alright?" I asked in concern, wondering if she almost passed out.

She nodded immediately. "Yes. I just thought you might be unwilling to touch me unless I made you." She smiled slightly. "And I can't easily *make you* when I'm handcuffed," she teased, her smirk growing larger, before her expression turned solemn. "I can see you feel horrible about it, but I don't think you should be. You were going to have to kill him anyway. It wasn't like he was just going to leave us alone. He'd probably keep coming after

me for the rest of my life. And no one would believe a cop was a serial killer – not when there isn't any solid evidence."

I stared at her in disbelief, mostly surprised that she'd anticipated how I'd react to her asking me to hold her. And then I was pensive as I considered the rest of what she said. "I guess you're right," I admitted, focusing on her vibrant red hair strewn across my arm. "But still, I think *how* I kill matters. I don't take pleasure in it – that's why I just stab them in the heart. To get it over with. I feel like it's a lot more humane than snapping a neck or stabbing them in the head. I'm not trying to make them suffer. I'm just trying to stop them from taking someone else's life."

"*Which !*" Gabriella said forcefully. "Is why you are *not* a monster!"

I stared at her, blinking a few times as I examined her determined expression, realizing she knew exactly what was on my mind. "Oh," I finally said. "I guess...maybe you're right." I looked away as I thought more about it, but she wasn't done.

"You see that man? Look at him," she demanded. She waited for me to comply before continuing, once I was grimacing at what I'd done. "*That* is a monster. A real monster, in human skin." She then paused to let that sink in. "What you look like, or even what you need to *eat* , isn't what makes you a monster. It's what is in your heart...and you have a good heart."

I was still grimacing as I glanced at her, prompting her to continue.

"Kai, you might look like some kind of devil to most people, but you have a good human heart. Whereas that man looks like a good human on the outside – a cop of all people – but there's no doubt he has the heart of a devil."

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. "Thank you," I whispered.

"For what?" she asked innocently.

I found it difficult to believe she needed clarification. "For...for saving *me* ," I realized. Because if I'd found this out about myself under different circumstances, discovering that I might need blood in certain situations, then it probably would have placed me at a crossroads where I would have been thrust into a world of self-loathing...

I mean, what if the first time I got hurt like this was when I was around *Serenity* ?

And if it did happen around someone other than Gabriella, then this was the kind of thing that would have made me run away from home. It would

have made me leave my lifelong friend, for fear that I might hurt her. To protect her from the monster parading around as her young roommate.

But Gabriella had just saved me from that fate, carefully guiding me toward the realization that I was a monster-killer, rather than a monster myself.

“I really wish I could touch you,” Gabriella unexpectedly whispered. “Do you think you could try to find the keys to these things? I think my hands are falling asleep.”

“Oh! I’m sorry!” I exclaimed, lifting her weight so that she was upright again. Once she was sitting and balanced, I crawled over to the cooling corpse and began searching the belt and pockets for the keys. Finding them, I scooted back over behind her and quickly freed her hands from their bonds.

As she rubbed her wrists, she smirked. “Jeez, at this rate, people are going to think you enjoy tying me up.”

“W-Why would they think that?” I asked, confused by the abrupt change of subject. My face was hot again, even despite everything.

She grinned at me. “You do, don’t you?!”

“Well, I umm...” Shit, she sure knew how to get my mind off things. I looked away, feeling like my face was going to explode from embarrassment as I considered telling her the truth. “It’s just...seeing you vulnerable,” I whispered.

“So, which is it then?” she asked playfully. “Seeing me tied up, or having me tell you what to do?”

I covered my eyes so quickly, that I almost slapped myself in the face. “Umm, both?” Were we really talking about this right now? I felt like I was going to die, I was so mortified to be admitting this to her. “Are we seriously talking about this right now?” I echoed out loud. “Shouldn’t we be figuring out what to do about...” My voice trailed off.

“Oh, sorry,” she replied. “I was just trying to lighten your mood.”

Well, fuck. She certainly accomplished her mission, at least by making me more uncomfortable about revealing my secrets rather than my recent homicide.

“It’s alright,” I sighed, dropping my hand to look around as my thoughts began focusing on the task ahead of me. “I guess I’ll put him in the trunk of his car, and then drive it somewhere far away. I’m not sure what to do about the blood on the ground though.”

Gabriella was pensive. “Do you think you could steal an arrow and kill a deer with it?”

I looked at her in surprise. “Well, yeah, I guess I could do that.”

She nodded. “Drop it off here, and make sure it bleeds in the same spot. Then Serenity will never suspect it’s anything different. And I doubt anyone knew this guy was here in the first place, since obviously he wasn’t really here to bring me in for questioning.”

“Right,” I agreed. Damn, she was something. “Gabriella, you really surprise me with how smart you are.”

She blushed. “Oh, well, I mean I’d like to think I’m at least of normal intelligence.”

I shook my head. “Your critical thinking skills are definitely above normal. You’re really impressive.”

She gave me an endearing look. “Thanks, Kai.” She sighed. “Is there anything I can do to help though? Because it sounds like you’ll have to do everything to clean this up.”

I sincerely considered the offer to help, before realizing she was right. “I guess just stay inside, lock all the doors, and don’t come out for any reason. Hopefully I’ll be done within an hour.”

She nodded in agreement, so I helped her get to her feet. I then went over and climbed into the still-running car, backing it up so I could load the body into the trunk. I also grabbed the gun, handcuffs, and bullet, deciding I’d just toss the bullet out of the window at some point along the drive. The distraction allowed me to fully revert to my human form, which was definitely necessary if I was going to be on the road.

Once I was ready, I focused on her, feeling awkward since I couldn’t touch her without transforming again. However, she seemed to understand, giving me a small wave to send me off. Climbing back into the cruiser, I turned it around and drove away.

I was careful to keep to the backroads to ensure I wasn’t caught on some random intersection camera or something. While I hadn’t watched a ton of crime shows, I knew the gist of how criminals got caught, though I knew movies and shows dramatized all that stuff.

Still, I couldn’t take any chances.

After driving for about thirty minutes away from the city, I finally stopped off on the side of an abandoned road, emptied the corpse’s pockets of all technology, and began dragging the body through the woods. Initially,

I considered just leaving the bastard in the trunk, but decided it might be better to make the body more difficult to find. At the very least, I knew from my detective friend that generally no body meant no solid case.

Even the blood in the trunk wouldn't necessarily be enough to prove anything.

I started by dragging the body in a straight line for probably about half a mile, but once it was obvious I wasn't leaving a blood trail, I changed directions a few times, moving deeper and deeper into the trees.

Probably about five miles into my trek, I stumbled across a small pond covered in a film of scum and algae. Figuring it was as good of a spot as any, I dropped the legs and began gathering all the rocks I could find, sticking them in the man's tucked shirt, as well as into his pants, before finally tossing him into the middle of the water.

The body sunk like a rock, as hoped, a ton of tiny bubbles floating to the top for about a minute. Satisfied with my handiwork, I walked back the way I'd come, following my own scent left behind in the air, while also making sure that there wasn't any evidence that I came this way.

A little surprised by how far I'd walked, I began running, deciding to go back to the car and drive it to a different location. I figured I could leave it on a different abandoned road to really throw people off, but then I came across a much bigger pond. After taking off the license plate to bury, I chose to instead drive the car straight into the water, with me jumping out at the last second.

The cruiser sank quickly, disappearing beneath the murky mirror that reflected the sky. With my sharp eyes, I could just barely manage to still see the top almost four feet down, even despite the reflection, but I doubted a regular person would notice.

With that done, my next step was to bury the license plate at a third location, and then break into a few houses in search of an arrow to steal. I figured it was getting close to lunchtime, so I was extra cautious even though I doubted most people returned home for lunch unless they worked really close to where they lived.

Once I found an arrow, I ran the thirty or forty miles back toward my place, which took me just under an hour to do, since I was capable of running much faster than a normal person. I then tracked down a deer once I was closer to home.

I estimated that I'd probably been gone closer to two and a half hours by the time I was dragging the unconscious doe into my front yard, and then stabbing it just at the edge of its heart with the arrow to let it bleed out while the heart still pumped. I smirked briefly, though there was no humor in the expression, when I realized that impaling the heart really was my MO. Granted, it was one of the preferred shots on a deer and guaranteed that it would spill a ton of blood, so long as the wound didn't make the heart stop right away.

Gabriella was immediately at the door once she saw me, revealing that she'd been waiting for me anxiously while I was gone. "How'd it go?" she wondered. "I really missed you."

Focusing on her over my shoulder, I saw that she'd showered and changed clothes. She was now wearing faded jeans and a green fitted long-sleeve shirt that hid the bruising on her arms. I honestly couldn't help but feel a little disappointed that she wasn't wearing the silk anymore.

She was still arousing to be around, both visually and olfactorily, but seeing her in those pajamas had been especially enticing.

"Well, I got the job done," I admitted, still facing away from her. "Although, I probably shouldn't tell you anything about it, in case you're ever questioned. It's best if you don't have to lie about knowing."

"Oh." She nodded, her expression serious as she walked closer. "Yeah, that makes sense." She then abruptly stepped behind me and wrapped her arms around my still exposed torso. I shivered as I felt her hands run along my stomach and chest, forcing my skin to gray again. "Let's go inside," she whispered.

Sighing, I reached up with my hands to cover hers. "Alright..." I agreed quietly. "But, I don't think I can do anything right now. I really need a shower. I feel dirty again, like last night."

She nodded, kissing me softly on the back of my shoulder. "That's alright. I understand. I'll let you take a shower while I make lunch. Then, we can just talk for a while."

"That sounds really nice," I admitted. "Although, I'm kind of surprised you want to eat after all this." Granted, I was honestly kind of feeling hungry myself.

"Well," she began, kissing me on the shoulder a second time, causing a chill to run down my spine. "I think it's because the guy was a murderer. I don't feel bad about it at all. I mean, if anything I'm relieved knowing I'm

finally safe *for real* this time. I strongly doubt there's a third party involved."

"Yeah," I agreed. "That's highly unlikely. But even if that were true, I'll come to your rescue no matter what. I promise."

She buried her forehead against my back. "Thanks, Kai. I love you so much."

"I love you too," I whispered, feeling like that statement was significantly more meaningful now.

After a deep sigh, she finally let me go, only to grab my hand, intertwining our fingers, and lead me into the house. True to her word, she gave me a short kiss on the cheek and then let me go upstairs to shower while she started on lunch.

It was really strange having her cook for me. I was so used to doing all the cooking for Serenity, and now I had a hot goddess taking care of me like I'd always done for my older friend. Honestly, it was kind of a nice change of pace.

I did love cooking, but what guy wouldn't want such a fucking hot woman doting on them?

Not that Serenity didn't dote on me in other ways. And honestly, I owed her everything, since without her I would have remained in foster care even after all this time, at least up until a couple weeks ago.

Once I was in the shower, I discovered that I didn't need to do nearly as much scrubbing to feel clean again – a sharp contrast to last night. I suspected that the difference was due to Gabriella's opinion of me. Or, more specifically, the fact that she wasn't ashamed of my actions. Having her approval, as well as her acceptance and forgiveness, after what I'd done when I got hurt, all seemed to help alleviate my conscience more than I'd expected.

I honestly wasn't sure what would have happened to me if my first time getting seriously injured had been before I met her, but I doubted it would have turned out well. How would I have coped without someone knowing about me and accepting me?

I shivered at the thought, knowing I would have absolutely refused to open up to anyone after that. I would have been far too afraid of rejection if they knew the truth.

Granted, I probably never would have gotten shot in the first place if this particular situation hadn't developed. After all, most people seem to go

their entire lives without getting shot.

Sighing, I turned off the water and got out of the shower. My body looked normal again, so I could see more clearly that there wasn't even a scar on my shoulder from the bullet. The rapid healing made me wonder what would happen if I resisted the bloodthirst.

Would I uncontrollably seek out the nearest source? Or would I be able to stop myself before hurting someone I cared about?

For obvious reasons, I'd been pissed at the bastard, which I felt like was a major contributor in me giving into the impulse and losing control briefly, but it was hard to say. Honestly, as I thought about it, I realized I'd probably do it again – rip his throat out.

It was much more cathartic for me, in a strange way, compared to stabbing a knife in the other guy's chest. I felt like the fucker got what he deserved.

But still, that left the scary question. What would happen if I resisted indefinitely? Would I heal normally if I ate regular food and just toughed it out? Was it a requirement I drink blood? And did it *have* to be human blood?

Lots of questions, all of which were significant.

I needed to test it out sometime in a controlled environment. I could probably steal some human blood from a blood bank, or something, and then intentionally hurt myself to see how long I could resist the urge. It was far too dangerous for me to not know what would happen in the worst-case situation.

And if I ever hurt Serenity or Gabriella...

I'd never be able to forgive myself. *Never*.

Gabriella's phone rang downstairs in the kitchen, snapping me out of my thoughts. Focusing on her, I listened for any signs of distress as she answered. However, surprisingly it seemed she was really happy.

Her tone was cheerful. "Hi, Serenity! Are you on break?"

"Yeah," she answered. "Just checking in on you two. Is Kai's phone off? I tried calling him, but it went straight to voicemail."

"Oh, I'm not sure, actually. I don't think he ever plugged it in last night, so it might be dead. I'll ask him when he comes downstairs. I'm making us lunch, at the moment."

"Oh, alright." Serenity then sounded playful. "Trying to impress him?" she wondered.

I heard Gabriella's heart skip a beat. "Umm, well, maybe," she admitted. "I wasn't sure what he likes, but I know he at least loves meat, so I figured I couldn't go wrong if that was an ingredient."

Serenity laughed. "Yeah, you're probably right about that. He's not a picky eater anyway. I'm sure he will love whatever you make."

"Thanks, Serenity," Gabriella replied sincerely. "I'm really glad I met you, and not just because of Kai. There's nothing like a near-death experience to make you appreciate the people in your life. So, thanks for being my friend. It really means a lot to me."

"Aww, you're so sweet. Ugh, you're going to make me cry again." I heard Serenity wipe her eyes over the phone. "I should probably get off. But I want to try some of your cooking when I get home, so save me some, okay?"

"Sure, of course," Gabriella replied cheerfully. "See you in a few hours."

After she hung up, I focused on getting dressed in jeans and a black t-shirt. Once I was done, I headed downstairs to meet her in the kitchen. She was just pulling lunch out of the oven. Based on the aromas in the air, I was pretty confident I already knew what it was.

"Enchiladas?" I assumed.

"Yep!" she announced, without looking at me. "I guess I shouldn't be too surprised you knew right away. I had a couple of different ideas, so I just searched around to see what ingredients were available. The only thing you didn't have was cilantro, but it should still taste pretty good."

"What are you going to eat?" I wondered, staring at her tight ass squeezed into her faded jeans while she scooped out a couple of enchiladas for me, placing them on a plate. It was undeniable that the dish had chicken in it.

"I'll eat this, of course," she replied, still focused on what she was doing.

Her response made me feel bad. "Oh, well..." My voice trailed off for a second. "I don't want you to have to change for me. I'd feel bad if you stopped being a vegetarian."

"It's okay," she replied. "I'll still probably avoid meat, for the most part – primarily out of habit – but there are more important things in life than that." She then paused, as she scooped an enchilada on her plate. "Or, is this about my scent?" she wondered, glancing at me for the first time.

I was about to respond, but she froze solid, the enchilada falling off the spatula partially onto the counter.

“What’s wrong?” I asked seriously.

She just gawked at me. “*Damn !* You look really good in black! Like, I want to jump you right *now* . Holy shit, you’re so hot!”

My body shifted instantly, shocked and embarrassed by her reaction. And I knew she wasn’t teasing – I could smell her arousal increase even as she spoke, with my sudden transformation making it even stronger as she saw the effect her words had on me.

Setting down the spatula, she abandoned what she was doing and began slowly approaching me provocatively, like she was about to pounce for real. Her scent was intoxicating, making me feel overwhelmed like I’d just taken some powerful drug for the first time.

My nerves were on edge now, my body beginning to tremble, to the point that I almost wanted to run away from her sudden intensity. However, I forced myself to stay put, my breathing shaky as I dropped my gaze and stared down at the floor.

After all, I did promise I’d let her do what she wanted with me.

She stopped only a few inches away, her visible upper chest flushed red as she gently reached out and wrapped her thin fingers around my wrist. I shivered at the warm touch, feeling goosebumps appear on my neck and arms as she spoke quietly.

“I think I’ve changed my mind,” she purred softly. “I want *you* for lunch instead.”

I tried to swallow the lump in my throat, unable to respond.

“Are you going to let me?” she asked quietly, tightening her grip on my wrist.

I could barely nod. “I d-did p-promise,” I stammered.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, her voice becoming cheerful. “That’s right! I get to do what I want with you!” Her grip tightened even more, forcing me to gulp audibly. Her tone was suddenly low and serious. “So then, is this fine? Or do you want to tie me up instead?”

I shook my head, feeling like I was going to pass out. “This is f-fine,” I gasped.

“Okay,” she whispered. “Then I’ll give you *one* last choice, before you have to do what I say.” I glanced up at her to confirm she wasn’t kidding.

She was absolutely serious. “Do you want me to take you upstairs to your bed? Or would you prefer I fuck you on the couch?”

I closed my eyes, my breathing coming out in ragged gasps now. I couldn’t respond. I couldn’t believe she was truly serious. I couldn’t believe this was happening.

“Alright then,” she said, sounding a little haughty now. “My choice. Bed it is.”

And with that, she began tugging on my wrist, leading me upstairs.

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CHAPTER 5: RELATIONS

When we got inside my bedroom, I saw the purple silk pajamas lying in a heap next to my bed, along with the white lacey panties she'd worn last night and this morning. The sight suddenly made it feel like she'd taken over my room, almost giving me the sensation like it was *hers* now, even though everything else was mine.

I gulped as I stared at it for a second, before she yanked on me again and began pushing me onto the bed. I tried to control my breathing as I looked up at her, my upper body supported on my elbows, watching her reach for the button on her jeans, undoing it and slowly pulling down the zipper.

I was completely shocked to see that she was wearing a shiny leopard-patterned *thong* now, the straps hidden by her long shirt. When she saw I was more confused than anything, she spoke up again, her voice low and seductive.

"I don't have very many sexy things," she admitted. "But when we stopped at my apartment last night, I kind of grabbed this on a whim." She blushed then, looking embarrassed. "The one serious boyfriend I had was the person who got it for me, though I never wore it for him. Never worn it for anyone." She paused. "Is that okay?"

I gulped, nodding. Like hell did I care right now. The shiny material almost had a plastic look to it, like it was made of vinyl, shiny like lubricated latex, though I didn't think it was either of those, due to the orange and black leopard print. Granted, I supposed either fabric could have a pattern.

Gabriella smirked at my reaction, her cheeks rosy as she hooked a thumb into each strap and pulled them up higher on her hips, snapping the stretchy material into place with an audible *smack* against her smooth pale skin.

My cock throbbed, straining against my jeans.

She began slowly inching her jeans down then, leaning forward slightly to reveal her cleavage as she shimmied the tight pants down her thighs. "I wonder," she whispered as she stepped out, one leg at a time. "You said you like my scent. Do I smell bad in any way? Like has my breath ever been unpleasant, or anything else?"

I shook my head. "No, everything about you smells amazing."

She smirked. "And I can do whatever I want to you?" she repeated.

I gulped, inclining my chin nervously.

Her emerald eyes deepened with passion. "Including sit on your face?" she asked seductively, her tone thick.

I sucked in a ragged breath, trying to respond but unable to.

She took that as a 'yes' anyway, lifting her fitted green shirt up to her midriff as she began climbing onto the bed. I fell back the rest of the way as she scooted higher, only to find myself staring up at the red pubic hair peeking out of the top of the leopard-pattern thong.

She was trimmed down there, but not shaven entirely. Which I was more than fine with. I'd be lying if I said I hadn't fantasized about seeing her pussy a couple of times, and now I was getting to experience firsthand just how similar reality was to my imagination.

One major thing was different though. Her pubic hair looked really fine and soft, as opposed to appearing coarse and rough. I couldn't wait to rub my lips against it to experience how velvety it was against that sensitive part of my skin.

"Still okay?" she wondered, staring down at my face between her legs.

I sucked in a deep breath, my head swimming with her arousal, the scent making me feel like someone was about to pour maple syrup on my face. I tried to speak, wanting to make it clear what I wanted.

"I like it when..." I began, trying to catch my breath. "When you do what you want. It...it turns me on thinking that you're going to use me, to enjoy yourself. Like, the idea of you being so horny..." My voice caught in my throat as I sucked in another shaky breath.

Her green eyes widened slightly. "So me pleasuring myself turns you on?" she clarified. "Like, would you think it was hot if I shoved something up my pussy and masturbated in front of you?"

I was shocked by her brazenness. "Y-Yes," I managed, my voice breaking.

She grinned, her cheeks flushing again. "I'll do that sometime," she promised, beginning to readjust her knees as she lowered her hot snatch toward my face. "But first, we're doing this."

My heart began racing as she pressed her vinyl-covered pussy on my mouth, the plastic-feeling thong hot from her body heat. She moaned as she put more weight onto me, reaching out with her hands to run her fingers through my white hair.

"Yes," she moaned with her eyes closed, rocking and sliding up to my nose, only to rub her pussy back down to my chin. "Oh, yes baby. Your face feels so good. I want to fuck your face so bad." She ran her fingers roughly across my scalp, peeking down at me as she rephrased. "I'm *going* to fuck your face," she emphasized. "And then afterward, I want you to fuck mine."

Oh shit!

I reached up the best I could, trying to grab for her heavy tits as she pressed into me more. Realizing what I wanted, she wiggled on my face as she pulled her shirt the rest of the way off over her head, and then reached back to undo her bra. My eyes widened as I finally got to drink in the sight of her huge breasts, the slightly dark areolas massive, the brown nipples large and hard.

She then grabbed my hands and squished them against her tits, swaying her hips forward as she grinded against my chin, beginning to move with heavier strokes. The shiny thong was wet now, both from my mouth as well as on the other side from her wet pussy, causing it to slide independently of us both as she moved.

Realizing it was just getting in the way at this point, she let go of one of my hands to pull it to the side, forcing her hot wet pussy lips on mine. I immediately began kissing her eagerly, tasting her sweetness for the first time, my head swimming again.

"Suck," she moaned, only to whimper when I began doing as she asked. "Yes baby, that's right. Suck on my pussy. Taste me." She gasped, shoving down harder. "Suck on my pussy baby, and I'll reward you by sucking on your cock."

She then reached back for emphasis, leaning as she grabbed ahold of my stiff member and gave it a tight squeeze before sitting upright again. I knew I had a huge wet spot already from all the precum leaking out, feeling like I was going to explode just from the one short act of stimulation. Refocusing on her tits in my hands, in response to her resting her fingers on

my forearms, I began squeezing before running my hands across her smooth skin, lingering on her nipples.

“Pinch me,” she pleaded.

I was so fucking horny right now, that I didn’t even care about being rough. I grabbed her nipples and squeezed firmly, causing her to unexpectedly cry out as she squirted on my face.

“Uhh ,” she whimpered. “Oh shit, oh shit. That felt so fucking good. Baby, that felt *so fucking good* . Oh fucking shit,” she hissed.

She pulled away from my face a little then, trying to catch her breath while also allowing me to breathe better as I attempted to stop my head from spinning. Smelling her was one thing, but having her intoxicating scent actually on me like this made me feel like I was drowning in it.

I was suffocating on her arousal, and it was literally fucking heaven.

Once she’d collected herself, she moved a little to sit lightly on my upper chest, keeping my face between her thighs. “W-Was that alright?” she asked, focusing on my eyes.

“Yes,” I whimpered, overwhelmed by her presence. She might have gotten there, but I was still almost at the peak of my passion.

“Can I suck on you now?” she asked, her tone a little pleading.

“Yes,” I whimpered again.

Oh shit, I’d never felt so helpless in my life, feeling like all I could do was just lay here and hope desperately she’d take care of me too. Thankfully, she didn’t waste any time, readjusting her thong and then climbing off me to sit at my side.

After unbuttoning my jeans, I moaned when I felt her thin fingers wrap around my shaft, carefully pulling me free of the restricting material. Glancing down at her, I saw her hesitate for a moment, holding my cock with one hand, before tucking some of her red hair behind her ear and leaning toward it.

I gasped as she stuck her tongue out and licked the head, breaking a string of precum that was still connected to my boxers.

“Oh!” she said in surprise, only to look at me apologetically, her face still close to my groin. “Sorry, I’ve never actually tasted cum before. I’ve been told by some of my friends that it’s both sweet and salty, and that I’d like it if I could get past the texture, but I didn’t think they’d be right.”

“Y-You like it?” I repeated, finding it hot that she did.

She smirked at me. "Yeah, I actually love slimy things, so the texture isn't a problem at all. One of my favorite candies is a sugary slime that comes in a tube."

"I'll have to keep that in mind," I gasped. "In case I ever buy you candy."

Her grin widened, leaning closer to my cock again and sticking her tongue out to run it along the top while still holding my gaze. "Next time I have some," she whispered, pausing to kiss my head. "I'll eat it like this for you."

Parting her lips, she barely sucked me into her mouth, just enough so she could roll her tongue around the opening where I was still actively leaking precum with every throb.

I gasped, my back arching slightly from the sensation, my eyes rolling into the back of my head. Holy fuck, was she really a virgin? I honestly couldn't believe she was at this point. She was too good.

Or maybe I was just too sensitive.

"If you've got experience," I blurted out, before I could stop myself. "It's okay."

She paused, lifting up just a little to focus on me, her expression confused. "I told you I've only ever kissed," she said, her brow slightly furrowed. Her green eyes then widened before I could respond. "Oh, wait. That good, huh?"

All I could do was nod.

She grinned. "Wow. Now *that's* a compliment. I admit that I've gotten some unrequested tips from the friends I mentioned, though I'm glad I listened now." She paused. "But I promise you're my first, so don't be disappointed if everything else I do to you isn't as great."

I gulped, causing her to giggle as she returned to sucking on my head, before shoving her mouth down on it. I then watched as she took a slow deep breath, her thin eyebrows twitching as she pushed down further, gulping actively like she was trying to swallow my cock.

"Fuck," I hissed, my hands clinching into fists as she tried to go all the way down. I was too long for her to make it, but she came pretty close to engulfing me entirely, her neck bulging slightly. She then pulled up to the end, grasping me with her fingers and using her spit for lubrication as she jerked me a few times, before taking another deep breath and shoving down faster this time.

“Fuck, fuck, *fuck* !” My legs tightened, my entire body shaking as I felt myself reach the edge. Gabriella pulled up a little, so that the tip was resting on her tongue, squeaking in surprise when I began shooting cum in her mouth. She immediately gulped loudly, before moaning as I gave her another couple of shots, not swallowing this time.

She moaned a second time as she ran her tongue around my head, sounding like she was savoring the taste. She then pulled away slightly, her eyes closed with a thin thread running from her lips to my cock. After a second, she swallowed audibly, squeezing my shaft again as she did so, before leaning forward to suck my head back into her mouth.

“That was amazing,” I whispered, continuing to twitch as if I was trying to empty my balls, though nothing else was coming out.

Gabriella didn’t respond right away, continuing to lick and suck my cock clean, before finally pulling away. “It really was amazing,” she agreed, her green eyes looking almost drugged, her cheeks bright red. It took her a second to focus on me, before continuing. “But that was just the start. I’m really fucking horny again, and I need you in me.”

I tried to swallow, my mouth suddenly dry. “D-Do we need a condom?” I whispered, feeling a lot more levelheaded and sensible now that I’d gotten there. Although, I didn’t have one available, and doubted she did either.

She smirked. “Nope. My mom made me start taking the pill when I was fifteen and I’ve never stopped even though I’ve not been sexually active. Between that, and the dessert I just had, we’ll be more than fine.”

I gulped. “O-Okay.”

Her expression filled with lust as she began jerking my cock slowly again. “Ready for me to fuck your brains out?” she asked seductively, leaning toward me. When I inclined my chin, she then hiked her leg over me and pulled her thong aside, before grabbing my cock again to aim it. She winced as she began sinking down on it, the slight scent of fresh blood alerting me to the fact that she truly was a virgin.

But fuck, she was so warm! As amazing as her mouth had been, feeling her tight pussy squeeze me was a whole different experience.

Once she got the head in, she then pulled up a little, only to force herself the rest of the way down, moaning as her pussy swallowed me up. Every time I throbbed, her snatch tightened in response, as if the muscled walls were reflexively reacting to the stimulation. Leaning forward on her elbows, she went straight for my face and planted a wet kiss right on my

mouth, shoving her tongue in to find mine, even though my face was still wet from her fluids.

I grimaced a little, knowing her mouth was clean now, but being able to still smell myself on her breath due to my sensitive nose. However, when I turned my head slightly, she abruptly moved her hands to the sides of my face, holding me roughly as she made-out with me, beginning to rock slowly up and down on my cock.

“*Mmm*,” she moaned, biting my bottom lip, running her tongue around the edges of my mouth, and then shoving it between my lips again.

Focusing on the scent of her juices still on my face, I realized that she was basically licking herself off me, which felt like only a step away from her making-out with some random woman’s pussy, like how she was doing to my face. The unexpected lesbian imagery alone was enough to make me forget my own smell as my level of arousal soared through the roof.

Paying more attention to her heavy tits squished against my chest, feeling her hard nipples against my skin, I finally began kissing her back while I felt the sides of her breasts. The juicy fat was firm from the pressure being put on them. I then moved my hands lower and grabbed her bony hips firmly, starting to thrust in sync with her.

“Yes,” she whispered against my lips, gasping for breath. “Please. Oh please, fuck me baby.” She grunted, her eyes closed, her brow furrowing as she pulled her head away more, arching her back slightly. “Fuck! Fuck, yes! Fuck my pussy!” She then screamed, slamming her head down into the bed next to mine. “Oh shit,” she whimpered after a second. “Shit, shit, *shit*.”

I held her trembling body in my arms, sighing in contentment as my cock continued to throb inside of her. Initially, I felt like I couldn’t get there again anytime soon, but she’d worked me up a second time with all the riding she’d just done.

I took a deep breath then, wondering if we were finished now. Of course, I didn’t want it to be over, but I also had no idea what was normal. Thankfully, she brought it up before I could, taking a final deep breath.

“Want to try for one more orgasm?” she wondered.

“If you don’t mind,” I replied.

She turned her head toward me, her weight still on top of my body, smirking as she puckered her lips to kiss me on the cheek. “What do you want to do to me, baby? I’ll do anything for you.”

My eyes widened in surprise, wondering if she really meant that. “That mean I can fuck your ass?” I teased, assuming she’d change her mind.

She grinned. “We can give it a try. I’ve gotten some unrequested tips about that too.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Wow, I have to admit, part of me is glad you have such pushy friends.”

She laughed, pulling up enough so that her heavy breast were hanging in front of my face. “Yeah, some of my friends in high school were pretty dirty. I don’t really talk to any of them anymore, but I’m glad the things they used to talk about has come in handy.”

I nodded, focusing on her right nipple when I realized it was wet, only to notice the left one was too. As far as I knew, it shouldn’t have anything on it, and yet there was a clear fluid smeared on it. Noticing my look, Gabriella glanced down as well, only to grab her boob and give her nipple a squeeze.

Instantly, a little bead of clear fluid appeared on the brown mound. She explained before I could even ask. “Sorry. This is normal, although it hasn’t happened in a while. I’ve been to the doctor about it and they just said it’s normal nipple discharge, which can happen due to spikes in certain hormones.” She grimaced. “I know that sounds gross, but it’s actually similar to what women produce the first few days they are breastfeeding. Most women don’t automatically start producing milk the moment they have a baby.” She then hesitated, still holding her boob. “Sorry, that doesn’t gross you out, does it?”

I shook my head, still staring at the clear bead of liquid. It had been slowly getting bigger, and was about to drip on to my chest. “I...I like it,” I admitted.

“Really?” she said in surprise. When I nodded again, she then paused for a second, only to lower her voice. “Want to suck on it?” she asked seductively. “Want to suck on my tits, baby?”

I lifted my head up a little in response, even as she held her boob forward more, aiming the nipple straight for my mouth. I was surprised to discover the clear fluid tasted sweet, just like the rest of her, as I sucked her nipple between my lips.

She moaned when I sucked harder, letting go of her tit and gently running her fingertips along my forehead and temple. “Feels like a nipple massage,” she whispered. “I could get used to this.”

I wanted to agree, but was lost in the sensation, shivering as she ran her fingers through my hair and then returned to running them up and down my temple gently. Reaching up for the other nipple, I squeezed, feeling my fingers become slick from the stimulation.

Shit, I was in heaven, my cock still throbbing in her pussy.

When she finally pulled her tits away from me, it was too soon, though I quickly forgave her when she dismounted, moved to my side, lowered her head to the bed, and stuck her ass in the air. "Just go slow," she said simply.

Hell yes!

I bolted up into a sitting position, and took in the sight of her tight ass, reaching up to feel the slick triangular patch of leopard thong in the back. Grabbing the straps, I then began slipping it down to her knees, before sticking my finger into her crack and feeling for her puckered asshole. I knew she'd just taken a shower not long ago, but was still surprised by just how amazing she smelled.

Reaching with my other hand, I felt her wet pussy, slipped my finger inside a little to get it wet, and then started smearing her juices all over her asshole. She sighed, sounding content as I pushed on it a couple of times, like it was a button.

Deciding to do more, I shoved my index finger in a little and began moving in firm circular motions, hoping to loosen it up. At first, not a lot happened, but then I felt her relax a little and her asshole became less tense.

"Go ahead and start trying to get your cock in," she instructed. "You focus on that part, and I'll worry about getting loose."

"Oh." I paused, before getting onto my knees and grabbing her hips. "Okay." Angling my rock-hard dick between her crack, which was plenty wet from being in her pussy, I pressed the head right up against her backdoor and began putting pressure. Sure enough, very slowly I felt myself advancing forward thanks to all the lubrication on my cock, feeling like someone had a death grip on the head.

I heard her wince a few times, but every time I stopped putting pressure, she told me to keep going.

And then I was in, throbbing in her asshole for half a minute, before pulling out a little and shoving back in. The sensation was different from her pussy, in the sense that there was no extra squeezing coming from her, but it was also as tight as fuck. I started picking up the pace the easier it got to thrust, surprised when she started moaning.

“That feels good?” I asked with wide eyes.

“Yes,” she gasped. “Not the inside, but my asshole is really sensitive. It’s sending little waves of pleasure to my clit.”

“Is that normal?” I wondered.

She turned her head to glance back at me, even as I continued to slowly thrust inside of her. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “The girls always just made it seem like something to do because guys liked it.” She paused. “I probably couldn’t get there just from this, not unless I rubbed myself, but it does feel good.”

“I’m okay if you do that,” I whispered, referring to her rubbing herself.

She grinned, and then readjusted her weight as she reached a hand between her legs to begin touching her pussy, working the top where her clit was with a circular motion.

Oh shit, it was so hot! Watching her touch herself and get off. Fuck, she was masturbating in front of me, and yeah, I had my cock up her ass, but still!

As I continued to thrust, she ended up getting there before me, prompting me to start cumming in her ass when she moaned and whimpered from her own orgasm, her asshole pulsing rhythmically as if her body was trying to milk my cock. Then, once we were both finished, she began sliding her upper body more on the bed, prompting me to readjust with her as I kept my cock in her asshole while she flattened herself out.

Once I was lying on top of her, still in her ass, I gently kissed her on the cheek and sighed in satisfaction.

Her green eyes looked sleepy as she spoke. “Oh Kai, who knew I’d make for such a perfect slut?” she whispered seductively. Her eyes then widened in alarm, as she instantly became serious, glancing at me from the corner of her eye. “Sorry. I didn’t mean it like that. I only want you. I’ve heard that talking about being a slut turns some guys on.”

I wasn’t buying it. “You kind of meant that though, didn’t you?”

She grimaced, looking ashamed. “I, umm, I didn’t realize I’d like the taste of cum so much, or that I’d like it in the ass so much, but I was only speaking theoretically. What I meant to say, was who knew I’d love sex so much, but I’m not going to turn into a slut. I only want *your* cock in me.”

“It’s fine,” I reassured her, only to clarify. “I mean, yes, please don’t rip my heart out, but I believe you.”

She nodded firmly, still trying to look at me from the corner of her eye. “Definitely. I only want you, baby.” She then sighed. “Now, how about you go wash your cock off really fast and then come back. I want to take a nap with you inside my pussy.”

I stared at her in surprise for a moment, before smiling slightly. I then leaned down to kiss her on the cheek, only to pull out to go do as she asked. Surprisingly, I wasn’t visibly dirty, but understood the necessity of taking care of the hygiene aspects of what we’d just done, so I made sure to use plenty of soap and water.

She came into the bathroom too, to clean up a little, and then we both went back to my bed, hand-in-hand, only for her to mount me while I wrapped her up in my arms. I knew I’d end up slipping out once I got soft in my sleep, but it was still nice to start our nap this way.

I didn’t realize how tired I was until I closed my eyes and relaxed, finding my mind drifting off to sleep much faster than I would have expected.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

I woke up to being kissed gently on the cheek.

Opening my eyes, I saw Gabriella lying next to me on my bed, completely stark naked. The sight, combined with the sudden memories of us fucking, made my body shift instantly.

She giggled at my reaction, a big grin on her face, her bright red hair tucked behind her ears, her green eyes dancing with delight.

My face felt hot, prompting me to glance past her at the wall in embarrassment. “What time is it?” I wondered, realizing my entire body felt super sore. Even just trying to move felt like a struggle.

“About two-thirty,” she replied. “We both slept for a good hour and a half.” She grinned at me. “You really wore me out.”

“Wore you out?” I scoffed at the idea. “I feel like I can barely move.”

“Really?” she said in surprise. “That’s weird. Maybe it was because you were trembling so much. You must have fatigued your muscles with all your shaking.”

My face flushed again, now feeling embarrassed by how much I’d been shaking earlier.

“Aww, I thought it was really cute,” she admitted. “And I probably wouldn’t have been as confident if it weren’t for that. You really made me feel special.”

“I did?” I asked in disbelief.

“Well, yeah. Because I knew that *I* was the cause – *I* was having that effect on you.” She wrapped her leg around my waist intimately, pulling her exposed pussy closer as she hugged me tightly. “Now,” she continued playfully. “Are you ready for round two?”

Shit, was she serious? I felt like this would be round four! “Umm, well...” I hesitated. “My hormones say yes, but my body says no. If that makes sense.”

“You don’t have to do anything,” she teased. “You can just lay there while I fuck you. I’ll use your cock like a sex toy.” She then grinned at my

reaction. “But,” she warned. “If you agree, then that’s your last choice again for a while. I’ll do what I want with you.”

Holy fuck!

I shook my head, wanting to say yes, but physically knowing it would be too much. “I don’t think I can handle it right now. Sorry.”

“Oh, alright,” she sighed, seeming a little disappointed. “We should probably eat anyway. I just wanted more dessert is all. Maybe if I just suck on your cock a little...” Her voice trailed off, a small mischievous smile playing on her lips.

“Well,” I said hesitantly. “I did promise I’d let you do what you wanted to me, so...”

Gabriella abruptly leaned forward and kissed me on the lips, her tongue slipping into my mouth briefly. She then sighed in satisfaction. “That’s what I want to hear,” she teased. “But, I guess I can give you a break.”

When she sat up, I couldn’t help but gawk at her heavy breasts and thin waist. Her body was more attractive than I could have even imagined in my wildest fantasies. It was difficult to believe that someone existed in reality that was hotter than my vivid imagination.

“What?” she said playfully, a grin on her face as she lifted up one of her plump tits. “You like?”

I nodded once, my voice caught in my throat. Shit, maybe I just needed to suck it up and let her do what she wanted to me.

“Well,” she purred, biting her full lower lip. “You can have this whenever you want,” she offered, only to grin. “I might even let you make the rules one day – maybe when you can handle yourself better.”

My face flushed, prompting another wave of giggles from her as she climbed out of bed. I had to admit, I kind of liked her teasing me though. It was fun to listen to her laugh, and kind of arousing when she did it at my expense in a sexual way.

I stared at Gabriella’s tight naked ass as she left to go to the restroom, before returning to get dressed. Watching her slip on her leopard-pattern thong was exceptionally hot, because now I knew she’d be wearing it for the rest of the day. Of course, I knew I might have to ask her to change before Serenity came home, just to avoid me exposing my secret by shifting at the thought, but for now I was all about her wearing the vinyl looking thong.

Once she snapped the straps seductively in place, pulling them up much higher on her hips, she then pulled on her jeans, neglecting to button them, followed by her green long-sleeve shirt. However, the moment she had the shirt on, she bunched it up around her midriff and tied a knot, revealing all of her toned stomach, as well as the thong.

Fuck. Even despite my weariness, my cock was hard as a rock now.

Her gaze shifted to it the moment she noticed, subconsciously biting her bottom lip as she inched closer. “You really have a nice cock,” she whispered seductively, sitting down on the side of the bed.

My gaze shifted from her huge tits, to her exposed toned stomach, to the thong straps, to the portion of the thong I could see due to her pants still being unbuttoned, with all the visual stimulation causing me to begin leaking precum again.

Still focused on my stiff member, Gabriella leaned forward, wrapping her fingers around it and bent down to suck on the tip.

The sensation immediately made all my muscles lock up – and with it, a wave of sincere soreness washed over my body, causing me to groan in discomfort.

She immediately noticed that something wasn’t right, abruptly pulling away, her expression serious. “Hey, what’s wrong?” she asked in concern. “Are you okay?”

I shook my head, closing my eyes when I realized just how drained I was. Which was bizarre. I’d literally just ran over a marathon earlier in the day, after disposing of the evil cop’s dead body, and yet I’d felt fine afterward.

But now? I was sore as fuck. “Just feel really worn out,” I replied. “I feel like I can barely move.”

“Oh!” she said in surprise. “I thought you were exaggerating.”

I decided to make an effort to sit up, only to fail miserably. “Nope!” I exclaimed. Fuck, what was wrong with me?

She immediately reached down and began pulling on my shoulders, helping me get myself upright and move against the wall. “Wow,” she finally said once I was situated. “I never imagined that I could wear *you* out. Do you just want me to heat up your food and bring it up here?”

I took a deep breath. “Yeah, actually that sounds perfect. Let’s do that.”

Gabriella nodded in agreement, standing up to finish zipping her pants before disappearing out the door to run downstairs. I thought about making

an effort to put my clothes on, but doubted I'd get very far at this point.

Thus, instead, I took a deep breath and leaned my head back against the wall, my hands limp in my exposed lap as I listened to her heat up each plate that she'd prepared earlier. Then, after a few minutes, she was heading back up the stairs.

Accepting my lunch appreciatively, I pulled my knees up to rest the plate on them and then began digging in. Gabriella climbed into the bed with me and sat by my side, leaning into my shoulder a little as she took a bite too.

Oddly enough, which each bite I felt better and better, until a few minutes later I basically felt normal again, the soreness having dissipated entirely. Continuing to shove food in my mouth, I noticed that the chicken was especially potent to my tongue, almost overwhelming the other flavors.

Swallowing the bite I was working on, I decided to bring the subject up to break the silence. "This is really good by the way," I began with.

She grinned at me, her expression the most content I'd ever seen. "I'm glad you like it!" she said cheerfully.

I continued. "But, I was wondering something. Can you describe to me how it tastes to you? Like, what flavor tastes the strongest?"

She gave me a confused look, and then took another bite as she thought about it. "Well, I mean I taste the cheese, chicken, peppers, onions...and of course the tortilla." She swallowed. "Probably the most potent taste to me is the sour cream. Why?"

I frowned. "For some reason, it's as if all I can taste is the chicken, whereas normally I would taste what you described. I mean, don't get me wrong, it's really amazing, but the flavor of the chicken is overwhelmingly mouthwatering, and..." My voice trailed off, my brow now furrowed.

"And what?" she prompted, seeming concerned by my expression.

"Well, my body feels a lot better already," I admitted. "The soreness is almost completely gone. But, surely I couldn't have digested my food that fast, right?"

Gabriella was thoughtful for a moment, taking another bite and swallowing before answering. "Really, we don't know anything about how your body works. So, for all we know, maybe you *did* digest it already. You obviously can heal almost instantly, which kind of seems impossible as it is, so why not?"

I sighed, suddenly recalling all the bruises still present on her body. “Honestly, I kind of wish you could heal fast too. It scares me to think you’d be in the hospital right now, or worse, if you had gotten shot instead of me.”

She just shrugged nonchalantly in response. “It is, what it is. No point in worrying about it. I’m just glad I don’t have to worry about you at least.” She grinned at me again. “You’ll just have to protect me is all.” Her smile widened. “My own personal guardian angel.”

I scoffed. “Some angel! Never seen one that looked like this.”

“Oh?” she retorted playfully. “You’ve seen an angel, have you?”

“Yes,” I said seriously, giving her a meaningful look.

Her face flushed when she realized I was referring to her, averting her emerald gaze for a moment, before scolding me in a playful tone. “Finish your food, young man, before it gets cold.”

“Yes ma’am!” I teased back, eagerly taking an exaggerated bite.

She giggled and resumed eating. However, as she stared at the wall across the room, she visibly became more and more pensive. After a few minutes, I finally nudged her gently, silently encouraging her to share her thoughts.

She gave me an apologetic look. “I was just wondering. What do you think you would do if someone found out about you? Like, someone who *wouldn’t* keep it a secret?”

I leaned my head back against the wall as I seriously considered it. “I mean, there’s not really many options. I’d probably have to run away or something.”

Gabriella nodded in agreement. “I have almost fifteen-thousand saved up, if we need to disappear.” When I looked at her in shock, she quickly continued, her tone lighthearted. “What? Did you think I’d let you leave by yourself?”

I shook my head. “No, I’m actually more surprised you have so much saved. Most people live paycheck to paycheck.”

“Oh, well it’s pretty standard to tip at a nail salon, except that I get paid a good hourly wage, unlike a waitress. Which means, all my tips are pure bonus. I could easily pay my bills without them. Not to mention, I live in a studio apartment, and I try to only buy things I really need.”

“Like a treadmill?” I teased.

She stuck her tongue out at me. “Hey, if you had any idea what I have to put up with on a daily basis, then you’d understand. You’d probably buy me one yourself!”

I smirked, knowing she was probably right. I hadn’t really thought much about her having to deal with other guys vying for her attention, but just the idea made me a little jealous. “Well, I’m glad to hear you’re good with money,” I admitted. “That you actually save it, instead of burning through it all.”

“Why is that?” she wondered.

I hesitated, setting down my now empty plate on the edge of the bed. “Well, I guess Serenity probably wouldn’t have mentioned it to you, but we both sort of have a lot of insurance money at our disposal. Like, millions worth.”

Gabriella’s jaw dropped, but then she was apologetic when she considered where it had come from. “Sorry,” she whispered.

I shook my head. “It’s alright. We don’t usually share that information with anyone though. Otherwise, people act like we won the lottery instead of lost our parents.” I grimaced, thinking of unpleasant memories. “I can’t even begin to tell you how many shitheads asked me for money when I was younger, and then bullied me when I refused.”

She nodded sympathetically. “That really is a lot of money, though. Most people don’t even have life insurance policies, and those who do maybe only have a hundred-thousand at the most.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “It is kind of unusual that our parents had such a large policy. And it was actually in a trust fund, so I still don’t really have direct control of my half. Serenity is technically the only one who can withdraw money at this point, though she never has. She’s always used her own insurance money.” I paused. “Obviously, I’m an adult now, but I don’t know if my access has fully kicked in. Not to mention, it’s all tied up in investments anyway.” I sighed. “I might have to fill out a form or something, but I’m not sure. Serenity probably knows, but I haven’t bothered bringing it up, since I have no intention on spending any of it anytime soon.” I paused, realizing I’d missed an important point. “Granted, even though I don’t have access to all of it, I do have like forty-thousand in my checking account that I have free reign over. Serenity withdrew it for me a few years ago, just so I could buy things without her permission, if I

wanted to. Although, I'm like you – I only buy what I need, minus the treadmill.”

Gabriella playfully stuck her tongue out at me again, only to poke me in the side. “Hey buddy! You might not be enjoying a well-toned body if I didn't jog every day! I would think you'd be a little more *appreciative* .” She focused down at her belly for emphasis, which was visible thanks to the knot in her shirt.

I grinned at her. “Okay, maybe the treadmill is a necessity,” I agreed.

She smirked, a playful glint in her eye as she flexed her stomach. “So then,” she said in a suggestive tone. “If your muscles are feeling better, then I think you're ready for round two!”

Knowing she was serious, I slumped over to my side and buried my face into the blanket. Without hesitation, she set her plate down and climbed on top of me as if she was chasing after. “You can't get away from me!” she teased. “We've got to build up your tolerance!”

“It's never going to happen,” I groaned, feeling overwhelmed again by her scent.

“Nope! You're wrong,” she said seriously.

I looked up at her then, my cheeks growing warm when I realized how close her face was to mine. Even though she at least had clothes on, I still felt aroused by her weight on me. “I am?”

She nodded. “Sure, you will probably always transform when I take advantage of you, but you've actually spent a lot of time looking normal while we've been talking. You might even be ready to take me out on a date in public soon!”

Holding up my hand, I saw that I was definitely dark gray now, but as I thought about it, I realized she was right. When we were eating, my appearance was mostly normal the majority of the time. Although, if we ever went out in public together, we'd definitely have to be really careful...

Well, actually, *she* would have to be the careful one – careful about touching me, or what she said to me – but maybe there was hope that I might actually be able to tolerate being around her in a more casual environment. Shit, it'd only been a day, and yet it felt like I'd already come a long way. At the very least, I could hold a conversation with her now, whereas when I first met her I almost transformed just from being in her presence, never mind speaking with her.

“Huh, I guess you’re right,” I admitted. “Then, I suppose I’m all yours for round two. I want to take you on a proper date as soon as possible.”

She squealed in sincere excitement, before focusing on the task at hand. “Alright then, that was your last choice! Are you ready to do what I tell you?”

I nodded weakly, only because I felt really nervous again. I would have thought that fucking her once would break through my anxiety, but her intoxicating scent made it feel like this new experience was going to be my first time all over again.

I also loved how assertive she was, but the nervous excitement made my stomach feel like it was in knots. “Let’s at least put the plates on the floor,” I whispered.

She climbed off me, quickly stacked our plates on my dresser, and then faced me while reaching to unbutton her jeans. As she began unzipping them, I couldn’t help but avert my gaze the moment I focused on her shiny leopard-print thong, wondering if she was going to sit on my face again – *hoping* for it. She immediately chastised me.

“Look,” she demanded.

I obeyed, watching her slowly begin to slip her pants down, stepping out one leg at a time. She then undid the knot in her shirt, took that off, and began working on her bra. I gulped the moment her heavy plump breasts were exposed, glancing away again.

“Hey buddy,” she said. “I’m going to have to start punishing you for not listening.”

I had no idea what she would do as a ‘punishment,’ but I strongly doubted it would be anything other than amazing. Working up my courage a little, I decided to play along. “Please punish me,” I whispered.

She giggled. “Oh baby, yes. That’s what I want to hear.”

I focused on her again when she snapped her thong, just to get my attention, only to bend down and pick up the purple silky pajama top from the floor. She slid the slick material over her skin, beginning to button the front halfway, leaving easy access to her tits.

I gulped as she took her time climbing back in bed, almost as if she was posing for a photoshoot. A fucking hot photoshoot. Her hard nipples were poking through the purple silk, the shirt almost tight enough around her chest to serve as a bra on its own.

Once she was on her knees beside me, her legs spread apart, she finally spoke.

“Scoot closer,” she instructed, pointing more toward the middle of the bed.

I did so, only to gasp as she twisted around and swung a leg over my head, placing us in a sixty-nine. However, she didn’t go down on me, instead sitting upright again as she lowered her ass onto my face, covering my eyes while my nose pressed into her pussy.

“Touch me,” she whispered.

Unable to see, I assumed she wanted me to feel her up, so I lifted my arms and felt the silky smooth skin on her hips, before raising my hands higher and searching for her boobs. She moaned as I rubbed her nipples over the purple silk, beginning to rotate her hips slowly on my face.

My muscles tensed when she lowered her upper body again, feeling her hot breath on the head of my cock as she slowly wrapped her fingers around the base, shifting her pussy onto my mouth.

Just as she gently kissed the tip of my cock, her phone unexpectedly chimed, prompting her to instantly pop up, lifting herself off my face.

Reflexively, I grabbed her hips, not wanting her to stop, since I assumed that she just had a message. “It can wait,” I pleaded, loosening my grip when she tried to move anyway.

She sighed, sitting next to me. “Normally, I’d agree. But if it’s Serenity, then I need to respond right away. Otherwise she’ll think something’s up.”

I smirked at her. “But something is up, silly.”

Gabriella gently leaned down to kiss me on the lips, before responding. “It will just take a second.” She then smirked. “And then I’m going to have to punish you afterward for doing something I didn’t say,” she added playfully.

I assumed she was talking about me grabbing her hips. “Maybe we need to clarify the rules,” I suggested, since it seemed like rules sincerely existed with her, but I honestly didn’t know exactly what they were.

She nodded as she scooted out of bed to grab her phone out of the back pocket of her jeans on the floor. She then angled toward me as she read the message. “Huh, nope. It’s my mom. Apparently, there’s a book sale at one of the stores in the mall. It’s today only.”

“Oh, do you want to go?” I wondered, seeing the torn expression in her eyes.

“Umm, do you think you can?” she asked seriously, clearly not wanting to go without me. Granted, even if she wanted to go alone, she didn’t have a car here – she would have to borrow mine.

I nodded, holding up a finger. “I should be fine, but only if you’re really careful not to flirt with me.”

She clasped her phone in both hands, looking excited. “I won’t! I promise I’ll be good!”

I grinned at her eagerness and sat up to scoot out of the bed.

She immediately held up her hand. “Hey! Where do you think you’re going?”

I looked at her in confusion. “To get ready?”

She shook her head at me. “Umm, nope! I’m not done with you yet!”

I gulped, my face growing hot as she jumped back on the bed, demanding I lay down so she could straddle my face again. Within a few seconds, I was staring up at the triangular patch of shiny leopard-print covering her hot snatch, trying to breathe while she engulfed me in her mouth. Reaching up, I grabbed her ass cheek, before slipping my fingers into her crack and pushing on her asshole again like a button.

She moaned from the sensation, but then leaned forward off my face a little, prompting me to stop.

“Okay, so that felt amazing,” she admitted. “But I think you’re right about us needing to clarify the rules. It excites me when I’m the one in control, so I don’t want you to move at all unless I tell you to. Last time, you did a really good job of only doing stuff if I told you to, but I realize now it was because you were so nervous.”

“O-Okay,” I agreed, dropping my arms to my sides again. “Sorry,” I added.

She moved her pussy back over my face, so that it was all I had to look at. “Don’t be. I’m glad you’re becoming more comfortable with me, and I can’t expect you to read my mind.” She paused. “Plus, even though our first time was amazing, it’s still going to take some time to learn what we both like and prefer. Maybe it would help if we have a simple code phrase. Like, if I say ‘*I’m in control*’ or ‘*You have to do what I say*’ or ‘*That’s your last choice*,’ then it means you can’t do anything unless I invite you to do it, like touching me.”

“Okay,” I repeated, gasping when she licked my cock briefly. “I don’t have a problem with that,” I added. “Although, I’m kind of surprised that

you know what you want.”

Gabriella hesitated for a moment. “Umm, there’s a reason for that,” she admitted. “But now probably isn’t the best time to talk about it.”

Now I was concerned. “Something that will bother me?” I asked seriously.

She sat up and leaned forward so that she could look down at me over her shoulder, giving me an amazing view of her tight ass. “No, not really. At least, I don’t see any reason why you’d be bothered by it. I just don’t think it’s a good sex conversation.” She paused. “How about I tell you on the way to the mall?”

“Sure,” I agreed, feeling less concerned, especially since it sounded like it’d be a conversation that wouldn’t make me transform, based on *when* she wanted to share.

She smirked at me. “Okay, so what are the rules?” she asked playfully.

“You’re in control, I have no more choices, so I have to do whatever you say and nothing else.”

“Exactly!” she praised. “Good boy! And like earlier, when I let you fuck me in the ass, I’ll let you know when it’s your turn to do what you want. And since you apparently like it when I’m tied up and vulnerable, we can try that sometime too.”

I was about to respond, but she abruptly decided to plop down on my face, shoving the slick thong against my mouth.

“Sound good?” she said, her tone amused as she lowered her upper body again.

I mumbled a response, causing her to giggle and resumed focusing on my cock in her face, taking a slow deep breath before deepthroating me. I tried not to squirm from the sensation, focusing on my cock in her mouth as well as her hot pussy on my lips. I wanted to suck on her so bad, still intoxicated with her arousal, but knew I had to wait while she toyed with me.

She pulled off, beginning to grind her pussy from my nose to chin. “Cum for me, baby,” she whispered, before deepthroating me a second time.

It didn’t take long before all my muscles were tensing, my cock straining. Gabriella immediately wrapped her lips just around the tip while continuing to stroke me with her hand. She squeaked again in surprise, the

sound adorable, as I started shooting my load into her mouth. There was no gulping this time though, with her keeping it all on her tongue.

She then pulled away once I was finished, grinding more fervently on my face as she held my cum in her mouth, like she was savoring the taste while she aimed for her own orgasm.

“Mmm ,” she moaned. *“Mmmm !”*

She squirted on my face, the shiny thong causing most of her aroused pussy juice to wet the sides of my jaw and her thighs. My head was spinning again, my nose filled with her scent as I sucked in sharp breaths, doing my best to keep myself from grabbing her, taking control, and fucking her silly.

I then heard her gulp loudly a couple of times, before climbing off entirely, looking down at me with a satisfied grin as she held up her finger. *“Wait here. I’ll be right back.”*

Looking at her in confusion, I did as she asked, not moving a muscle while she whipped around and took off out of the room. I heard her run to the kitchen, open the pantry and grab something, before running back upstairs.

My eyes widened in surprise when I saw she had a bottle of maple syrup in her hand. Without hesitation, she straddled my chest, this time facing me. She then unbuttoned the purple silk shirt the rest of the way, pulling the sides away so that her hot stomach and massive tits were exposed.

She then uncapped the bottle and held it up to her plump breasts.

My slightly hard cock immediately stood at attention when she started squeezing the syrup on her upper chest, the room-temperature liquid beginning to slide down to her nipples. She then laid the capped bottle next to her and started running her fingers through the sugary fluid, rubbing it into her nipples like a lotion. Once her tits were covered in a layer, looking all sticky now, she wiped her hands off on her stomach.

Glancing back at my cock, she grinned when she saw how hard I was, before focusing down at me, moving her body forward a little so that I was staring underneath her boobs. *“You like my tits?”* she wondered, her tone a little haughty.

“Yes,” I gasped.

“Want to clean them off for me?” she asked, sounding indifferent, like she didn’t care one way or another, and she’d be doing me a favor by letting

me.

“Yes,” I moaned.

“You’ve got to beg me for it. Say, *‘Please let me lick you clean, mistress.’*”

Dang. She was really getting kinky, and I loved it.

“Please let me lick you clean, mistress,” I repeated.

“Good boy,” she said encouragingly, still sounding aloof. She then brought her finger to my lips, before forcing one into my mouth. “Suck,” she demanded.

I did, tasting the residue of the syrup as I gently ran my tongue around it. She then proceeded to pull it out and insert another finger, one at a time, until I’d cleaned them all with my mouth. After I was done, she climbed off for a moment and instructed me to sit against the wall.

I scooted back, prompting her to grab the syrup bottle a second time and begin pouring more of it on her tits, with some of it dripping onto my chest as she straddled my waist. Looking up at her hard nipples, I kept my hands to my side while she moved her thong over a little and began sinking onto my cock.

I whimpered when I felt her tight pussy squeezing me whenever I throbbed, feeling like I was about to explode just from that. She set the bottle to the side, grabbing her tits and holding them up a little as they continued to drip thin threads of syrup.

“Clean me up, cutie. I’m dripping everywhere.”

I complied, my mouth open as I went for her nipple, sucking it in between my lips. She moaned from the sensation, leaning toward me briefly, before speaking up again. “Hold my tits,” she demanded in a whisper.

I reached up to place my thumbs underneath them, grabbing them firmly while I sucked on the one, the tip of my nose getting covered in syrup. Letting go of her breasts, she placed her hands on the sides of my head, holding me while I sucked, beginning to rock up and down on my throbbing cock.

“Try not to cum,” she whispered. “Focus on licking my tits clean.”

What she was asking felt impossible, but I did as she asked, letting go of her nipple and running my tongue all along her plump boobs while she rode my cock rhythmically. My muscles were already beginning to strain, trying to hold back this time, as she brought her lips closer to my ear, still

holding my face while I licked her, occasionally running her fingertips tenderly through my hair.

“Good boy,” she said affectionately. “After this I’m going to cover my pussy in maple syrup and make you eat me out. Do you want to eat me out?” she wondered curiously. “Say, ‘*Yes mistress.*’”

“Yes, mistress,” I repeated breathlessly, resuming my licking.

“Please let me taste your pussy, mistress.”

Shit, she was making me so fucking horny.

“Please let me taste your pussy, mistress,” I echoed, my cock straining.

“Please fuck me, mistress,” she whispered passionately.

“Please, *fuck* !” I unloaded in her, my cock throbbing as I emptied my balls.

“That’s right, baby,” she whispered, leaning down more to kiss me on the temple. “Cum in me. Give me all that cock juice.”

“Shit,” I hissed after a second, my body trembling from the effort.

“Fuck, that was wonderful.”

She grinned, waiting for a few more seconds, before pulling off of me. Instantly, cum was dripping out of her snatch, leaking all over my cock and pelvis. She reached down with her fingers to stop the flow, using the thong to help, and then scooted back off the bed. “Be right back. I’ll clean up really fast, come clean you up, and then I’m going to make you eat me out.”

I gulped, only able to nod as she turned around and walked awkwardly toward the door. A minute later and she came back with a bunch of toilet paper. However, she didn’t immediately wipe my cum off like I assumed. Instead, she bent down, one leg still off the bed as she knelt on one knee, and engulfed me in her mouth. She then licked me up, angled my cock away with her fingers, and began slurping up the cum on my pelvis.

The sensation of having her down there caused my stomach to flinch repeatedly, eliciting more giggles from her. She then used the toilet paper to dry off her spit, before crawling to my side and lying down. Lifting her tight ass off the bed, she pulled her thong off and discarded it onto the floor.

I knew there was probably still cum in her hot snatch, but she’d cleaned the outside really well – there was no indication I’d just unloaded in her.

“Now,” she said firmly, focusing on me, her cheeks flushed. “Grab the syrup bottle and squirt it on my pussy.”

I focused more intently between her legs as I reached for the bottle, enthralled with how soft her trimmed red pubic hair above her perfect pussy

looked. Everything about the sight was enticing, the way her pale skin turned pink, the way her swollen lips seemed to beg me to kiss them, the way her partially hidden swollen clit looked like a cute little button just begging to be touched.

Uncapping the bottle, I held it over her velvety red pubic hair, beginning to let it drizzle onto her skin. I then watched as it slowly moved down her pussy, a trickle of it slipping in between her ass crack.

“What a naughty boy!” she exclaimed in a playful tone. “You got me all messy.”

“I did,” I agreed, my face flushed.

“Now eat my pussy out, and clean up your sticky mess,” she demanded. “That’s your punishment for cumming in me.”

My whole body felt hot as I readjusted myself and lowered my face between her legs. She immediately reached up and snagged her fingers roughly in my white hair, pulling me down against her snatch, even as she lifted her ass up a little, wrapping a leg around the back of my neck.

“Hurry,” she encouraged. “Before your mess drips all over the blanket.”

Some of the syrup was already about to drip from her crack, so I quickly ran my tongue between her cheeks, tasting the sweetness, which only enhanced the excitement induced from her natural juices, and then started sucking on her sticky lips.

“Oh yes, baby!” she exclaimed, thrusting her chest upward as she arched her back. “Suck on my pussy, you naughty boy!” She moaned, reaching up with one hand to place her palm on her own forehead, her fingers in her bright red hair, even as she used her other hand to force me roughly between her legs. “*Uhh* , baby! Lick me baby! Suck on my clit!”

I moved a little higher, pulling her swollen clit between my lips.

“*Ugh* !” she half-groaned, half-screamed, squirting against my chin. “Fuck, fuck, *fuck* ! Yes! Fuck yes!” Her thighs were trembling against my cheeks as she squeezed them tightly together, squishing my head while her hips uncontrollably bucked against my mouth. “Fuck,” she repeated, her body beginning to relax. “Oh fuck, you’re such a good boy. I think you’ve earned yourself a reward. Say, ‘*What do I get to do to you, mistress?* ’”

“What do I get to do to you, mistress?” I mumbled against her pussy lips.

She finally opened her eyes again, looking down at me passionately, her face flushed red. “You get to tie me up and play with me however you want.

You can also dress me in whatever you want. I'll even whimper and pretend like I'm nervous for you, like it's my first time."

Fuck yes!

"What should I use?" I wondered, realizing I didn't really have anything to tie her up with.

"Have any belts or anything? Even just a pillowcase or shirt could work too."

I nodded, climbing out of bed to grab a couple of belts from my closet. In the meantime, she made a quick trip to the bathroom to clean off the residue syrup, and then returned only to grab her thong off the floor and slip it back on. She also buttoned up the purple silk halfway a second time. Sitting on the edge of the bed, the sight of her smooth toned thighs making my cock stand at attention again, she then held out her hands together, as an offer for me to tie them up.

Of course, I wanted to be careful with her, trying to ignore the bruises on her arms, but I also wanted her to be unable to get free on her own. Wrapping one of the thinner leather belts around one wrist, followed by the other, I then wrapped it twice around the portion connecting her hands, only to give her a tug like I had her on a leash.

She stood up in response, letting me lead her just a couple of feet to the end of the bed.

"Sit," I instructed.

She gave me *the look*. An expression of pure submission and vulnerability, her bottom lip sticking out slightly into a pout, her green eyes looking nervous to the point of almost being afraid. Holy fuck, I'd never believe that she was acting if I didn't know otherwise. It was all too convincing.

And the craving to dominate her resurfaced in full force.

Tying the belt to the top of the bedpost after she sat down, leaving barely half a foot of strap left between it and her bound hands, I gently pushed her down onto her back, her arms held up as I began readjusting her body, sliding her carefully further away from the bed so that her arms were stretched out.

I then used the second belt on her feet, winding the entire thing around a couple of times and tying it. Standing up, I grabbed my blanket to toss on the floor, only to pull my sheet off and tie the thinner material between her ankles. Once I had it secure, I pulled the sheet taut in order to wrap around

the foot of my dresser, which was well-balanced and really heavy – even if she wanted to get free, she’d really struggle to slide it across the floor.

The moment I was done, Gabriella tensed her body, looking like she was trying to pull her knees up, only to be unable to do so. I doubted she was putting her whole effort into it, but she was sincerely stuck, with no easy way to free herself.

When she looked at me with that vulnerable expression again, nervous and afraid, I gulped. Focusing on her nipples poking through the purple silk, her huge tits spread far apart due to their weight, I scanned her slim waist followed by focusing on her leopard-print thong and smooth legs.

“Master,” she whispered, her voice trembling. “What are you going to do to me?”

Holy shit! How was she so good at roleplaying?

She was so fucking hot!

“I’m going to play with you,” I replied seriously, moving closer to sit by her hip. Reaching out, I rubbed my fingertips over her hard nipple, feeling the smooth silk. She whimpered from my touch, her full bottom lip sticking out.

“Are you going to be rough with me, master?” she wondered innocently.

“Yes,” I whispered, abruptly grabbing a handful of her tit and squeezing firmly. She whimpered and moaned, her back arching slightly.

With my other hand, I then felt her muscles tensing underneath the silk on her stomach, before moving my fingers lower and rubbing over the plastic-feeling thong. She continued to whimper as I played with her tit and pussy, deciding to slide my fingers underneath to stick one inside. Holy fuck she was so wet and warm.

Reaching deeper, I felt her muscled walls squeezing against me as I felt around. Noticing a rougher spot of what felt like thick wrinkled tissue, I gave it my attention, rubbing my finger over the area firmly. Based on its location, I assumed it must be her g-spot.

Gabriella sucked in a sharp breath. “Fuck, that feels so good, master,” she whimpered. “I’ve been a bad little slut and need to be punished.”

My eyes widened slightly at the roleplay, before I smirked. “You like that, little slut?” I asked, going along with it.

She whimpered, her expression vulnerable. “Yes, master. I’m your naughty little slut. Punish me, master.”

Readjusting my hand a little, I continued to rub my finger inside of her while using my thumb to gently rub over the bit of skin covering her clit. She gasped, arching her back again, her arms and legs straining against the straps.

“Oh master,” she whimpered. “I’ve been so *bad* . I need a spanking. Spank my tits.”

Holy fuck!

Uncertain of how hard I should slap her, I continued fingering her pussy while holding my hand up to the side of her heavy boob. Giving it a small slap, my cock throbbed in response to watching it jiggle.

“Harder,” she whimpered, her hips bucking slightly. “Spank me harder, master.”

Pulling on the silk, I freed one of her tits entirely from the shiny shirt, before smacking it firmly, causing the whole thing to jiggle toward the other before falling back in place. When she moaned, her eyes closed as she bit her bottom lip, I smacked her tit again. And again, beginning to spank it with a rhythm, letting it fall back into place for a second before giving it another smack.

“You’ve been a bad girl,” I said firmly, noticing the side of her boob was red now. *Smack* .

“I’ve been such a bad girl,” she agreed with a whimper. *Smack* . “Spank your bad girl, master.” *Smack* . “*Uhh !*” she cried out, her hips jutting upward as she squirted on my hand.

Pulling my finger out of her pussy, I immediately bent down as she tried to catch her breath, pressing my mouth firmly against her parted lips and shoving my tongue in. After the rough kiss, I then pulled away as I brought my hand up, sticking my wet finger between her lips, a little bit of her juice on my hand dripping onto her chin.

Her green eyes widened in alarm, before her face flushed and she obediently began sucking on the finger I’d used to fuck her. I leaned forward again to kiss her on the cheek, before pulling away to whisper in her ear.

“You’ve been really naughty, so I’m going to fuck you and cum in your pussy.”

She whimpered again, still sucking, so I kept my finger in her mouth as I moved to straddle her waist, supporting my weight on the elbow of my free arm. Adjusting my hips to angle my stiff cock right, I began putting

pressure between her thighs, slipping right inside once I found the correct spot.

Fucking her in this position, with her legs together below me, made me realize I couldn't get inside her as deep as before, but my cock was plenty long enough to make it work. Thus, with her still sucking on my finger, I began thrusting into her, curling my back so I could get her nipple in my mouth too.

"*Mm-Mm-Mm*," she moaned in time with my thrusts as I picked up the pace.

Grabbing her jaw with my free fingers, curling the finger in her mouth around her bottom teeth, I held on firmly as I felt myself reach the edge, sucking her nipple as far into my mouth as I could.

"Fuck!" I cried out against her tit, letting go of her face and placing my hand on the ground to help support my weight.

"Wow!" she said cheerfully, breaking character. "You really liked that, didn't you? Naughty boy!"

I gasped for air, kissing her dark areolar next to her nipple. "Yes," I admitted, taking a deep breath. "I wasn't too rough, was I?" I wondered, glancing up at her endearing expression.

"Nope! You were perfect!" She smirked. "I've always been told that it's important to have a safeword for this kind of sex, but I'm not really big into the idea of acting like I don't want it." When I gave her a confused look, she elaborated. "Like, if we decided that I was going to tell you 'no,' or asking you to 'stop' over and over again, then we'd need a different word that truly meant no. Like 'Chimera' or something odd like that."

"Oh," I said in surprise. "Oh, yeah I'm not sure I'd be too into that either. I like you being tied up and looking even a little afraid, like what you were doing, but I want you to want it."

"Right," she agreed. "You want to dominate me – for me to act like I've been naughty and need to be punished, but want the punishment. For me, I like more verbal bondage where you can't move because I tell you not to. That's the part I get off on, feeling like I'm the one truly in control. And even just now, I still felt like I was really the one in control, even though I'm tied up."

I nodded in agreement, knowing that was the case. Even despite her vulnerability and nervous act, she was the one telling me what to do and how to do it. Sure, I did some things on my own, and she let me, but

ultimately I was going to look for signs of what she wanted when it was time to pleasure her, as well as looking for signs that might indicate she wasn't enjoying it whenever it was my turn to get off.

Although, I felt like it was strange that we worked so well together. Or rather, strange that she seemed so experienced even though she was undeniably a virgin – based on the objective fact that I'd taken her first time only hours ago.

"Just wondering," I began hesitantly. "But how do you seem to know what I want? I believe you're a virgin," I quickly clarified. "But having sex with you feels like I'm fucking a highly experienced woman."

She grinned. "Thanks for the compliment!" she chirped. "It's because we're perfect together!"

"Really?" I asked, trying not to sound too skeptical.

She pouted, being playfully adorable. "I mean, I think we're pretty perfect for each other, don't you? Kind of hard to believe it's your first time too, with how you just handled my pussy. Who taught you to use your thumb while fingering me?"

My eyes widened as I thought about that. "Oh, I guess you have a point," I admitted.

"It just felt *right*, didn't it?" she said in understanding.

"It did," I agreed.

Damn, she hit the nail right on the head. Something about the whole thing just felt 'right.' Prior to fingering her how I did, I'd never even thought about doing it like that before, and moving my thumb and fingers independently of each other, in different directions, just felt so natural as if I'd trained my hand to do that.

Honestly, it hadn't been the first time my body adapted to a situation, like the first time I chopped wood or the first time I flew, but still it was strange.

"So," she said emphatically, her arms still tied above her head. "Am I free to go now?"

I smirked at her, before standing up. "No," I said firmly, carefully stepping so that my feet were next to her armpits, her arms still pulled above her head. I then lowered myself slowly until I was on my knees with my cock in her face. "Lick my cock clean, and then I'm going to keep it in your mouth until I get soft."

She grinned at that, leaning her head forward to kiss my head. “Not sure if you’ll be able to get soft in my mouth, but we can try!” she said cheerfully, only to open up and suck me in.

I gasped from the sensation, still sensitive from cumming in her pussy.

“*Mmm*,” she moaned, rolling her tongue around me.

Reaching down for her head, I curled my hand around the back of her neck to give her support while I started running my fingers gently through her red hair. She continued to tease me as I tucked some of her hair behind her ear and then continued to massage her head.

Tensing my arm supporting her neck, I unexpectedly pulled her closer, shoving my cock to the back of her throat and making her gag, before releasing.

She continued bobbing on me without complaint, moaning as she did so. Once I started getting close, I began rocking my hips gently, prompting her to finally relax her mouth as I carefully fucked the back of her throat. I wasn’t shoving myself in nearly as far as she did when she was swallowing me, instead just poking at the back of her tongue where it got tighter before pulling out to thrust slowly again.

Not wanting her to accidentally choke from my cum shooting into the back of her throat, I reached down to start stroking myself, still holding her head with my other hand, resting the tip of my cock at her lips. She opened her mouth in preparation for me to get there, quickly wrapping her lips around the top when I grunted and shot my load.

“Fuck,” I whispered, throbbing as she gulped it down.

With another few kisses on my cock, she grinned at me after a moment. “Okay, now you need to let me go, master. You still have a date to take me on, and we both need a shower.”

I smirked at her, moving to her side and kissing her tenderly on the cheek. “Yes, mistress,” I whispered, before getting to work.

“I love you, baby,” she replied, her expression affectionate as she watched me untie her hands from the bed.

I paused what I was doing to focus on her emerald gaze. “I love you, Gabriella. Thank you for fucking me.”

She grinned. “You’re welcome, naughty boy!”

CHAPTER 7: DATE

After Gabriella and I rinsed off in the shower together and got dressed, I made sure I knew what mall we were going to, and then took a few deep breaths downstairs, focusing my thoughts in order to look fully human.

She approached me cautiously once I was done, looking for any signs that I was going to shift back. She was wearing her long-sleeve green shirt again, which covered up her bruising, as well as her jeans and normal panties underneath.

I angled myself more toward her, trying to keep my eyes on her emerald gaze, instead of roaming her body. Normally, it had never been a problem before – a habit I’d long since established, to avoid examining a woman’s body – but things were different now.

I could vividly remember every aspect of her naked form.

Especially her huge tits, now secured in a bra, but still arousing to even glance at.

Damn, I wasn’t sure I’d ever heard of someone being so skinny with such big boobs, unless they had implants. Yet hers were real and almost abnormally plump and firm. Not that I had a ton of experience touching boobs though. Really, I supposed I was mostly going off what I could remember from being around my mom, whose chest hung lower when she wasn’t wearing a bra underneath her shirt.

Granted, Serenity’s tits were pretty plump too, although admittedly much smaller than Gabriella. I knew Serenity’s bra size was a C-cup, which was actually above average for someone as skinny as her, but I couldn’t even imagine what cup size Gabriella was.

I figured I’d ask her sometime, just out of curiosity, but not right now.

I had to focus.

I took another deep breath. “Okay, so what’s the plan?” I wondered.

She nodded, her expression serious. “While we’re out, you make all the rules. And if you just need to walk away from me, then do it. Don’t feel bad.”

“Sounds good,” I agreed. “Thankfully, if I feel like I’m going to start transforming, then I can kind of control where it begins.”

Her red eyebrows shot up. “You can?” she said in surprise.

“Yeah, like if I focus on keeping my hair normal, then generally my chest and back will start turning gray instead. And when I try to keep that normal too, then it will start showing up in my eyes – I can at least close those.” She nodded again to indicate she understood, so I continued. “So, if you *do* see me close my eyes, just know that is probably the reason why.”

“Alright,” she agreed. “And I’ll do whatever you say without hesitation. No need to be polite. If you need me to walk away from you, because your eyes are closed and you can’t move, then just say ‘go’ and leave it at that. I won’t get offended or anything.”

A smile slowly crept onto my lips. “I really love you,” I whispered. How in the hell did I get so lucky?

Gabriella reached out her hand to grab mine, but then stopped herself, not wanting me to shift again. She looked up at me apologetically. “Sorry. I really love you too.”

We both sighed, knowing it was going to be difficult to remember not to touch each other.

Grabbing my keys and wallet from the small entrance table, I opened the door for her and then followed her outside to my car. I could smell that the deer I’d killed earlier, to hide the sadistic cop’s blood, was already beginning to rot a little in the heat of the sun.

Of course, I planned on waiting until Serenity got home before I moved it, because I wanted to make sure she saw it for herself. That way, there would be no doubt about where the blood on the ground came from.

Once we both climbed inside my silver used car, I took a minute to inhale a few more times deeply, just to make sure my heart rate stayed calm despite Gabriella’s intoxicating scent filling the interior of my car.

“We don’t have to do this,” she whispered unexpectedly. “I’m alright with waiting if it’s too much for you.”

I shook my head. “It will be easier when we aren’t alone anymore. Right now, your heartbeat and smell are the strongest things bombarding my senses. Once we’re in a crowd, I’ll have plenty of other things to focus on.”

She nodded, so I began backing the car up and then started down our long driveway, before pulling out onto the road a few seconds later.

On the way, we ended up talking mostly about music, discovering that we had completely different tastes in what we liked. Not that it really mattered too much to either of us. She certainly didn't seem to care, and neither did I.

I felt like worrying about something so superficial was comparable to not having the same favorite color, or the fact that we probably didn't like the same genres of movies, which was a fairly normal difference between most men and women. At the end of the day, we were distinct people, so there were bound to be some major differences.

The thing that mattered the most, especially to me, was the fact that she appeared to be willing to respect me and put my needs ahead of hers when it really mattered.

And the fact that she knew and would keep my secret.

I also really liked that she was responsible and supported herself.

Besides, growing up with my older friend, I'd gotten used to watching chick flicks, especially since I couldn't handle scary movies without risking my hair turning white from being startled. Serenity and I also had different tastes in music, with her offering to take turns, though often I just listened to whatever she wanted.

Either way, I liked that Gabriella was different.

I felt like it made our budding relationship more interesting.

When we were getting closer to the mall, I decided to bring up the subject of our relationship status, since it wasn't something that we'd really discussed at all. I had to be careful with my words though.

"So..." I began hesitantly. "Just wanting to make sure. We're boyfriend and girlfriend now, right?"

I didn't realize how embarrassing it would be to ask, until I said it.

My cheeks were flushed now.

Gabriella looked at me in surprise. "I'd say we're a lot further than that already," she exclaimed. "I want you forever."

Instantly, my hair shifted white.

She was immediately apologetic. "Oh! I'm sorry!" She then paused, lowering her voice as she sank back into her seat a little. "Yeah, I mean, unless you want to take it up a notch anytime soon, we'll go with boyfriend and girlfriend."

I took a deep breath, feeling my hair return to normal. Thankfully, we were still driving, and I didn't think anyone was looking this way when it

happened. At the very least, I knew I usually wasn't paying attention to other people, even when I was riding in the passenger's seat with my housemate driving.

"I'm not sure how Serenity would react, to me asking you to marry me so soon. Plus, I'm still technically in high school."

"True," she agreed. "But we wouldn't have to get married right away. You could still ask me, and then we could just be engaged for a while." She looked at me warmly, only to abruptly continue. "But make sure you have a ring first!" she blurted out, quickly blushing in embarrassment. "If you don't mind...I'd like it to be special, if that's alright." She paused, growing a little somber. "Assuming you think you want to be with me forever," she added quietly.

Honestly, I couldn't imagine being with anyone else. Getting to fuck her hot body for the rest of my life was kind of a no-brainer, even if I had other options, not to mention that I actually liked her. In so many ways, I loved everything about her. It was as if the most perfect woman had fallen into my life out of nowhere.

And sure...I sincerely did love Serenity...

But I was being unrealistic to think that having her in my life like I wanted was anything other than a fantasy. I loved Serenity desperately, but knew I'd probably lose her if she ever found out the kind of pervert her younger housemate was.

Would she even be able to look at me the same if she knew I was infatuated with her? Or worse, found out that I actually wasn't human?

At the end of the day, I could have Gabriella, while the only way to keep Serenity was to let us both move on with our lives and continue being normal friends to each other...

Facing reality kind of made me depressed, but at the very least I knew it wouldn't be completely devastating if my older housemate finally moved on and got a boyfriend.

I wouldn't be alone, thanks to Gabriella.

I smiled at her, seeing that she looked nervous now, due to my silence. "I guess we should probably get your ring finger measured then, huh?" I teased. "Just so I know for future reference."

Gabriella blushed again, suddenly covering her face partially with both hands. "It doesn't have to be super expensive. They have really nice stuff for a few hundred dollars."

I glanced at her in surprise. "I mean, I can afford a higher price."

She shook her head, dropping her hands. "I'd feel horrible if I lost something that was thousands of dollars. I can send you some ideas...if you want."

"That would help," I admitted, having no clue what she'd be interested in. "I want to make sure you like it."

She looked at me reassuringly. "I'd like anything you got me."

I glanced at her endearing gaze again, before quickly focusing on the road when the intensity of her look made my face grow hot. I then suddenly found myself chuckling.

"What's funny?" she wondered, sounding confused.

I shook my head. "I just can't believe this is really happening." I sighed. "I had completely written off having a relationship with anyone. I mean, I can't. Or at least, *couldn't*. Because I'd transform. And now here I am talking about marrying you after a day. My life has changed so much, and it hasn't even been a full twenty-four hours yet since it started."

I slowed down a little, getting ready to turn into the massive mall parking lot.

"Are you happy about it?" she wondered.

"Well, yeah. I don't think I could be happier," I replied honestly. I then decided to change subjects, since I was looking for a spot to park now.

"Alright, you've got to be good from here on out," I teased. "No more fun talk."

"I promise," she said seriously. "I'm really looking forward to this," she added.

"Me too," I agreed as I pulled into a spot.

Climbing out of my car, we were careful about regrouping behind it, ensuring we didn't accidentally touch while we walked side-by-side toward one of the mall entrances. When I held the door open for her, I didn't even bother meeting her gaze, wanting to make sure I didn't catch her giving me an endearing glance that would start pushing me over the edge.

Gabriella was more familiar with where we were going, so I followed her lead as she sort of led the way, although I still mostly kept to her side. I really wanted to hold her hand, but I knew I wouldn't be able to under these circumstances – at least not yet. However, I was sincerely looking forward to the day when I could touch her more casually without my body flipping out.

The mall wasn't overly crowded, given the time of day even if it *was* a Friday, but there were still a decent number of people milling around. As we made our way to the bookstore, for the first time I finally got a glimpse of what she had to deal with regularly.

To be completely honest, I kind of thought she was exaggerating before, even despite how hot she was. Yet it seemed as if almost everyone took the time to glance at her as we walked together.

Granted, I could understand why.

For one, there was nothing like a skinny girl with huge tits to catch everyone's attention. But that was the thing – even the other women would look at her with jealousy in their eyes. And it certainly didn't help that she naturally had vibrant red hair, and was overall drop-dead gorgeous.

Comparing her to the other women we passed, Gabriella was like a vibrant rose amongst thorns – a goddess, among mortals. A hot young woman with a physique that almost seemed impossible in real life, without surgery at least.

After about only a couple of minutes, I finally realized I'd probably have to try focusing my attention on her after all, so I could actually enjoy myself.

Nothing like sensing the abrupt arousal of other guys to ruin my mood. It had happened when I was out with Serenity before, but she and I were so emotionally close that it almost didn't matter.

In a strange way, Serenity felt like mine to the point that I didn't have to worry about anyone else, even though she obviously wasn't mine in that way.

But with Gabriella, I supposed the newness of our relationship made me feel like one of the guys was going to try to steal her away. I wasn't nearly as secure with her as I was with Serenity, even though my older friend was ironically not the one considering to be with me forever.

However, I realized this was probably just the curse that came along with being so beautiful. And for me, the curse of having such a hot girlfriend. Everyone else was going to want what I had.

Sighing heavily, the gesture caught Gabriella's attention.

She immediately looked up at me in concern. "Are you alright?" she whispered.

I nodded. "Yeah, it's just..." I paused. "I can see why you bought a treadmill," I admitted.

She mimicked my nod somberly. “Yeah, I’ve gotten used to all the stares, but having guys approach me and simply refuse to leave me alone is the worst part. And it’s not even like they can’t take a hint – I tell them flat-out to leave me alone, and yet they still try to get in my pants.” She sighed. “I’m really glad I have you here, actually. It’ll be nice if having my boyfriend around keeps them away.” She then looked at me apologetically, likely concerned that calling me her boyfriend would affect me.

I shook my head to indicate I was fine. “I’m okay.” I then grinned at her. “I’m looking forward to being able to show more affection in public, eventually.” I abruptly looked away then, blushing at the thought, realizing this really wasn’t a subject we could talk about right now. From the corner of my eye, I saw she was blushing too.

I was thankful when the bookstore came into sight only a few seconds later, because she used it as an excuse to change the subject.

“Oh! We’re here,” she said excitedly.

As we walked in, I saw that the bookstore was really a separate building attached to the mall. It was massive inside, much larger than a traditional mall shop would be, with there being rows and rows of books of every genre imaginable. Of course, I’d been to this mall before with Serenity, but never looking for books. Plus, there was another smaller strip mall that was closer to our house, that we visited much more frequently if we went shopping.

I could understand Gabriella’s excitement though. This place was like a little slice of heaven for a book lover. There was also a coffee shop inside at the other end of the store, so she asked if we could go there first.

I smirked at her enthusiasm. “As long as I get to pay. This is our first date after all.”

My comment made her so happy that she almost grabbed my hand, only to abruptly pull it away and hold her fingers up against her chest. “Oops, sorry,” she said, quickly changing subjects. “Umm, what do you think you’ll get?” she wondered, as we continued walking down the main aisle.

I shrugged. “Probably nothing,” I admitted, lowering my voice. “Definitely not coffee. Too much caffeine can trigger the same effect as when I touch you. That’s why I usually don’t drink it.”

“Oh!” she said in surprise, quickly lowering her voice. “I didn’t realize that, but it makes sense. Good to know.”

Surprisingly, in contrast to the thinner crowd of the mall itself, the bookstore was pretty packed with people due to the storewide sale going on. The main aisle wasn't too bad, but there were a lot of customers standing between bookshelves as they browsed, along with a nice long line of people waiting to order coffee.

As we got in line at the end, remaining silent for the most part, I tried to focus on the menu, just to have something to do, only to notice that people were staring at *us* .

Like, not just Gabriella, but I was getting looks too.

Granted, most of the other customers were women, and I knew I wasn't bad looking myself, assuming that the reactions I got from some of the girls at school were any indication. However, I felt like I didn't normally get a ton of stares.

It kind of made me wonder if the difference was the fact that Gabriella was by my side, with the combination making us stick out more together. It was also possible I just ignored the looks before, since I was primarily only thinking about my older friend as being *my friend* , and housemate, not my date.

At the very least, I felt like they probably weren't thinking, 'How did *he* end up with someone as attractive as her.'

Or at least, I hoped.

Kind of made me wonder what was actually on their minds. I strongly doubted the other girls closer to my age were jealous of Gabriella, for having me, but the idea that they might be jealous of her for having such a hot boyfriend kind of boosted my confidence a little.

Possibly somewhat ironic, but even though I was the supernatural one, when we were walking into the mall earlier, I couldn't help but find myself feeling a little inferior when everyone had been ogling her. Thus, despite the fact that the stares were awkward, I was kind of secretly thankful for them.

Once I purchased Gabriella's coffee, I followed her to what was apparently her favorite section – paranormal fantasy.

"Huh," I commented. "I kind of figured you would like romance or something."

She blushed slightly. "Well, I do like that too. I read a lot of different stuff. But some of my favorite book series have been fantasy."

"Like what?" I wondered.

Her face began turning red again. “Oh, you know, stuff about vampires, werewolves, and such. I guess they do usually have a good romance in them too. I just finished a book about demons actually. Well, not exactly demons like we think of them, but it was interesting. Different.”

“Different like me?” I teased quietly.

She smirked, focusing on some of the titles. “Yeah, except you’re better, because you’re real. Never thought any of this stuff could actually exist,” she admitted. “Kind of crazy when I think about it.”

I nodded.

She pulled out a book then, focusing on the cover, before holding it up toward me. “This seems interesting.”

I glanced at it, not really agreeing, but not wanting to admit that. “Cool,” I said simply.

“Oh, sorry,” she said, looking apologetic now. “This isn’t boring for you, is it?”

I shook my head. “No, this is fine. I’ll admit that I’m not super excited like you are, but I just want to hang with you. I don’t care what we actually do. Being around you is plenty entertaining enough.”

She smiled up at me warmly. “Are you sure though? Because I’m fine with doing something else if you want.”

“No, really. It’s fine. Even if I’m not interested in books much, I’m not bored being here with you. Trust me, I’m *anything* but bored around you.”

Her expression became more tender, prompting me to look away.

Sighing, she put the book she was holding back, only to pull out another that was bright red. It caught my attention, with me realizing the vibrant color reminded me of what had happened only just that morning – killing the cop, drinking his blood.

I abruptly turned my head away again, glad her hair color didn’t have that same effect, but she didn’t seem to notice.

“Huh, this looks interesting,” she commented, finally looking up at me. “Are you fine if I read a little to see if I want to buy it?”

I nodded, clearing my throat. “Yeah, of course. That’s fine. We’ve got all day, really. I should probably send a message to my friend anyway, to let her know where we are. I don’t want her flipping out if she comes home early and we aren’t there.” To emphasize my point, I pulled out my phone as I spoke, which was only half charged after Gabriella plugged it in for me earlier.

She smiled and eagerly began reading the first few pages of the book she was holding.

After sending a quick message to Serenity, I focused on her again, finding my cheeks warming up at just the sight of how adorable she was reading her book in the middle of the aisle. I then decided to occupy my time by looking at some of the book covers on the shelves. A lot of the books were showing only their spine, but there were quite a few that were situated so that the cover was visible.

After a few minutes, Gabriella closed it. “Well, this one isn’t on sale, but it has a pretty interesting start, so I’m going to get it.” She seemed hesitant then. “Would you be alright with holding it for me?”

I smirked at her. “Of course,” I replied, reaching out to accept it.

Before long, she’d handed me another two books that she wanted to get, and then decided to move on to a new section. We checked out the science fiction next, where she picked out yet another book, and then finally romance.

However, in the romance section, I finally had to walk away from her after catching a glimpse at a particular cover that was overly suggestive. Normally, it wouldn’t have bothered me, but the image prompted me to think about what we’d done just not even a full hour ago. Never mind the fun we had before our nap.

I could feel her eyes on me as I abruptly disappeared around the corner, but she didn’t chase after me right away. Instead, she waited a few seconds, before I heard her slowly leave the section, seeming to just want to keep me in her sight.

Once I’d collected my thoughts and gotten my mind off fucking her, I made my way back, unwilling to make eye contact now. I was thankful that she realized I was still struggling a little.

“I think I’m done looking for now,” she said decisively, grabbing the books from my hands. “I’m going to go ahead and get these four books, and then do you want to check out the food court?”

I cleared my throat, feeling bad about ruining her fun, but also really needing a change of scenery at this point. “Can I buy them for you?” I wondered, finally glancing down at her. However, I immediately had to look away when her emerald eyes were suddenly full of affection.

“Careful,” I said quietly.

“Oh, sorry,” she whispered. “Yes, I’d really like that actually. Not that I can’t afford it, of course, but it makes it feel more special knowing you paid for it. It’s like a gift then.”

I smiled, still averting my gaze as I turned to head toward the check out. However, she didn’t follow. I glanced back at her in confusion. “Coming?”

“Oh yes, sorry,” she said, catching up. “I wasn’t sure if you needed to get away or not.”

I shook my head. “No, I’m alright.”

As expected, the line to checkout was decently long, but they had enough cashiers to make it go quick enough. After only about five minutes, we were finally leaving, heading back into the mall toward the food court, with me carrying Gabriella’s bag of new books.

Once we got there, we decided on getting a couple of giant cinnamon-covered pretzels that came with a frosting dip, before sitting down across from each other at a small secluded table next to the only wall that had seating. I was grateful she seemed to know to avoid the word ‘dessert,’ instead using the word ‘snack,’ since the former held a significantly different meaning for me right now.

I wasn’t sure if she was doing that consciously, or not, but I definitely appreciated it.

I was angled more toward the wall, with the rest of the food court behind me, focused intently on Gabriella as we carefully socialized.

It was while we were talking about possibly going to one of the jewelry stores in the middle of the mall, to get her ring sized for future reference, that I caught unexpected movement from the corner of my eye.

A guy who looked like he was on steroids had been walking by, but he unexpectedly changed directions, and headed straight toward us. I was sincerely shocked when he continued to walk right up, as if he knew Gabriella, only to place his hand on the table between us, giving my date his full attention.

It all happened so fast, and was so bizarre, that I didn’t even know how to react.

Did she know this guy from somewhere?

“Hey there, babe. Why don’t you come hang out with me? I’m much more fun than this guy.”

What the fuck?!

Was this bastard for real right now?

I immediately closed my eyes, suddenly trying to restrain myself, as I had the urge to rip out his throat. And not for his blood this time.

No, I just wanted to slaughter the bastard.

A small part of me was glad I was at least facing the wall as I felt my chest and back turn gray, knowing no one would see if my face showed signs of changing too. Still, I couldn't believe this was really happening right now. How could someone be so arrogant and bold to just approach some random girl and try to steal her, while she was clearly on a date!

Something didn't feel right about this.

Did this kind of thing really happen to her?

I mean, I knew she was hot, but *seriously* ?

This was ridiculous. To the point that I wouldn't believe it if it wasn't actively happening right now. Was Gabriella some kind of magnet for assholes or something?

Forcing my transformation into my eyes to stop my skin from graying more underneath my clothing, I tried to take comfort in the fact that Gabriella knew how to handle herself. After all, she'd dealt with this kind of issue for years now, and had always been able to get out of these situations on her own.

Not to mention, the way this guy looked – the way he *smelt* – I suspected that me trying to intervene would actually just make him more aggressive. The only person who could truly shut him down was her, which meant I just needed to let her do what she already knew to do – make it clear she wasn't interested.

I still hated it though. Hated that I couldn't just get up and shove this guy on his ass.

Because, while technically her job was to say 'no,' I felt like my job was to intervene if he didn't respect that no. But could I? Could I make him go away without transforming?

Gabriella's tone was firm. "Not interested," she snapped. "Leave us alone."

It was obvious she was pissed, but I also noticed a hint of concern in her tone too, likely because she'd noticed that my eyes were closed.

Unfortunately, it wasn't so easy.

The asshole didn't let up.

"Oh?" he scoffed. "You're with *him* ? I thought that was your brother or something," he laughed.

This wasn't my first time dealing with jackasses. I knew he was intentionally trying to be offensive, especially since Gabriella and I didn't look anything alike. If anything, he probably thought that putting that idea into her head would make her reconsider her choice, which was stupid as hell.

Either that, or maybe he was actually hoping for a fight.

Gabriella ignored the comment, apparently smart enough to not let the guy bait her into arguing with him. "I said, leave us alone," she repeated firmly.

"Hey now," the bastard replied. "I'm just trying to have some fun."

Gabriella was definitely pissed now. "I *said* –"

Unexpectedly, I sensed him grab her arm roughly, immediately causing my eyes to flash open to confirm what my other senses were telling me.

Enraged, I did everything in my power to stay seated, while forcing my pupils into slits like a cat's eye, my irises bright gold.

"Hey!" I barked out.

He turned to look at me with a triumphant expression, almost as if this was what he was aiming for, before he suddenly jerked back.

"What the fuck!" he exclaimed in alarm, sincere terror pouring out of him.

My tone was ice cold. "I suggest you leave, *before I gut you*," I hissed.

Without hesitation, my prey turned and bolted away as fast as he could, like he was sincerely running for his life, cursing as he went. My eyes closed the moment he was gone, my fists clenched in my lap, my palms hiding sharp black claws that were just beginning to elongate.

I could hear Gabriella shifting in her seat as she urgently looked around, making sure no one saw me. But I was pretty sure no one had been paying attention, though I was confident we definitely had people staring now, due to the commotion he caused.

She then leaned forward toward me. "We should just go."

I quickly shook my head, trying to get ahold of my emotions. Part of me really wanted to run after him and make good on my promise to gut him. She waited patiently for me to respond verbally.

Finally, after a couple minutes, my eyes were back to normal, so I opened them to find her watching me in concern. She looked ashamed and guilty too, though I already was aware of that from her scent.

I tried to smile at her. “We still need to get your ring finger measured, remember?”

“No, seriously. It can wait,” she disagreed. “What if that guy tells security? Or calls the police?”

I sighed heavily, knowing she was right.

Dammit.

Standing up, we grabbed our snack to bring with us, prompting her to vent once we left the food court and began making our way to the exit.

“Jeez,” she hissed. “I figured that after yesterday, and this morning, I had used up my quota of bad luck for the rest of my life.” She then clarified when I gave her a confused look. “I do have guys come up to me like that sometimes, but I don't think assholes who are *that* arrogant are normal. The fact that he actually grabbed me is shocking. No one has ever gone that far before.”

I focused ahead as I considered that. “Yeah, actually there was something weird about it,” I agreed, thinking back on his behavior. “Honestly, it almost seemed like he was trying to provoke *me*, rather than trying to get with you. He acted almost...*accomplished*, when I finally reacted. Maybe he was just looking for a fight?”

“Maybe,” she replied. “He did seem like the kind of muscle-head who might do something like that. It just sucks that all our bad luck had to happen all at once.” She then was thoughtful for a moment, only to continue with an endearing tone. “Thank you, by the way. I really appreciate you coming to my rescue.”

I intentionally didn't meet her gaze, knowing her expression would probably make my hair start turning white. “You're welcome,” I whispered simply.

Once we reached my car, I sighed heavily as we climbed in, glad to have that over with. It was a nice date, but it ended up being more stressful than I anticipated. I spoke up again as I pulled out of the parking spot.

“Well, I'm glad all that was just a fluke, instead of the norm. I'm certainly not going to tolerate guys putting their hands on you.” My grip tightened on the steering wheel as I spoke, my knuckles turning white. However, after a second, I realized that what I'd just said might sound more controlling than I intended. I quickly focused on her. “You know you can walk away, right?”

Gabriella looked at me in surprise. “What? What are you talking about?”

I grimaced. “Like, if you decided you didn't want to be with me...” I paused. “I'd be devastated, of course, but you can do that. Leave me.”

“I don't want to leave you though.”

I realized she didn't understand what I was getting at. “I mean, I just didn't want you to feel...trapped.” I glanced at her again. “Because you know my secret, and obviously I'm a lot stronger than normal people. What I meant is that I wouldn't hurt a guy if you *let* him touch you, although obviously I'd probably die on the inside.”

Gabriella immediately reached over to touch my arm, causing my hair to flash white unexpectedly. However, she didn't move her hand, and I decided I didn't care if anyone saw me with white hair – for all they knew I could have just dyed it.

“Kai...” she began hesitantly. She then shifted gears, addressing what I was trying to tell her. “Thank you. I get what you're saying. You won't be a stalker ex-boyfriend, who hurts everyone I date, or who even might try to hurt me. But you won't ever be an ex, so long as you always want me. I don't just casually date. I've really only had the one other boyfriend, and it wasn't even that serious. I'm serious with you. I'm committed.”

I sighed, my breath coming out more ragged than I was expecting. I reached over with my left hand to place on hers still resting on my right forearm. “Me too. Even if you cheated on me, I'd still take you back in a heartbeat...” I grimaced again. “Granted, I'd probably have trust issues after that, if I'm being honest.”

“I won't cheat on you!” she exclaimed. “I'm not that kind of girl! I won't even be friendly with other guys! You're the only guy I need.”

I sighed heavily, thankful to hear that, but now feeling paranoid about it happening one day.

She switched subjects then, her tone sounding a little more playful. “So, are you saying you don't currently have trust issues?”

I glanced at her, recalling what my housemate told her the previous night. “I have a hard time forgiving people,” I admitted. “Or rather, it's not that I don't forgive them, because I'm not holding a grudge against anyone right now. So I guess, really it is trust. Obviously, I have to keep people distant to begin with, but overall I give everyone *one* chance. If they break

the small amount of trust that I have for them, then that's it. I'll never trust them again."

"You know I would never break your trust on purpose, right?" she asked urgently. Her scent was immediately tainted with panic, almost as if she was afraid that a single mistake would make me leave her forever.

"I won't leave you," I reassured her, assuming that was the subject on her mind. "Like I said, even if you cheated on me, I'd be devastated and miserable, and probably wouldn't be able to have sex with you again for a long time. But I'd still take you back. I'd still want you in my life."

She finally let go of my arm and leaned back in her seat, probably so I could start trying to look normal again. "Well, I won't cheat. Never. And actually, what you said goes both ways. If you somehow ended up sleeping with someone else, I'd take you back." She sighed. "But I just want to make sure you know that I'd never betray you on purpose. The fact that I haven't told Serenity about you, even though I think she could handle it, should be proof of that."

"It's not just that," I explained. "She's a detective. It's her job to catch criminals, which would put her in a tough position if the police ever decided to come after me."

"Oh. Yeah, I see what you mean." She paused. "I hate to say this, especially since you saved my life, but maybe you should stop getting involved."

I glanced at her pained expression, smelling guilt coming from her for even mentioning it, as if she was being selfish for asking me not to risk it.

"You might be right," I admitted. "At first, I only did it when the case made Serenity especially upset. But now it's kind of hard knowing that someone's about to be killed, and I'm not there to stop it. Sometimes, I think about all the people who would have died – all the people who were spared that trauma. At least, that thought eases my conscience."

"I know," she whispered. "I sometimes think about what would have happened had you not saved me. I feel like I'm stealing that from someone else by even asking." She then scoffed. "The law is so stupid. If you're killing a known murderer, then I don't see what the problem is."

I sighed. "Well, the problem is because regular people can get it wrong. Someone might be framed as a murderer when they are innocent. That's why the law is written the way it is. At least, I think that's why." I took a deep breath, both of us falling silent for a moment.

I then continued. "I guess maybe I could just try catching them instead, but then I'd have to figure out a consistent way to tie them up, as well as a way to avoid them seeing me. Not to mention your attacker probably would have gotten away, since he had an accomplice – never mind the fact it was a cop! It makes me sick just thinking about all the murders they might have gotten away with. Never mind the ones they may have already done, that the police don't know about."

Gabriella nodded in agreement, but didn't respond, causing us to fall silent again.

Her voice was quiet when she spoke up. "What do you think we should do when we get home?"

Given her serious tone, I knew that us spending any more intimate time together was probably not on her mind. I ran my fingers through my hair as I considered my response. "Well, I want Serenity to see the deer for herself. Of course, she would believe me if I told her about it, but I'd rather make sure there's no doubt in her mind. Other than that, I need to cook dinner."

"Can I help?" she asked, suddenly eager. "I think it'd be fun to cook together. Plus, Serenity said she wanted to try my cooking."

I smirked at her. "Yeah, sure. That does sound like fun. It could be like an extension of our date."

Gabriella gave me a huge grin. "Perfect! And I also need to work on your tolerance more before she gets home."

"Umm, are you sure?" I asked seriously. "That might not be a good idea."

"Why not?"

"Well, what if Serenity comes home early? She normally only sends me a message if she's going to be more than an hour late."

Gabriella was pensive. "Well, you can hear her coming, right?" She continued when I nodded. "The worst case is you might have to go hide in the bathroom for a few minutes. See? Problem solved!"

I chuckled at her enthusiasm. "Alright, but let's keep my mind on something else until we get there. This conversation isn't good for my skin."

Gabriella laughed abruptly. "Wow, that's a great quote." She then gave me an apologetic look. "I know what you mean of course, but '*this conversation isn't good for my skin*' is hilarious. I might have to reuse that

someday.” She giggled again in response to my confused expression, before continuing. “So, what do you want to talk about?”

I thought about it for a minute. “Can you tell me more about your life? Like, maybe tell me about your family? Oh, and you also said you were going to tell me the reason why you knew what you liked...” My voice trailed off, knowing she’d know what I meant.

Why she knew what she liked in the bedroom.

“Oh, umm, sure,” she agreed. “Family first. My parents only live about twenty minutes away. I have a sister who is twelve years older than me, so I grew up most of my life basically as an only child. I barely even remember it when my sister lived at home. It seems like such a long time ago. As you can imagine, my parents are kind of old compared to other people my age...”

I interrupted her. “*Our* age. I’m only two years younger than you.”

“Right, sorry!” She gave me another apologetic look. “That really bothers you, doesn’t it?”

I shook my head in denial. “I don’t know why. I guess it’s because it makes me feel like I’m too young for you.”

Gabriella laughed again. “Oh, so my parents? Robbing the cradle seems to run in my family, because my mom is eight years older than my dad. Although, what’s crazy is that my mom actually looks younger than my dad. You’d probably think that she’s in her early forties, maybe even late thirties, even though she’s in her fifties.”

I looked at her in surprise. “Oh, that’s different. Not necessarily the age gap, since I’ve definitely heard of people being even a decade or more apart in age, but the fact that it’s not the reverse. I feel like it seems more normal for men to marry younger women, rather than the other way around.”

She shrugged in response. “Maybe. It seems normal to me, since that’s what I grew up with. However, that’s actually part of the reason why I enjoy being so dominating with you in bed.” She paused when I gawked at her, prompting her to immediately continue. “Like, their entire relationship was like that growing up. It still is. Not that they ever did anything around me,” she quickly added. “They barely even kissed if someone was around, but as I got older, I began to realize that their playful banter was essentially foreplay.”

Damn, that was awkward.

I cleared my throat. “So, I’m confused. How exactly does that relate to you knowing what you want in the bedroom?”

She looked a little embarrassed now. “Well, my mom is kind of really into the dominating thing – obviously. When I was younger, I had the normal conversation with her about sex pretty much when they covered it in school, but when I turned eighteen a couple of years ago, we had a more thorough conversation about that kind of stuff. Specifically, she gave me a rundown on how to be safe, and how to communicate what I wanted.”

Holy fuck, was she serious?

I didn’t know what to think about that. I mean, I supposed that wasn’t too weird, but I couldn’t imagine talking with my dad about that kind of thing.

Then again, I’d never know how I would have felt about it, since he was gone...

Dammit.

I tried to continue the conversation, not wanting to get depressed and ruin what was left of our date. “Well, I guess I’m glad I know, and glad you waited to tell me, although I hope it doesn’t affect my perception of them. Especially if I’m going to probably meet them one day.”

“Oh! I’m sorry!” she exclaimed. “I guess that was a little TMI, wasn’t it?” She paused. “But, I mean, you do like it, don’t you? How I take control? Because my mom helped me figure out what I like, and gave me tips on what kind of things to do to exert control.”

Holy fuck!

I felt my hair immediately beginning to turn white again, unable to believe that Gabriella’s mom was the person I had to thank for this hot beauty knowing how to take control in the bedroom. And did that include an education in sex positions too? Because Gabriella really seemed to know what she was doing, as if she had experience.

Then again, she did mention that she had some pretty slutty friends in high school, so maybe her mom just gave her more vague tips about the dominating and communication part, and her friends filled in the rest.

I cleared my throat, knowing I needed to answer her question about liking her taking control.

“Yes,” I admitted. “But this probably isn’t the best time to ask that.”

She glanced around, the road surrounded by trees now that we were out of the city. “Why? We’re almost home, right?”

Her words sent a chill down my spine. *Home.*

“What?” she wondered, a hint of playfulness in her voice.

I glanced at her affectionately. “I just really liked it that you referred to my place as home. As if it was your home now too.”

“Oh. Well, they do say your home is where your heart is.” She smirked at me. “And my heart is with you,” she added. She was then pensive as I pulled onto our street. “Although, what are we going to do long-term?” she wondered. “I doubt Serenity would be too thrilled if I moved in, and I’d kind of feel bad if I stole you away and made you start living with me.”

I shivered at the thought of her ‘making me’ live with her.

I cleared my throat. “Umm, well I guess I could ask Serenity if you could live with us, but you’re probably right. I strongly doubt she would agree to it. Mainly, she probably wouldn’t like the idea that we were... umm, you know, in the house.”

“So then, I guess we need to convince her to let me keep you at my place.”

“Jeez,” I scoffed. “You make it sound like I’m a pet.”

She grinned widely. “Oh! That could be fun. Maybe I’ll make you my pet next time I take advantage of you.”

My heart was suddenly pounding in my ears as my body shifted fully, my face feeling like it was burning up. My phones started vibrating in my pocket then, but I ignored it, trying to change the subject. There was no one else on the road, and I could see my driveway, but still. I was fully transformed right now.

“Umm, back to your parents. I was wondering more about like what they do for a living and such,” I tried, just as I was getting ready to pull in.

“Nah, I’d rather talk about you being my pet,” she teased. “We’re home anyway.”

Immediately, I slammed on the brakes just as I pulled in, quickly ducking my head even before the car fully stopped. My face was now almost in Gabriella’s lap.

She quickly looked up in alarm to see what caused the abrupt reaction, only to realize the problem.

Serenity was home early, appearing as if she’d just arrived before us. And she had company.

CHAPTER 8: DETECTIVE

Serenity was home early, standing outside the house next to the dead deer, and she wasn't alone. There was a guy with her, crouched over the corpse and examining the arrow intently. Although, I wasn't really worried about them thinking the deer was more than what it seemed.

I was fully transformed due to Gabriella's teasing!

Shit!

With my head now almost in Gabriella's lap in the passenger's seat, I tried to process the situation.

I was safe for now, confident that I hadn't been seen, but I had to think fast. I couldn't look normal when I was this anxious, and especially not with my head where it was! Her scent was overwhelming this close! To the point that I felt like my head was swimming in her intoxicating aroma!

Gabriella's tone was urgent. "I'm sorry! What do we do?"

I tried to grasp for anything. *'Wait! Mailbox!'*

"Check the mail," I instructed in a much calmer voice than I felt. "Even if there's nothing there. I just need a few seconds."

Gabriella glanced behind us at the mailbox, just a dozen feet away from where we'd abruptly stopped, before responding. "Okay, I'll try to take my time. Look at my phone or something, as if I got a message."

I nodded, prompting her to open the door, climb out, and close it behind her.

Now alone in the car, I tried to focus my thoughts, taking a few deep breaths. Gabriella's potent scent still permeated the air, but I'd been around it all day, which helped a little. However, that alone wasn't enough to allow me to focus, prompting me to begin talking to myself.

"Calm down. Deep breath. No one saw me. They were both looking at the deer. Everything is fine. Just chill out!"

Catching the sound of a bird in the trees, muffled slightly by the glass windows, I focused on its singing, homing in on its feathers rustling as it

moved, while continuing to breathe evenly, my anxiety finally settling down.

Taking a final deep breath, and checking my hand to verify my skin was its normal shade, I slowly sat up to see that Gabriella was stopped halfway on her way back to the car, focused intently on her phone as promised. Of course, she didn't have any mail – if we had any, then I was sure Serenity would have gotten it.

Gabriella finally glanced up, noticed that I'd returned to normal, and then hurried back to the car.

"Sorry," she whispered the moment she closed the door.

I shook my head, beginning to drive slowly down the driveway. "It's alright. You didn't know. Although, this is kind of why I can't take chances like that." I paused when I smelt her scent become tainted with guilt again, glancing to see the same look in her emerald eyes. "Hey, I love you," I whispered.

"I love you too," she replied almost inaudibly, still sounding sad.

"Hey, now," I said gently, my tone endearing. "We'll just have to be more careful next time. And you need to act normal around them, or else they'll know something is wrong. So, don't beat yourself up about it. It's okay. Really. Let's just focus on making dinner together."

A small smile tugged at her full lips, the guilt disappearing. "Right. I'm really looking forward to it."

"Me too," I agreed as I pulled up next to Serenity's blue car. However, now that I had a chance to process the situation more, with my most pressing emergency over, I finally registered *that my housemate had brought a guy home*.

What the fuck?!

Of course, this wasn't the first time she'd brought a coworker by for dinner, but never a guy!

Fuck!

Surely, she wasn't interested in someone out of the blue? Did she decide to date all of a sudden because she knew Gabriella and I were interested in each other? Did she think something like '*my young friend is dating, and about to be out of high school, so maybe I should move on in the romance department too?*'

The thought alone made me jealous, irritated, and a little depressed, though I knew I had to play it cool, since obviously I shouldn't even care

that much. Not to mention, we were trying to cover up a murder, and that definitely came first!

When we got out, I recalled that I hadn't mentioned the deer to Serenity yet, so I decided to act surprised. She was already looking at me now.

"Hey Ren, what happened here?" I asked seriously, trying to keep the edge out of my tone.

Gabriella glanced at me, only to quickly take my lead, also looking surprised and confused.

"Hey, Kai!" my housemate said cheerfully. She then held up her hands as she shrugged. "Dunno. Looks like a hunter must have gotten a deer or something. It must have happened just after you left for the mall, because it already kind of stinks. I was just trying to call you, to let you know about it, when you pulled in."

"Wow," Gabriella chimed in. "That's pretty crazy."

The guy who had been crouched over the deer stood up then, prompting Serenity to introduce him. He had dark skin, short curly brown hair, and dark eyes. Overall, he had a very easy-going vibe about him, though it might have just been because he looked exceptionally tired.

"Oh, and this is Nicholas," Serenity explained. "He just moved here, so I decided to invite him over for dinner."

Fuck. This couldn't be happening. Did my housemate really like this guy?

Serenity immediately gave Gabriella an apologetic look. "He's actually on the case for the man who saved you, but he promised not to ask any questions about last night."

The person in question spoke up then, his tone reassuring. "Right, I'm not here on business. And you can both call me Nick. I don't usually go by my full name."

Dammit! Serenity was intentionally calling him by his full name?!
Fuck!

"Nice to meet you," I said evenly, attempting to avoid being rude. I didn't inherently have a problem with him and would have been fine under different circumstances, but knowing that he wasn't '*here on business*' was actually worse than the opposite.

I then focused on Serenity, that edge finally leaking into my voice. "Although, it would have been nice to know you were having company over." I quickly tried to recover, focusing on Nick. "Not that you aren't

welcome,” I lied in a more convincing tone. “My best friend just almost never has anyone over.”

Could I call her that? My best friend?

I mean, she *was* my best friend, since forever, as well as my *only* friend, but still...

“Kai!” Serenity exclaimed, her cheeks turning rosy. “You make it sound like it’s a big deal.”

Fuck! I was an idiot!

“Uh, right,” I agreed. “Definitely not the first time you’ve had a coworker over for dinner. Just wasn’t expecting it, is all, since Gabriella is over.”

Serenity suddenly looked a little ashamed, seeming uncertain of how to respond.

However, Nick chimed in again, before the conversation could get any more awkward, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb. “Want me to help you pull this into the trees?”

I nodded, looking at Gabriella. “I guess do you want to pick out what you want us to make for dinner?”

“Sure,” she replied happily, having no idea I was distressed about my friend’s unexpected date. She then continued when Serenity gave her a confused expression. “We were going to make dinner together. Figured it would be fun.”

“Oh! Sounds good!” Serenity agreed, motioning for Gabriella to follow her inside.

I proceeded to walk over to the deer to grab a leg, avoiding the guy’s gaze entirely. I knew I had to keep my cool, but I was in no way happy about this situation. I wasn’t ready for my older friend to move on, and now that she’d brought a guy home, I suddenly realized I might not be able to ‘deal with it’ like I assumed.

Granted, I suspected that my recent sexual experience with Gabriella had some influence on me there. Previously, I’d been a virgin, but now that I’d lost my virginity, I found myself not wanting Serenity to have that kind of experience with another guy, even if it would allow me to live vicariously.

I mean, sure, it was possible she’d slept around and I’d just somehow missed it, but as far as I knew, she was still a virgin too. Granted, she’d been casually dating someone before all our parents passed away, so it was

possible she wasn't as inexperienced as I assumed, though she hadn't dated since then. Still, with my overly sensitive nose, I felt confident I'd know if she'd done something...assuming she didn't shower right afterward...

Dammit, now I really wanted to know if my friend was a virgin or not!

And either way, I really didn't want her to move on right now. I wasn't ready! I wasn't sure I'd *ever* be ready!

Fuck!

With my fingers grasping one of the deer's hind legs, I was about to begin dragging it alone, only to stop myself at the last second, realizing it would probably be suspicious if I didn't need the help. After all, while I was toned, I wasn't sure I looked strong enough to drag it by myself.

Nick grabbed the other leg just a second later, and we both began tugging it into the trees.

"How far do you think we need to go?" he asked after a moment, seeming as if he was helping progressively less and less as we went.

I cleared my throat. "Well, coyotes will probably find it tonight, so the further, the better."

Fuck, it felt like he wasn't even helping anymore. Granted, the guy wasn't massive by any means, being about average size, but he didn't look weak either. Maybe it was just because he was sincerely tired? The dude looked like he hadn't slept in days.

It was also possible he was out of shape too.

By the time we'd dragged the corpse a good distance away from the house, I was confident he wasn't helping anymore, just keeping his hand on the leg for show.

Whatever.

Didn't need his help anyway.

Satisfied that we'd gone far enough, we finished dumping it and began walking back to the house in silence.

Nick tried to start up a conversation after a few dozen steps.

"Well, that was fun. You must work out," he commented.

I shook my head, not wanting to lie about it and get found out later. "I'm pretty active, but I don't lift weights or anything." I paused. "I do run sometimes though," I added. "I'm sure that helps with my endurance." I glanced over my shoulder, seeing that the deer was almost out of sight. "Kind of weird though. We've never had that happen before."

Nick nodded in agreement. “I almost wonder if someone actually shot it right there in your front yard,” he said, only to continue when I gave him a confused look. “It’s just that, there wasn’t a trail of blood leading to that spot, and it looked like the arrow pierced the heart, which would have caused an instant death.” He paused. “Although, it would then make you wonder why the hunter left it there.”

I tried not to seem too shocked that he’d been so observant. After all, I had to remember that he was a detective, and looking for clues was his job – something that had likely become a habit, even when he wasn’t working.

Of course, there wasn’t a trail of blood, because I didn’t shove the arrow into its heart until it was laying directly over the blood from the cop serial killer, who tried kidnapping Gabriella earlier that morning. My goal in waiting was to ensure a ton of blood covered that spot.

Not wanting to seem suspicious, I kept my tone casual. “Yeah, actually that is kind of weird.”

Nick quickly became apologetic. “Sorry, I have a thing with puzzles. That’s why they always put me on hard cases, like the one I’m currently working on.”

My eyes widened in surprise, quickly trying to think of a more logical excuse. “Huh, that’s cool. Though I’m not sure it’s much of a puzzle. Maybe the hunter left it since they technically shot it on someone else’s property.” I shrugged. “They might not have seen the house until after they were going to grab it.”

“Oh,” he said, nodding. “Yeah, that could be.”

Fuck.

I was glad Nick seemed to think that explanation made sense, but now I was concerned that he was going to notice something else odd. But then again, I couldn’t imagine there was enough evidence to lead the police to a solid suspect in the case regarding me. Honestly, there should be no reason to be concerned about it.

The only reason why I’d found myself in this situation was because Serenity was a detective herself. Otherwise, this kind of coincidence wouldn’t have happened.

Still, I needed to be careful I didn’t do anything that might give Nick reason to be suspicious about me. Normally, that wouldn’t be a problem, but now I had to be extra careful since Gabriella would be around. My

housemate might not notice something small, but if this guy was really so observant, then he might pick up on my skin graying or something.

When we got back to the house, Nick waited outside with me while I took the time to hose down the area. Which I appreciated. Not that I would have been unaware of what was going on inside, thanks to my heightened senses, but it was still nice to know he wasn't going to just barge into *my home* and try to hit on my best friend and girlfriend.

Because it *was* my home too.

The blood had of course coagulated, which meant I basically ended up just using the thin stream of water to push all the clotted mess further away from the house.

Unfortunately, there wasn't much I could do about what had soaked into the ground. I could still smell it – the stench of rotting blood – but at least the grass prevented it from being visible. I just wished it wasn't so close to the front porch, but I only had myself to blame for that.

Finished, Nick finally followed me into the house to see what the girls were up to. However, only Gabriella was in the kitchen, looking through the pantry while she had some boneless chicken breasts thawing out in the sink with hot water running over it. I knew Serenity was upstairs getting changed, probably into jeans and a t-shirt, instead of her more professional work attire.

Oddly enough, Nick was already dressed more casually himself, prompting me to wonder if he made less of an effort to look professional, since it sounded like his skills were valued to the point that no one cared. Either that, or today hadn't been an official workday for him.

Deciding to rinse my hands off, I went over to the sink, nudging the spout over before dipping them under. I then grabbed some soap, scrubbed up a little, and went to dry my hands.

Nick followed my lead, only to look at the steaming water in confusion for a moment before just barely touching the stream with his fingertips. "Shit!" he exclaimed, jerking his hand back. "Damn that's hot."

"Oh," I said, quickly adjusting the temperature, while noticing in the corner of my eye that Gabriella was failing to hide her concern. "Yeah," I continued in a lighthearted tone. "It was almost unbearable by the time I was done. Sorry about that."

Gabriella chimed in without missing a beat. "I just turned it on, so it probably hadn't warmed up all the way."

I gave her an appreciative look, before deciding to move on before the situation became even more awkward. I honestly hadn't even thought about the temperature being too hot for a normal person, but thankfully it seemed as if Nick was going to let it go.

"So, what are we making for dinner?" I asked her cheerfully.

She immediately caught on to the shift in my tone. "How does Roman Chicken sound?" she asked with the same level of enthusiasm.

I considered that, running through the required ingredients in my head, since this wouldn't be the first time I'd made that dish. "Well, we do have bell peppers, and all the right spices, but I don't think we have tomatoes."

She shook her head. "I found some canned tomatoes that will work fine. They were stuffed in the back of the pantry, though I left them there in case you wanted to do something else."

"Yeah, that's fine," I agreed.

She smirked. "Then would you want to chop up the raw chicken once it's finished thawing, so it will cook faster in the skillet? I can work on the bell peppers."

I grinned at her, sincerely looking forward to cooking with her. Thus, it took me a moment to realize that Nick was standing there awkwardly, seeming unsure of what to do now that he'd finished washing his hands.

I focused on him, trying to maintain my lighthearted tone. "Oh, hey, Serenity should be down in just a minute. Do you want anything to drink? Although, we only have milk and orange juice at the moment." I paused. "Serenity might have some lemonade in there, but I'm not sure." There was a lingering scent of lemonade, but that didn't guarantee it was gone.

"Sure," he agreed. "I can get it though, if you're fine with me going through the fridge."

I nodded. "Yeah, that's fine. Cups are up there," I added, gesturing to the appropriate cabinet.

Nick proceeded to open the fridge, pull out some orange juice, and then open the cabinet to grab a glass. As he was pouring at the table, he spoke again. "Oh, do either of you want some, while I have it out?"

I glanced at Gabriella who shook her head, so I decided to volunteer. "Yeah, I'll have some. Thanks," I added. The boneless chicken breasts looked to be thawed enough now, so I decided to grab a cutting board and pull it out to begin chopping up, while Nick poured a second glass.

However, my muscles tensed when I unexpectedly heard a small ‘*plop*’ just after he was done pouring.

I glanced over my shoulder, knife in hand, to see that he was putting the cap back on the orange juice, returning it to the fridge as if nothing unusual happened.

However, now I was suspicious as hell, especially after everything that’d occurred in the last day.

The guy then proceeded to grab a glass and sit at the table, leaving the other for the taking. At the same time, I heard Serenity making her way back downstairs, prompting me to snag the second glass before anyone else tried taking a sip of it. Gabriella noticed my behavior, but didn’t say anything, instead just watching me closely as I returned with the drink, holding it up like I was going to sip it.

Instead, I used my nose.

Sure enough, without a doubt, there was something with a faint bitter scent in *my* drink.

Fuck.

I was doing everything in my power to not overreact.

“Hey,” I commented loudly, just as Serenity made an appearance in the kitchen. “This tastes kind of weird,” I lied, since I’d used my nose instead of my mouth. “Does yours taste alright?”

Nick gave me a sincerely confused expression, before taking a sip of his drink. He then immediately looked at me apologetically. “Oh! I’m sorry! I’m really tired, so I put a caffeine pill in it to dissolve. But I must have grabbed the wrong one, because normally I can taste it.” He then turned his apologetic expression on Serenity as he got up. “Sorry, it looks like I may have wasted some of your orange juice.”

Fuck, no way in hell was this going to waste.

If it was really just a caffeine pill, then this guy was going to prove it by drinking it himself.

“Actually,” I said, my tone a little firm as I walked up to him. “I barely touched this, so you can have it. I’ll take yours.” I reached out and grabbed it without waiting for him to agree, handing him the one I had.

He hesitated for a second, before accepting it, taking a second sip. “Yep,” he said. “The caffeine pill is definitely in this one. Sorry about that,” he repeated, before moving to go sit back down at the table. “Although, worst case, you just might have had a hard time going to sleep tonight.”

“R-Right,” I agreed, holding the glass up to my nose to verify it smelled normal. When it did, I decided to gulp half of it down and then set it on the table. Of course, Nick would have no idea that caffeine could have an adverse effect on me, not to mention the guy really did look exhausted. I supposed I really did overreact, although it made me wonder why he didn’t just swallow the pill.

I decided to ask, echoing my thoughts. “Hey Nick, just wondering, but why not take it like a normal pill?”

He nodded in acknowledgment, taking another sip, only to swirl the juice in his glass a little. “Oh, well, there are two reasons actually. One is that I have a hard time swallowing pills in general – bad gag reflex – but the main reason is because I get horrible stomach cramps from taking these pills whole. Letting it dissolve in something prevents that from happening.”

Gabriella chimed in then. “Why not just drink coffee or something?” she wondered.

Nick shrugged. “Well, honestly I didn’t want to ask you guys to make some, since you were already making dinner for us.” He paused. “And I also like to know exactly how much caffeine I’m getting. It’s sort of an OCD thing.” He paused again. “Well, not really. I don’t actually have OCD, but you know.” He shrugged.

Serenity hadn’t said anything yet, seeming like she felt a little awkward from us pestering him with all our questions. She finally spoke up.

“Anyway Nick, do you want to go chat in the living room while they make dinner? It sounded like this whole ‘them making dinner together’ thing was sort of a date.”

Fuck! How was I supposed to enjoy my ‘date’ with Gabriella when my lifelong friend was in the other room with some random dude?

And Nick *was* definitely some random dude! She said he’d only recently moved here! Surely she couldn’t already be interested? But then for what other reason would she have invited him over? Just to be nice?

At least I’d be able to listen in on them, to kind of gauge my friend’s interest, and to make sure there was no funny business. But shit.

I shrugged in response to Serenity’s comment, trying to act casual. “Yeah, I admit it was, but I didn’t want to be rude.”

Serenity smiled, though it was a little off. “Oh, no. You’re fine, Kai. I’m glad you two are getting along so well,” she said, giving me a wink that thankfully no one else noticed – Gabriella had turned to focus on chopping

up the peppers, and my housemate was standing a little behind Nick, off to the side.

Normally, I might have found myself threatening to at least blush, between her wink and what she was suggesting, but I was too distressed over the drink situation and just the very fact that Nick was even here.

“Anyway,” Serenity continued, focusing on her guest. “Let’s leave them alone until dinner’s ready.”

Nick nodded in agreement, holding his glass of orange juice as he followed her out of the kitchen. He glanced back one last time just before entering the foyer area. “Sorry again about that.”

“It’s alright,” I replied casually. “It’s just caffeine, after all. Wouldn’t have hurt anything anyway.”

I then sighed heavily once they were out of sight.

I heard Serenity suggest he have a seat on the couch, followed by her sitting down as well. I relaxed a little when I heard her shift her weight, because while I couldn’t be sure without looking, the fact that neither of them had quicker heartbeats suggested to me that she made sure there was a cushion between them.

However, now that they were occupied, I was thinking about the drink again, as well as the fact that this guy was on the case involving me in the first place.

Turning around, I saw that Gabriella was watching me cautiously.

She spoke up in a whisper when I moved closer to begin working on the chicken again.

“Can they hear us from in there?” she wondered. When I shook my head, she continued. “Well, that was a close one. That could have been really bad.”

I shook my head a second time. “No, I didn’t actually drink any of it. I heard him put the pill in and I could smell it, so it wouldn’t have been an issue either way. I was just more concerned about whether or not the pill was truly harmless. But I guess I was just being paranoid.”

She shrugged. “I don’t think you’re being paranoid. I mean, he’s on the case. Not to mention, we just had that encounter this morning with someone who appeared to be one of the good guys. So, I really don’t think you’re being paranoid at all. We did talk about how that man could have had a third accomplice.”

I thought about that for a second. “Yeah, but I honestly don’t think it’s him if that’s true, especially if he just moved here. Plus, he seems too sincere. I can hear when people have elevated heart rates, and I can smell when they are nervous. He seems completely chill, just tired is all. I think he’s alright, so let’s just focus on enjoying cooking together.”

Of course, I didn’t want to mention that I also had a problem with him due to the fact that I had a thing for my older friend.

Gabriella smiled. “Okay, but I don’t want to accidentally say something to turn you on, so maybe we can talk more about you. Can you tell me more about yourself?”

I nodded, grabbing the knife again to cut up the thawed chicken. “Sure, what do you want to know?”

“Hmm, let me think,” she replied, working with her own cutting board, the two of us side-by-side. “Can you tell me about school?”

I sighed, running the knife through the raw meat. “I mean, there’s really not much to tell about that.”

Gabriella seemed cautious as she responded, as if she might offend me. “Well, Serenity mentioned you don’t have any friends, so does that mean you sit alone for lunch?”

“I try to,” I admitted. “I usually don’t socialize with anyone, although I’m not exactly rude either. If someone talks to me, then I’ll respond most of the time. But I also don’t make an effort to keep a conversation going.” I shrugged. “I think most people have gotten used to it, although I know it bothers some of them, since I do interact a lot more when I have to, such as for class.”

I paused, knowing there was really only one person in particular, which prompted me to elaborate.

“For example, there’s a girl who sits with me at lunch almost every day. She knows I won’t talk to her for the most part, so she doesn’t even try getting me to socialize anymore, but she still sits with me. However, she has a lot of friends, so that means the table always ends up full.” I sighed. “Honestly, if it wasn’t for her I probably *would* eat alone, although I’ve kind of gotten used to it.”

Gabriella looked at me in surprise, suddenly suspicious. “Is she pretty?”

I shrugged. “I mean, maybe? But I don’t think about stuff like that – I can’t.” I then paused when I realized she looked a little jealous. “Hey, you

don't need to be jealous of her. Even if she is pretty, she's got nothing on you."

She sighed. "I just don't like the idea of some random girl trying to steal my guy. Or rather, I don't like the idea of being replaced. I suppose it wouldn't bother me too much if..." Her voice trailed off.

I looked at her in confusion, expecting her to continue, but she didn't. I thought about prompting her, but then wondered if maybe it would be better to just ask her later. After all, anything related to dating wasn't exactly a subject we should probably focus on right now.

I cleared my throat. "Well, to be fair, you and I have only been together for a day. If anything, she'll probably think the same thing, if she finds out I have a girlfriend." I paused. "I mean, if she even has a thing for me in the first place," I quickly added.

Gabriella sighed heavily. "How long has she even been doing this?"

I began putting some of the chicken in the skillet as I thought about it. "I think she started after we had a group project together. I obviously had to talk to her, so she probably found it as a shock when I didn't speak to her much after the project was done." I paused, grimacing. "Now that I think about it, she *did* seem hurt that I wouldn't socialize with her when she tried eating with me the first time, but for whatever reason she never gave up." I shrugged. "That was two years ago."

Gabriella abruptly stopped what she was doing, looking up at me in disbelief. "She's been doing this for *two* years? Okay, seriously that's obsessive. Are you sure she hasn't been stalking you too?"

I shook my head, rinsing my hands off, before leaning against the counter now that I was finished with my part of the chopping. "I would know if she was," I replied in a low voice. "Heightened senses, remember? Her scent isn't overwhelming like yours, but I know what she smells like."

Gabriella was quiet for a few minutes, her red eyebrows knitted together as she focused on cutting up the bell peppers. When she finally spoke, she seemed less annoyed. "Well, honestly, I guess I can understand. Even though you ran away the first time I met you, I wanted to pursue you, and I would have kept trying." She then looked up at me carefully. "What I mean is, I probably would have done the same thing – obsessed over you, hoping you would let me in eventually."

I looked at her in surprise, suddenly concerned. "Do you think my unfriendliness actually makes me more enticing?"

Gabriella considered that. "Possibly it does for her, but not for me. I was actually happy that you opened up to me sooner rather than later. Meaning, I was interested either way. You didn't have to be distant, or play hard-to-get, for me to feel obsessed."

Obsessed ? Holy fuck.

I was careful as I probed for more information. "Okay, obviously we need to be careful about how intimate this conversation gets, but I have to ask..." I hesitated. "You're obsessed with me?"

She sighed, glancing at me. "Are you sure you can handle the truth right now?" When I nodded, she continued slowly. "Obsessed, infatuated, fixated, lovesick. I'm it all, honestly. I wish you could feel my emotions, so you could know just how crazy I am about you. And it's not just a shallow infatuation based on appearance only. You really are everything I've ever wanted, and you're even things I didn't realize I wanted."

"Like what?" I wondered, trying to keep myself reserved emotionally, as if we were talking about math or something.

Gabriella took a deep breath, her voice still low. "Well, I would have been fine with you being a normal guy. That wouldn't have changed my fundamental interest in you. However, the fact that you aren't normal..." She hesitated. "Well, you're fulfilling a need that I didn't even realize I desperately wanted. Like, I do like to read stories about this kind of thing, but it's just fantasy. I never realized how much it would mean to me to be loved by someone like you." She paused, only to quickly clarify. "Not that you being supernatural is the most important thing. I wasn't lying when I said I would have come here last night, rather than trying to find the guy who saved me, if it had been someone else."

I nodded in acknowledgement, unsure of how to respond.

Gabriella took a moment to examine my expression and appearance, before continuing while remaining focused on her chopping. "And then, there's the fact that you're so innocent. I know that won't last forever, and I already knew I liked that about you, but I didn't realize how much I *needed* to be the one to steal that innocence from you. Like, I really feel like you're mine for keeps, even if something ever happened between you and someone else, because I got to be the one to take that from you."

I couldn't hide my shock from what she was insinuating, the implications forcing me to close my eyes as my body started shifting.

Because it almost sounded like she was saying she didn't mind me being with someone else too, which I knew couldn't be what she meant, but just the thought was too much for me right now.

Especially since there was someone in particular that I also did sincerely want, even though it was never going to happen.

Gabriella continued without missing a beat, not seeming to notice. "Mine forever," she emphasized. "Plus, it makes for an amazing time in bed," she added, sounding amused before her tone immediately became apologetic. "Sorry."

I shook my head, still trying to focus my transformation so that it didn't show on my visible skin or hair. Then, I took a deep breath.

I knew Serenity and Nick were still safely in the living room, so I decided to open my gold and black eyes to glance at her. "It's alright," I whispered. "Maybe you can tell me more tonight, but we should probably change subjects."

Gabriella nodded slowly, her emerald eyes wide, now seeming entranced by my gaze.

I quickly looked away. "I'm going to grab the can of tomatoes and get it open, so we can begin sautéing them with the peppers." Really, I just needed an excuse to walk away for a few seconds.

"R-Right," she agreed, quickly attempting to finish up.

However, just as I turned away, I heard her wince quietly, knowing instantly that she'd cut herself. I could smell the blood.

"Ouch," she hissed softly.

I turned back around to see how bad it was, glad that it didn't look too deep, although it was still bleeding freely, already threatening to drip onto the cutting board. Gabriella moved her hand over the sink to rinse it off.

"Wait," I whispered, my tone more urgent than I intended.

I then immediately turned my head away, suddenly ashamed when I realized why I asked her to wait. Because I wanted it. I wanted her blood.

Gabriella picked up on my expression. "Do you need it?" she asked quietly. When I didn't respond, her tone became more decisive. "Hurry up, before it drips." She then reached out with her other hand to grab my shirt, urging me closer. "Hurry and do it. Otherwise, it will go to waste."

I focused on her with my black and gold eyes, still feeling ashamed, sincerely craving her blood, but hating myself for the desire.

Gabriella reached up then, grabbing my chin as she brought her bleeding finger closer, holding it up to my mouth. The fact that the blood was about to drip on my shirt finally gave me the little extra push I needed to allow her to stick her finger in my mouth.

The taste was overwhelming, my mind flooded with relief briefly as I began sucking on it.

However, after the small amount, the desire vanished, the urge completely dissipating again. I quickly pulled her finger out of my mouth, my ears attentive to Serenity in the other room as I held Gabriella's hand down under the sink to rinse it off.

I could hear my girlfriend's heart pounding in her chest now from our shoulders being pressed firmly together, but I ignored it, experiencing a weird combination of depression and compassion. The compassion, at least, was enough to cause my skin to continue darkening underneath my shirt.

Once the gray color was threatening to climb up my neck and down my arms, I finally pulled away, apologizing quietly as I went to go hide in the closet-like pantry for a moment. Standing alone for a few minutes helped a ton, reminding me that I had more pressing issues to worry about, including the fact that we had company over, who also happened to be on the case in the search for the guy who saved Gabriella.

Taking a deep breath, I grabbed the can of tomatoes and then returned to her side.

She was holding a paper towel against her finger, checking to make sure it had stopped bleeding when she noticed me approach.

"Do you need a bandage?" I asked quietly, my tone somber. She nodded, so I continued. "Come with me?"

When she indicated she would, I set down the tomatoes on the counter and then led her upstairs. I called out to Serenity on our way up, saying we would be right back.

She didn't seem concerned.

Once we were alone in the bathroom, I apologized again. "I'm really sorry about that."

She shook her head. "If you needed it, then you needed it. It would have just gone down the sink anyway."

I sighed, pulling out a bandage for her finger, and then beginning to apply it for her. "Yeah, but..." My voice trailed off for a second. "I really don't like this," I admitted. "I've gone my entire life not knowing this was

something I might need under certain circumstances. It makes me feel like a monster.”

Gabriella gently rested her hand on my chest, prompting my hair to flash white. “You’re not a monster. We just talked about this earlier today,” she added firmly.

“I know,” I agreed. “But still. I don’t know what will happen if I try to resist. I don’t even know for sure that being injured is the only thing that will make me want it. And most importantly, I don’t know if it’s truly a ‘need,’ or if it’s just a strong desire to speed up the healing process in the event I get hurt. If it’s a want, then it means I can resist. However, if it truly is a need, then I’m afraid of what would happen if I did resist.”

With her finger newly bandaged, Gabriella reached up to clasp my face in both of her hands, attempting to ensure I would look at her. “I understand, baby. But right now isn’t a good time to test it out by trying to resist all evening. You obviously needed it, or wanted it, whatever. Either way, now we can have dinner and relax without having to worry about what might happen if you *had* resisted.”

I took a deep breath, glancing away. “Are you sure you can still love me though? If it turns out this is something I really need,” I clarified.

“Look at me,” she demanded quietly. She continued once I did. “I’m committed. I’m in this, no matter what. And besides, you’ve gone your entire life without drinking blood, so obviously it can’t be that strong of a need.”

My shoulders dropped in resignation, hoping she was right. That, and hoping she didn’t ever decide to change her mind. This whole situation put things into perspective for me. Here I was all flustered about my lifelong friend bringing a guy home, forgetting that having her for myself was a complete fantasy. I’d gotten really lucky with Gabriella accepting my secret, and while it was possible my friend might be able to handle it too, I couldn’t live with her rejecting me entirely. To the point that I’d never risk taking that chance.

I really needed to stop wishing for the impossible.

After all, even if a miracle happened, and I could somehow have Serenity, then that would only mean I’d have to give up Gabriella in exchange. And while I would have made that trade in a heartbeat earlier this morning, I wasn’t sure I could do it now. Our afternoon together had really changed how I felt about Gabriella – made my attachment a lot stronger.

Sighing, I changed the subject, able to still smell our cooking food in the kitchen. “Well, we need to get back downstairs. The chicken is done, and we need to get the tomatoes and peppers added.”

Gabriella smirked. “I think it’s going to take a while for me to get used to your strong sense of smell. You still surprise me when you comment on things that most people wouldn’t be capable of sensing.”

“Like how you want me right now?” I wondered playfully.

She blushed. “Sorry, I just think you’re hot.” She quickly removed her hands from my face, seeing that she’d been covering up graying skin.

“Right, so about that chicken,” she said, being overly serious.

I smirked, giving her a quick peck on the forehead, before urging her to head downstairs without me, allowing me the chance to focus on my breathing.

Once I looked normal again, I followed after her, joining her in the kitchen.

Gabriella seemed pensive while she prodded at the contents in the skillet.

“What’s wrong?” I whispered.

Her frowned deepened. “I was just thinking about that girl again. The one who always sits with you at lunch.”

“What about her?” I prompted, when she didn’t automatically continue.

“Well, I was wondering if I would have ended up like her, if you had not allowed me to see you transformed.” She grimaced, glancing up at me. “I almost feel bad, knowing she’s probably liked you for so much longer. She’s been waiting on you for two years by the sounds of it, and here I am getting you almost right away, simply because I lucked out.” She sighed. “So I was just wanting to know how things might have turned out differently if I didn’t see your secret last night.”

I frowned as I thought about it. “I guess it depends on how assertive you ended up being,” I realized, only to pause. “Let me ask you this. If the events of yesterday had not happened, and it had just been a normal day, then what would you have done about your interest in me?”

She was quick to respond. “I’d already decided I would try harder to talk to you. All I could ever do was think about you. I just wasn’t sure when would be a good time.” She focused on me again. “But eventually, I would have tried to corner you, to force you to either admit you liked me or prove you didn’t.”

“Really?” I said in surprise.

She nodded, confident in her answer. “When you disappeared the first time we met, I saw the look on your face just before you excused yourself. I could tell you were interested, at least interested in me physically. But then you escaped to your room.” She sighed. “I tried to understand why you would have done that, which was one of the reasons I started asking Serenity questions about you. Eventually, I realized that you probably were only embarrassed, and didn’t know what to do about your feelings. It gave me more confidence, and I decided that I would give you time to think it over, hoping you might ask about me or something.” She paused. “But honestly, I was really interested in you and was beginning to get impatient. I was already almost at the point of just inviting myself over and finding an opportunity to corner you – even barging into your room if I had to.” She then looked up at me urgently, as if she was afraid she might be disclosing too much for me to handle right now.

I was fine though.

“It’s hard to believe you’d be so bold,” I admitted.

She grinned. “I mean, I probably would have been *extremely* nervous, but that wouldn’t have stopped me from still cornering you. I can’t handle dealing with lots of people at once, but when I’m just dealing with one person, I don’t let my nervousness stop me. It’s like last night when I came downstairs. I could barely talk, but I still did it.” She was pensive for a second. “Granted, it helps if I’m actually determined to accomplish something in particular.” She paused again, glancing up at me. “But then, my question for you is, what would you have done when I *did* corner you?”

I already knew the answer. “It was a really close call when I first met you,” I explained. “My reaction to you was completely different than anyone else, including the girl at school. Sure, I guess now that I’m thinking about it, she is pretty. But my attraction to her is nothing like it is with you.” I sighed. “Honestly, if you’d cornered me successfully, then I wouldn’t have been able to stop it. With no other options, I would have just stood there, frozen in place with my eyes closed, hoping you wouldn’t be afraid of what you saw. Because I would have transformed in an instant.” I grimaced. “It pains me to think of how vulnerable I would have felt.”

Gabriella was giving me an endearing look. “If I’m being completely honest, I probably would have been afraid at first, shocked at what I was seeing. But I would have quickly recovered. Seeing your vulnerability, I

would have moved closer and asked if I could touch you, like I did last night on the couch. I know for a fact that's how I would have reacted, because that's basically how I reacted last night when you were carrying me out of the woods. Once I saw your face, and realized who you were, I immediately felt a lot calmer. The only reason I wasn't more myself then was because I was still in shock from everything I'd just gone through."

I gave her a warm smile. "So, then I guess it was inevitable."

"Sounds like it," she agreed. "Honestly, I was less than a week from confronting you. I'd already waited a while to give you a chance to work through your feelings on your own."

I nodded, my focus suddenly elsewhere as I quickly changed the subject.

"They're coming," I whispered.

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CHAPTER 9: DINNER

After giving Gabriella a quick warning, Serenity appeared in the kitchen, with Nick unfortunately close behind. “It smells amazing in here!” she commented with a grin...

A grin that didn’t quite seem to reach her eyes, despite her excited tone. I felt like her statement was sincere, her excitement was real, but there was something bothering her. It made me wonder if her chat with Nick wasn’t going as well as she hoped, which I selfishly was okay with. Then again, this was the first time my friend had seemed interested in someone, so maybe it really was horrible of me to not want it to go well.

Dammit.

Gabriella’s response was just as cheerful. “Yep!” she agreed. “It’s almost done. Probably just another couple of minutes.”

Serenity nodded, noticing the bandage on her finger. “Oh, did you cut yourself?” she asked in concern.

I decided to respond. “Yeah, but it’s not too bad. That’s why we went upstairs, to get it all cleaned up.”

Nick seemed to be a lot more awake now, likely due to his caffeine pill having taken effect. He certainly was more animated as he chimed in. “Man, I haven’t had a home cooked meal in ages. I’m really looking forward to this.”

Gabriella smiled, since he was focused more on her, but didn’t respond. I realized she was truly serious, when we were talking in the car earlier, about not being overly friendly with other guys even if they weren’t trying to hit on her.

I decided to pick up the conversation, so it wasn’t awkward.

“Do you live alone?” I wondered.

He nodded, not missing a beat. “Yep. My mom passed away when I was younger, and my biological father is a deadbeat who skipped out on us right after I was born. I at least have my step-dad, but I moved out as soon as I

was able to, in order to relieve the financial stress on him. My little sister still lives with him,” he added.

“Oh,” I said simply, not wanting to delve too deeply into his personal life. Although, suddenly I suspected I knew what the attraction Serenity had might be. Ironically, it was comforting knowing people who could relate, understanding what true loss really felt like. “Sorry to hear about your mom.”

He shook his head. “No, it’s fine. I know you both lost your parents, so we’re all in the same boat. It’s rough, of course, but time helps.”

I nodded in agreement. “So, just wondering, but how old are you?”

“I’ll be turning twenty-five here in about two months,” he replied.

“And you just moved here?” I continued.

“Sort of,” Nick admitted. “I used to live here, and this is actually where my sister was born, but my step-dad decided to move us away after my mom passed away. It’s been almost a decade since I’ve been back here.”

Serenity chimed in then. “Is it hard being back?” she asked seriously, concern knitting her brow together. I could tell from her expression that they had in fact covered this subject briefly, but it seemed as if she hadn’t probed much earlier.

He shrugged. “Not really. Like I said, time helps. It’s been a pretty smooth transition for me.”

“What made you come back?” I wondered.

“Oh, well...” He paused, shifting his weight awkwardly. “I know you guys don’t want to talk about it, so I’ll just say it’s the case I’m working on and leave it at that.”

Gabriella surprised us all by chiming in, opening one of the cabinets. “I’m okay if you talk about it. I just don’t want to answer any more questions. I already told them everything I knew, so rehashing the events of last night is the last thing I want to do.”

I realized she must be thinking the same thing I was, which was that this might be a good way to find out just how much they knew about this killer of serial killers. I then noticed that she was getting out the plates, so I moved to begin helping her again. Serenity likewise went to grab some silverware for everyone.

Nick shrugged in response to her comment. “Well, I wouldn’t mind talking about it,” he admitted, only to glance at Serenity. “It might be nice to get another detective’s opinion on the situation, but...” He focused on me

and Gabriella again. “If I do, then nothing I say can leave this room. Granted, if anyone ever found out, I could just say I was disclosing information as part of an interrogation, even though that obviously isn’t true.”

I nodded, handing a full plate to him. Nick accepted it and sat down at the table. I then gave one to Serenity, who proceeded to sit beside her guest.

I tried not to grimace.

What was I even expecting anyway? It’s not like I could ever have her too. And certainly not without giving up Gabriella in exchange. If she was interested in this guy then I just needed to let it go, especially when there were much more pressing matters at hand.

Dammit.

Once Gabriella and I took a seat too, both of us sitting across from them, Nick picked up where he left off.

“So anyway, the code name we’ve been using for our mystery guy is the Impaler, since impaling his victim’s through the heart is his MO.”

Serenity quickly spoke up. “Nick, maybe ‘victim’ isn’t the best word to use, considering who you’re explaining it to.”

He looked at Gabriella apologetically. “Oh. Right. It probably isn’t best to refer to that serial killer from last night as a ‘victim.’ I’m sorry about that. It’s just how we refer to people who are killed.”

Gabriella simply shook her head. “It’s fine.”

He continued. “And in fact, that’s why this case doesn’t have more personnel involved with it. Since all the vict...” He paused, clearing his throat. “I mean since all the people killed have been murderers themselves, who were all in the act, it could be ruled as self-defense. Technically, intervening to defend *someone else* from imminent danger falls under that category.”

I decided to interject. “So, then why do they have you on the case at all if that’s what they think?”

Nick sighed, taking a bite of food before answering. “Well, because the only way to determine if that’s true, is to question the guy. Basically, my job is just to find him, so they can bring him in for questioning.”

“And how close are you to finding him?” Gabriella asked cautiously.

Nick eyed her for a second before answering. “You don’t want me to catch him, do you?”

Gabriella was surprisingly well composed as she responded. “Can you really blame me? The guy saved my life after all. I’d be dead right now if it wasn’t for him. Like, you realize that, right? I’d be *dead* right now. And only after some really horrible shit happened to me.” She scoffed. “Of course I don’t want you to catch him.” She then quickly clarified. “Not that I’m holding anything back,” she added. “I really did tell them everything I knew last night, especially since that was before I knew they’d try looking for him. But the guy didn’t stick around long enough for me to even get a good look at him, not to mention it was so dark in the woods.”

Nick sighed before continuing. “Well, the guy technically doesn’t have anything to worry about if he really is doing this in self-defense. However...” His voice trailed off for a moment. “Well, let me just say that, since I’m the only person on the case, it means I don’t have to share what I know with any of the other detectives...” He then glanced at Serenity briefly. “What I mean is, I’m closer than they think.”

Since Nick was focused on my housemate, she asked the question we were all thinking.

“How close, exactly?”

Nick scratched the back of his head briefly. “Most people who are aware of the case think there are only three vict...I mean murderers who were killed. However...” He paused, glancing at me and Gabriella. “There’s actually a fourth incident that happened about nine years ago, and I’m fairly confident it’s the same guy.”

I glanced away, my eyes suddenly unfocused as I attempted not to react, knowing *exactly* what he was talking about. It was the one time I failed to make it in time – the one time when I killed out of revenge for the victim who’d been slaughtered, instead of killing to prevent it.

I’d only been nine years old...

And to make it worse, the woman had been *very* pregnant, which really meant there’d been two victims instead of one.

“Jeez,” Gabriella commented, regarding the length of time. “How old do you think this guy is?”

I was honestly impressed she didn’t seem to react, discovering for the first time that I’d killed someone when I was so young. At the very least, it sounded like Gabriella thought that I was well outside of the age range for the suspect, since obviously a kid couldn’t be the Impaler.

Unfortunately, Nick’s response wasn’t reassuring.

“Well, to answer that, I have to tell you a little about the first incident. This one is different than the rest, because the person being attacked, the true victim in this situation, didn’t survive.”

I saw Gabriella glance at me from the corner of my eye, which unfortunately didn’t go unnoticed by Nick.

But thankfully, he continued after barely a breath. “However, as it turns out, the paramedics were able to revive the woman who’d been attacked.” He paused. “At least, briefly. She didn’t say much before she officially died, but she was able to give them a description of the person who had tried saving her.” He paused again, glancing at everyone at the table as if he was telling a really good scary story around a campfire. “A description that was later ruled out as a symptom of delirium from blood loss.”

Fuck, this wasn’t good.

I tried not to react, but couldn’t look him in the eyes at this point, hoping that me staring at the wall behind him looked more like me just being pensive. However, Gabriella did stiffen in her seat next to me.

Thankfully, Serenity took up the questioning. “So? What was the description?” she said curiously, being the only one who looked fully calm now.

Fuck.

Nick looked at us all again before responding. “She said a young boy saved her, around eight or nine years old. If that’s true, and we assume she was off by a few years, then our perp... I mean our mystery guy, is probably between the ages of sixteen and nineteen right now.”

Unexpectedly, Serenity looked alarmed, though I was more focused on trying not to react myself. Because while she might be shocked to hear that kind of description, I was much more concerned by the accuracy of it.

When neither Gabriella nor I responded, Serenity chimed in again. “But surely,” she exclaimed in disbelief. “That can’t be right. How could a little boy kill a grown man?”

Nick nodded in agreement, sitting back in his seat. “That’s one of the reasons why it was thrown out as delirium. However, then again, how does a normal person shove a blunt object through a grown man’s sternum?”

Serenity caught the small detail in Nick’s statement.

“One of the reasons?” she repeated.

He nodded, smiling at the fact that she’d caught on. “Yes. The other reason is because of her description of the boy. She said he had yellow eyes,

white hair, and that his skin was really dark. But not like my skin. She said his body was gray.”

Serenity was giving him a bizarre look now, seeming speechless.

Gabriella finally chimed back in, clearly wanting to seed doubt while she could. “So then, I guess she really was delirious, by the sound of it.”

Nick shrugged. “Maybe. Most people would agree with you. However, I’m not most people. I let the evidence tell me what’s true, even if that evidence seems to defy what we consider normal.”

Serenity responded with a frown. “That’s surprising to hear you say,” she admitted, only to clarify as she looked up at us. “Nick’s almost famous in the detective community. They consider him to be a genius. He’s known for having solved some really difficult cases.” She then focused on him again. “So, it’s just weird to hear you say you’d believe that kind of description.”

Nick held up his hands, seeming embarrassed now. “No, no, no,” he laughed. “I’m not really a genius. I’m just really good at solving puzzles, but I’m completely average in all other areas. In fact, I almost flunked out of high school because my grades were so bad, and barely made it through the academy.” He laughed again. “But they were willing to let some of my grades slide, since I’m so good in other areas.”

I cleared my throat then, knowing my silence probably seemed odd. I needed to participate and engage just like everyone else, or else I might raise suspicion. “What do you mean by puzzles?” I asked casually.

He shrugged. “Just what it sounds like. I’m really good at seeing how all the pieces fit together, like...” His voice trailed off as he thought about it. “Like, some people can view an object in three dimensions in their mind, rotating it as if it was really in front of them, which isn’t that rare. But what is kind of rare is that I can do that, not only with objects, but with situations too. I can see a situation in more dimensions than most people, being able to rotate it in my mind and see a depth deeper than everyone else. My brain picks up on the little things and pieces them together.” He sighed. “But really, like I said, that’s the only area in which I could be considered above average.”

Everyone was quiet for a few seconds.

Gabriella cleared her throat. “Well, at the very least, I think that the woman’s description was either due to delirium, or else the guy who saved

me isn't the same person, because surely I would have noticed if he had yellow hair and white eyes."

"White hair and yellow eyes," Nick corrected her.

"Oh, right," Gabriella replied with a straight face. "Either way. It was dark, so I didn't see those features, but surely I would have noticed *that*."

I couldn't help but smile slightly at her intentionally misstating the description. I knew she was smart, but her critical thinking skills sincerely were impressive. At the very least, I felt like she was handling herself well.

Nick only grunted, seeming to acknowledge her comment without response, since he'd promised to not ask her questions about it. "Well, anyway," he continued. "That's about all I have to say about the case." He then focused on me, switching subjects. "So, how long have you two been together?"

I glanced at my girlfriend, seeing that she was going to respond.

Gabriella smiled. "Well, I've been interested in him for a few weeks now," she admitted. "Ever since I met him. However, I only just worked up the courage to ask him out last night." She laughed humorlessly then. "Nothing like a near-death experience to make you stop dragging your feet."

Serenity and Nick both seemed sympathetic, with him immediately apologizing. "Sorry, I wasn't trying to bring that up. I didn't realize you just started dating. You both seemed so close, I assumed you had been dating for at least several months."

"Really?" Gabriella said in surprise, seeming genuinely shocked.

Nick nodded. "Yeah, that's one of my things. I can read people really well – see a level deeper, so to speak. At the very least, I can see you two are highly committed to each other already."

"Nick!" Serenity exclaimed, looking almost alarmed that he'd say that.

I wasn't sure if it was because she was worried that saying such a thing might ruin our fledgling relationship, or something else entirely. She almost looked upset.

However, Gabriella responded in the affirmative. "Yeah, I guess you could say that. You're definitely not wrong."

Serenity immediately looked at us both then, seeming almost confused now.

I decided to meet her deep brown gaze, my thoughts and words formulating even before I really had time to process the reason behind what

I was saying. But her reaction triggered it, because I saw a hint of something else there.

Something that I wanted to provoke, and draw out, if it really existed.

I wanted to see how she reacted to me shamelessly agreeing with Gabriella.

“Yeah,” I affirmed. “Honestly, I think I want to marry her, and might even ask her soon. Just need to get a ring first.”

Much to my shock, Serenity sincerely looked flustered. “B-But, you two just started dating,” she exclaimed. She then looked apologetically at Gabriella, before focusing on me again. “I mean, I think she’s great,” she continued, her tone suddenly unconvincing. “But you *just started dating* . It’s not even been a full day!”

Nick jumped in, taking our side. “This kind of thing happens sometimes,” he explained. “Trauma, especially, can make people become emotionally attached to each other faster than normal.” He then nodded toward us. “Gabriella had a near-death experience, and Kai realized he almost lost her. It’s just like she said, she stopped dragging her feet, and he did too. It’s only natural for them to bond so quickly, given the circumstances.”

My older friend’s expression dropped, going from shocked to almost depressed.

I knew there were a lot of potential reasons for why she seemed so somber now, such as just the realization that I was growing up, or maybe even the fact that starting a relationship with Gabriella would mean I’d move out eventually. Both possibilities would be reasonable downers, given her situation.

But a part of me, deep down, wanted the reason to be something else, even though I wasn’t thinking it through at the moment.

Nick continued, his tone hesitant now. “Although, what I can’t figure out is – excuse me if this is rude – but you both seem so...” He paused, choosing his words carefully. “*Cautious* , around each other.”

Fuck. He really did pay close attention.

I tried to give Gabriella a confused look, surprised that she was mirroring my expression, both of us probably alarmed that he’d hit the mark perfectly and doing our best to hide it. We *were* cautious around each other, and we were both trying to pretend we had no idea what he was talking about.

I decided to respond, since Gabriella didn't seem like she intended to.

"What do you mean by cautious?" I wondered, trying not to sound defensive.

Nick held up his hands. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying it's a bad thing. You both just seem like you're extra careful around each other is all." He paused. "Well, at least when others are watching. Sorry if that sounds rude, but I don't really know how to explain it without sounding *really* rude."

Gabriella decided to state the obvious. "You think we're hiding something?"

All my muscles stiffened, shocked my new girlfriend would be so blunt about it, and suddenly wondering where her thoughts were headed. I met my housemate's now alarmed gaze, almost feeling afraid now, knowing that there wasn't a single secret I had that I wanted Serenity to know about.

Similarly, Nick stared at Gabriella for a moment, before nodding slowly. "I didn't want to say it, but yeah. That's kind of what it looks like."

Without missing a beat, Gabriella replied immediately. "You're right." She then looked apologetically at Serenity. "I'm really sorry."

It took everyone a second, including me, before it dawned on all of us what she was implying. On the one hand, I realized this was the perfect way to remove Nick's suspicion, but on the other hand...

Fuck.

I almost expected Serenity's face to grow red in anger or embarrassment, in response to finding out that I'd screwed her best friend, but instead the blood drained from her face, suddenly looking as pale as a ghost, her deep brown eyes becoming extra dark.

I attempted to recover, not wanting any backlash to fall on Gabriella. "It was my fault," I tried explaining. "She wanted to respect your wishes, but I pretty much begged her..." My voice trailed off when she visibly winced, her eyes pained.

Shit.

Serenity looked like I'd just stabbed her in the heart.

Like I'd betrayed her in the worst way possible.

Was it because she trusted me to listen? Did she feel like she'd failed me, by letting us stay alone at the house?

Or was it something else entirely?

In contrast to Serenity's devastation, Nick seemed mortified. "Oh, fuck. I am so sorry. I should have just kept my mouth shut." He shook his head, giving Serenity a sideways glance. "Sometimes I swear this gift I have really is a curse." He then attempted to help cover for us, as if he was trying to further apologize. "Serenity, I believe them when they say they're going to get married as soon as they can. They really are that committed, whether they did anything or not."

His words made it worse.

My friend slowly pushed away from the table, looking like she was about to pass out. "I need a minute," she said in a strained voice, getting up and moving toward the stairs.

Gabriella gave me a concerned look, probably not expecting her to take it so hard, prompting me to hesitate before getting out of my seat too. However, just as I made it to the stairs, Serenity already almost halfway up, she stopped to look back at me, likely having heard me scoot out of my chair.

She gave me one pained look, before shaking her head, continuing up the stairs to her room.

I wanted to go after her, even despite her silent objection, but I knew her well enough to know that sometimes she sincerely did just need a minute, like she said. However, as I stood there, my thoughts finally began catching up with me, realizing what I was trying to do.

I was trying to make her jealous.

I *wanted* her to be jealous. And not just for my own sake, to know she might love me more than she should. But I also wanted to make *her* realize that she was jealous. I wanted to make *her* realize she might love me more than she should.

However, if that was really what I'd just done to her, which I couldn't help but doubt now that I thought about it, then what kind of position did that put us in?

Because nothing was different. We still practically grew up together, separated in age by a whopping five years. Not to mention, I'd have to give up Gabriella to pursue something that likely wouldn't go anywhere.

And then, as I stared up at her closed door, it really sunk in how pathetic I was being.

Of course, that wasn't why she was upset.

She wasn't jealous!

She was fucking upset because she felt like a failure! Because she'd trusted me to keep my dick in my pants, and I'd betrayed that trust. Her reaction was no different than it would have been for my own mother, since my friend had been forced to play that role in my life for the last five years.

Fuck, I was an idiot.

Taking a deep breath, I sat down at the foot of the stairs, holding my head in my hands while I listened to her upstairs. She wasn't crying or anything, like she might be if she was heartbroken or something. Instead, she was just silent, sitting on her bed, her breathing surprisingly slow despite her fast heartbeat.

I heard Nick apologize again to Gabriella, but she didn't respond, probably just nodding or something.

I could smell that my girlfriend felt guilty again, but honestly this was a smart decision. As much as I hated it, this got Nick off my trail, preventing him from thinking the secret we were hiding was something bigger than traditional teenager stuff...

Well, technically only I was the teenager, but same idea.

Serenity stayed in her room for probably only about five minutes, though it felt like an eternity, before she took a few deep breaths and got up. I rose to my feet even before she opened the door, with her meeting my gaze almost as if she expected me to still be waiting.

I was sure that the anguish in my expression communicated more than words would ever do.

However, she gave me a reassuring look after a second. "Sorry," she said sincerely, still sounding a little sad. "I think I just wasn't ready for you to grow up. Almost feels like it happened overnight."

I tried to lighten the mood, though I felt anything but amused. "Well, I did technically only turn eighteen a couple weeks ago."

She gave me a weak smile in return. "Trust me, I'm aware."

I wasn't sure what that was supposed to mean, but I knew now wasn't the time to nitpick about details when we had company over.

When I didn't respond, she sighed heavily before making her way back down the stairs. She then gave me a small hug in passing, before returning to the kitchen and apologizing to both Gabriella and Nick.

But especially Gabriella.

I noticed she didn't seem as friendly with Nick, though I was fully aware that I might just be imagining it.

Once I finally returned to my chair, followed soon by my housemate returning to her seat since she was standing closer to Gabriella at first, Serenity resumed the conversation from where it left off.

Her gaze shifted to mine.

“You’re serious about marrying her, aren’t you?” she said, sounding more like a statement than a question.

I glanced at Gabriella, before nodding. “I mean, yeah...” My voice trailed off for a second. “Obviously I haven’t officially asked her yet, but...” I sighed, glancing away when her expression almost became a little endearing. “Ren, don’t make a big deal out of it yet.”

In part, I felt a little embarrassed, but also a little disappointed that she seemed kind of happy for me now.

It was obvious that Gabriella wanted to ease the tension too, trying to lighten the mood. “Shh,” she said playfully. “Don’t jinx me, Serenity.”

My friend smirked at that, before sighing again. “Okay, okay. I’ll drop it for now.” She then looked at Gabriella critically. “But where do you plan on sleeping tonight?”

Gabriella looked shocked. “You want me to go home?” she asked, sounding sad.

My friend quickly shook her head. “No, I wouldn’t make you do that. I know you need to be around people right now.” She sighed again. “I mean, where in the house.”

I quickly interrupted, since this conversation was heading somewhere that could be very bad for my skin.

“Can we talk about this later, Ren? We *do* have extra company over right now.”

Nick agreed immediately. “Yeah, and I don’t feel like I should be a part of this conversation. I mean, I just met all of you. I feel like I’m intruding on some pretty personal stuff.” He paused. “And I’m sorry again,” he added.

“Oh, sorry Nicholas,” Serenity replied, sounding sincere. She then picked up her fork to resume eating, her tone more chipper as she changed the subject. “So, how was the mall?” she wondered casually.

Gabriella and I quickly exchanged a glance before I went back to eating too, making it clear that I was leaving it up to her to talk about our mall experience. Thankfully, she didn’t miss a beat.

“It was great!” she exclaimed cheerfully. “We went because my mom told me they were having a sale at one of the bookstores. I ended up getting several new books. Oh!” she added, glancing at me. “I left them in the car.”

I nodded. “Actually, we left the cinnamon pretzels in there too. We should probably put them in the fridge for later.”

“Right,” she agreed, standing up. “I’ll go get them.”

“Are you sure?” I asked seriously, sitting more upright in my seat, indicating I was about to get up to do it myself. Of course, I was well aware she would be physically fine, but I was still worried about her being outside alone, especially since she might notice the spot where I’d killed the cop earlier that morning. I didn’t want her to have to think about it again unnecessarily.

However, she seemed calm and determined.

“Yeah, I’ll be right back. I want to show her what I got.” She then gave me an endearing smile, only to look at me apologetically, before rushing out of the kitchen and toward the front door.

The moment the door closed, Serenity was immediately on my case. “Okay, seriously Kai, what was *that* about? It doesn’t take a genius to see that something is up with you two.”

I shrugged, taking a bite of food to have an excuse to not answer right away. I tried to think of a good reason as I chewed, but nothing came to mind. In a weird way, I felt kind of emotionally drained about this whole situation now, especially with all the whiplash-thoughts I was having about my housemate’s reaction to everything.

Not to mention, the fact that she seemed fine now made me both relieved and depressed.

After I swallowed, I focused on Serenity’s crossed arms and sighed. “Well, I guess I’m just afraid she’s going to snap after everything, you know? She’s doing really well considering what happened yesterday, so I suppose I’m being a little overprotective.”

“Yeah, I get that,” Serenity said right away, likely knowing we didn’t have much more time before Gabriella would be back. “But, it just seems like she’s so careful around you. As if she’s always silently apologizing.”

Taking a deep breath, I put my fork down, deciding I should probably try to be as honest as possible in order to put my friend’s mind at ease. “Remember what you said this morning?” I asked her. “About me not knowing what to do with myself?”

She nodded slowly.

“Well, that’s really true,” I admitted. “It’s why I ran away when I first met her. She makes me really nervous – in a good way. But still, she promised to try not to be so affectionate around others, so that I’m not so embarrassed...” I paused. “Because I overreact to the smallest things with her. So that’s why.”

“Oh,” Serenity said with raised eyebrows, leaning back in her seat, only to turn her head toward the kitchen entrance when we heard the front door open again. She glanced at me then, lowering her voice, her words coming out in a rush. “Sorry. I guess I shouldn’t be so nosy. It’s just hard, since normally we share most stuff with each other, and all...” Her voice trailed off.

I nodded, trying not to focus too deeply on what she was implying, since now wasn’t the time to contemplate any hidden meaning behind her words.

“We’re fine. Don’t worry so much,” I whispered, focusing on Gabriella’s cheerful expression as she reappeared in the room.

When she set the pretzels and books down on the table, I grabbed our snack from earlier and got up to put it in the fridge while she gleefully showed off her new books.

Thankfully, when I sat back down to eat, the rest of the meal felt a lot more relaxed, largely because my lifelong friend and girlfriend kept the conversation going as they settled into a comfortable subject regarding their shared interest.

My explanation for why Gabriella was so careful around me also seemed to help as well. Even if it wasn’t the complete truth, Serenity seemed a lot less concerned and suspicious now.

Once everyone was finished eating, I began grabbing plates to clean. Gabriella offered to help, and Nick even did too when I declined her offer, but I was fine doing it myself. Besides, having them talk filled up the time, making it not feel awkward that us guys weren’t socializing. Because I honestly didn’t really want to get to know Nick better.

Even if Serenity had no feelings for me beyond just being friends, I still wasn’t sure I was ever going to be okay with any guy she brought home. He seemed like a cool and easygoing dude, but him possibly being here because my housemate was interested automatically tainted my perception.

Once I was finished, Gabriella paused when I sat down, only to switch subjects. “So Serenity, you *are* fine if I stay here again tonight, right?” When my friend nodded, giving her a confused look, Gabriella continued. “It’s just, I need to run back to my apartment then, to grab some things. I’d prefer to do it before it gets too late.” She grimaced. “I’m not a fan of being out after dark right now.”

“Oh, of course,” she replied, seeming apologetic again. “You need me to take you?”

Gabriella quickly shook her head. “No, you have company over. Kai can take me. I just didn’t want to be rude by leaving suddenly.”

Now I grimaced, not liking the idea of Serenity being here alone with Nick, especially not in our house.

Serenity hesitated for a second, seeming pensive, before noticing my expression. I wasn’t sure if she was worried about what might happen at Gabriella’s apartment, or if she also didn’t want to be alone with a guy she barely knew, but I quickly pushed the first thought out of my mind, before it started affecting me.

Unexpectedly, Nick scratched the back of his head, only to chime in. “Actually, I should probably be getting back home too, if you don’t mind Serenity.”

She looked at him in surprise. “Are you sure? Maybe we could grab a coffee on the way back and chat a little more.” She paused. “But if you’re busy I understand,” she added.

Nick shrugged. “I mean, if you want, I’m fine with that. I can push things off for a while.” He sighed. “I’m kind of a workaholic sometimes, but there isn’t anything too pressing right now. I could always use more caffeine.”

Serenity smiled, though it didn’t reach her eyes.

I was glad to discover that Nick was actually a nice guy, volunteering to leave the house too, so that my friend didn’t feel awkward about it, but I still didn’t want her to end up dating him. Still, it was nice knowing I didn’t have to worry about him being the pushy one in the event that they did end up alone someplace.

Serenity unfortunately seemed set on the coffee date. “Okay! Coffee it is then.” She laughed. “I could drink it all day and still sleep like a baby.” She chuckled again at her own comment, returning her focus to Gabriella.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you two in a little while then, after I drop Nicholas off. How long do you think you’ll be?”

I tried to keep my mind blank, knowing that even a simple answer to this question might affect me, depending on what Gabriella said.

She shrugged in response, glancing at me briefly. “We might stop for some coffee too.” She paused. “Or at least, I will get some...” Her voice trailed off as she gave me another quick look. “So, I don’t know, but it will most likely be before dark. Or, at least not long after.”

Serenity nodded. “Oh, right. Sorry.” She then glanced at the clock, seeing that it was almost 5:30 PM. “I guess I’ll see you two in roughly two hours then. I should be home by that time as well.”

“Sounds good,” I abruptly chimed in, rising from my seat.

I was trying not to feel depressed that Serenity suddenly seemed fine with me being alone with Gabriella, while also trying not to get aroused by the idea that the two of us might end up at her apartment for well over an hour, minus driving time.

Nick quickly stood up too. “Actually Kai, I was wondering if I could talk to you before you go. I wanted to show you something. Are you cool if we chat before you head out?”

I hesitated before nodding, seeing that Serenity seemed exceptionally concerned now. Which confused me. I mean, it was a little odd that Nick had something he specifically wanted to talk to me about, but she looked almost scared by that fact.

However, I suspected she was more concerned about me snapping at his somewhat unintentional invasiveness and chewing her newest ‘friend’ out.

At the very least, I doubted it had anything to do with the case at this point, since Nick didn’t seem suspicious at all anymore. And, honestly, I realized I’d been overreacting to the whole situation. The dude put a caffeine pill in his drink because he was tired, accidentally gave me the wrong glass because he was *tired*, of course having no idea it could affect me, and only ended up at our place because Serenity invited him over.

“Sure,” I agreed simply, giving my housemate a reassuring smile.

Nick reached his hand in his pocket, taking a step away from the table, only to then look surprised as he patted his other pockets. “Oh, I think I must have left my phone in your car,” he said to Serenity. “Is it unlocked?”

She nodded. “Oh, umm, yeah.”

“Great,” Nick replied, focusing back on me. “Care to join me?”

I nodded, assuming he wanted to talk more privately anyway. I gave Gabriella one last look as I followed after him. Once we were outside, Nick headed straight for the blue car and grabbed his phone, just like he indicated he needed to do.

I stopped by the hood as he closed the door and began messing with the device.

After a second, he glanced back up at me. "I wanted to send you a link to an article, if that's alright. Care if I have your number or email to send it?"

I shrugged in response, figuring there was no harm in it. After rattling off my phone number, Nick nodded.

"Alright, it's sent. Check it out later, when you have the chance. I think you'll find it interesting."

I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket, but the battery was still really low, so I figured I'd just ask about it instead.

"What's the article about?" I wondered, trying to sound casual.

Nick leaned his arm against the car, seeming to relax as he thought about his answer. "Well, I mentioned I had a sister, right?"

"Umm, yeah?" I replied, now sincerely confused.

"Did I ever say how old she was?" he asked.

My brow furrowed. "Umm, no, I don't think so. You just said she was younger, and that she still lived with your step-dad."

He nodded. "She's nine, actually," he said simply, giving me a meaningful look, like I should find some significance in that fact.

But I didn't have a clue why that mattered.

"Okay?" I prompted, quickly doing the mental math and realizing that she was a good fifteen years younger than him. Was he trying to make some kind of connection with me over the fact that Serenity was quite a bit older than me? Because that was kind of stupid, if he was.

However, he didn't respond right away, eyeing me for a few long seconds, making it start to feel awkward. Finally, he elaborated.

"Remember that story I mentioned, about the Impaler's first kill?"

Instantly, my chest and spine flashed gray underneath my clothing as sincere shock clawed its way up my neck, raising the fine hairs at the base of my skull. Suddenly, I felt like I was going to pass out, my entire world literally flipped upside down in barely half a second.

“They saved the baby?” I said almost inaudibly, my words sounding like they were coming from someone else.

Nick nodded once.

“And that was your sister?” I gasped in disbelief. “Your *mother*?”

I couldn’t stop the flashbacks from flooding my mind with horrible images that gave me nightmares for months when I was younger. Shit, I *still* had nightmares about it sometimes. However, then my mind began kicking into gear as I realized that my reaction was probably more extreme than it should be for the average person.

I quickly tried to collect myself, suddenly being acutely aware that Nick was watching me carefully. After a second, I cleared my throat, sounding sincerely concerned, since I knew that swinging too far in the relaxed direction might be suspicious.

“Wow,” I said, shaking my head in disbelief. “Shit, man. That’s messed up. I never imagined that the story you told us about would actually be so close to home for you.” I then paused, realizing the significance of the fact that Nick was specifically sharing this with me. “But why just tell me though?” I asked seriously. “Did you not want Serenity to know for some reason? She can handle a lot,” I added.

Nick shook his head, not answering my question directly. “The truth is, I’ve actually been on this case for a long time. Way before it was actually an official case. In fact, this was the first puzzle involving people that I ever became obsessed with, when I was only a couple years younger than you are now, and it’s the primary reason why I ended up aiming to become a detective.” He sighed. “I’ve always been on the lookout for the kid who saved my little sister.” He then paused. “Well, to thank him really. That particular serial killer targeted only pregnant women, and his MO was something I don’t even feel comfortable discussing, but let’s just say that my unborn sister would have had the worst of it.”

I forced myself to keep my thoughts focused, to avoid letting my imagination run wild at what horrible things I’d prevented by intervening. The scene I’d stumbled across had already been terrible by horror movie standards.

I ended up shaking my head, trying to physically rid myself of the memories threatening to invade my mind again.

I then focused back on Nick, seeing that he was still eyeing me.

Of course, I realized now why he was telling me. After all, he'd claimed that he was closer than people realized. However, no way in hell was I going to admit that I was the Impaler. If anything, he might just be baiting me, but there was no doubt I was a suspect at this point.

Fuck.

But there was no evidence, no proof, and my suspicious reaction was only hurting me right now.

I finally took a shallow breath, giving him a sympathetic look. "That sounds horrible," I replied. "Like, just imagining what this guy did is really disturbing. And it's even more crazy to think you have a direct connection to that situation." I paused. "But you still didn't answer my question. Did you not want Serenity to know about this? I just don't understand why you're only telling me."

Nick shrugged, only to abruptly stand fully upright. "Well, I guess because you're eighteen, and thus match the age range perfectly." He shrugged again. "And, coincidentally, Serenity has been on all the recent cases where the Impaler got involved. In fact, it's almost as if the mystery guy disappeared until Serenity became a detective. *But ...*" he added with more emphasis. "There are a couple of others who were on those cases too. However, since I figured I was already here, I decided I would tell you in case you were him, so that I could thank you in person."

I scratched the back of my head, trying to seem embarrassed. "Well, I'm not him," I lied. "And it kind of feels weird having you thank me for something I wasn't involved in." I then intentionally became annoyed. "Wait, is that why you came over with Serenity? Just so you could talk to *me*?"

I didn't want to imply that I was disappointed, because if that was true then I was actually relieved that he might not be interested. But then again, who was I kidding? My housemate was hot as fuck.

And sure enough...

Nick quickly held up his hands defensively. "What? No, that's not how it is. She invited *me* over for dinner. I didn't ask."

Fuck.

"But that's why you said yes?" I hoped. Dammit, why couldn't I just keep my mouth shut?

He shook his head, holding up a finger. "It would be *a reason* to say yes, but it was not the main reason I did say yes."

Fuck! But why was I even surprised?

Stupid genius. Why did Serenity have to be so hot? Or at least, why couldn't he already be in a relationship or something?

Dammit.

I tried to keep my expression mostly neutral, maintaining a critical look as if I didn't believe him. I then spoke up again. "So then, what are you going to do once you find the real Impaler?" I wondered, figuring that was a safe thing for a normal person to ask. "Obviously, it's not me. I don't even match the description. Granted, a description like that is hard to believe."

Nick shrugged again. "I'll try to find him, and then – whether I do or don't – I'll still end up classifying the case as currently unsolvable and let it sit on the shelf to collect dust indefinitely. I'm not about to get the guy who saved my little sister thrown in jail." He hesitated. "At least, assuming the Impaler doesn't reopen the case with a new vict...I mean, a new murder of a serial killer. I probably won't be the one to take the case next time, and there are other people out there just as smart as me. Smarter even. They might figure it out."

It was obvious he was giving me a warning to stop, in the event it somehow really was me. But I could also tell that Nick wasn't completely confident in his assumption, which meant I'd successfully convinced him otherwise, and just needed to continue to play on that doubt as much as possible.

"Well, then do your best to find him, if that's the case. Hopefully, he's a nice guy and will take your warning seriously. I'm sure he would appreciate the thank you too, although I doubt he did it for a pat on the back."

I wasn't sure if that had been too much, but I figured it might be an assumption most people might logically deduce.

Nick finally sighed and scratched the back of his head. "Right. Anyway, I guess we should all get going. I just wanted to share all that with you, just in case. But I can see I still have some searching to do. Sorry about that."

I shrugged. "It's fine. I mean, it's not like I'm offended or anything. Although, maybe don't be so forward about it, if you talk to anyone else in that age range. I'd like to think I'm pretty mature for my age, but I don't know that other eighteen-year-olds would respond to an accusation like that very well. You basically accused me of murder just now."

"Sure," he agreed, moving to walk toward the house.

Apparently, Gabriella and Serenity had been watching us out of the window, something I would have noticed if I wasn't so shocked by Nick's disclosure, because they opened the door the moment we approached.

Gabriella looked especially worried, prompting me to give her a reassuring smile, even if it didn't seem to help much.

"Ready to go?" my girlfriend wondered hesitantly.

"Yep," I agreed simply, moving to give Serenity a quick hug. We then exchanged a quick farewell and 'see you later' before Gabriella and I were climbing into my car while my housemate ran back inside to grab her purse. I then waited until she and Nick were getting into her car too, before beginning to pull out, making sure Serenity was following me down the driveway just to guarantee that they were really leaving the house.

Once we were a few miles down the road, finally going our separate ways at an intersection, I gave Gabriella my full attention, knowing she was patiently waiting to talk. And I was sure we had a lot to talk about, between the situation with my friend's coworker, not to mention how we might proceed with our relationship now that Serenity knew we were an item.

Which reminded me about the fact that we were about to be alone again, in her apartment.

I tried to keep my thoughts focused as my chest began graying underneath my shirt in anticipation of what I felt confident was going to happen once we arrived.

CHAPTER 10: DISCLOSURE

“What was that about?” Gabriella finally asked, once we’d driven in silence for a few minutes.

I sighed heavily. “He thinks it’s me, of course,” I admitted.

She was immediately alarmed. “Should we run away then?” she asked seriously.

I shook my head. “He doesn’t *know* for a fact that I’m the Impaler, so running away would pretty much confirm it for him. Plus, he said he wants to find the guy to thank him.”

“Thank him?” she repeated in shock. “For what?”

I grimaced, taking a deep breath, before beginning to recount the whole story to her. Of course, she already knew about my first kill now, thanks to Nick talking about it, so I elaborated on what it was like from my perspective as a little kid. And then, I dropped the bomb on her, regarding how that woman was actually Nick’s mother, and the baby who actually survived was the little sister he mentioned.

I also realized he’d hinted at it earlier, when he said his mom died almost a decade ago, and that his step-father had moved them away from the city shortly after she passed away.

“I’m sorry,” Gabriella finally whispered when I was finished sharing everything. “I knew he had been talking about you, of course, but I hadn’t thought about how it affected you. No child should have to witness something like that.”

I sunk down in my seat a little, sincerely feeling depressed just thinking about it. “Yeah, it was honestly really traumatizing. I still have nightmares about it, even after all these years. It’s so bad sometimes, I’ll wake up transformed.”

“You know it’s not your fault, right?” she said quickly. “There was nothing you could have done to save her. I mean, you were only nine years

old!”

I nodded weakly. Of course, I knew she was right, but it didn't help the guilt much, especially now that the memory was fresh in my mind again. However, discovering that the baby survived did help. A lot. I supposed even though I felt like I failed, I technically didn't.

A life existed today thanks to me.

Taking a deep breath, I let it out slowly. “Well, the good thing is, Nick doesn't know for sure it's me. And as long as I stop, like you mentioned earlier on our way back from the mall, then it will end up as a closed case.” I sighed. “It's just...”

“Hard to stop,” she finished for me.

It wasn't a question.

She knew how I felt, having said as much earlier, with her feeling guilty for even suggesting it. Not to mention, my perception of the world was significantly larger than a normal person. If I sensed something going on five or ten miles away, possibly in a house behind closed doors, could I really just ignore it and turn a blind eye?

I mean, stuff *did* happen, and I did turn a blind eye most of the time, because I didn't feel like it was my job to come to everyone's rescue. However, those situations usually just involved a lot of yelling and screaming, not killing.

Either way, ‘coming across’ an incident was very different for me than it was for a normal person.

Unexpectedly, Gabriella sat up straighter, looking like she'd just been hit with an idea.

“What if you worked *with* the police?” she wondered. I looked at her in shock, prompting her to clarify. “I mean, what if you worked with Nick and Serenity, specifically. You would have to let them in on your secret of course, but—”

She cut off when I grimaced, with me not liking that idea at all.

Gabriella quickly continued. “It's just an idea, Kai. Just hear me out for a second.”

I nodded weakly.

“You could just tell them where the bad guy is, and then they could handle it. For them, if they shoot the perp, then it's as an officer of the law, so there wouldn't be a problem.”

I sighed. "But that wouldn't work," I replied. "First, they're both detectives, so they don't usually do that part of the job." I frowned, knowing I never would have been okay with my lifelong friend becoming a cop if she was going to be put in harm's way on a daily basis. I cleared my throat. "Not to mention, I don't like the idea of putting Serenity in danger like that," I admitted out loud.

Gabriella sunk back in her seat. "Oh, I guess you're right. I'm sorry."

I shook my head, reaching over to grab her hand.

She jumped in surprise by the unexpected affection, before quickly intertwining her fingers in mine, eyeing me cautiously to make sure it wasn't too much. However, probably due to the mood of our conversation, I found that I was *mostly* alright at the moment.

"You don't need to be sorry," I replied gently. "Like you said, it was just an idea. You shouldn't be afraid to share that kind of stuff, or else we'll never figure anything out."

She nodded in agreement, pulling my hand up to her mouth, rubbing her lips against my skin, before kissing me gently. When she saw that my hair still looked normal, she grinned. "See! You're getting used to me!"

"Not at all," I replied with a laugh. "Almost my entire body is gray underneath my clothing."

"Oh! I'm sorry!" she exclaimed, trying to give my hand back.

I grasped her fingers more tightly, squeezing gently. "No, it's alright. Just maybe not the kissing."

She quickly folded her other hand on top of mine, eagerly holding my hand in her lap with both of hers. It actually *was* too much for me, the gray creeping up my neck, but I tried to focus on the road, knowing it made her really happy to be able to hold my hand.

However, once we were getting close to her apartment, with her instructing me where to turn each step of the way, I finally took it back.

We pulled into a fairly nice parking lot, where every apartment either had a balcony on the upper floors, or fenced-in porch area on the ground level. Altogether, there were probably at least ten separate buildings, all of which were designed with a rocky exterior, making it almost seem like it was a really expensive place to live, though I doubted that was the case.

Granted, Gabriella lived in a studio apartment on the ground floor, so it might sincerely be expensive for those who were in larger spaces. She explained that she wasn't a fan of having neighbors above her, since she

could hear them walk around, but it allowed her to jog on her treadmill without having to worry about bothering anyone below.

As she led me inside the building, which had a glass door separating the apartment doors from the outside, she led me to her black door and invited me in.

It was actually even smaller than I'd been expecting – the whole thing, including bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, and living space could all probably fit inside my living room back home. At the very least, I could understand how she managed to save up so much money, because she clearly did only spend money on the necessities, and apparently having a decent amount of living space wasn't one of them for her.

The treadmill was right next to the sliding glass window, although the view was blocked by the wooden fence, so that no one would be able to see her jogging unless they were actually on the tiny patio just outside. She also had a small flat-screen TV sitting on an equally small black entertainment center, as well as a two-seater couch that looked like it was used, but in good condition. It had a black couch-cover over it, but I could see at the bottom that the original fabric was an ugly shade of tan.

Still, it looked comfortable.

A foldout table with only one chair was sitting in the corner, which I suspected served as the dining area.

There was then a separate room for the kitchen, bedroom, and bathroom. And then, her very small closet even had a small washer and dryer. However, there was only one door in the entire place, which was for the bathroom. The kitchen had a regular-sized fridge, as well as microwave, oven, and sink, but there was limited counter space.

The entrance to her bedroom was a narrow opening that was about four-fifths the size of a normal entry, being roughly one-fifth too small to fit a regular door.

Her actual room was barely large enough to fit her queen-sized bed, with there being just enough space to walk around the edge. It looked as if she'd gotten creative with her clothing, having some stuff hanging in the closet, while other necessities were folded in flat bins underneath her bed, essentially serving as her dresser.

Her bed wasn't made, but it wasn't super messy either. It looked like she kept everything really clean and orderly. Obviously, she hadn't planned for company, and yet it was clean like she had.

“What do you think?” she asked excitedly.

“Well...” I hesitated. “It’s smaller than I expected,” I admitted. “But it’s nice,” I quickly clarified. “Very clean too.”

Gabriella blushed. “It’s not hard to keep it clean when it’s so small, but I don’t need a lot of space to be happy. Just having my own place is nice.”

I nodded, beginning to see myself living here with her, knowing I probably wouldn’t feel cramped at all. At least, not with *her*. The idea of having our own space together, even one as small as this, where we could fuck as much as we wanted, kind of excited me. Granted, part of me wished she could just move in with me and Serenity instead.

I knew that probably wouldn’t work out long-term, but I really didn’t want to stop living with my housemate either, as much as I also wanted to begin living with Gabriella.

“What are you thinking?” she asked me curiously.

I suddenly realized that my hair was snow-white, my skin completely gray. My face felt hot as I looked away. “Nothing,” I quickly replied.

“Aww, come on!” she teased. “Tell me!” Her look then became more intense, her expression hungry as she moved closer and reached out to wrap her thin fingers around my wrist.

I gulped, trying to formulate an answer despite my scattered thoughts. “Umm, I was just...” I took a deep breath, my mind feeling like it was becoming even more incoherent. “I just saw myself living here with you,” I managed.

It felt like there was a current of electricity running up my arm from where she was holding me.

“That would be nice,” she agreed quietly. She then paused briefly, before continuing, her tone more heavy and seductive. “You know why I brought you here, right? I haven’t had enough of you today. I’m still hungry for some dessert.”

I gulped again, my throat feeling dry. “Okay,” I whispered.

She laughed then, causing me to glance at her. “You’re so much fun! I wish you could stay this innocent forever, because I love it!”

I scoffed, feeling kind of embarrassed. “I’m glad you’re enjoying yourself,” I replied. I was then serious, unexpectedly feeling a little vulnerable. “I hope you don’t get bored of me when I’m not.”

Gabriella shook her head. “No, there are plenty of ways to make this exciting. I’m just enjoying this part while it lasts.” Her eyes then lit up.

“Oh! Actually, why don’t you sit on the couch? I need to check on something.”

I gave her a confused look, but obeyed, walking over and sitting down as she’d asked. She disappeared around the corner to her bedroom, beginning to rummage through her closet. By the time she was coming back into the living room, I was pretty sure I knew what to expect, given the sounds and smells.

My eyes only confirmed what my other senses told me.

Gabriella came out wearing a black leather biker jacket, and nothing else. The zipper went all the way up to her neck, where it had a leather belt that could be fastened like a collar, and there was a pocket over each breast, with a small buckle and strap, instead of buttons. The shoulders had buckles and straps too, though they didn’t seem to serve a purpose, other than aesthetics.

The whole thing was fitted, including the chest, with the sleeves hugging her arms like a glove all the way down to her wrists, where there was another set of straps and buckles. However, it was probably most noticeable on her chest, since it held her huge tits firmly in place even though I was confident she wasn’t wearing a bra underneath. The leather was tight against her entire waist, including underneath her boobs.

The whole thing fit her form so perfectly, that I was sure that no one would ever know she wasn’t wearing lingerie underneath.

She giggled when she saw my expression, since I was both unsurprised and suddenly hungry. “I guess I should have known I couldn’t surprise you, but I’m glad you like!”

“Sorry,” I said sincerely. “But yeah, it’s pretty much impossible for me to not hear what you’re changing into...or neglecting to change into,” I added, glancing down at her red pubic hair.

She smirked. “I figured I’d show this jacket off to you, since I can’t really wear it in public.”

“You can’t?” I said before thinking, realizing barely a second later why that might be the case. She was ridiculously sexy in it, and not just because it was all she was wearing.

Gabriella nodded somberly. “My mom got me this when I was your age – eighteen.”

I groaned, knowing she was intentionally teasing me about my age now. I was also kind of embarrassed to know that I *again* had her mother to thank

for what I was seeing now, feeling a little awkward about that knowledge. However, I quickly pushed that thought aside.

Gabriella giggled in response to my expression, before continuing. "It even fits perfectly too, as you can see, but wearing it the first time was *not* a great experience. I pretty much can't wear anything sexy in public without it being a big deal." She sighed. "In a bad way, for me."

I nodded, looking her up and down as I took it all in. The colors themselves were extremely enticing, with her short red hair sharply contrasted against the black leather. Without thinking, I slowly reached out to grasp her leather-clad forearms, shocked that the jacket was even smoother than I was expecting.

I then laughed, as I focused down at the soft red fuzz hiding her hot pussy. "Now all you need is a pair of leather pants to go with it, and it'd be perfect."

She giggled again. "Oh, I actually do have a pair! I just figured they wouldn't stay on long."

I couldn't help but blush, glancing away.

Her tone was amused. "Now, young man, are you going to do something about this sexy girl in front of you? Or do I need to take control?"

I loved both ideas, but I took action before I even realized what I was doing.

Letting go of her forearms, I instead grabbed her waist, lifting her up slightly and yanking her forward so that she was forced to move her knees onto the couch. She yelped in surprise, only to reach down for my shirt the moment I had her straddling my lap.

I helped her get it off, and then scooted my hips forward slightly to twist to the side, all while pulling her forward onto my toned gray stomach, her bare pussy hot against my skin. She squeaked again from the abrupt movement, resting her hands on my muscled chest once I was flat, my head on one armrest while my legs were draped over the other.

Shifting her weight on me, she then curled down and pressed her lips against mine, prompting me to grab handfuls of her massive juicy tits, before moving my hands to her back to feel the smooth leather over her slim shoulder blades.

"You're not trembling this time," she whispered against my lips. She then giggled when a shiver ran through my body. Pulling away slightly, she

grinned, her emerald eyes sparkling. “Maybe I spoke too soon,” she teased.

I rolled my black and gold eyes, reaching up to place my hand against her cheek, her soft red hair flowing over it as I held her gaze for a long few seconds.

Unexpectedly, her phone rang in her bedroom.

I groaned, only to give her a pleading expression when she sighed heavily, surprised when she pressed her lips against mine again, making no effort to climb off.

“Whoever it is, they can wait,” she mumbled, sucking in a deep breath through her nose. She then smirked as she pulled away, her gaze passionate, her cheeks flushed red. “Now, are you ready for round three?” she wondered.

I trembled again, my heart racing as I nodded weakly in response.

“Good boy,” she teased. “Maybe I should sit on your face again,” she added playfully. “I want to smother you.”

I gulped.

She grinned widely. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” she said playfully.

“I mean...yeah...” I admitted, trying to keep my breathing even.

“Well, I don’t think I could actually smother you,” she commented, her expression slightly more serious. “It’s like you’re struggling for air as it is.”

“I don’t know why,” I replied. “My heart is racing.”

She pursed her lips, her brow furrowing. She then reached back to touch my cock through my pants, only to climb off.

I gave her a confused look as she got down on her knees and began fumbling with my belt, before I reached down to help her get my pants off, leaving me mostly naked now.

“I don’t think you’re horny enough,” she explained as she wrapped her thin fingers around my shaft. “Or rather, you’re more nervous than horny, and we need to fix that.”

I supposed she must be right, because even though I was hard, my cock wasn’t sticking straight up. However, as she began stroking me, and then when she leaned forward and began kissing my head, both my heart began calming down and my cock turned into a brick in her hand.

“That’s better,” she said playfully, running her tongue across the top to collect the precum leaking.

I moaned from the sensation, before laughing, a bizarre idea suddenly occurring to me.

“What’s funny?” she asked, her tone full of amusement. “Humor wasn’t exactly what I was going for,” she added with a wink.

I took a deep breath, feeling a lot more relaxed now...and horny as hell. “Well, I’ll tell you, but you’re probably going to think I’m really weird.”

She continued to stroke me slowly, her hand gently gliding up and down, a small smile playing on her full lips. “Kai, it would take a lot to ‘weird me out’ at this point. And I haven’t even really scratched the surface to how weird and kinky my parents really are.”

I frowned at that, prompting her to immediately give me an apologetic expression.

“Sorry, that probably wasn’t the best sex subject.” She then bent forward again and engulfed me fully in her mouth, running her tongue around my head. She then shoved downward almost as far as she could go, before pulling away and stroking me again, using her spit as lube. “So tell me?” she prompted with another smirk.

My head was swimming from her scent now, feeling like the aroma had significantly intensified, my mind scattered from momentarily feeling my cock in the back of her throat.

“Umm...” I said, trying to collect my thoughts. “Oh, well, when my heart was racing just a few minutes ago, I was reacting almost as if I was being attacked by someone.” I looked at her apologetically. “I know that’s really weird, but then you completely took my mind off the sensation, and I suddenly thought it would be funny if you were actually a succubus or something.”

Immediately, Gabriella’s expression dropped as she blanched, looking like she’d seen a ghost.

Her scent was instantly tainted with fear.

I quickly sat up, her face now next to my stomach. “What’s wrong?” I asked seriously.

She blinked a few times, before looking up to meet my gaze. “I...” Her voice trailed off. “You don’t think I really am, do you?” she asked almost inaudibly.

I looked at her in shock. “I mean, how would I know? Why? Do you think you are?” I asked seriously.

She took a deep breath, closing her eyes as she let it out slowly, not responding for a long minute. “Sorry,” she finally whispered, her emerald gaze meeting mine again.

Without thinking, I reached out and rested my hand on her head, gently running my fingers through her vibrant red hair.

She continued without prompt. "It's just, whenever I used to complain about guys trying to hook up with me, my mom always teased me that it was because I was part succubus. A sixteenth, to be exact." She grimaced. "Or at least, I assumed she was teasing. But with you saying that..."

"Could you ask her?" I wondered. "And would there be any danger if you were actually part succubus?"

"You don't think I'm crazy?" she whispered, sounding vulnerable.

I scoffed. "Gabriella, look at me. I'm not exactly human myself, and while I've never met anyone else supernatural, I'm well aware it would be foolish to think I was all alone in the world. Plus, you've eaten meat, and your scent hasn't changed, so my assumption that it is from you being vegetarian might actually be wrong. Maybe it's because...well, because you're part succubus."

She frowned as she considered that, her red eyebrows knitted together. "My mom has also said she's an eighth succubus, and she once explained that's why she..." Her voice trailed off, looking embarrassed now.

"She what?" I prompted.

Gabriella took a deep breath, looking away. "You...you won't, like, leave me or anything, right? If I tell you just how weird my mom is?"

I was again shocked. "What? No, of course not!" I then sighed when she didn't seem convinced. "Gabriella, think about it from my perspective. You're probably the only person I can ever be with. I'm not going to risk telling my secret to anyone else, not even my housemate, and even if I *did* tell someone else, I'm still crazy about you."

Unexpectedly, she looked at me with a critical eye. "Serenity?" she repeated.

I held her gaze for a second, trying to understand her expression, before it dawned on me that I'd just sort of connected those two concepts together – dating someone else, and telling Serenity my secret.

And she'd picked up on it.

Maybe it was my tone, or just the way I said it, I wasn't sure. But she definitely read between the lines.

Fuck.

I couldn't help but look away.

Which of course, told her what I didn't want to tell her.

“Kai,” she said, sounding incredulous. “You like Serenity?”

Fuck!

I knew I had to say ‘no.’

I *knew* I had to!

But I couldn’t respond, my heart racing again.

“Shit,” Gabriella hissed.

I looked at her in shock, afraid that now she was going to consider leaving *me* . “I’m sorry,” I said without thinking.

She sighed, shaking her head as she stood up. At first, I thought she was going to walk away, but instead she moved behind me slightly to sit down in the small space I’d left from sitting up. I quickly shifted my weight to sit beside her on the couch, me still mostly naked, while she was only wearing the leather jacket.

She seemed pensive now.

“Please say something,” I whispered after a second. Part of me still wanted to try denying it, but for whatever reason I just couldn’t say it. I couldn’t say that I didn’t love my lifelong friend like that, even if she was so much older than me and had been forced to be responsible for me since I was younger.

It was easy to deny when I was in middle school, because back then I truly just viewed her as my friend and playmate. Sure, I loved her more than anything, but I didn’t want to fuck her back then. It wasn’t until I got in high school that I started realizing that I was really attracted to her.

Or rather, I just noticed how fucking hot she was.

Gabriella reached out and put her hand on my bare gray thigh, as if she was trying to reassure me, but didn’t respond. I finally covered her hand with my own, prompting her to look up at me apologetically.

“Sorry,” she said again. “I just don’t know *how* to respond. I thought Serenity’s reaction was weird at dinner, when we talked about getting married, but only now do I realize why that might be.”

“W-What?” I stuttered in disbelief.

She sighed heavily, focusing on her small flatscreen TV next to the apartment door. “Kai, when Serenity talks about you, she doesn’t sound like a girl talking about someone she just takes care of. She sounds like someone who’s in love. *Romantically* .”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. Literally, I couldn’t believe it.

“Why are you telling me this?” I asked seriously, wondering if this was some kind of test.

Her voice was almost inaudible as she responded, staring straight ahead, her green eyes unfocused. “Because I don’t want to lose you,” she whispered. She then focused on me with a grimace. “Kai, I know you live together, but you’re not related to her, and while some people might frown on it, there is really nothing stopping you from being with her.” She paused. “Well, except for *her*, of course. She’d have to be willing. But I’m not sure if she even realizes how she really feels. However, tonight she didn’t look only upset. She looked devastated, as if she’d just found out her boyfriend cheated on her.” She focused on the wall again, slumping back more into the couch cushions. “But I don’t want to get serious with you, only to have you break my heart by leaving me for her.”

“I...” I took a deep breath. “I wouldn’t do that,” I replied, knowing I was trying to convince myself just as much as her.

She didn’t respond, causing us both to fall silent again. I wasn’t sure if she believed me, suspecting it probably didn’t help that I wasn’t sure if I believed myself.

Honestly though, I didn’t know how I could possibly live without either one of them at this point. I had zero idea how I was ever going to let Serenity go, and I definitely felt like I couldn’t let Gabriella go either.

Dammit.

“S-So,” I began hesitantly, deciding to change subjects. “About your mom?”

She took another deep breath, continuing to stare at the wall. However, she squeezed my thigh reassuringly. “I told you my mom was really into the dominating thing. She’s a little extreme though. More so than I initially let on.”

“How so?” I asked quietly.

Gabriella finally looked up at me. “Well, my parents tried to keep it a secret, but when I finally asked about it, my mom explained it was because she was ‘an eighth’ succubus. Again, I thought she was joking, or coming up with some stupid excuse, but basically...” Her voice trailed off for a second. “My mom sleeps with other men...and makes my dad watch.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Oh,” I said simply as I tried to absorb that, before suddenly needing to make sure I clarified something. “I’m not okay with that,” I replied hastily, only to give her another

apologetic look for the outburst. "I mean, with you and me, I'm not okay with that."

Gabriella's emerald eyes were wide, looking surprised, before she nodded firmly. "Yes, of course. I told you I wouldn't cheat on you," she said reassuringly. She then paused. "And even if you *were* into that kind of thing, I'm not sure I'd want to," she added.

"Really?" I said in surprise, only to quickly clarify when she seemed confused. "I mean, I feel like that's something most people would like. Not that I'm complaining," I added.

She smirked slightly. "Of course, I'm sure you'd love to make me watch you fuck another girl, wouldn't you?"

I grimaced, more out of embarrassment than anything. "Umm, no..." I lied.

She scoffed. "You're not fooling anyone, young man!" she teased, only to sigh, growing serious again after a couple of seconds.

"What's wrong?" I whispered, knowing we'd covered so many topics unexpectedly, that it could be almost anything.

"I'm just concerned now," she admitted. "Because what if I am really part succubus? Does that mean it's not safe for us to have sex? My mom never warned me about it being unsafe, but she's always acted like she expected me to get really into fucking, like she is. That's why she got me this leather outfit, and why we had a thorough discussion on how to be safe."

"Maybe you should call her and ask?" I suggested. "I mean, I'm assuming your mom has sex with your dad, right?"

Gabriella shrugged. "I mean, I assume so. Why?"

"Well, because then that would probably mean it is safe, but maybe frequency is a problem. Maybe that's why she sleeps with other men too."

She pursed her lips as she thought about that, only to sigh heavily and stand up. "I can't believe we're seriously considering this. But I guess we can't take the chance, since obviously the supernatural exists." She gestured toward me and my still-grayed skin for emphasis.

"Right," I agreed.

Her gaze then focused on my lap longingly, as if she wanted to wrap her mouth around my somewhat soft cock and make it hard again. However, unexpectedly her phone began ringing a second time, prompting her eyes to widen in surprise.

“Oh, and I guess I better figure out who that is,” she said, hurrying to her bedroom, only to walk back more slowly. She was staring at her phone like she was confused by the number. She then gasped. “Shit, I thought I recognized this number.” Her expression turned dark as she focused on me. “I better deal with this right now, before it becomes a problem.”

I had no idea what she was talking about, but nodded in response.

Gabriella answered and held the phone to her ear, speaking with a rude tone. “Can I help you?” she demanded harshly.

The male voice on the other end was cheerful. “Hey Gabby! I just saw you on the news and wanted to make sure you were doing alright.”

She immediately rolled her eyes. “James, why do you even still have my number? I thought I made it crystal clear I never wanted to talk to you again.”

“Aww, don’t be like that, Gabby. It seems you’ve been through a lot recently. I thought I’d take you out to dinner or something to help get your mind off everything.”

“Umm, no,” she scoffed. “Absolutely not. My *fiancé* is taking great care of me, thank you.”

“You’re getting married?” he replied in sincere shock. “Well, I’m sure he won’t care. I even stopped by your work to check in on you, but you weren’t there.”

Instantly, her expression was livid, her tone just as pissed. “It doesn’t matter whether or not if he cares! *I care!*” she snapped. “And if you stop by my work again, I’m going to get a restraining order on you. If you *call me* again, I’m going to get a restraining order on you. I am perfectly happy with my man, and I don’t need *or want* you in my life. Are we clear?!”

His response was short. “Bitch!”

He hung up.

The moment the line went dead, her anger immediately shifted to distress. I quickly got up and wrapped my arms around her, trying to ignore my stiffening erection in response to my bare waist being pressed against hers. She rested her head against my shoulder, leaning into me heavily.

“Are you alright?” I whispered.

She took a deep breath before responding. “Yeah. Let me block his number really fast, so we don’t have to worry about him calling again.” She leaned away then, tapping the screen on her phone in the small space between us, my arms still wrapped around her.

I wanted to lighten the mood, but wasn't sure how, so I just commented on what she'd said, my tone playful. "So, I'm already your fiancé, am I?"

She gave me a weak grin in response. "Sorry about that," she replied softly. She then tossed her phone on the couch behind me and leaned more into my arms. "That was James. He's the only real boyfriend I've ever had. But I haven't seen or talked to him in almost two years now." She took a deep breath. "As I'm sure you could probably tell, the only reason he called is because he wanted to take advantage of my recent traumatic experience, hoping he might be able to get in my pants. He's an asshole, although he had me convinced that he wasn't, at first."

I nodded, holding her tightly. "Well, I think his goodbye was definitely proof of that. I can't believe he called you that."

She shrugged. "He was really sweet for the first few weeks that we dated, but when I absolutely refused to sleep with him, he eventually got fed up and revealed his true colors. I ended up breaking up with him immediately when he became a lot more pushy and aggressive, and that's how he said 'goodbye' then too." She paused. "Calling me a bitch," she clarified. "I wouldn't have considered spending time with him ever again, even if he was the last person on the planet."

"Well, I'm glad I don't have to worry about him winning you over again," I replied, trying to still tease her.

However, instead she glared up at me. "You don't have to worry about *anyone* winning me over. I'm yours and only yours – forever." She then leaned her cheek against my upper chest again. "As long as you'll have me," she whispered.

I didn't respond right away, not wanting to bring Serenity up again, but knowing I had to, since I assumed that was her concern now.

"Gabriella..." I began hesitantly. I then switched gears, taking a deep breath. "Okay, yes, I do have a thing for Serenity. How could I not? She's been everything to me, and the only person I've trusted for a long time." I took another deep breath, holding her tighter to avoid her trying to look up at me. "But I wasn't lying when I told you that I was planning on being alone for the rest of my life. Because I couldn't risk telling a girl, only to have her betray me, and I can't risk losing Serenity either, if she reacts badly."

"But what if she finds out?" Gabriella whispered. "And what if she's okay with it?"

I grimaced. "I...I don't know..." I admitted. "But I don't want to give you up. Especially not now."

She sighed, only to scoff humorlessly. "Maybe I'll just have to convince her to share you."

All my muscles tensed, feeling a mixture of shock and nervousness. Because the idea just seemed way too surreal to be realistic, and the fact that she brought it up almost felt like a test again.

"You aren't serious, are you?" I finally asked after a moment.

She held me tighter, only to shift her waist so that my cock slid between her thighs, her head still buried against my shoulder. "No, not really. But then again, that would be better than losing you." She sighed. "I really like Serenity though, and if I was going to share with someone, I could see it being her." She paused, her voice dropping. "Especially since that's what might have happened anyway, if I hadn't met her, and thus met you. More than likely, you two would have eventually become romantically involved."

I honestly didn't know what to say, knowing she was telling the truth, but also unwilling to hope for that kind of reality. Because for that to happen, it would mean I'd have to tell my lifelong friend my secret, and even if it was a low risk that she'd reject me upon finding out, it was one I just couldn't take.

I mean, what if she sincerely was freaked out by me being some sort of devil?

What if it was too much for her?

Losing her forever would be devastating for me, especially when she'd been the most important person in my life, for almost *all* my life. Even when all our parents were still alive, I looked up to her much more than anyone else.

Thus, instead of continuing this line of discussion, I decided to switch subjects slightly.

"Well, I'm at least glad to hear that you wouldn't ever cheat on me, or otherwise want to sleep with other guys," I admitted. "Especially since you might be part succubus," I added in a slightly playful tone.

She groaned. "I guess I should probably call my mom and ask," she replied, making no motion to go for her phone on the couch.

"Yeah," I agreed, likewise not making any effort to let her go.

We were both quiet for a minute, just holding each other, my cock hard as a rock between her thighs, throbbing against her hot snatch, before I

spoke up again.

“You know I would have been fine if we waited to have sex, right?” I commented, wanting to make it clear that I wasn’t like her ex-boyfriend.

She laughed at that, pulling away a little to look up at me. “More like, you never would have done it, had I not forced myself on you!” she retorted.

I grimaced, knowing she was completely right.

My expression just made her laugh all the more. Which was nice, hearing her chuckle after everything we’d just discussed.

She then sighed, resting her head underneath my chin again. “I’m really glad I waited for you.”

“Me too,” I agreed. “But why *did* you wait?” I wondered, since she seemed completely against having sex with the other guy, but jumped in bed with me right away. Not to mention, if she really was part succubus, and her mom even expected her to become extremely interested in sex, then it did seem odd.

She sighed. “Well, I don’t know how to explain it. I was just waiting, in general. I didn’t want to do it with someone who I wasn’t sure I truly loved. James was great at the time, at least when he was working his deceptive charm, but I never felt like he was the guy I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.” She paused. “I guess that’s what it was. I never got to the point where I would have said ‘yes’ if he had asked me to marry him. Granted, that *certainly* was never on his agenda. Had I slept with him, allowing him to accomplish his true goal, then he probably would have moved on pretty quickly after we fucked a few times.” She then looked up to meet my black and gold gaze. “But with you, I knew pretty quickly I’d marry you in a heartbeat. I don’t know what it is about you, but I just can’t see myself with anyone else now.”

I smiled warmly, sincerely touched by her words. “I’ll get you a ring,” I blurted out, before I even really thought about it.

“Really?” she said hopefully, a little stunned as well.

I glanced away as I thought more about my answer.

Honestly, there really was no reason *not* to jump in all the way with her, minus the fact that I really wanted Serenity too. But that just wasn’t going to happen, not to mention on the off-chance that my older friend did actually want me too, even after finding out my secret somehow, Gabriella had already disclosed that she might be okay with sharing me.

Even if that wasn't preferable for her...

Granted, I doubted Serenity would be okay with that arrangement either, but why put something amazing on hold in hopes of something that was just never going to happen?

And I knew it was never going to happen, because I was just never going to risk telling her my secret.

Overall, I felt like there was a lot to consider, but my logical mind kept telling me to be realistic.

Realistically, Serenity didn't love me any more than a friend, even despite Gabriella's opinion on her reaction. And even if Serenity did, realistically I was never going to risk telling her about my secret. The consequence of her reacting badly was just too much of a nightmare for me.

And finally, I couldn't imagine ever finding anyone else as amazing as Gabriella. Not only was she drop-dead gorgeous, she also had a scent that was literally the most enticing thing I'd ever experienced in my entire life. But most importantly, through unfortunate circumstances, she'd found out about my secret and was more than happy to do whatever was needed to help me hide it.

So yeah, I didn't see any reason why I shouldn't just jump headfirst into the deep end with her.

I took a deep breath, meeting her vulnerable emerald gaze, my tone more confident.

"Yeah, I'll get you a ring," I repeated. "We can even go now, if you want. We still have about two hours before most places close." I gave her a warm look. "We can make it official today. I'll kneel right in the middle of the jewelry store, if you want, and propose to you right there. Because I want you, forever."

Her emerald eyes filled with tears, only for her to hug me tightly. "That sounds really romantic," she replied. She then sighed, nodding to herself. "Let's do it! I'm definitely that committed to you, so let's make it official."

I smiled briefly, only to frown. "Although, I might not be able to propose to you in the store," I realized. "And even buying the ring could be difficult, since I might end up looking like this."

She pulled away to focus up at me. "Oh, yeah, probably not. But that's okay." She paused. "Although, do you think you could at least handle the 'buying the ring' part? We can wait on the proposal details until we're alone. Like, you don't have to propose to me in public or anything."

I considered that for a moment. “Yeah, I should be fine doing that, so long as you behave. You’ll have to keep your excitement under control until after we leave the store.”

She grinned up at me. “I can do that. Promise!”

I returned the smile, secretly wishing things didn’t have to be so complicated with me. Maybe if I just had better control, though really I did have good control – it was only due to Gabriella that my control seemed to be lax.

Taking one last deep breath, I set my resolve, realizing this was sincerely what I wanted to do.

I was going to propose to her, eventually marry her, and fuck her every chance I got from now until forever, making me the luckiest guy alive.

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CHAPTER 11: PROPOSAL

After the repeated interruptions, I wanted to continue from where Gabriella and I had left off, about to fuck, but there was still the issue of her possibly being part-succubus to consider. And, unfortunately, when she tried calling her mom, the woman didn't pick up. Thus, when Gabriella asked what I wanted to do, I decided I'd just try to cool off and we could go with our plan to buy her a ring.

Once we were both dressed, with Gabriella wearing her long-sleeve shirt to hide the bruising that was still present on her body, I waited on her to gulp down a glass of water before speaking up again.

"Ready?"

"Yep!" she said cheerfully, only to quickly dial down her enthusiasm. "Sorry, I'll keep it under control. Maybe what we should do is go into the store together, but then after I give you a few ideas, I can wait in the car while you buy it. That way I don't get too excited in the store."

I considered that for a moment. "Yeah, that could work. And then, just try to keep your mind off it until we get back here."

Her face immediately lit up again in a wide grin. "Okay!" She then gave me an apologetic look.

I laughed, my tone playful. "Well, I guess it's up to me to do my best to keep my thoughts focused, since it's obvious that restraining yourself might be impossible."

Gabriella stuck her tongue out at me, only to look at me apologetically for the third time in a row.

I chuckled as she headed back to her small bedroom to grab what she needed for the night, just in case we decided not to come back here for some reason. Then, once she was ready, we headed back out to the car.

Once we were on the road, she brought up another subject, seeming hesitant.

"So just wondering..." Her voice trailed off.

I glanced at her, trying to understand her expression. “Yeah?” I prompted.

She grimaced. “Well, I was just thinking about that girl again – the one at school. What would you do if she did find out about your secret and blackmailed you? Like, tried to make you date her?”

I gave her a confused look for a second, before focusing on the road, wondering why this had come up. Either way, I supposed I knew my answer, but it would be nice to hear hers first. “Tell me what you would do, if someone blackmailed *you* with my secret, and then I’ll share what I’d do.”

She shrugged. “Oh, well I admit I would want to protect you, but I wouldn’t subject myself to *that*. Sorry if that’s not what you wanted to hear.”

I looked at her in shock. “You’re kidding, right? Not want to hear? Of course I wouldn’t want you to let yourself be blackmailed like that. My secret’s not *that* important, even if that meant I had the government after me or something. You’re much more valuable to me. So please don’t ever let anyone make you do something you don’t want to, just to protect me.”

“Same goes for you,” she agreed adamantly. “So then, what would you do?”

I sighed. “Obviously, I’d kidnap you and run away.”

She laughed. “I’d really like that,” she said cheerfully. “Being kidnapped by you,” she added. She then groaned. “Ugh, the things I want to say! But I can’t right now.”

I chuckled as well. “Yeah, if you’re wanting to tease me, then it should probably wait. We’re already here.”

Rather than go to the mall, where there would still be lots of people, especially since it was a Friday night, I’d driven to a nearby jewelry store, with us having passed it on the way to her apartment. There were only three cars in the parking lot, which was encouraging.

Once we parked, Gabriella unexpectedly turned off her enthusiasm entirely, and began acting like she was getting ready to participate in some kind of business transaction – her demeanor was very professional.

I tried not to laugh again as we got out, with me holding the entrance door open for her. “Oh, one rule first,” I whispered quickly, prompting her to pause. “Don’t worry about the prices. Just focus on what you like. Once

you've given me a few ideas, I'll worry about how much I want to spend. Deal?"

She nodded firmly, her face twitching as she tried to conceal her resurfacing excitement. "Deal," she replied simply.

Unsurprisingly, there were a few couples already in the store, so we were able to slip in and begin browsing without being approached by a salesperson right away. However, once an older man in a suit and tie with snow-white hair asked if we needed help, we decided to get Gabriella's finger sized and then continued looking around at the options.

It was fun watching her emerald eyes glisten at the various rings, even as her expression remained mostly neutral, but really what I was focused on was her scent and pulse, both of which seemed like more accurate indications of what she liked most, rather than what she said.

She definitely seemed to be a big fan of marquis diamonds, but she got really excited when we came across a ring that was full of tiny diamonds instead of one single large one. Granted, it did have a bigger diamond too, just not as big as some of the others, falling more in a medium range.

The band curled around the centerpiece, with a flat circular diamond residing in the middle, surrounded by a ton of smaller ones. I suspected that she loved the way it reflected the light, with all the tiny ones making it exceptionally flashy compared to most.

And when she didn't react as strongly to any of the others, I decided that was probably the one I would get her. However, I still waited for her to begin pointing out her top seven picks, thankful that the one I wanted to buy was one of her choices. It was also priced in about the middle range of the ones she liked, though that didn't matter so much to me.

"Does that give you a good idea?" she finally asked after she was finished pointing them all out.

I nodded, not wanting to tell her I already knew exactly which one I would get. "Yep. Ready to wait in the car?"

She did her best to hide a grin, before nodding and leaving the store. Needless to say, the man who'd asked if we needed help seemed a little perplexed, having been watching us the whole time, but stood straighter when I focused on him.

"I'm ready to buy one," I announced.

The older man's expression brightened. "Absolutely. And which one are we interested in?"

I pointed to the appropriate ring, prompting him to pull it out and then take it back to be resized to match Gabriella's finger. While that was done by someone else, he then came back out to discuss warranties and insurance plans, which I fully intended on getting. Only a few minutes later and another guy dressed more casually, wearing nice slacks and a button-up shirt, came out with the ring.

The older man in the suit took a second to examine it, before addressing me again.

"Alright then," he said pleasantly. "I just need your driver's license and your method of payment."

I pulled out my wallet and handed him both, using my debit card since I didn't own a credit card.

He walked over to a computer with both of them and began completing the transaction. I was glad he didn't say anything about my age, though I was pretty sure I could buy a ring even if I was still seventeen – I just wouldn't have been able to get married yet, at least not without my court-assigned guardian's permission, who was thankfully not in my life anymore.

However, just the thought made my heart sink briefly, as I thought of my housemate again, and how I would have really liked to marry her...

A part of me felt like taking this step was completely destroying the fantasy of being with Serenity, but I also knew I couldn't put my life on hold in hopes of something that wouldn't happen. And despite what Gabriella said about how my older friend reacted to finding out I wanted to get married, I also wasn't about to try to confront her about it and pull out the truth.

Because what if Gabriella was wrong about that?

It was just another way I might lose my best friend forever, and felt too risky, simply because the consequence of her reacting poorly was too massive of a loss for me to handle.

It would almost be like someone giving you the choice to inherit millions, or die instead. If the decision was anything over ninety percent in favor of the money, then I suspected most people would do it, but no way in hell would I ever risk my life for money, even if the possibility of dying was less than one percent.

Because what about when you got unlucky and ended up on the wrong side of the gamble?

When the guy was done, he brought over my cards and ring with a big grin on his face. “There you are,” he said, handing me my cards first, and then putting the boxed ring in a bag with the insurance documentation and receipt. “I’m sure she’ll love it. Very happy for you both. She seems like a very nice young woman.”

“Thanks,” I replied sincerely, feeling my chest gray slightly just at the thought of the significance of this purchase.

When I got back outside, I discovered Gabriella waiting with a neutral expression, but it was obvious from her scent that she was barely containing her excitement. She didn’t say anything when I slid into the driver’s seat and closed the door, but her body was radiating bursts of pure joy and her heart was racing.

I grinned as I slipped the bag between my seat and the door, far out of her reach, prompting her to look slightly disappointed. Her reaction made me laugh as I put the car in gear and began backing up.

“What?” I said playfully. “Did you really think I’d let you see it yet?”

“I’m trying to be good, I promise,” she said just as playfully.

I grinned again as we began driving down the road. My mind was racing now, wondering how I might make this more romantic, since I fully intended on proposing once we got back to her apartment. Honestly, I felt kind of lame for asking her there, instead of someplace more special, but knew there weren’t many options that didn’t involve the possibility of me being seen.

Plus, there was always the ‘after the proposal’ part, which I was trying really hard not to think about.

Although, Gabriella still needed to get ahold of her mom...

Ah, fuck it.

We’d already had sex twice, and I was clearly fine. Not to mention, obviously Gabriella’s parents had sex too, even if her mom also fucked other men, so it must be okay.

Plus, even if Gabriella was truly part-succubus, she was only a sixteenth, compared to her mom being an eighth. That was actually a pretty significant difference. Not to mention, Gabriella said that her mom acted like she expected her daughter to be really into sex like she was, and yet that obviously wasn’t the case.

Or, at the very least, she wasn’t crazy about fucking every man she saw. So yeah, fuck it.

We could screw after I proposed, and worry about those details later.

Unexpectedly, I caught sight of a small grocery store and decided to pull in, knowing there were certain types of fruit in season at this time of the year, making them more prolific for purchase.

Gabriella gave me a confused look. “Am I going in?” she wondered.

“Nope,” I said simply. “I can’t surprise you if you come in with me.” I grinned again. “I’ll leave the keys with you, but I’m putting the ring in the trunk. Promise to be good?” I teased.

She nodded eagerly, her red hair bouncing slightly, her emerald eyes sparkling again. “I promise!”

After climbing out and putting the ring in the trunk, I headed inside to search for ideas, with it only taking me a few minutes to formulate a more solid plan. I knew exactly what I wanted to get, and within another ten minutes, I was checking out. I then stored my bags in the trunk, to ensure she didn’t catch a glimpse of what I had, and climbed back into the driver’s seat to return to her place.

I wasn’t sure she could be any more excited, but it was obvious she was thrilled. It was also clear she wanted to ask for hints, but overall she kept her promise to be good.

Parking near her apartment entrance, I instructed her to go wait in her room, so I could slip everything inside and get things prepared while she waited.

Slipping into the kitchen with everything, I began working to prepare my surprise for her.

It was nice to finally be back behind a locked door and out of sight, allowing me to finally relax and speak more freely.

“Are you excited?” I teased from the kitchen, listening to her change her clothing in the other room.

“Umm, yeah!” she called out. “You have no idea!”

“Oh, I think I do, actually,” I replied playfully. “Heightened senses, remember?”

She paused, before responding, her tone suddenly hesitant as she changed subjects. “Hey, just wondering, but what’s your favorite color?”

I grinned, opening up a package of chocolate, now that the water on the stove was beginning to boil, another pot set within it. “Do you mean my favorite color, in general? Or my favorite color *on you*?”

She giggled. “How about both?”

I thought about it for a few seconds, breaking up the chocolate into smaller chunks so it would melt faster. Focusing on her appliances, which were all black, including the stove top, microwave, and refrigerator, I wondered how the color would look on her, suspecting it would really make her fair skin, red hair, and emerald eyes pop.

“Well, my favorite color is red, ironically.” I paused. “Although, I don’t think I would prefer you in red clothing. Honestly, I’m not sure what I would like most on you, since I’ve only seen a couple of outfits so far. Black would always be a safe choice, but I’m sure there are other colors I would like too.” I paused again. “The purple pajamas you wore before were really nice.”

“Why ironically?” Gabriella wondered, referring to my comment about my favorite color.

I pursed my lips as I stared down at the chocolate, suddenly realizing why I’d said that. It was because of my recent discovery that I might need to drink blood in certain situations. However, I didn’t want to ruin the mood by bringing the subject up, so I decided on a different excuse – one that wasn’t technically a lie.

“Well, because your hair is red. Like, actually red, instead of orange like a lot of redheads.” I sighed. “That might be one of the reasons I find you so attractive, other than the fact that you’re drop-dead gorgeous and smell intoxicating.”

She laughed at that, though her heart began racing at the same time. It made me wonder if I’d embarrassed her a little, in a good way.

She cleared her throat after a second. “Well, I think I have something you’ll like me in. I don’t have a ton of sexy clothing, but the few things I do have are pretty seductive in my humble opinion.” She paused, her tone playful again. “Kai, what color are you right now?”

I scoffed, trying to resist the urge to find out what she considered to be seductive.

“Umm, I think you know.”

“Gray, white, and gold?” she teased.

“Yep,” I replied. “Now be good, so I can focus on what I’m doing.”

“Oh, alright,” she said with mock disappointment.

I didn’t want to make her wait too long, so once over half of the chocolate was melted, I began dipping fourteen strawberries in, one at a time. The scent of chocolate was already thick in the air, so I knew

Gabriella at least had a hint of what was coming. I then took the roses I'd purchased and cut the stems on three of them, so that they were only a few inches long.

I then arranged the fourteen cooling strawberries into a heart-shape on a white plate, placing one of the roses in the center, with the other two going on the sides. It was a lot to fit on one plate, but I was able to make it work.

For the other roses, I grabbed them and carefully plucked all the pedals, lying some on the table and some on the floor in the short hallway, making her a figurative trail of roses to follow. Once I had everything set up, I looked it all over, before deciding it was good.

Grabbing the boxed ring from the bag I'd put on the couch, I opened it to take a peek, and then held it behind my back.

"Okay, ready!"

My heart was racing again as I heard her get up from the edge of the bed.

Gabriella eagerly stepped out of her bedroom to find me waiting, dressed in a sky-blue silk nighty, with black lacing around the edges. Which did little to hide her overflowing chest. Thin straps were all that covered her shoulders, and the material was some of the shiniest I'd ever seen. An elastic band was sown into the fabric, keeping the silk tight underneath her chest, allowing it to show off just how skinny she was.

The whole thing was short enough that I could just barely see a pair of purple silk underwear, her legs being completely exposed.

My thoughts instantly scattered, my breath caught in my chest at the sight of her, my heart racing, pounding in my throat.

The first thing she noticed was the flower pedals on the floor, but she stayed where she was, allowing me to get over my obvious shock.

"Do you like it?" she asked with surprising timidity, her cheeks rosy.

All I could do was nod like an idiot. Speaking didn't feel like an option at the moment.

However, after a few seconds, I managed a response with a small laugh. "You almost made me forget that I'm supposed to be the one surprising you, not the other way around."

She grinned. "Hmm, maybe I should have worn a robe and surprised you afterward."

"Too late now!" I retorted playfully, squaring my shoulders, the ring still behind my back. "Are you ready to see what I have for you?"

“Yes! It smells amazing!”

She dashed across the short distance and gasped when she saw the strawberries and roses on the table, only to move like she was about to jump on me in her excitement.

I quickly held up a finger to stop her, getting down on one knee.

She immediately clasped her hands in front of her chest, forcing her heavy tits to slip into the crook of her arms slightly, her nipples poking through the shiny blue fabric.

I tried to keep my gaze on her emerald eyes as I looked up at her, pulling the ring box forward to reveal the one she’d reacted the strongest to in the store.

Her green eyes immediately widened, a small gasp escaping her full lips.

“Gabriella, will you marry me and be mine forever?”

“Absolutely yes!” she squealed excitedly, rushing forward to jump on me.

I could have probably remained upright, but didn’t want her to get hurt, so I instead allowed her momentum to roll me backwards, resulting in her lying on top of me on the floor.

“I still need to put it on your finger, silly!” I teased.

“Oh! Sorry!” She gave me an apologetic pout, pushing up a little and holding out her left hand between us.

I carefully pulled the ring out of the box and slipped it on, unsurprised that it was a perfect fit. She gazed at it for a few seconds, twisting her hand slightly to catch the light.

“Oh, Kai,” she whispered with sudden desire in her voice. “I love it so much!” Without hesitation, she leaned on me more fully as she grabbed my face in her hands, planting a passionate kiss on my lips, her tits squished against my chest.

I figured the sex part would come later, after we had at least enjoyed the strawberries, but apparently not. And she didn’t even bring up the succubus issue as she broke the kiss to begin yanking my clothes off.

“I need you in me,” she said seductively, once I had my pants off. However, instead of mounting me right away, she instead stood up, making a big show of slipping her purple silk panties off. She then moved closer, stepping on either side of my legs, my face suddenly level with her hot

pussy. “But first,” she continued, inching just a little closer. “Suck on my clit.”

I began trembling as she grabbed a fistful of my white hair with one hand while lifting up her silk nighty a little with the other, only to ease my face between her thighs, tilting my head back a little as she pressed against me firmly.

Suddenly I had a mouthful of pussy, sucking in deep breaths through my nose, overwhelmed by her maple syrup-like scent as I tried to focus on her fleshy lips against mine.

“Suck,” she demanded, her tone thick with lust.

I did as she asked, pulling her pussy lips into my mouth and sucking. I wanted to take some initiative and do other things, but I knew she preferred to give the orders.

“Do you want to touch me?” she whispered, grabbing another fistful of my hair with her other hand.

Of course, I couldn’t respond easily, so I just made a noise in response.

“Feel my butt,” she demanded.

I reached up to squish her toned ass, overwhelmed by how smooth her skin was. She began moaning as it sounded like she reached up to grab her own heavy tits, her fingers rubbing against the silk gently as if she were teasing her own nipples.

“I want to cum in your face,” she moaned. “Would you like that?” she wondered, only to moan again. “Want your mistress to cum in your face?”

I continued to suck on her lips as I managed an affirmative sound in my throat, my face covered by the bottom of her silk nighty.

“Then stick your finger up my ass,” she said seductively. “And I’ll reward you by cumming in your face.”

I felt in her crack with my right hand, beginning to press on her puckered hole, feeling it tense underneath my touch, before slowly relaxing.

“That’s right baby, shove it in. And move your mouth higher to suck my clit, so you can shove another finger in my pussy,” she added.

As I began easing my finger into her asshole, feeling it tense again around me, I reached between her thighs with my left hand and felt underneath my chin for her wet snatch. She was more soaked and loose than I realized, allowing me to easily slip two fingers between her lips while I focused on sucking her swollen clit.

“*Uh !*” she exclaimed the moment I resumed sucking. “Oh fuck yes! Oh fuck, yes !”

My head began swimming as my hand and chin became soaked, her asshole pulsing around the tip of my finger as she orgasmed. However, instead of pulling away, she gripped my hair more firmly, beginning to grind her clit against my mouth as she started moaning louder.

“Uh, uh, uh, *uh !*” she exclaimed cumming a second time in a row, her legs trembling now.

I pulled my fingers out of her pussy and ass as she began lowering herself, aiming with surprising accuracy straight for my cock. I gasped as my head sank inside her, all my muscles tensing as she wrapped her arms around my shoulders and curled into me.

“Hold still,” she whispered as she tried to catch her breath against my shoulder. “Fuck, that was amazing,” she added after a second.

I couldn’t respond. My cock was throbbing inside her hot snatch, and I felt like I was already going to explode any moment. She then sucked in a deep breath, and pulled away, only to immediately go for my lips, kissing me passionately even though my face was covered in her juices.

Her tongue slipped into my mouth as she moaned again, pressing her hard nipples into my bare chest, her heavy silk-covered tits squished between us.

She pulled away then, meeting my gaze, her expression still full of lust. “Ready to cum?” she wondered innocently.

I nodded, trying to focus on catching my own breath.

Gabriella just barely pushed up a little, only to slide back down, making my cock tense. “Sure you want to cum?” she wondered, only to incrementally rise up again.

“Yes mistress,” I pleaded, suspecting I needed to do our earlier roleplay if I wanted her to fuck me.

“Hmm, I don’t know if you’re ready,” she teased, slowly moving up and down again. “Maybe we need to experiment a little to see if there are other ways I can make you feel good.”

“L-Like what, mistress?” I asked breathlessly.

She slowly moved her hands to my shoulders, giving them a gentle squeeze, before beginning to feel my chest, only to start rubbing my nipples.

I gasped from the sensation, surprised it felt so good, and then jerked forward slightly when she pinched me firmly.

“That’s more like it,” she purred, beginning to rub my nipples between her thumb and fingers. “A lot of people think only women have sensitive nipples, but I’ve had a few friends who didn’t think it felt good at all, whereas they had boyfriends who loved it.”

“H-How do you know that?” I wondered, hoping I wasn’t ruining the mood by asking.

“Oh,” she replied, still playing with my nipples. “Because they told me. I did mention that they told me a lot of stuff, including giving me tips that I didn’t appreciate at the time.”

I nodded, trying to keep my hips from thrusting upwards into her hot snatch.

She finally pushed up again then, rising higher this time, before sinking back down while tugging on me. “Now, I don’t want you to move,” she whispered. “And try not to cum. If it happens, I want it to be because you couldn’t hold it back.”

I whimpered as she pulled up again, sincerely becoming overwhelmed with pleasure as she teased my nipples while falling into a steady rhythm of riding my cock.

By the time that I was reaching my climax, I felt like I was in my own separate world, with just me and her, and no one else in the universe.

“Fuck!” I exclaimed as I shot my load inside her.

She immediately stopped pinching me and pulled my head against her upper chest. “That’s right baby. Fill me up with your juicy cum.” She moaned, reaching down with one hand to begin rubbing her clit. “You were such a good boy for your mistress. And now I can’t wait to suck on your cock,” she whispered. “I want to lick you clean,” she added, only to gasp before her body jerked forward into me.

“Wow, three times in a row?” I commented playfully.

She groaned, her entire body tense for a moment before she relaxed. “Yeah,” she gasped. “I’ve heard it was possible, but never thought it would happen to me.” She took a deep breath, readjusting her head on my shoulder even as my cock throbbed slightly inside of her, almost ready to go for my own second time. “But after I got there, I was just right there on the edge again. And then again.” She sighed, holding me tightly while I supported our weight on my hands behind me, leaning back a little.

We were both quiet for a few minutes, listening to each other breathe, before she pulled away a little and began leaning over to the side. Unsure of what she was doing, I just went with her, pulling out as I helped her lay down.

“You okay?” I asked seriously.

She nodded, a content smile on her face. “Yeah, I just didn’t want your cum to leak out onto my carpet.” She then got a mischievous look in her eyes. “Now, ready for strawberries? I want you to grab me one, stick it in my pussy to get your cum on it, and then feed it to me.”

My eyes widened in shock. “Umm...”

She burst out into a fit of giggles. “I’m just kidding, though your reaction was priceless!” She chuckled some more, and then sighed. “How about you grab me some toilet paper instead, and then I’ll get my panties back on and we can have our little snack.”

I smirked. “Sure,” I agreed, getting up to do just that. I cleaned myself off too while I was in the bathroom, before grabbing her the toilet paper and returning.

“Kai,” she whispered as she wiped herself up, keeping her gaze on mine. “I am so in love with you.”

“I love you too, Gabriella,” I replied sincerely, feeling like it was the most I’d ever meant it in the most literal sense possible. “And now you’re mine,” I added with a grin. “Forever.”

“Forever,” she agreed with a smirk of her own.

CHAPTER 12: PREDICAMENT

After we ate some of the chocolate covered strawberries, which were even tastier than I was expecting, Gabriella decided she wanted me to carry her to the bed as a sort of symbolic ‘crossing the threshold’ for our engagement. At which point, we ended up fucking again, her riding my cock on top, with me being allowed to fuck her without rules or restraint.

Once she got there, I wrapped my arms around her and held her tight while I kept shoving myself in her pulsing pussy until I was cumming too.

Now, she was lying on my chest, one of my arms holding her firmly while my other hand gently felt the smooth silk of her sky-blue nighty on her back. My heart was still racing even though we weren’t moving around anymore, though I ignored it, enjoying our postcoital embrace.

Gabriella had her left hand on my chest too, eyeing her brand-new engagement ring with a small smile playing on her full lips.

It’d been really nice being able to touch her *whenever* I wanted to touch, *wherever* I wanted to touch, allowing my passion to guide me, but I definitely liked it both ways, including when we played by her rules.

She finally broke the silence after a long handful of minutes.

“That was really amazing,” she said softly.

“*You* were amazing,” I agreed with a smirk. Then, after a pause, I laughed.

“What?” she asked playfully, looking up at me, her emerald eyes endearing, her bright red hair a little disheveled.

I sighed. “I still just can’t believe how different my life was only yesterday morning. I went from being a virgin to fucking you at least four times in one day. Not to mention the whole engagement thing.” I sighed again, squeezing her gently. “I had no hope of ever being able to have a relationship with anyone, and here I am suddenly *engaged*. It’s hard to wrap my head around. Everything has happened so fast with us.”

She grinned at me. "Are you happy about it?"

I focused down at her. "Of course!" I said sincerely. "This is the best day of my life by far."

"Me too," she agreed quietly, beginning to run her fingertips along my dark gray chest. She then sighed. "I guess we should get back to your place though. Serenity will probably start worrying about us if we are too late."

"Do you want to finish the strawberries here?" I wondered, since we still had a few.

"Nah, we can eat them on the way." She paused. "If that's alright?" she added, looking up to see my expression.

I inclined my chin. "Yeah, that's sounds fine. We should probably rinse off in the shower too, and I also want to clean up your kitchen a little before we go. Don't want to be a messy houseguest," I teased.

Gabriella grinned at me. "I loved it, by the way. The chocolate strawberries and roses. It was simple, yet really romantic."

"I'm glad," I said cheerfully. "Maybe I can try to calm down enough, so you can get a picture."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, her emerald eyes widening. "Absolutely! I can place my phone on the kitchen counter with a timer on it. That's where the lighting is best, and the beige wall would make a good background. You can hold what's left of the plate of strawberries while I show off my ring." Her grin widened. "How's that sound?"

"Perfect," I agreed, returning the smile.

She scooted up my torso then to reach my lips, planting a passionate kiss before climbing off to head to the bathroom. I knew I was going to need some time to cool off, so I opted to focus on cleaning up the kitchen, still naked, before grabbing my clothes and slipping off to the bathroom when she went into her bedroom to get dressed.

I noticed in the corner of my eye that her hair was still dry, though combed out, indicating she must have just washed off from the chest down, or possibly even just the waist down. I decided to follow suit, since this was going to be my second shower of the day anyway.

Then, after drying off and dressing, I took a few deep breaths prior to finding her waiting in the kitchen, the plate of strawberries rearranged to create a smaller heart with what remained. Thankfully, it wasn't too difficult to snap a picture, since all I had to do was stand there with a grin on my face while she did everything else. I had my arm out like I was hugging her,

but she always waited until right before it was going to snap the shot to lean into me.

After a handful of pictures of her trying out various poses with her ring, she decided on a couple and deleted the rest.

“Going to send these to my email for now,” she commented. “I don’t want people thinking I’m crazy, so I’ll wait to put this on any of my social media accounts.”

I nodded. “Probably a good idea,” I agreed. “Not sure anyone would think we were sane for moving so fast.”

She glanced up at me, as if an idea just hit her. “You don’t have anything, do you?”

I shook my head, assuming she was referring to social media. “Nope. I mean, I don’t really have any friends, so no point.”

She nodded. “That’s fine. Just wanted to add you in case you did. Probably good that you don’t, because I’d likely end up stalking all the girls you were friends with.”

I frowned at that, only because it made me think of the reverse. “Not that I mind, but do you have a lot of guy friends online?”

She shook her head. “Nah, not really. Certainly no one I was ever interested in. A lot of them are either a friend’s boyfriend, or possibly more of a family friend I know from our parents being friends.” She paused. “Granted, there aren’t many of either of those on there. Like, the guys who used to be a boyfriend to one of my friends, I always unfriended the guy when the two broke up.” She paused again, lowering her voice. “Usually because the ex-boyfriend began trying to chat me up after they separated.”

I nodded, not really that surprised, given how hot she was.

“Ready to go?” I wondered.

She nodded, turning to grab a plastic container to stash the strawberries. Then, we were heading out the door, with her locking it behind us.

Unsurprisingly, it was already after dark, despite what Gabriella promised my housemate, so I wasn’t too shocked when Serenity called Gabriella’s phone just as we were pulling out of her apartment complex.

“Hey, you guys doing alright?” she asked, her tone sounding normal despite her earlier reaction at dinner.

Gabriella nodded, prompting me to smirk, considering my older friend couldn’t see the gesture. “Yeah, we’re actually on our way back now,” she said reassuringly. She then glanced over at me, lowering her voice as she

pulled the phone away. "Should I tell her?" she asked me quietly. "Might be better if she finds out now."

I considered that for a moment, knowing I hadn't really thought that far ahead. Part of me wanted to test out Gabriella's theory, that Serenity might really have feelings for me, but the other part of me felt ridiculous for even hoping for it.

Not to mention, even if she did, then what?

As I'd considered many times over now, there was no way I was going to risk telling her my secret – that was just an objective fact that wasn't going to change.

However, I also didn't want Serenity to end up reacting negatively while I was away either, preferring to at least be in the house to keep an eye on her, in case she took the news *really* bad. Thus, I shook my head.

"Let's wait," I whispered hesitantly.

Gabriella pursed her lips, before nodding. "Sorry we're running late," she continued to Serenity. "We actually made a trip to a few stores. Needed to grab a few things," she hedged. "But we're on the road now." She then paused. "How was your date with Nick?" she added.

"Date?" Serenity repeated, sounding surprised. "Oh, umm, I wouldn't really consider it a date. I just met the guy today, and we mostly talked about work." She paused. "But it was fine. He's a really interesting guy, but I'm not sure if I'd want to date him."

"Oh, sorry to assume," Gabriella said apologetically.

I was glancing at her from the corner of my eye, wondering why she was even bringing the subject up, especially after what we'd talked about earlier, but she didn't look at me.

"No, it's fine," Serenity replied. "I mean, I did bring him over for dinner, so I guess it probably looked like that." She paused. "I was just kind of interested in knowing what was going on with the case and such," she added hesitantly.

"Oh," Gabriella said with wide eyes, suddenly looking up at me. Her brow then furrowed. "Right, well, we should be home in the next twenty minutes, so see you then."

"Sure," she agreed. "See you both soon."

Once they hung up, I glanced at Gabriella questioningly.

However, she was completely silent, her phone and hands tucked between her thighs as she stared straight ahead.

I finally cleared my throat. "So, what was that about?" I wondered.

She looked up at me. "Which part?"

"Asking about the date," I clarified.

"Oh." She looked away.

"Gabriella," I prompted when she didn't respond.

She sighed heavily. "Well, after we talked about how she might actually have feelings for you too, I started doubting it when I considered the fact that she wanted to go on an extended date with that guy." She sighed, glancing up at me. "But it kind of sounds like she was much more interested in finding out information on the case. Possibly wanting to find out how close they are to catching the guy."

"But why would she want to do that?" I asked seriously, trying to think of my own reasons, since I knew her best.

Gabriella shrugged. "Honestly? Possibly because she doesn't want him to get caught either. After all, the guy saved my life, so she's probably hoping to discover they aren't close."

I nodded as I considered that.

"Unless..." Her voice trailed off.

"Unless what?" I asked in a flat tone, feeling concerned by how she said that.

She sighed, focusing on me more intently, replying with a question. "You're confident Serenity doesn't know your secret, right?"

I looked at her in shock. "No, I'm pretty sure she doesn't." My brow then furrowed, thinking back to earlier that morning when my hair almost turned white. My housemate had seemed legitimately shocked that it looked a little gray for a second, so I felt confident she had no idea. "But why do you ask?" I wondered.

Gabriella focused on the road. "Well, maybe she invited him over specifically because she's trying to protect you."

I was shocked again. "How so?" I said in disbelief. "Because all I did was raise suspicion."

She shook her head. "I mean, if she thought you might be the one involved, but doesn't know your actual secret, then maybe she figured it would *remove* suspicion. To show you are a normal guy, or maybe she was just focused on seeing if there would be suspicion in the first place. In which case, she might have uprooted you both and run away if needed."

I shook my head, feeling like that was just too ridiculous to be true.

“Probably not though,” Gabriella reconsidered. “Now that I’m thinking about her reactions at dinner when Nick was telling his story about you, she reacted more like she didn’t know. So then, it’s probably just because she doesn’t want them to catch the guy who saved me, prompting her to be extra curious about how it was progressing.”

I nodded, agreeing that might be the case, and knowing that made the most sense at the moment. Especially if she didn’t invite him over as a date, or have coffee with him for a date either.

“Although...” Gabriella continued hesitantly.

“Although what?”

She frowned. “It’s just, there was one point when that guy was initially telling us about the first case, about when you were younger, I saw the look Serenity gave you. The moment he said ‘eight or nine years old,’ and added that the Impaler was probably your age, it was like she suddenly knew he was talking about you.”

Fuck.

I didn’t respond, having no idea what to say. Or if her assumption was even true.

She continued. “Would there be any reason why she would know?” my new fiancé prompted.

I sighed heavily. “I...” I took a deep breath. “I was really depressed afterward. For months. Everyone knew something was wrong with me. My parents. Her parents. And of course she knew too.” I paused. “I didn’t tell them anything, but maybe...”

“Did they take you to see a therapist or anything?” Gabriella asked gently, sounding more like she was just curious.

I shook my head. “No. I mean, why would they? Yeah, I was acting strange, but I didn’t say anything odd. And even if I did see a therapist, then I would have just made an effort to act more like my normal self.”

She simply nodded, and we both fell silent for a few minutes, before she spoke up again hesitantly.

“But what if she does know, Kai?” she whispered. “Or what if she figured it out from Nick’s story? What then? Even if she doesn’t believe his description of the guy, she might now suspect it’s really you who saved me.”

I glanced at her, suddenly wondering if she was right. Of course, my housemate wouldn’t know for sure even if she did suspect, but she might

have made connections between Nick's story and my own life. After all, I'd been nine years old when I unexpectedly became extremely depressed – a depression that lasted for months with seemingly no cause.

Doubtful that was something she'd ever forgotten about.

And it was also possible she'd made the connection between the victims and the fact that all the murders had been serial killer cases she'd been working on. All cases that resulted in her being extremely upset, compared to the others she was assigned.

But as Gabriella said, what then?

If my lifelong friend knew my secret now – actually believed Nick's description of the perp – and yet still seemed fine with me, then what?

"I don't know," I admitted quietly.

"I'm going to talk to her," Gabriella blurted out, prompting me to look at her in shock. She quickly clarified when she saw my alarmed reaction. "Like, I'm not going to tell her your secret," she reassured me. "But I'm going to figure out what she knows."

"And what would be the point of that?" I asked seriously.

Gabriella was hesitant. "Kai, if she has feelings for you...and if she already knows your secret..." Her voice trailed off, before she took a deep breath. "Look, I'm not an idiot. I know I'm hot, and I know you like me, but you've only really known me for a day. You've loved Serenity for much longer, and I'm not stupid. I know that if it came down to it, you'd probably choose her over me."

I didn't know how to respond.

What could I even say to that?

Because denying it felt like a lie. Or rather, I felt like I wouldn't even know how to choose at this point. Then again, I could probably survive losing Gabriella, whereas I felt like I couldn't survive losing Serenity, even though losing either would be horrible.

"So," she continued quietly. "I'd rather see if we can work something out now, instead of you leaving me years down the road."

I again couldn't believe what I was hearing. "But why would you even want to do that?" I asked quietly. "I can't imagine that most women would want to..." My voice trailed off.

She sighed heavily, her gaze focused out the window. "Because I feel addicted to you. And because I don't want to lose you." She paused, her tone shifting. "You're right, most women wouldn't put up with it. But I'm

not most women. I've finally found the guy I want to be with, and it might be different if it was another girl, but it's Serenity." She sighed. "I guess I also don't want to lose her friendship either," she added. "Because this feels very much like my friend telling me about the guy she's crushed on for years, and then I went behind her back and stole him from her."

Nothing about this conversation was making me horny, or otherwise affecting my appearance. Because it felt like she was speaking about impossibilities, and even the idea that she was serious about possibly sharing me with my lifelong friend felt surreal. Like, it was as if I was in some kind of alternate reality, where what would normally be every guy's dream was coming true.

I had a girlfriend that wanted to share me?

Or was at least okay with the idea?

I mean, was she seriously *that* addicted to me? How was that even possible?

Or was she bisexual or something?

My eyes widened at that possibility, suddenly wondering if she wasn't telling me something about herself.

Gabriella continued before I could speak. "So, let me talk to her and at least try to figure out how she feels about you." She sighed. "And then, we can go from there. But I promise I won't tell her your secret, unless you approve first."

I nodded slowly, my thoughts now elsewhere as I glanced at her from the corner of my vision. "Hey," I finally managed, only to choke up, suddenly really nervous.

"What's wrong?" she wondered, her tone still a little somber from our conversation.

I took a deep breath. "C-Can I ask you a question?" I stammered. "One that might be offensive?"

She looked at me in confusion, her expression reassuring. "Of course, Kai. Anything. You won't offend me."

I grimaced, hoping that was really the case. "Umm," I delayed, before gritting my teeth and just getting it over with. "You don't, like...I mean, you aren't like, interested in women too, are you?" I finally said.

Instantly, I knew from her scent she was embarrassed as hell. I glanced at her to see that her face was flushed red, all her muscles tense, her heart racing.

“I’m...” she tried, only to hesitate. “I’m not sure,” she whispered, focusing straight ahead at the road.

I sighed heavily, feeling a little less stressed now, mainly because her own tension made me tense, but having her admit my random suspicion made me feel less crazy for even wondering. It also helped everything make a lot more sense, making all this feel less like some kind of test or trap.

“Okay,” I replied simply, relaxing more fully.

She looked at me in surprise. “That doesn’t bother you?” she asked seriously, only to clarify. “I mean, obviously most guys would be thrilled to learn about that, but it doesn’t bother you that I have a bit of a crush on Serenity?”

My hair instantly flashed white, mostly alarmed by the unprompted confession.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” she replied quickly, glancing around to see it was far too dark for anyone to notice my appearance anyway. She then lowered her voice. “But I guess that means you’re okay with it,” she added somberly, like she’d just admitted to a grave sin.

I took a deep breath, trying to force my body to relax again. “Umm, it’s just that everything makes a little more sense, is all,” I admitted. “But then, that makes me wonder if adding women to the equation changes your answers from last night...” I paused. “About your experience with other people,” I added quietly.

“What?” she said in alarm. “No, of course not, Kai. I didn’t lie to you.” She then hesitated. “I mean, okay, yes, I did let the lesbian friend I mentioned kiss me once, but it was hardly anything romantic or sexual. It was more me just wanting to know what it was like.” She examined my expression for a moment before continuing. “And with that one boyfriend I had, we only ever kissed. Nothing more. All of that is still true.” She grimaced. “I’ve never actually dated a girl or anything. I just, sort of...” Her voice trailed off.

“Like my best friend,” I finished for her.

She sighed. “Well, obviously I like you a lot more. But Serenity is really sweet, and we have a lot in common, and of course she’s really pretty, and...” She sighed again. “I just kind of fell for her, I guess. At least, before I met you for the first time.”

I nodded, trying to keep my thoughts reserved since it still felt like she was talking about something impossible. Because I knew Serenity really

well, and I just couldn't imagine her being into anything at all deviant. No way in hell was Serenity interested in me as anything other than the young friend she grew up with, and no way in hell was she interested in women at all.

Certainly, Serenity had never had a serious boyfriend, assuming the few guys she dated before our parents passed away weren't serious, but she'd also never shown any signs in even considering a date with a girl either.

As far as I knew.

I mean, what exactly was a date anyway?

Really, it was subjective, since going out to eat could be a date, depending on whether or not the two people were interested in each other. So then, technically my housemate having lunch with Gabriella almost every day could be a 'date,' but I doubted that was the case.

Even just now, Serenity denied that going out for coffee with Nick was a date, or even bringing him home for dinner, so she likely didn't perceive herself as being someone who had gone on a date in a long time.

Either way, if she was actually into anything deviant, she'd never shown any signs of it, which would mean she'd have successfully kept her own huge secret.

Even though I was sure that wasn't the case.

Taking a deep breath, I focused more intently on the road, just trying to process everything. I wasn't going to ask Gabriella to *not* talk to Serenity, to figure out what she knew, but I also knew I'd be a fool to hope anything would come of it. Thus, instead I tried to focus on the more practical things to consider for the evening, like our sleeping arrangements.

"We need to figure out what we're going to do about the bed situation," I commented. "Like, it'll be too risky to try sleeping together. Not that Serenity would do it, but if she barged in on us, or even just came downstairs if we were on the couch, then she'd find me transformed."

Gabriella nodded with a pout. "Yeah, I hadn't thought about that, but I guess you're right." She sighed. "That really sucks. I really want to sleep with you, and not for a romantic reason."

I assumed she meant she wanted to feel safe. "I'm sorry," I whispered, sincerely feeling bad. "I wish I had more control."

She shook her head, looking up at me affectionately. "No, it's not your fault. I'm glad I make you lose control, because then I might have never

found out your secret either.” She paused, only for her face to flush bright red, her heart unexpectedly racing again.

“What is it?” I asked in concern, smelling her embarrassment as well.

“W-Well,” she stammered. “I was kind of awake by the time Serenity came downstairs this morning, and I heard her offer to...” She gulped.

“Well, to let me sleep with her...” Her words began coming out in a rush.

“Which, I normally wouldn’t be embarrassed about at all, even if I did have a bit of a thing for her, but just after telling you about it, my feelings suddenly feel more real than they did before, and it just feels really embarrassing knowing what you might be thinking and...” Her voice trailed off, only for her to calm down as she looked at me in confusion, probably realizing I hadn’t transformed. “Or maybe I’m overreacting?” she wondered hesitantly.

I shrugged. “I mean, I guess it’s just because the whole idea doesn’t seem realistic, so my mind automatically wants to write it off as an impossibility.” I paused. “And honestly, I don’t want you to be scared, so I have no problem with that, if you want to sleep in her room, instead of alone in mine.” I was then pensive. “Granted, if you do that, then I’ll probably sleep in my room, just in case I do start getting weird ideas.” I frowned. “I’d rather be behind a locked door if I’m going to be transformed. And of course my friend won’t try unlocking it if you’re not with me.”

Gabriella nodded slowly. “Okay, then that’s what I’ll do then. Hopefully she’ll be okay with that, because I really don’t want to sleep alone.”

I ran my fingers through my hair. “I’m sure she’d prefer that over us sleeping together. Or at least, over the possibility of it happening.” I glanced at her. “Obviously, if you’re in the room with her, then she knows where you’re at.”

She nodded, only to unexpectedly grin. “See ?” she said excitedly. “You really are getting more used to me! You couldn’t even talk about this stuff before, and here you are looking completely normal.”

“Huh,” I commented, realizing she was right. “I guess I am.” I then frowned. “But please still be careful, especially around Serenity tonight.”

Gabriella nodded confidently. “I will. I made a promise to keep your secret, and I fully intend on keeping that promise.” She then did a salute at chest level. “Scout’s honor.”

I scoffed, shaking my head. “What in the heck was that?”

She grinned. "I don't know, but it was cute, wasn't it?" she said playfully.

"Sure," I offered, grinning when she pouted and stuck her tongue out at me. "Okay, now let's be serious though. You're making my chest start to gray."

"Oh, okay," she said with mock disappointment. She then frowned for real. "Sorry, by the way. About admitting at dinner that we had sex. I just wanted to get him off your trail, and couldn't think of anything else that would be believable."

"It's okay," I replied. "It was really awkward, but it was a smart decision, since he was convinced we were hiding something."

"Sorry about that too," she replied quietly. "I felt like I really screwed up when he pointed it out."

I shook my head. "No, I think you did fine. More than fine, I thought you were pretty amazing. He was the problem, not you. I don't think a normal person would read so much into our glances and other nonverbal body language. Serenity certainly didn't seem to notice, and she's a pretty observant person." I sighed. "And, at the very least, you handled yourself a lot better than I did."

Gabriella nodded slowly. "Thanks. And you did fine too, but I think you're right. He was just really observant. Plus, based on what he told you when you went outside, it sounded like he already thought it might be you to begin with."

"Right," I agreed. "So nothing to be sorry about."

She smiled warmly at me, and then focused straight ahead again.

"Also," I continued, prompting her to return her gaze to me. "Now that I think about it, I think he was testing me from the moment we met. When he was helping with the deer, he stopped pulling less and less, until I was pretty sure he wasn't helping at all. He was probably trying to see if it would get harder for me, and of course I didn't even seriously consider acting like it did." I sighed. "And he noticed there wasn't a blood trail either, meaning a hunter would have shot the deer right in our front yard. Granted, I gave him an excuse, but all those little things added up, I'm sure. Not to mention, how the deer died." I scratched the back of my head briefly. "It would be a great shot for a hunter, but also probably wasn't the best choice, given that it apparently is my MO."

She nodded. “Yeah, but you were doing all that for Serenity to see, not him. We had no idea he was going to be coming over. And if he hadn’t, then no one would have thought anything different about the deer, or how it died.”

“Yeah, but then I didn’t think about the water temperature either, when I was washing my hands. Extreme temperatures don’t bother me, and I didn’t consider that it was hot enough to almost scald a person.” I sighed. “Just a lot of stupid mistakes.”

She reached out like she was going to rest her hand on my arm, only to just pat me once instead. “Well, I think it’ll be alright. If he really just wanted to thank you, then we shouldn’t have to worry about it becoming a problem.”

“Yeah,” I agreed simply, sliding down in my seat a little.

“Don’t beat yourself up too hard,” she continued. “But thanks for making me feel better,” she added with a grin. “Clearly, I was perfect in comparison.”

I scoffed playfully. “Jeez, thanks.”

She laughed then, only to grow more serious. “Let’s just hope he really meant what he said, about only wanting to thank the Impaler. It’s good you didn’t admit it, or else we may have discovered that he was trying to bait you.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” I agreed. “But I wouldn’t have admitted it either way.”

She smiled. “It really does make me feel special, you know – knowing your secret. Like, the fact that you haven’t even told Serenity is kind of a big deal. Granted, I know you might have avoided telling me too, if possible, but I’m still happy to be the only one who knows.”

I gave her a warm smile. “Well, I’m glad. You *are* special.” I reached over and intertwined my fingers in hers, since we were driving down the backroads now.

Gabriella kissed the back of my hand briefly, before rubbing it along her face. She then kissed it again and sighed in contentment, pulling my hand into her lap. I didn’t take it back until we were turning onto our road, a little gray underneath my clothes, and wanting to be fully normal and controlled when we arrived.

However, as I pulled into the driveway, the hairs on the back of my neck immediately stood on end, an uneasiness settling over me as my

senses became focused.

Superficially, everything looked fine, with Serenity's car parked in its usual spot, and yet my instincts were suddenly on high alert, an itch appearing in the back of my mind even before I fully understood why I felt like something was wrong.

Gabriella must have noticed the abrupt shift in my demeanor, because she spoke up right away.

"What's wrong?" she asked urgently, her gaze quickly following mine to the house. But there was nothing to see.

I hit the gas, speeding up for a second, before slamming on the brakes next to my housemate's car.

"Something's not right," I hissed urgently, popping open the door. "Stay here and lock it, understand?"

I didn't wait for a response, slamming it shut even as I smelt her panic escalate.

Gray was already creeping up my neck as I bolted for the front door, finally registering that *I couldn't hear a heartbeat*.

Not in the house, not in the surrounding trees.

There were no humans in the vicinity, other than Gabriella back in the car, and yet Serenity's vehicle was in the driveway, untouched as if she were home.

And then the other smells – *unfamiliar* smells.

Another person had been by recently, someone I'd never smelt before, along with a faint trace of something with a chemical scent lingering in the air.

When I reached for the door, it was unlocked.

Shoving it open, the chemical aroma strengthened just slightly, the additional smells and sounds further confirming that no one was home.

Nothing was amiss, everything completely untouched, minus the fact that my best friend wasn't present, who Gabriella just talked to not even fifteen or twenty minutes ago.

Fuck!

Rushing to the kitchen, desperately hoping for some sign of where she might be – possibly hoping to find some scent that I could follow, beyond her own, prior to me looking for her by air – I froze solid when I laid eyes on the table.

A note was lying on it, being unfamiliar paper, with unfamiliar scents.

I dashed over to read it.

I have Serenity. I know WHAT you are. You have one hour to find her alive. After that I'll leave you a trail of pieces to collect for her funeral. Have fun looking.

Instantly, my body fully shifted, my fist slamming downward in rage before I even knew what I was doing. An earsplitting *CRACK* filled the room as the whole thing split in two, erupting in half and smashing into the floor with another boisterous crash.

The motion sent a tiny black object clattering against the floor as well, appearing to have come from underneath.

Reaching down to snag it, I realized immediately what it was – a microphone, and it had Nick's scent all over it, looking like it was placed underneath the table right where he'd been sitting.

Fucking bastard!

Enraged, I crushed the object in my hand just as I heard a vehicle on the main road swerve wildly into our driveway, sliding into the grass before getting on the gravel again, racing down the long path. Rushing to the window, I saw it was Nick in the driver's seat, my sharp eyes being able to see him even despite the blinding headlights aimed at the house.

I didn't even care anymore, not in this moment, when my best friend's life was at risk!

Fuck it all!

In a flash, I bolted for the door, the floorboards cracking under my abrupt movement as I abandoned all concern for restraint. The only thing that mattered now was getting to Serenity as fast as possible – and fucking *murdering* whoever the hell took her.

CHAPTER 13: PREDATOR

By the time Nick was slamming on his breaks, I was already yanking open his door, reaching in to tear his seatbelt right off only to grab a fistful of his shirt with the same hand, jerking him out of the car and thrusting him high into the air. The crushed microphone was still in my other hand.

“Where the fuck is Serenity?!” I snarled in outrage, trying to do everything in my power to not kill him right then and there.

His dark eyes were bugging out of his head, his hands grasping at my wrist from him sliding down until my fist was underneath his jaw, his feet kicking wildly in the air.

“It wasn’t me!” he exclaimed, his eyes wide with terror, his scent radiating it.

I held up the crushed object still in my hand. “Then what in the hell is this?” I snapped.

He didn’t have an answer for me.

Gabriella popped open the door to my car, yelling my name as she climbed out. “Kai!”

I only barely glanced at her, smelling her distress, only to meet Nick’s gaze as my mind began kicking back in, realizing it would be foolish for him to return here if he’d been the one to take her. And I didn’t have time for this shit. I had to find her *now*.

Letting go, he dropped to the ground, falling completely into a heap from the two-foot drop. I continued to hold out the microphone as he struggled to get to his feet, grabbing at his vehicle for support, with me still waiting for a response.

Without hesitation, Gabriella rushed up behind me and wrapped her arms around my torso while burying her head against my back. Her scent was borderline tainted with fear, likely a natural response from my sincere anger, but it wasn’t preventing her from trying to appeal to my humanity.

Nick finally recovered enough to respond, both hands out slightly, palms down, as if he was nonverbally trying to urge me to calm down.

“I heard it happen,” he exclaimed breathlessly. “I didn’t take her. I would never do anything to hurt her! I like her, dammit! I came as soon as I heard it happen.”

“And what exactly happened?” I snapped, tossing the plastic pieces on the ground and balling my hands into fists, even as Gabriella tightened her embrace around my chest. A part of me didn’t want to hang around for the answer, wanting desperately to just jump into the sky and start searching now, but any hint I could get might be the difference between life and death.

Problem was, time itself *was* the difference between life and death.

“Someone took her,” he replied quickly. “She struggled, but they must have drugged her or something, because it ended fast.” He jerked his hand into his pocket. “Here, you can listen to it. Maybe you’ll hear something I didn’t notice.”

Pulling out his phone, he made a few taps and then handed it to me.

I immediately held it up to my ear, even though I could already hear the start, putting all my focus into every detail I could pick up. For a second, there was nothing at all, minus some even breathing that most people probably wouldn’t be able to hear without a ton of audio adjustments.

Then, a knock on the door.

My housemate shifted her weight in the kitchen chair, followed by hesitation, before I heard her grab her gun, pop in the magazine – which she left loaded, but always took out of the gun when she came home – and then stuck the weapon in the back of her jeans.

However, the moment she unlocked the door, it sounded like it was kicked in, hitting her and knocking her backwards onto the floor, possibly smacking against her head. It then sounded like she barely had time to recover, another loud *smack* occurring, skin-to-skin, followed immediately by sudden silence.

If I had to guess, based on the sound, I’d say it was Serenity who smacked the assailant, before the individual somehow drugged her, whether that be via injection or by covering her face.

Either way, it was over just like that.

I listened for a few more seconds as the attacker began dragging her limp body outside, a low growl subconsciously rumbling in my throat, before I handed the phone back, realizing I’d just wasted time after all.

“Gabriella,” I said firmly, in response to her tightening her embrace when she heard the quiet but deep growl. “I have to go. I have less than an

hour to find her, or else she's dead."

I was struggling to be patient, because the stakes had never been this high before. Serenity's death was the one thing that I couldn't handle. The one thing I wouldn't tolerate. The one thing that would turn me into a bloodthirsty monster, out to slaughter whoever I had to, in order to find her.

And unfortunately, knowing Serenity's scent, and now having the faint scent of the stranger to go off of, suddenly didn't seem like enough.

Nick interjected before Gabriella could respond. "How do you know that?" he asked in shock. "That you only have an hour?" he clarified.

I shot him a glare, my tone harsh from my impatience. "Because the kidnapper left a note. It's inside on the kitchen floor, next to what's left of the table," I added with a sneer. I then glanced down as Gabriella slipped to my side underneath my arm, prompting me to try to force my tone to be more gentle. "I'm sorry for scaring you," I said sincerely. "But I have to go."

She shook her head, while simultaneously doing as I asked, taking a step back. "I'm not afraid *of you*, Kai. I'm afraid *for* you. Sorry," she added, likely in response to delaying me. "Please find her."

I nodded. "Go inside and make sure all the doors and windows are locked. Don't answer for anyone, no matter what."

"I can help," Nick said urgently when I took a step back.

I shot him another glare. "I don't need help," I hissed.

He shook his head, holding out his phone again. "It's not worth the risk. Just take my phone. It's fully charged, and the emergency contact is my second phone." He paused when I seemed hesitant. "I realize you can probably do this alone, but *just take it*, in case you do need help. Or in case you need to warn us about something."

"Just do it," Gabriella agreed. "Don't let pride cause you to take an unnecessary risk. It's not worth it. You're strong and fast, but you aren't a god. Even you have limitations."

I focused on her determined expression in surprise, before gritting my teeth and grabbing the phone. Because she was right. If I failed, I'd always wonder if it was my fault for not accepting every help I could get.

"Fine," I said flatly, slipping it in my pocket. "Now, go inside Gabriella. Lock everything."

"I'll make sure she stays safe," Nick commented.

I leered at him, prompting Gabriella to chime in. “It’s okay, Kai. I think we can trust him. Just go. We’ll be fine.”

I returned my gaze to Nick, struggling to speak briefly. “Fine. But if you so much as touch her, I swear...”

Nick immediately held up his hands. “Of course! I won’t, I promise! I owe you my little sister’s life, remember?”

My eyes narrowed.

“Go Kai,” Gabriella urged. “Just go. Find her. You don’t have much time.”

I nodded again, turning without saying goodbye, taking off into a sprint as I tore my shirt off, my muscles actively reshaping as wings erupted from my back.

I then leapt upward.

Within seconds of my ancillary appendages beating as hard as they could, I was high in the air, far above the trees, desperately trying to track down either Serenity’s scent, or the stranger’s odor in the conglomerate of other aromas vying for my attention.

Thankfully, I had the starting point, leaving me a pretty obvious trail to follow, my nose a thousand times sharper than a bloodhound. However, the problem was that it led into the city, where I might be seen in the sky if I flew too low.

Thus, I stayed high above as I tried to navigate an invisible trail, leading me to the south side of the city where there were tons of warehouses and business offices that likely didn’t get frequented by the general public. At the very least, the streets were empty enough that I dared fly lower, realizing the trail was leading me past some of the newer buildings to what appeared to be a couple of older abandoned warehouses.

And then I found my first real clue, a black car parked outside the side of one of the warehouses, the smell of exhaust still potent in the air, though I was sure it had been here at least twenty or thirty minutes. At the very least, while I wasn’t sure how long I’d been in the air, the kidnapper had likely come straight here at a quick pace, whereas I couldn’t fly nearly as fast as a car was capable of going.

Even without the head start, I would have fallen behind, my only advantage being that I didn’t technically have to follow the roads.

Listening carefully as I began dropping toward the ground, folding my wings just enough to let myself start falling without losing control of my

speed, I didn't notice any signs of life inside the warehouse itself.

Finally dropping the last twenty feet to the heavily cracked pavement, reabsorbing my wings the moment I touched down, I focused only briefly on the empty car before following my nose to a metal door leading inside.

Part of me wanted to just barge in, but I knew stealth was the best approach to try to ensure Serenity's survival. Thus, I cautiously opened the door, listening carefully for any noises within as it creaked slightly, before slipping in and closing it just as quietly behind me.

Dashing silently down the pitch-black hallway, which did nothing to hinder my grayish night vision from my glowing gold eyes, I finally picked up a faint heartbeat far off in the distance. However, I didn't hear anything else, or anyone else. The scent of the stranger who'd taken her was thick in the air, but there were no signs of him being in the vicinity.

When I reached the end of the hallway, ignoring all the closed doors, I realized that the heartbeat wasn't as far away as I thought, instead just being heavily muffled by another closed door. Opening it carefully, I peeked inside to discover myself in the main portion of the warehouse, which was completely empty aside from a solitary metal table lit up by just a single overhead light, as if this was some kind of massive operating room.

Granted, the light reached further than a spotlight, but it still left the vast majority of the empty warehouse nearly pitch-black.

And Serenity was lying on her stomach on that table, completely naked, with a tray of knives directly next to her head, her clothes in a heap on the floor. There were also a couple of large orange rubbery bands next to her bare feet, almost looking like some kind of makeshift tourniquets.

It was obvious from her open eyes, which had nowhere to look except the knives, that she was conscious, but her body was otherwise completely limp. There was nothing holding her down, and yet it was obvious she couldn't move a muscle.

I could actually smell the drug leaking out of her pores, the same scent as back at the house, wondering if it was some kind of powerful muscle relaxer or something.

The idea pissed me off to no end.

Just the fact that the bastard clearly planned on cutting her up while she was conscious, killing her slowly while she was fully aware, chopping her up piece by piece until there was nothing left to even have a proper funeral...

Keeping her alive as long as possible by cutting off the blood flow with tourniquets...

I was about to go on a massacre myself.

However, I still hesitated, holding myself back as I strained all my senses, feeling like everything about this situation screamed 'trap.' After all, this whole setup had my friend looking like bait, and the note said that the kidnapper knew *what* I was.

Not who, but *what* .

Yet there was nothing.

Aside from the stranger's odor, there was no heartbeat, breathing, or any other noises to indicate a second person was in the vicinity.

Deciding to just get this over with, caring about *absolutely nothing else* except getting my best friend to safety as fast as possible, I finally took action, beginning to creep into the room while looking in every direction for any signs of *anything* .

Yet there weren't even cameras as far as I could tell.

Still, my heart was racing, all my nerves on edge, and there was no way in hell I'd be able to try looking human right now, even if I wanted to.

Which meant...

Focusing on Serenity again as I began moving a little quicker, I watched her dark brown eyes shift away from the knives, widening slightly in shock as I got close enough to become visible to her eyesight. But I didn't care at this point.

I didn't care if she'd reject me. I didn't care if she'd end up wanting me out of her life.

In this moment, her rejection was *nothing* compared to the need to make sure she survived.

The need *to keep her safe*.

Because, at the end of the day, when it really came down to it, I'd give up *everything* to protect her.

Even if that meant actually giving up *her* .

Thus, I remained focused on the task at hand, instead of worrying about what she'd think, or worrying about how this would change things.

Now close enough to really begin formulating a plan of action, realizing I'd probably just have to grab her, toss her over my shoulder naked and make a run for it, I paused again when I heard an odd clicking sound coming from up above in the distance.

Followed immediately by more clicking coming from behind me too.
There wasn't even time to react.

Instantly, the wind was knocked out of me as something heavy hit me from the front and back nearly at the same time, splitting my bones as I was struck straight through.

Then, just as fast, I was abruptly lifted off my feet as my entire ribcage was strained to the point of feeling like the whole thing was being crushed under the sudden pressure.

Gasping for breath, I focused down at the metal rod sticking out of my left shoulder, feeling and looking like some kind of harpoon, realizing that metal prongs were similarly crushing me against my ribs on the right side from the one that had struck me straight through from behind. Both of them were attached to now taut metal cables, holding me a good four or five feet off the concrete floor.

Coughing up blood, struggling to breathe, my mind registered that the one impaling me through the back must have collapsed my right lung, knowing I might not be able to draw in air at all if the other had hit me just a few inches lower.

Never mind the fact that they'd both missed my heart.

Yet, as I reached out to try to tug on the cable in front of me, I knew there was no hope of me escaping any time soon, if ever.

I was trapped, unable to free myself or even support my own weight. Who in the hell would develop some crazy trap like this?

And who in the fuck even had the resources to set up this kind of thing? How in the hell was it even aimed? Was it motion sensitive? Was the clicking sound some kind of aiming mechanism? Could I have avoided it if I hadn't walked straight toward Serenity?

Pulling on one cable only meant that I put agonizing pressure on the other crushing my ribs as it held me in place.

Still, I had to try to get free.

Attempting to focus, I grasped the steel cable tightly again, making an effort to at least yank one of the barbed shafts out of my body, only to cry out in a vicious growl of torment. The pain was excruciating, more so than I could bear, even with my life on the line.

Even with my best friend's life on the line.

Fuck!

Gritting my teeth, I tried yanking again, attempting to turn and twist in hopes that maybe it would find the exact angle that it had gone in. But to no avail, even as my growls and shouts echoed in the empty warehouse.

With every passing second, I began feeling colder and colder, like the temperature in the room was actively dropping.

Unexpectedly, a door opened in the distance, prompting me to stop what I was doing as I focused on the man confidently taking a step through. He had dark skin, a shaved head, and simultaneously looked old and young, like a man in his fifties or sixties who'd just aged really well. I'd certainly never seen him before, as far as I knew, but there was something about him that felt a little familiar, though I had zero idea why.

After a second pause, he grinned widely, his white teeth a sharp contrast to his dark skin, beginning to clap loudly after looking the scene over.

"Congratulations!" he announced in a deep booming voice that echoed in the room. "I'm surprised you got here so fast! You're just in time for the main event!"

I coughed again, tasting metal as I tried to speak. "Who the fuck are you?" I demanded, my mind racing as I tried to stall, while desperately hoping to come up for any way to get myself out of this mess. Or at least for a way to get Serenity to safety.

"Ah!" he said, grinning wider as he approached casually. "I'm sure you'd like to know, wouldn't you?!" he taunted, only to scoff. "Well, I think I'll give you a hint! Nine years ago, I hired a man to kill my ex-wife and her soon-to-be-born infant. A nasty fellow, he was, but the bastard was perfect for the job!"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing, my mind working into overdrive as I tried to process what he was saying. Tried to grasp the implications.

He didn't wait for a response, laughing then as he continued. "I had cameras set up at the location where it was supposed to happen, so that I could have a recording to watch whenever I was in need of some entertainment." His grin widened even more, a vile look to his dark brown eyes. "However, much to my surprise, something amazing happened! A devil, of sorts, appeared and killed the hired help, thereby finishing off the job for me, since I was going to have to end him myself afterward anyway." He gestured with both hands toward me, as if he was showing me, to myself, on display. "And a child devil at that! I was amazed! Obsessed,

really. I had to find this monster and thank him myself. And I knew exactly how I'd do it too."

Finally, a plan began formulating in my mind as he moved closer, him seeming more than thrilled to monologue about everything he'd clearly worked so hard to achieve to get to this moment.

My right upper back began reshaping, pain radiating across my muscles from the effort, as he continued.

"First, I would figure out if this monster had anything worth losing, and then I would steal it from him. Because..." He paused as he finished striding right up to me, now only a few feet away, smirking up at his captive as he spoke with a lowered voice. "Because I had to make it clear that there was no greater predator than *me*."

I didn't care who this fucker was, or what connections he had to my past. All that mattered in this moment was that Serenity was going to die before my eyes if I didn't end the threat, and this man had just unknowingly stepped within my reach.

Clearly, this predator didn't fully understand what he was hunting.

Without hesitation, I finished shoving out my right wing, and whipped it around, aiming a bony finger in an uppercut arc, the difference in height making it so I could just barely reach his neck from this distance.

He still had a grin on his face as I stabbed him through the throat, with me lifting up even as it caused excruciating pain to radiate through my entire body from the strain. But I was irrational at this point, my mind feeling feral as my body grew colder.

I lifted him by his neck right up to my face, his hands grasping wildly at my wing, with me coughing as I spoke to him before the light died from his eyes, realizing I could barely draw enough breath for words.

"No," I hissed, a growing thirst clouding my thoughts. "There is no greater predator *than me*."

My mouth began feeling extra wet as I started pulling him a little closer, only for my strength to unexpectedly leave me, my fatigued wing dropping as it cramped, causing him to slip off into a heap on the floor. I could hear his blood gushing out below me, frantically trying to reach down with my wing to grab him again, not even fully understanding why I wanted to so desperately.

Instead, I ended up stabbing him aimlessly with the end of my longest bony finger, hearing him gurgle in pain, probably thinking I was

intentionally torturing him when in reality I was trying for something else entirely.

When I realized I wasn't going to be able to grab him, I finally gave up, and just hung there limply, attempting to focus on my breathing again, feeling like the lack of oxygen in my system was the problem.

Slowly, my clouded thoughts began to clear a little, prompting me to refocus on Serenity, still lying there, having silently watched with wide eyes everything unfold before her.

Fuck.

Seeing her nakedness. Seeing her vulnerability. Suddenly the only thing on my mind was wishing I could cover her up. To shield her from all this.

To shield her from the monster I was.

Without thinking, I reached out my wing again, attempting for her clothing on the floor now, but of course it was too far out of my reach. Still, I tried aimlessly for a few seconds, my mind unable to focus on anything else, until a thought hit me.

She was safe now.

Assuming this guy didn't have an accomplice, she was safe now. The drug would wear off, and she'd be able to get dressed and walk out of here. She'd be okay.

She'd survive.

Relief swept over me then, still wishing I could cover her up, but knowing she'd be able to do it herself soon. Which meant I really just needed to focus on getting myself free, if at all possible, or else I was the one who was going to end up dying.

Normally, I knew that pulling the harpoons out would make a normal person just bleed out, but I was pretty sure my body would at least try to seal up the wounds if I could just get them free.

Coughing weakly, I attempted to pull on the shaft coming out of my shoulder again, crying out as I tugged as hard as I could manage, fighting against the pain. But it was no use.

I might be able to chew through the cable if I could reach it, but I couldn't even do that, since giving it a tug did little to bring it closer, instead just increasing the pressure against my ribs.

Finally giving up, I refocused on the person I'd loved for so long, feeling completely helpless and defeated now. And realizing that if she

rejected me, then this was my only chance to apologize before she decided to never speak to me again.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.” My vision began blurring. “I was afraid you wouldn’t love me anymore if you found out. I’ve always been like this, since I was born. And I’ve always tried to hide it from you. Afraid I would scare you.” I coughed again, realizing my tears were brimming over now. “Gabriella knows,” I admitted quietly. “I’m the one who saved her last night.” Was it really only last night? How could so much happen in a day? “So she knows,” I continued with another cough, my thoughts feeling cloudy again. “That’s not why she loves me though. At least, that’s what she said. And I believe her. She liked me before she found out. And she liked me even *after* finding out.” I tried to focus on the girl I loved again, attempting to meet her gaze, wishing I knew what was going through her mind. “I’m so sorry, Ren. I’m sorry if I frighten you. I’m sorry this happened. I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you when he kidnapped you.” I tried to suck in a deep breath. “I’m just sorry.”

Attempting to take another breath, I ended up coughing up blood instead, feeling like I was drowning for a moment before I finally managed to suck in a shallow gasp.

I had to do something.

I was really trapped, and I had to get free soon, suddenly realizing I was making assumptions about Serenity’s recovery. What if she needed medical attention? For all I knew, maybe the drug wouldn’t wear off like I thought. Maybe she’d be paralyzed forever, unless she got to the hospital soon.

I wasn’t even sure if that made sense, but at this point I was beginning to panic and felt like I couldn’t fully think straight.

And then it hit me, instantly making me feel like an idiot for having forgotten.

My phone was in my car, but I still had another one!

Reaching down while trying to pull my legs up by twisting sideways, straining my abs, I began fumbling in my pocket to grip the phone, hoping desperately that I didn’t drop it as I finally managed to get it up in both hands.

Unsurprisingly, it was locked, but I recalled Nick saying something about the emergency contacts. I tapped on the screen, and then started a call to the single number listed.

I was sincerely shocked when Gabriella answered it.

“Kai!” she exclaimed. “Are you alright?”

I coughed again, trying to speak. “The guy is dead, but I need help. I’m hurt really bad.”

It sounded like she was about to cry. “We’re coming, Kai. We are already almost there. Nick had us leave soon after you did – he used his phone’s GPS to track you. He didn’t want to risk it. And it’s the same for me too. I didn’t want to risk it either. She’s my best friend.”

“It’s okay,” I tried to reassure her, my voice sounding hoarse. “I was wrong to think I could do everything myself. I guess you were right to tell me I’m not a god.” I coughed up more blood. “The fact that I’m superior to regular people must have gone to my head.”

“Oh Kai! I’m so sorry!” she exclaimed. “Don’t talk anymore, we’re almost there.” She then spoke to Nick. “Hurry! He sounds like he’s dying!”

I shook my head weakly in response, suddenly smiling at the fact that I’d just done what I teased her of doing – giving nonverbal responses over the phone. “No,” I managed after a second. “I don’t think I’m dying...” I paused. “Well, I’m not sure, actually. I can barely breathe.”

In the distance, in the direction I’d come, I heard a vehicle pulling up outside.

“Kai!” Gabriella said urgently on the phone. “We’re here! Where do we go?”

“There’s a door. It’s the only one. Just go through it,” I instructed, knowing they might not be able to see it as easily since there were no lights outside, aside from the headlights of the car they were in.

“Oh! Over there,” she said to Nick, seeming to have spotted it.

I continued, my thoughts feeling foggy again. “The hallway leads straight to us. I think I’ll be fine though, so check on Serenity first. She’s been drugged. Make sure she’s still breathing alright.” I paused. “And please cover her up. That...” I coughed. “That *bastard* took all her clothes off.”

I could hear them running down the hallway now, so I finally let the phone slip away from my ear, still clutching it in my hand, but not having the strength to keep it up. I realized they had a flashlight with them when I saw a shift in the darkness to my side from the light shining behind me. And then I knew when they caught sight of me, because I heard Nick curse and Gabriella gasp in shock.

They both ran up to me, with Nick rapping his arms around my lower legs, as if he was trying to lift me up to support some of my weight, but it didn't do much since I was so high. Gabriella was looking up at me the most panicked and helpless I'd ever seen, completely ignoring the dead body at her feet, her eyes full of tears.

"Kai! Oh Kai!" she exclaimed. "What can we do? How can we help?"

"Serenity," I replied weakly. "I'm okay. Check on her. Make sure she's okay."

I could see the torn look in her eyes, but Nick spoke up then.

"Go ahead. I'll look for a way to get him down."

She gave him a quick nod, only to look up at me with an apologetic expression. "I love you. I'm sorry. I'll be right back." She then turned to run over to my housemate.

I focused on Nick, seeing him looking around with the flashlight for any sign of where to begin searching, his light unable to reach far enough to see whatever contraption had shot these harpoons.

"That man," I whispered, catching his attention. "He came out that way," I said, pointing in the appropriate direction. However, when he nodded, shining his flashlight over there, I recalled a random detail about what I'd just learned. "And Nick. This guy is the one responsible for your mother's death. He hired the man who killed her."

That got his attention.

He looked up at me in complete shock, before shining the light down at the man, looking at him more closely.

"Holy fuck," he hissed in disbelief, taking a step back. "Fuck," he said again. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck*. This can't be..." His voice trailed off.

Gabriella looked over, having gotten Serenity's clothes laid on top of her. "What's wrong?" she asked seriously.

Nick didn't respond, just staring at the man for another long few seconds, before shaking his head. His expression was pained as he abruptly turned around and began jogging toward the other doorway on the far side of the room.

Once he disappeared, I started listening to Gabriella again, hearing her speak to Serenity. "Can you move your fingers?" she wondered.

I could see that she managed it, just barely.

"Okay, I'll probably have to flip you over to get you dressed, but first we need to be able to communicate. I want you to blink once for yes, and

twice for no. If you aren't sure, then blink three times, okay? Blink once if you understand."

My friend blinked once, being very intentional, a low groan escaping her throat as well.

"Okay, good," Gabriella replied. "Were you able to move your fingers just a few minutes ago?"

She blinked twice.

"Okay, so then the drug must be wearing off. Do you feel like it's wearing off?" she asked, sounding uncertain.

Serenity blinked once.

"Good," she repeated, sighing heavily. "We haven't called the police yet, since they'll see Kai. But we might have to call an ambulance if you need to go to the hospital."

Serenity immediately blinked twice.

"No to the ambulance? Or you don't think we should call the police?"

She blinked once.

"No to both?" Gabriella tried clarifying.

Blinked once again.

Gabriella hesitated. "Is it because you're worried about them finding out about him?" she wondered.

One blink.

Her voice was even quieter. "Did you already know?" she whispered.

Serenity didn't blink right away, clearly hesitating, before blinking three times. I figured that meant the answer was more complicated than a simple yes or no.

Gabriella took a deep breath, her voice still a whisper. "I'm sorry we didn't tell you. Kai was just afraid of what you'd think. But he's still the same person. He didn't even want to tell me either, but I sort of found out." She paused. "He's the reason I wasn't killed last night. He saved me. As soon as he found out, he came to my rescue. He's been doing that for the last couple of years. He told me that whenever there was a serial killer case that made you really upset, he would stop them for you. He did it *for you*, because he didn't want to see you so upset. Because he loves you. Probably more than you even realize," she added quietly.

Suddenly, the cables loosened, causing me to abruptly sink down to the floor, creating enough slack for me to fall to my knees.

Gabriella immediately looked over at me in alarm, startled by my abrupt descent.

Without hesitation, I grabbed the cable in front of me and pulled it into my mouth, beginning to gnaw on it.

She hesitated again, before returning her attention to Serenity, since it was obvious there was nothing she could do to help me. "Here, I'm going to try to carefully flip you over so I can get you dressed." She then grabbed the tray of knives, set them on the ground, and then carefully began to roll my friend over.

In the meantime, I was beginning to make progress, though it was painful, the metal frays I was creating cutting into my gums. Still, it was nothing compared to the pain of trying to pull the barbed spikes out, and at least this way Nick should be able to pull them all the way through once I got the wires cut.

Finally, after what felt like ages of feral chewing, I cut through the first cable, immediately turning around to start working on the second, not wanting to use up all my remaining strength trying to pull the harpoon out. Plus, the one in my shoulder wasn't the one affecting my breathing.

However, just as I was starting to get the metal to fray, I heard Nick come running in our direction, only for him to tell me to stop.

"I found some wire cutters," he explained. "Let me try with them first."

I'd obviously already gotten through one, but I needed the break, my gums raw and bloody at this point. However, rather than be relieved, I was almost dismayed when Nick began easily snipping through the individual wires that made up the cable, feeling like I'd just put myself through an extra hell for nothing.

Oh well. There was no way for me to know he'd have a solution.

And no way I was going to wait around for one.

However, once Nick finished cutting through it, he stopped as if he was waiting. I looked up at him, assuming he knew what I was going to say, but was hesitant to do it. "You'll have to pull them out," I explained simply.

"Are you sure?" he wondered, seeming worried. "Right now, they are probably the only reason you aren't bleeding to death. If I pull them out, you might be dead before we can get help."

I shook my head. "I can't go to the hospital. I'm not sure if I can stop looking like this while I'm hurt," I admitted. "And if I can just..." My voice

trailed off when I heard Gabriella run over to me, turning just in time to see her fall to her knees next to me, holding out her arm.

“Kai, you need to drink my blood,” she said firmly.

I pulled away from her in shock. “Absolutely not!” I exclaimed, coughing again. I could suddenly feel the spike in anxiety and tension coming from Nick, knowing he was probably shocked by her statement.

Unfortunately, Gabriella wouldn’t let up, moving her arm up to my face. “It’s not going to kill me! But you heard him, you might bleed to death otherwise. And even if you could look normal, do you really think you could go to the hospital in this condition? Imagine the questions they’d have! You’d have the police all over your case.”

I shook my head again, even though I knew she was right, unable to accept drinking her blood as an option. Because blood wasn’t just some random thing. It was her life. It was the reason she lived. It was the thing that allowed everyone to live.

And what if I drank too much? What if I lost control again and bit her somewhere else? What if I went for her throat?

The idea was unforgivable.

And I certainly didn’t want to hurt her and cause her pain for my own benefit.

Glancing over at the dead body, I wished that was an option instead, but the blood had already coagulated quite a bit, not to mention no heartbeat meant no blood pressure to push the blood out of the body, even if it was still drinkable.

Gabriella looked over too. “Can you drink his blood?” she wondered. “Will that work?”

I shook my head, coughing. “No, he’s been dead too long.” I then glanced over at Nick. “Just pull them out. I can try to go track down a deer or something afterward.”

Gabriella was skeptical. “But will animal blood even do it? Kai, look at me.” She waited until I did. “Do you know for a fact that animal blood will help you heal?”

When I didn’t have an answer, she held her forearm up to my mouth again, pressing her skin against my lips. Except, this time she wrapped her other arm around my head to try to keep my mouth against it.

“Kai, it’s not going to kill me. Just do it already. If you don’t, then I’m going to grab one of those knives and do it myself.” She paused, her tone a

little mocking. “I wonder which will be worse, me slicing my arm open with a knife? Or having you bite me? Either way, I’m going to bleed.”

I grimaced, wanting to pull away, but desperately needing her touch right now. If nothing else, I really needed her touch. I felt so cold and miserable as it was, and she was warm, her physical presence comforting, as if she was literally seeping away all the pain.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” I finally whispered, feeling defeated.

She held onto me more tightly. “You aren’t hurting me. I’m giving myself to you. I already have.” She then paused, only to shift gears entirely. “Kai, if I was possibly going to die, and you could save me by giving me some of your blood, then would you do it?”

I didn’t respond, since the answer was pretty obvious, even if it did nothing to reduce my reluctance.

“Please, Kai,” she whispered, pressing her forearm more firmly against my mouth. “Please, just do it. I don’t want to lose you. And I’ll tell you if it’s too much.”

Slowly, hesitantly, hating myself for it, I opened my mouth, allowing her to shove the meaty part of her forearm in between my teeth, though her arms were so thin that ‘meaty’ felt like an exaggeration.

Convinced I was going to bite her, Gabriella spoke to Nick. “Okay, go ahead and start pulling them out.”

Nick had clearly been frozen in place, still seeming stunned by the revelation that I drank blood. He grunted after a second, seeming to reanimate. “Oh, err...” His voice trailed off for a second. “Right,” he finally said, taking a step toward me.

“Wait,” I interrupted, pulling away from Gabriella as I reached up to the one sticking out of my shoulder. “Let me get this going first,” I said, grabbing the shaft and gritting my teeth as I shoved it through more. It was a lot easier now that I was pushing it in the right direction. I then continued after moving it a few inches through. “And then, if you can just push on the other one, I can probably pull that out myself.”

“Oh, umm...” His voice trailed off again as he moved into position behind me, prompting Gabriella to hold onto my good shoulder as he started pushing on the lower one.

There was an audible popping sound, like the sound of a suction breaking, as he got the barbs to shove away from my body a little, enough

that I could get my fingers underneath it and start tugging the spike through my chest.

“Here, let me help,” Nick commented, moving around to grab it himself.

“Wait!” Gabriella exclaimed, moving closer to my side again, holding up her forearm. “Bite first!”

I grimaced as I let her stick her forearm in my mouth a second time, finally sinking my teeth into her flesh.

She screamed, only to wrap her other arm around my head again even as she reflexively tried to jerk away. “I’m okay, I’m okay, don’t stop. I’m okay,” she repeated.

Her blood was so inviting, that I wasn’t sure if I would stop anyway, her discomfort suddenly not as much of a priority. My mind felt almost ravenous, like that brief moment I lost control before when killing the second guy earlier that day, but I tried to keep it under control as I slowly gulped from the bite I’d made.

She spoke to Nick. “Okay, hurry up and get it out.”

Nick seemed to be able to get the front one out without too much of a problem, but when he moved to my shoulder again, he struggled with it. Finally, he apologized, before placing his foot on my back to give him more leverage.

And then it was out.

I wrapped my arms around Gabriella’s waist, trying to pace myself, and trying desperately to avoid biting her again – to avoid biting her someplace where she’d bleed faster. I could already feel my body warming up and beginning to heal, though I felt like I was going to need a lot more blood than what I was willing to take from her.

Not to mention, even though I hadn’t bitten into any major arteries or anything, there was still the risk of her getting an infection, which meant we’d have to make sure we cleaned it really well.

Nick seemed exhausted from all the running around, so he just slumped down and waited while I slowly took gulps of Gabriella’s blood, seeming to crash now that his adrenaline rush was wearing off.

Once my internal wounds felt healed enough, I forced myself to pull away.

However, Gabriella wasn’t fooled. “I’m fine, Kai. If you aren’t fully healed, then keep drinking.”

I shook my head, unable to meet her gaze as I focused on the bite. Thankfully, it didn't look as bad as I was expecting, the two semi-circle gashes continuing to bleed slowly. "I'm healed enough for now," I said quietly, bending down a little to lick the blood off. "I'll find another source. I'm not taking any more from you."

She didn't respond right away, likely hearing the resolve in my tone. "Okay," she finally whispered.

"I'm sorry," I replied.

She shook her head. "I love you," she said simply in return.

I then sighed, trying to focus my thoughts, since this was far from over. Not only did I have to find another source of blood, but we still had to get the hell out of here, not to mention I probably needed to come back later tonight and destroy the evidence.

"We need to get everyone back to the house," I said out loud. "And I can come here later to clean this mess up," I added, echoing my thoughts. "But first, I want to make sure everyone is safe."

Gabriella nodded in agreement, prompting me to reach up and begin tearing off the sleeve to her shirt, carefully wrapping it over her forearm to help stop the bleeding. Once she was set, pressing her palm firmly against the covered wound, I got up and went over to Serenity.

Gabriella had managed to get Serenity's bra on, though it was still unhooked in the back, with her shirt instead covering her waist since Gabriella seemed to struggle with the underwear and pants. Given that my older friend was dead weight, I wasn't too surprised, with my fiancé having managed to get the underwear up to Serenity's lower butt, before she couldn't get it any higher in the back, unable to lift the older girl by herself.

I wasn't able to meet Serenity's gaze as I apologized, carefully turning my best friend on her side to clasp her bra and get her underwear pulled the rest of the way up, keeping my eyes averted the whole time. I then began working on both her shirt and pants, shimmying one pant leg fully on before gently rolling her on her back again to finish it off.

It was no problem for me to easily place my hand underneath her lower back and lift her with one arm enough to pull her pants all the way up with the other.

I then grabbed her neck and shoulders, carefully sitting her up, wanting to make sure I had her head supported on my shoulder as I slowly scooted her still limp body into my arms.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered again. I then spoke louder to the other two. “Ready?” I asked simply.

Gabriella stood right up, but Nick still seemed shell-shocked from everything, not budging as I approached.

“Come on, Nick,” I said gently to get his attention. “Let’s go.”

He nodded weakly, not looking up at me as he stood on shaky legs. Gabriella stuck right by my side as we continued on down the hallway, with Nick finally passing us up to take the lead since he had the flashlight. Not that I needed the light, but he didn’t know that, and I was sure Gabriella appreciated being able to see.

Once we exited the building and reached Nick’s car, I carefully climbed into the backseat with Serenity in my arms, Gabriella closing the door for me and then walking around to join me on the other side. Scooting my rear to the edge of the seat, I rested my knees on the passenger’s seat while readjusting Serenity in my lap to make sure she was comfortable.

I then focused on Nick as he climbed in too, still looking shaky. “Are you going to be able to drive?” I asked seriously.

He nodded in response, though he kept his eyes forward. “Yeah, man. It’s just...” His voice trailed off, only for him to take a deep breath. “That guy in there...” He paused, glancing back at me. “That was my deadbeat biological father...”

My eyes widened in surprise, seeing Gabriella look at me in alarm. Of course, I recalled the guy saying that the woman he had killed was his ex-wife, or something like that, but didn’t really put a ton of thought into it at the time. After all, I had other things going on.

Like killing him, for one, before he tortured the most important person in my life.

Although, now that I was thinking about it, I started wondering if Nick’s mom remarrying was part of the bastard’s motive, especially since Nick’s younger sister would be his half-sister, conceived by his step-dad, who actually sounded like he cared about them.

When I didn’t respond, Nick continued, returning his gaze ahead as he started the car.

“I knew he was a horrible person, but I had no idea...” He paused again, taking a deep breath, his hands on the steering wheel. “This whole time. All of it was his fault. He’s responsible for my mom’s death, and he’s the one who almost got my little sister killed too.” He then shifted it in gear,

and focused on the rearview mirror to back up, though there wasn't anything behind us to hit. "He was a horrible person, but he was also smart. Supposedly, that's where I get my thing for puzzles from." He shook his head. "And if he's been somehow stalking me, then it's possible I accidentally led him straight to you..." He grimaced, glancing back at me as he started driving toward the road. "Sorry, man. I'm really sorry if that's true."

I shook my head, gesturing with my chin for him to watch where he was going. "It doesn't matter now. It's over. Let's just get back to my place."

Nick nodded, focused on the road now as he pulled onto it.

We were all silent on the way home, with Serenity closing her eyes, causing me to wonder if she'd fallen asleep. At the very least, her heartbeat and breathing were steady, so I knew she was alright. For a few minutes, I just stared out the window up at the stars, but then noticed from the corner of my eye that Gabriella was watching me intently.

Focusing on her, I was surprised that her expression was endearing.

I gave her a small smile in return, prompting her to lean into me, Serenity's legs partially draped over her lap. We then continued to ride in silence, the whole experience almost beginning to feel surreal, like it was all just one horrible nightmare.

Unfortunately, I had the scent of Gabriella's wound on her arm, coupled with the chemical stench still lingering on my best friend, to remind me that it wasn't just a bad dream.

Once we finally got home, Gabriella was exceptionally sluggish getting out of the car, as if she'd almost fallen asleep herself. And she continued to walk with an unsteady gait, to the point that I had Gabriella walk up the stairs in front of me, Serenity still in my arms, concerned she'd fall if I wasn't right there behind her.

Nick waited downstairs while I got Serenity in her bed, Gabriella likewise deciding to just crawl into bed with her too, promising to keep an eye on my best friend even though she seemed so tired that her emerald eyes looked like they were about to cross.

I nodded in agreement, giving her a kiss on the forehead once Serenity was situated, even though I suspected she would be out soon too. Deciding to lock the door to Serenity's room, being extra paranoid at this point, I closed it behind me and then headed downstairs.

This whole time, I hadn't even bother trying to transition back to my human form, so Nick nearly jumped out of his skin when I walked into the kitchen, white hair, gold eyes, and gray skin. He was sitting on one of the kitchen chairs, next to the broken table, immediately apologizing unnecessarily for his reaction, only to indicate that he would keep watch, since I'd already disclosed that I was planning on going back to clean up.

I nodded in agreement, prompting him to speak up again.

"And hey, after you get back..." He paused. "Mind if I crash on the couch? Not sure I'll be awake enough to drive home at that point."

I nodded again. "Yeah, that's fine," I agreed, not at all having a problem with it. My tone then became a little more firm, a 'not so subtle' warning in it. "Just keep them safe while I'm gone."

Nick nodded adamantly. "Of course. And hey, I'm sorry about the whole microphone thing. I just wanted to know for sure that you were the guy. I'll be dropping the case now, so you won't have to worry about anyone digging into it again anytime soon."

"Right," I replied. "Thanks."

I then took a deep breath, before turning around to leave, seeing no point in delaying what needed to be done. Locking the door behind me, I took to the air to first find myself some blood, and then to go hide my second dead body for the day.

CHAPTER 14: PRUDENT

I'd kept two huge secrets from Serenity all my life, and yet she now finally knew one of them. After Serenity was kidnapped by a serial killer, who had caught my devilish form on camera when I was younger and had been trying to identify me ever since, I was forced to reveal myself in an attempt to rescue her.

It was a trap, of course, and my twenty-three-year-old friend was the bait.

The problem was, I didn't have much choice, since I had no doubt the bastard would make good on his promise to butcher her and leave me a trail of pieces to collect for her funeral. And sure enough, I found her in an abandoned warehouse both aware and conscious, but also drugged, a tray of knives resting on the table she was lying on.

It had been a close call, since the man succeeded in rendering me immobile even despite my cautiousness. However, he apparently wasn't aware of my full capacity and found himself dead at my feet barely a minute after arrogantly introducing himself.

Nevertheless, even despite his death, without the help of my busty girlfriend, Gabriella, and my older friend's coworker, Nick, I would never have managed to free myself.

But now everyone was back home and safe, my drugged housemate and exhausted girlfriend, technically fiancé, both asleep in my housemate's bed, behind a locked door, after an extremely stressful evening.

And *thankfully*, Serenity still didn't know my other secret -- that I was desperately in love with her, even despite the five-year age gap and the fact that she'd been forced to raise me like a mother during the teenage years of my life.

Granted, I was still concerned how Serenity would react when she woke up, since the fear of my religious older friend rejecting me over my appearance was the main reason why I wasn't willing to risk her finding out, even despite our close relationship.

Unfortunately, my concerns would have to wait for later though.

Now, it was time to hide the evidence of my latest victim, to hopefully prevent the authorities from making any connection between me and the jackass who tried to kill the most important person in my life.

I also needed to take care of my thirst too, having only recently discovered that drinking human blood would accelerate my physical healing.

Of course, I was hoping that animal blood would do the trick too.

Thus, after hunting down a coyote, I was relieved to discover that drinking its blood satiated my lingering craving, and also reassured of my durability when its claws and teeth weren't strong enough to harm me. Then, I made my way back to the warehouse to formulate a cleanup plan.

Part of the fundamental problem was that my DNA was everywhere from my previous injuries, making 'hiding the body' the least of my concerns, even if that needed to happen too.

Thus, the first thing I did was figure out what I had available to me, going back outside to rummage through the serial killer's car, which only made me realize I had an even bigger problem -- it appeared to be a rental car!

And when it didn't get returned, it would likely alert the authorities that this man was missing!

Dammit.

In the backseat, I found Serenity's gun on the floor, so I grabbed that, making sure the safety was on, and then stuck it in my pocket. Then, rummaging through the center console, I found a lighter and package of two cigars, giving me the disgusting impression that they were victory smokes.

Fuck that bastard.

I half wanted to light them up and do my own victory smoke over his dead body, though I wasn't sure I could handle it. With how sensitive my nose was, inhaling cigarette smoke from another person had always been unpleasant, even when it was scented. Or, I guess, flavored.

Whatever.

Sticking the lighter in my pocket too, I decided to go looking for the keys in anticipation of driving it to another location. However, first I needed to figure out what to do with the body. Venturing further into the warehouse, following my nose, I ended up finding some gloves, which I assumed the guy planned on using when he chopped up my best friend,

along with a small bottle of alcohol. And then I also found a container of paint thinner, but I didn't want to start a fire in the warehouse and have the whole thing come down.

Or more specifically, I didn't want to burn the body here, and have them discover the charred remains of a corpse.

Thus, instead, I decided to go back into the main section, sprouting my bat-like wings before picking up the stiff cadaver and doing my best to shoulder the body, disgusted when some kind of nasty fluid began leaking out of his mouth. Then, with some effort once I was outside, I took to the air and flew with him high in the sky, aiming for far beyond the city outskirts.

On the way, I had quite a bit of time to try to figure out what to do with my cargo, but honestly I still wasn't really sure. In the end, I figured I'd just try to borrow a shovel from some stranger's house and bury him.

Which ended up being exactly what I did.

Although, even with my strength and speed, I spent a good half hour digging, going far deeper than I suspected most people would, until I got low enough that the bottom started developing a puddle of water from the ground.

I then checked the guys pockets thoroughly again, just to make sure I hadn't missed something, and tossed him in, thankful once I couldn't see him anymore as I heaped the fresh dirt back into the hole.

This spot was pretty far off the beaten path, but just to be sure no one tried digging him up, I found sticks and other forest debris to try to conceal the area, wanting it to look like its surroundings as much as possible.

Finally finished, with the body gone and shovel returned, I felt more relaxed on the return flight, though I knew I still had a lot of work to do. When I got back to the warehouse, I stripped my shirt and pants, setting my phone, keys, and gun to the side, leaving me only in my boxers, before I poured a little bit of the paint thinner over the spot where we'd both bled.

I then lit it with the lighter.

The fire blazed larger than I was expecting, but the warehouse was huge and there was minimal smoke caused by my burning cloth. Thus, I ended up pouring more paint thinner over the area, ensuring the harpoon-like projectiles were in the flames too, glad that things were going even better than I expected.

Before long, there was nothing but a charred area half a dozen feet away from the table my housemate had been lying on, all the evidence burned away.

After that, I stashed the harpoons in a closet in a random office in the hallway, then donned the gloves and went back out to the car with the bottle of alcohol, trying to smear it around wherever I'd touched.

My final step was then grabbing my phone, keys, and wallet and then driving the car off to a remote location to another town entirely, trying to stick to the backroads.

I knew there was going to end up being a problem if this was really a rental car, but I was still wearing the gloves and, so long as I cleaned the interior well after I dropped it off someplace random, there should be no reason for them to link it to me.

Plus, no one should be finding the body anytime soon, if ever. And no body usually meant no case. He'd certainly become a missing person, but doubtful anyone would suspect murder.

Not to mention, if they *did* think it might be murder, then it likely meant he had other enemies in his life the authorities were aware of, making them suspects instead.

But not me.

In fact, this man trying to kill Serenity almost guaranteed that there would be no clues leading the cops to the warehouse anytime soon. After all, this guy had likely been wanting to hide his sinister activities just as much as I did now.

When I finally got back home hours later, I discovered that Nick was barely hanging in there.

He was still sitting next to the kitchen table, or what was left of it, half asleep. His dark skin was extra dark underneath his dark eyes, his face almost having an ashen hue to it, and his short curly brown hair was a little lopsided, as if he'd fluffed one side by excessively running his fingers through it.

He didn't even really seem to noticed that I was only in my boxers, gratefully heading to the couch when he saw that he was off guard duty for the rest of the night, not even saying much as he plopped down and passed out.

Made sense I supposed, since he'd already been tired to begin with, earlier that evening.

Alternatively, even despite everything I'd just done, I was still wide awake, my heart racing in my chest. I wasn't sure if it was anxiety, or from my body reacting to my previous injuries, or what. But I was still on high alert, all my senses homing in on every little sound, every little twig snapping outside. Or every time a cricket stopped chirping unexpectedly.

However, at the same time, I did feel emotionally drained.

Between the fear of my best friend getting kidnapped, to the realization that she finally knew one of my secrets, and now the anticipation that came along with her waking up in the morning -- it all made me feel drained.

So I supposed I *was* anxious, among other things.

Hearing that both Serenity and Gabriella had normal heart rates, the first thing I did was set my stuff on the counter and then go upstairs to take a shower. And I probably would have stayed in there a long time, even after the hot water ran out, but my stomach wouldn't let me. I hadn't even really noticed the empty sensation, combined with the escalating twinge of pain, until my thoughts started focusing on that coyote again, fantasizing about skinning it and eating the meat raw.

Shaking my head at the disturbing thought, I got out and hurried downstairs to raid the fridge, wearing only my towel. Not that I was concerned about being seen half naked, since everyone in the house was passed out.

Thankfully, there were still leftovers from dinner, but even after devouring all the Roman Chicken, I still felt like I was starving. I ended up finishing off the leftover pancakes I'd made for Gabriella, slathered with peanut butter, syrup, and then downed with two large glasses of milk, before I started feeling satisfied.

It was only then that I got dressed in a t-shirt and gym shorts upstairs, and then grabbed the hidden key we had for the inside doors, in order to do a more thorough investigation in Serenity's bedroom, recalling that we'd never cleaned the bite on Gabriella's arm.

I found my two loves almost exactly how I'd left them, Serenity still on her side facing the middle of the bed, while Gabriella had likewise rolled toward her so that they were only half a foot apart. I'd managed to shift back to my human form while I'd taken a shower, and of course I could still smell Gabriella's scent through the door, but opening it and entering the room had been like getting hit by a truck.

I wasn't sure if time spent away from my fiancé was the cause, or what, but I shifted in an instant, as if it was the first time I was experiencing her arousing aroma all over again.

Focusing on my best friend's heart rate, I realized it was a little faster than before -- still normal, but between that, and her smelling less like the drug, I suspected her paralysis was truly wearing off. She was still hastily dressed in her clothes from earlier, wearing jeans and a t-shirt, her plump C-cup sized chest looking almost small next to my girlfriend's huge breasts, both of them ridiculously thin thanks to their active lifestyles.

I tried to not focus on that now though.

Moving over to Gabriella's side, her red hair strewn about on the pillow, I carefully adjusted her arm and lifted the makeshift bandage, made from her sleeve, in order to take a look at the bite.

Which shockingly didn't look bad at all.

My eyebrows pulled together then, as I debated how it might be best to clean it without waking her up. Obviously, running clean water was out of the question, since I'd have to move her, and no way in hell would I use Rubbing Alcohol on it, considering the pain alone would probably be worse than pouring lemon juice and salt on it.

However, I was pretty sure Serenity had a bottle of Hydrogen Peroxide underneath the sink somewhere, which shouldn't hurt at all.

Returning to the bathroom, I found the brown bottle, and got a couple of fresh washcloths so I could try to clean the area up.

The solution sizzled and bubbled less than I was expecting, prompting me to gently pull her skin in various direction to make sure it got in the wound. However, ultimately, I knew that after so long, it should be showing signs of being red and inflamed if it was infected. Instead, her skin was smooth around the bite, with no swelling, as if there wasn't a bite there at all.

Or at least no infection.

Unfortunately, we didn't have any bandages on hand that were large enough, so I instead opted for using a paper towel from the kitchen to cover it back up, continuing to use the torn sleeve to hold it in place for now.

Satisfied that both women were fine for the time being, I went back downstairs, ready to find something else for me to do to help distract me for the rest of the night. Of course, the first thing I focused on was the broken table I'd snapped in my outrage. I knew there were some random two-by-

four boards in the shed out back, left from the previous owners of this house, so I figured I could snap one of those and use it to temporarily fix the table until we got a new one.

I also found a box of nails, though we had more in the laundry room closet, so we were good in that department either way.

Carefully flipping the two halves of the table over, I lined them up and then placed the boards a couple of inches from each side, using my thumb to force twelve nails through the wood, six in each board. I was pleasantly surprised when I cautiously flipped it back over, putting some weight on it to make sure that it would hold.

Yet, despite the crack down the middle, it was pretty sturdy.

Definitely not an ideal solution long-term, especially since a few of the nails were just barely poking through the top, but at least we had a table to eat on again. However, once I was done with that, I didn't really have much else to do, except sit in the kitchen and listen to all the sounds outside.

No way was I going to be able to sleep right now, not after everything that happened.

Logically, I knew there shouldn't be any more danger -- that everything was over now -- but my body wouldn't fully allow me to relax at all. I felt on edge, all my senses alert. It was a miracle I could even stay in my human form, though I constantly felt like I was on the verge of transforming.

Which meant I just sat in silence for several hours, waiting for it to be time to start making breakfast for everyone. I was almost relieved when that time came close enough, beginning to work on making a feast the moment the clock hit six in the morning. I initially started with pancakes again, but then decided I personally wanted eggs and sausage, only to end up opening up a can of pineapple and mandarin oranges so that Serenity could have the fruit with cottage cheese.

Of course, all my preparations were premature, since no one was even showing signs of stirring yet. So once I was finished, I put everything on low heat, sticking the fruit in the fridge, and sat back down, deciding to eat some eggs and sausage while I waited. Normally, I'd wait for my housemate to join me before eating, but I was hungrier than I expected. In the end, I ate all the eggs and meat, and had to fry up more of both when it sounded like someone upstairs was beginning to stir.

I wasn't entirely confident who was waking up, but my anxiety began to spike when I realized I'd have to face my lifelong friend soon either way.

And I wasn't sure what I'd say to her, or what she'd say to me.

I'd gone basically my entire life trying to hide this secret from her, and now I'd been forced to reveal it. Would the fact that I helped save her life help at all? Would I smell fear when we finally came face-to-face again? Would she wonder if I was really the same person she grew up with?

So many questions, all of which did nothing but make me more anxious.

When someone finally got out of bed, I knew who it was from the little sounds they made, surprised when Serenity ran straight to my room upstairs. And even more shocked when her heart rate spiked, and she bolted for the stairs instead.

"Kai?" she whispered urgently when she reached the bottom, taking a few steps into the living room, likely spotting Nick, and then turning around to dart into the kitchen.

She came to an abrupt halt when she finally laid eyes on me, almost as if she was surprised that I looked normal, instead of the monster she saw last night.

"Good morning, Ren," I said quietly, having a difficult time meeting her gaze.

She shocked me by rushing forward to my seat and wrapping my head up in her embrace, my face pressed against her squishy C-cup tits.

"Oh Kai," she whispered, sounding like she was about to cry. "I'm sorry. Thank you for saving me. I was so scared. When I woke up after being kidnapped, that man told me what he was going to do to me, and I..." Her voice caught in her throat.

I slowly reached up and wrapped my arms around her thin waist, returning the embrace. "Why are you sorry?" I asked hesitantly.

She took a deep breath, hugging my head tighter against her chest, resting her chin on the top of my head. "I woke up for a few minutes last night, I think just after you left. Gabriella was still awake, and told me more about..." Her voice trailed off. "Well, about everything. She explained that strong emotions can make you..." She paused. "Well, make you look different, like last night..."

She sniffled then, her voice coming out strained. "And I just feel so horrible, because I never knew. I feel like you've needed me all this time, and I wasn't there for you. And the worst part is, I probably did things to make it more difficult for you to hide this aspect of your life." She sniffled

again. "I ended up dreaming last night about all the times I teased you when you were embarrassed. I figured it was harmless, but now I realize that whenever you've walked away from me in public..." Her voice trailed off again, coupled with another snuffle. "I'm just so sorry."

I cleared my throat, trying to reassure her. "Yeah, well you haven't really teased me much in public in a long time. Not for a couple of years at least." Though she certainly did in private sometimes, like yesterday when she was teasing me about my feelings for Gabriella.

"I know," she agreed. "But still. I wish I'd known. Why didn't you tell me? Why were you so afraid of me finding out?"

"Because I can't lose you," I said almost inaudibly. "I couldn't risk you rejecting me. Especially not after all our parents passed away. You're the only one I have left."

"Oh Kai," she whispered, squeezing my head. "I would never reject you. No matter what. I love you more than anything."

My face immediately flushed in embarrassment, my hair following suit, flashing white. Not because her words made me aroused, but simply because of their intensity, combined with our embrace.

"I love y-you more than a-anything too," I stammered in response, my voice suddenly trembling.

I felt her muscles stiffen for half a second, and then felt her chin leave my head as she looked down at me, seeing that I looked like a devil again, my hair white, my skin dark gray. She then tightened her embrace, turning her head to rest her cheek against my hair, her heart suddenly racing.

"I'm sorry if I scare you," I whispered, knowing she was anxious now, but uncertain as to why.

"You don't scare me, Kai," she replied quietly.

I tried to keep my tone gentle as I responded. "I'm not sure if Gabriella told you, but I sort of have heightened senses. I can smell happiness, sadness, anger, and...anxiety." I sighed. "And I can hear your racing heart," I added softly.

She took a deep breath, only to lift her head again, her embrace still firm. "I'm not afraid of you," she repeated with more confidence. "Here, look up at me Kai. I'll prove it."

I hesitated, before slowly complying, tilting my head up so that my chin was resting in the middle of her chest, uncertain if she was prepared to see

that the whites of my eyes were pitch-black now, my irises a glowing gold - the same eyes that Gabriella found mesmerizing to look at.

Carefully I met Serenity's gaze while she kept her arms wrapped around me.

Her heart rate spiked again when we made eye contact, her pupils visibly dilating a little, the deep chocolate brown of her irises growing thinner. Part of me wanted to look away, becoming anxious about her reaction, but I felt like she was determined to make a point.

So I let her.

But her pulse was visible in her neck now, her usually pale cheeks flushing as she continued to hold my gaze, her full lips parting slightly as her breathing became more shallow. Suddenly, it felt like there was no one else in the world, other than me and her.

It almost reminded me of Gabriella's reaction when she held my gaze on the couch that first night, which had prompted me to close my eyes before I felt like my girlfriend was going to uncontrollably kiss...

My older friend leaned down faster than I anticipated, causing my muscles to lock up in response, shocked when her lips suddenly met mine.

Instantly, my thoughts vanished from my mind as my body began reacting, my knees slipping between hers as I pulled her forward, forcing her to sit down in my lap, straddling my thighs.

My tongue slipped into her mouth as I again wrapped my arms firmly around her thin waist, relieved when her tongue seemed to just as eagerly meet mine. My cock quickly became hard as a rock, the gym shorts I was wearing doing almost nothing to stop it from pressing into her ass, feeling even more encouraged by me noticing the strengthening scent of her arousal.

However, almost just as fast as it started, she abruptly broke the kiss and turned her head, causing me to freeze solid, my mouth pressed against her slim jaw.

She was breathing heavily, like she'd run a marathon, seeming to struggle to catch it.

And now I felt guilty as hell, even more so when I smelt some guilt coming from her too.

"I'm sorry," I whispered against her skin, sincere remorse in my tone, even though I wasn't able to separate my lips from her. Even though my cock was throbbing against her tight butt.

She just barely shook her head, sucking in a long deep breath. “Kai...” She paused. “I love you so much, but we can’t...” Her voice trailed off.

And my heart sank.

“I’m sorry,” I repeated, unable to let her go, though she wasn’t trying to escape anyway. At least, not yet. However, my cock still throbbed nevertheless, the guilt seeming to make it even harder, rather than having the opposite effect.

When she didn’t say anything, I spoke up again, suddenly feeling desperate to know it wasn’t just me. That I wasn’t the only one with these feelings, with the kiss we’d just shared not feeling like enough proof.

“How long?” I whispered. “How long have you felt this way about me?”

Her guilt only intensified. “Kai, I’m your... I mean, I don’t...” She hesitated, seeming to really struggle to explain why she was against us being together. “I can’t...” Her voice trailed off.

Of course, if she just didn’t like me in that way, then she didn’t need an excuse. But I had no way of knowing if it was her way of letting me down gently, or if she truly was interested, and just felt like it wouldn’t be appropriate.

Either way, her rejection still made my heart sink even more, my thoughts grasping for anything now. “What about those silk pajamas?” I asked desperately. “The purple ones. Why did you buy those? And when?” I wondered.

She shook her head, prompting me to bury my face against her neck.

“Why did you get them?” I repeated. “Please tell me,” I begged. “Please be honest.”

She sucked in a shaky breath. “I got them a couple of weeks ago...” She sighed. “Because I thought you might like them.” She shook her head again, her tone suddenly urgent. “But I was never going to wear them. By the time they got here, I felt miserable for even getting them, and...” Her voice trailed off again.

“I don’t remember any packages coming,” I replied quietly.

Her body stiffened in my arms. “I bought them when I got your birthday present,” she admitted softly, seeming reluctant to admit that they might have been *a part of* my present for my eighteenth birthday. “Had everything sent to work. And of course, I didn’t want you to find out what I got you, so I was careful when I brought everything home.”

“Well, I liked them,” I admitted, feeling a little more bold. “When I saw Gabriella in them, I really wished it was you wearing them.”

“Shit,” she hissed. “Gabriella.” She shook her head again. “Kai, we can’t. I need to get up.”

I would have loosened my grip on her if she’d made any effort to actually rise to her feet, but she didn’t. I wasn’t sure if she was waiting on me, like I was waiting on her, or what. But, for now, I was content to hold her in my lap.

“I love you,” I repeated quietly. “More than anything,” I added for emphasis.

Her heart started racing again, guilt tainting her scent, as she took a few controlled breaths. When she spoke up, her voice was almost inaudible. “I’ll ask Nick to go home,” she whispered. “And then later we’ll talk,” she promised, only to sigh heavily. “But right now, I need to get up.”

I nodded somberly, loosening my grip on her, almost relieved when she didn’t try to jump off right away. Instead, even as my arms dropped to my sides, she gave my head another tight squeeze, before slowly rising to her feet, her legs shaky.

Her entire composure suddenly made me feel like she was being very intentional about not making it seem like she was rejecting me. Even more so, when she leaned against the table for a second, only to focus on the large crack down the middle of the wood, before leaning forward to kiss me on the forehead.

She then gave me a reassuring smile and moved to sit down in the chair across from me.

“I’m sorry,” I repeated, all my brazenness -- what little I had -- vanishing, now that she was sitting further away.

She shook her head, leaning her cheek into her hand, her elbow on the table, as she focused toward the front windows in the kitchen.

I spoke again, desperate to not let an awkward silence fall over us. “Can I get you anything to eat? I sort of made enough to feed a small army. There’s pineapple, oranges, and cottage cheese, or you could have pancakes. Or eggs, if you want.”

She gave me a small smile. “Fruit sounds nice,” she agreed, only to look away abruptly when I got up, her face flushed at the sight of my still-hard cock.

In my haste to get breakfast for her, I’d sort of forgotten.

Although the distraction helped me cool off a little, and by the time I had cottage cheese and fruit in a bowl, my semi-hard cock was much less noticeable. I then went ahead and grabbed a couple of pancakes, along with some more eggs, to have something to poke at while she ate.

When I sat back down, she seemed more relaxed.

“So how did you sleep?” she asked casually, likewise seeming to want to try to dispel the lingering awkwardness.

I scoffed, keeping my eyes on my food. “I didn’t sleep.”

She abruptly looked at me in concern. “You didn’t sleep?” she repeated. “Are you going to be okay? I’m up now for the day, so you can get some rest if you need to.”

I shrugged. “I probably will in a little while. I just couldn’t stop myself from keeping an eye out for danger all night, even though I know things are probably safe now.” I sighed, glancing up at her. “I’ll probably end up staying awake tonight too. Or at least sleeping downstairs on the couch so that I’m closer to the front and back doors.”

She frowned. “Is it also because of Nick?” she asked quietly. “Are you going to wait until he leaves before you go to sleep?”

I glanced away as I thought about that, a little shocked that she’d called him ‘Nick’ twice now, instead of Nicholas.

“I don’t know,” I admitted, my tone becoming more hesitant. “He said he was going to drop the case. But he does like you,” I added quietly. “Said so when I accused him of being involved in everything that happened last night.”

Serenity took a deep breath and let it out slowly. “Kai, I realize now that it kind of looks like I brought him home for a date, but I just met the guy.” She lowered her voice, as if she was afraid he’d overhear from the living room. “I just kind of wanted to know how much he knew about the case.”

My eyes widened slightly. “Did you know it was me?” I asked seriously, recalling what Gabriella had considered previously, regarding reasons why Serenity might have brought Nick over.

She shook her head. “I don’t know. I guess I just wondered deep down if you might be involved, especially since the three original cases were all ones that I’d told you about. Not to mention that Gabriella had all those weird questions when I brought her home, like questions about your diet and such. Like, who seriously asks if someone eats potatoes? And not casually, but more like, *‘Are they against it like I’m against eating meat?’* ”

I nodded, not really surprised in hindsight that she'd noticed that.

Serenity sighed. "But I suppose I was kind of in denial at the same time, figuring that having Nick meet you would ensure there was no suspicion when he saw that you were just a normal guy." She grimaced, focusing on me more intently. "But I really messed up. When he started talking about the other case, that no one knew was related, things just lined up so perfectly, and suddenly all I could think about was how depressed you got when you were nine." She shook her head again. "I barely kept it together when it hit me. And I was even more distressed when I realized you fit his target age group perfectly. But then there was that crazy description, and I wasn't sure what to think, because you obviously don't look like that."

"Normally," I agreed quietly.

She gave me a weak smile, sighing again. "I'm sorry. I was trying to help, though now I'm not even sure what my goal was. Maybe I was just trying to prove to myself that it couldn't be you, hoping the evidence was leading Nick to some middle-aged guy or something, not you..." She grimaced.

"I'm sorry," I repeated. "I'll try not to get involved again. It's just hard knowing that someone's going to die, and I could stop it."

She shook her head. "I'm thankful you saved Gabriella," she admitted. She then gave me a warm look. "And thankful that you saved me too," she added, her tone more meaningful. She glanced away. "And I realize killing was your only option. Especially if you caught them in the act. I don't blame you for any of that, even if the law might not see it the same way."

I tried to lighten the tone. "Well, that's good. Would be awkward if my own best friend turned me in."

She smirked a little, knowing from my playful tone that I was teasing, but also almost seeming to like that I'd referred to her as my 'best friend' even though she should know she was quite literally my only friend.

Her grin then widened, her own tone becoming a little haughty. "I don't know. Still could. Might hold it over your head for a while to make you do what I want," she added, a mischievous look in her eye.

Instantly, my body shifted, causing her to jerk back in her seat in alarm from the abrupt change.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I'm sorry." She then frowned. "Kai..." She paused, her brow furrowed. "I didn't mean it like that..." she said

hesitantly, her cheeks flushing in embarrassment as it looked like she started second-guessing what my assumption was.

But she was correct.

I wasn't trying to take it in a perverted manner, but I did, nonetheless.

I stared at my partially eaten pancakes as I replied. "It's fine," I whispered, my tone becoming a bit too serious. "And besides, I already pretty much do what you want anyway, so nothing different there." Which was objectively true, and had been for a long time now.

Serenity swallowed audibly, trying to clear her throat as she changed subjects. "S-So, I'm not sure how to ask this, but I was kind of wondering about the blood situation."

I ducked my head, feeling ashamed all over again.

"Hey," she said gently, reaching her hand out toward me on the table. "I still love you, no matter what. I just want to know. I had no idea you needed it."

"I don't usually," I admitted quietly, unable to meet her gaze. "Yesterday morning was the first time I'd ever felt the urge. First time I'd ever really gotten hurt either."

Serenity immediately straightened in her seat, withdrawing her hand. "Wait, what?" she said in alarm. "Yesterday morning? Not last night? Or the previous night?"

I finally glanced up at her. "The guy who kidnapped Gabriella had an accomplice. He came looking for her in the morning after you left for work. Dressed like a cop. Might really have been a cop too. I was the one who killed the deer, to hide his blood."

She abruptly leaned forward, resting her forehead in her hands while staring down at the table. "Oh shit, Kai. I had no idea." She shook her head against her hands. "Shit." She shook her head a second time. "Shit, shit, shit."

"Sorry," I whispered. "But there was nothing else I could do. He flat out told Gabriella he was going to 'finish the job' after handcuffing her, and he shot me when I tried to stop him."

Her deep brown gaze snapped up to meet mine. "He shot you?" she repeated in bewilderment. "And you're okay?"

I cringed. "After I drank some of his blood." Honestly, I was surprised she'd even ask, considering what happened last night, but maybe the memory was hazy for her or something.

“Oh, Kai. I’m so sorry,” she said gently. “I feel horrible, because I had no idea about any of this.” Her tone abruptly became more serious as she dropped her hands and leaned forward. “Does Nick know about that one? What did you do with the body? And did he have a car? What did you do with that?”

I sighed, knowing she was now thinking about me getting caught. “I hid the body in one location, far away from here, deep in the woods. And I drove the car into a pond. Buried the license plate, though I’m not sure if that helps anything.”

She frowned. “Since we have company over, I don’t think now is a good time to go into further details, but later I’m going to need you to elaborate. And what about the guy from last night?” she added.

“Flew him out of the city and buried him. And he had some Rubbing Alcohol at the warehouse, so I made sure I got rid of my fingerprints on the car. Also burned the area where I bled, but I don’t think anyone will find that anytime soon anyway.”

Her chocolate eyes were suddenly wide as saucers. “F-Flew?” she repeated.

“Oh, umm, yeah. That’s sort of how I killed the guy from last night too. With my wing. Didn’t you see?”

“I’m not sure what I saw, Kai,” she admitted. “I couldn’t really turn my head, so half of what happened was in my peripheral vision.”

“Oh, well, I can sort of grow wings too,” I said cautiously, trying to gauge her shocked reaction. “Do you want to see them?” I wondered.

She seemed stunned. “I mean, yeah, of course.”

I nodded, my skin turning dark gray as I grabbed my shirt in the back to start lifting it up. Her gaze was completely on my shoulder in anticipation, not at all seeming drawn to my abs like Gabriella had been, likely since she’d seen me without a shirt many times before, her eyes visibly widening in shock as she watched the bat-like appendages form and open up around us, with one higher than the other due to the table.

“Kai,” she said in disbelief, reaching out without hesitation to feel one. “How long have you been able to do this? And have you always been like this?”

“As far as I know,” I replied, answering her second question. “And I think I first grew my wings when I was around eleven or twelve. I don’t actually remember the exact date, but my back was itching a lot and every

night it felt like the moon was calling to me, and..." I paused when she gave me a confused look. "I always feel like that for a couple of days before and after the full moon, but this was different." I glanced at my left wing. "So I snuck out of the house one night and my instincts just kind of kicked in. Growing them out felt like I was scratching the itch."

She nodded slowly, still feeling the membrane. "I'm really sorry," she repeated, only to give me an apologetic expression, her eyes glistening slightly. "I just keep thinking about the morning you started being so depressed. I'm not sure if you remember, but we had a sleepover, and the two of us stayed up late that night, because we were playing a game together, and when my mom told us to go to bed, you seemed really sad, so I promised we could continue it first thing in the morning." She paused to reach up and wipe her eyes. "And then you didn't want to play at all, and I just kept wondering if I'd done something wrong. If it was somehow my fault."

"What?" I whispered. "Of course not, Ren. Why would it even be your fault?" I asked seriously.

She shook her head, sniffing. "I don't know. I was fourteen and kind of moody myself sometimes. But you just never got like that. *Never*. And I assumed I must have done something. I had no idea what, but felt like it was my fault somehow."

I sighed heavily, still keeping my wings out. "Sorry," I said gently. "I just...I just didn't know how to handle what I experienced. And I felt like I couldn't tell anyone." I paused when she nodded, more tears slipping out of her eyes. "But you helped a lot," I reassured her. "You and your mom both. And of course my mom too. I couldn't have gotten through it without all of you. And I definitely couldn't have gotten through losing mom and dad without you," I added quietly.

She sniffled, giving me a small reassuring smile, not responding this time as she tried to collect herself. After a second, she returned her focus to my dark gray wing, reaching out to feel the membrane again.

Oddly enough, whereas usually I didn't like having them out unless I was going to fly, instead I was more than comfortable to have them out in her presence. There was almost something cathartic about it, being completely exposed to her -- finally, after all this time -- and having her *acceptance*.

"Thank you," I said quietly after a few seconds.

She looked at me in surprise. "For what?" she wondered in confusion. I decided to be blunt. "For accepting me. And for loving me."

Her eyes pained briefly as she nodded, returning her focus to my wing as guilt tainted her scent again.

"It means a lot," I added softly. "You're everything to me. So please don't feel guilty. You've been my friend when I needed a friend, and helped fill the role of our parents when we were left all alone."

"But that's the problem," she finally whispered. "It's not right for me to..." She shook her head, not finishing her statement. She then glanced at me. "And what about Gabriella?" she asked seriously. "You seemed pretty certain about marrying her last night."

I stared down at my plate, uncertain of how to answer her.

My best friend scoffed, her tone becoming chastising. "Kai, I know you've never dated anyone before, but I would assume you'd understand the basics. You can't date two women. I mean, what would Gabriella think if she found out what just happened?" Her frown deepened, though there was nothing unappealing about it. "Kai, you basically just cheated on her by kissing me."

I shook my head, deciding not to correct her by pointing out that she kissed *me*, my voice feeling like it was caught in my throat.

"She knows," I finally managed.

Serenity abruptly sat up straighter in her seat. "Knows what?" she whispered in confusion.

I felt mortified even thinking about it, unsure if I could really tell her everything. Lifting one hand, I covered my eyes, my elbow on the table. "She knows how I feel about you," I admitted. "And she's fine with it. She..." My voice choked up, my heart pounding in my ears now. "She's okay with..." I sucked in a sharp breath. "With us being together at the same time," I hedged, my voice almost inaudible, finding myself unable to say the word 'sharing.'

Serenity didn't respond for a long minute, and I couldn't bring myself to look at her. I couldn't even believe I'd really said it.

Finally, she spoke. "Y-You're serious, aren't you?" she said in disbelief. "She really said that?" she added, though the question sounded rhetorical. When I didn't respond, she cleared her throat. "Kai, look at me please."

I slowly dropped my hand, focusing on her small frown instead of her eyes.

“Kai,” she repeated a little more firmly.

I looked a little higher, meeting her chocolate brown gaze, feeling the most embarrassed I’d ever felt in my entire life. I assumed she was going to scold me or something, but she didn’t respond, her expression unreadable as she examined my face.

She then sighed heavily, and focused on my wing, reaching out to touch it one last time. “You should probably get some sleep,” she finally said. “I’ll ask Nick to leave when he wakes up. And then I guess we’ll talk when we have time later.” She focused on me, her expression a little endearing, though there was a hesitation to it. “But for now, get some sleep, okay?”

I nodded, slowly pulling my wings back and reabsorbing them as I rose from my seat, pulling down my shirt. “Are you alright with me checking on Gabriella first?” I wondered cautiously. “I cleaned her wound with Peroxide, but I want to make sure it’s not getting infected.”

Serenity nodded, her brow suddenly furrowed, staring off into space like she was deep in thought now. “Yeah, that’s fine,” she agreed, seeming even more pensive.

“Okay,” I replied, hesitating for a second, before deciding to go upstairs without making things awkward again by trying to hug her goodnight or something.

Once I crept into Serenity’s bedroom, I felt a content smile tugging slightly at the sight of Gabriella sleeping, her vibrant red hair strewn over the pillow, her lips slightly parted as she slept soundly. She was really out of it though, not even rousing a little when I sat on the edge of the bed and carefully checked the wound.

On the plus side, it seemed perfectly fine, having scabbed over nicely with no signs of inflammation.

Staring at her for a few seconds, I reached out and began gently running my fingers through her hair, feeling a longing begin to stir in my chest -- not something sexual, but a different kind of desire. It was like I missed her, even though she was right here, wishing I could hold her in my arms while we both slept. I doubted Serenity would be thrilled about that though, especially in *her* bed.

Especially with our relationship feeling like it was in flux right now.

I mean, I disclosed that Gabriella was theoretically fine with sharing me, but what about my best friend? Would she be okay with that? And what did she mean by ‘we’ll talk later’ anyway? Was she going to explain to me

all the reasons why we couldn't be more than friends? Or did she want to talk about making it work out somehow?

I had no idea, and was almost afraid to hope it might somehow be possible.

But in this moment, I just really wanted to hold Gabriella, or to at least sleep beside her.

Taking a deep breath, I stood back up, figuring it couldn't hurt to ask. I'd just have to make it crystal clear that I would only sleep, and nothing else. However, when I got downstairs, I discovered that the quiet commotion I'd noticed half a minute ago was my housemate digging through a closet, with her now sitting at the table, looking through a shoebox full of envelopes.

"What are you looking for?" I wondered, seeing that she still had that pensive expression.

She glanced at me for a second, before patting the table next to her. "Sit down. I'll tell you in a minute."

I nodded, carefully approaching to sit beside her like she'd indicated. It was difficult to not feel a little nervous around her now, between the question I wanted to ask, in addition to the fact that we'd literally kissed not long ago.

After a few more seconds, she seemed to find what she was looking for, pulling out an old envelope that had been long since opened. In the corner, she'd written 'For Kai' on the outside.

"Here it is," she announced, handing it to me.

"What's this?" I wondered, preferring to just ask instead of reading it.

"A letter from the bank," she explained. "They have something for you in a lockbox, left by your mom and dad. But you weren't allowed to withdraw it until you turned eighteen." She gave me an apologetic look. "I'd completely forgotten about it until now."

"Oh," I said, nodding. "What do you think it is?"

She shrugged. "Honestly, no idea. It's obviously not money, but when you mentioned biting Gabriella, it suddenly made me wonder if this might have something to do with your secret." She paused when I gave her a confused look. "I mean, I may be completely wrong, but I just started wondering if your parents knew that about you."

"What makes you think they did?" I asked seriously.

She sighed. “Well, of course you know that when you first started living with them, I thought God sent me an angel for a friend. A playmate.” She hesitated when I grimaced, only to quickly continue. “But I remember your mom laughing the first time I said that, saying something like ‘*well, she’s not wrong*’ to your dad. It really confused me, and really stuck in my mind as proof that you were really an angel. At least, it did for a few years, before I stopped being so naïve.”

“Well, obviously, I’m not an angel,” I said quietly, suddenly feeling almost ashamed of my demonic look when I was transformed.

She reached out and rested her hand on my shoulder. “Kai, you’re still my little angel, no matter how you look.”

I nodded, a lump appearing in my throat. “Umm, so did your parents do something like this for you?” I wondered, knowing the lockbox thing wouldn’t seem so weird if they’d done it for her as well. Or maybe it was just some kind of heirloom or something, or possibly even a letter left by whoever dropped me off to live with them.

Serenity shook her head, giving my shoulder a small squeeze before letting go. “No, just you,” she whispered.

I nodded, clearing my throat. “So, when can we go check it out?” I wondered.

Serenity glanced at the clock, seeing that it was only about 7:30 AM. “Well, it’s Saturday and the bank is open from nine to noon. I can wake you up at around ten, if you want, so you can get a few hours of sleep.”

I nodded slowly. “Okay.” I hesitated. “Umm, do you mind if I lie down with Gabriella?”

She immediately gave me a critical look, seeming to think it over. “Only as long as you both are actually sleeping,” she replied.

My face flushed, my hair threatening to turn white, prompting me to look away. “Of course,” I whispered, feeling embarrassed. “Thanks,” I added, beginning to get up again.

Serenity surprised me by saying my name in a strange tone. “Kai...” She grimaced slightly as she looked up at me. “I love you,” she said meaningfully. “Sleep well.”

“I love you too,” I replied gently, unsure if that was truly what she wanted to say, but not wanting for things to become awkward again. “Don’t hesitate to wake me up if you need anything,” I added.

“I won’t,” she promised. “And thanks.”

I nodded, making my way to the stairs, afraid that hugging her would cause another spark to flare between us. Thankfully, as I made my way upstairs and focused more heavily on Gabriella's scent, I felt a little more relaxed. Entering the room, I was almost relieved to climb into bed with her and lay down, keeping a few inches between us, but suddenly feeling my fatigue really begin to hit me.

Now that the sun was up, and my housemate was awake, I felt like I could finally relax and allow myself to drift off into a hopefully dreamless slumber.

Within only half a minute, my mind had already wandered, as I quickly began falling asleep.

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CHAPTER 15: PROBLEM

A low growl unexpectedly startled me awake, my eyes popping open as all my senses focused downstairs, the sound similar to the rumbling of an aggressive dog ready to attack. Instantly, even without looking, I knew right away that Gabriella wasn't in bed with me, because her scent wasn't as potent.

Instead, she was downstairs.

And her scent was *hostile*, my housemate's aroma tainted with panic.

I bolted out of bed the moment I heard Serenity speak up, her voice breaking. "G-Gabriella?" she said in confusion and alarm.

I heard the growling move, faster than I'd think possible for a normal person.

Just as I reached the top of the stairs, Serenity screamed, Nick already dashing past the foyer into the kitchen. Skipping the steps entirely, I leapt straight down to the bottom, landing hard on the floor only to twist just in time to see Nick go flying against a chair, tumbling like he'd been tossed from a pickup truck in full motion.

Time seemed to slow as I finally registered what I was seeing, now that Nick's body wasn't obstructing my view.

Gabriella was on top of Serenity on the floor, my housemate's forearm in her mouth in an obvious attempt to block an attack for her throat. But what left me confused was the color of my fiancé's body, her hair an even more vibrant red, her crazed eyes a more vibrant green, and her normally pale skin now a deep tan like she'd been outside all summer...

I didn't have time to process further, bolting for them as fast as I was physically capable. Because the attack was sincere, the hostility unmistakable, Gabriella clearly out for blood as she actively sucked on my best friend's arm, her teeth buried deep.

Without hesitation I jumped over Gabriella's back, straddling her as I jerked my hands down and jabbed my fingers into the joint of her jawbone on both sides, just below her ears, knowing it was a major pressure point.

Gabriella shrieked even louder than Serenity had, quickly pulling away as I instantly enveloped her in an almost crushing embrace, yanking her off my housemate.

Serenity sounded like she was hyperventilating as she started scooting backwards on her elbow, her eyes wide, her scent thick with panic, desperately trying to get away even though I had her assailant now.

In the meantime, Gabriella's scent instantly shifted to alarm. "Oh my god. Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!" Her scent then shifted to guilt and remorse. "Serenity! Oh my god, Serenity! I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, I didn't..." Her voice trailed off as she sobbed.

My own thoughts finally caught up to me, realizing the wound was nothing like my own controlled bite from last night. This was like my friend had been attacked by a ravenous wolf...or starving bear...

"Nick!" I barked, focusing on his stunned expression, still on his ass on the floor. "Get the bleeding to stop!"

Serenity's face was as white as a ghost now, her brown eyes looking pitch-black, her hyperventilating beginning to sound like she was borderline panic-crying, not even making an effort to stop the profuse bleeding, still just staring up at Gabriella like she was terrified of a second attack. Or at least in shock that it happened in the first place.

Nick finally snapped out of his stupor and hurried to his feet, grabbing a dishtowel and kneeling next to her to cover the wound.

Gabriella was sobbing now, limp in my arms, with me holding all her weight. "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to, I'm so sorry."

After checking the wound more closely, Nick looked like he was about to puke, before speaking up after taking a second to collect himself. "This is really bad. It's going to need stitches."

"Should we call an ambulance?" I asked seriously, not about to let Gabriella go, in order to call myself – not when I wasn't confident that she wouldn't attack again. "Or do you think it will be safe to drive her to the hospital?" I added, not even considering any alternatives.

Serenity finally chimed in, her voice shaky, her jaw trembling. "N-No h-hospital," she stammered. She then looked up at Nick, her eyes looking almost wild now. "Y-You used to b-be an EMT, r-right? For like a y-year?"

"Only a few months!" he corrected her. "And while we *did* train to do emergency stitches, I've never actually done it on a real person before! Only on practice mannequins!"

Serenity's expression grew more determined. "Nick, they'll probably know this isn't an animal bite, even if we say a dog bit me." She paused, taking a deep breath. "Y-You'll have to do it."

I chimed back in, my tone urgent. "Ren, are you sure? Even if they know it's a human bite, it isn't going to expose..." My voice trailed off as I looked down at Gabriella again, seeing that her coloring was still as vibrant as ever, as if she'd died her hair a more stark red and was wearing vibrant green contacts now. Never mind the deep tan.

I hesitated, because I was about to say 'my secret,' only to realize 'our secret' might be more accurate. For some reason, my fiancé's new look screamed 'stripper' to me, though I wasn't sure why. Maybe because obviously dyed hair, combined with a deep tan and huge tits was just the association I made in my head. But either way, I knew that the change in her appearance, combined with the attack, meant she must have somehow become like me.

Nick and Serenity both shook their heads, Nick being the one to answer. "The medical staff will be required to file a police report, even if she doesn't want to." He then looked up at Gabriella who was still a mess. "Hey, let's see your bite."

She stiffened in my arms for a second, before beginning to support her own weight as she pulled down the makeshift bandage over her own wound.

Yet there was nothing to see, not even a scar or any other indication she'd been bitten.

Nick nodded his head in response, as if it was what he expected. "Obviously, it looks like Kai somehow changed Gabriella. At the very least, I doubt she would have been capable of tossing me across the room like that yesterday." He sighed, focusing on Serenity. "Which means, if it was caused by his bite, then this wound will also probably be healed in the next..." He paused to glance up at the clock in the kitchen, seeing that it was only a little after 8:15 AM. "Ten to eleven hours, more or less. Assuming her bite can have the same effect as his."

A silence fell over the room as those words sunk in.

Gabriella's whisper broke it. "I'm so sorry," she said almost inaudibly.

I squeezed her again, this time meant as a hug, while Serenity took a long deep breath before finally addressing her.

“It’s alright, Gabriella,” she replied without looking up. “I admit you really scared me, but I know you wouldn’t attack me on purpose.” She took another deep breath, finally focusing on her. “What exactly happened?”

Gabriella shook her head in response, sniffing. “I don’t know. I don’t even remember coming downstairs...” She grimaced. “Or attacking you. When I realized what I was doing, I felt like I was waking up.”

Nick sighed as he stood. “You probably *were* sleeping then. I have a buddy who sometimes raids the fridge in his sleep – sleepwalking essentially.” His toned lightened some. “I guess that means you can’t go to bed hungry from now on.”

Unfortunately, his attempt at humor fell flat.

No one was amused, and it did nothing to ease the tension.

Gabriella shivered at the thought. “I think I still am,” she admitted quietly. “Hungry,” she clarified. “Or maybe thirsty is the better word...” She shivered again.

I took a deep breath. “It must be because you’re low on blood from me drinking it last night. I didn’t think I took much, but maybe I did. Do you think you can control yourself until after we make sure Serenity is alright?”

“Of course,” she agreed adamantly, turning her head to look up at me from the corner of her eye. “I never would have, if I was conscious.” She then looked down at my best friend. “Serenity, I am so sorry.”

She nodded, her entire body trembling like she was cold, still looking like she might pass out.

“Right,” Nick commented. “I have a fancy First Aid Kit in the trunk of my car. Pretty sure it has sutures, although I never imagined I’d have to use them,” he added with a grimace.

I only nodded while he ran out to grab the kit, Gabriella apologizing a few more times while he left. However, once the front door closed, I carefully let her go, suggesting that Serenity just needed a little bit of space. I then proceeded to grab a chair for Serenity, figuring we’d do the stitches down here at the kitchen sink.

Once I had it situated, I slowly bent down and very gently picked my housemate up, in order to set her in the chair. She didn’t even try to help, which I took as her trusting that I was strong enough, with her continuing to hold the rag over her arm, her body trembling.

“T-Thanks,” she whispered.

“Of course,” I replied, only to glance over my shoulder to look at Gabriella, standing there like she was lost. “Hey, can you grab the Hydrogen Peroxide upstairs? It’s under the bathroom sink.”

She looked at me, it seeming to take a moment for her vibrant emerald eyes to focus, before her expression became determined. “Yes,” she replied simply, turning to run upstairs.

“And grab the Rubbing Alcohol too,” I called after her. “Just in case we need to sterilize something,” I added when Serenity gave me an alarmed look. I then lowered my voice. “Of course I’m not going to use that on the wound.”

Serenity nodded, taking a long deep breath. She then looked like she was about to say or ask something, but the front door opened up, both of us looking over at Nick.

“Found it,” he announced, though from what I heard outside, it didn’t sound like he had trouble locating it to begin with. He then proceeded to bring everything over to the counter, asking Serenity to move her arm over the sink so he could take a look at it.

She was already right there, so she just leaned forward a little, sticking her arm out.

One glance at the bloody mess and Nick suddenly looked like he was going to be sick again.

“Fuck,” he hissed.

“What’s wrong?” I asked in alarm.

He shook his head. “Nothing, it’s just...” His voice trailed off.

“Just what?” I asked seriously. “Does she need to go to the hospital? Because I’m about to put her in my car and drive her to the hospital. Whether they fill out a police report or not.”

“Kai,” Serenity said, sounding a little surprised. “I think I’m going to be okay. And Nick’s right. If your bite caused her to change, then...” Her voice trailed off, her gaze unfocusing as it seemed to really sink in that she might change too.

“It’s not that,” Nick finally responded. “It’s just, this is why I was only an EMT for a few months. I can’t handle the gore. Not in real life. It’s different on TV, but just looking at this makes me feel like I’m going to pass out.”

“Oh.” I paused as I considered that. “Well, then just tell me what I need to do, and I’ll do it.”

“Kai, are you sure?” Serenity asked seriously.

I shrugged. “I mean, the gore isn’t a problem for me, so as long as you’re fine with me doing it.”

Her deep brown eyes widened slightly, before she nodded, lowering her voice. “I trust you.”

I gave her a small smile of appreciation, glancing over my shoulder again as Gabriella came down the stairs. However, when she entered the kitchen, she stopped at the entrance, as if she was afraid to come too close.

Serenity noticed, speaking up before anyone else could. “It’s okay, Gabriella,” she reassured her. “Just bring it over.”

My fiancé nodded, remorse crossing her expression as she made her way to Nick’s other side.

“Okay,” he began after a second, seeming to collect himself and organize his thoughts as he recalled his training. “First, we need to sterilize the scissors, and then you’re going to have to cut out all the tissue that’s sticking out.”

“Wait, what?” I said in surprise.

He nodded toward the wound, grabbing the Peroxide, while keeping his eyes averted. “Here, pour a little bit of this on it, and you’ll see what I mean. Oh, and wash your hands first too,” he added, reaching to turn on the sink, only to wash his hands as well.

I did as he asked, washing my hands and then grabbing the brown bottle, pouring a little on my hands and rubbing it on the bottle itself, while my friend ducked her head and pressed her forehead against her upper arm as we began to work. It wasn’t bleeding as profusely, allowing the Peroxide to wash away enough to see what looked like little chunks of yellow fat sticking out in various places.

Nick continued, keeping his eyes averted. “Any of the stuff hanging out is going to die anyway, so you have to cut it off before you can stitch the wound up properly.” He sighed. “If we were taking her to the hospital, and this was an emergency stitch-up, then we wouldn’t worry about it. But since we aren’t going to the hospital, we need to make sure we do it right the first time.”

“Is it going to hurt?” I asked seriously.

He shook his head. “Most likely no. She probably won’t even feel it. This is tissue that’s usually underneath where the nerves are.”

I nodded, accepting the small pair of scissors when he handed them to me. They were still wet, but he'd used the Peroxide to sterilize them, so I wasn't worried about the liquid hurting her. I hesitated when Gabriella walked away, pausing for a moment until I realized she was grabbing the paper towels to clean up the floor behind us.

"Are you ready?" I whispered to Serenity, beginning to readjust my grip on her forearm.

"Yes," she said weakly, her voice muffled due to her position.

I nodded, carefully going for a piece of tissue that I felt confident wouldn't hurt her much, if at all, since it was barely hanging off.

She didn't even flinch.

"Did you feel that?" I asked softly.

"No," she replied almost inaudibly.

I took a deep breath, and then moved to another piece. Followed by another, slowly growing more confident that she really couldn't feel it. Granted, she did flinch a couple of times, but when I asked her if it hurt, she claimed that she barely felt it and was just surprised when she did.

About ten minutes later, and we were finally moving on to the stitches, with Nick pouring Peroxide over the wound for probably the fifth or sixth time.

"Okay," he commented, still keeping his eyes off her arm. "Now this part, she's going to feel."

"I'll be okay," Serenity said right away. "Let's just get this done."

Nick nodded, though only I could see it, grabbing the curved needle and sutures. He got everything set up and ready to go, and then carefully handed it to me, verbally beginning to instruct me on how to do it. The process seemed a little redundant, with him asking me to go back and make extra loops that seemed unnecessary, as if I was going to tie it off and cut it. And I felt like I was going way deeper with the needle than I should, but I continued to follow his directions exactly as he said them, doing my best to ignore Serenity's constant wincing.

Finally done, I cut the last end and we finished up, with my patient having two jagged half circles on her arm now. I had to admit that it didn't look nearly as bad at this point, with Nick finally able to fully focus on it without looking like he was going to be sick.

"You did a good job," he praised.

I only grunted in response, not feeling super excited about my handiwork, instead glancing back at Gabriella who had long since finished cleaning up the floor and was now sitting in a chair. I gave her a small reassuring smile.

She gave me a weak smile in return, still looking like she felt as guilty as hell. And still looking abnormally vibrant.

Serenity finally lifted her head to take a look at it too, opening and closing her hand a few times as she examined my work. She then took a deep breath and sat up straighter in her chair, prompting me to stand up more as well and step back to give her space.

Without hesitation, my housemate looked over at Gabriella, her brown eyes widening as she took in her appearance, only to focus more on her dejected posture. She then cleared her throat. "Hey, come here please," she said simply.

Gabriella looked up in surprise, hesitating for a second, before slowly standing and moving closer. Her shoulders were slumped in shame. She was already a couple of inches shorter than Serenity, but her posture made her look even smaller.

Once she was close enough, Serenity grabbed her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze.

"Hey, it's alright," Serenity said softly. "I know you didn't do it on purpose."

Gabriella's vibrant emerald eyes began filling with tears again. "I'm so sorry," she repeated in a choked voice. "I really didn't mean to."

"I know," Serenity agreed. "I believe you, I really do."

I sighed heavily, starting to feel like this was really all my fault. "I shouldn't have bitten her in the first place," I commented. "I should have just toughed it out. Now she's probably going to have the same problem I have for the rest of her life. Risking exposure whenever she feels a strong emotion."

Serenity immediately shook her head. "Kai, I'd rather have this nasty bite right now than have risked you dying last night. I'm glad Gabriella did what she did. I would have done the same if given the chance."

My eyes widened slightly at that, seeing her obvious sincerity.

"Plus," Nick chimed in. "She doesn't really look strange at this point. Maybe in comparison to how she usually looks, but she could pass as normal right now..." He paused, lowering his voice. "Assuming her skin

doesn't start turning gray." He then cleared his throat. "And while it does seem as if the bite is what caused it to happen, we don't know that for sure. Might be sexually transmitted, for example."

All of us immediately looked in different directions, every single one of us embarrassed by the realization of that possibility. And the reminder that Gabriella and I fucked despite my older friend's wishes.

"Oh," Nick continued after a second, seeming to realize only after the rest of us just how awkward that was. "Umm, well *anyway* , we'll at least have a better idea if the same thing happens to Serenity."

I tried to clear my throat, wanting to move the subject to something else.

Anything else .

"So, in the meantime, I really need to figure out what the limitations are for this, err..." I hesitated. "I guess *desire* , we seem to have. For blood." I took a deep breath. "I was already able to confirm last night that animal blood seems to be fine, but we need to test and see how long the craving can be resisted." I focused on Gabriella's guilty expression for a second, and then met Serenity's wide eyes. "It's too dangerous not knowing what will happen if we go too long without, whenever the craving rears its ugly head. For all we know, what happened just now with Gabriella might not have been a fluke. It could be something that could happen to either of us, under the right circumstances."

Nick nodded in agreement. "First, you should probably make sure Gabriella gets some animal blood, since it sounds like she's still needing it. But at least animals can work. Stealing human blood would be a lot more difficult, especially since most places that store blood bags have security cameras."

Fuck, that brought up another concern.

Could Gabriella even stomach drinking blood from a living animal? I mean, she was a vegetarian before all this, and yeah she was kind of alright with eating meat, but this was an entirely different situation.

"R-Right," I said hesitantly, my thoughts moving to considering how we could test our limitations out. "Oh, and can I borrow your gun?" I asked, directing my question to my housemate.

That caught them all off guard, everyone looking at me like I was crazy.

"To shoot yourself?" Nick clarified in disbelief.

I nodded, causing Serenity to gasp.

“Kai!” she exclaimed. “Isn’t there some other way?”

I focused on her again, giving her a sympathetic look. “To see how much I can get hurt, before I might lose control? No, I don’t think there is.”

She grimaced, taking a shallow breath. “You just better be careful! I can’t lose you! You’re basically the only one I have left!”

I fully understood how she felt, knowing that there was no one who could replace her in my life.

I gave her a weak smile. “I know. And I’m not going to try to kill myself. I’ll stop before it gets to that point. But I also can’t risk killing some random person just because I don’t know what my limits are.” I sighed heavily. “I love you, Ren.”

“I love you too,” she whispered, still seeming against the idea, but knowing I was determined.

I bent down to give her a quick hug, and then grabbed Gabriella’s hand to lead her over to where I’d left Serenity’s gun after collecting it from her kidnapper’s car the previous night, followed by heading out past the stairs to the backdoor. Once we got outside, Gabriella started apologizing again, obviously still feeling miserable about what she’d done.

I shook my head in response, leading her past the shed into the trees. “No, *I’m* sorry. I didn’t know this would happen. I wouldn’t have bitten you if I’d known.”

She was quiet for a few seconds as she absorbed that. She then tentatively spoke up. “Kai...I feel horrible about what I did. Like, really horrible.” She paused. “But, if this means I’ve really become like you, then that makes me kind of glad. It makes me feel closer to you now.”

“It does?” I said in surprise, glancing back at her still-vibrant emerald eyes.

She nodded, a slight blush appearing beneath her tan cheeks. Her tone was more lighthearted, with it being obvious she was trying to lighten my mood. “If anything, it might mean I can actually overpower you in bed now.”

I unexpectedly chuckled at that, which was a nice temporary release from all the tension I felt.

Gabriella smiled weakly in response, seeming happy to have made me laugh, but clearly still feeling miserable.

I took a deep breath, still a little amused as I shook my head. “Wow, you really have a one-track mind, don’t you?” I teased.

She gave me a slightly more playful look. “Normally it’s guys with that kind of problem, but when I’m with you, I just can’t help myself.”

I gave her a small smile. “As if you didn’t already do what you wanted before,” I said with mock disbelief.

She finally smiled more fully, before it vanished just as fast. “I love you,” she whispered somberly.

“I love you too,” I replied sincerely. “Now, we need to get you something to eat, hopefully—” My voice cut off when her expression suddenly became serious, as she started looking around. It was enough for me to quickly focus on my senses in alarm, only to not notice anything significant.

Just the trees rustling in the wind, the bird singing at each other, a few early cicadas chirping in the distance. It was actually kind of peaceful, or would have been were it not for what just happened in the house.

“What’s wrong?” I asked after a moment.

Her vibrant emerald eyes focused on me. “It’s just, you said your senses were stronger than regular people. But I don’t feel much different than usual, except maybe a little stronger.” She then held up her arms, focusing on her tan skin. “And I can’t seem to turn back to normal. I tried earlier after I was done cleaning up the floor, but nothing happened.” She sighed. “Although, I’m not really sure how to do it anyway.”

I honestly wasn’t sure either, since I had no idea how to explain a process that I’d just done naturally all my life.

I just did it.

I took a deep breath. “Well, let’s just focus on finding an animal to hunt for right now. We can worry about the details later.”

Gabriella frowned briefly before agreeing with a nod, prompting us to set off to hunt down a deer. I figured that would be easier for her than a predator like a coyote, or something really small that she might perceive as cute, like a squirrel. Granted, I wasn’t sure how she was going to do no matter what I picked out.

As we moved quickly, I noticed that she was definitely faster than a normal person, but there was no way she’d ever be able to outrun a four-legged animal at this point.

Still, it was surprisingly nice to run beside her at such an accelerated speed. In gym at school, I of course always had to hold back, making sure I wasn’t the fastest person, in order to avoid the coach trying to recruit me for

track or something. Thus, I was familiar with running beside others. However, going at a pace that would be considered world record breaking for humans was a different experience.

Primarily because I'd never been around anyone who could even remotely keep up with me. It made me look forward to, and hope, that maybe Gabriella would actually get faster as time progressed, though I had no idea what to expect from this seemingly unprecedented transformation.

Once I located a deer with my nose and ears, I asked her to wait so I could catch it for her, knocking it unconscious and dragging it back. However, much to my surprise, when she caught sight of me, she eagerly ran to meet me halfway, suddenly seeming extremely cheerful.

And then, even more shocking, she didn't even hesitate when I held the head up by its small antlers, wrapping her arms around the buck's neck as she bit into its furry throat, readjusting her teeth a few times until she had the blood flowing, beginning to slurp it up with each heartbeat.

Seriously, I was in shock.

I watched her in disbelief, continuing to support most of the deer's weight as she drank until its heart began sputtering and eventually stopped.

Finally, she pulled back, some of the blood having gotten on her already-torn shirt.

"Wow," she exclaimed emphatically, a huge grin on her face, a little bit of blood actively disappearing on the corners of her mouth as it seemed to get absorbed into her skin. "That was *extremely* satisfying."

"You liked it?" I asked seriously.

She nodded, leaning forward and grabbing my face to give me a long kiss on the lips, prompting me to drop the deer.

"Yep!" she agreed cheerfully, grinning up at me. "It was like caramel popcorn, but in liquid form. Salty, sweet, and buttery all at once. Possibly the best thing I've ever tasted..." She lowered her voice, gently rubbing her thumbs along my jaw. "Aside from your cum," she added.

I cleared my throat, only able to nod.

She tilted her head to the side slightly. "What's wrong?" she wondered, her expression adorable.

"Umm, you just seem different," I admitted. "Like, you've gone from vegetarian to drinking blood in less than a day, as if it's no big deal."

She pouted. "Is it because of my smell?" she asked. "Did it change?"

I gave her a confused look. “No, but what does that have to do with anything?”

Her pout deepened. “Well, you never did tell me if that’s why you didn’t want me to stop being vegetarian.” She sighed. “But remember, I told you I grew up that way. I don’t have a particular issue with eating meat, other than habit. And I’d much rather kill a deer than accidentally kill a person.” She shivered then, dropping her hands from my face and wrapping her arms around herself. “It really scares me thinking about what might have happened if you hadn’t been there to wake me up.”

Honestly, I didn’t want to think about it either.

Because if I hadn’t been around, Gabriella could have killed my friend, and that was a horrifying thought indeed. Not to mention, I couldn’t even imagine how my fiancé would have felt when she did finally wake up, only to discover that she was drinking from Serenity’s neck.

I mean, being completely honest, if I woke up like that, I probably would have killed myself.

Especially if it was Serenity.

Which was even more reason to figure out what our limits were, to make sure nothing like that ever happened to either of us.

Unexpectedly, Gabriella cheered up again, dropping her arms and interrupting my thoughts. “So then, I still smell good?” she asked, sounding hopeful.

I just stared at her in disbelief, surprised by how quickly her emotions seemed to be shifting. “Umm, yeah. You still smell as amazing as always. Your scent hasn’t changed at all.” I frowned then, really focusing on it, wondering *why* it was the same.

I’d already considered that it might actually be because she was part-succubus, something that I’d almost forgotten about with everything going on. But I supposed this really confirmed that my assumption about her diet being the cause was wrong, because not only had she eaten meat the previous day, but she’d also just drank more blood than should be possible for her stomach to hold. Yet, she still had that intoxicating smell somewhat similar to the taste of maple syrup.

So then, maybe it was truly because she was part-succubus.

Granted, we hadn’t actually confirmed that yet, since Gabriella’s mom hadn’t gotten back to her.

However, either way, Serenity usually had the same base scent too, despite what she ate, just not as potent as Gabriella's aroma, and much more normal too. So I shouldn't be so surprised it wasn't due to her diet.

Although, with my housemate's scent, while she didn't smell bad to me, I'd never compare it to something related to food. Serenity just smelled like a human female – a very familiar scent that was extremely comforting, but not appetizing. Or more specifically, the scent itself didn't provoke my sexual appetite, like Gabriella's smell did.

"Well, that's good," my fiancé replied with a dramatic sigh. "Knowing that how I smelled was so important to you, that's been my biggest concern."

I nodded slowly, my thoughts returning to the seriousness of what almost happened back at the house. "But I guess that means I need to go catch another deer now. And shoot myself."

That got her attention, her expression immediately somber. Her voice was barely a whisper as she responded. "I can shoot myself instead, if you want. You have a better chance of stopping me from hurting anyone."

I was again taken aback, before I shook my head. "I really can't believe this. Offering to shoot yourself? And you drank the deer's blood like it was no big deal. How are you coping with this so easily?" I asked seriously.

She almost looked like she was about to cry now. "Kai, I love you. A lot." She took a deep breath, glancing away. "I accepted that this was your reality pretty quickly, and I even imagined what it would be like for you..." She paused, only to scoff. "I've certainly read enough vampire books to imagine it." She then sighed, focusing up at me again. "So it's not too difficult for me to accept this as my reality too. Besides, my body wanted it. The blood was really good, so it wasn't hard to give into that craving. And, if anything, it makes me happy that I'm like you now."

Happy?

I hadn't really thought about how I felt about this, aside from feeling guilty that I'd given her my problems. But that kind of brought up a good point.

Did it make *me* happy?

Not that it really mattered, since I couldn't change what I'd done. But I had been perfectly content with her being a normal person. Although, now that I thought about it, maybe this meant I wouldn't have to worry about her dying from a gunshot too easily.

Not to mention...

"Hey," I said gently, glancing down at her stomach. "Can you lift your shirt up a little?" I wondered.

Gabriella gave me a confused look, before reaching down, yanking her fitted shirt up to just below her chest, revealing all of her firm tan stomach. "Why?" she wondered. "Something wrong?"

I shook my head, taking a step to the side to confirm what was already obvious. "No. But your bruising is gone."

She immediately looked down too, twisting to the side, her butt sticking out as she tried to look at her lower back, her dimples becoming more visible from the position, though the nastiest bruise from the Taser had been higher. "Huh, well that's certainly a perk," she commented.

I nodded slowly, with it finally settling in that this might be a good thing.

At the very least, she would probably perceive it as a benefit if her senses got stronger. For me, the world was so much richer than it seemed to be for a normal person, largely because I could hear, smell, and see so much more than most people. Not to mention being able to run for miles without tiring, and also having the ability to fly.

I could never imagine being a normal person, and realized I'd never want to be normal if given the choice. Even despite the problems that came with it.

Taking a deep breath, I let it out slowly, refocusing my thoughts on what I had to do next. "Well, regarding the gun thing, it seems you aren't fully like me at this point. At least not yet. So we don't know for sure you would be able to handle a gunshot like I would. For one, you might not heal as fast, and it's not worth the risk."

She pouted again, but nodded in agreement.

Before continuing, I focused more heavily on my nose, testing the air to confirm what I was about to say. "Plus, there are no people around for miles. So if something happens, there are plenty of other wildlife for me to attack, assuming the next deer I catch isn't enough."

She frowned but gave me another small nod.

Leaning forward, I wrapped my arms around her and gave her a kiss, only to take a deep breath of her scent. "Okay, I'll be back."

"I love you," she whispered as I pulled away.

“I love you too,” I replied sincerely, turning and beginning to jog toward what sounded like the nearest deer a couple of miles in the distance. However, as I got closer I had to abandon that particular one, because I caught a whiff of human, and while the person was far enough away, chasing down the deer could last sometimes half a mile or more, especially if it sensed me coming before I got close enough. Not to mention, the trees seemed thinner in that direction, and I just didn’t want to chance it.

I assumed it must be a hiker or something, because while it was definitely bow season this time in April, I was pretty sure it was for turkeys or something, not deer. Thankfully, Nick hadn’t known any better when we were discussing the deer thing the previous evening, though I had to admit I didn’t pay much attention to that kind of thing either.

If anything, that would have been a better excuse for why a hunter might leave a deer in the middle of our yard. Because it wasn’t the right hunting season.

About ten minutes later, and I’d picked up on another deer, sneaking up on it without issue and taking it down. Unfortunately, it woke up as I was dragging it back, so I had to knock it out again before continuing on.

Gabriella seemed concerned when she caught sight of me, though I suspected it was just because of what I was about to do. She met me halfway again, and when I knelt down in front of the deer’s limp body, pulling out the gun from my pocket, she knelt behind me to wrap herself around my torso, leaning her forehead against the back of my white hair, pressing her heavy tits into my shoulders.

She had one of her arms across my chest, her upper arm against my neck while her hand was on my side, prompting me to gently kiss the part of her arm resting against my cheek. She gave me a squeeze in response, keeping her forehead buried.

I took a deep breath, made sure the safety was off, and then held the barrel up to the meaty part of my forearm.

“Ready?” I whispered.

She only nodded in response, holding me tighter.

I took another deep breath, and then pulled the trigger.

The ricocheting gunshot was louder than I was anticipating, causing us both to flinch, the thunderous noise immediately silencing all the birds and few cicadas, though the pain itself wasn’t nearly as bad as I was expecting. Certainly nothing like I’d experienced the previous night, even if it still hurt

like hell. The bullet also wasn't in my arm, having gone straight through and buried itself in the ground.

The entry and exit wounds immediately began gushing blood, and the craving to drink blood resurfaced, but within seconds the bleeding had stopped, leaving me with a chilled sensation as my skin healed up.

The thumping of the unconscious deer's heart beating began sounding louder, my focus being drawn to it, but resisting didn't feel any more difficult than it had been last night.

"Are you alright?" Gabriella whispered after a few seconds.

I took a deep breath. "Yeah, I'm fine so far. I have the urge, but it isn't too bad."

She nodded, giving me another squeeze.

Readjusting the barrel of the gun, I gave her a quick warning and then shot a second time. I felt lightheaded for a moment this time, but could already tell that not much else had changed. Thus, I repositioned the gun, and fired again.

The wound stopped bleeding just as fast as before, but it didn't seem to heal right away this time.

Yet still, the craving for blood didn't seem to get any stronger.

"I think I need to try to bleed more," I announced. "Because the urge isn't changing. I probably need to hit a major artery or something," I added, positioning the barrel on my bicep.

Gabriella nodded against the back of my head, glancing at what I was doing. "You need to move the gun a little lower then," she instructed quietly. "There's a major artery that runs down the center."

I glanced back at her in surprise, causing her to pull her head away slightly.

She answered my confused expression. "Anatomy and Physiology, remember?" she said simply.

"Oh, right," I replied, my brow furrowing as I readjusted the gun. "Thanks," I added, getting ready to pull the trigger again.

She didn't respond, holding me tight in preparation. It was obvious she hated this, but we both knew it had to be done. We had to know what would happen if we were hurt too badly, and I suspected that blood loss was the most important aspect. Because while I'd suffered a lot of damage last night, those harpoon-like projectiles had also prevented excessive bleeding.

And with the way my body worked, even internal bleeding likely didn't count as blood loss, since my body could seemingly just reabsorb it. If anything, that might have been why I was able to keep my own sanity even despite the situation.

Taking another controlled breath, I pulled the trigger.

Instantly, the bullet lodged itself in my bone, my body jerking forward from the agony, barely managing to stifle a scream as it began gushing all over my side. Gabriella immediately started to apologize over and over again, as if it was somehow her fault, her scent laced with guilt and remorse.

My head felt like it was swimming as I tried to pull myself together, my vision dark around the edges.

"I think I'm going to pass out," I hissed just as my vision darkened even more.

"What should I do?" I heard Gabriella ask urgently, her voice sounding like it was a mile away, both of us knowing we hadn't planned for something like this to happen.

But I wasn't able to respond, feeling like I couldn't form coherent thoughts as the ground abruptly came a little closer, my head dropping.

I barely heard Gabriella urgently ask something else, but I couldn't hear her now, my mind fading away entirely, a low growl the only sound rumbling in my ears.

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