



HER

ONE

AND

ONLY...

THE KEEPER SERIES

BY DENISE SULLIVAN

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Introduction

Newly partnered caterer, Rebekah Waters, has been searching for true love and romance for a long time. Being a full-figured black woman on the rise with a new partner and scores of clients, she fears that love has passed her by. While confident in herself as a business woman, she begins to lack confidence in her personal life. She has dealt with the heartaches of an abusive boyfriend, a mama's boy, a stalker – even a closet bigamist. All she wants is a real shot at love.

From her first love in high school to her sex stalking attorney, Rebekah is about to swear off men altogether – that is, until she meets her new neighbor – enter Jake Turner – a very well-off gallery owner and entrepreneur, who recently uprooted from the Bay area to open a new art gallery in Los Angeles. He is gorgeous, financially secure in more ways than one and, unbeknownst to anyone – even himself, has eyes only for Rebekah. After his not-so-private breakup with Eliza, Jake wants to get to know his neighbor better – both on and off the clock.

Unbeknownst to either party, there is someone lurking in the shadows – watching – waiting. He wants it all – he wants Rebekah.

Like Rebekah, Jake's been searching to find the right person to settle down with, and thanks to a "slight" nudge from his grandmother and her business partner; they both may have found what they have been searching for – The Keeper. Will *he* get in their way?

Prologue

“Oh my God! I can’t believe something could be so good – yes I can! Yes, I can! It is so sinfully delicious! Bekah, you are the connoisseur of dessert extravaganza!” “Uh – thank you?” Those were the only words that Rebekah Waters could muster after watching her friend, and client, Gail Abernathy, sink her teeth into another bite of her new dessert, *Ambrosia Delights*.

“Tell me, Bekah,” Gail mumbled as she took another succulent bite of the mouth-watering, newly invented dessert, “-what did you put in this? I taste a hint of rosehips and – and, champagne?” Gail’s eyes rolled to the back of her head, and Rebekah wanted to laugh as she watched her friend delve into what was left of the tasty treat. Rebekah spent two days working on a recipe specially suited for Gail’s upcoming event. Having created a champagne tart in the past from scratch that won Gail over the first time they met, she wanted this to knock her socks off. And by the way Gail was dancing in her chair with delight, she had done just that.

“These little Champagne Ambrosia cakes are heavenly! They are perfect size to tease the pallet and make you want more! Bravo, Bekah! Bravo!” Feeling giddy, Bekah smiled and replied with great pride, “Thanks, Gail. I am so glad you approve. Do you think they will really go over well?” Unable to answer, Gail repeatedly nodded in delight and continued to savor the last bite.

If Beckie, or Bekah as her family and close friends called her, could pat herself on the back right now, she would. She’d never seen anyone enjoy one of her desserts like Gail Abernathy did. Gail was a high-end socialite party extraordinaire who hosted, if not attended, an enormous amount of upscale business parties, debutant balls, personal social gatherings of important business moguls, and the like. She was the one person someone wanted on their side when trying to promote ones’ business or bring together prominent authority figures. Rebekah had been fortunate enough to be introduced to Gail through an acquaintance from one of the firms she had done legal work for. At first Gail was skeptical, not by the way their mutual friend had gone on about Rebekah’s cooking, but because Rebekah didn’t appear to be your typical well-bred caterer that she had been used to dealing with.

When Gail and Rebekah first met, Rebekah had just moved from the East Coast in search of a new beginning. She loved baking and had done successfully with family and close friends back home, and wanted to bring that talent, along with her legal

background, to the West Coast and see which one would take off first and fastest. She worked with various firms, in and out of their office researching and filing legal documents with the state and federal courts throughout portions of the Southern California area. One firm loved her and her work, and the Senior Partner was throwing a party to welcome new associates and partners to the firm. Aside from her shy demeanor, Rebekah had made friends quickly in the firm and would bring in the occasional treat or sample platter to share with the employees.

Many of the firms that she did business with would receive a delectable, mouth-watering care package upon her arrival as a kind gesture for giving her their business, in a sense. Even on occasion, she would offer to do the catering for the occasional conference room meetings and breakfasts.

At first meeting, Gail had been in a foul mood having had a heated discussion with her then pastry chef who had decided to up and quit on her. She had dismissed Rebekah like a common servant, barely touching her hand when Rebekah had extended it in kind greeting. Gail had given her a list of the foods she wanted and insisted that she make a handful of desserts while the “culinary chefs” worked on the main course. “My dear, it is rather important that you follow my instructions to the letter. I do not tolerate half-created concoctions from ‘mama’s kitchen’ and I do not divulge in southern eatery, do I make myself clear?” All Rebekah could do was nod her head and say “yes ma’am” in a barely audible voice.

As Gail turned to walk away, Rebekah cleared her throat and began to make a few choice selections of her own – “Miss Aber...” “That’s Ms. Abernathy, my dear. I’ve buried two husbands and divorced another. I am no more a Miss than the man on the moon.” “Yes, of course – Ms. Abernathy, you have quite and extensive list of desserts that you want to go with your selection of main courses, I see...” “Yes, and?” “Well, I noticed that you have a chocolate shaved double chocolate cake and cherry tart to accompany the pork tender loin with new baby potatoes and asparagus? Might I suggest that since you are going with such a rich main course, that you finish with a light dessert – perhaps a light and airy Raspberry and Champagne Chiffon cake, drizzled in a light chocolate raspberry sauce?” Gail just stood there, waiting – trying to keep herself from licking her lips in front of Rebekah. As she turned to walk away, she called over her shoulder, “Very good, my dear. I will expect a sample of your- what did you call it?” “Champagne Chiffon cake.” “-yes of course. Your cake, as well as the double chocolate cake and the cherry tart in my office tomorrow morning. We will see which the appropriate choice is.”

It wasn’t long before Rebekah had created the desserts and was at Gail’s door before start of business the next day. She had taken her time the night before perfecting her chiffon cake. It was one cake she could bake in her sleep and not skip a beat. As a child she watched her mother bake the same cake, and as she got older she was able to

duplicate it, and more. Every nook and cranny of the cake was raised to perfection. It was nice and moist, and lay perfectly on the fork without losing its decadence. The light raspberry filling was enough to tease the pallet without taking away from the champagne chiffon cake. Drizzling it with the chocolate raspberry sauce instead of the butter crème was definitely the right choice.

She set a slice of each dessert before Gail and waited while she tasted each one. By the time that Gail was finished, there was nothing left of the Chiffon cake. Having followed the instructions and ingredients to the letter for both the double chocolate and cherry tart, given to her by the then current baker, it was no wonder over half of the slices were still on their respective plates.

As the last bite of the chiffon cake disappeared into Gail's mouth, Rebekah watched as she wiped her mouth in unrelenting satisfaction and beamed an aura of pure delight in Rebekah's amazed direction. Pushing the plate away from her, Gail stood, walked over to Rebekah, and held her hand in hers for a long time as she welcomed her as her new "dessert connoisseur" or pastry chef as one would call it. Rebekah was over the moon with her new-found success as well as the beginning of new found friendship.

However, there was one thing that still gnawed at her; something that this new-found success could not give her. She longed for something more and knew in time that it was something she wanted to make happen. Tired of being alone, Rebekah decided that it was time to make a goal for herself and seek out the man of her dreams.

Chapter 1 – Memories

He took her into his arms, caressing her face, stroking her hair gently. Pulling her closer to him and pressing her against his body as though he was hoping for some permanent impression of her on his very soul, he began to peel her clothing from her wanton body. Looking aching and deeply into each other's eyes, their lips met endlessly. The kiss seemed to last forever, longing, burning, and aching for more. Their mouths and bodies intertwined with one another and heat could be felt expelling from their very beings. Their hands invading each other's bodies relentlessly – looking to seek that one point of pleasure before time ran out. He stopped kissing her long enough for her to say, "Oh, John! I love you so much – I knew we would be together again! I just knew it!"

Famous words from the TiVo' d soap opera that was playing in the background while Rebekah Waters sat at the cherry oak dining room table of her two-bedroom townhome-home just outside of Los Angeles, California. Glancing up long enough to see Natalie and John kiss for the umpteenth time, caused Rebekah to roll her eyes, grab the remote, aim it like a shotgun and turn off the television, making sappy kiss noises as she went back to her books. While going over her business accounts, she slowly began to smile as she saw the ever-increasing business revenue and the quickly disappearing debt that had been an unwelcome crutch since before her much-needed departure from the East Coast some nearly four years ago. Her work with the catering and event planning business was taking off as well, and she thoroughly relished in the new clients her best friend, Gail Abernathy, had been introducing her to as her business partner since their first meeting not long after her arrival in California.

"Four years...has it really been that long?" She said to herself and pausing, like she was waiting for a response. A smile would come and go on her face as she realized that she was officially in business for herself and doing pretty well at it. She loved working in the legal field, no matter how many people tried to deter her from going forward with her legal degree. She was fluent in all that she did as a Paralegal, but her true love was cooking. No matter how many toes she had to step on along the way, she was happy that she made it this far.

She had even managed to get a degree in culinary arts, something she loved doing. Rebekah couldn't remember a time when she was so passionate about doing something for herself. Not only was she thriving as a legal professional, but she was able to give herself a pat on the back for the well-done job she had accomplished as

Gail's head pastry and sous chef for many of the prominent functions Gail had been a part of. She was even more proud of herself for being her new business partner.

Being a paraprofessional was one of her favorite things to do – baking was another; and man, could she bake. She thoroughly believed that had she not chosen to take on a part time business in the legal profession, she would have been a full-time pastry chef or the next Betty Crocker. Cakes and pies were her specialty. She was a whiz in the kitchen – picking it up early from her mama before she was twelve. She learned to bake cakes and pies as well as cook a full course meal just like the rest of her siblings. Her sister, Serlee, had started baking and cooking with her mama before she got sick. Rebekah remembered that she was good at it too and felt a tear form and trail down her cheek.

Rebekah had thought long and hard as she got older about what it was that she wanted to do in the career sense. She couldn't see herself being a doctor or lawyer like her brother and sister were – or even a decorated military officer like her oldest brother. Being more on the shy and reserved side, like her mother, Rebekah liked being behind the scenes and making sure everything was in place, which was something she thrived on.

Taking on the corporate world was fine for her, but it was not completely where her heart lied. When she was in college, she told herself that she would take a chance and see where one or the other would take her; knowing that if one didn't pan out for her the way that she wanted it to, she would have the other to fall back on.

Serlee, her middle sister, was her soul inspiration in that no matter what obstacles God laid before you, it is there for a reason. He would never give you anything too hard or too big to overcome. She believed that, even after the good Lord called Serlee home again. It made her heart ache to think about her long-departed sister. Although she would push her memories to the back of her mind to concentrate on the here and now, she always knew that her deepest thoughts of her sister were never far away.

The goals she set for her self were important to her. Even in Junior High and High School, setting goals, even the little ones, helped her make it through some of the trying and not so easy times during her young life growing up. From the time she was a young girl of 9, all the way up until she was about 25 or 26, Rebekah had to struggle to make sure she didn't waiver from being who her sister, Serlee, wanted her to be.

Her teenage years were the hardest. She had grown anxious about leaving home and going off to some far away college, setting hers *and* Serlee's dreams in motion. She kept her nose in her books and would never allow herself any grade below a B+. Rebekah had made the Honor Roll every semester, every year, all the way up to her junior year in high school. There were a few times where she didn't think solely about *their* dreams, and she let someone in a time or two, to see the real her.

A lot of her youth was spent in the shadows, working vigorously on her studies a majority of the time, but Rebekah reminded herself that she needed to interact with her peers, even the boys who sometimes didn't give her a second thought – sometimes. From the time she was twelve she found she was able to turn the head or two of the boys in school. Being a pretty, little girl, she wasn't as stunningly handsome as her older sister, nor was she the former homecoming queen and Miss Rhode Island, like that of her mother.

Not too much of a tomboy, but not too dainty of a flower either, she made work with what God had given her, and it seemed to suit her just fine. Rebekah was not the head turning beauty like her older sister JoAnn; however, she was not some homely wannabe either. She had been what her parents called “healthy” for most of her life. She remembered how Serlee loved wearing dresses and dainty shoes on her feet and frilly bows in her long, thinning hair. She told herself that she would continue Serlee's “froo froo” tradition and don the occasional party dress with heels. No matter how badly those heels hurt her feet, or how awkward she thought she looked in a dress, she did it just to remind herself that she was still female, and she could turn a head or two.

From the time she was able to properly dress herself without the aid of her mother or older sister, all the way up through her Senior year in high school, she wore a skirt or dress at least once a week until she left for college and made it her mission to hit the books and close the “froo froo” door until she got herself right.

Rebekah loved her hometown near Providence, but felt it was time to make a change and move to someplace a little more upbeat and exciting – something hugely different than the quiet, introverted life that she had made herself accustomed to back there. While she enjoyed the exceptional four seasons back home, she could not deprive herself of the warm, beautiful, and sunny weather of Southern California.

Growing up in the small town of North Kingstown, Rhode Island, Rebekah led a somewhat, self-made quiet childhood. Being the youngest of five boisterous brothers and sisters, she often wondered how she could possibly be related to such a loud and crazy group. With three older brothers and two older sisters – one still living, she was never without playmates or rivalries. Serlee – who was just three years older than Rebekah, had been struck down just before celebrating her twelfth birthday, with Leukemia and lived only another eight months before passing on.

Serlee's death was devastating to Rebekah. She cried for weeks missing her. There were days when she would lock herself in Serlee's old room and not come out for days at a time. At times her mother feared she would completely withdraw from the family. She knew how much Serlee meant to Rebekah and hoped that in time, she would be able to heal and come back to the living and her family who loved her dearly.

Serlee was Rebekah's best friend. They did everything together – even when Rebekah could barely walk, Serlee made it her job to look after her and be there for her. The others were somewhat older than Rebekah was – Reginald, had just turned 16, and was seven years older than Rebekah when Serlee got sick. Already standing an even 6 feet 1, he towered over most of the other students in his class. Jackson – well, he didn't have time to play with girls, especially at ten and a half and already on the youth center football and basketball teams. Then there was JoAnn – she was the oldest at twenty. She just completed three years at Salve Regina University and had received a scholarship to Howard University under the direction of then famous University President, before his departure.

JoAnn was ecstatic about attending Howard in the Fall. She had long dreamed of going to law school and having the opportunity to go to Howard was a great honor for her. Her parents were just as proud but could not give her the support she richly deserved as it was around the same time Serlee's illness took a turn for the worst.

Serlee had been playing with Rebekah one morning on the kitchen floor when her mother had noticed a cut on her leg that had occurred the previous week that looked as if it had just happened. She also noticed how tired she looked around the eyes. Feeling concerned, as any parent would, she made an appointment to see the doctor. After they listened to her mother's concerns, they decided to run a few tests to rule out a few of the common, and not-so-common, illnesses. Serlee was given some antibiotics and was told to get a little more rest. A few days later they were called back to the doctor's office and were given the news that it was more than just an unhealed cut and fatigue that would plague Serlee for the next eight months.

Rebekah was there with Serlee, even when her parents thought it not such a good idea. She wanted to be by her sister's side and not miss a second of them being together. It hurt Rebekah when she couldn't hug her sister at times. Seeing her walk around in a mask only added to her unanswered questions of why her sister was so sick, or why did Serlee have to keep going back and forth to the doctor. There were times when the once pudgy twelve-year-old would look so sullen in the face that it scared Rebekah.

Chemotherapy took its toll on such a fragile little girl like Serlee. Their mother sat longingly at Serlee's bedside every night, just watching her sleep – watching her labored breathing expand and deflate her tiny chest as she tossed and turned. Their father had been deployed overseas for six months and had received word to return home. He had taken medical leave from the Navy and flew home quickly – well, as quickly as traveling across the oceans and country would allow. He was able to be TAD on base while Serlee underwent treatments and testing for AML (*acute myelogenous leukemia*).

All Rebekah could do was watch as her sister became weaker and slowly faded away from her life. She would often recall the handmade bracelet and necklace that Serlee's tired, but ever-thriving hands had made for them just before she got too sick to know who Rebekah was. She had made the costume jewelry with thin fishing wire, plastic beads, and hand-picked shells from Newport Bay that their father spent painstaking hours carefully drilling tiny holes in, at the request of his doting princess, who had been unable to walk outdoors and enjoy the sunshine.

"Mama is Serlee going to be alright?" This was an unanswered question that Rebekah would always ask her parents. They weren't sure how to explain Serlee's declining state. They wanted Rebekah to enjoy the short time that she had left with her sister. So, most of the time they would just smile and brush the hair from Rebekah's face and give responses like, "Don't you worry about your sister, now. She's tired right now, so why don't you go play." Or, "Give your sister a kiss and tell her how much you love her, ok?"

There were nights when everyone was asleep that Rebekah would sneak out of her room and into Serlee's. She would make herself a bed on the floor next to her sister, just to be close to her in case she needed something. Her mother, coming in to check on Serlee every now and then, would see Rebekah sprawled out on the floor, sound asleep. She never had the heart to wake her. Instead, she had their father bring in a cot for Rebekah to sleep on at night; explaining to her that it could only be once or twice a week to keep things clean for her sister.

Serlee had gone from a blustering, vivacious little girl – so full of life, to a fragile and sallow-looking child in a matter of months as she waited for God to call her home. Rebekah remembers the day her sister died like it was yesterday – it was a clear and sunny day in New England. Her mother had just finished the wash while Rebekah sat in Serlee's room singing her favorite hymn "He's got the Whole World in His Hands." Serlee couldn't sing along because life was slowly draining from her and every breath she took, Rebekah prayed and prayed it would not be her last.

When Rebekah would finish singing, she would remember touching Serlee's hand, and it feels ice cold while she watched Serlee struggle to breathe in and out, moving her lips to try and sing the song. Her mother came over and told Rebekah to give her sister a big hug and kiss and tell her how much she loved her. After Rebekah had done what her mother asked, tears started to fall from her eyes as she was led out of the room by JoAnn. She remembers looking back and seeing Serlee's eyes slowly fix on her and close with a crooked smile on her face as the door shut quietly; blocking her view of the last breath Serlee took. Her father sat in the hallway just feet away, with her brothers crying on either side of him. Rebekah would look up at JoAnn and watch as tears stained her face with silent sobs for her sister.

Rebekah's raven, long, curly ponytails bounced around as she wiggled herself free from her sister's grip and went running downstairs and out the front door, crying as loud as she could, "Serlee! Come back!" Her cries went unanswered – as she knew they would. Her sister, her best friend, was gone and she wasn't coming back. That was a reality that hit her all too hard for such a little girl.

Missing her sister, Rebekah had fallen in and out of depression from childhood to her teenage years, turning to food and school as her comfort. She had promised herself and Serlee that she would follow their dreams by going to college and becoming whatever God had planned them to be. In Rebekah's case, she believes now, was to be an entrepreneur and have a multitude of successful businesses under her belt.

She wasn't the party girl like some of her classmates; nor was she the kind to get into drugs and alcohol like them either. She feared that even though her sister was gone, Serlee would see her discrepancies and feel shame for her. Rebekah didn't want any of that. She wanted her to be proud of her and to know that she did everything to the best of her ability to become the person she knew that she could be.

Jostled from her memory, Rebekah walked over to the stereo, turned it to the current R&B station, and continued her work on the inescapable numbers that were jumping off the paper in front of her. The music made her come to her senses a little more and ease the ache of still missing her sister. She would catch herself humming every now and again to familiar tunes, while adding up the numbers to the beat.

Unfortunately, it would not ease the ache of her need for a male counterpart. Now, almost 36, and single – again, Rebekah has been able to make a pretty good name for herself as a pastry chef and semi-home-based Paralegal; with a catering partner and clients in both businesses, she is very proud of where she is at in her professional life; and very unhappy with her personal one. She longed for a man – not just any man. Rebekah longed for the kind of man that would come along and love her for the intelligent, kind hearted and loving woman that she was. She wanted the kind of man that would make her toes curl by the slightest touch.

There were times she would go out on the occasional date, but it wasn't the same as a steady man in her life, sharing her dreams, and her bed. Most of the men that she had dated once or twice usually wanted only one thing after the night was over. One-night-stands were not in her vocabulary; that was a lesson she learned before she moved from the East Coast.

Memories from her past would soon plague her and she needed to get away from them so that she could start fresh and with a clean slate. She thought the only way to do that, was to uproot herself from her familiar surroundings and start over somewhere that didn't carry the memories of high school loves, past abusive relationships, and lovers

who had cheated on her, or the ones who couldn't get out from under "mommy's" watchful eye.

The time had come for Rebekah to make her move before anyone or anything else got in her way.

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Chapter 2 – Allow Me to Introduce Myself

She was stuck and trying to decide where she wanted to go was a whole new ball game. There were a lot of possibilities for Rebekah, but none stuck out as much as California. Her parents tried desperately to talk her out of leaving but knew that they had raised their daughter to be an independent woman and whatever choices she made, they would always be there to support her. They supported her when she completed both courses of study. She managed to finish the top of her class in culinary arts which made her mother extremely happy. She also felt she had a small part in it.

Before taking on the calling of a paralegal, Rebekah landed a job at one of Providence's more refined restaurants where patrons loved the ambiance, not to mention the top-quality food, and couldn't get enough of her signature desserts. She had done well in landing a job with a top restaurant. It wasn't long before she was able to learn the ropes from some of the top chefs in the business.

It wasn't long after she started working in the restaurant that she met a young man named Raymond Xavier Pernell. Her parents had hoped that he would be in her life long enough to change her mind about leaving; they were wrong. He became one to the reasons she would run from Rhode Island.

While Raymond was sweet and loving on the outside, the inside was a completely different story. Raymond was a sous chef in training at a local restaurant she and her girlfriends had frequented every once and a while. He was a smooth-talking brother who loved the ladies. He stood around 5 feet 11 with a lean yet somewhat sturdy build. He wasn't a football player in high school or college; and he wasn't overweight. Most of the weight on him was on his upper body of which was muscle. He wasn't muscle distorted like most body builders, but he didn't look like he was lacking in that area either.

His legs were lean and strong and were proportionate to his upper half. He was a good-looking man for someone who fancied tattoos. He had many of them, up and down his arms. They could only be seen if he took off his chef coat after work or rolling up his sleeves when he needed to get down to serious cooking. The tattoos ranged from inscriptions of friends long past, to a picture of a little boy who took after his features. Raymond's hair was a short curly fro that ended about two inches above the nape of his neck. He wore no facial hair, though you could see his five o'clock shadow before three in the afternoon.

The first time he notices Rebekah was when she had to work late and met up with her friend, Charlene Davis, who she had known since they were in middle school and managed a small boutique not far from where Rebekah worked. They thought it would be nice to just sit, have a light dinner and catch up since neither of them had to work the next day. Charlene was already there when Rebekah walked in.

“Girl, I’m sorry I’m late.”

“That’s all right. I just got here myself.” Charlene gave Rebekah a haggard look as she watched Rebekah plop herself down on the chair across from her.

“Ooo girl, you look tired. Waiter, could we have a couple of waters, please? Thanks.”

“We were a little busy tonight. I tried a new recipe for dessert and they loved it. So much that I ended up having to make enough batter and directions if they needed more for the next couple of nights.”

Raymond was standing at the kitchen door watching Rebekah and Charlene chat it up. When he saw the waiter about to deliver their water, he stopped him and explained he wanted to bring it over himself.

“Here you fine ladies go.” The words rolled off his tongue like butter on a hot roll. Rebekah glanced up to accept the water and had to take a second look. “Thank you, very much.” “*You* are very welcome.” Raymond’s signature smile caught her attention, while Charlene just rolled her eyes and drank from her glass.

“So, how are you ladies doing this evening? Out for a night on the town?” Raymond was pouring it on, but Rebekah liked the attention. Charlene jumped in just as Rebekah was about to reply. “We’re just having a girl’s night – catching up on things.” Crinkling her nose with her last statement, she continued, “You know how it is.” Chuckling a little and giving Rebekah a wink, he responded, “Heh heh, yeah, I do.” Extending his hand, he introduced himself.

“My name is Raymond – Ray for short.” Again, Charlene became the mouthpiece for them both, “This is Rebekah – Bekah for short and I’m Char-” “Well, how do you do, Rebekah? It is a pleasure to meet you.” Raymond took her hand and kissed it. *Smooth brotha* was all that Rebekah could think of. *Jerk* was more of Charlene’s thinking after he cut her off during introductions.

The waiter returned, to Charlene’s relief, to take their orders. While Charlene ordered, Rebekah was fascinated by Raymond’s caramel colored skin that complimented the tattoos that were peaking out from the sleeve of his chef’s uniform, together with his hazel-green eyes. *What on earth would a fine brother like him want with me?* The moment she thought it to herself, she felt an imaginary slap across her face

from her inner demon. As they talked for a couple of minutes, Raymond was interrupted by the head chef calling his name from the kitchen door.

“Look, I gotta get back to work. Why don’t you drop me your digits and let’s hang out?” Rebekah smiled. No man, not since Ryan, had asked for her number. *This man wanted to go out with her*, she thought. He liked her. She happily wrote her number on a paper stashed in her purse and handed it to Raymond.

“Coo, coo. So, uh, listen. Maybe we can go out this weekend or suh’en. Catch a movie, or whateva.”

“I’d like that, Raymond.”

“Call me Ray. I’ll catch you lata.”

“Bye.” As Raymond walked away, Rebekah became silently ecstatic. Charlene rolled her eyes and took another sip of her water. Raymond, as he was walking back, glanced over with a gleam in his eye and smiled. Rebekah, on pins and needles whispered to Charlene, “I think he could be a keeper. He seems, nice, right?” “Yeah, whatever. Let’s hurry up and eat so we can get out of here.” Charlene, saw “loser”; Rebekah saw a keeper; Raymond – he saw another woman to control.



Rebekah had been on cloud nine since meeting Raymond a few months prior. They had hit it off well. As Raymond and Rebekah saw more and more of each other, Charlene and her other friends saw less and less of Rebekah. It was like they were one. Raymond didn’t go anywhere without Rebekah, of course unless it was with his buddies, and Rebekah *couldn’t* go anywhere without Raymond at her side. It wasn’t so much that Rebekah insisted he go with her; it was at Raymond’s insistence that he be with her. If he didn’t want to go, most of the time she wouldn’t go either.

Charlene began to worry about Rebekah. Normally they would have a girl’s night and the group would gather at a restaurant or club and enjoy the evening. Since meeting Raymond, Rebekah seldom met up with her girls, or she would bring Raymond with her. It wasn’t so bad that she would bring him; it was that when he wanted to leave, she would leave too – even if they were only there a short time.

One day Rebekah had stopped returning Charlene’s calls. She didn’t make it into work the night before and it wasn’t like Rebekah. Rebekah was a slave to her love of cooking; and to miss work was not something Rebekah did. Charlene started calling around to see if any of their friends had heard from her and nothing. So, she decided to call Rebekah’s mother to see if she was ill or something.

“Hi Mama Waters, is Rebekah there?”

“Hi Charlene – n-no, she went with Raymond yesterday – he was going to drop her off at work. Said she would see me later today. Is something wrong?”

“Well, no one has heard from her lately and I can’t seem to reach her on her cell phone. I went to surprise her at work yesterday and she never showed up. It’s not like her to miss work.”

“No, it’s not. Ever since she met that boy, she’s changed. She’s been quieter – reserved, even.”

“I agree. Listen, don’t worry. I am sure she’s fine. If you see her, tell her I called, ok?” Charlene and Mrs. Waters said their goodbyes and hung up the phone. Charlene knew she was not all right. She knew where Raymond lived from dropping Rebekah off a few times. She decided that she needed to pay him a visit to see just what it was that was going on with her best friend.

After making a few calls, Charlene got in her car and drove to just outside Providence where Raymond stayed. It wasn’t the best area of town where he lived, and she wondered if going alone was such a good idea anymore. Her cautionary senses kicked in before she left, prompting her to call some people to let them know where she was and what she was doing. Despite a couple of her friends’ warnings, Charlene made the thirty-five-minute drive to Raymond’s place.

To her surprise, Raymond’s car was parked just outside of the apartment he was living in. It was the beginning of fall so Charlene had slipped on her hoodie she kept in her back seat. She placed her keys in one pocket, her cell phone in her back pocket, and her can of pepper spray in the other jacket pocket.

The last call she had made was to Rebekah’s big brother Reginald, who had just returned from his fifth tour of duty and was home on leave before returning to Camp Pendleton in California. He told Charlene to make sure she called him when she arrived, and he would head to her. She knew it was against anything that Rebekah wanted, but she was not about to let some low life continue to hurt her friend.

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me about this sooner, Charlene. You’re supposed to be her best friend.”

“I know, she made me promise not to tell you, but I am telling you now, Reg.” She could hear Reggie breathing on the phone and talking to a couple of people in the background.

“What’s this boy’s address, Char? We’ll meet you there.” *We* – as in Reginald and a couple of his friends on the force who knew of Raymond’s track record with women, as well as the law.

Reginald found out about Rebekah's relationship with Raymond a couple of weeks after they met. She brought him by to meet the family before going away to Newport for the weekend. Reginald was his baby sister's protector and trusted no one with her, especially not for a weekend. He had seen how devastated she was after Craig and Ryan. He wanted to make sure that she was well cared for in the hands of Raymond.

"So, Raymond – why don't you tell us about yourself, man?"

Raymond tried to square up to Reginald who was a good four inches or so taller than Raymond, and nothing but muscle – the Marines will do that do a man. By the time her brother had joined the Marines, he was already 6 feet 4. Realizing that he needed to step back for a minute, Raymond replied, "I'm a sous chef downtown. Working my way up to head chef, maybe have my own restaurant one day."

"That's very commendable, Raymond." Rebekah's father said. He himself stood 6 feet 3 and was no wallflower. "Is your family around in this area?"

"No sir, my dad is dead, and my mom's is in reha- uh Florida with her sister."

Knowing Raymond had just caught himself before telling them what he already knew; Reginald interjected and said, "Really? What part? I have friends all over Florida; maybe we'll cross paths one day." Reginald sat on the edge of the couch waiting for a reply when Rebekah jumped in, "Reginald, I doubt that you will run into two nice older women enjoying their retirement." Glancing up at Raymond, who stood with his shoulders squared, Rebekah continued, "Besides, I don't think they would be running around with your jarhead buddies anyway!"

Reginald looked over at Rebekah and then conceded, "True, true. Well, you two better get going if you are going to beat the traffic." Holding out his hand for Raymond to shake, Raymond just stared at him for a second then shook his hand.

"It's all good, man. Maybe one day we can sit, and you can tell me what it's like to be 'all you can be.'"

Reginald squeezed his hand a little tighter and replied, "Sure. Let's do that." Wanting to rip Raymond's arm out of his socket, he relented and let go.

After they were on the road, Rebekah was glad that he met her family. She like Raymond and wanted them to like him too. She noticed that Raymond was silent for a while as they drove. He jaws was tight and his hands clutched the steering while.

"Ray, everything ok?" Rebekah looked worried. Raymond had seldom been silent like this; unless he was angry. It would worry her at times when he got angry. He would shut down and not talk to her, or he would lash out.

“You know what?” He said rather snidely, “I think your family, your brother especially, think I’m nothing but a piece of shit.”

“No, don’t be silly. He doesn’t think that.” Rebekah said, trying to reassure him.

Pulling off to the side of the road, Raymond put the car in park, turned to Rebekah and just stared at her. She couldn’t say anything. Fear had taken over.

As if he were about to turn and start driving again, Raymond drew his hand back, then forward and struck Rebekah on the side of her face, knocking her head against the back of her seat. This was the first time he had hit her. She was shocked and slightly disoriented as she grabbed the side of her face.

“You need to know your place, woman.” That was all he said.

Glancing at him from out of the side of her eye, she watched him as he turned and continued to drive. Silence filled the air until Raymond turned the radio on and started bopping to the music as if what had just happened, didn’t happen.

There had been times in the following weeks where he had grabbed Rebekah by the arm for, what he called, “mouthing off” to him. Bruises were visible on her arms, but she always kept a shirt on that would cover them, not wanting to explain what happened. This knocked Rebekah off her game. She didn’t know what to think of the situation. She prayed that it would never happen again.

Things got worse after that. Rebekah started staying over Raymond’s house more frequently; not just because she wanted to be near him all the time, but because she didn’t want her friends and family to see her bruises after Raymond had lost control.

One day, when Raymond was working a different shift, Rebekah agreed to go to lunch with Charlene – some place out of Providence. It was a day after Raymond had lost his temper. Charlene insisted that they meet because she missed her best friend.

It was a beautiful day out. The weather had to have been at least 75 degrees out. However, Rebekah showed up in a long sleeve shirt. She had donned a pair of dark sunglasses to hide the bruise Raymond had left on her the night before.

Charlene went to hug her and immediately saw the bruise peaking out from the bottom of her shades.

“Girl, what the hell is going on? He hit you?” Charlene said it loud enough to disturb a couple of the other patrons in the restaurant. Rebekah lowered her head and began to cry. She was unable to control her emotions at that point. She removed her shades and witnessed the shock and awe on Charlene’s face as Charlene shook her head and grabbed her phone, to call the one-person Rebekah didn’t want to know about her abuse.

“Uh uh. We need to tell Reg.” Rebekah knew how her brother would react; she snatched the phone out of Charlene’s hand and responded, trying to control her emotions.

“No! If you tell Reggie, he will kill Raymond. Please, don’t.”

“Look at your face, Rebekah. No man needs to put his hands on a woman. Does that fool think he is going to just beat you whenever he feels like it?”

Rebekah sighed and put her face in her hands. “I don’t know what to do, Char. I care about him so much. I don’t want to lose him.” “What do you mean you don’t know what to do? You need to leave his trifling ass and tell Reggie. He shouldn’t be putting his damn hands on you. This is crazy, girl. You’re better than this. Don’t let this loser bring you down.”

“I know. I-I just need some time, ok? Please. Tomorrow he is bringing me to work. I will break things off with him after that ok. Please Char. If you are my best friend, you WILL NOT tell my brother.”

Charlene looked at Rebekah with such pity that it nearly broke her heart to agree.

Charlene had regretted that decision; and after not hearing from her friend for almost two days, she is regretting it more. As soon as she gave him Raymond’s address on Prospect, Charlene agreed that no matter what, she would leave and take her best friend with her at the first sign of trouble.

Charlene had been beside herself with worry ever since that night. She had tried calling Rebekah after their lunch and she never picked up nor called her back. Now she was standing in front of Raymond’s place with her cell phone in one pocket, set to speed dial Reggie and the police, and her can of pepper spray in the other, just in case Raymond tried to get stupid with her.

Taking a deep breath, Charlene continued to the building. It wasn’t the most pleasant of buildings. In fact, you could see where delinquents had tagged it with their signature marks. Thugs and degenerates frequented the area where Raymond lived. Having watched her brother die at the hands of a gang member, this was one place that Charlene did not want to be around.

Forging ahead, Charlene was taken aback by the stench of one of the neighborhood’s unsavory residents before she reached the doorway. Blocking her way into the building, he looked down at her, exposing his half gold capped grin and scratching his stomach.

“Yo, baby – you fine as a mutha fucka. A man would have some serious fun bustin’ a nut up in that ass fo sho.” Grabbing at his genitals, Charlene looked at him,

rolled her eyes and continued to walk past him. This did not set well with the *Lothario*. In a split second he grabbed Charlene's arm and swung her around to face him. Anger spewed from his pores as the smell of alcohol and weed expired from his mouth.

"Bitch, don't you be disrespectin' me up in here. I will bu-" Before Prince Charming could get the rest of his sentence out, Charlene had grabbed his thumb, pulled it all the way back to his wrist, breaking it; kicked his knee out of socket and slammed the palm of her other hand against his nose with such force, the sound of it breaking could be heard down the hallway of the building as he fell, writhing in pain. The poor man never knew what hit him as neighbors cracked their doors to see what the commotion was about. Looking at Charlene through the cracks in their doors, some laughed, while others just went on with their business. Charlene looked down at him, smirked, and then continued her mission, at a little quicker pace.

Finally reaching Raymond's front door without further disruption, Charlene stood silent for a moment before catching her breath and knocking on the door. The door swung open with a thud. Raymond stood there staring at Charlene like he wanted to rip her head off.

"What the fuck do you want, bitch?" Sweat beading above his top lip as his arm muscles flexed. She just stared at him, and then replied, "Where is she?" "Who? Oh, you mean Rebekah - heh, she over there." Charlene attempted to push past him, but he blocked her way.

Flexing his fists at his side, Charlene matched him stare for stare. She was not one to back down. She learned to protect herself from her father, former Navy Commander, and military police. She and Rebekah learned the art of self defense from him and Rebekah's brother when they both were heading off to college, which is why she couldn't understand why Rebekah let Raymond abuse her the way that he had.

"You need to move out of my way, so I can see my friend." "Bitch, I don't need to do a damn thing, you feel me?" Hearing Rebekah whimpering caused Charlene to react without hesitation. Pushing Raymond aside, she stormed into his apartment. She rounded the corner to the bedroom and stopped in her tracks. Her heart nearly broke when she saw Rebekah sitting on the floor, half naked, with her arms wrapped around her knees.

"Oh my God, Beck. What the hell did he do to you?" As she reached Rebekah, Raymond was already at the doorway. "This cunt needs to learn her place. She needs to know who wears the mutha fuckin pants up in here." With her back to Raymond, Charlene managed to help Rebekah to her feet. Lifting her face, she saw the dry blood staining her nose; red and purple discoloration surrounded her right eye and the split lip that swelled before her eyes.

"You son of a bitch! What the hell is wrong with you?" She turned and yelled at Raymond. Clenching his jaw, he slowly started walking into the room causing Rebekah to step back. Charlene straightened her stand, squared her shoulders, and looked evil in the eye. She knew Raymond's type. She dealt with his kind before. In prior years as a social worker in Providence, Charlene had seen abused individuals enter her office daily; sometimes their abuser was right by their side to ensure they were not "outed" in the process.

Charlene knew that Raymond was no different than the abusers and wife beaters that had frequented her office; she refused to let him intimidate her in any way. The only difference right now is that she was on "his" territory and without the aid of police to back her up – at least that's what she thought until she looked over Raymond's shoulder and saw Reginald and two rather large, uniformed officers backing him up.

It was only a split second before Raymond reacted to Charlene's accusatory remark. As he lunged at her, she was able to move herself and Rebekah out of the way while at the same time, Reginald took one long stride and had put Raymond in a headlock and pinned him against the wall.

"Are you two alright?" His question was premature as he glanced over at Rebekah and saw what Raymond had done to her. His grip around Raymond's neck tightened a little as his buddies approached to take Raymond into custody. Reginald knew Raymond was starting to gasp for air, but he didn't care. It took every ounce of his self-control to keep from pulling his own weapon and ending Raymond's life – and his own career. The only thing that kept him from doing so were his buddies and Rebekah shaking her head, acknowledging that she knew what he was planning to do, and Raymond was not worth it.

Reginald had entered the Marine Corps during his second year of college. A recruiter had been to the campus and he had become intrigued. He had contacted his father what he had decided to do, which made his father proud, although he had hoped he would have chosen the Navy like himself.

Reginald made it through boot camp at the top of his unit. He was able to move up in the ranks quickly over the next ten or so years of service; making Master Gunnery Sergeant less than a year ago. Rebekah wasn't going to let him throw it away on the likes of Raymond. One fool in the family was enough.

Finally releasing Raymond, Reginald walked over to Rebekah and held her in his arms, "Sis, you should have told me what was going on. You know I am here for you – always."

"I know, I thought it would get better, or that I could handle it myself."

“Bitch you can’t handle shit! I hate you! I should have beaten you into the hospital like my last ho! She couldn’t keep her mouth shut neither!” Raymond yelled as he was being led out in handcuffs. Fighting to get free, Rebekah was able to respond to him before he was out of sight, “I hate myself more than you hate me, because I let your hate of me consume me. I let the devil himself worm his way into my life and take advantage of me, and I will be damned if I let it continue. I will make sure that you don’t do this to anyone else, your sorry bastard.”

Raymond looked at her, unshaken by her remarks, but shaken by the way she stood up to him. Raymond had tried to break her, but with her friends and family at her side, she was able to take control back and begin to move forward.

She managed to press charges against Raymond and see it through. She was able to sit in the courtroom during his trial and sentencing of the assault and domestic abuse charges. Sentencing was a relief, and it made Rebekah feel more at ease with herself; that’s when she decided that it was time to make a change for the better.

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Chapter 3 – Time for A Change

Jackson Waters worked at Providence Memorial where Rebekah was taken to be evaluated after Raymond's abuse. It was a place she didn't expect to have to be; especially when it came to explain to another family member how someone she thought cared so deeply for her could treat her the way that Raymond had. Discretion was not an option when it came to Jackson being a doctor. Word spread quickly through the hospital staff that Jackson's sister was in the emergency room. Leaving his station at the Cancer and Critical Care Unit, Jackson made it down to the ER in record time.

"What's going on, Rebekah? What are you?" Jackson's words escaped him as he saw the answer on his sister's face. Tears burned Rebekah's eyes, and words were unable to be formed as Reginald interjected and explained to Jackson what happened.

Fury filled Jackson quickly. He had heard about Raymond's run-ins with the law, but he didn't think that his sister would become the brunt of his anger so quickly. Reginald made sure that his brother knew of his baby sister's potential love interest and what he was capable of. He had long hoped that she would be far enough away from Raymond before anything ever happened.

"That bastard did this to her? I hope you beat him within an inch of his life, Reg." "I wish I did. Carl and Joe were there to make sure things didn't get out of control." Putting a hand on Jackson's tense shoulder, he continued, "We're going to make sure he goes away for a long time, so he doesn't do this to anyone else."

Jackson looked over at Rebekah and saw the pain in her eyes. Walking over to her, he wanted to give her a hug but thought better of it considering the circumstances. Turning to his brother, who shared the same concern for their sister, he said, "Well, I hope you put the fear of God into him."

"Yeah, well, I don't think really had to. He tried resisting arrest when they were putting him into a squad car. So, let's just say that Joe gave him a little wake up call to let him know who is in charge."

Smirking, Jackson replied, "Well, just looking at Joe would make a person think twice about resisting arrest." Reginald nodded in agreement. It had been Joe who recruited Reginald into the Marines. He taught him martial arts as well as how to assemble and disassemble a rifle in record time. Joe Reynolds, being no pushover,

pushed every Marine he enlisted to their fullest capacity, including Reginald. He knew who had what it took to be a Marine and who didn't. He said himself in Reginald.

When Joe was deployed overseas one year, he had been injured. When he returned stateside, he went to work in the recruiting office until his injuries had healed. He remembered the day he met Reginald at the college, after giving a lecture about joining the service and serving your country. Reginald had been awestruck by what he had said. They spent the next two hours talking about Reginald's options and where he could go in the Marines and was proud when he was able to be there at nearly every ceremony honoring his accomplishments.

Then there was Carl Weatherly. Carl had been some young punk kid that Joe took under his wing when he first joined the force. Growing up on the wrong side of the tracks, Carl saw a lot of things that no one at his young age should ever have to witness. After cleaning up his act and finishing school, both high school and college, Carl ran into Joe and decided to join the force just like him. Carl believed that he could make a difference in his neighborhood and being one of those who could get crime off the streets and make it better for the next generation. He not only wanted it for the neighborhood kids, but for his best friend, Charlene's brother, who had been shot and killed by a local gang member.

Jackson was the same way. He wanted to make a difference. When he was in high school, he considered following in his brother's and father's footsteps by joining the service. Many thought he would go into professional football or something like that. He made Varsity Quarterback both his sophomore and junior years. However, it wasn't something that he wanted to pursue as a profession.

During the last part of his junior year and the beginning of his senior year, he made the decision not to continue with sports. Leaving football behind, Jackson realized he wanted much more in life. Something deep within had told him to go in a much more challenging direction. Jackson had taken extra courses during high school, allowing him to graduate a full year ahead of his peers.

Having a handful of college credits when he started his first semester at University of Rhode Island, he was able to gain early admission into Mayo Medical School in Rochester, Minnesota. Once he completed his studies there, he couldn't stop. It was only a matter of time before he received admission to Johns Hopkins to complete his studies.

After Jackson finished medical school and finished his residency at Providence Memorial, he became one of the youngest Oncologists in Rhode Island, devoting a majority of his time to Cancer research. He wanted to beat the one thing that took his sister away from the family at such a young age. He, like Rebekah was devastated by

her passing, that's why he made the conscious decision to choose the Oncology field of medicine.

Now, he was down in the emergency room trying to understand how a man could abuse a woman the way his sister had been abused. Looking at her chart, he was glad that there were no permanent, physical injuries. He had heard about Raymond's last girlfriend. In fact, he had been one of the residents in the emergency room that night when she came in. Unlike his last girlfriend, Rebekah's physical injuries would heal over time. The ones that could not be seen, however, the emotional scarring, that would take quite a bit of time to heal.

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Over the next eight months Rebekah was all business; working again as the lead pastry chef at a well respected and popular restaurant, she kept herself busy so that she didn't have to think about what happened to her at the hands of Raymond. She began to think about leaving again and decided to start saving everything she could, so that when the time came, she would have enough to leave Rhode Island, and go where she believed she could make a name for herself – and to forget the hell of dancing with the devil himself.

Her brother, Reginald even brought her out to California a few times to see if she would consider moving there. He wanted to ensure her safety, even if it meant her traveling 3,000 miles to do it, he would make it happen. He loved his sister and couldn't help but be protective of her. He had lost one sister already to an evil that couldn't be fought. Raymond was one of the devil's minions who would get his ass kicked.

She dodged the dating scene all together and concentrated on work, and her family. There were times when Raymond would enter her mind – those thoughts she quickly tossed into a mental trash compactor and turned the button to "mulch." The bruises were gone; the split lip and black eye healed. No permanent, *physical* damage. It amazed her at how strong she felt, and how comfortable she was starting to feel in her own skin again. Raymond had almost broken her. She almost let him break her spirit; her will. She was grateful that her family and Charlene were there for her when she needed them.

They continued their lunches and girls' night out occasionally. It took several months for Rebekah to be coaxed into even going shopping with her friends. She was still a bit skittish when it came to being out in the open. She convinced herself a few times that she had seen Raymond lurking around corners watching her. Some nights she found herself waking up in a cold sweat after having vivid dreams of his return – and abuse. *Girl – you know he isn't coming back for you. Just breathe and move on. You'll be fine.* That inner voice was a welcome comfort many nights.

Rebekah needed a change. She couldn't go through the rest of her life being afraid of shadows and men. Raymond was out of her life and she wanted it to stay that way. She couldn't let the actions of one man determine her fate and she was not going to let anyone else have that kind of control over her again. She chose to fight back after the beating, and she won. With her sister, who was the acting ADA at the time, and her brothers behind her every step of the way, she was more than determined to make sure Raymond didn't hurt any other woman.

To her surprise, Raymond's former girlfriend, Sherry Alderson, was a woman like Rebekah in both size and inhibitions. She was quiet, and slightly heavier than Rebekah. Rebekah noticed a lot of herself in this woman – from her hair all the way down to the way she carried herself. The only differences with this woman were that Raymond had beaten her so bad that she had become partially blind in one eye and left with a multitude of scars – both inside and out.

Almost a year to the day, this woman had her arm twisted behind her back in such a way that it broke at an angle just above her elbow. Her nose had been broken which also required surgery as well as the re-setting of three fractured ribs. Raymond had punched her in the eye with such force that it shattered her eye socket, causing bone fragments to be embedded around her cornea. Surgery did very little to repair the damage to her face after such a beating.

When it was time for Sherry to come face to face with Raymond in court after the attack, the defense attorney had badgered her so much that she could barely function on the stand, let alone state Raymond as her attacker. The defense attorney had a field day with her. He had accused her of being promiscuous to the point that she suffered multiple anxiety attacks right on the witness stand.

All in all, she rallied on and gave her accounts of all the abuse she had endured at the hands of Raymond. However, Raymond's attorney did not relent. In the end, Raymond received a two-year suspended sentence and 3 years probation with one year of anger management classes. It was a slap in the face for Sherry, as her attorney told her that he should have been serving at least six years on battery charges alone. With all the surgeries she had to go through, Raymond only had to pay 75%, and to date he had only paid less than one third of it.

Sherry knew he didn't have the money to pay and had found out that it came from his uncle, who had been a retired Senior Chief in the Navy. He had taken money from his pension to pay it and turned his back on Raymond – his only brother's only son, letting him know he was done bailing him out and not to contact him again. It was no wonder that Sherry ended up going through her savings and 401K to make sure that she was able to live and pay her medical expenses.

This time, Sherry was ready for him. When it was time to give her testimony, she reiterated what happened to her and stated how much she pleaded with the court not to let Raymond out. She insisted that letting him go free would allow him to do the same to another woman. Rebekah was proud of the way Sherry spoke up. In the weeks leading to the trial, she and Sherry had been in contact several times. They had become fast friends.

When it was Rebekah's time to take the stand, she didn't hold anything back. She had kept a diary that gave all the dates when Raymond had abused her. She called it her personal savior. She would write in the diary as if she were telling her story to the world. This time Raymond had a public defender and most of the objections he threw at the Assistant District Attorney were quickly overruled. JoAnn was no pushover; she gave as good as she got and then some.

Her attacks on Raymond's character were on point and left his public defender questioning his next strategy. It was clear to Rebekah that Raymond was not happy. Every now and then she would look up at the notes she was reading from her diary, to see Raymond, just glaring at her as if to intimidate her. When Rebekah read the incidences that occurred, including the times when he held a knife to her throat, as well as pushing her up against a wall so hard that the impact left a hole in the wall where her head and shoulder had made contact, Raymond leaned over to his attorney and whispered in his ear for what seemed an eternity.

Out of the blue, his attorney requested a fifteen-minute recess and asked to speak with counsel and judge in chambers. Allowing the quick break, both attorneys followed the judge into his chambers. As Rebekah left the witness stand, she looked over at Raymond, who gave her a threatening stare that would scare any child into giving up their milk money to the playground bully. Rebekah was not a child. She walked with an air of pride and determination, completely deflating attempts at taking control.

While in chambers, it became evident that they wanted to strike a deal. Hearing the public defender's pleas for his client, the judge stood his ground, "You do realize that Mr. Pernel assaulted this woman, not only physically but mentally *and* emotionally?" "Y-yes your Honor, I'm well aware of that, but" "But nothing. Mr. Pierce, I am a little surprised at the way that you have conducted yourself at the hearing, especially today. Since the beginning of this trial you have done nothing but try to intimidate the witnesses, make it look as though your client was the victim." "Your Honor –" "Mr. Pierce, you are an embarrassment to your client – to this Court and I will no longer stand for any of your theatrics, do I make myself clear?" Admitting defeat, the attorney relented.

As they all returned to the court room, Mr. Pierce leaned over to his client to let him know that no deal would be struck. Having heard that, Raymond blurted out obscenities and threats, forcing the judge to have him removed from the courtroom until

conclusion of the trial. To Raymond’s dismay, it was over before it even began. The jury was told to ignore the outburst, however, that was something that did not cause them to render their verdict - Guilty – on all counts.

The judge required all parties to return in two days for the sentencing hearing. Since he violated his probation on the previous assault charge, the judge showed him no mercy. He was given ten years for the battery charge, plus another three for misdemeanor assault – the maximum allowed, with the possibility of parole after eight years; plus, the two-year suspended sentence to be served consecutively, as well as five years probation and anger management classes at a state facility. While during his probation, he must report to a court appointed housing facility where he will undergo random drug testing as well as the annual psychological evaluation. On top of everything else, as if there couldn’t be anymore, he was ordered to pay for all medical expenses.

At the end of the sentencing, the judge stated to Raymond, who realized that he was not getting out any time soon and he had an idiot for a public defender, “Mr. Pernell, I am appalled by your lack of remorse during these proceedings. Domestic violence is not a means to any problem. Striking a woman, keeping her prisoner in your home to do with as you see fit is something only a coward would do. I hope that this has opened your eyes, and during the time you are a resident in our facility, you will be able to reflect on your transgressions; thinking long and hard before you attempt to do anything of this magnitude again. Bailiff take him out of my sight.”

Overjoyed by the conclusion of the sentence hearing, Rebekah was able to breathe again. It was then she knew she could continue with her life and continue with her plans to make her big move.



It had taken Rebekah almost two years to save nearly \$40,000 to move from Rhode Island to just outside Los Angeles, California. It brought her great joy to have the opportunity to start her life over again. It brought her parents both joy and sadness. They were happy that her worst days were behind her, but they didn’t want their baby to move so far away from the nest. Her dad couldn’t help but feel concern and protection over her after all that had happened. Rebekah knew that no matter how much she tried to reassure her parents, they were always going to worry about her. She even agreed that if things did not work out wherever she wound up that she would turn around and come back home. They knew that she would not come back, at least not right away. She was grown and needed to be out on her own and make her dreams her realities.

The money she had saved would help with her move, find an apartment to pay up for at least six months as well as take care of any necessities that came up later. Her parents had been very proud of the way she put her foot down and made the very best

out of a bad situation. She had come a long way since Raymond and they would not allow any part of him, mentally or otherwise, cloud her way of thinking or steer her off the path that she had laid before herself.

Her parents wanted to make sure that she didn't have to worry about things for some time while she was getting settled. In doing so they had transferred the interest from one of their investments to Rebekah to ensure some security for her. Opening a savings account in her name for nearly \$25,000 was more than Rebekah expected. She didn't want the money, but her father insisted that it was available to her for emergencies; she could let it stay in the account and continue to draw interest, or she could use it for a down payment of a condo, house or whatever. Rebekah appreciated the gesture. Not wanting to disappoint her parents, she accepted the gift and made a promise to use it only in emergencies or to buy a home.

Two weeks before Rebekah was to move, she received a letter from Raymond. He had written to her apologizing for the way that he had treated her. He was sorry for hurting her the way that he had. He told her that he loved her and hoped that she could find it in her heart to forgive him. This made Rebekah shake – not mentally – physically. She was angry. No, she was furious.

She couldn't believe that he had the audacity to write to her – again. Previously letters from Raymond would occasionally be opened and read. But there were times that they were discarded or given directly to the ADA, her sister, and she would pursue the threats and accusations he had written. Some of the letters were foul and distasteful – calling her out of her name; wishing she had died; there were instances when he would write and apologize for the previous letter only to start all over again because she refused to answer them.

It must have been almost a year since she had received a letter from him. This letter was different. It looked like he had taken a long time to write this letter – telling her how sorry he was for the abuse; how bad he had felt for all the harm he had inflicted on her. He even asked her to come see him so that he could apologize in person.

Not feeling sorry for him, and not wanting to believe the words that he put on paper, Rebekah thought long and hard before she would sit down and write him a quick note:

*Raymond,*

*I can't believe you would have the nerve to write to me. I have read your letter over and over and find it very hard to stomach any of your admissions of guilt in the way that you treated me and asking for me to forgive you.*

*While I have conceded long ago that God wants me to forgive you, and in my own way I have, I will not, under any*

*circumstances come see you. You are a closed, burned chapter in life.*

*I can't help but relive the words you first wrote to me, wishing that I was dead to you and that you wished you had killed me that first night when we left my parents' home. Well, here I am, giving you your wish.*

*Consider this my obituary letter to you. I take back any hold you ever had on me. With all the pain and heartache that you put me through, you should have just let me stay dead to you. Here's your chance. I am dead to you.*

*Do not write to me anymore because the old Rebekah that you knew doesn't live here anymore. She died and took all those bad memories with her.*

*Bury her in the back of your mind like she did to you and you will be able to sleep better at night – because as for me, I now sleep just fine.*

*Rebekah*

Rebekah felt like singing at the top of her lungs when she placed that letter in the mailbox to this now stranger who once invaded her life. She was over him and she was happy. She had felt like a great weight had been lifted off her shoulders and she was ready to take on just about anything.



## **Chapter 4 – Back to Basics**

Since moving to the West Coast not too long ago, Rebekah realized she was happy being a pastry chef. Her new business had taken off at such a fast pace. She loved cooking and enjoyed creating new dishes to share with Gail. In fact, the event planning and catering business had been doing so well lately that she hardly had time to be a paralegal. Thinking long and hard, Rebekah decided to cut back at physically working in the law firms 3 days per week, to being on call one day out of the week and having a virtual office available in the evenings for emergencies.

It was a blessing that it worked out that way. She enjoyed the legal work and couldn't see herself giving it up all together, especially with new clients popping up here and there. She loved the idea of being able to work from home from time to time. This gave her more time to work on the list of dessert ideas she had for a new client of Gail's.

Over the last year or so as Gail's pastry chef, Rebekah found herself meeting with political officials, as well as obscenely wealthy clients that she would have never thought to have had the opportunity to meet on her own. She met politicians from other counties as well as those from other states. Gail made it her mission to make sure that Rebekah met the right people and left a lasting impression.

She enjoyed meeting various people, but preferred staying behind the scenes to make sure the work got done. She preferred her solitude in the kitchen, working on different dessert recipes and sharing her insights on main dishes and appetizers. It wasn't long before Gail had insisted that she take over overseeing the dishes prepared by the chef and sous chef on a regular basis. She also thought it might be a good idea to show her the ropes of being an assistant party planner. This left time for Gail to concentrate more meeting with new clients and checking out various venues for party planning preparations.

Gail's first assistant, Kayla, was great at first, until she met a man from a party Gail had hosted. While the young, single assistant was just that – single, her suitor was not. They had set up rendezvous in between Kayla going out to the venue and making sure everything would be ready for the celebration the following day. Things did not always go as planned. There were times when Kayla never made it to the venue and the organization was in complete disarray. If there wasn't something wrong with the decorations, then it was short staffed, or she failed to confirm the venue altogether. After

having a nasty run-in with Kayla, who had botched a high-profile wedding reception, that left the bride and groom without their wedding cake, which had been redirected to a baby shower, it left Gail no choice but to let her go and double her own workload.

It took a few months for Gail and Rebekah to recover from the Kayla Disaster. That's when Gail decided she needed Rebekah as her right hand. She knew how to run an office and she had proven herself in running kitchen staff. Rebekah agreed to be in the spot light a little more, but only until they found another assistant that could handle the job.

"Beckie, I am glad you agreed to learn the ropes here on my end. Frankly, I don't know what I would do without you."

"It's actually turning out better than I imagined it would. I – I kind of like working in the office and talking to new clients. I mean, it's kind of like being a paralegal, only without the legal mumbo jumbo, you know?"

Smiling, Gail replied, "Of course I do my dear, and I am so glad we work well together. I couldn't ask for a better partner."

Rebekah stopped going through paperwork and looked up at Gail. She was checking off a list and glanced up at Rebekah to see her staring at her. "You heard me right, Rebekah. This new direction we have been going in has taken off more than I thought it would." Putting her pen down, she folded her fingers together and continued. "I know it hasn't been a long time, you and I working together, but, there comes a time when you see a good thing and don't want it to slip through your fingers. This," she said, spreading her arms out to embrace the office and surroundings, "this is a good thing and I would be honored if you would be a partner in this venture with me."

Tears formed in Rebekah's eyes and she couldn't keep the excitement off her face. Jumping out of her chair, she ran over to Gail and hugged her as tightly as she could.

"Gail, you have no idea how happy you have made me."

"I take it that's a 'yes' then?" She asked, trying to breathe, and returning Rebekah's exuberant hug.

Letting go, Rebekah straightened, wiped the tears from her eyes, she extended her hand and answered, "Most definitely, partner."

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Coming from Pastry Chef to partner was a lot to take in for Rebekah, but she didn't care. She worked hard for it and it paid off, in spades. Some of her darkest days were behind her and she thought a lot about meeting someone new, testing the waters

again. She realized that she hadn't been intimate with a man in what seemed like forever. That number screamed in her head, causing her to realize that if she didn't find a real man, real soon, her "naw naw" might think she joined a convent and close shop entirely. No, she needed to handle her business and scratch that itch that was already knocking on her door.

Good ol' Char had kept her up to speed on what was going on back home; who was dating whom and who wasn't. She even kept her up to date about Raymond. While she was curious about his life behind bars, she was glad to finally be over him. Word had it that he had gotten into a serious altercation in prison; almost killing another inmate and wounding a correction's officer. Those assault charges added two more years onto his current sentence. *Serves him right for being such a hothead*, she thought.

Chatting with Charlene made her miss home a little. She thought of going back for a week to visit with friends and family. She knew her parents would be overjoyed. She thought it would be a good idea and decided to take a mini vacation at the end of the month.

As she was about to call and make reservations to go home, her line rang, "Miss Waters, there's a gentleman from Just Desserts and Fine Dining on line one." "Thank you, Sheila." She was a godsend. Rebekah talked Gail into hiring a new assistant a few months prior, just to take the edge off. Sheila Haddock was an administrative guru who could work her magic on any office equipment. You couldn't tell by looking at her, but she had a knack for being a quick study.

At 22 and standing only 4 feet 10, she made herself a quick reputation for being a very outspoken individual. Her hair left very little to the imagination. It was originally brown with blonde highlights. She wore it somewhat short, just above her collar. It varied the ways she styled it; from colorful spikes to slicked-back and demure with a slight fishtail at the end. A tattoo could be somewhat visible just at the nape of her neck that read something to the effect of "Bite the Weenie," with a picture of a green penis in a bun underneath it.

Her makeup was, for lack of a better word – interesting. The black eyeliner surrounded her bold green eyes, causing them to be the center piece of her face. She had flawless skin. Rebekah thinks she never had a pimple in her life the way her skin was so flawless. There were days she would wear the deepest of red lipsticks, to not wearing any lipstick at all, and just lip liner – in jet black. Her barely tanned skin set off her Barrymore-like nose.

Always clean and presentable, Sheila carried her own style. Her vintage style meshed well with her somewhat gothic appearance. She was wiry and knew her job well. Gail was reluctant at first, but Rebekah reminded her of the day they met and

where they were today. However, at Gail's insistence, she wanted to check her office skills, from how fast she typed to replacing the toner cartridge in the printer.

Amazed that Sheila's typing skills were impeccable – typing nearly eighty words per minute and able to change the toner as well as *fix* the fax machine; so much so that after only two prior interviews, Gail cancelled the others and hired Sheila to start that very day. Going on four months and kicking in to high gear made Gail giddy. She even managed to take a couple of days off – which she never did.

Rebekah felt more and more at ease in the office. She was able to take time out and get party preparations together with little interruption. When the phone rang, Rebekah was just about to plan her trip. "This is Rebekah Waters."

"Miss Waters, I'm Nigel Berry from Just Desserts and Fine Dining. I would like to meet with you and your partner and discuss the upcoming party you are hosting with the Von Tassel's."

"How can I help you Mr. Berry." Pausing a second he replied, "Please, call me Nigel. I would like to discuss, in part, the nature of the event, the menu and how you became a highly recommended dessert chef."

Waiting a moment, Rebekah held her breath. After a few seconds she responded, "That could be a possibility. I have Friday at 11:30 available." "That would be great. Would you care to meet me at Amor's for lunch?"

"Um, sure. That would be fine." "Great, see you then."

"Gail!" she shouted, running out of the office. Sheila looked at her with a smirk as Rebekah bolted past her. Nearly running Gail down as she rounded the corner to the kitchen, she managed to blurt out, "Nigel Berry,"

"From Just Desserts and Fine Dining? Yes, what about him?" Gail was not surprised by the call since she had been the one to spread the word about her new partner and dessert chef's many accomplishments.

"Uh, well, he wants to meet us for lunch tomorrow at Amor's to discuss the Von Tassel event."

"Oh, I'm sorry my dear, I can't make it. My grandson is in town for a visit, finalizing some papers and we're meeting for lunch. You, my dear, are going to have to do it yourself."

"W-what? Grandson? You mean that little boy whose picture is on your desk?"

“AJ is a grown man now. He’s considering relocating and opening an office here in town. He has designs on a new building for his company and is here to find new clients and possibly purchase the building he’s been eyeing.”

“Oh, okay. Well, I-I-I can’t do it by myself; not an interview with Just Desserts and Fine Dining!”

“Why not? It’s just like any other interview you’ve given.”

“Uh – no.” Shaking her head and waving her hand she continued. “This is Just Desserts and Fine Dining; the ‘who’s who’ of fine cuisine and desserts, Gail. Not ‘Mama’s Kitchen Extraordinaire’. And besides, you were always there with me.”

Laughing, Gail could only pat Rebekah on the shoulder as they walked back to the office. “My dear, first, we are far from mama’s kitchen, as you put it; and two, you are ready for this. I have complete faith in you. You were right there with me the whole time with Mrs. von Tassel and she adores you.”

Sighing, Rebekah felt sick to her stomach. “Are you sure I’m ready, Gail.” Stopping in front of Sheila’s desk, Gail took Rebekah’s face in her hands and smiled. “You have been ready since the day you were born. Isn’t that what you keep telling me?”

Smiling back, Rebekah nodded in agreement. Removing her hands from Rebekah’s face, Gail took her hands and told her that ‘no matter what, he’s going to adore you.’

“If you say so.” Was all Rebekah could say as she walked back to her office.

The next day, Rebekah came in dressed to the hilt. She wore her hair straight and was suited up to take on the best of the best. She was on time for her meeting with Nigel Berry. Once she entered the restaurant, Rebekah noticed she had caught the attention of a few men, and that made her smile. Keeping her head up, she continued to follow the waiter to Nigel’s table.

Nigel Berry was 33, handsome, about Rebekah’s height, and had just a little more weight to him than needed, but still handsome. His afro was high and tight to his head. His facial hair was impeccable. His mustache and goatee were trimmed evenly and edged off just at his chin and jaw line. The suit he wore was an Italian cashmere, double button-down suit that fit him very well. He looked good – almost too good.

Rebekah aback took Nigel. She looked stunning. Her suit was like that of his own. Both charcoal gray in color, and nearly identical in style – save the fact she was in a skirt. While he wore a silk light gray tie to accompany his ivory white shirt, Rebekah

wore her chiffon collared blouse open to the top of her cleavage – leaving a man to only wonder.

“Miss Waters? Hello, finally nice to meet you.” Rebekah smiled and reached out to shake his hand. Standing there staring at her, Rebekah looked a little uneasy and tried to remove her hand as she said, “Rebekah, please.”

The waiter pulled out her chair allowing her to sit. Once seated, Nigel continued to smile and stare at her before he realized what he was doing and gave himself an imaginary slap, bringing him back to reality.

“Ms. Abernathy isn’t joining us today?” Placing the napkin on her lap, Rebekah responded, “N-no, she had another meeting and asked that I fill her in when I return, if that’s alright with you?”

“Of course, that’s not a problem. I’m somewhat glad that I get a chance to talk to you alone.” With a puzzled look on her face, Rebekah responded, “Why is that?”

“Well, it gives me an opportunity to get to know you personally as well as professionally – if that’s alright with you.”

Rebekah felt the heat rush to her cheeks as she began to smile.

Before she could respond, Nigel continued, “I take it that’s okay then.” Smiling back at her, he sat back in his seat and began to scan the menu – and Rebekah.

After lunch and nearly an hour and a half or more of chatting and interviewing, Rebekah began to gather her bag to leave. Before she could say anything, Nigel reached over, touching her hand, “Would you care to have dinner with me tomorrow night, Rebekah?” Shocked by his invitation, Rebekah just sat there for a moment before agreeing to go out.

The day was turning out to be pretty good after all. She made it through the interview and lunch without a hitch and received a dinner invitation on top of it.

That evening after telling Gail of her meeting with Nigel Berry and his invitation to dinner, Rebekah headed home. Leaving her car in the garage, she had just retrieved her mail from her box when her phone rang. It was Nigel.

“I just wanted to confirm our dinner date for tomorrow evening. We’re still on, right?”

“Of course, I’m looking forward to it.”

“Good, so am I. I hope you like seafood.”

Smiling, she responded, “As a matter of fact I love seafood.” Standing there chatting for a moment, Rebekah almost didn’t notice the tall drink of water talking to the agent that handles the sale of the apartment homes. Glancing over she was able to make out a silhouette on the masculine man just yards away.

“I-I’m sorry, what did you say?”

“I said I’ll pick you up at 7:30 if that’s alright?”

“Yes, of course. If you have a pen handy, I’ll give you my address.”

Glancing over every now and then at the tall handsome stranger, Rebekah gave Nigel her address and agreed to meeting him for dinner the next night. Quickly getting off the phone, she looked over once more and was shocked to see him staring at her as the agent gave her a friendly wave. Waving back, she pulled her bag over her shoulder and continued to walk to her home. The tall, dark haired stranger stared and smiled as she walked past, barely hearing what the agent had to say to him.

They both felt a slight tingle in their skins as their arms lightly brushed against one another. His nostrils flared when he caught wind of her heavenly scent. Jasmine perfume – not too heavy to mask her own glorious scent that permeated underneath that stayed in his senses. Clearing his throat, he interrupted the agent and said, “I’ll take it. Have the papers drawn up and I’ll be back to sign them in a couple of weeks.”

“Right away, Mr. Turner. You’ve made an excellent choice on the apartment home location. The neighbors here are extremely pleasant.”

Glancing over his shoulder, he watched as the beautiful full-figured black woman swayed her luscious hips and sauntered inside, closing the door behind her, but not before stealing one last glimpse of him. *Holy moly – he is simply divine.*

Feeling the heat rising within him as he stood there staring at the woman’s closed door, visualizing her on the other side, he responded, “Yes, I am sure they are.”

Chapter 5 – Once A Cheater

Nigel was prompt picking up Rebekah for their dinner date. She was nervous since she hadn't dated in a while. She wanted this to be a nice evening. She was dressed to the nines when he arrived – on time. It was nice weather out, so she wore a flattering chiffon pantsuit – royal blue in color with a black and gold clutch and black matching heels.

With a knock on the door, Rebekah opened it and smiled. "I told you I'd be here at 7:30." Nigel said returning the smile.

"Yes, you did. You look very handsome this evening."

"And you look quite stunning yourself." Unable to hold back her emotions, Rebekah let out a slight giggle making Nigel laugh.

Continuing he said, "Are you ready to go?"

"Mmmm, yes." With that, they left for a night out on the town.

Rebekah had a great time. They had gone back to Amor's for dinner and dancing; finishing the evening up with a drive and a walk along the Santa Monica pier.

"I had a wonderful time Nigel, thank you."

"The pleasure is all mine, Rebekah."

"Please, call me Beckie."

Smiling, he responded, "Alright. Beckie it is."

Taking her hand in his, they continued to stroll down the boardwalk. The lights in the city were beautiful this time of night. It was nice hearing the waves breaking over the rocks below the pier. The moon had a mesmerizing glow to it.

Stopping, Nigel turned to face Rebekah, "You are an extraordinary woman, Beckie. I'm surprised you don't have a man on your arm 24/7."

"Well, I decided to take it easy for a while. Focus more on business and such."

"How's that working for you?" Moving a little closer, massaging her hand, Nigel looked deep into Rebekah's eyes.

“It’s going pretty well.” She stammers, looking into his eyes in response.

Moving closer still, Nigel returned the response. “And now?”

“B-better.” It was all she could say as his gaze left her feeling weak in the knees. Coming closer still, he swept a strand of hair behind her ear; not saying a word until his mouth touched hers, he replied, “Good.” Heat rose from within as she placed her arms around his neck mere seconds after his mouth found hers.

She swore the earth shook when he kissed her. When they parted, the earth – it was still shaking.

“Earthquake?” She questioned. Then realized what she said, she said it again, only this time with more emotion, “EARTHQUAKE!” The ground shook beneath them as they stood on the pier. Nigel grabbed her hand to try and move her to a haven. Rebekah encountered tremors before, but not a full-blown earthquake.

Managing to get her to a secure location out of harms way, Nigel shielded her in his arms for the next ten seconds or more as the rumbling passed. Rebekah had been in California long enough to get used to tremors and mild aftershocks but was not quite prepared for the earth to move under her feet like it did.

“Wow! That was definitely a first for me!” She said as she tried to gain her composure.

Nigel smiled, trying to keep from laughing at her “earthquake phobia”. “For a minute there, I thought you were going to jump out of your skin for sure! It takes getting used to, and I’m sure even those of us who have lived here all of our lives still aren’t!” They shared a chuckle and began walking back to Nigel’s car.

With Rebekah’s nerves a little frazzled, Nigel thought it best to take her home, so she could relax in comfortable surroundings.

“I had a lovely time tonight, Nigel. Thank you.”

“No, thank you, Rebekah. Perhaps we can go out again. I promise to check to see if we are in for another earthquake before heading out.” Laughing at his dry wit, Rebekah smiled and was about to say something until her phone rang, “Aren’t you going to answer that?” Looking at the number, she saw Charlene’s name blink across the screen. “No, it’s just my friend back home. I will call her back.”

Nigel leaned in a little further, as did Rebekah. Tilting her head slightly to accept his advances, Nigel began to kiss her – it was beautiful. She didn’t want it to end.

Keeping himself from going any further, Nigel pulled back, looked down and squeezed her hand before responding, “I better let you go or this could be trouble.”

Shaking her head in agreement, Rebekah smiled as Nigel climbed out of the car and opened her door.

Walking up to her apartment, Nigel continued to hold her hand as they talked. Stopping to talk a few times to prolong the end of their evening, they finally reached her door.

“Well, goodnight – again.”

Rebekah opened her door and started to walk in. Nigel grabbed her by her hand before she completely descended inside, wrapped his arms around her waist; he looked into her eyes for a split second before his mouth had invaded her own.

Rebekah was on fire. Nigel was passionate in his kisses. He held nothing back. His mouth covered hers as he would slide his tongue between her lips. Licking at the roof of her mouth, then swirling around her lips and making the same traces over and over, was making Rebekah dizzy with desire.

Rebekah couldn't breathe. His passion had overtaken her own as he began massaging the small of her back, her arms, then her breasts, all the while smothering her in kisses. Feeling that Nigel wanted more – perhaps even more than she did, Rebekah had to pull back.

“I – I can't breathe, wait.”

“I don't want to wait baby. I want you. I have wanted you since we first met yesterday.” He continued to smother her with kisses – trailing up and down her neck as he held her closer. The passion that was dripping off him was more than she could handle. Nigel squeezed her a little tighter, holding her closer – making her unable to move.

“Nigel – I – I can't!”

Nigel stopped assaulting her at just stared. She felt his excitement through his slacks as well as her own.

“I haven't been with anyone in a while. I need time, please.”

Taking a deep breath, Nigel took a step back. Touching her cheek with his fingers, he relented and said, “Ok baby. I am a patient man – err, well – sort of!”

They both chuckled a little before he gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“I will call you tomorrow, Rebekah. I want to take you out again.”

Smiling, Rebekah agreed, then closed the door.

Nigel didn't call her the next day, or the next. Nearly three weeks went by before he contacted her.

Rebekah was sitting at her desk going over new ideas for desserts when her cell phone started vibrating. It was Nigel. She was in no mood for game playing, "Hello. Yes, Nigel. What can I do for you?"

"Hi Rebekah – don't hang up. I'm sorry that I didn't call you before. I just felt we left things at an odd place and all. I ended up going out of town on business for a while and everything. I would still like to go out again."

Gail just happened to walk by when Rebekah answered her phone. Stopping at her door, she leaned on the door hinge, folded her arms, and waited to see what else Rebekah was going to say. Rebekah had told her about their date and him not calling her the past few weeks.

While Gail admired Nigel's business sense, she didn't fully trust him. He was hiding something. She kicked herself from trying to get the two of them together. Maybe his actions were for the best. Maybe he wasn't the man for Rebekah after all. Maybe she knew exactly who was.

"Well, I don't know Nigel. I would like that, yes. Of course, I'll see you Saturday then. Bye."

"Well? What did he have to say for himself?" Gail came in and sat down.

"He apologized for not calling and that he ended up going out of town. He just got back and wanted to start over again."

"Hmmm – well, you just be careful my dear. I love you like a daughter and wouldn't know what to do with myself if you got hurt out of all this."

"Why is that? You didn't have – ugh, or did you?" Looking suspiciously at Gail, Gail finally broke down and fessed up to Rebekah.

"Oh – I can't believe I am about to do this – I'm the one who told the magazine about my 'up and coming new chef and partner.' I had Sheila make an anonymous call to Mr. Berry, scripting her on what to say – frankly I think I did well with that. But none the less, I had hoped you two would hit it off and you would be a little happier."

Rebekah looked at Gail in shock. Putting her hands over her face, and then dropping them on her desk, she laughed. "Only you, Gail – only you. I appreciate the push; and who knows, maybe something good will come out of this. After all, we got an exclusive in the magazine, right?"

“Nigel, I am so over you and your bullshit. I can’t do this. No, I *won’t* do this. I am not going to be with someone that clearly has no time to be with me.”

“Baby, I’m sorry. Listen, I’ve been going through this rough patch lately. My ex-wife and –”

“Whoa –what? Ex-wife? You never mentioned that you had an EX-WIFE.” Silence came over the phone.

“Yes, yes I did. A couple of weeks ago, when I was late for dinner, and you wanted to know why my face was red – that’s when I told you.” Nigel didn’t have a dark chocolate complexion like Forest or Idris. Like that of her own his was a cocoa mahogany shade. The hand print that night was clearly visible. Rebekah didn’t say anything. She just listened. “I told you she and I got into an argument and she slapped me.”

Knowing he was lying through his teeth, Rebekah jumped in and responded, “Whatever, Nigel. It is very clear that you have a full plate now and don’t have time for me. You and your ex have a lot of unresolved issues to handle. And quite frankly, I *do not* want to be in the middle of all THAT!”

“Now, Beckie, that’s where you’re wrong; I have been doing everything to make up for all of our lost time. I need you, baby. Please.” Hearing the desperation in his voice, Rebekah decided she would give him one final go.

“Okay, Nigel – Saturday.”

“W-what?”

“You heard me, Saturday. I expect to see you at Hal’s for lunch. 12:30; don’t be late or don’t come at all.”

“Uh, wait, Hal’s huh? O-Ok. I’ll be there. 12:30. I promise. I will even call you and confirm Friday, ok?”

“Fine, I’ll be there – and if you aren’t...” Rebekah stopped, hoping to get her point across.

Silence filled the air, “B-Beckie – are you there?”

“Yes, I’m still here. Saturday, Nigel.” She hung up the phone.

Saturday came, and Rebekah, despite the voice screaming in her head telling her not to go, got dressed to meet Nigel at the restaurant near Venice Beach. It was a beautiful day and Rebekah told herself she was going to enjoy it – no matter what.

She had heard from Nigel every day the rest of the week and took it at face value that they were still a go for that weekend. She had turned him down the entire week for dates, just to see if he would make good on his promise to be there, and on time, Saturday. He even surprised her at her office one day with a bottle of wine and half-dozen roses trying to make up for any misgivings she previously had about him. Not once did she relent. She accepted the wine and flowers and sent him on his way. It felt good to oversee her life again.

Rebekah had made it to the beach in plenty of time to enjoy taking a quick walk to check out some of the vendors and make a call to Charlene to see how her wedding plans were going.

“Girl, you know I can’t do anything without my best friend here. I just wish you were back here already to help out.”

“So do I, Char. With me being a partner now, things are starting to get busy. Gail has a whole new client list and we had to hire another sous chef for Gilbert and one for myself. But I promise I will get there to help with the Shower at least!”

“You better, girl! You know you are the closest thing I have to a sister and I desperately need your help. My mama is driving me crazy with all this talk about an old fashioned southern wedding. I’m not from the South and neither is Peter.”

Laughing, Rebekah glanced around to see if she saw Nigel yet. She thought she saw a man that resembled Nigel, except this man had two young children and a very pregnant woman with him. She had to do a double take but still couldn’t quite make the man out. She turned around in the other direction to finish her conversation with Charlene.

When she hung up the phone and turned back around – they were gone. Shrugging it off that it wasn’t him, she continued towards the restaurant. As she walked she could hear some arguing coming from the direction the restaurant was in. Spying around the corner, she could hear two women arguing, cursing each other out while the man, NIGEL, was putting two young kids, no older than 4 or 5, into the awaiting cab.

“Bitch, who the hell do you think you are fucking my husband?”

“Your husband. Oh – Hell – No! This is my man. We have been together for the last eight years!” Rebekah recognized the pregnant woman as Nigel’s former assistant, Patrice. She could now see why she was his former assistant. She had to be at least five or six months pregnant.

“Eight years. Nigel, what the fuck is this heifer talking about?” Nigel’s supposed *ex-wife* wasn’t an ex at all, but his still current and present spouse.

“Brenda, please. Just wait a minute. Patrice, baby I can –”

Brenda snapped, “Baby! Mutha Fucka you best to check yourself real quick!” Brenda was not your typical high class, or even middle-class spouse. She was not your typical run of the mill housewife that took anything off any man except his money.

Rebekah just stood there, at the entryway of the patio to the restaurant where a crowd had gathered. She was shocked and speechless.

“Nigel – I thought this BITCH was dead?” Patrice was rolling her neck and stepping out of her slippers, getting ready for what seemed to be the fight of the century – regardless of how pregnant she was.

“Dead – hooker, the only dead bitch around here is gonna be you!” Brenda dropped her bags that carried her daily shopping and started to pull her hapless weave back into a ponytail. Rebekah couldn’t believe it. She was starting to feel sick to her stomach.

Patrice started waddling from side to side while Nigel stepped in between them. The cab driver turned the car off and stood outside and leaned against the fender. Trying to keep the two women from coming to blows, Nigel did everything he could to try and coax Brenda in the car with their children.

Before he knew what happened, Nigel was met with a Gucci bag to the face. The cat fight was on. Not one blow reached the other woman as their arms spun in whirlwind like motions. Nigel had finally gotten back to his feet when he noticed Rebekah standing there.

He was awestruck. Unable to move he just stood there, watching her. Amid the chaos, Rebekah had managed to move closer in the hopes of wishing she had made a mistake in identifying the man as Nigel. But there was no mistaking it.

Nigel was there with Patrice, his pregnant ex-assistant, his two children with his not-so-ex-wife. Nigel couldn’t say a word. He couldn’t speak when the police arrived and broke up the commotion. He couldn’t speak when he saw Rebekah running from the scene.

Rebekah couldn’t bear to stand around and be listed as another one of Nigel’s women. It was clear he had his hands quite full and had no room for her in his life. She was okay with that now. Nigel had left a gaping wound in her that day. It was something she thought she would never recover from. She so desperately wanted to believe that there was someone out there for her – she desperately wanted to find her keeper.

Chapter 6 – Lovers, Lovers, Lovers

She thanked God she had not given up the goods to Nigel. He was one memory she would throw in the incinerator. She continued to reflect on life and loves long past, and realized that she has only had two, yes *two* – possibly three, serious relationships that truly meant something to her. The first one was in high school, where she met her high school sweetheart, Craig Sanders. He was very cute for a high school kid; tall, about 6'2, and built like a football player. He had blond, wavy hair and the bluest eyes she had ever seen. He was part of a group of guys in high school that had been well respected – almost everything they did was ok.

Craig was the first boy she had ever liked and dated outside of her own racial heritage. To her, color didn't matter. Unfortunately, back then, it was somewhat of an issue – especially on the East Coast. She remembered growing up and seeing how mixed-race couples would get second looks, even distasteful comments thrown at them.

She remembered back to her high school sweetheart and realized that from the first time she saw him her freshman year, until they started going out her junior year, he had changed for the better. He had gone from flirting with girls and clowning around with the guys from the team and his “click”, to becoming more aware of what he wanted – and Rebekah. Rebekah was more on the shy side, but pretty with thick, wavy black hair that lay just past her shoulders when she didn't have it up in a ponytail. She was very soft-spoken for a high school valedictorian. Giving her graduation speech was the hardest thing she ever did – the other was accepting a date with Craig.

She was not the debutant type. Rebekah was a thick, pretty, young, black girl in high school who, not too often, would attract the attention of a young boy long enough to go out on one date or get notes from for homework.

She would daydream of her and Craig being married one day with a couple of kids; being popular with the other parents; loved by her husband and adored by friends and colleagues of both her and her husband. She always loved the simple, perfect things in life. She found that life isn't always kind, as that notion came crashing down around her once they finished high school and Craig went off to college.

He promised to love her and come back for her, but never did. Instead, he lost his ride on a full scholarship after being expelled from the University for his “alleged” involvement in a series illegal activity his sophomore year. People say that it had a lot to do with drugs. Rebekah found out the truth when she heard he was back in town and

went to see him at his parents – only to find him there with his new bride, who was clearly pregnant with child. Sickness and betrayal started to swallow her up as she ran from the house in tears – all Craig could do was stand sullen at the door with his wife joyfully at his side. A couple of years later she'd heard he had divorced and she took their little girl and moved to the mid-west with his best friend. *Ain't Karma a bitch!* She thought to herself.

Shaking her head of at that memory and tossing it from her mind, Rebekah got up from the table where her papers were spread and went to the refrigerator, opened the door, and just stared. She looked around and stopped in mid stride – shook her head and closed the door, determined not to let food rule over her emotions again like it did for so many years.

Busying herself to keep from thinking of Craig and that humiliation, she began to put her papers in their respective piles of “to be paid”, “paid” and “other” documents. Soon she found herself drifting back in her mind to the other true, die-hard relationship that Rebekah [thought] she had. It was when she was just starting out in the legal field after finishing her studies in Criminal Justice. She finished her Bachelor's in a little over three years and was working to receive another degree in Business Management when she met Ryan Jameson Jennings III. Ryan, or RJ, was well educated, very handsome and very well off, thanks to his father's sound investments over the years and good business sense. In her eyes, and the eyes of many other women, Ryan was to die for.

Dishwater blond curls surrounding his tan-looking olive complexion, piercing hazel-green eyes, and pearly white smile with the almost perfect body to match, made girls stop and take notice. At 5'11" Ryan was symmetrically in tune. He had broad shoulders like a linebacker, which tapered down to his six-pack abs, all the way down to his strong, muscular, marathon running legs. His only imperfection – he had lost half a pinky on his left hand when he was little. He had said a *former* nanny accidentally closed the car door on it, shattering the bones rendering it immobile and un-repairable.

He was mulato, meaning his mother was white and his father, black. His parents didn't distinguish between the colors until it came to their only child – their son.

Ryan's parents were more particular about whom he dated than he was: beautiful, thin, Caucasian girls with the long blond hair and big dopey eyes were not suitable for Ryan, according to his mother. They were labeled as “gold diggers” and “home wreckers” in her book. While they were, what she called “trophy wives”, they still weren't what she wanted for her son. She should know, being tall, blond, and slightly on the thinner side of things. She was strong minded and intelligent. She wanted nothing less for her son than the best and would do whatever she needed to get her way. She was good at getting her way. Her husband tended to agree, only because he knew he was married to one.

Big Caucasian girls may be considered if they had formal upbringing and could produce heirs that didn't look like they were inbred. Skinny African American women – from Mrs. Jennings' playbook, most weren't any differently labeled than the "trophy wife" girls. No matter how beautiful they were, if they had any type of "street lingo" in their vocabulary or dressed like someone walked out of "Shaniqua's Boo and Do Salon", forget it – they may as well wear a sign around their neck that reads "I am ghetto trash" and walk away.

Thick, full figured black women educated or not – well, let's just say rumor has it, Mrs. Jennings felt that if they didn't eat her and her husband out of house and home, they *might* be considered if they knew how to keep a clean house and take care of the kids. You could be as famous as Oprah, but if you couldn't maintain a home, all the money in the world wouldn't matter. Well – not true. Mrs. Jennings was all for money – the more money the better. Hispanic girls, no matter how beautiful or educated, they were labeled as south of the border hookers looking for a green card. Asian girls – she didn't even consider – while cute, demure, and well behaved, and what she wanted to believe at times to be submissive – in her line of thinking they were all bred to be widow makers of some sort – having affairs left and right and causing some woman's husband to commit the ultimate crime. It was bewildering to Rebekah how a man like Mr. Jennings even got tangled up with a woman like that. Love must have surely been blind.

Every time Rebekah thought about Ryan, it would bring a smile to her face and a twitch of pain to everything else, because she knew exactly how Ryan's mother felt about her. Even though she put on the 'kind mother' façade in front of everyone, Ryan let it slip once during an argument that his mother didn't trust Rebekah and how much she wished she never had to lay eyes on her because she was not good enough for her perfect son. She thoroughly believed that Rebekah would walk up to their door one day six months pregnant, boasting about how it was Ryan's, and he better make it right.

Rebekah let that memory also slip to the back of her mind and went on to dealing with what was going on in front of her at that moment. Unfortunately, the memory left a mark in other places as she squeezed her thighs together to stop the dull, aching vibration between her legs. Ryan was a great lover, and while she didn't wait on her wedding night to lose her virtue, Ryan was not her first.

She recalled the night she had given her most sacred self to Craig before he left for school. It was a clear night. You could see every star, every constellation, clearly in the sky. The weather was starting to cool down. It was two weeks before Craig was to leave for college and he had picked Rebekah up to catch up with some friends at the local eatery. Craig had chosen not to go there, but to their favorite hang out just off the breakers in Newport, Rhode Island.

It was beautiful. Just off Narragansett Bay, you were able to take in the beauty of the Atlantic Ocean and the tranquility of the waves hitting the rocks at the shoreline. While not the best idea for kids to hang out, being patrolled frequently, it was one of the most exquisite.

In a secluded section of land not far from the lighthouse hotel is where the gang would meet from time to time. Most times they would just sit in silence and watch the waves hit the shoreline, while others, they would hang out and talk about the mishaps and accomplishments of the day. This night, it was just Rebekah and Craig.

Rebekah's emotions were on high alert that night and she knew that Craig would be leaving soon and who knows when they would see each other again. Young and believing they were in love; Rebekah wanted to share herself with him. She wanted to give him a part of her that she held dear.

The night was warm for late summer. Craig had brought a couple of blankets to lie down on. They had made plans to sit up all night and view the constellation; find Orion's belt as well as the big and little dipper. Rebekah had told her mother that they wanted to stay to watch the sun come up, so she wouldn't be home until just after dawn. Her parents loved Craig and believed him to be a respectful young man when it came to their little girl.

But he wanted Rebekah that night just as badly as she wanted him. They talked and kissed for what seemed like hours. Both nervous they decided it was time to take their relationship one step further. With hands shaking, Craig help Rebekah remove her blouse and bra. He sat there entranced by her body. Not too thick, but just right in the right places – her breasts for one.

His shaking hand reached out to touch it. Rebekah jumped slightly as his hand slid over its form. Full and round with nipples erect and sensitive to his touch. He bent over and kissed her gently and whispered, "Is this alright?" "Y-yes," was all she could say now; she was too nervous and excited to say anything else. Slowly, he bent down further and began to suckle one nipple, while caressing the other. Moans began to escape her lips as one hand kneaded her breast and his mouth kneaded the other.

It wasn't long before the need to fully connect overtook them both. Craig, furious with desire, removed his clothing quickly. Standing before Rebekah with his member erect and aching, he managed to grab a condom from his pants pocket. It jerked up and down as if knowing where it was going to go. Craig reached down and massaged it – stroked it a little to keep it at attention. It throbbed in his hand as he tried to concentrate.

She realized he was much bigger than she thought he might be and felt a twitch between her legs. He kneeled beside her, slowly kissing her as he removed the rest of

her clothing. Not a soul was around to see them in their naked forms. It was a beautiful night – they waited on this for a long time.

Craig wanted it to last forever. Forcing himself to pull away from her, he looked down to take in the full view of her body. She lay there, shivering, covering herself with her hands. Gently, he removed her hand that covered her breasts, then the one covering the warmth between her legs. To him, she was amazing. There were no lights in the secluded cove where they lay; just the glow from the moon shown over them. The silhouette on her body shook him to his core. Without touching her, he ran his hand in the air over her body.

Unable to resist the temptation anymore, he looked deep into her eyes and asked, “Are you sure this is what you want, Beckie?” Unable to speak, she could only nod in acceptance. She lay there as she felt Craig’s hand slide down her leg.

Crawling down to her feet, he went to part her legs, and was met with slight resistance. Rubbing one calf, he eased her fear a little and she allowed him to continue. He leaned back on his heels and placed one of her feet on his thigh. He began massaging her foot, then calf and legs with his hand – going up and down; making her as comfortable as possible. Gently, and slowly, Craig began to kiss up her calf, knee, and thigh. Parting her legs completely to finish, stopping at the base of her warmth, he was able to spread her legs apart more – “More, baby, please?” he said coaxing her to relax. She did as he asked.

Her mound glistened with moistness. Her scent was heaven to him. Softly he blew against her and watched as her labia reacted. Running a finger along the edge of her opening, he peaked up and saw she was resisting the urge to call out. He was glad he made her feel good. Craig knew that Rebekah had never been with anyone, that’s why he wanted this to be special for her. He would take his time and make sure he wasn’t hurting her in any way. “Beckie, I’m going to kiss you there so don’t be afraid, ok?” She shook her head in acceptance and took a deep breath.

Suddenly, all she could feel with his hot breath on her before the invasion of his tongue in a place she never thought possible. Her senses were out of control. Electricity shot through her body as his tongue assaulted her inner walls. She spread her legs more and welcomed him. He could feel her begin to lift her hips and grind to his rhythm. His mouth accepting her latched on and wouldn’t let go. Kissing, licking, and sucking every part of her, he buried his face into her honey.

He buried his face in her juices and dined on ecstasy. He raised his head long enough to blurt out, “Baby, you taste so good. I want to have all of you.” Running her hands through his hair, she had no need to direct him in the spot that was driving her to the brink. He licked, nibbled, and softly bit at her labia and stuck his tongue deep into

her center sending shockwaves throughout her body. Using his thumb to massage her clit as he suckled only made her want to explode even more.

Moans and muffled cries escaped her throat. He knew she was ready. Giving her clit one last kiss and flick with his tongue, he reached down and fashioned the condom on his penis. Then slowly, he crawled up to her mouth and kissed her. She never realized how she tasted until that moment. It was new to her. She could feel the head of him massage where his mouth and just been. Pulling away long enough to say, "wrap your leg around me and hold on. This may hurt just a little." She did as he asked. As she felt the pressure from Craig's cock, she buried her face into his shoulder as he entered her.

He didn't enter all the way. Going in halfway, then pulling out just to the tip of his cock, he laid his face along side her and thrust with a deep moan. The pain was quick. The sound of his moan in her ear reverberated throughout her body and mind. He lifted his head to see her face. As he looked down at her, he could see tears streaming down and he stopped.

"Hey, hey – what's wrong? Did I hurt your?" He looked scared and a little upset. She shook her head and smiled, "No, I'm fine. I guess I just wasn't prepared for how good you felt." Smiling back at her, he kissed her nose, then lips and began sliding in and out of her. She moaned in unison with him. She felt herself ready to fall off the edge. Her moans got louder, and he knew she was about to come.

"You feel so good, Beckie. So tight..." Thrusting harder and faster, she would tighten her walls around him more and more. Moving in unison, he could hear her muffled whispers, "Faster, faster." He did as she asked. Soon he could feel her explode all around him. He tried to hold on but couldn't. As if on queue, he matched her explosion and collapsed on top of her. Quivering from exhaustion, Craig raised his head high enough to plant kisses all over her face. It was real love to her, and she believed that they would be together forever.

The night breeze cooled their skin as Craig rolled to the side and held her in his arms. Catching her breath, she welcomed the night breeze and whispered softly against his chest, "That was incredible, Craig. I am glad I waited. I'm glad my first time was with you." Rebekah caressed Craig's arm and chest as he pulled her closer, kissing the top of her head and replying, "I'm glad too, Beckie. There has only been one other girl besides you, but you are everything to me."

Rebekah couldn't hold back her tears and he lifted her head and kissed her gently, sending sparks through her body again. As if on queue, Craig was hardening again. Replacing the used condom with a new one, Craig rolled over on his back, bringing Rebekah over him to straddle his mid section. "I want to see you in the moon light Beckie. I want to see your face when we make love again."

The heat in his eyes matched the one in his groin as he positioned her on top of him and slid his masculinity inside her to the hilt and felt her body shake as she began to ride him. He held her thick thighs and buttocks as he helped her ride him hard. He pushed himself deep into her and watched as the sensation filled her face. Nearly collapsing onto him, she grabbed his shoulders as he pushed in harder and faster until they both came.

The moonlight formed a heavenly glow over her breast. Craig reached up and caressed each one. Still embedded deep within her, he sat up, wrapped his arms around her waist as he wrapped his mouth around one nipple and sucked at it long and hard. It was painful but pleasurable to her. He continued to shift from one breast to another, making her squirm more and more on his still implanted erection. In one swift movement, he lifted her off him, laid her on the blanket between his legs; lifting her pussy to be level with his mouth, he devoured her once again, not letting her move and feeling her juices flow until she was completely spent.

After that night, they made love only a few times more before he left for college. Making love to him was one of the best memories she had of Craig at that moment. Unconsciously she began to massage her breasts and a slight smile escaped her lips. Feeling the heat rise in her cheeks she brushed the tendrils of her curly hair from her face and continued. Thinking of her past loves was going to be her undoing.

Ryan, well he was a story all his own. Their meeting was purely by chance. Rebekah was headed to her next class when she literally ran into Ryan in the corridor of the main building on campus.

“Damnit, I’m so sorry.” She responded as she bent down to help retrieve one another’s papers that had fallen during the sidewalk collision.

“No, I’m sorry, really. Y-your, Rebekah Waters, right?” Ryan asked. Surprised he knew who she was, Rebekah nodded in agreement. “I’m Ryan, Ryan Jennings. We have Philosophy together – well, we have the same professor.”

“Yes, I know. I’m sorry I didn’t mean to run into you like that. I’m in a bit of a hurry to my next class.”

Straightening up and trying to replace the mish mosh of papers, Rebekah continued. “Did you understand any of Professor Stanwick’s notes on the board at all?”

“Sort of; he didn’t give a lot of information on the handout and his writing is atrocious.” Both chuckling in agreement, Ryan reached over into Rebekah’s pile, lightly touching her hand as he went for one of his papers he stammered to say, “oh – t-t-that’s mine. Uh listen –” clearing his throat, he continued, “would you like to get a cup of coffee after class? I’m free now and don’t mind hanging around, if-if you are interested that is?”

Rebekah could only stare into his beautiful eyes and grunt “uh-huh.”

Smiling from ear to ear, Ryan placed his paper in his pile. “Great. Would you like to meet out front? Or better yet, why don’t I just come to your next class with you?” Shocked by his suggestion, Rebekah could only stand there slightly slack-jawed. Clearing his throat again he continued, “O-or maybe not?” “No, that’s fine. We can sit in the back. That is, if you want to sit and list to Professor Greuner’s lecture on Business Ethics – A Global and Managerial Perspective.”

He couldn’t help but smile at her. She was beautiful. Grabbing her books, Ryan said, “Lead the way.” Rebekah smiled, and they began their walk to her class.

About an hour and a half had gone by and the class finally concluded. Ryan was completely taken with Rebekah. Not once did he stir in his seat or become irritated for having to sit through such a grueling lecture. Quite fascinated with her take on the subject at hand, Ryan found himself taking notes. When class was over, he grabbed her books again and walked her out of class. Onlookers were surprised to see one of the colleges leading students being escorted in and out of class by one of the University’s most handsome, eligible, and wealthy bachelors.

It was natural, the way they walked and talked, not paying any attention to the onlookers as they laughed and completed one another’s sentences. Rebekah seemed completely at ease with Ryan. For weeks they would meet between classes and talk, hold hands and occasionally kiss. There wasn’t a day that went by that they were not seen together on campus.

Ryan found himself falling hard to Rebekah. He enjoyed spending time with her. He enjoyed it even more when he was able to meet her family one weekend when she went home. Ryan had contacted his mother just before break to let her know that he was going out of town with a friend and that he wouldn’t be home that week during the short break. It was no surprise to him that his mother was unhappy with the whole idea of him traipsing off with what she believed was a buddy instead of coming home. Ryan loved his parents, but he desperately wanted to get out from underneath his mother’s watchful eye.

It was a three-day weekend and Rebekah was going home to see her sister’s new baby. She invited Ryan along who literally jumped at the opportunity. “I’d love to go home and meet your family Rebekah.” Ryan liked her given name as opposed to calling her by the nicknames she also answered to. She loved that about him; and he loved her – he just hadn’t told her yet.

Taking Rebekah into his arms, Ryan kissed her for what seemed to be forever. When they parted, Rebekah felt lightheaded and joyful. A couple of passers by couldn’t resist telling them to get a room. Ryan stopped smiling; gazing into Rebekah’s deep

eyes he managed to say, "I love you Rebekah Ellen Waters. I want to make love to you; right now." Rebekah was speechless. She never imagined him telling her his true feelings like he did, and especially not so soon. Her only response to his announcement was her acknowledgement of her feelings for him as well.

It was a Wednesday afternoon. They had no other classes for the rest of the week, which allowed both a five-day weekend instead of three. Ryan told her he wanted to spend the next couple of days with her before they went to her parents that Friday. Waiting for her response, she agreed and he managed to book a suite at an upscale hotel, overlooking the beautiful city and Rowes Wharf. Ryan wanted this to be a special couple of days for him and his lady love. He wanted to make their first time together to be tranquil and memorable.

Rebekah was excited to be on the arm of such a handsome, caring, and loving man like Ryan. He did everything to make her happy. He would take her out shopping for little things she liked, such as a household knick knack or a trinket for her to wear. He would also take her out to dinner at least two or three nights a week when they weren't closed in hers or his apartments studying, or just cuddling on the couch. Many times, they came close to having sex when they were completely alone, but Rebekah was glad that they waited. Ryan had gone all out when he booked the room.

When they checked in, he made sure that the room was filled with roses and carnations and a bottle of the hotel's best wine. The bed was sprinkled with rose petals as well as the heated Jacuzzi tub. Rebekah was in heaven.

That night, after dinner and their walk, they settled into the sitting room of their Greenway Suite. It was breathtaking to see such luxury. Rebekah didn't care for all the extravagance, but Ryan wanted to show her the time of her life these next couple of days. He surprised her with Tiffany rose gold and sterling silver infinity necklaces. They were simple and elegant at the same time, and Rebekah loved it.

Wanting to show Ryan how much she cared for him and the way he fussed over her, she went to their room and changed into an antique white and pink laced negligee and cover. With her hair in curls, lying elegantly at her shoulders, Ryan couldn't help but stand to his feet and welcome her with open arms.

The room was 72 degrees – perfect room temperature for what she was wearing that evening. Ryan took a step back and gazed at the beauty standing before him. Cupping her face in his soft masculine hands, he leaned over, kissing her. She parted her lips enough to allow his tongue to enter – causing her to feel weak in the knees. Pressing his body against his, the kiss deepened, sending both of their heads spinning, longing for more.

Heat was rising from their bodies with every kiss, every touch. Pressed against Rebekah, she could feel Ryan's erection growing. His body trembled as he moved his hands down Rebekah's arms, caressing them. Pulling her mouth from his to catch her breath, Ryan managed to get out, "I've wanted you for so long, Rebekah. I need you. I need to be inside you right now."

With that, Rebekah let go of all doubt and gave herself fully to Ryan. He had managed to strip down to his briefs while leading Rebekah to the bedroom as they continued to kiss. Once at the bed, Ryan sat at the edge as Rebekah stood over him still covered in her negligee and matching cover. His hands trailed up her waist to her breasts. She winced at the sensation of his touch.

Gently he removed the top layer of her negligee, then the negligee itself. Standing before him in the moon and candlelight was the woman he wanted to be with. Rebekah stood nervous and he caressed every curve of her full figure. Hands shaking, he traced the shape of her arms, waist, breasts. Gently and seductively, he began flicking a nipple between his fingers on his exploration. Putting his arms around her waist, he leaned closer and began suckling on her nipples, one at a time. Moans escaped her mouth with each tug of her nipple.

Pulling her down to the side of him so he could look down at her, his mouth invaded hers like no other. In one swift move he was able to remove his briefs and have one leg draped across her mid-section. She could feel how hard he was. His penis pulsating against her stomach.

It only took a mere second for him to go from gentle caresses to commanding massages. Kneading her flesh with his hands. It was both stimulating and painful. He went from lying at her side to spreading her legs and having a condom covering his throbbing manhood before she could position herself properly.

Ryan was ready – Rebekah wasn't. He sucked on her breasts like they were the only source of nutrients left on the planet. Rebekah gasped at the pain but enjoyed it a little. Her head was spinning and she almost screamed out loud when she felt Ryan quickly slide two – not one – two fingers into her vagina at one time. He didn't say a word, licking his lips and rubbing against her, he continued to knead her pussy with his fingers. Rebekah would have exploded for sure had she not grabbed his hand to keep him from racing in and out of her. It was an invasion of her like no other. She didn't have time to react.

Feeling him slowly remove his fingers, she was able to relax, until he rammed them in long and deep making a tear fall from her eye.

"I just want you so much, Rebekah."

"Ryan, please. It hurts."

“I-I’m sorry. Here, let me kiss it for you.”

With that, he removed his fingers one last time. Without warning he had stood up, grabbed Rebekah by her thighs and pulled her to the edge of the bed. Leaning over one more time, he kissed her mouth. With a sneer-like grin, he dropped down to his knees, spread Rebekah’s legs as far as they could go – possibly farther, and began assaulting her clit with no resolve.

His tongue licked the edges of her walls, as well as darting in and out of her. She was unable to do much being in the position he put her in. Not only had he spread her eagle on the bed but had his face and shoulders against her so she couldn’t sit up, as well as having grabbed hold of her arms and held them at her side, rendering her motionless - defenseless.

He had somehow immobilized her like she was a deer on the hood of a truck. His face was completely buried between her legs. Not once did he get up to take a breath. Not once had he made eye contact with her to see the shock and excitement on her face.

Rebekah’s body trembled with each lick and suck. Unable to control it anymore, she let out a handful of moans and cries that went unanswered. Without notice, she let out a final cry of ecstasy and squirted her juiced in Ryan’s direction. She couldn’t believe it had happened, and Ryan seemed to relish in it.

He continued his assault on her pussy, sliding his tongue up and down, in and out. She realized a few times he had licked her from the tip of her clit all the way down to her ass. She didn’t know what to think of it, but it felt different. Oddly enough, it made her even that much wetter. Now she was ready. Ryan let go of her hands long enough to slide her back up towards the headboard.

Her pussy was red and swollen from Ryan’s mouth. It ached, but Rebekah wasn’t sure if it was aching for need of more or for the pain it was feeling.

Ryan lay over Rebekah, rubbing the head of his cock against her opening; he bent over and kissed her. Her juices covered her mouth. Suddenly she felt his manhood plunge deep inside her. He didn’t need to assist its entry, nor did he need her to assist. It all came with one swift movement.

She didn’t have time to react before the next thrust, and the next one arrived. Ryan was like a well-oiled machine. He didn’t relent once. Pounding her pussy repeatedly with the beast between his legs, he continued to kiss her. His movements were deliberate. Slow then fast. Slow then fast. No matter the motion, the thrusting was powerful. He slid out and slammed back into her like a jack hammer.

Taking her arms and holding them above her head with one hand, Ryan continued to drive deeper and deeper into her. Leaving her once again helpless to the assault.

The pain was intense as Ryan pulled one of her legs over one of his shoulders to get a better position. He made it possible to hold her in that position and bend down to suck on her breasts. Ryan had stamina. Rebekah came at least twice more before he even slowed down.

With sweat dripping off him, he pulled out long enough to command, "Roll over baby, I want to see you from behind." Looking exhausted and perplexed, she tried with all the energy she had to move. It wasn't fast enough for Ryan. He helped her along; flipping her over and pulling her up to him long enough to devour her mouth with kisses and massage her breasts with no kind of tenderness.

He pushed her upper half down on the bed leaving her on her knees with her ass exposed in the air.

"Don't move baby. Let me get positioned."

Curious as to what he meant, she felt his fingers again, only this time it wasn't in the place she thought. He had started from the top of her butt and slid his finger down to the rim of her anus, causing her to jump up.

"No. I don't want that."

"Please, baby. It's just us. I want to try it – with you."

"N-no. I don't want to do that, Ryan."

Realizing she wasn't going to give in to one of his desires, Ryan agreed, but asked that she stay in the same position.

Rubbing his head against her opening, he slammed deep into her. She took a deep breath, but not before he had dug his nails into her hips and began pounding her. Out of nowhere, she felt a slap against the meat of her ass. She jumped. "You like that?" She couldn't answer. He did it again. This time a soft whimper came out of her mouth. He did it again, and again, and again. With every slap he would drive deeper into her. He didn't stop until he had exploded.

Ryan collapsed onto Rebekah's back and they both lay motionless, trying to catch their breath. Rebekah could feel the sting from the spankings Ryan gave to her. The sensation was alarming. She knew her ass would be sore in the morning. She lay there on her stomach, unable to move. Ryan's body seemed heavier. Soon, Rebekah realized he had fallen asleep on top of her – with his penis still erect inside her. Unable to move completely, she shifted enough to where he was half on her and half on the bed.

She waited a full five minutes before she was able to release herself from his body completely. He had finally gone soft so they were no longer connected. She got up from the bed and felt him move a little – enough to roll over on his side without even waking up.

Gathering the complimentary robe that she had laid on the chaise lounge, Rebekah covered herself and went into the bathroom. She was sore and swollen and wanted to cry and laugh at the same time. She had no idea behind Ryan's kind, sweet demeanor, was such a rough and rowdy sexual animal. She was shocked by the way he went from the gentle man she had come to know and love, to this sexual predator. It was exciting and scary at the same time.

That weekend at her parents' house was relaxing for her. Ryan was a perfect gentleman. He slept in the guest room and behaved very well. The only time she had to worry was when they were alone somewhere and Ryan would kiss her to the brink of insanity. His hands would be all over her body. It was like a drug for him. He couldn't get enough of touching her.

When they got back to school, they spent more and more time together. Most nights he would be at her place where they spent most it in bed. There were times when she had to lie about being on her period to get some rest. She thought those lies were going to catch up with her when he asked if he could fuck her while she was still on her period. She insisted that it would not be a good idea or wise, considering the outcome. He finally agreed and never brought it up again. *Thank goodness.*

The last night she and Ryan spent together was the night he took her home to meet his family. His mother, Clarissa, was the epitome of perfection. Not a hair out of place, no wrinkles or flaws in her clothing, nothing. She looked at Rebekah as if she had a third eye – dismissing her before she even allowed her to sit down. From the moment she met Rebekah, she didn't like her. Rebekah was not what Clarissa wanted for her son.

At the dinner table, Rebekah was unmistakably quiet. Ryan's mother had done everything to make Rebekah feel uncomfortable, unwelcome. Ryan told his mother the day before that he was bringing Rebekah home for dinner that weekend and that he was in love with her and wanted to marry her.

His mother just laughed and told him that he had no idea what he wanted and 'thinking only with the head between his legs was only going to get him disinherited'. He didn't want to believe it and felt that his mother would never carry out such a threat. He wanted them to love Rebekah as much as he did. His mother agreed to dinner and meeting her son's supposed love of his life.

As the houseman opened the front door, Rebekah could feel eyes probing her – and not in a good way. Standing aside and allowing her entry, Rebekah walked in the foyer and was met by Ryan, his mother, and his father. His father seemed harmless enough, but his mother was a completely different story. She was tall and slender and a nose that had clearly been reconstructed at least twice.

By dinner, Rebekah had lost her appetite. His mother had been goading her the entire evening; making snide comments about her weight and attire. She wore a tasteful cashmere sweater and dress slacks. That was not what Clarissa considered appropriate dinner attire. She wore a Versace dinner dress that in Rebekah's opinion was a little too much for a simple gathering; unfortunately, there was nothing simple about Clarissa.

As the butler was about to serve Rebekah the veal in mushroom sauce, she politely declined, whispering to him that she was allergic to mushroom. "Very good Miss." he said and served her selected portions of vegetables, causing Clarissa to roll her eyes and drop her napkin in her lap before biting, "Oh come child, surely you must want more than that, you're a big girl." Glaring at her over the top of her wine glass, Clarissa continued, "It's bad manners not to try something at least once. Didn't your mother teach you that?" "I'm allergic to mushrooms, sorry. The vegetables are fine." "Well, I must say, maybe we should have run the menu by you first before wasting such a fine piece of veal. Shocked, Rebekah looked around the table to see the men steadily concentrating on their food – even Ryan didn't come to her defense.

Rebekah had had enough. "If you will excuse me, please. Thank you for dinner Mr. Jennings –" Glaring at his wife, she added, "Mrs. Jennings. Ryan – goodnight." Rebekah stood to gather her things and leave, but not before she saw the satisfaction on Mrs. Jennings' face.

"W-where are you going?" Ryan nonchalantly asked, as if deaf and blind to his mother's attack on Rebekah.

"You're kidding right?" Looking around the table, Rebekah continued, "I am not going to stay someplace that I am clearly not welcome. I am not going to sit here and let your mother continue to insult me and her *boy* say nothing in my defense."

Ryan was left speechless – or at least he appeared to be. Or maybe he just didn't know what to make of it altogether.

"Rebekah, that's ridiculous. My mother likes you." A cough escaped his father's mouth, causing both Rebekah and Ryan to look in his direction.

"Ryan, I can't do this. It's been clear since the moment I stepped through your front door that she didn't like me; saying everything short of calling me fat. And you – you sit there and do nothing. Who does that?"

Shaking her head, she walked to the foyer where she was met by the same man who let her in – only this time he was holding her purse and coat waiting for her to leave.

Rebekah got the hint. She left. It was the last time she saw his family – it was the last time she saw Ryan. She remembered Ryan mention how impossible his mother could be sometimes but never thought that she would witness it first hand. His ignorance to her attack only made it that much worse.

Her memory of making love with Ryan left a tingle in her nether regions as she reminisced on their sexual excursions. However, the memory of his parents left emptiness for him in her heart. She realized she wanted a combination of Craig and Ryan's sexual attention, together with the love of a man that would lay down and die for her.

Her wariness of finding another man was beginning to take its toll on her senses. She made it a point that from here on out her heart would be completely off limits until she had a ring on her finger...at least that's what she kept telling herself. Being a romantic at heart, she knew she was in trouble.

Rebekah shrugged off the insecure feeling she had been getting and tried to finish with her accounting. Absently rubbing her thigh, she subconsciously tried to rub the extra thickness from her leg. Rebekah stood 5'6. Her weight was not completely proportionate to her height. Her measurements spoke for themselves. She was a thick black woman with plenty of curves – more than she liked to have in some areas. She never wore a training bra during her adolescent stage and has never been smaller than a C or D cup her entire life. Rebekah knew her breasts must be some cruel curse handed down from her grandmother on both sides. Her body appeared to be that of an hour glass shape, except her waist was not that pencil thin type – it bordered on the edge of muffin-top formation. *Do more sit-ups* she added to her daily exercise list.

Thighs – those thighs were thick and helped her sway as she walked. The size 14 jeans she wore looked very good on her and she still managed to turn a head or two every now and then. Her thighs were tight and thick, not flimsy and jiggling. She liked that about her legs. She prided that on the many walks she took and the menacing heels she wore to help strengthen her calves. Her legs and her backside were what she thought made her. She knew she had a pretty face and all, but her shyness over the years prompted her to keep her face directed at the sidewalk, seeing a person's shoes instead of looking ahead and seeing their faces as she went by. After college she made it a point to raise her head a little higher and tell herself that she was a beautiful creature and any man would be proud to have her on his arm.

Chapter 7 – A Tall Drink of Water to Quench My Thirst

Looking deep into the screen of her laptop, she waited to see if it was going to give her any kind of advice about her need for male companionship – *companionship my ass!* - Who the heck was she trying to kid! She needed sex – and big time! Her memories were proof of that. Realizing that the thoughts running through her mind had nothing to do with the numbers on the papers in front of her, Rebekah saved the items on her computer and shut it down. Leaving it on the table, she walked over to the kitchen cabinet and grabbed a glass. Humming the song “Can’t Touch This” to herself, which had annoyingly been stuck in her head, she poured herself a glass of water. Thankfully, the song had been interrupted by conversation outside of the large picture window in her living room.

With the blinds not completely closed, Rebekah was able to make out the elderly woman cackling at the tall, ruggedly handsome gentleman standing on the sidewalk just outside her townhome. Mrs. Devereaux was an elderly, thin, light-skinned black woman, who walked every now and again with a cane, and was relatively harmless. She knew everyone’s business and none of her own for the 18 years she lived in the monumental community and wasn’t afraid to share some of the gossip. She watched tenants and owners come and go, back before it was converted into apartment/townhomes, as well as babies coming and going, and growing up in the area.

She has seen the upgrades – even put her two cents worth in to the owners and building contractors over the years, about the oversized fountain and fish pond what she considered to be vandalism waiting to happen. Complaining it was an eye soar, yet she was one of the first to contribute a pint-sized gold fish that grew to be “trout-sized.” She could hear Mrs. Devereaux muttering something about being such a “handsome young man” and “why don’t you have that pretty girlfriend anymore”. Rebekah couldn’t help but peak out of the blinds to see who it was she was talking to.

Not wanting to draw attention to herself, she tried her best not to disturb her blinds too much. Suddenly she heard his voice – deep and very strong – it had sounded like he was standing right beside her, and Rebekah’s head began to spin. The world seemed to stop spinning on its axis as she tried to catch her breath. It was Jake Turner. Jake was one of the most handsome – if not the only handsome, single man in the townhome complex. “Mrs. Devereaux, you know I only have eyes for my favorite girl!” And with that, he leaned over and gave her a gentle peck on the cheek. All the blood in that poor woman’s body must have run to her cheeks as they turned a bright, rosy pink.

Mrs. Devereaux was on the shy side of 80 – hair coifed in a slightly tilted up-do. Her withering hands doing what they can to contain the item between them, and after her bout of giggling stopped, she handed Jake a plate of cookies. “Now, these were my mother’s recipe. Chocolate drop and molasses – they were her prize-winning favorites.” “Thank you so much Mrs. Devereaux. I – I don’t know what to say.” Rebekah giggled a little to herself as she watched Jake’s nose flinch in protest while he painted an approving smile on his lips. How she wanted to devour those lips of his. Full, kissable, and deliciously perfect, just like the rest of him.

She could feel that ache in her nether regions begin to stir again and decided she was going to need a long hot bath later. She remembered him all the way back to when she first saw his piercing gray eyes staring at her.

Rebekah had crossed paths with Jake a few times that she can remember in the few short months that he lived there. A more memorable or embarrassing time was once while walking from the mailbox, she practically mowed him down trying to pick up her mail that at flown out of her hands. Rushing to retrieve her mail and not watching her backside, literally, stooping over to pick up her Accountant’s Are Us magazine, he had graciously picked up a piece of mail beside and behind her, and as she stood, nearly head-butted him into the rose bush next to the on slot of mail boxes.

She practically turned three shades of red realizing what she had done and dropping her mail once more as she saw he was there, in her presence, helping her. She thought for sure the heat from her embarrassment could singe his early afternoon ‘five o’clock shadow’ that so commandingly brought out his beautiful features. Stumbling with her words as well as her actions, Rebekah managed to pick up her mail once more and was about to leave when she felt him touch her shoulder.

She turned slowly and saw him there – looking deep into her soul. He gently handed her the mail with an intriguing grin. Unable to say the words, she managed an embarrassing squeak and quick smile, and then scurried off to her destination. That second embarrassing moment which had befallen her, she was walking from her car with an armful of groceries that he offered to help carry, but she politely declined as she rushed to her townhome, only to drop the carton of orange juice she had been carrying on the tip of her pinky. She tried to break its fall with her foot, but instead, she was greeted with a splatter all over her foot and the front of her slacks. Shaking her head and rushing off, Jake stood there helpless as she glanced back at the mess that was made, and Jake. He was always smiling – sweet and sexy – strong and commanding – “*my goodness*” would be what she thought to herself, however, her squeaked ‘hellos’ and nervous smiles were all she could muster up when in his presence.

She enjoyed the way it made her feel sometimes, running into him now and then – but didn’t like the result of her flustered reaction. She wanted him – bad.

According to Rebekah, he was perfect in everything that he did – from the way he dotted his I's, to the way he enjoyed a woman's company. His last girlfriend, from what Rebekah could see peeping from her window, was a sexy brunette bombshell with legs that went all the way up to her chin – not to mention her “million dollars” boob job as she put it. It was no surprise that he captured the attention of many women the way he looked. His skin was smooth as silk – his eyes grayer than gray – like steel; his complexion was flawless – not even the evidence of pre-adolescent pimples as a young boy. He was toned in all the right places – his body was to die for, and he didn't need pharmaceuticals to get it looking the way that it did. His legs were strong looking – muscled and toned. Probably less than 5% body fat he was so tone.

For a white guy, Rebekah was surprised that he fit so well in the jeans he wore. The front package looking just as appetizing as the back, and Rebekah wanted to see more of him.

Jake Turner was a man among men. Almost every morning at 5:30 a.m., he could be seen jogging his way out of the complex through the front gate for his daily run. A couple of the women in the area even took up running just to watch him – to be around him. He would pay them little mind as he donned his earphones and cranked up his music while he ran. His fanfare would barely make it the first two miles before they had to stop and rest – and watch – as Jake made his way down the hill to continue his daily non-stop eight-mile hike. The way some of the women in the complex reacted, you would think he had invented some new-found cure or deciphered the Da Vinci Code or something.

The women fawned over him from the day he moved into his townhome – that is when his then girlfriend wasn't keeping watch. Even Mrs. Devereaux managed to claw her way at his door like an old mother hen. She would constantly be chasing the girls away so that she could sit and find out all about him and his family.

And he certainly didn't need to cook for himself with all the women cooking him snacks and full course meals, or at least some tried - many times he would enjoy eating them, while other meals, he wouldn't be able to stomach from those who *thought* they could cook. Sometimes, Rebekah would see him late at night, carrying out bags of uneaten meals that he was too kind to turn away. Not once had she dared to fix him something.

On the day Jake moved in and entered her life, he had rekindled a fire down deep in her belly she thought had been long extinguished. She was sitting at the table by her picture window, chatting on the phone with Charlene, when out of the corner of her eye, she saw him walking by with a handful of boxes.

No shirt and all man.

Stopping in mid-sentence, Rebekah caught her breath and felt the heat rise in her cheeks. *What a specimen of a man.* She thought to herself. “Hellooo – Beckie? Are you even listening to me?” Charlene was one of her oldest friends. They would talk for hours on the phone – but today, Rebekah had to cut it short – “That guy I told you about he’s moving.... I-I, I have to go girl, there is some...one...” her words trailed off, and before Charlene could say another word, Rebekah hung up the phone.

She stared long and hard at the all male specimen outside of her window. There was an ache between her thighs that had not been there in quite a long while. She knows that fact down because it was right before her break up with a man she had been dating off and on after moving to the west coast. He was nothing like this man standing just beyond her reach. Sure, her ex, if he could even be considered that, being as they were only together a month, he was a decent lover – at the time, but from her current view – that all but faded away into a distant memory. She couldn’t even remember his name anymore.

In that instant, she wanted to know just how good of a lover this Adonis was. As if he could hear her thoughts, the man, Jake Turner, had slowed his pace and stopped right across from her window. Doing a double take, they both stared at each other. That moment seemed like an eternity for Rebekah. Wanting to wave but couldn’t, he mouthed “*hello*” to her and she could do nothing but bite down on her lower lip. She slowly sat back in her chair as a smile formed on his full, suckable, lips. She gave a quick smile, polite nod and tried to hide her face with her hand, as if trying to keep the sun off her – didn’t work.

Girl stop it! You are embarrassing yourself! He can still see you! Damn that inner voice, she muttered to herself. She was going to have to find a way to stifle it.

Jake remembered seeing Rebekah for the first time when he came to view the townhome a few months earlier. She was walking to her home when they nearly collided. Her sweet scent inflamed his nostrils as she went by. He remembered deliberately standing close enough to graze her hand with his own as she went pass him, only to *accidentally* bump into her, causing his body to become acutely aware of her presence.

Seeing her sitting there now did the same thing. He continued to stand there for a moment, taken by her natural beauty, until the bond was broken by his then girl friend, Eliza. She was a long-legged, long haired brunette, about 5 feet 9 inches, a body to die for, and breasts that must have cost a small fortune. Walking over to Jake, she stopped to see what he was looking at, and saw Rebekah sitting there. With a disgusted smirk on her face, she leaned over and gave Jake a slutty kiss that would put any porn star to shame. With Jake’s hands full, he was helpless. She sucked on his upper and lower lips like a lion sucking the marrow from a bone.

Glancing at Rebekah, she mouthed something that had to have been derogatory, then grazed Jake's manhood with a finger and walked to his townhome. To his chagrin, he put on a fake smile, shrugged his shoulders while trying to be nonchalant, and went back to carrying his boxes. Rebekah felt a little twinge of embarrassment at the way his girlfriend had assaulted him. At the same time, she wished it was she that was kissing and touching him.

"What is wrong with you, girl?" she thought to herself – "You haven't even met the man yet and you're drooling all over the place!"

How could anyone not drool over him? He was immaculate. Broad shoulders, almost shoulder length wavy dark brown hair and the most beautiful gray eyes imaginable. His 6-foot 2-inch frame was tone and primed for just about anything. His washboard abs – granny's old washboard had nothing on that; and biceps that flexed without trying to – why any woman would be honored to be swept up in those arms.

Girl, he's not a train wreck waiting to happen – he's the damn train! My my my my my!

From what she could see of his legs, they were all muscle in the front and back all the way to his nice ass – not too much and not too little. She could tell he took care of himself. No body fat to be seen. Well, then again, glancing at the front – well, let's just say he didn't have a problem in that area at all. Licking her lips, a little, Rebekah tried to convince herself that she had had her fill of "Mr. Wonderful" and turned her back to the window.

The urge came back again, and she knew before long, she would need to quench her thirst – but not just with any man – that wasn't her style. She thought often of calling an old boyfriend. That thought quickly left her mind when she remembered that an old boyfriend, unbeknownst to her, had been screwing his secretary, *when* his WIFE found out! Yeah, she ran from that relationship quick and didn't look back. *I am so glad I didn't give my cookies away to him.*

Going backwards to exes and old flings was no longer an option – she needed to strive forward, no matter how much it killed her.

Seeing Jake Turner made Rebekah realize that she was in deep trouble if she didn't do something about her urges – and quick. He had been setting off sparks in her that no man had done in quite some time.

Jake's girlfriend had come back outside long enough to chase any of the female onlookers away and try to diminish his manhood a little more. While the chasing part worked – the diminishing part failed to her dissatisfaction.

“Jake, honey, you know those girls just want you for your looks, sweetie. Who wouldn’t! You are -”

“Eliza, that’s enough. If you are going to be out here, a little less lip and a little more lift, please.” Jake handed her a box which she reluctantly took, giving the spying neighbors dirty looks as she hefted the box into his townhome.

Hearing a scream and a crash, Jake set down his box and was off like a shot to his townhome. To his dismay, he found Eliza standing by the door with an emery board, filing down what was left of one of her dainties, perfectly polished, pink nails. In front of her lay the box she carried – and what was left of a rather nice set of crystal long stem champagne flutes.

“Look at what your damn box did to me, Jake! My nails are ruined!”

He was dumbfounded. Taking a breath, Jake knelt down and looked through the broken flute glasses, and without even eyeing Eliza, he replied, “Damn it Liz! I thought it was something serious-”

“Not serious! What the hell do you call this! My nail is broken! I am sure it cost more than those stupid glasses of yours did.” Jake moved his hand in time to see Eliza kick the box away from him and storm away. He didn’t stop her from walking out as he let out a sigh – not sure if it was from relief or frustration – or both.

Rebekah had managed to step outside of her door in time to see Eliza swing her purse over her shoulder and make a fiery path down the walkway. Glancing over at Rebekah she snapped – “what the hell are you looking at you dumb bitch!” Her voice sounded like nails on a chalkboard – loud and annoying. She stormed her way past the oncoming residents and continued her brooding mission to her car. Jake, overheard Eliza’s reign of terror and stood to see who the victim was.

His jaw opened slightly as he saw Rebekah standing there with her hands on her full, voluptuous hips in a pair of khaki Capri’s and a pale pink t-shirt. He caught his breath. Eyeing her from head to toe, he took in the long drink of her and it gave him an ache in his groin. *What the hell is that, Jake?* He thought to himself. His own girlfriend didn’t give him an ache like Rebekah Waters did at that moment. He took in every inch of her being. From the top of her head – those luxurious black curls that ended just past her shoulders – her shoulders, which were not too broad for a woman of her stature.

He loved women with meat on their bones. From what he saw, she appeared to have it in the right places. She was not the petite model type, but from his perspective, she wasn’t overweight either. Her curves were killing him. He loved the natural curves of a woman, and Rebekah had it. From what he could surmise by his own calculations, her measurements were like an hourglass, only with more glass – maybe a twelve or fourteen – he didn’t care; his girlfriend was probably a size zero, but she was beautiful.

He had to admit she was good in bed too – when he was able to get it, but he wanted more. He wanted a lot more.

He traced her profiled frame and found that she was not really that short, nor was she tall – about 5 feet 6 or 7 inches. The way that she stood, he could see her firm, large breasts, and the way her shirt appeared taut over them – he dared to guess them to be a 42D – *quite possibly a double D*. His mouth began to water a little. Mesmerized, he inched his way down to her waist, which was not tiny but not over bearing either – just enough to slip an arm around and hold. He liked that.

Then, there it was – *My God, what an ass*. He said under his breath. That full figured butt that didn't stick out like the more prominent "ghetto booty" but was there for the thrill of looking at and knowing it belonged to a real woman. A slight groan escaped his lips and he continued his ball-busting journey to her thighs, and the ache came back as he imagined those thick, edible thighs wrapped around his waist while he slid his throbbing beast into her. Shaking his head and clearing his throat, he managed to adjust himself before she could turn around and catch him staring. Adjusting his growing erection in his pants was painful and he decided that he will have to take care of that need in the shower later. Looking her over seemed like an eternity, which, was only mere seconds.

Rebekah released her hands from her hips and thought about flipping her off but changed her mind and turned to go back into her townhome. She felt eyes watching her and stopped in mid-turn to find him staring at her. Those few seconds seemed like a lifetime. As he waved her acknowledgement, he blurted out "Sorry!" To his dismay, she did an about-face and scurried back into her townhome, peeping out of the crack as she slowly closed her door.

Jake had a problem – he wanted his new neighbor – he wanted her bad. But how was he going to have her if she wouldn't even give him the time of day? He shook his head to himself and mumbled, "You idiot, you have a girlfriend –" Facing the entrance, he stood and stretched, but not before grabbing himself and making yet another adjustment, then continued to move into his new townhome.

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Once he had everything moved in and stacked up against the walls so that he would have a neat path from room to room, Jake thought it would be a good idea to finish meeting his neighbors – all of them. As he stepped out of his door, watching the moving van drive off after signing the moving slip, he was ambushed by at least five of the dozen or so single women in the community – not to mention a couple of married ones who thought of using him for recreational purposes.

The first introduction came from a petite, pixy blonde, “Hi! I’m Jenna, nice to meet you!” She nearly yelled while grinning from ear to ear, like she had just won the lottery.

Suddenly pushed out of the way by a raven haired older woman, with buck teeth and a style all her own, who interjected – “Mary, my pleasure.”

Shaking her hand before he was assaulted by yet another woman, Jake found himself taking a few steps back, as the crowd appeared to move closer to him.

Greeted by a mousy brown haired young woman in pigtails, who managed a barely audible greeting - “Rosemary, I – I live right there, so if you need any-” “I think he’s got it Rosie! Let go of his hand!” The raspy words that startled even Jake came from the all familiar Mrs. Devereaux. “Move aside girls and give the young man some room.” Jake was amazed at how the women split apart at her command and gave her room to enter.

“Hello, dearie. Don’t let these girls scare you.” Looking over her shoulder, she gave each one the evil eye to retreat to their townhomes so she could continue.

“I’m Mrs. Devereaux. Here, I made a fresh tuna casserole for you. I figured you would be too tired to take your dishes and pots out to cook.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Devereaux. My mother would be very pleased that you were looking out for me.” He lifted the foil from the dish and caught a whiff of the tuna. It was loud but looked appetizing. He took a chunk with his fingers, placed it in his mouth and saw Mrs. Devereaux give him a sour apple expression for not using a utensil.

“This is good, thank you, Mrs. Devereaux.” He choked down a large piece of tuna and pasta, which tasted pretty good. “I’m glad you like it my boy.” Patting him on the chest she continued in a whisper,

“Tomorrow, I will make you southern style goulash!” “Uh – yum – can’t wait.” He half heartedly replied. Mrs. Devereaux was satisfied and smiled as she walked away, moving her cane about so the onlookers would stand aside.

Rebekah looked out her window and saw the crowd dwindle as he turned to head back towards his townhome, but not before he glanced over to catch her watching him and smiled.

## Chapter 8 – And You Want What?

It had been almost four months or more since Jake moved in, and Rebekah's needs were starting to get the better of her. She hadn't had male stimulation in a while and found that she was long overdue. Her thoughts would wander to when she first saw Jake Turner and what she wanted him to do to her on every level of sexual pleasure – from kissing her, to grinding his body against her while having hot, sweaty sex. For weeks she would see him come and go – sometimes with a friend, and other times just himself. He had managed to catch her once or twice and get a “hello” out of her.

Every time Jake passed by, Rebekah couldn't help but sneak a peak at him. For months he would smile and try to stop her to talk for a minute, but there were only polite hellos or nods to him as she hurried herself along to get to her destination. She couldn't believe that she had returned to a shy, introverted young woman when it came to being face to face with him. She could never fully muster up the courage to have a conversation with the walking, talking Greek God.

The day he had broken up with his girlfriend, almost the entire community was a buzz; not from the fact that Eliza had thrown a tantrum in the courtyard when he sent her packing after finding out about her “extra curricular activities” with a co-worker, but because he was a *FREE MAN – AVAILABLE – BACK ON THE MARKET*. That shook Rebekah to her core. Her senses were all a flutter, more so than usual around him. Her honey pot stood on alert as if instinctively aware of his new-found freedom.

It appeared that the minute Eliza was out of the picture, his body was letting off the most powerful essence of testosterone in her immediate direction – and she couldn't get enough. She wanted to bottle that scent and sell it on the black market to the highest bidder. This wasn't just any testosterone scent – this was Jake's scent. This was the kind that made its way into the nose hair follicles and stayed there. She could not get enough of it even if she tried.

Today was no different. As he walked down the sidewalk in front of her townhome, she could hardly manage to keep herself from sticking her face through the blinds of her living room window and plastering it against the glass. She had dreams of him walking up to her door and asking her out on a date more times than she can remember. Sometimes Rebekah thinks that he sees her watching him, and he deliberately slows down so that she can take in all of him. Today, as he passed by, he

quickly looked out of the corner of his eye and spotted Rebekah watching him. He couldn't help but smile just a little as he passed her front door.

There was something about him; something that she couldn't explain. It wasn't so much the fact that he was beautiful – it was something entirely different. *Was he noticing her?* She thought to herself. *Don't be silly girl! He is Adonis, Apollo, and Hercules all rolled into one! That man will sex you up and leave you having orgasms for days!* That's exactly what she wanted. She wanted him to ruin her for any other man. She wanted him to use her up and leave nothing for anyone else.

It wasn't long before she would find herself contemplating calls to a certain man she knew that might be able to handle that little issue for her. Then she pinched herself and heard that little voice says, *"Don't do it, girl. It will only lead to trouble. A healthy dose of self-satisfaction will have to do for now."* This voice was a constant in her mind. She wanted more than those battery operated "Platinum Pete" type accessories to handle her needs.

By luck – or not, the phone rang. Before she could get out a greeting, a familiar voice came through the line, "Beckie – how are you baby?" "Markus," saying his name left somewhat of a bad taste in her mouth. Markus Simon, Esquire – attorney at law and pain in her ass. He was an acquaintance through a friend, and ever since their first official date, he clung to Rebekah like a wad of chewing gum to a shoe. He was confident in everything that he did. He tended to point out everyone else's misgivings, but at the same time, denied any of his own.

Markus Simon was a good looking black man for being 10 years older than she was. He was well dressed and had an average build. He stood about 5 feet 10 inches and had a very alluring smile that blended with his eyes. He was an attorney to a good number of "high paying, high profile" celebrities – as he put it. Rebekah summed it up to be an attorney to the ones that couldn't seem to keep their asses out of the frying pan before jumping into the fire, and their actions made him financially secure. That was a perk for going out with Markus – he always insisted on paying for everything so that he could slap down his platinum American Express card like he was playing dirty poker. The downfall – while he was a handsome and successful black man, his table manners, if not all, were seriously lacking; not to mention a couple of other annoyances that made her want to run for the hills.

"How are you, Markus? I thought you were out of the country on business." *Hoped was more like it*, she thought.

"I just got back yesterday and wanted to give you a call – see if you were free for dinner." Getting up and walking to the window to glance out – seeing Jake was being introduced by Mrs. Devereaux to a couple of younger residents, she walked back towards her couch, cleared her throat, and tried to think of a lie – but none came to mind.



“That’s very kind of you, Markus. L-L-let me check my schedule and I will call you ba-”

“Well, I was hoping you could give me an answer right now, seeing as you are already home and just standing there.” Not realizing that the small crowd that had been talking a few feet away, had quickly silenced as Markus announced his arrival. Even Jake looked over his shoulder to see what was going on and couldn’t help feeling a bit jealous – and why, he had no clue.

“I beg your pardon?” Markus had a way of showing up unannounced – and uninvited. Taking a deep breath, rolling her eyes, and sighing, she walked back and glanced out of her window again and was greeted by Markus’ smiling face. She grimaced, hung up the phone and made her way to the door.

Opening the door, she half smiled as she heard, “So is that a yes?” You could hear the frothing in his words as he turned off his phone.

*So much for Platinum Pete.* She swore to herself. That would be the beginning of the end of her so-called relationship with Markus. Glancing over his shoulder, she was able to spy the small group watching as Markus entered her townhome, and she could only lower her head and close her door in defeat. She needed to get out more.

Markus came in and sat down on the couch, while Rebekah sat in the overstuffed chair. Looking disappointed at her choice of seating, Markus smirked a little before saying, “You are such a character Bekah. No wonder I am so into you.”

“Ha – well, you know me Markus.” There was a little sarcasm in her tone – however, her mind was on other things – or was it another person?

“So, Beckie, tell me how you have been lately? Being partners with Gail Abernathy definitely has its advantages, right?” She looked a little puzzled at his assumption as he continued, “I mean, who hasn’t heard of Gail Abernathy. She is the ‘know all’ of celebrities. She’s the one you have to get to know to be invited to one of those galas.”

“Well, I tend to agree in some respect. However, she is down to earth like most people. It’s only the ones that question her – what’s the word I’m looking for? Oh, stature – it’s only the ones who question her stature in this industry that tend to be ‘black listed’ to events.” *Gotcha.* She knew he had been black listed at a few of the events that Gail hosted; not only on her recommendation, but the client as well.

Markus sat there and stared at Rebekah before doing the one thing she detested – stick his tongue between the gap in his teeth and suck like he was picking something out of them. It reminded her of someone sucking the remnants of a drink through a straw when they knew there was nothing left.

“So, Markus, what brings you by?”

“Do I really need an excuse to see such a beautiful woman like you, Bekah?” He tried to don an innocent smile, but it didn’t work.

“You are full of all kinds of good humor today, aren’t you Markus?” *He’s full of something alright; and humor ain’t it!* That little voice couldn’t help getting her two cents worth. Folding her lips inward, Rebekah held tight not to burst out laughing from the inner comment.

“Honestly, I wanted to see you; take you out to dinner and dancing, you know, stuff like that.” Rebekah tried to oversee the ill-fated humor in his statement, but she came to know Markus all too well. He always had ulterior motive lurking in the background.

“Tonight, really? I don’t know Markus. I have a busy day tomorrow.”

“Oh, come on now, Beckie. You know how I hate to beg. Let’s go to Tony Roma’s or Red Lobster for dinner. I promise to be a gentleman. I will even bring you back at a decent hour and tuck you in if you wanted!” His grin would be the death of him – it gave all his secrets away. *This man needs to stop while he’s behind.*

“That won’t be necessary Markus – I think I am old enough to tuck myself in.” *See! I knew he had something up those polyester sleeves of his!* Unable to hold in her chuckle, Rebekah agreed to dinner. “Dinner is fine. I just don’t want to stay out too late, ok?”

“Rebekah, your wish is my command.” Standing up to leave, Markus reached out to take Rebekah’s hand to help her to her feet, but before doing so, leaned in, and kissed it.

“It’s so good to see you again, Bekah. I promise I will make this a great night.” *What the hell?!?! I swear if he switches up my name one more time. . .*

Hoping that there would be some sort of reprieve for all the good she had done lately; her wishes fell short. “Um, sure, why not? I mean, you did promise me a great night, and I will hold you to that, Markus.”

Unable to hold his excitement of her accepting a dinner date after such a long time of blowing him off, Markus jumped off the couch and rounded the table to the chair where she sat. Not quick enough to dodge his affection, Rebekah received a rib-crushing bear hug.

“Rebekah, you will not be disappointed. I intend to redeem myself for- hold on one second.” Markus’ phone rang in the middle of his sentence. Standing straight to look at

the number, he grimaced at what he saw. Apparently, he was not happy with whoever it was on the other end.

“I-I need to take this call, Rebekah. I will pick you up around 7:00 this evening, ok? You won’t be disappointed!”

Before she could answer, he was out the door. All she could hear was a muffle word or two from Markus in response to the person on the phone. Rebekah’s senses kicked in, but not before that little voice in her head got off a warning shot, *now you know damn good and well that man is lying through his ‘lie gapped’ teeth!*

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She didn’t wear anything too revealing that evening. She dressed more for comfort than showcase purposes. She wasn’t trying to nab anyone – especially Markus; and while he was a very handsome man, he had rubbed her the wrong way one too many times – this evening was no exception.

Tonight, she wore a simple dress with a wrap and matching shoes. Her hair was pulled back in a makeshift bun with tresses of hair flowing down the sides of her face. She looked simple but elegant all at the same time.

When Markus came to pick her up, he was taken by her natural beauty. She wore very little makeup and scent was that of her lavender soap and a soft hint of her lavender scented oils she dabbed in the appropriate places. Stepping out onto her porch, she noticed motion from her left. Glancing over, she noticed Jake standing in awe. He had been on his porch signing for his pizza order when she walked out. After taking a double take, and nearly drop his box of pepperoni pizza, it was all he could do to stand there and stare at Rebekah as she was about to leave on a date with another man.

His jealousy radar was on high alert, and he didn’t know why. She didn’t belong to him. She rarely said two words to him, and that he couldn’t tolerate. He wanted more from her. He wanted to be the one who had her on his arm that night. He wanted her in his bed, always. Suddenly he realized she was staring back so he smiled and waved. She returned the gratuities as Markus leered at Jake.

Soon, Jake’s jealousy reached a near boiling point when he saw Markus lay a hand on her lower back as he hurried her to his car. Clenching his jaw together, to the point where he could have broken a few teeth, Jake turned and walked back into his home. He was becoming possessive of a woman he barely knew, let alone had any claim on, and couldn’t shake the feeling.

Dinner that night turned out to be surprisingly pleasant, considering her escort. It had been a while since she had accepted a date from him – or any man for that matter. She always made excuses not to be able to go out. While his table manners had

improved, the only downfall about her dinner companion was that his phone kept ringing off the hook. Rebekah knew it wasn't just about business either. A couple of times he got up from the table and stepped outside to finish the conversation. She thought it a little rude of him to even have his phone turned up to hear the ring, let alone have it on in a restaurant during a dinner date. *You know that fool has something up his sleeve, and I'll bet dollars to donuts that it's a woman!*

She convinced herself in trying to make the most of the evening, knowing that she would be home soon enough – *"No dessert, girl. The faster this is over with, the better!"* She spoke in her head. When Markus finally returned this last time, Rebekah uttered a comment in his direction,

"My goodness you must really be busy. With all those phone calls, you would think it was the president or – eh hmm – or something." A hint of sarcasm looming in the air from her comment, Markus wasn't sure how to take it.

Markus chuckled and quickly sat back down. "Err – something like that. Nothing I can't handle later or in the morning. But never mind about that, where were we?" Trying to flash a million-dollar smile, which in her eyes was only worth about a buck and a quarter, Markus glided his hand over hers by what appeared to be guilty come-on. Markus was smooth, but not smooth enough for her liking. Slowly moving her hand away, she said politely, "Maybe we should just call it a night then?"

A Cheshire cat-like smile beamed across Markus' face. "Anything you want, baby – anything you want! Let me just get the check and we will be outta here." Markus quickly gestured for the waiter to come back and requested the check. Asking if they wanted dessert, Rebekah politely declined, and placed her hands on her lap as the waiter finished clearing the table.

It had only taken Rebekah a split second to realize that Markus was under the impression that *dessert* would come after he took her home, so Rebekah added, "I have a busy day tomorrow anyway – why with the caterer's meeting and then over to the firm, I am just completely spent." Batting her eyes slightly and pretending to hide a yawn, she smiled.

"Beckie, let's not stop now! It has been so good to see you this evening. Did I tell you how beautiful you looked tonight?" Like sugar, Markus' words only seemed to add more weight to her. He was spreading it on thick.

"Thank you, Markus. Yes, you have –" *about six times already* – "but a girl always like to hear it." Rebekah was sporting a simple maroon and cream colored sleeveless dress with a matching jacket. Her hair had been pulled up to show her long neck. She wore maroon heels to accentuate her strong calves. The dress fit well with her figure,

and she was surprised earlier when she caught a few of the patron men staring and smiling at her.

As they got into his car and left the restaurant, Markus laid a hand on top of hers, sucked in air between his teeth, causing her to role her eyes and said, "So, how about a little night cap, for old times sake, Beckie?"

"Old times sake? Huh, you must have me confused with someone else, Markus." She stated while looking out of the corner of her eye at him.

"Aw, don't be like that Beckie. I missed you – I'm sure you missed me too. Have you been getting any action lately?" As quickly as the words rolled out of his mouth he tried to take them back, but it was too late.

"Excuse me? *That* is none of your business Markus, and I would appreciate you keeping your thoughts to yourself." *Not that I would tell you of my lack of sexual partners!* That little voice in her head knew her all too well.

"I'm sorry. You just look – mmm – so delicious this evening. It's hard for me to think of any man but me sweating all over you." The visual of that analogy made Rebekah's stomach turn. She couldn't believe she heard what he just said. It surprised her that something like that would come out of his mouth – well, not really.

Turning the corner to her gated community, he pulled over and put the car in park. As Rebekah was about to get out of the car, Markus locked the door. She turned and eyed him with ferocious intent. *What the hell is this fool up to??*

"Can we just talk for a second, Rebekah?" Pleading as he turned the car completely off. "It seems like forever since with talked, and I know the last time we saw each other, you were a little pissed."

"A little pissed. Markus, you claimed you forgot your wallet and made me pay for dinner. Not once did you offer to reimburse me at least half of the \$145 bill but insisted that I add a huge tip to boot. Then –"

"Now wait, baby –" he tried to cut in, but she wasn't having it.

Putting up a hand and speaking a little louder, she added "Then you followed me up to my townhome and fell asleep on my couch. And when I tried to get you up – what did you do? YOU got up just long enough to strip your clothes off and try and crawl into my bed. Now, forgive me if I am wrong in this, but I think that gave me just cause to be, as you say, a little pissed off."

Markus sat there, cheeks heating from her words, as well as the bulge growing in his pants. Her irritation was turning him on.

“I am sorry. I did forget my wallet. It was still in my desk at work when I got there the next morning. And if you had only returned my calls, you would have known this.”

“I got your messages – all twelve of them, and not one of them had an offer of apology or anything in them.” Closing her eyes and taking a deep breath, Rebekah tried to continue, but was confronted by a sloppy, wet kiss on the lips by Markus.

The after taste of wine, breath mints and salmon left her feeling nauseous. Suddenly from out of nowhere, she could feel his hand running up her arm to her breast. He feverishly tried massaging them and attempted to remove them from their secure covering, but with no avail.

Pushing Markus back up against his door, she wiped her mouth while at the same time trying to check her dress for tears as she yelled, “Markus, what the hell is wrong with you!”

Shocked and embarrassed, Markus could only say, “I’m sorry, Rebekah. You are just so beautiful and – well, I’m sorry.”

“Will you please just unlock the door so I can go inside? I have a very busy day tomorrow.” Looking defeated, all Markus could do was unlock the door and mutter, “Yeah, sure. Again, I am sorry. Good night.”

Hearing the door unlock, she looked at Markus, “Good night Markus.” Quickly climbing out, she closed the door behind her and walked up to the gate and went inside. Her cheeks still heated when she got to her door, she had to stop and take a breath before continuing. She took her time opening the door, listening to the commotion across the street.

A couple had been standing outside having a rather loud discussion about why their teenage son should be grounded indefinitely for coming home a little wasted. She had to laugh to herself and shake her head as she started to open her door. *Bed sure does sound good right now.* Rebekah didn’t wait to get comfortable. The moment she walked in the door, she tossed her purse and keys on the table in the foyer, but not before releasing her feet from her heels.

She locked her door and turned on her stereo to listen to some jazz. It soothed her to listen to it. Turning it up enough so the speakers she had secured on the stairwell could reverberate down to her room. She slipped out of her dinner clothes in no time. Leaving them on the floor of her living room she went upstairs and made herself comfortable. Before she knew it, she was fast asleep.

The rest of the week and weekend went by quickly for her. She got a lot accomplished in her personal life as well as business. Markus had continued to contact her but she ignored him. She wasn’t ready to speak to him, not yet.

In her eyes he had crossed the line the other night and that didn't sit well with her. Remembering how he locked her in his car just to make a point only irritated her mood. The only thing that seemed to calm it was Jake. His kind demeanor and polite manner made him all that more appealing.

There had been a few times over that past weekend where he had stopped her to talk for a moment. He would ask general questions about where the best place to buy something which in her eyes, would not have been of any significance to him at all, but she would tell him. He would also ask for small personal things – Band-Aids, etc. because he confessed he hadn't gotten to that point of buying some of his needed personal essentials. She would only laugh inward and get it for him then he would be on his way again.

It wasn't until she came home late from the office that she was confronted by a note attached to her peep hole:

*Miss Waters, my name is Jake Turner and I live adjacent on the corner from you. If you have a moment tomorrow, I would like to get together with you – to talk over possible business that is. – Always,
Jake*

Shocked and excited at the same time, Rebekah made a squeal, which caused her neighbor, Greta Furlong, a retired postal worker, to peep out of her window at the commotion. "S-sorry, Mrs. Furlong." Rebekah tried to whisper. Mrs. Furlong just glowered at her and shut her blinds again. Holding the note tight to her bosom and a smile on her face, Rebekah unlocked her door and danced her way inside, attempting to retire for the evening.

Chapter 9 – Business is Business

Oh, Jake – yes, yes. Oh, that feels so good. Yes, yes. Don't stop, yes, more, more. Rebekah felt Jake's mouth on hers, massaging them as his tongue slipped in and out, over, and over. His hands kneading her body, as his own body laid half way on top of hers. She could feel his massive erection pressed against her stomach as his hips moved against her. His face went down and she could feel her nipples tighten as his hot breath brushed against them. Suddenly, without warning, his mouth was over her left nipple. Sucking and biting softly, her back arched, giving him full access. His soft hand was massaging the other as he continued to grind his body against her. Feeling the sensation of excitement of having him inside her, she parted her legs more.

He removed his mouth from her now sensitive breast and kissed her mouth with commanding determination – all the while, sliding his hand down to meet her honey pot that nearly exploded with her juices right in his hand. Sliding one finger inside her, she tightened her muscles around him. He stopped kissing her long enough to smile, then slide in a second finger, working them in and out while she spilled her wetness all over them.

When he thought she was primed and ready for him, he positioned himself over her and tickled her clit with the tip of his cock. Then, without the slightest hesitation, filled her to the brim with his beast and watched as she nearly jumped out of her skin accepting every inch of him. With every . . . BUZZ! . . . there was. . . BUZZ! . . .

BUZZ! BUZZ! Rebekah nearly leapt off the bed as her alarm clock sounded. Feeling the tightness between her legs, she realized that this dream was more intense than the previous ones. This time it was more vivid and it made her feel like she had just gone a couple of rounds with one of those television wrestling gods. Jake was commanding in her dreams, not to mention beautiful, and Rebekah resigned herself to believe that she would never have a chance with a man like Jake, if only in her dreams.

She managed to get up from her tussled bed and drag herself to the bathroom. Turning on the shower, she turned and looked at herself in the mirror. With her hair slightly messy – escaped trestles of hair from her silk wrap, she pushed them behind her ears and began her daily ritual. The hot water felt good on her skin. It helped to loosen the tense muscles from that forever embedded dream – not to mention any remnants of her date the night before.

Once showered and ready for the day, Rebekah stepped out onto her porch and was greeted by a delivery man.

“Miss. Waters?” “Yes –” “Delivery for you Miss. If you could sign here please. Thank you.” “Uh, thanks.” That little gesture was all she could manage to say. She knew she hadn’t ordered anything in a while, so who could have sent it? A long box was placed in her hands. Reopening her door, she walked to the kitchen table and opened the box that housed some two dozen roses that sent off the most exhilarating aroma. On top was a card which simply read – “I’m sorry.”

Trying to keep herself from smiling, she walked over to the sink and filled the accompanying crystal vase with water and placed the roses inside. Smiling, she looked at the roses and walked out again.

This time as she walked out, she saw that Jake was just opening his door. She lost her breath when she saw all he had on was a towel – that didn’t cover much; letting her imagination run wild. Trying to reach down and pick up his newspaper, and hold on to the edges of the towel, proved a bit of a challenge for him. He spied around, hoping no one was looking, and then saw her. She looked professional and beautiful in the charcoal gray, calf length skirt and matching jacket and heels.

Today she wore her hair straight. It had taken her a good hour to blow dry her soft, naturally curly hair straight, but it was worth it. The suit she had on was one of her favorites because it fit her curves so well. Jake liked the curves – a lot. Underneath her jacket was a chemise cream-colored blouse which she wore a matching camisole underneath for modesty. He liked looking at her. Her curves are what made her the woman he desired. Granted she was not petite, but he didn’t care. He had grown tired of those barely their model types. He wanted a woman that wasn’t ashamed of her body – and from the looks of Rebekah, she had no shame in her game. He wanted to devour her on the spot – from her beautiful black hair, her dimples, even when she didn’t smile, all the way down to her breasts, thick thighs, and dainty feet. He wanted it all.

As she saw him struggle to stand up straight while holding his towel and paper, she immediately had to cover her eyes when he lost hold of one corner as he attempted to wave to her. She couldn’t hold in her giggle as he turned three shades of red and backed into his townhome, while covering his ever-growing erection with the paper. With briefcase in hand, Rebekah waited until he closed his door; she then managed to turn and head towards the parking structure to her car. But something made her turn around and go back into his direction.

In his townhome, Jake was pressed against the back of the door; slightly banging his head against it as he scolded himself for what he claimed was his own idiocy. *Shit! You have got to be the most bungling, hair-brained . . .* a knock at the door. “Uh – j-just

a minute.” He dropped his towel and grabbed the jeans he had slung over his kitchen chair.

Looking at his full-blown erection, he shook his head and moaned before sliding his jeans on. He painstakingly snuggled his erected penis into his jeans and muttered, “Down boy!” as he tried not to let the pain of his massive dick being confined overtake his train of thought. Once zipped, he opened the door, where he was shocked to see Rebekah standing there. Sucking in what seemed to be the entire earth’s abundance of oxygen, he managed to fasten the button of his jeans.

Rebekah stood there for a second, just staring. Finally, feeling that imaginary kick in her butt she managed to say, “Hi, you left this on my door last night?” It took all of her will not to grab at his naked torso. She continued to eye him up and down – trying to be as inconspicuous as possible as she noticed the bulge in the front of his jeans. Quickly averting her eyes from the beastly distraction, she looked at him and smiled.

“Yes, yes I did. Mrs. Devereaux said you had a catering business, and I was wondering about brochures or food lists you might have available. You see, I just opened an art gallery not far from here and we are having a big grand opening in a few weeks and I was wondering –” “If I was for hire?”

Jake looked a little puzzled but nodded in agreement just the same.

“I hope I wasn’t being too abrupt in my note. You come highly recommended, at least around here, anyway. I’m sorry. Would you like to come in? I finally got things squared away here and-”

Smiling she blurted out, “No, no, but thank you. I am on my way to a meeting. I’d be happy to drop off a price list of various catering packets later, that way you can check it over and let me know if you are still interested.”

“I’m definitely interested.” Rebekah looked at him confused. Realizing what he had said, he rolled his eyes and continued, “Err, I mean that sounds good. If I’m not here, just stick it to my door. Uh, thank you again for stopping by, Miss. Waters.” He smiled and reached out to shake her hand. She stared at it for what seemed to be forever, then slowly reached out and slid her hand through his fingertips. “Rebekah, please.” The sensation was too much to bear for either of them.

Jake didn’t want to let go but didn’t want to scare her off by maintaining the vice grip he had on her hand. Taking a second to let go, she turned and walked away, practically holding her breath with excitement. Today she welcomed that little voice in her head who commented, *this may turn out to be a good day yet.*’

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The day had turned out to be a good day as anticipated. She and Gail met with new chefs needed for a celebration Gail was setting up at a local venue. In her spare time, she put together a list of hors d'oeuvres and light dishes in the hopes of landing a new gig for Jake's gallery opening. She was excited at the prospect of working with him, which meant that they would be in constant contact with each other about the status of things. Suddenly she felt sick to her stomach as she realized *they'd be spending a lot of time together*. What was she going to do about that?

She was nervous just talking to him for a moment this morning. To have meetings and conference calls with him about the progress of the party – that was something she completely overlooked. Leaning back in her chair, Gail came into her office and sat down across from her.

"Beckie, you look troubled, dear. What's going on?"

Reluctant to tell her, she opened her mouth and began to speak, "I may have a new client for us."

"That's great, right?" A little perplexed, Gail rested her bottom lip on her fingers and eagerly awaited Rebekah's response.

"Yeah, sure it is." *Just breathe girl*. "It's Jake Turner." Silence reverberated throughout the room.

Gail was awestruck. "Oh – oh. You mean, your neighbor, Mr. Tie Me Up himself?!" Gail had to laugh at herself for referring to her grandson like that, but she didn't dare tell Rebekah who he was. Rebekah only nodded. "I'm impressed, Beckie. However, my dear, you don't look too pleased."

"I am thrilled that he's interested in hiring us to cater his gallery opening in a few weeks." Clearing her throat, she continued, "I just realized that we would be spending a lot of time together, that's all." Making a sigh and waiting for her dear friend to respond, Rebekah thought she needed to explain further, "I-I mean, it's a big deal catering a gallery opening and all, right?" No response. "Ugh – it's just that – he is so beautiful. Humph – I mean *really* beautiful."

The worried look was back and Rebekah went on to fill Gail in on her conversation with him that morning – and her dream of him the night before.

Gail was glad her hands hid her smile and admiration over the way Rebekah was beside herself over Jake. She had been talking about him for weeks, and that was something she had never done since she and Rebekah crossed paths. Rebekah was smitten – and it showed. Jake was Gail's pride and joy ever since his father laid him in her arms after he was born. Her son, Everett was a proud father of four men and two beautiful young women, all successful in their own making.

Gail's desk was fluttered with pictures of her grandchildren – especially Jake – however, she managed to keep his older pictures hidden from Rebekah. Being the youngest of the boys, and next to youngest out of all six, she couldn't help but fuss over him growing up. Like Rebekah, his older siblings were off exploring and living life when he you a child, so they never really had time to play with him; however, they were always there when he needed them most. His youngest sister, and baby of the clan, Iris, had a knack for getting him into trouble just because. It was like she waged her own personal war on big brother Jake when he didn't want to play with her; going into his room and taking his prize toys or putting pudding into his catcher's mitt proved to be their undoing. Gail would fuss over her grandson like no other. She would do anything for him – that included playing matchmaker.

Gail would also fuss over Rebekah like a mother hen, but Rebekah didn't mind at all. It reminded her of her own mother who she missed terribly. She loved Gail like a mother, and Gail loved Rebekah like a daughter. She loved seeing Rebekah happy; and if her grandson was able to do it, then so be it.

Laying her hands in her lap and looking intently at Rebekah as she fidgeted in her chair, she couldn't help but smirk and hold back a laugh.

"Well, darling, you're just going to have to take charge and let him see you in action, then aren't you?" Gail finally responded after letting Rebekah stew for a minute.

"Uh, Gail...what are talking about?" Rebekah looked terrified at the answer she knew she was about to receive. The look on her face was priceless – like a deer in the headlights.

"I mean, I am going to be so busy with this other celebration, I'm simply not going to have time to help you plan the menu and wine list. No, you are just going to have to work on this one yourself." Smiling, Gail got up from her chair, walked up to Rebekah, kissed her forehead, and glided in succession over to the door. Turning back, she saw Rebekah looking dumbfounded at the idea.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Beckie! He's just a man! I am sure you'd have no trouble at all wrapping him around your finger and getting his business. I have seen you in action and you can put one of these together in your sleep. You're headstrong and business savvy. Why do you think we work so well together? And besides, it's about time you took over some of the event planning and hosting, don't you think?"

Stopping with her hand on the knob, she couldn't help but show her Cheshire cat smile and say, "I'm off to the hair dresser! Bye, byeeee!" Turning and closing the door behind her, she muttered, "Yes, he is a man, and by the way you're acting, a keeper."

Putting her elbows on the desk and her face in her hands, Rebekah just shook her head and whined inward.



Gail never thought of matching Rebekah up with her favorite grandson. She didn't dare tell Rebekah who he was for fear of 'putting the cart before the horse'. Gail had humor and a flare for the dramatic, but she waited to show her excitement until after she left Rebekah's office. She couldn't help but dance down the aisle as she went back to her office. Sheila just watched, thinking she really needed to do something more constructive with her time.

She knew that Jake deserved to find true love. He had been with the wrong woman for far too long, and Gail knew that it was high time he found the right woman. Gail wanted Rebekah to be that woman.

She had watched her children and grandchildren find love, lose love, and regain it again. Jake was no exception. He had been with the right woman fewer times than he had been with the wrong woman. Jake was no stranger to love. He was about who he gave his heart to. He dated plenty but had only truly loved once – that she knew of.

She realized this new generation of young adults was completely different than when she was a young woman, but that wasn't going to stop her from playing matchmaker. When Jake had told her that he agreed with her idea of opening the art gallery in Los Angeles, Gail was tickled pink. She also knew that it meant he would closer to that dreadful Eliza whom he had been dating over the past of years.

She was ecstatic when he broke up with her – nearly dancing for glee. Jake knew his grandmother didn't care for Eliza. Moreover, Eliza didn't care too much for his grandmother either. However, that didn't stop Gail from making Eliza's life a living hell while she was dating her grandson.

Jake had always made it a point to visit his grandmother whenever he was in town. On a night not long before his move, he had stopped by his grandmother's home in Los Angeles to check up on her. After her divorce from Miles, Gail purchased a home in the Los Angeles area to open another catering and event planning business. She talked her eldest grandson, Allister, into moving into her San Francisco home and run things there.

Once settled, Jake would visit her often and help maintain her business there while he was in town. He would come to Los Angeles at least twice a month to help Gail, among other things – that's how he met Eliza. She had been a thorn in Gail's side ever since. Now it was time for him to move on to what Gail wanted to be his greatest love – and she knew all about greatest loves.

## **Chapter 10 – Of Loves Remembered**

Sitting at her desk, Gail couldn't help but smile and feel giddy as she remembered back to when she had persuaded Jake to open his art gallery in Los Angeles nearly a year ago. He came to town with the hopes of acquiring a building that would allow him to continue with his own sculptures and paintings, but also allow for new artists have a place to learn, grow and enhance their art skills before going on public display at his gallery.

Jake was not only an entrepreneur, he was a gifted artist. He studied art at Chicago's Art Institute before transferring to UCLA when his grandfather took ill. Gail's second husband, Alexander Mason Turner, was an artist. Jake's grandfather, as well as Jake's father, loved art. His grandfather had a rare talent for painting and photography. Both he and Jake saw the beauty in things that no one else could see. Alexander could take the most minute subject and magnify it one hundred times to expose its true essence.

Jake inherited his grandfather's art gallery in San Francisco not long after his death. It displayed quite a few successful artist's work in its day, and Jake hoped that the one in Los Angeles would do the same. Gail was proud of the way Jake had run the art gallery in San Francisco and knew he would do well in Los Angeles.

Having come from a very wealthy background, Jake had no problem funding his businesses. However, he never touched 'the family' money. Everything he created, he built from the ground up – that included his gallery as well as a couple other investments on the side. Gail taught all her children – all seven of them – as well as her near twenty grandchildren and great-grandchildren, that hard work pays off in the end. She conditioned in them at a young age that money is not the most important thing in the world, and to be happy in whatever you decide to do.

She was very proud to know that none of her children had wandered too far off the beaten path that they couldn't find their way back home. Her offspring ranged from Jacob and Jason, twins, and the oldest at 62, Alex, Jr. – 60, Hillary and Everett, Jake's father, were also twins at 56, Georgina – 49, all the way down to Fiona, the unexpected miracle at 39.

She and Alexander had been married for the better part of fifty years before he took ill. They married when she was just shy of nineteen, and a little less than a year after being widowed by her first husband, George Austin Sommerstein. Unlike her first

marriage, she and Alexander had originally married out of convenience. Unlike George, she was not in love with Alexander when they married; their love grew over time. It became stronger than any love she had ever known. George was her best friend who ended up joining the service. He didn't want to leave for the war without marrying Gail. Being the best of friends, they loved each other unconditionally. They agreed to marry in case something was to happen. He feared she would be left alone and didn't want that for her.

They were together long enough to stand in front of the judge and say 'I Do' before he was shipped off. Writing everyday for the first three months eased her pain of him being gone. Having never consummated their marriage, she didn't have the luxury of knowing whether he would return to a new family. It was in the middle of the fourth month that the letters stopped coming and hers were being returned. It had been weeks before the Army sent someone to her house to tell her that her husband had been killed in action during a night raid. Gail had been devastated.

She cried for weeks at the loss of George. She didn't understand what was going on. A young bride at seventeen was a lot to take on; now a young widow as well was too much. She would lie in bed for days, crying; crying for the husband that would never return to her. Her mother feared she might die of a broken heart or grief, so she encouraged her to go down to New York and try and do something that would make her happy. That's when she met Alexander. She had been in New York for about a month when they crossed paths. She had just finished auditioning for a play and got the part. On her way to meet a friend to celebrate, she had been walking down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue when a man who had just exited his car, crashed into her. He was to die for. He had jet black hair and green eyes that pierced her soul. Had she noticed him right away, she probably wouldn't have hit him about the arm and shoulder with her purse a dozen times like she had.

"How dare you! Why don't you watch where you're going?"

"I'm awfully sorry, Miss. I meant no disrespect, I assure you. You see, I was getting out of my car and lost my bal-" She was striking. Her deep blue eyes and platinum blonde hair made her stand out from the raven and fiery red-haired beauties he had been akin to. "Gosh all mighty - I am dreadfully sorry." He couldn't help but stare, even through her bashing him with her purse. When she stopped, she was mesmerized by the emeralds that looked back at her. He was much older than she was – at least twenty-three or twenty-four.

Gathering herself before walking away, she said, "Well, you should be. Good day, sir." She mounted off and left him staring in awe of her. While captivated by his eyes, she was resigned not to let him get to her – like he already had. She refused to sully her

dead husband's name by associating herself with what she believed to be a real lady's man.

Alexander was a beautiful specimen of a man – he was tall, well built and back then, had many of the ladies swooning over him. Many believed that the self-made millionaire would gamble all his money away. On the contrary, while he enjoyed the lavish parties and such, he made smart investments and business deals that guaranteed a lengthy windfall for his future and the future of any woman he included in his life. He had no plans to marry any time soon, until he ran into Gail.

For months he would pursue, and for months she refused his attempts to “woo” her. He attended her performances at whatever theatre she was in, and made certain to send her flowers – anonymously, of course. He enjoyed seeing the smile across her face as she received them, standing around the corner trying to catch a glimpse of her. He wasn't certain why he wanted to be with her, only that he wanted no other man to have her. Being a lady, she let him know that as a widow to a soldier and had no interest in being pursued. That didn't stop Alexander. There were many times he would show up at her door while her parents visited. He would sit on the porch and discuss business and politics with her father, knowing full and well she had no interest. His way of thinking was that if he couldn't get to her directly, he would pursue her through her parents.

Her mother had taken an instant liking to him. She knew of his reputation on the business end of things and of his worth. It didn't matter to her that he had money and many businesses under his belt; she saw him as a means of comfort and companionship for her widowed daughter. She didn't think it was appropriate for her daughter to live in such a busy city and not have a husband. She also noticed that he had taken quite a liking to her little girl.

After weeks of talking and discussing matters between the four of them, Gail had finally agreed to marry Alexander – for convenience only – or so they thought. Once they married, their union became front page news on the major papers in the area, with headlines reading: 'Millionaire Playboy Marries Widowed Socialite'. Hearts broke over Alexander's sudden “off the market” status. Jealousy over their nuptials had people believing that Gail was with child the reason they married so suddenly. Waiting for the onset of her supposed pregnancy subsided when no baby came.

Over the first year they exchanged politeness towards one another. Gail did everything a wife was expected to do, except share his bed and bare his children. That was one thing she was not prepared to do. She had been a virgin when her first husband died; she had no desire to carry another man's child, especially if she *claimed* not to love him.



Upon the agreement of their marriage, she insisted they have separate bedrooms. She wanted to make it clear that she wanted no part of building a family with Alexander. While a little taken aback by her request, Alexander agreed, however, he had realized he was in dire straits as he was falling hopelessly in love with Gail.

He would take her to dinner and the theatre regularly – twice a week or more. He enjoyed showing off his elegant and beautiful wife, even if it weren't the ideal marriage *she* longed for at the time. Alexander was a dutiful husband. He never strayed, nor did he lash out at her in anger, or for any other reason. There were times when he would come home frustrated over an incident at his company, but he wouldn't burden her with the details, even though she would unconsciously insist on knowing about his day and how things were going. Whether she wanted to admit it at the time or not, it pained her to see him upset over his work.

After the first six months of wedded bliss, subtle changes in their behavior towards one another were noticed by their respective families. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they would compliment and do things for each other only the most endearing married couples would do. Most of the time they hadn't even realized how close they had gotten, however, while considerate of one another and aware of their own needs and desires, they remained at a distance.

Almost a year had gone by and the marriage of convenience was beginning to weigh heavy on both. Alexander had finally admitted to Gail his feelings for her and how having separate bedrooms was no longer an option. He wanted his wife whole-heartedly and without restriction. He wanted her mind, body, and soul; to be his partner in business, life, and bed. Unable to deny her feelings anymore, Gail moved out of her room and into 'theirs'.

After a year or so of trying for a child, Gail finally gave birth to twins. Then the rest followed suit quickly. Every year Alexander and Gail found they were more and more in love. They were not only compatible in the bedroom; they were just as compatible in the boardrooms. Gail became Alexander's right hand when making business decisions. When most of his board members and office management team frowned at the idea of him including his wife in his business makings, Alexander didn't care. Many of her suggestions were right on. He was proud that his wife had a great head for business and that they were able to talk about anything and everything beyond the scope of general ideologies.

He had made sound investments in stock and oils over the years by taking some of her suggestions or recommendations to heart, where other companies took another direction, and had gone belly up. There were a few suggestions that had landed him in hot water, but he recovered rather quickly. He also made his own personal investments by continuing with the one thing he loved, almost as much as Gail; his art.

He was an artist long before he met Gail but put his passion for it aside when he had begun dating an heiress prior to meeting Gail. She didn't think it was beneficial for their future and insisted he do something more serious that would help them more financially for their future. Granted his had made his own money and was financially stable, she insisted that being an artist was one thing she would not tolerate. Thinking it was the right thing to do, Alexander put away his paint brush and stencil and concentrated on his businesses. Little did he know a few months later, she would run off with some Count from Yugoslavia.

With her out of the picture he allowed his passion for his art to grow again – only this time in private. While his father had sold a great number of his paintings, along with some of his own, Alexander resigned himself to painting and sculpting for private parties who asked for specifics. He also made sure he made time to relax and paint freehand for the sheer pleasure of it. Alexander was excellent with a brush; like Gauguin or Picasso. He could draw and paint from memory down to the very last detail. His mother, before her death, had been his one true muse. While he inherited his father's and grandfather's talent and passion, there was no other who influenced him to draw, sculpt and paint more than his mother.

Late at night while Gail was sleeping, he would go to her room and check in on her before heading to his workshop at the end of the first-floor hall. He did nothing special to that room when he purchased his home. The walls were a type of cobblestone that resembled a medieval castle. There were two large windows on the east and south walls that went from floor to ceiling. He liked that the sun shone through it in the morning, as it did through his bedroom window directly above his workshop on the third floor.

Some nights while she lay sleeping, he had walked in and studied her face, then would traipse down to his workshop and sketch picture after picture of her. Even if she were in the sitting room he would study her and later go off and sketch every detail of her dress, facial expression, and gleam in her eye.

Gail had been awakened a few times by soft, soothing music coming from one of the rooms on the first floor's east wing. At first, she would become startled and walk to Alexander's room, only to find him not there. Curious, she crept downstairs where music playing on the gramophone, or phonograph, became louder, only to find a man – Alexander – standing in the middle of a large, somewhat empty room. The only items in the room, from what she saw, were paints – oils, acrylics, and water, not to mention other various art paraphernalia. She stood just outside the door, peeping through the crack, spying on him.

He looked positively angelic with just the fire from the fireplace lighting up the room. That night he wore nothing but a pair of tattered pants and a t-shirt that fit snugly

across his chest and shoulders; even his feet were bare and slightly spotted with droplets of paint. From the looks of his attire, they were all he would wear when painting; they were covered in blotches of paint and charcoal smears. The shadows from the fire danced on his skin with every stroke of his paint brush. The floor was covered by a canvas tarp in some places, while in others, the floor had been somewhat ruined by droplets of paint and clay.

In one corner she could see a half dozen or so paintings of various sizes and subjects. She could see that some had signs indicating that they had been sold for a great deal of money, while others appeared to be covered by sheets, hiding their identity.

One painting caught her eye. It was that of an older woman. She was sitting on a porch, much like the one that surrounding the front portion of his estate home. She was sitting in a swing barefoot, wearing a red, rose embroidered springtime dress, hiked up above her knees. Resting on the back of the swing she saw what looked like a simple, handcrafted, blanket that was full of yellows and greens and other vibrant colors, bringing out its full beauty.

Her hands were delicate looking with long piano player fingers. Her face was the feminine version of Alexander, all the way down to the long, curly raven colored hair and emerald green eyes. She was exquisite. Gail was so taken with the painting she gasped loud enough for Alexander to hear her. Stopping in mid brush stroke, he walked to the door to see who was there but found no one. Grinning, he walked back inside to finish his work. Gail barely made it down the hall before he got to the door to see who was spying on him. She peaked around the corner and saw his smile just before he walked back inside. Brushing back the fallen tendrils of hair from her face, she quietly walked back to her room. The next day at breakfast, nothing was mentioned about what had happened the night before.

Gail's spying went on for the next few weeks. Now that Alexander knew she was spying, he purposely left the door ajar, enough so she could see in more clearly. One night, as she watched Alexander sketch a profile of a woman, she saw something similar in the features. Eyeing it as close as she could through the crack, the picture came to life as she saw just who the subject was. Her heart swelled as she realized it was a drawing of her. She was looking at herself on his canvas.

The drawing was a striking likeness of her. She knew she had never posed for him and was heart-filled to see how much detail he had put into it. Trying desperately to remain silent, Gail looked away and then back again. Suddenly, Alexander was no longer at his canvas, but standing between her and her likeness, watching her.

"You know," he said softly, "you needn't spy me so. Please come in."

Reaching out his hand for her to take, Gail slowly wiped an escaping tear from her eye as she accepted it. Heat rose from his hand as it encircled her own. She could immediately feel her cheeks flush as she stepped closer to him. He was gentle as he led her to his recent creation.

Looking at her as she eyed the drawing with loving eyes, he said, "I wanted to capture your truest beauty." She glanced up at his emerald eyes then back at the canvas. On it, she saw herself sitting comfortably on a lounging chair that she enjoyed lingering on in the sitting room. She remembered that day as if it were yesterday; she was so comfortable sitting there with her legs curled under her summer dress and no shoes. She noticed he had drawn her toes peaking from underneath her dress, just as she had been sitting. Tears wanted to escape her eyes as she continued to stare at the canvas.

"It's beautiful. I had no idea you were so talented."

"You helped inspire me to return to *one* of the things I love so dearly." He couldn't help but to emphasize that it had be only one of the things he loved – nay he say what, or whom the other was at risk of losing her.

Looking at him, she couldn't help but smile. Turning her head as if not to give herself away, she continued, "I—I noticed a painting – here, this one." Walking to the painting of the woman she admired so from afar, she pointed, "Who is she?" She asked in innocent wonder.

Alexander had walked over with her and taking her hand again in his own, he answered, "That's my mother – here, on the porch. It was one of her favorite places to sit before—"

She could feel his hand tighten around hers as she looked up and saw the pain in his eyes.

Trying to hold back his emotions, he managed to choke out, "She – passed away – last summer."

"Oh – I'm terribly sorry – I didn't mean to pry." She realized just then that she had never met nor heard him mention his parents until now. She knew he had two older brothers and a younger sister from the society pages. She decided to make it a point to know more about him and his family.

Looking into her angelic face, Alexander gave a soft smile. Unconsciously, he lifted her palm to his mouth and kissed it before saying, "She would have loved you, Gail – you and your free spirit."

Gail could only look at him. Forcing herself to turn her head yet again, she examined the painting closer. Every brush stroke made the portrait perfect. He had meticulously perfected her curly hair and radiant green eyes.

“She is beautiful, Alexander. She looks so incredibly happy in it.”

“She was. I don’t think there was ever a time when she wasn’t happy. Her spirit ran wild and my father loved her for it.”

Gail was mesmerized by his words. She could hardly think when he spoke to her. She shook her head to get back to reality and continued to eye his work. She was amazed at what he had done. The paintings ranged from simple fruits turned into elaborate masterpieces to life like portraits, like that of his mother.

“This,” he said, taking her hand, and leading her to a mural on the wall by the door, “this is one of my favorite pieces.” As Gail turned around, she stopped in her tracks. Alexander stared at her while she stood there, frozen in awe over his not quite finished mural on the northwest wall of the workshop. He had sketched the most magnificent portrait of his home, with his siblings, parents – and even Gail sitting in the grass with children around her.

Gail’s heart skipped a beat as she stood there, unable to speak. She wasn’t quite sure how to react to the mural. She wasn’t sure how to react to his sudden acquiescence of his feelings. As she stood there, she felt his hand smooth over the shoulder of her robe.

“I know that this is not the ideal marriage you had hope, Gail, but if you allow me to, I can, and will make you very happy.”

He turned her towards him so he could get a better look at her. He loved looking at her. Her ivory skin and radiantly blue eyes only made her more of the woman he had fallen in love with.

As he cupped her face; she reached up and covered his hands with her own. The warmth of his hands filled her entire being. She could feel the sparks underneath his touch as she let out a sigh, fighting back tears as he began to draw her closer.

“I fear that I am unable to resist us being any further apart than we are right now, Gail. I find myself falling hopelessly and completely in love with you.”

“Alex-”

Before she could finish speaking his name, a low growl crept from within him and he leaned over, covering her mouth with his own. She could barely keep her knees from buckling as he devoured her mouth. The insatiable desire that had been dormant within



too greedy, caused him a lengthy, legal battle that ended with him having to sell off portions of his own stock just to keep afloat. He swore after that he would make a change and not let money cloud his judgment.

Ready for retirement and wanting to explore new things with his wife, he decided it was time for a change. He had purchased a 2500 square foot home in California after the children were all gone, and opened an art gallery in Northern California, just to give himself something to do and help other artists get their big break. He was well known as an artist and entrepreneur. It was a long road but he and Gail had made it work just fine. They were never without anything – not money, family – or anything. They were especially happy that they had each other and it showed.

After some fifty years or more of marriage, Alexander suffered a stroke after a holiday gathering. He never fully recovered after that. Gail decided as his health declined, that she would stay with him every day until the end – and that's just what she did. Once he was home from the hospital, he was no longer able to move freely about the house. Confined to a walker, Gail moved their bedroom to the first-floor guest room where she stayed with him until his passing six months later.

Gail was heartbroken. She felt for the longest time that she wouldn't be able to live without him, and she was grateful for her children being there when it was time to say goodbye. Even most of the grandchildren were there. Alexander was especially happy to see Jake. He had flown in from college to be with him. He and his grandfather were very close. Jake was the only one of his grandchildren that took up the passion for art. Jake was a natural and it showed.

Jake took every compliment and criticism from his grandfather and molded himself for the better. His father, while he loved painting and sculpting, found a different calling. Elliott continued to paint and sculpt for pleasure and even opened a couple of galleries after he married. Jake was equally, if not more so devastated when his grandfather died; he never left their side, and Gail was eternally grateful for that.

Gail had made quite a name for herself over the years – married to a wealthy entrepreneur and becoming a savvy business mogul herself. She being a wealthy widow was what attracted her third husband – not to mention her stunning good looks as aging was kind to her. Her third husband, Miles Ambrose Abernathy, was a scoundrel in her book. She knew he loved her, but unfortunately, he loved a great deal other lady as well. After divorcing him, she managed to keep her wealth, as well as claim a large chunk of his. She swore that Miles would be the last man she would ever marry.

She and Miles had only been married a short time, but it seemed like a nightmare that would never end. He had swept her off her feet on a cruise when her grandchildren insisted she get away to relax and enjoy herself. She had grown somewhat bitter and

buried herself deep within her business and isolated herself from everyone close for a while after Alexander died.

Anger and distraught made her an unpleasant person to be around. Jake drove her to the dock where the cruise liner was boarding for a week-long cruise to Alaska and Canada. She had fought tooth and nail not to go, but her grandchildren, especially Jake, had made it hard for her to say no.

She, along with her companion, Vernadine, had been set up in the luxury penthouse with a verandah overlooking the water. Miles had noticed her lavish arrival and made instant inquiries about her. She was still beautiful for being over 70 years old. She had carried herself well over the years.

She remembered how he had swept her off her feet on the dance floor. She had declined his invitation several times, but he was persistent. Unable to refuse his charms any longer, she relented and accepted a dinner invitation with him before the ship returned to San Francisco. After that, it became a whirlwind romance. She knew she wasn't in love with him but she longed for companionship and married him anyway.

Her children and grandchildren saw through his façade quickly – especially Jake and Iris. They had caught him several times talking to a woman on the phone and making plans. The last time they caught him, they made certain that Gail had been aware of his goings on and rigged the phone to record his calls, not to mention the cameras Jake had installed in every room of her house. He caught Miles taking jewelry as well as cavorting with young female companions when Gail was not there.

On the evening of Miles' departure, the entire family had gathered for dinner and to support Gail. Unbeknownst to Miles, he thought it was a family get-together, which he rarely attended. However, the family insisted he be there as they had a "big announcement."

Once Miles had been confronted of his infidelity, Gail's lawyer, her eldest grandson, had drawn up divorce papers for him to sign right then and there in front of family and close family friend, Judge Bellows, Chief Justice of the local Superior Court. He realized he had no choice but to sign, pack what little he brought with him and leave. Relieved that the worst of the worst was behind her, she promised herself it was the last time.

Sitting in her office, tears swelled in Gail's eyes as she remembered her one true love so fondly. Remembering all the happy times they had spent together up and until the day she said goodbye to him, made her more determined to see her grandson happy.



## **Chapter 11 – Betrayal of the Heart**

Rebekah left the catering office early so she could rush home and drop off the list to Jake, in the hopes he would not be there. She had spent a good part of her afternoon making up a proposal and gathering a list what she hoped to be the right dishes for Jake's opening. She knew it would all boil down to how many would be in attendance and what the atmosphere of the opening would be like.

Rebekah wanted this deal to go through; not just because it was Jake, but because it was one area of the event planning business that Gail handled alone, while she worked her magic in the kitchen – cooking and creating various entrées and appetizers. Of course, that was until Gail decided to change things up and teach her everything about her business. The only administrative portion she wanted to handle was setting up the appetizer and entrée sample lists and revising the menus for upcoming events.

She rounded the corner of her back driveway and b-lined it straight to Jake's door. To her luck, and somewhat disappointment, Jake wasn't in. He was kind enough to leave her a note on her door; a premature thank you for the list and letting her know that he would look it over when he returned that evening.

She smiled and stuck an envelope with the list inside, to the message board he had strategically affixed to his door for notes and messages from artists and other business people. She let out a sigh and practically danced to her townhome.

It was early enough for Rebekah to sit and relax for a while after changing out of her suit and heels. Her feet hurt from all the standing in the kitchen she did today. She wanted to conjure a genie that would grant her the wish of a hot masseuse to rub her aching feet. Instead of the genie, she settled for her hot oil electronic foot massager.

While she turned on some soothing music and allowed her feet soaked up the warm oil, she was able to go through her mail from the office and home. Once completing the receivables for her businesses, she was able to start on the personal mail, unaware that Jake had just walked by, which was a good thing, because she DID NOT want him to see her soaking her toes in a vat of oil. To her surprise, she had received a letter from her mother:

*Dearest Baby Girl,*

*How are you doing these days? I know it has only been a few days since we spoke on the phone, but I couldn't help but sit and write you a letter to let you know just how proud I am of you. You have come so far and Serlee would be so proud of you right now.*

*Your sister, JoAnn, called to tell me that she and William finally decided to add to their family and hope to be parents by the New Year. She said that since she made partner in her firm, there is no reason to wait any longer to start a family. You know how William is too. He always wanted a big family. He wants her to have at least five or six. I just laughed when I saw the expression on her face!*

*Speaking of family, your father fell off the ladder the other day trying to clean the gutters and broke his pinky finger. My goodness I have never seen a man act more like a baby in my life. You would think he cut his leg off the way he hollered, making me come running out the door - darn near broke my neck tripping over him and the ladder.*

*Jackson came by after his rounds at the hospital to check in and see how he was doing. Do you know where your brother found him; right back up there trying to clean out those gutters! I almost had a heart attack when I heard your father calling my name - thinking he had fallen again! He's fine though. Doctor says he will need to stay off those ladders and hire a real gardener to help. I'm just happy he wasn't trying to trim the hedges or something. (ha ha ha)*

*Your brother Reggie will be home from Georgia this weekend. He has 3 weeks leave and is bringing Allison and the kids up to visit. He will be going back to Iraq soon after though. I really wish he didn't have to, but I guess that's what officers must do. I can't believe how much the kids have grown in the last year. Ally sent me a picture on the email and they are the spitting image of Reggie.*

*We miss you baby girl and hope you are doing just fine. I think I am going to start gardening again. I always loved to do that.*

*Love,*

*Mom*

Rebekah had to choke back tears as she finished the letter. Her mother was a simple woman. She loved that about her. She didn't beat around the bush, always telling it like it was. She always said that the truth is better than a lie any day. The truth may hurt sometime, but a lie can devastate a person. She was right about that. Lies she had been told in the past certainly devastated her.

An argument outside quickly shook Rebekah back to reality. She turned her music down a little to be nosy and try to hear what the commotion was about. She recognized Jake's voice right away, but couldn't make out the females voice, so she got up, wiped the excess oil from her feet and stood just out of sight at her window. It was Eliza. *What the heck is that heifer doing back here! Didn't he give her walking papers!*

"Jake, sweetie, please-"

“No Liz – we’re done. I told you that.” Every time he would try to walk away, she would block his path. Jake, never in all his life, laid a hand on a woman in anger, and wasn’t about to start now – not even with Eliza. However, she was working on his every nerve.

“Don’t be like that Jake. You know how much you mean to me.” Her unsuccessful attempts to sound innocent in any of her wrongdoing sent a surge of anger up Jake’s spine, forcing him to come to grips again with her betrayal.

“You fucked your supervisor, Liz. I think that’s a deal breaker, don’t you?”

“It was only one time. I was drunk at that Christmas party last year, and-” Realizing she said more than she wanted to, Eliza covered her mouth with her hand as Jake began to fume a response.

Her words shattered his wall of composure, causing him to lunge forward, stopping mere inches from her face and ground a reply through his pearly whites, “I doubt it was only once and - wait a minute – the Christmas party?” Turning away and running his hand through his hair and down his face, Jake continued, “Jesus - I was with you at that party, Liz. Are you telling me that you snuck off and banged your supervisor while I sat there, waiting to go home? You have got to be fucking kidding me right now!” His voice grew louder and louder every second as he began to pace back and forth, running his fingers through his hair.

Trying to get a grip on what was left of his sanity; he searched his memory and found her deceit had no boundaries. “Oh, wait – is that why you rushed in to shower when we got home? You told me you had spilled a shrimp cocktail on yourself, and didn’t want to smell like seafood when you got in bed – bed...well that explains it, doesn’t it? You wanted to get his cum and stench off you before fucking me!”

Jake’s mind took him back to that night and how they had mingled with others at the party – dancing and laughing. He remembered how Eliza had clung to his arm and he was happy to be there. But just as quickly had she clung to him, she had kissed him on the cheek and told him she wanted to go and say hello to a few co-workers. “*You want me to come with you, babe?*” “*N-no, we’ll just talk shop for a minute or two – boring stuff.*” “*Ok, I’ll be here. Let me know when you are ready to go.*” She walked away. Jake hadn’t remembered until just then how she walked up to a man and touched – no – caressed his arm. He also thought he was mistaken in seeing the man put his hand on Eliza’s ass in a way to no one could really see unless they were eyeing them.

Fast forwarding to them getting to his place; Jake was kissing and caressing her, feeling in a frisky mood, only to have her dodge his kisses and him trying to put a hand up her tight little party dress. “*H-honey, no. Let me go shower first ok?*” “*Mmmm, want me to wash your back?*” “*Ha ha, no, it’ll only take a minute. Why don’t you get us*

*something to drink and I will be there before you know it, ok?" "Ok but hurry up."* He kissed the tip of her nose as she fled to the bathroom.

Jake felt like retching. The evening breeze added comfort to the sickening feeling he had. Feeling the sweat bead on his forehead, he took his trembling hand and pushed his hair back; taking deep breaths to try and clear his mind and calm his nerves. He couldn't believe he was hearing this from her. But then again, her cheating was why he ousted her in the first place.

Eliza looked at him and tried to figure a way to wiggle out of this without serious consequences. "Y-you know, I wouldn't have fucked him if you hadn't been so mean to me before. All those times I wanted you to go away for the weekend, but you were soooooo busy with that damn gallery of yours and-"

Her trying to come off as an innocent party didn't work – not in the slightest. It only fueled his anger that much more.

"Mean to you? I have worked my ass off to get where I am today. I have given you everything you could possibly want. I have taken you on vacations around the globe; I even gave you my heart, not to mention that car you're driving. And by the way, I'll need the keys for that back as well." He took the key ring from her hand, took the car key off before tossing the rest back, and started to walk away when Eliza grabbed him by the arm.

"You can't be serious! How the hell am I supposed to get around?" Eliza blurted out at the top of her lungs, not caring who heard her tantrum.

Jake snatched his arm from her grip and responded rather emphatically, "Call your supervisor. Maybe you can ride his dick home." Disgust filled his eyes and words as he continued, "On second thought, just keep it." Tossing the keys back at her, he finished, "I am sure you used it for many of your rendezvous' with that sleaze, and who knows what or who else." And with that, he turned and headed back to his townhome.

Deception and betrayal were two things Jake didn't tolerate. He had been cheated on once before and swore he wouldn't let it happen again. He cursed to himself all the way into his townhome, even after slamming the door behind him. Rebekah had to hand it to Jake. He didn't hold back the punches with his ex and was thankful that it ended before a bigger crowd could gather outside.

At first, she felt sorry for Eliza, being rejected a second time, although, this time, it was on public display. However, after what she had just heard, she concluded that Eliza deserved it, and then some. Peeking through her blinds she could see Eliza picking up the keys and storming off, screaming obscenities to the onlookers.

In all that was said and done, she couldn't help but to feel hurt for Jake. He had given so much of himself to someone, only to have it thrown back in his face. She knew that feeling all too well. Pursing her lips and lifting a brow in disapproval, she concluded that Eliza lost a good thing. She wanted to go right over and comfort him – to hold and kiss him, tell him everything was going to be alright – she wanted to be in his bed.

She knew how he felt because of Nigel's betrayal. She wouldn't wish that kind of pain on her worst enemy. She remembered the pain he put her through; all the lies and deception from him, and how she wanted to just crawl into a vat of pralines and cream ice cream and cry herself to sleep. She hated feeling that way. It took her a few weeks to get back into the swing of things and bury herself in her work.

Thinking that out loud didn't sound too pleasant. She had buried herself in her work to keep from letting another man hurt her. She had put up a wall so high that no one, not even herself, would be able to get past it. Rebekah rolled her eyes at the very thought of what she put herself through.

She had guarded her cookies like no one could and wouldn't let a soul get within a hundred yards of her without a background check. She had almost forgotten what fun was until her friend Charlene came to town to visit.

After the incident with Nigel, Rebekah had called Charlene and told her everything that happened. She cried and cursed on the phone for hours; and Charlene, being the best friend, she ever had, listened, and consoled her.

"Girl, you know you'll be alright. Just try not to let that fool's actions get to you so much."

"I'm trying, but it's so hard. People like me don't get-"

"Wait – people like you?"

"You know – big girls."

Before Rebekah could continue, Charlene had cut her off and got right to the meat of things, "Now wait a minute. You are a beautiful and vibrant woman Beckie. – No, now hear me out. You are starting to wallow in your own self pity – again. You have come too far to let some scrub get the better of you. I thought you were over that stuff."

Silent for a moment, Rebekah answered, "I thought so too. Maybe it's taking me longer than I thought."

"Girl don't do this to yourself. You are better than that. Didn't that nightmare of an ex – who, by the way shall remain nameless – trifling fool – didn't that situation teach you anything?"

“Yes, but that was different. He-”

“Oh, no it isn’t! He tried kicking you when he thought you had nowhere else to go. Now you listen to me, Beckie. I love you like a sister, you know that – but if you let another man hurt you, walk on you, or think he got the better of you – girl, please. I know you don’t want me to come out there and tell him what for and get all in his face!”

Rebekah couldn’t help but laugh a little, because she knew that’s exactly what her bestie would do. Suddenly her laughter turns into sobs all over again.

“Oh, Rebekah, girl. You know what? I have a few days coming to me – I am going to come for a visit.”

“No, Char, don’t do that. I’m just blubbering like an idiot. I’ll be alright.”

“No, now I’m going to go online and book a flight to come in this weekend. Besides, it’s been a little while since I have been to Cali – I think I am do for some of the Southern California sunshine – maybe this time I can bottle some up and bring it back to Rhode Island.”

The phone line lit up with laughter between the two of them. Rebekah was glad to have a friend like Charlene.

“I don’t want you to take time off or anything, especially now with a wedding to plan. I’ll be alright.”

“Girl, please. I have more vacation time than I know what to do with. Don’t worry my sister, I’ll be there soon and I will help you forget all about what’s his name!”

“It would be good to see you. I miss my best friend.”

“You know I am always here for you, Beckie.”

After their goodbyes, Rebekah went to the bathroom to wash her face and gather herself.

That coming weekend, Charlene had made good on her promise and flew to the west coast to help her best friend get over this hump that was emotionally draining her. She hated to see Rebekah hurting and feeling sorry for herself. She didn’t want her spiraling back down into the abyss that Raymond and dropped her into.

They sat up nights talking about anything and everything. Charlene shared her plans for the wedding while Rebekah graciously smiled. But then, Rebekah would stop and let her emotions catch up to her and she would end up crying all over again.

“Seriously, girl – you have got to stop beating yourself up over that loser – and I’m being nice when I say he’s a loser, too! You’re better than that! This is not the Rebekah

that I know.” Charlene eyed Rebekah for a minute before putting the spin on her statement and shaking her *bff* back to reality, “The Beckie I know would have picked herself up off that floor, brushed the dust off her, and would have made it *her* business to make sure that everyone knew that she was not one to be played with – that she was a strong black woman and there isn’t a man alive that could knock her down.” That did it.

Wiping the tears from her eyes, Rebekah took a deep breath and replied in a gravelly voice, “You know, you’re right. I let too many men walk over me and treat me like crap. I am tired of being lied to and deceived.”

“That’s my Beckie! I knew she was in there somewhere!”

Smiling, Rebekah reached out and gave her friend a hug. “Thank you – thank you for coming, for being my friend.”

Returning the hug, Charlene responded, “You know I love you, girl. Always. Hey – let’s go out – do something crazy.”

Looking at Charlene with a little hesitation, she said, “Something crazy? I’ve seen your crazy Char! It is not pleasant after a few drinks!”

“You know what I mean!” Shoving Rebekah, a little, they both laughed, and then Charlene continued, “Let’s go dancing. What’s good out here tonight?”

Rebekah laughed as they set their plan in motion to go out dancing. It was a night well deserved. She was dressed in an outfit that would make any many stop and put the brakes on just to get a second glance. Her double ‘D’ breasts were aching to be released from the barely their piece of red material that she had bought before going out. This ‘little’ dress ran all the way up to her high thigh. It showed everything but her naw naw and left very little to the imagination. Her hair fell past her shoulders with little ringlets. She was looking fierce and hot.

Charlene didn’t look half bad either. She wore her designer couture black dress and shimmering heels that matched her bag. She had let her lavish long legs do all the talking while her long black mane flowed halfway down her back. She was proud of her hair, and it showed.

She and Charlene entered the club and heads were turning left and right to get a look at the buxom beauty in her Jessica Rabbit style mini dress with stiletto heels that pinched her baby toes as she walked, and her statuesque companion who looked too appetizing for words. Rebekah didn’t appear to have a care in the world.

She was happy to decompress and think very little of Nigel and his deceptions. In fact, she hardly thought of him at all – until she saw him standing at the bar with some

redhead with breasts like beach balls. All she could do was turn and head towards the bathroom, praying she wasn't seen.

"Girl what's wrong?" Charlene looked at Rebekah as she tried to hide. She followed her all the way to the ladies' room before Rebekah responded.

"Nigel is here." "What! Where! Let me go talk to that fool!"

"No – please. It's enough that he humiliated me in a restaurant parking lot. I don't need him doing it here of all places."

"No, Beckie. He isn't going to humiliate you. In fact, he's not even going to know what hit him when I'm done with him. Come on."

"Where are we going?"

Charlene looked at Rebekah with a sneer and said, "To put that asshole in his place."

Charlene stormed out of the bathroom and down the hall with Rebekah closely behind. Eyeing the men at the bar, Charlene leaned over and whispered, "Which one is Nigel?" Rebekah pointed to the man talking up a redhead. As Charlene started towards him, Rebekah grabbed her arm and said, "What are you going to do?"

Charlene answered, "Well, let's see – I'm going to walk up to him, nice as you please, slap the shit out of him and tell him exactly what I think of him."

Rebekah's eyes widen as she watched her friend go on the attack. It only took a second or two for Charlene to reach her destination. Nigel had been coozied up to that woman – who wasn't his wife – or his girl friend. Charlene stopped for a moment, took off her engagement ring to appear single, and placed it in her purse; she managed to squeeze in between the two of them – "You must be Nigel Perry."

Looking hungry and puzzled at Charlene, Nigel smiled and said, "Yes, yes I am baby. Who are you?"

"Um – excuse me!" Charlene rolled her eyes and turned to face the annoying squawking coming from the woman she just shut down.

"What?" Charlene snapped as she eyed the busty botoxed beauty.

"You're in my way, girl. WE were having a conversation."

Charlene could not believe that this heifer just said that. "Well – GIRL – now you aren't."

Nigel was getting a kick out of what he thought were two women fighting over him.



Rebekah had to move closer to hear and see for herself what was going on. She could see Charlene stiffen her spine as she talked to Nigel's latest conquest.

Charlene was turning around to talk to Nigel again and complete her mission, when "Red" got bold and decided to catch Charlene by the shoulder and attempt to spin her around. That was the wrong thing to do. Before the redhead could initiate any kind of confrontation, Charlene had grabbed her hand from her shoulder, bent back her thumb and slammed her face on the bar in one swift motion.

"I'm sorry – GIRL. Maybe you didn't hear me the first time I said it. Mr. Perry is otherwise busy." Nearby onlookers formed a makeshift circle around them to get a close look at Charlene in action. Squeezing her hand, she had placed on the woman's neck, Charlene continued, "Now, you and I don't have a problem, yet – but if you continue this way – we are going to have a major fucking issue. You feel me?"

Unable to speak, the woman just nodded. Slowly, Charlene lifted the woman's face off the bar. Releasing her hold, the woman grabbed her neck before grabbing her purse and leaving.

Nigel was on fire – he loved a saucy woman. The uproar from the crowd allowed Rebekah to edge closer to Charlene as she turned her attention back to Nigel. She decided to take a different approach to the self-proclaimed sugar daddy.

"Damn, woman! You got some serious moves on you!"

"Thanks – now – as I was saying, Mr. Perry."

"No – Nigel, please."

Charlene just looked at him for a minute – she was unimpressed and it showed.

"You are quite the ladies man."

"Heh heh – you could say that. I have had my share of them; petite, big, short, tall, skinny and fat – I love them all!"

"Uh – right. So, these women you *love* so much, are you ever serious with them?"

"Serious? Sometimes – why? Don't tell me you want to get in on the action?" Nigel gave Charlene what he thought was a winning smile – he thought. Moving a little closer, Charlene could smell the scotch on his breath and the overpowering cologne.

"Hmm – maybe – I hear you are a very influential business man – who likes the ladies. I have a favor to ask of you."

"Baby we can discuss anything you want – for a price." He had looked her up and down like a lion sizing up its next meal. Charlene knew by his actions and remark

exactly what he had in mind. “Perhaps we can go outside and discuss it.” Nigel was already getting excited, thinking that he was about to get lucky.

Turning to leave, Charlene spied Rebekah hiding behind a pillar and winked at her. Rebekah covered her mouth before hiding behind the pillar to keep Nigel from seeing her.

Outside, Nigel couldn't keep his hands-off Charlene. She had to keep two steps ahead of him just to keep an arm's length away. Nigel, being the man, he was, blindly followed Charlene around the corner to a dark corner in back. Rebekah was right behind her, making sure nothing happened to her best friend.

Peeking around the corner, Rebekah was able to make out some of what was being said, “You never did tell me your name lovely lady.”

“You can call me Char.”

“Char – kind of like – Cher.”

“Uh – yeah – ok.” She rolled her eyes. “So, Nigel, what do you want?”

Unable to keep his composure, Nigel grinned from ear to ear and moved closer to her. Moving in to slobber all over her face, it was all Charlene to do to turn her head and push him back.

“I think you know what I want.”

“Well, I suggest that if you want this-” Pointing at her person, “you need to strip for me.”

“You want me to strip, out here?”

Smirking, she walked closer, running a hand up his leg, grazing his groin and caressing his face. Taking a deep breath, she whispered just out of reach of his chapped lips, “Nobody can see us here. You can go first, then me. Go behind those crates over there and put your clothes on top so they don't get dirty.” Rubbing her nose against his to distract him, she could tell he was willing to do anything.

Rebekah tried hard to stifle her laugh. She turned and saw one of the security guards, who happened to be a friend of hers. Motioning him to come over, she continued to look on.

“Hey Rebekah, how you been baby girl?”

Ricky was a big guy. He was very sweet and met Rebekah one night when she had come out alone. They became instant friends.

“Shhhh – remember that guy Nigel?”

“You mean that douche bag who thinks he’s a lady’s man? Yeah – I saw him with another conquest just leave here.”

“She’s not a conquest – that’s my friend Charlene. She is on the warpath and out to teach him a lesson. Look!”

Ricky spied around the corner with Rebekah and almost broke out laughing.

“Is she really making him undress?”

Laughing quietly, Rebekah could only nod.

“Well, make sure when she gets him that way, she let’s me take over. I’ll take care of the rest.”

As Nigel stood behind the crates, tossing his clothes – pants, shirt and even his boxers, on top of them, he said in a loud whisper, “Okay, baby, come and get your just desserts.”

“Oh, I’m coming baby. Now, close your eyes, no peaking.”

As Charlene was about to grab his clothes, she heard someone whisper to her. She turned around and saw Rebekah and a very big security guard watching her around the corner. She thought she was busted for sure until she saw Rebekah laughing.

“What’s wrong?” She said as she got to the corner.

“Ricky wants to take over.”

Charlene was speechless. “Really? Oh, I can’t wait to see this.”

She stepped out of his way and watched him walk over to the crates.

“Baby, where you at?”

“I’m almost ready.” She called from the corner.

He looked up and saw his clothes disappearing into the darkness.

“What the-” was all he got out as he stuck his head from around the corner and found a rather large, statuesque-type black man with the words “Club Bouncer” stretched across the tight-fitting t-shirt he was wearing.

“Get your ass from behind there.”

“Huh – what?”

“You heard me! What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Nigel looked around and didn’t see Charlene.

“But –but”

“Butt is right – yours is going to have my foot planted in it if you don’t start explaining yourself.”

Nigel heard giggling coming from the other side of the bouncer. Wincing, he stretched his neck a little further around, and saw, to his surprise, not only Charlene, but Rebekah standing there laughing and staring at his naked form.

With only his hand available to cover his penis and other extremities, Nigel stood straight and rolled his eyes.

“Come on. Let’s go.”

“What! Let’s go? Are you kidding me! If you haven’t noticed, you have my clothes.”

Grabbing Nigel by the nape of his neck and leading him out, Ricky replied, “You should have thought about that before you decided to show your business to the respectable patrons of this establishment.”

Looking at Rebekah as he walked by, he tried to turn and get her attention, “Rebekah, Rebekah! I’m sorry!!!” That was the last thing she heard him say. That was the last time she saw Nigel Perry. Two weeks later, the magazine let him go – conduct unbecoming.

That memory of Nigel hit her like a ton of bricks. She wasn’t expecting the reaction she got from herself. Tears swelled up in her eyes and she fought to keep them at bay but failed. She wanted to laugh and cry at the same time, but her voice was silent. The remaining remnants of that memory rolled down her cheek, and drifted away.

## Chapter 12 – The Heart Needs No Introduction

Rebekah walked away from the window, cleaned up the mess she made with the foot massager, and headed back to the living room to sit down on the oversized black and gold couch. She plopped down and grabbed the remote, beginning her ritual of channel surfing hoping to find some kind of sappy romance movie on LMN, or a thriller on the SyFy channel.

Nothing of interest caught her attention, so she forced herself to watch one of the over-dramatized reality shows about housewives and beat-downs about who is leaving whom and which gold digger is going to be ousted this week.

“Who in their right mind is going to degrade themselves and appear on a reality show and air their dirty laundry?” Rebekah mumbled to herself while popping some peanuts into her mouth that she had managed to get between commercial breaks. *‘Eighty-three. Ugh - This is going to be a long night.’*

She had been watching the clock for nearly an hour. She was ready to call it a night when she heard a knock at her door. Wiping the salt from her hands onto the bottom of her tee shirt, Rebekah walks to the door, assuming it is her friend, Brianna from across the quad, whom she had spoken to earlier and declined on an ice cream pity party. Poor girl had just lost her job and refused to come and work with Rebekah, afraid it would ruin their friendship. Rebekah had to agree with her on that note.

“Brianna, girl, I told you I –” there he stood, all six feet two inches of well toned man. Rebekah caught herself as she stood there staring at Jake.

“I’m sorry. I hope I didn’t disturb you.” *Say something stupid!* But she couldn’t; not sure if she was dreaming or not, she just stood there – staring. “May I come in?” Finally, giving half a smile and quick nod, she moved away from the door to allow him entry. As he walked by, Jake reached up and squeezed her shoulder as a form of thank you. Rebekah couldn’t help but straighten her spine, and doing all but grab his tight ass, all the while taking in a deep breath and instantly receiving the masculine smell of men’s deodorant, sandalwood soap, and him – perfect.

She noticed that he looked distracted and slightly off his game. He had gone inside after arguing with Eliza and managed to change into a pair of jeans and a polo shirt. His hair was slightly disheveled, probably from running his hand through it

repeatedly. Delicious was all that came to mind. She also noticed he still looked a little upset.

“Is everything alright? Would you like something to drink; perhaps a glass of water or coffee?”

Jake adored the way she seemed concerned about him. “I’m fine, thank you. I just have a few things on my mind. Nothing a stiff drink wouldn’t cure. However, a cup of coffee would be nice – if it’s not too much trouble. I am sorry again if I am disturbing you, but I was looking over your list and I can’t seem to decide which would be best for the opening. Would you mind giving me a hand and help me out?”

“...h-h-help you out?” she stammered, looking a bit bewildered.

Seeing the note pads and recipe holders sitting on the coffee table, and the television on, Jake couldn’t help but say, “I’m sorry. I should have called, right?”

“No, this is fine. I was just sitting here relaxing for a moment before I started on new recipes.”

Smiling, he continued, “I must say that the list is quite appetizing, though I don’t think I will need all of it.” He managed to look over his shoulder and grin at her as she walked into the kitchen to fix a pot of coffee. Speaking a little louder, he continued, “From what you listed as the entrees and appetizers, I am sure no one will be hungry for some time.”

Able to see him from the opening over the counter, she returned the smile with a response, “Well, you can pick which ones you would like most and I can put together a sampler tray. That way you can see and taste them for yourself before I go ahead with the order. I usually like doing it within the first couple of days of the proposal, that way if there is something that isn’t to your liking we have time to eliminate it and work more on the other dishes.”

He was awestruck. He hung on everything she had to say. It was fascinating to him how her words seemed to calm the tension he felt.

“Here you go. Please, have a seat.” Rebekah turned off her television and sat in the plush chair adjacent to the couch he sat on. He couldn’t help but smile inward and graciously accepted the coffee.

Sitting the coffee down, he moved to the edge of the couch, closer to Rebekah. She smelled heavenly. He could smell her D&G perfume as well as a light subtle hint of jasmine. She had pulled her hair up in a pony tail, but a few strands had escaped, causing her to look more desirable.

He looked her up and down, wanting to find out where she dabbed her perfume – was it between her luscious breasts, or behind her ears, or perhaps just at the base of her elbows and backs of her knees? He wanted to explore every part of her.

Grabbing his coffee again, he took a sip. It was good, just the way he wanted it. Clearing his throat, he tried to make small talk, “You have a very nice place here.”

“Thank you, it’ll do for now, but I like it.” Jake had been looking around at the collage of pictures hanging on the wall, figuring they must have been of family, and possibly friends. He noticed an older picture of a man and woman. It wasn’t your typical 8x10, but rather a large canvas portrait that hung in the center of the wall just behind her. The frame itself was quite detailed. It was a mahogany cherry wood frame, with ivy and an indistinct pattern throughout the border that surrounded the magnificent portrait.

“That is an amazing portrait.” Turning to look behind her she complied, “Thanks, those are my parents. It was taken when they were married.”

“May I?” Asking permission to get a closer look. “Go right ahead.”

Jake stood and walked over to the hanging. He was fascinated in knowing that it wasn’t a picture at all, but an extraordinary painting done by someone with initials JLW.

Looking over her shoulder, she could see how taken he was with the picture. “My brother did that one; Jackson Luther Waters. He did different ones for each of our siblings and me.”

A look of amazement came over Jake’s face. “I am quite impressed. Has he sold any of his work?” Rebekah just chuckled and replied, “No, he was never interested in pursuing it full time. He said it’s just a hobby.” Jake snapped his head towards her and the look of down right confusion appeared.

“You’re kidding, right? This is excellent work. The brush strokes show true boldness of his work and-” Jake had to stop himself as he noticed the glint in her eyes. “I’m sorry, I tend to ramble on and on about art. Tell your brother any time he wants to have an art showing to please let me know.”

Pride over her brother’s work and Jake’s interest, showed on Rebekah’s face as she gave an approving nod. As he walked back to the couch, his hand glided over and squeezed her shoulder ever so slightly, sending electricity through her – which caused a soft moan to escape her lips before she realized what happened.

Hoping that Jake didn’t hear, she quickly cleared her throat and watched as he sat back down.

“Do you mind if I call you Rebekah?” He questioned, looking every so delectable as he sat back down at the end of the couch.

“No, not at all, please do.” Butterflies began to form in her stomach as he continued to go over the list. It took all of her will to stay focused on the business at hand and answer any questions he had. She couldn’t help but look him up and down, curiosity and fascination filling her thoughts. She wanted to know how he could stay so in sync with preparing for a gallery opening and what had happened outside earlier.

She watched his lips form words; she watched as his eyes danced, making him look even more desirable to her. She couldn’t help but watch as the dimple in his chin flexed with each sentence, causing her to shift a little in her seat and get back to work.

“So, do you have partners at the gallery that will help with the final decisions?” Jake shook his head and replied, “No, this is my baby. I have a gallery in San Francisco, but I wanted to start one here. I have always liked the Los Angeles area and felt more at home here.”

“Well, that’s good. That way, if you don’t like something, you have no one to blame but yourself.” Rebekah joked, hoping to bring a smile to his face. It worked; he chuckled and leaned back on the couch.

“Ha, ha. That’s very true. Of course, I could always blame the caterer if I am not *totally* satisfied.” He winked and smiled again before taking another sip of coffee. This time Rebekah almost fell out of her chair trying to steady herself.

Laughing and feeling slightly more at ease, Rebekah concluded, “Touché!”

Taking a chance, Jake leaned in a little closer to continue their conversation. “You know, rumor has it that you are a whiz in the kitchen – a – connoisseur of sorts. I overheard someone talking to your friend one day about a dessert you made once that was to die for.” He sat there looking at her - waiting for a response. All Rebekah could do to keep from jumping out of her chair was grab her own cup of coffee and nod in reply. Jake’s coy smile made her heart skip a beat.

“I love to cook. It was something my mother taught my sisters and me when we were little. She always said, *‘No matter what you do with your life, be it a teacher, or doctor or the President – you have to know how to cook.’* Then she would add, *‘because once you all leave this house, my kitchen will be off limits!’* Then she would laugh.”

Jake couldn’t get over with way Rebekah’s face lit up as she remembered words her mother said to her as a child. The way her mouth puckered as she mimicked her mother was tantalizing. Spending a lot of quality time with his mother was something he never got to do as a young boy. He was totally taken by her and couldn’t figure out what to do. Biting his lower lip, he couldn’t help but smile. He needed to taste her. He knew if he didn’t he was going to explode. Realizing he was nudging closer to her, he had to stop himself from reaching out to her.



Rebekah just looked at him, as if looking deep into his soul and felt the ache rise in her again. Never in her wildest dreams did she think he would be sitting in her living room talking to her. Scoping him up and down like a predator eyeing its prey, she watched his lips forming words, not paying full attention to the conversation. *He sure does have a nice set of lips – kissable if you ask me!* Rebekah placed her hand to her mouth as she felt tingle after that remark from her inner voice.

“Rebekah?”

“Hhmm? Yes, I’m sorry. What was your question?” She could feel her cheeks getting flushed with embarrassment. This time she sat up straight, like a student in class, paying full attention to his repeated question.

Smiling, he continued, “I said, perhaps one day, when it doesn’t have to do with our business deal, I can persuade you to share your cooking and baking techniques with me. I’m not the greatest in the kitchen – hell, I’m lucky to pop some popcorn in the microwave.” He laughed at himself because he knew that wasn’t entirely true. He was a pretty good cook, but preferred dining out on occasion.

Swinging her foot back and forth; licking her lips and eyeing him like a lioness after her prey, made him blush a little at the thought of her riding him right then and there.

*My goodness, did he just ask me on a date?* It was all she could think as she smiled and nodded in agreement, “That sounds like it could be – interesting.” *Interesting? Really?*

A hearty laugh came from deep within Jake and Rebekah had to smile and relax a little more.

Suddenly the statement finally registered and she sat up straight again. “Wait a minute – you said, ‘business deal.’ Does that mean you’re going to hire us to cater your opening?” Shock and awe filled the room as Jake smiled at her and replied, “Why, yes. I believe it does; if that’s okay with you, of course?”

Squealing with excitement, Rebekah jumped to her feet. Unable to control herself when Jake stood, she all but leapt into his arms, full of appreciation. Hugging him tightly, her eyes popped open, realizing what she was doing. She also realized that he was hugging her back. His hands slid across her back and down her sides and she slowly took a step back, trying to compose herself a little, not realizing that Jake still had his hands on her waist.

“Oh, my goodness - crap, I am so sorry.” Trying to do everything to catch her breath, she started fanning herself. She began explaining how she never flew solo on a new deal like this, and how exciting it would be to cater such an event. Her mouth going

a mile a minute, Jake just stood there, staring at her...staring at her lips and thinking about how badly he wanted to taste them right now.

Smiling a little, Jake replied with the utmost sincerity, "It's perfectly alright, Rebekah. If I had known it was going to make you this excited, I would have told you when I walked in!" Jake already decided that he wanted the deal – all he needed to know was where to sign. He would have walked on water to get to know her more.

He needed to remind himself to thank his grandmother for *not* referring a catering service. He still had no idea she was his grandmother's up and coming business partner. That was one detail his grandmother graciously left out in their conversations. He knew she had a new partner, but never really asked about the person. He had decided early on that it would be taboo to go into any kind of business with family. So far, he had been proven wrong, seeing that his brother, Quentin, was his attorney and older sister, Beth Ann insisted on checking the books and ledgers every now and then.

He told himself that Mrs. Devereaux was a gem and deserved a gracious hug for sticking her nose into his business. He was into Rebekah. He wanted to taste her lips so bad at that moment. He could feel the heat rising in his cheeks being in such proximity with her. He knew he needed to do something quick before he lost his chance.

As Rebekah continued to fan herself to keep from fainting from all the excitement, Jake managed to catch her hands and placing them at her sides he reached up and lifted her chin with his finger, looking into her eyes he gently told her, "Just breathe."

Doing as he said, she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Exhaling, she opened her eyes again. The grayest of gray eyes looked back at her. She smiled. On impulse, Jake placed a hand on either of her cheeks, studying her face, bent down to kiss her. Millimeters from her lips, he heard her catch her breath and he opened his eyes, forcing himself to stop. Looking at each other, he placed his forehead against hers and took a deep breath.

Whispering and rubbing his thumb gently against her cheek, he relented and said, "I should go."

Unable to speak, Rebekah conceded, nodding in defeat.

Moving his thumb and rubbing it across her lips, he looked deep into her dark brown eyes, "Damn, you're going to be trouble for me."

She smiled as he lightly kissed the tip of her nose, rubbing her arm as he made his way to the door. Taking a final look back, hurt and wanting filled his eyes as he went to tell her goodnight, but couldn't gather the words.

As she watched him leave, both silent, Rebekah could still feel his hands on her cheeks. *Oooh girl, that was close!* Rolling her eyes at herself and that menacing inner voice, Rebekah touched her cheeks to make sure they weren't on fire. Jake had set off a spark within her that even Platinum Pete couldn't extinguish. She wanted him; now she realized, he wanted her too.

Once her door closed, Rebekah couldn't help but rush over to it and open it a little so that she could watch Jake as he went back to his place. Touching her cheek, then her nose, Rebekah opened the door a little wider, as if she were about to step out, but she just stood there.

Something made Jake stop and turn around. He could see her there at her door, staring – watching him. He couldn't will his legs to walk towards her, so he just stood there and stared back at her – wanting her. Soon, Rebekah got up enough courage to stand on her porch and call out, “I'll have the contract drawn up and drop it off for you to sign, ok?”

Dropping his head for a split second then lifting it with a makeshift smile, he replied, “That would be great, thank you.” Smiling in her direction again, he waved and turned to walk away.

“J-Jake?” She called out his name, sending fire up his spine, making him wince for a split second and turn around.

She watched his expression, igniting that spark into a full on three-alarm fire. The moon cast its brilliant light on his profile, giving new life to his features.

“Yes, Rebekah?” A little bit concerned, he stepped a little closer, “Is everything all right?” *Hell, yes there's something wrong! You got my panties all wet from all that flirting and touching! Get back here and finish the job!*

Rebekah smiled as she replied, “Would you like to come over for dinner this weekend?”

Rebekah stepped off her porch and stood there on pins and needles waiting for a reply. It seemed like an eternity had passed before he answered her. Giving an appreciative smile, Jake accepted her invitation.

“Great, how about Saturday, around 7:00?”

“That would be great, Rebekah. Thank you.” Smiling even more now, he added, “I'll bring a bottle of wine, if that's alright?”

Overjoyed by his acceptance, she could barely contain herself when she responded, “That would be great. I'll see you then.”

Nothing else was said, but they stood there for a moment, just staring at each other until another resident happened to walk by, breaking Jake's concentrated gaze on Rebekah.

Jake watched as Rebekah smiled and waved as she walked back inside. All was quiet for the moment, and then *he* stepped out of the shadows he had been lurking in – waiting. *He* walked over to her window and looked inside.

This is not what *he* was expecting – another man – after *his* woman. He was going to have to do something about that.

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## **Chapter 13 – A Kiss Worth Waiting For**

Jake wanted to go back to Rebekah's and finish what he had started. Mentally kicking himself, he continued to walk to his townhome. Closing his door, he couldn't help but think about what had just nearly happened. He almost kissed the woman who had been the cause of his cold showers for the last couple of weeks. He wasn't sure if it was good or bad, but the feeling it left inside him, made him want her even more.

He was happy to accept her dinner invitation – meaning he would get to see her all that sooner, and not for business – he hoped. He knew that it would be a long night if he didn't keep his libido in check on Saturday. Thinking of her made his groin ache with need, which had been happening a lot lately. He knew another shower was in order before slipping off to bed.

Jake remembered one of the moments he saw Rebekah. She had been walking to her townhouse in a lavender and paisley sun dress. She hadn't noticed him staring, which was a good thing, because for some reason he couldn't take his eyes off her, even with Eliza standing next to him. Her dress was simple and it accentuated her bountiful breasts. The knitted periwinkle coverlet made the outfit stand out. He remembered the first moment he ran across her, literally, in her business suit – making his manhood jump to attention.

He couldn't believe he was admiring another woman right in front of his girlfriend. Unbeknownst to him, Eliza spied him looking at the plus size beauty and laughed to only where he heard.

"Seriously, Jake; why would you even give that beached whale the time of day?" She snorted and Jake's head snapped in her direction, eyeing her down. The realtor had heard the comment and made herself scarce by heading into the townhome.

"Will you be quiet?" He whispered. "Not everyone is starving themselves thin. And I do believe that the correct term is thick or full figured."

Eliza just looked at him in disgust and followed the realtor into the townhome. He glanced over quickly to see if the woman had heard his obtuse girlfriend, but she was already gone. A frown developed over his face, as if hurt, and then followed Eliza inside.

When he signed the papers with the bank, purchasing the townhome, he was overjoyed. Eliza wasn't pleased with it, but he didn't care. It wasn't for her, that's why he wanted it. He had noticed a change in Eliza over the past few months and it wasn't good. Lately they had been arguing more about the smallest things; be it from the type of gas he put in his car to the way he hung his jacket in the closet.

Ever since the Christmas party nearly a year ago he noticed she was spending more time at work and going on trips with co-workers she didn't even consider her friends. He had figured that it was because he was spending more time renovating the new art gallery and making plans to prepare for its opening. He had been busy booking new artists and choosing the right décor for the building that he hadn't been spending as much time with Eliza as she wanted him to.

They had been together nearly three years, traveling back and forth from San Francisco to Los Angeles seeing each other and spending quality time together. When he told her that he was planning on pulling up stakes in the bay area and making his move the Los Angeles region, he thought she would be more than excited. However, he was a little shocked when she told him that the way things were hadn't been so bad and that she liked the distance and seeing him every other weekend, because it gave her time to be with her girlfriends and do the "bff" thing.

"Eliza, baby, I just don't understand why you think it's a bad idea. Is there something going on that you aren't telling me?"

Eliza was silent for a moment over the phone then conceded, "No sweetie, I just don't want to lose my bff time with the girls is all."

"Well, don't worry about that, because I will probably be busy with the new building for a little while anyway, ok?"

"Oh, ok. Is that gallery necessary, Jake? I mean, I am glad you will be moving this way. Who knows-" swallowing hard, she continued, "who knows, we may even be able to get a place together."

"Uh, sure. One day, we will have to sit and discuss that." Jake could feel the sweat beading on his brow. His insides were turning at the thought of it. He had no current plans of even considering him and Eliza moving in together. He wanted to figure out why things were a little scattered with them in their relationship; and even then, he still didn't think he would be ready to move in with her.

He hung up the phone with Eliza that night and didn't think much more about her. In fact, he didn't call her for the remainder of the week, which was strange for him.

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A couple of weeks before Jake was to move into his new place, he flew to Los Angeles to get things in order; ordering things he needed and measuring for fixtures and anything else he could think of. At least that's what his excuse was. What he really wanted was to see that woman again.

After taking painstaking measurements and picking out colors for his repainting project, he was leaving his new place and nearly mowed the mystery woman down.

"Shi- I'm sorry. Are you alright?" His voice was deep and husky. He had managed to catch hold of the woman before completely knocking her off her feet. He was captured by her deep brown, almost charcoal eyes. Her long eye lashes complimented them, leaving him mesmerized. Her complexion was nearly flawless, save a couple of moles and minute freckles around her nose. At the left corner of her mouth he saw a mole. Her lips were full and kissable. He couldn't help but run his tongue over his own as he stared at her.

The woman was enchanted by the way he spoke to her. He had slightly touched her arm to keep her from tumbling over that neither had realized it was still there. Taking a deep, labored breath, she replied, in a barely audible tone, "Y-y-yes, I'm fine, thank you." Searching each other's faces for what seemed to be forever, she broke the awkward silence by adding, "I, I should go." She slowly walked away, trying desperately to break the invisible bond they had between them.

He couldn't help but smile when he saw her. She was just as he had remembered from the first time he laid eyes on her; and the second time.

The weekend he moved in, he saw her again. This time she was sitting in her picture window. At first glance he hadn't noticed her, but the double take caused him to nearly drop the box he was carrying. The sun had shown down on her face like a beam of light. Her milk chocolate skin was soft and ringlets of hair cascaded along her cheekbones causing him to catch his breath.

She sat there staring at him as she hung up her phone. He managed a smile and tried to wave with a finger but the box was relentless. He swore he could see her almost laugh at that and he appreciated her noticing him. Suddenly their invisible bond was broken by Eliza.

Eliza had the manners of a three-toed sloth. She was unpredictable and annoying at times, but he cared of her. He could almost say that he truly loved her, but he couldn't. While he was busy trying to give her his heart, she was busy taking him for his money and riding the supervisor's dick when he wasn't looking.

He hated the way she made him feel when he found out about them. He had given so much of himself to her. She was a great lover and awesome eye candy, but that's as far as it went. He honestly believed that she would have been good wife

material, except for that one minor annoyance of infidelity. She couldn't stop riding her boss' dick long enough to enjoy his commitment to her.

Eliza had been his undoing the day her supervisor had sent him a picture text of her laying in his bed with his dick in her. There was no mistaking that it was Eliza. She was wearing the diamond pendant he had made with her and his initials on it for Christmas the year before. That afternoon he had come home early to be with her and realized she hadn't been there all morning. He called the office to see if she was coming by but found that she hadn't been into work either.

After receiving that text, he realized what a fool he had been. Cursing aloud he began to go through each room and grab anything that he hadn't bought for her that she left over his place, throwing it all in a garbage bag and setting by the door. All the pictures of them together, he either ripped from his photo album, or took out of the frames. Not caring about the weather, he lit the fireplace and set the pictures ablaze.

Next, he called his banker and had them close out the small account he had set up for her when he moved to Los Angeles. He was grateful that she needed his signature to take out large sums of money but found she had been taking out the maximum limit he set on it every week, reducing the account from \$15,000 down to a mere \$10,800. This enraged him even more. She made good money and had no reason to withdrawal so much. He stopped payments on all pending transactions immediately and laughed inward that she was going to be pissed when she realizes her pot of gold disappeared.

He remembers how he sat and waited for her to arrive. Sitting in the corner of the living room, beyond the light that beamed in from outside, he waited. Soon he would hear her keys jingling in the door – only the door wouldn't open. He managed to run to the hardware store, grab a new security door knob, and change the lock after gathering her things. He was hell bent on making sure she was out of his life but good.

Eliza began knocking on the door, then pounding on it. He calmly got up from his seat and walked over to the door. He unlocked it without opening it for her as he used to do at times when she would forget her key. He made himself at home again in his chair and she walked in.

"What's wrong with the door, babe? My key wouldn't work."

"Oh, that – broke my key in it; had to replace the lock. Where were you today?"

Not sure what to say, Eliza stammered with her response. "I-I-I took the day off. A friend of mine was in town and we wanted to catch up on girl gossip."

"Really? Who was it?"

“Who – it was Rachel. Yes – Rachel.”

Standing slowing and heading towards her, he responded, “Rachel? You mean your friend from college?”

“Y-yes, that Rachel.” Eliza looked a little bewildered by his questions. Not sure what to make of it, she continued, “You know how we get – we chat forever about everything.”

Slowly removing her purse from her shoulder, and her keys from her hand, he laid them on the couch next to her. He began circling her like a predator. He noticed that her hair was little wet, and she didn’t smell like the perfume she had put on that morning.

“Yes, well-” he said as he stood behind her, a breath away, taking in her scent. He wanted to gag. Rubbing his hands up and down her arms, he continued, “I came home early to get you to meet me for lunch, but they said you were out today.” Wrapping his arm around her waist, Eliza caught her breath, rolled her eyes to the back of her head as she leaned in to him. “I checked the messages and found that you had a couple of calls today.” His hand drifted up to her breasts – no bra. She moaned with excitement as he continued.

Slipping his hand into her top and squeezing, and running the other up her thighs, he spread them. Not touching her where he knew her boss had just been, he ground his penis against her ass, causing her to moan louder accepting what she thought were his advances for sex. Trying to hold his composure he continued still, “You like that baby, don’t you?”

“Yes.” She managed to get out in a husky, barely audible voice.

He ground against her even more, knowing it was driving her crazy – but making him sick to his stomach. She began grinding against him. His churning stomach was the one thing keeping him from getting a hard-on; that and knowing that she had just come back from fucking her boss.

Before reaching over to the oak console table where the cordless phone and message machine lay, Jake grabbed a side of her thong underwear – again, not the ones she left wearing that morning, and ripped them off her body, causing her to wince in pain as the fabric took a few pubic hairs along in its descent.

Bending her over the couch in a position she was sure not to escape, and not see him push the button to the machine, she heard Rachel’s voice, “*Hey Liz – sorry I’m not going to be able to make it out this weekend as planned, my boyfriend and I are going on a cruise and won’t be back for a couple of weeks. Tell that hunky man of yours hello and see you when we get back.*” Eliza didn’t move a muscle. Then she heard another voice on the machine. It was her supervisor, “*Hi, this message is for Eliza, tell her she left her*

birth control pills on my nightstand and she can pick them up along with the rest of her shit at the office.”

Releasing Eliza from his vice grip, Jake stepped away. She slowly straightened herself as Jake walked around to the front of the couch. Before she could react, Jake grabbed your clutch and removed the checkbook and credit card he had given her.

“Jake – I can explain.”

“Really – can you explain this?” Jake picked his phone up from the coffee table and opened the text from her boss. Eliza took the phone from Jake’s hand and became speechless. Jake watched as the blood drained from her face. There was no mistaking it was her in that picture.

“Now, Eliza – you have exactly ten seconds to grab your things and get out.”

“But-”

“I’ve already gathered them for you.” Jake pointed to the trash bag on the floor next to the door. Eliza looked at the bag then looked back at Jake – tears threatening to spill down her cheeks as she looked soulfully at him.

“Jake – please, let me explain.”

“Eliza, there’s nothing to explain. It’s clear as water where you’ve been and what you’ve been doing. How long has this been going on?”

Eliza couldn’t answer; instead she turned her head and looked away in guilt.

Jake had his answer. He walked over to the door and opened it. Eliza stood there, motionless. Since she wouldn’t leave, Jake bent over, grabbed her bag, slung it over his shoulder then walked over to her.

She stood there as tears ran down her cheeks.

“Eliza, you need to leave – now. You need to grab your purse and get the hell out of my home and out of my life. I told you when we met that I had no time for lies and deceit. I especially wasn’t going to have someone who cheats on me.”

Peering out at him from the corner of her eye, relenting in defeat she grabbed her purse. She began to walk the dead man’s walk to and through the front door. Being the gentleman that he was, Jake resisted the urge to toss her bag out the door after her. Instead, he walked it to the front gate and set it outside of it and held it open as she walked through it. Once she was through, Jake motioned for the gate key. He had also reminded himself to tell the security guard at the entry way that she was no longer allowed on the premises. Reluctantly, she complied and removed it from her key ring.

“Goodbye, Eliza.” He walked away.

“Jake, please! Don’t do this!” Eliza called out.

Jake stopped in his tracks and turned around. He was pissed, and it showed. His tone grew louder the angrier he became, “Eliza, I can’t understand how you could betray me like that. I mean, look at you. How can a beautiful woman like you turn out to be so fucking ugly? When I got that picture of you fucking your boss, I told myself it wasn’t you. Then the more I looked at the face – and then saw that necklace I had made for you, that’s when I knew. That’s when I knew you were nothing more than a money hungry bitch who would wrap herself around any man’s dick to get ahead.”

A small group of the residents gathered and watched as Jake spewed his venom to what they realized was now his *ex-girlfriend*. Then without another word, Jake turned and headed back inside. He noticed people staring but didn’t care, until he glanced over and saw *her* standing in her picture window looking back at him with hurt in her eyes. *He* was watching as well.

He remembered how he wanted to knock on her door and take her in his arms until the pain went away. He wanted to kiss her until she couldn’t breathe, but he was too angry and too freshly wounded to do any of that. He knew if he took advantage of his situation, they may both regret it afterward. He continued to walk past her home, all the while he could feel her watching him. As he turned, he looked up to see her standing outside her front door – watching him.

He now wished he had done something that evening instead of waiting as long as he had to so he could get close to her. Even now he was kicking himself because he had just had a falling out with Eliza yet again and didn’t want that incident to be the reason for his need of her.

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He had been home about an hour, enjoying the silence. As he started walking around his living room, he was interrupted by a knock on the door. Instant irritation arose thinking it might be Eliza crawling back a second time for forgiveness.

Slinging open the door, Jake was about to tear into Eliza when he was met by the deep dark eyes that he had left an hour earlier.

Smiling up at him, she said, “You left your phone on my coffee table.”

“Oh, thank you very much. You didn’t have to bring it over, I’m sure I would have missed it – eventually.”

“I don’t mind, really. I – probably wouldn’t have noticed it at all if I hadn’t seen it blinking on and off.”

Jake looked at her then looked at his phone – two missed calls from Eliza. He turned it off.

Laughing a little, Jake opened the door and allowed her to walk in. A man definitely lived there. He had his fireplace refinished in dark mahogany. His large dark brown leather sectional with matching ottoman and rustic, smoked glass and brass lamps on either side that sat atop rich dark stained oak end tables, gave it a down to earth tone along with the matching coffee table that all matched the console table.

His dining room table was simple; smoked glass inside a mahogany and brass finished framework. All eight chairs matched the mahogany finish. He had his grandfather's old grandfather clock in one corner and family portraits that cascaded up the stairwell.

Rebekah was taken aback by his decorating expertise. "You have a lovely home, Jake." She said as she walked in, carefully running her fingers along the side of the console. As she passed Jake, he couldn't help but to take in her scent as he always did when he passed by her – sweet and alluring.

He threw his head back and closed his eyes as he thanked her, savoring her scent in his nostrils.

"I hope I'm not intruding. I mean, I just wanted to return your phone to you." *Girl, you are such a liar. You know you wanted to get another gander at that Adonis and Herculean Mandingo swinging white man!* She cleared her throat to clear her thoughts and stood beside the couch.

"No, you aren't intruding, not in the slightest." He voice was becoming more and more husky the more he was in her presence. "Would you like to sit down?"

*Girl, those are leather cushions! Just looking at them can make a person think all kinds of naughty-* "Thank, you. Are those your brothers and sisters?" Rebekah pointed to the collage of pictures on his stairwell. He had a rather large family. His extended family had been just as large with in-laws, aunts, uncles, and more cousins than he could count.

"Yes, they are. They are scattered all over the globe – New York, Maine, Brazil – Africa. I think one is even in Wyoming – something about the Great Plains and getting back to the real life. I guess my sister Samara got tired of the hustle and bustle of the cities and got back to nature. She said there's nothing like the fresh smell of the open land at the crack of dawn. I told her that she will change her mind once she realizes it's the sweet stench of manure!" He smiled when he said that. Rebekah loved his smile – it lit up the room, not to mention her heart.

“Wow, Wyoming. That’s a stretch from the big city life. I’m sure it’s beautiful though.”

“Mmm, it is. I’m sorry. Can I offer you a glass of wine?”

“Um I really should get back.”

“Just one glass?” The look on his face was priceless – innocence where there definitely was none.

“Ok – sure, why not?” *Careful, girl - he may be trying to get you drunk! You go girl!* That voice had quite the imagination – but this is one-time Rebekah didn’t mind at all.

Jake got up and went to the kitchen, where he returned a short time later with a couple of wine glasses and a nice chilled bottle of Merlot. Once poured, he sat next to Rebekah on the sofa – as close as he would allow himself to get. He was just close enough to inhale her scent, and even closer to reach out and caress her cheek if he so dared.

Silence filled the room for a moment while Rebekah enjoyed the glass of wine – and the company.

“So, Rebekah – how many brothers and sisters do you have?”

“Oh – well, I have two older brothers and an older sister. I had two older sisters but one died when I was very young.”

Jake saw a twinge of pain on her face when she said it. He couldn’t help but to reach over and caress her shoulder. “I’m sorry, Rebekah.” His words were soft and honest. She could only look up and smile as she felt a tear begin to form. She mentally commanded it to cease as she took another sip.

“Thank you. We were close. She was only three years older than me, but she was my best friend. We did everything together.” *Steady, girl. Don’t lose it now.* Jake could see how much she loved her sister as she continued to boast about her in conversation.

Everything she said made him feel like he was right there. She was protective of the memories of her sister, so she only shared what she wanted. She told Jake about how they played and baked mud pies, up until she got sick. “There was this one time, before she got sick, my parents had taken us out to the ocean to build sand castles and such. The weather was nice and my brother, Jackson had just gotten his cast taken off his arm from falling out of the big tree in our back yard.” She continued sharing the wonders of her childhood, and Jake hung on every word.

What seemed like an hour that had passed, somehow became two. In between talking, she had finished one glass of wine, and just polished off her second glass while she continued to talk, motioning to Jake as he cautiously refilled it a third time – this time, less than half way. She was beginning to relax a great deal and it showed. Rebekah had gotten a little more comfortable in her seat and reared her head back to take in the ambiance and the manly scent of Jake's home.

He enjoyed watching her. She had an air about her that commanded attention. He was willing to give her all the attention she needed and desired of him if she wanted. They had shared childhood stories they never shared with anyone. Jake realized he shared more of himself with Rebekah that evening than he had with Eliza the entire time they were together.

After she shared her last stories of Serlee, Jake looked at her with the sincerest eyes, touched her hand and said, "Your sister sounds like she would have been a great person to know."

Rebekah breathed a heavy sigh, allowing the wine to warm her before she answered. "Yes, she was great. We were inseparable. We'd probably be traveling somewhere celebra-" suddenly, Rebekah stopped herself and realized what the date was. She had never done that before. She attempted set the glass down on the coaster before she went on but stopped in mid-stride. "As a matter of fact, tomorrow would have been her birthday." Realizing she had just remembered the day – something she never forgot, that tear that she had managed to keep at bay was back, and there was no stopping it. Before she could will it away, it took flight and ran down her cheek.

Jake felt the pain she was feeling as he saw her lip quiver for a moment as she tried to continue but couldn't get out the words. Jake sat down his glass then reached over and took hers and watched as her heart spilled down her face.

He couldn't help but to take her in his arms and hold her, letting her cry on his shoulder. He held her close; he held her gentle. It was what she needed at that moment. The more he caressed her, the more natural it felt to have her in his arms. He sat there with one arm wrapped around her shoulder, while his other had instinctively reached up and caressed her face, wiping the tears away. The warm salted water of her tears that streamed down the front of his shirt slowly began to subside.

"Sssshhh...it's alright. I didn't mean to make you cry." Jake continued to stroke Rebekah's hair, even when she sat up to wipe her tears.

"Oo-oh, look at me. Just blubbering everywhere. I-I should be going. I didn't mean to carry on like that, really-"

"N-no – you stay right here and relax. It seems to me that you needed that. No, you aren't going anywhere until you relax, ok?" Jake reached over and brushed her hair

out of her face and saw two red and puffy eyes staring back at him, trying hard not to cry again. He put his hand under her chin to look her squarely in the eyes. Even with the puffy blood-shot eyes she was still beautiful to him.

She agreed, knowing he was sure not to let her go until she got it together.

“May I use your bathroom; I just want to splash some cold water on my face.”

“Sure, straight down the hall on your right.”

As Rebekah stood, a little too quickly, she became light headed, nearly toppling over.

Jake was quick to stand with her and catch her, “Whoa, baby. Steady. Come on, let’s get you laid down.”

“I guess I shouldn’t have drunk that wine so quickly. O-or maybe I should have eaten something first.” Her words stumbled in her mouth as she tried to steady herself and failed. Jake had his arm around her waist in record time, holding her close to him. He was mesmerized by her. She was real. She wasn’t plastic, or fake, or trying to be someone that she wasn’t.

“You haven’t eaten today?” He shot a scolding look at her before continuing. “That’s not good, especially when you’ve had that much wine. Here, sit down, I’m going to fix you something real quick.”

“No – no, you don’t have to do that – really. I had a snack earlier – I just forgot – no need to go to so much trouble, really.”

“It’s the least I can do after plying you with all that wine.” His smile was sincere and mischievous at the same time as he helped her sit back down.

“I’ll be right back.” Jake raced down the hall and was back in a flash with a cold wet washcloth.

“Here, use this. Just sit there. I’ll be right back.” Jake handed her the towel and went to the kitchen and made a quick bite – grilled cheese sandwiches, a vegetable plate and coffee – black. When he returned, he was happy to see that she was still sitting there, staring into the fireplace. She looked amazing to him.

“Here we go. Forgive me. I’m sure I’m not quite the chef as I heard you are.”

“Thank you. You really didn’t have to though.”

“Well, I would hate for your first memory be of us sitting here thinking I tried to get you drunk!”

Rebekah chuckled a little. She felt a little better. “I’m sure that wouldn’t be my first memory.” She replied then quickly took a bite of her sandwich. Jake watched her delicate hands hold the sandwich as she took her first bite. Unconsciously he licked his lips as a piece of cheese stuck to hers. Rebekah felt his eyes on her and put the sandwich down. Grabbing the napkin, he laid on her lap before, she gently wiped her mouth.

“Did anyone ever tell you how sexy you look doing that?”

Nearly choking on the remnants of her bite, Rebekah couldn’t help but to look at him. He hadn’t touched his. He just sat there – staring at her.

“N-not that I can recall.” She quickly chewed and swallowed as he continued to watch her. Out of nowhere he lifted his hand to her mouth and gently rubbed his thumb across her lips. She couldn’t believe he was doing it. She couldn’t believe she was letting him. That voice that had been in her head since she was a little girl had grown its own personality and body – like her own. She closed her eyes for a minute and could see her dancing the ceremonial touchdown dance.

His palm rested softly on her cheek while he continued to look deep into her soft features. She couldn’t help but to look back at him. Her vision of her inner self slowly drifted away. After that, everything went blank in her mind. Because after that, Jake’s senses kicked in, and putting one hand at the back of her neck, he pulled her closer and kissed her.

When Jake’s lips met Rebekah’s, she felt as though a fire had been ignited underneath her. Her entire being was set aflame. It was an innocent kiss at first, until an unconscious moan escaped her lips; that’s when he knew he wasn’t the only one feeling it. Jake pulled away for a moment and could see the sultry desire in her eyes as she stared back at him. He didn’t wait for her approval to continue, he had already received it when she pulled him in to accept his second kiss. This kiss was to die for.

She had never imagined it would feel like this. She allowed him to invade her mouth without a second thought. It was like molten lava the way he burned her soul. Passion ignited Jake’s senses causing him to moan as Rebekah’s hands kneaded the back of his head. He felt like he was about to burst out of his jeans. The tightness of them caused him to wince silently in both pain and pleasure.

Rebekah managed to slip a few words in between, “We should – stop.”

“Mmm-hmm,” was all Jake could say as he continued to assault her mouth with his own. His tongue intertwined with hers as he pressed himself closer to her still. Her nipples poking from beneath her top and bra were singing his thought process, making his kisses that more demanding.



“I – I can’t breathe. Jake – oh my God.” She wrapped her arms around his neck as his hands massaged their way up and down her body. As he stopped at her breasts, he stopped kissing her. Their eyes lazily opened as they stared at each other.

“Rebekah –” he managed to get out after taking a deep breath.

Rebekah looked at him slightly bewildered. She released her hold around his neck and leaned back on the couch. The heat in her face was overwhelming and she began to feel light headed again. Her lips were swollen from his kisses and her heart began to ache a little.

“I – I should go.”

“Rebekah, wait.”

Before he could say anything else, she got up from the couch and tried to steady herself as she walked to the door. The room was spinning and she could barely see two feet in front of her. *Girl, either you are a serious lightweight, or he slipped you a mickie!*

Jake watched as she managed two wobbled steps around the couch, before he called her name. “Rebekah –” Before Jake could finish his sentence he was off the couching and catching her as she twirled and fainted in his arms.

“Oh – shit.”

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## Chapter 14 – Girl, Get Your Love Right!

*He* wanted to break in and snatch her out of his arms. *He* wanted to hold her – take care of her. *His* time would come soon enough he thought. *He* was a patient man – however, his patience was wearing incredibly thin.

Jake stood there in shock and guilt. Rebekah lay there, passed out in his arms. She was such a beautiful woman. He wanted to just hold her and kiss her over and over. Slowly Rebekah started to come to.

“Come on, baby. Let’s get your someplace more comfortable.” Jake could kick himself for allowing her to drink so much wine. That Merlot was a great wine, but this particular brand had a kick to it that would send the senses to a whole other level if not consumed in moderation. He managed to steady her for the moment. She looked weary. The alcohol and emotional adrenaline had obviously overwhelmed her.

“I’m ok – I just got up too fast.” She slurred her words a little. To his own embarrassment he thought it was adorable.

“I think you should rest a bit, ok? Don’t worry; I’ll make sure your place is locked and secured.”

He walked her to the spare room down the hall and turned on the light. Rebekah winced a little, so he turned it back off. The moonlight shown through the window would be enough, he thought. He gently sat her down on the bed and helped her out of her wedged sandals. He noticed her dainty pink nail polish perfectly painted on her toes. Every other nail had a heart or star designed on top of the polish. It was cute.

While Jake was kneeled in front of her, taking off her shoes, she gently began caressing the top of his head – running her flingers through his thick mane of hair. He stopped for a moment and laid his head on her knees as she continued. It felt natural. It felt good. With every stroke of her fingers through his hair, he reciprocated with a massage of her calves and feet.

Lazily she allowed her fingers to touch the sides of his face. The stubble of his 5 o’clock shadow felt good. Jake enjoyed the attention she was giving him. He hadn’t received this kind of attention in quite some time. He wanted to linger in the moment and not let it escape.

Without warning, Rebekah stopped caressing, causing Jake to sit up and look at her. She sat there, looking into his eyes as he straightened up. The sultriness in her eyes was undeniable. Without breaking eye contact, Jake knelt between her legs, gently moving the abandoned tresses of hair from her face, he caressed her cheek. The chemistry they shared was unmistakable. It was like home to him to touch and caress her.

“You are an extraordinary woman, Rebekah. You have no idea how much I want you right now.”

“I’m sure not half as much as I want you, Jake.” She said it. It was too late to take it back, but she didn’t care. Jake looked at her in surprise and relief. Without hesitation, she pulled him closer and kissed him. She wanted to feel every part of him. She wanted to taste him. She wanted to feel every muscle, every curve of his body against her skin.

The fire in his pants grew all over again. He wanted to extinguish it by molding with her – being inside of her. However, he was trying hard to be a gentleman and kept telling himself he wasn’t going to take advantage of her this way. He tried several times to stop but she wouldn’t let him. She kissed him with every fiber of her being; holding him close to her like a second skin.

Rebekah managed to wrap her legs around him and pressed her wetness against his groin causing him to moan for more than the heavy petting. Jake reached down and grabbed her ass and pushed himself against her. She moaned as she felt the length of his beast and the way it throbbed underneath all that material.

Rebekah was surprised at the way she was reacting to him. She felt him wanting to pull away but wouldn’t allow them to separate. For a moment, Jake managed to push himself back a little to catch his breath and think clearly.

“Rebekah, are you sure this is what you want? I don’t want this to be something you’ll regret later.”

“This – this right here – is all I’ve wanted to do to you since I first saw you.” *Shit! You have a big mouth!* Without hesitation, she slid her hand down between them and felt his member growing. Jake laid his head back at the mere touch of it. Rebekah couldn’t believe she was sitting there, massaging him like that – and he was enjoying it.

Slowly Jake reached up and began massaging her breasts; first the left, then the right and back and forth. Rebekah bit her lip at the sensation of his hands kneading her flesh. He bent his head down and began to kiss and lick the exposed part of her breasts, squeezing with his hands every now and then. Further still he bent and nibbled at her protruding nipples through the material. That nearly sent her over the edge. She

managed to squeeze him through his jeans – he exhaled loudly and lifted his head and kissed her hard.

He wanted her – too much. Finally, he forced himself to stop. Rearing back on his toes again, he laid his head on her lap for a moment before he confessed to her.

“You caught my attention that day I came to look at this place. I wanted you then. I’ve wanted you ever since.” Looking up into her eyes, he continued, “But I don’t want it to be like this. I don’t want to take advantage of you like this.”

Still feeling the affects of the wine, Rebekah looked into his soulful eyes and saw his sincerity and agreed that it wasn’t quite the right time.

“I understand, you aren’t ready for someone like me.”

“No – that’s not it at all. Believe me, I want you – badly. I think tonight showed just how much I do. I just think we should wait until the timing is right.”

Jake stood and helped Rebekah to her feet. She was steadier now. He gently caressed her face and hair before kissing her again. Afterward, they stood there, holding each other. He could feel her trembling.

The thoughts that ran through her mind wouldn’t go away. She believed this was the only chance she had to be with him – but she felt that he clearly didn’t want her as much as she had hoped.

“Hey, I’m serious when I say I want you, baby. I just want to make sure that we both have a clear head when we do move forward, ok?”

“Ok. Maybe I should go then.”

Jake smiled down at her and kissed the tip of her nose. “No, I want you to stay.” He took her keys out of her pocket and ran outside and made sure her place was locked down for the night. He watched as this man made his way freely about Rebekah’s place as if he lived there. When he returned, he found her sitting at the edge of the bed. Before he made his way back to her, he managed to turn out the trail of lights around his place.

“Come on – come lay down with me.” Rebekah looked at him with the sultry eyes again but knew it best not to go in that direction. She took his hand and stood. He looked in her eyes and brushed his thumb across her lips. Then led her around to the other side of the bed and helped her lay down.

Jake removed his shoes and socks and climbed in next to her. Lying on his back, he pulled her close into his arms and nuzzled her head on his shoulder. Rebekah, out of

instinct, wrapped her arm around his waist and shut her eyes. Jake caressed her arm and kissed the top of her head and before too long, they were both sound asleep.

*He watched through a crack in the curtains at them laying there. 'Who did he think he was trying to take advantage of her?'* Watching them like that made his blood boil. He wanted to break through the glass and end them – at least him.

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Rebekah lay sleeping soundly as the sun rose. It wasn't until she mumbled Jake's name, and heard a muffled response beside her that she remembered where she was. Her eyes sprung open to see Jake laying sound asleep next to her, with his arm still draped securely over her. It was comforting at best, but soon she began to recount the night before. She squeezed her eyes shut again, praying she was dreaming. Nope. No such luck.

As she rolled over to get up, the arm that lay across her stomach tightened its grip and pulled her closer. Rebekah lay still for a moment until he released his hold and rolled over. He looked so good and peaceful laying there sleeping. At some point throughout the night, he had managed to remove his shirt and jeans and don a more comfortable pair of pajama pants to sleep in.

Rebekah managed to sit up at the edge of the bed. She was about to stand up but had to grab her head to keep it from blowing off her shoulders. *Note to self – make sure you eat before you consume so much wine.* Slowly she took a deep breath and steadied herself before attempting to get up again. She made it. *Good, now run, girl, run!* Slowly she made it to the other side of the bed and retrieved her shoes; but not before she looked up to see a pair of liquid gray eyes staring back at her.

"Mmmm...morning. Where are you going so early, sweetie?"

"Um – I need to go. I have a lot to do today at the office." She looked at Jake as she hugged her shoes.

Leaning up on one arm, Jake looked at her, not sure what to make of her confession.

"You sure that's all, baby girl?"

"S-s-sure, that's all." She lied. She couldn't tell him she was embarrassed by her actions the night before – but Jake knew. He sat up at the edge of the bed and motioned for her to come closer. Every baby step she took, he encouraged her to move closer until she was standing between his legs looking down at him.

Jake wrapped his arms around her and squeezed a little before releasing her.

“I have no regrets about what I said last night, Rebekah. I meant it. I wanted you last night – hell, I still want you now.” He looked down at his morning wood and back up at her. She couldn’t help but to smile. Taking the shoes from her hands and kissing her palms, he continued.

“So, don’t wonder, don’t feel bad or anything about last night. Believe me; if I were some douche bag out for a quick lay – I – might have taken advantage of your delicate nature. Oh – that reminds me,”

She looked at him a little puzzled as he continued, all the while, rubbing up and down on her arms, “next time, give a guy notice about not eating before I ply you with liquor!”

Rebekah thought for sure she had turned three shades of red before Jake started laughing. She agreed and responded, “I promise. I should really get going though.”

Jake stood. His muscular 6 feet 2-inch frame towered over her and she wanted to melt. He wrapped his arms around her, holding her close. Kissing the top of her head he whispered, “You are an extraordinary woman, Rebekah.”

“Bekah.” She said into his chest.

Jake stood back a little and replied, “What?”

“Call me Bekah – or Beckie, if you like.”

Jake returned the smile as he responded, “I’m kind of hooked on Rebekah, if that’s okay with you?”

“Sure, whatever you like.”

“Really? So-” He wrapped his arms around her again and continued, “Whatever I like – baby, sweetie, baby girl?”

“Those are good, too.” She responded with a slight chuckle. He was calling her pet names you would give a girlfriend or lover. She wasn’t quite sure how to digest it but she didn’t care. She looked into his eyes again. Before she could say anything else, Jake leaned down and kissed her.

“Morning, beautiful.”

“Morning.”

Jake kissed her again before reaching on the nightstand for her keys. Taking her by the hand, he walked her to the front door.

“So – are we still on for tomorrow night?”

“Sure – maybe you can come over later and watch a movie or something.”

“Or something.” He said as he grabbed her from behind before she could descend out the door. She couldn’t help but laugh out loud as he did so, causing a couple of the neighbors outside to stop in their respective tracks and gawk at the two of them.

Rebekah had to straighten herself up as the onlookers stood there, staring. With a profound smirk on her face she started to walk away, but not before Jake grabbed her again, turned her around and kissed her so passionately that she dropped the shoes she was carrying.

Once he left his mark on her for the entire world – or at least the neighbors, to see, he bent down, picked up her shoes and handed them to her. Then, for good measure, smacked her on her ass as she walked away, causing her and the onlookers to jump.

She looked back at him, and continued on her way, smiling, and slinging her shoes over her shoulder.

The two nosy bodies couldn’t help but watch him, watch her walk back to her place. For good measure, he made it a point to straighten his manhood in view of them before closing the door. *Jake -1, Neighbors – 0.*

When Rebekah got back to her home, she looked at her cell phone she left on the counter – six missed calls; one from Charlene and the rest from Markus. She noticed that she also had about as many text messages from him, if not more.

She sighed and set the phone back on the counter. She had just enough time to down a couple of pain killers for her headache, shower, dress, and race out of the door. She was thankful that it was Friday. With last night still reeling in her head, she could barely think. Jake wanted her and she wanted him – her only dilemma was trying to figure out if it was just sexual or something much more? She needed to know, she needed to find out, and soon.

The day kind of lagged on, for lack of a better word and Rebekah continued to endure the pain of her slight inebriation the night before. Her eyes burned and her head pounded. She was happy that it wasn’t as intense as it was that morning, but just the same, she did everything she could to will it away or use some homemade concoction of Sheila’s – which caused her to lose her lunch and anything else she had left in her stomach.

During the day she made her regular calls for produce and such that was needed. She even managed to complete the contract for Jake to sign, in the hopes that he was

still interested in being a client. She only just realized how awkward it might be if they became lovers or something like that and must do business together.

“Bekah, darling, what’s wrong?” Gail entered Rebekah’s office as she sat there, hitting her head against the back of her chair – an appropriate form of punishment, she thought.

“Oh – nothing. I just landed Mr. Turner as a client – *if he still wants to be.*” That last part she muttered to herself.

Smiling, Gail sat down and innocently asked, “What was that dear? With that head banging I couldn’t quite make out what you said. Did you say you that you acquired Mr. Turner as a client?” Rebekah looked at her and stopped. Straightening herself upright she continued, “Yes – but there may be complications.”

“Complications - whatever do you mean?”

Girl you better spill the beans and get it over with! “Jake Turner hired us to cater his gallery opening in a few weeks. But-”

“What do you mean, ‘But?’ Oh, you know I don’t like buts dear child. I am sure whatever the dilemma is, YOU WILL handle it. I have complete faith in you. Err-did you give him the contract to sign yet?” That question was more of an inquiry, seeing as neither Rebekah nor Jake knew of one another’s connection to Gail.

“No – I was actually going to give it to him Saturday night.” She swallowed hard and finished. “I invited him to dinner.”

“Oh – well – that is a dilemma.”

“No – a – that’s not the problem – well, that’s part of the problem but-”

“There’s that *but* again!”

“I think last night we may have taken things to a whole other level.”

Gail looked at her in hidden fascination. As nonchalant as she could be, she asked, “What on earth happened last night?”

She could see the red rise in Rebekah’s cheeks as she tried to explain to Gail what had transpired the night before. To Rebekah’s embarrassment, Gail didn’t look shocked at all.

“So – the two of you – didn’t -?”

“NO! Err – not that we didn’t want to though. I hope it isn’t just physical attraction.”

“I’m positive he’s not like that at all my dear.” Gail caught herself before giving herself away, “What I mean is, I am sure he likes you more than that.”

“Yeah, well, we will see come Saturday. I just hope it doesn’t become a problem with doing business together.”

Gail: So, do I my dear, so do I.

“You look weary child. Why don’t you go home and get some rest? There’s nothing else pressing to keep you here, and everything else can wait until Monday, I’m sure.”

Rebekah looked at the clock – 2:30.

“Okay – if you’re sure it’s alright.”

“Of course, it is child. Besides, you look like you could use a little shut eye anyway.” Gail got up and walked over to Rebekah and kissed her on her head, “who knows, *Mr. Wonderful* could be waiting for you right this minute.”

Rebekah snapped her head up to meet Gail’s smile. Without argument, she jumped out of her seat, gathered her things and was out the door before Gail could say goodbye.

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Rebekah took her time walking to her front door. She lingered, thinking about the night before, wondering if Jake was thinking about it too. As she rounded the corner of the building, she spied a few of her neighbors huddled in a circle, peaking back at her every so often. They would stop and wave and go back to their gossiping – about that morning’s display by her and Jake.

She chuckled a little, admitting that it was a rather heated display by the two of them, but that was okay. She figured some of those nosy neighbors needed something to talk about other than Mrs. Harrison and her twenty million cats.

Jake didn’t appear to be home; which in some cases was a relief and disappointment. She would have enjoyed seeing him but would have also been embarrassed by the previous night’s events. While he had insisted that he had no regrets about their heavy petting, she herself had wished it had gone farther.

She couldn’t wait to get inside and drop everything and just lie down on her couch and take a nice long nap. As Rebekah walked through her door, she managed to slip off her shoes and felt something under her foot. She looked down and found a note someone had slipped under the door. She picked it up and set it on the table next to the

door as she walked in. Once setting her purse and other items in her hands down, she walked back over to see who had left the note. She was surprised at who it was:

Baby Girl - Rain check on the movie tonight, ok? I must fly to San Francisco unexpectedly. You know how business goes. If I am not back tonight, I promise to be back before dinner tomorrow. Can't wait to taste your cooking. Can't wait to taste you again.

Jake

Rebekah couldn't help but to grin from ear to ear. Jake still wanted to see her – and taste her. Maybe this was the answer she was looking for. She was tired all day and just wanted to kick off her shoes and relax; but after reading Jake's note, she was wide awake and full of energy. She was doomed. She told herself if she didn't get at least a couple hours in she would be regretting it tomorrow.

Rebekah headed upstairs to her room and began changing her clothes when she heard a knock on her door. Looking out of her bedroom window, she couldn't quite make out who it was with the cherry blossom tree blocking her view. *Note to self – tell HOA to trim that tree!*

She knew it couldn't be Jake back from San Francisco already. However, she wasn't taking any chances. She donned her royal blue sundress and matching chiffon coverlet. Calling out her window, "I'll be right there!" she headed downstairs to open the door.

"Now I know you can't po-"

"Hello Beckie."

"Markus, what are you doing here?"

Markus just stood there and stared for a moment before responding, "May I come in?"

She stepped back a little to allow him entry. Standing by the door, Markus seemed upset.

"Is something wrong, Markus?"

He just stared her up and down, as if inspecting her then in an instant snapped back to reality.

"I'm fine. Sorry, I was deep in thought. I just wanted to stop by for a moment and apologize again for the way I acted the other night. I wasn't acting appropriately."

"No harm no foul, right?" She was a little hesitant in her response but didn't let it show.

"Good. I would like to make it up to you and take you to lunch tomorrow if you are not busy." He continued to stand and stare at her, waiting for her response.

Rebekah was having a hard time reading him. Something was off, but she wasn't quite sure what it was.

"Well I have plans later in the day, but I guess it wouldn't hurt going to lunch. Thank you by the way, for the flowers. It was very sweet of you."

"Mmm – yes. Okay then. I will pick you up around 1 o'clock tomorrow, okay?"

"S-sure. That's fi- are you sure everything is alright?"

Markus looked at her for a moment then blindly reached out to touch her but pulled himself back just as quickly and responded, "See you tomorrow, Beckie." As he turned, he had a strange look on his face that somewhat concerned Rebekah, but before she could say anything further, he walked out of her door.

After Markus left, she couldn't help but feel a bit concerned. He had never acted that way around her. It was a bit strange – and unnerving. She let it drift to the back of her mind, locked her door, and went back upstairs. She ran a hot bath and stripped off her clothing. She longed for a bubble bath to relax her aching body. However, her phone ringing interrupted that.

"Hello?"

"Hello baby girl."

A smile came across Rebekah's face. "Jake – how are you?"

"I would be a lot better if I were there. Unfortunately, I can foresee this little project at the gallery up here turning into an all-nighter. So – I guess the movie is going to have to wait, ok?"

"Ok that's fine. I understand how business is."

"I knew you would. Listen – I've been thinking about last night, and – well, I do have only one regret."

*Uh oh – here we go.* Rebekah cleared her throat before responding. "Oh? What would that be?"

“That I didn’t get the chance to make love to you last night like I really wanted. I’m hoping that will change when I return. I must say though, you definitely went from kitten to lion rather quickly!” Rebekah laughed and was relieved that it wasn’t anything damning.

*Whew – had us a little scared there for a minute!* “Yes – it must have been the wine...or the company.”

“Mmmm- I am glad to have an affect on you.” Jake’s mind started to wander and he could feel his crotch tightening. Clearing his voice, he changed the subject.

“So – listen – I’m going to get going here, but I promise to be back before dinner tomorrow.”

“So, we’re still on?”

“Yes – why wouldn’t we be?”

Smiling over the phone she replied, “Oh – no reason. So, I’ll see you tomorrow night then?”

“Most definitely baby girl. Bye now.”

“Mmmm- Bye.”

She was happy that Jake called and was looking forward to tomorrow night. Once she finished her hour-long soak in the tub, Rebekah threw on her most comfortable pair of clothes that she wears around her house. It was nearing 5 o’clock and she was relaxed and settled on the couch. Her headache had finally gone and she was able to go over her books work as well as check her emails for any upcoming legal work she needed to do.

Nine o’clock came quickly and she was feeling incredibly spent after her long day. Markus showing up threw her for a loop, but she didn’t let it bother her too much. Rebekah grabbed her glass of water, locked her doors, and shut off the lights downstairs before setting her alarms and heading up for the night.

When the lights went out, she had this eerie feeling that eyes were upon her. She peaked out of her living room window and only saw a couple of people across street walking into their home. Thinking no more about it, she returned the blinds and curtain to their usual position and went upstairs.

Once up stairs, she was out of view – out of *his* view, and he walked away.

## Chapter 15 – I See You

It was after 9:00 a.m. before Rebekah woke. She had a hard time sleeping the night before. She wasn't sure if it was because her alarm kept acting up by beeping at two o'clock in the morning; the anticipation of her pseudo dinner date with Jake, which she couldn't wait to happen; or because Markus has just shown up at her door without notice. She should have been used to him doing that. However, yesterday's visit was different. It made her feel downright uncomfortable.

She started off her usual routine – daily bathroom duties of showering and such, before heading downstairs to get started on her actual daily errands and such. As she walked out of the shower, she couldn't shake the feeling that someone had been watching her. With the towel wrapped around her, she slowly made her way out of the master bathroom. Her feet still wet from her shower, she tips toed her way out of her room and peaked around the corner and down the hallway towards the stairs.

"Hello?" She called out. No answer. *Girl – you know there is no one in here. You're just nervous.* Rebekah shook her head to rid herself of that feeling and went on about her morning, unaware of the shadowy figure that darted down the stairs and out her back door before she or any of her neighbors noticed.

Rebekah enjoyed trying out different recipes. She grabbed her monstrous sized recipe book and sat at her kitchen table going over what to fix her and Jake for dinner that night. She wanted to make sure he enjoyed the meal, and the company. She decided to cook prime rib and new baby potatoes with vegetables. For dessert, she decided to make something on the light side – fresh berry mini pies. Thinking about it was making her hungry when she realized that she still had to get through with her lunch date with Markus. He was a nice guy, but there had been something off about him. She just couldn't put her finger on it.

*Beep Beep* went her phone. A text message. Praying that it wasn't Jake canceling dinner, she picked up her phone and was somewhat relieved to see it wasn't Jake at all, but Charlene.

Charlene: *Sending you a package next week. Hope you like it! Get your freak on!*

Rebekah had to laugh and be scared at the same time. She had no idea what Charlene was sending her, but if she knew best friend as well as she claims she does, she wouldn't put anything past her.

Rebekah: *What is it and should I be worried?*

Charlene: *LOL that's up to you, girl! TTYL*

*Oh - good luck tonight!*

Rebekah left it up to chance that Charlene wouldn't send her something that would totally embarrass her or make her blush in any way.

Instead of making herself her regular breakfast of whole wheat toast, an egg white and spinach omelet and grits, Rebekah chose to forego the omelet and just have a small bowl of grits and toast so that she isn't too full when she meets Markus in a few hours.

*The Big Date!* That's what she had written on the calendar in her planner, as well as the calendar on her refrigerator; not to mention the one on her Smartphone. She didn't want to forget the date. Tonight, she was going to find out just what the attraction was between the two of them, and why.

Sitting at the table finishing her breakfast, she was able to thumb through some papers she had printed off from her email so that she could get them out of the way before she left. One document was taking longer than she had anticipated. She looked at her watch and noticed a whole hour or more had gone by. She had less than an hour and a half to get ready for her lunch date, and she still needed to run to the store to pick up a few things for dinner that evening.

She headed upstairs to grab her purse when she glanced at the back door and saw a shadowy figure move just out of view. She had to take another look but didn't see anything else, so she chalked it up to it being her nerves again – like her alarm and continued upstairs.

Grabbing her purse, she was startled by her phone ringing:

"Hello?"

"Rebekah, hi it's Jake. Can you hear me alright?" Jake was at the San Francisco airport waiting on his flight. It had been delayed a couple of hours so he thought it would be a good idea to give her a call.

"Jake, how are you? Is everything ok?" Rebekah's voice was a little shaky which caused Jake to be concerned.

"I'm fine, are you ok? You sound upset or something."

Walking down the hall, she took a deep breath and replied, "No, I'm fine. I was deep in thought and the phone startled me is all."

“Oh – okay. Hmmmm – what were you thinking about – me?”

“As a matter of fact, I was. I was wondering if you were going to have to give me another rain check.” She stopped midway down the flight of stairs and sat down.

“Not a chance, baby girl. I’m pretty sure you would skin me alive if I did it twice in a row.” Laughing, Jake continued, “My flight’s been delayed a couple of hours, so I won’t get home until 5:30. I just wanted to call and let you know that I was definitely on my way back to you.”

*To you* – now that was something she liked to hear.

“Well I will be back at home in plenty of time.”

“Back home? Don’t tell me you went out of town, too?”

Chuckling a little, Rebekah replied, “No, nothing like that. I’m having lunch with a friend of mine. *He* dropped by yesterday unexpectedly.”

There was a slight pause on the other end.

“Well, should I be concerned about this date of yours?” Jake tried to sound serious but it wasn’t working.

“Not at all. He’s just a friend. I think he is trying to make up for being an ass the other night when he took me out.

“Oh? So, I should be concerned about your well being then. He didn’t harm you or anything, did he?” Jake sounded territorial and found himself wishing he hadn’t.

“N-no, he’s relatively harmless.” *Liar*. She didn’t want him to get all worked up over what she thought was nothing; an issue over and done with.

“That’s doesn’t sound very convincing, baby girl. Listen, I know I may be overstepping my bounds here, but if you aren’t feeling comfortable around him then you shouldn’t go. I personally would prefer that you not go. I’m selfish and want you all to myself, but it’s not my place to say otherwise. If it means anything, I do care about you, and don’t want you feeling the least bit uncomfortable in any situation, okay?”

Rebekah sighed over the phone as she felt the warmth of Jake’s concern. He cared about her well being – he cared about her. “Thank you, Jake. I think I’ll be fine. Besides, if things get out of hand, I can always pepper spray him or something.” They both laughed before Jake intervened. “Well that’s a plus then. Well – what do you know, they called my flight early. Maybe I will make it back a little earlier after all.”

“Well, I look forward to seeing you.”

“Same here, baby girl. And Rebekah-” He paused a moment before expressing himself further. He hadn’t realized he had grown to care for her as much as he had, and so quickly.

“Yes, Jake?”

“Please be careful today - for me?”

Rebekah’s heart leapt as she heard the care and concern in Jake’s voice. She swallowed hard and responded, “Okay, I promise.”

“See you in a few hours, okay?”

“Okay – have a safe flight.”

“Mmmm – thanks baby girl. Bye now.”

“Bye.”

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Rebekah came back from the store in enough time to put the groceries away and throw on the outfit she set out before leaving: a denim pleated skirt that stopped just above her knees, and the floral sky blue chiffon top with a white tank top under it. She tossed her necessary essentials into a denim clutch and slid her feet into a pair of denim and floral wedges. Rarely wearing makeup, she only put on mascara, a little blush and lip gloss. She was ready to go in record time with about ten minutes to spare.

Before heading downstairs, Rebekah went into the bathroom and brushed her hair back into a simple, but elegant ponytail. It was a beautiful day out and she didn’t want the growing heat to cause her to perspire.

It wasn’t until she walked out of the bathroom that she noticed something out of place. Her closet door set ajar, as if something was blocking it. Walking over to adjust what she thought might have been a shoe or hanger in the way, she was a little startled at what she found. She found a red dress she had worn out with friends one night, hanging on the edge of another hanger. She didn’t recall setting it there, and nor would she have worn such a dress for a simple lunch date.

Rebekah’s mind raced while she tried to think back to see if she had set it out. Unable to come to a conclusion, she put the dress back in place in the closet and closed the door. She jumped and let out a slight yelp when her phone rang.

“H-hello.”

“Beckie – Markus. I – I should be there shortly. Just disposing of some old items.” His tone was cold and distant, but Rebekah chose not to say anything about it.

“Oh – ok. Call when you get here and I will walk out.”

Markus paused for a moment before responding, “No, need. I will come in and get you.” With that he hung up the call. No goodbye, nothing.

“Ok – I guess that’s ok.” Rebekah said to no one on the other end and shoved her purse into her clutch.

Five minutes later, Markus was knocking on her door. *Wow, didn't take him long did it?*

Rebekah opened the door to what she thought would be someone in a bad mood, but it turned out to be just the opposite.

Markus, dressed in a pair of pressed jeans, loafers and a polo shirt looked better than he did in a suit. He reached out and took her hands in his and twirled her around. “Beckie, Beckie, Beckie. My goodness you look delicious.”

“Thank you, Markus.” The way he eyed her was unnerving. Trying to be nonchalant about it, she pulled her hands from his vice grip, hugged herself around her waist with one hand and coyly played with her necklace in the other – to hide her “essentials”.

“I’m ready to go if you are.” She said as Markus continued to inspect her every asset. She liked Markus – as a friend and wanted to keep it that way. He had blown things for them to go beyond that.

“Yes. Yes – let’s go, shall we?” His observance of her was all too obvious in her opinion. “After you, my dear.”

Rebekah walked out of her home allowing Markus to close the door behind them. As she reached to lock her door, Markus took the keys out of her hand and responded rather authoritatively, “I’ll get that young lady.” Locking her door, Markus started to walk away.

“Um – aren’t you forgetting something?”

Markus stood for a second and responded, “Mmm, no, why?”

“My keys?” Markus looked at her, then at her keys. It seemed like forever but didn’t move. She stood waiting until he handed her back her keys. “Sorry, I forgot.” *Yeah right. You just shady!*

“Now that that’s out of the way, let’s get going.” He continued as he put his hand at the small of her back in a possessive fashion. Rebekah couldn’t help but to move a little faster to prevent contact as they walked to his car.

Angelo's turned out to be a nice place to have a quiet, yet simple, patio lunch. The food was excellent. She thought she had made the right choice ordering Broccoli and Fettuccini Alfredo and Spinach salad. It was to die for. Unfortunately, her appetite had been diminished by her company's rather distracted train of thought. He looked a little too ominous for her liking.

"Thank you for lunch, Markus. It was very sweet of you to invite me."

"My pleasure sweet thang. I just wanted to make up for – being a jerk the other night." Markus eyed her up and down, stopping at her breasts and her lips every so often. She noticed he had to adjust himself in his seat afterward. *Lovely – just lovely.*

"So – Markus-" she said loud enough to get his attention away from her body and onto her face.

"You seemed a little upset yesterday. Is everything alright now?" She waited for his reply. Shaking himself back into reality he finally responded, "Yes, yes – everything is fine –just fine now." Markus looked at her then quickly looked away, but not before grabbing his beer and finishing off the bottle.

"Well, that's good. I hope it wasn't anything too serious that had - or has you distracted?"

Markus just looked at Rebekah. Unsure of what he would say, or do, Rebekah continued, "I mean, you seemed a little out of sorts yesterday. I just hope you were able to resolve anything that was causing your dilemma." She picked up her coffee and took a sip, waiting for his response.

What seemed like an eternity, he finally replied, "Well, Beckie, if you must know, I – uh – I've been at a crossroads lately. I have encountered some things that have been a little jarring – alarming to my personal stance. But – I think I have found the solution to rectify it." He looked at her over the top of his water glass as thoughts spun in his head.

"So – Rebekah, would you like to go to dinner later this week; perhaps this evening?"

"Oh, thank you Markus but I have plans this evening. In fact, we should get going because I have a lot to do before hand. I didn't realize it was after three o'clock already."

"Hmm – ok. Let's make plans for dinner this week. I know a great place that we can try."

Rebekah was reluctant to make any plans now. She wanted to see where things were heading with Jake. "I'll let you know, ok?"

Markus looked at her and sucked air between his teeth before answering, "Sure thing baby girl, sure thing." *Baby girl? Oh no he didn't just call you Jake's pet name!*

Rebekah looked puzzled as Markus filled his glass with more water, repeating 'baby girl' a few more times in between sips.

"I'm sorry, what was that you said?"

"Hmm? Oh nothing, just something I heard – watching a movie; sticks in your head if you hear it enough." He continued to polish off his second glass of water while Rebekah just stared at him.

Rebekah wasn't going to argue with him. After all, it was a common saying – she thought. She brushed off her clothes and grabbed her clutch as Markus paid the bill.

The ride back to her place was quiet. Eerily quiet. Markus pulled up to her gated community and stopped the car. He got out and walked around to open her door. "So – I'll give you a call this week and we'll go out."

"I'll give you a call on Wednesday and let you know how my week has been. We are getting ready for a few parties coming up and things are starting to get a little hectic."

"Okay. I will call you if I don't hear from you then."

"Um – fair enough. Thank you again for lunch. Good to see you."

She touched his arms and started to walk away. As she was passing him, he grabbed her arm, causing her to stop in her tracks and put her guard up.

Gazing at her, he released her arm and simply said, "I'll see you." Then walked back to the driver's side; he got in and was about to drive away but stopped to watch Rebekah disappear through the gate. Even his cell phone ringing didn't distract him from watching her.

It was at least an hour after Rebekah went into the community that a limousine was spotted pulling up directly behind a Chrysler 300, causing the driver to glare out of his rear view and side view mirrors. The driver of the limo got out of the car and opened the rear door for his occupant. Jake stepped out with his brief case in one hand and his cell phone and flowers in another, while the driver reached in and grabbed his duffle bag about to carry it for Jake until he let him know it wasn't necessary.

"Will there be anything else, Mr. Turner?"

"No, Michael, thank you. You can head back to grandmothers and tell her I will call her later."

"Very good, sir."

The driver of the Chrysler was throwing daggers at Jake through the rear-view mirror. He watched as Jake walked up the walkway to head through the gate. Jake had glanced over at the gentleman once, but the man turned his head and sped off before Jake could get a good look at him.

Jake thought nothing else of it and continued to walk to his place. He stopped for a moment as he was nearing Rebekah's door; tempted to knock it but decided he would wait until that evening when he saw her.

However, as he approached her home, he noticed her door standing wide open, and her things strewn on the floor. Dropping his duffle bag and briefcase at the door, he walked half way in, placed the half dozen red and yellow roses on the table next to the door, and called her name but she didn't answer. His growing concern for her made his heart race erratically as he called her name again only more demanding.

"Rebekah!" He only heard his own voice echoing off the walls. About to go into full stealth mode and race upstairs, he was startled by a voice coming from behind him, "Jake?" He turned to see Rebekah standing at the door with a rather large box in her hands.

"Jesus, woman; you scared me! You didn't answer me when I called the first time. Are you alright?" Jake took the box from her and stood aside as she walked in.

Rebekah picked up her purse that must have fallen off the table by the door and answered, "I'm fine. Henry, the mail carrier, asked if I could sign for this box for you was all." Relieved that it was not earth shattering, Jake set the box on the floor next to him and walked over to Rebekah and gave her a hug. She could feel his once tense body relax in her arms.

He pulled away just enough to kiss the tip of her nose and whisper, "Hello baby girl."

"Hi." Was all she could say as she stood there smiling.

Jake just stood there and stared at her for a moment, memorizing her features. He took a step back and looked at the outfit she was wearing.

"Wow, don't you look gorgeous. Was this for me?" He teased.

"Uh – not exactly – remember I told you about the lunch date I had today? Well, I got back about a little while ago and-"

"Was that the guy I saw outside in his 300?"

Rebekah looked puzzled. "Markus is still here?" She walked around Jake to head outside the gate until she heard Jake's reply.

He felt of twinge of jealousy as he continued, "Markus, huh - no. He drove off after I got here. It was a little strange though."

"Strange - how so?"

"It was like he was staring right at me; sizing me up or something. It was just weird. When I looked back at him, he bolted."

Markus didn't know Jake and vice versa.

"Hmm – well maybe it wasn't him."

Jake looked her up and down with a smirk, *you little vixen. You're trying to make me jealous*, he thought.

"So – Markus, huh?" He smiled a little as he looked at her.

"No – don't even think of it like that, please. He's someone I met through a friend and we went on a couple of, shall I say, interesting dates and, – you know what, HE doesn't even register."

Jake smiled and picked up his duffle bag at the door before grabbing Rebekah's hand.

"I'm sure you're right. Listen, I'm going to get cleaned up and relax for a bit before I see you tonight. We still on?"

"Definitely."

"Mmmm – that's what I like to hear baby girl." Jake leaned over and kissed her.

"Mmmm – you taste so good." Jake had to stop himself before going any further there outside of Rebekah's door, in front of their curious onlookers – in front of *him*.

"How about I come by a little early, that way you can show me a few pointers on – um – cooking?" Jake brushed a few strands of hair from her face and ran a finger across her cheek then lips.

"I could do that."

"Good." Unable to resist temptation any further, Jake dropped his suit bag back on the sidewalk and wrapped his arms around Rebekah. His mouth covered hers with predatory pursuit. He pressed her into himself as she wrapped her arms around his neck. The few neighbors that were outside stood and watched in shock, and fascination.

Losing some control, his hands began to wander up and down her sides, all the way down to her ass. He squeezed it a little but had to stop before it went beyond the boundaries of innocent displays of affection.

He watched in silence from a distance as this man molested Rebekah – in front of everyone. He ground his teeth so hard he hadn't realized he had bitten part of his tongue to the point it was filling his mouth with the taste of blood. His anger grew as he continued to watch them. *What the hell does he think he's doing – slobbering all over her like that? That son of a bitch is disrespecting her – he is about to get dealt with in more ways than one. Bastard better watch his back before I put a knife in it. That bitch is mine – do you hear me! She's mine!*

Jake kissed her one last time before picking up his bag and briefcase and going home.

"Oh-" Noticing the flowers he brought sitting by the door. He handed them to her and continued, "These are for you."

She couldn't help but admire the flowers. Their scent was heavenly. "These are for me? They're beautiful!"

"No one more deserving of these flowers than you, pretty lady."

Stealing one last kiss, he once again headed towards his place.

"Hey!" She said, cradling the bouquet in her arms like a newborn baby.

He turned and smiled at her before answering, "Yeah?"

"You forgot your box."

"Keep it there. It's for you anyway. We can open it later." With that he smiled and turned away – but not before seeing what he thought was a shadowy figure duck behind some bushes outside of the gate.

Convinced he was seeing things, Jake turned and walked to his door and went inside.

He watched Jake entered his home from the furthest corner of the gate, hidden from view behind the bushes. Jake was going to be his undoing if he didn't watch himself. He balled his hands into fists and pounded them against the concrete wall like he was pounding in someone's face. Unbeknownst to residents, blood from his inner tantrum trickled down the outer residential wall. Turning to walk away, he could feel the fury within him building as the scrapes on his knuckles didn't even register pain that silently pulsated from his hands.

Walking away, he began mutter to himself, "*You have no idea who you are fucking with.*"

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Jake managed to clean out his bag and grab a beer before tackling the load of emails he needed to respond to. His trip to San Francisco had been an eventful one. One of his aspiring artists had finished a handful of paintings he wanted to send to Los Angeles for the premier. Jake wanted to inspect each piece before the premier of his new gallery opening. He had set up a few of his San Francisco artists as well as local Los Angeles and Orange County artists to show some of their work at the premier to help jumpstart their careers as well as the gallery.

Each art exhibit had its own flare. They transcended the beauty of the artists work and personality at every premier. There were various sections of the gallery which housed various types of art. They ranged from sculptures and clothing, to paintings, art deco and graphic art. Jake had an additional small gallery in San Francisco that depicted art made from transportation – starting with tricycles all the way up to buses. That particular gallery had sold quite a bit since its opening five years earlier.

Jake had been very proud of his accomplishments in opening his own galleries. His father, Everett, had helped design the buildings as well as donating a few of his own pieces. Most of the emails received were acknowledgements and RSVP's to the gallery opening; others were letters from students and/or potential students looking to include one or two of their finished pieces at the grand opening. It was Jake's responsibility to either accept or turn away various artworks. Tonight, was not the night he wanted to sit and review some two hundred emails requesting entry. He had bigger plans – and those plans included Rebekah.

He wasn't sure why, but he had been instantly drawn to her the moment he saw her. Her milk chocolate skin and deep dark eyes did something to him that even his then present girlfriend couldn't do. Ever since he and Eliza split, Jake had been silently pursuing Rebekah. He remembers when he had been invited into conversation with some neighbors while she was there and asked her out for coffee, only to be politely turned down. He didn't take it completely to heart. Seeing how shy she was, he was going to push the envelope until he was ready. He saw her as a challenge and wanted to jump in with eyes wide open.

She was constantly on his mind. She invaded his thoughts like a virus – and that was in a good way. He couldn't shake the feelings he was having over a woman who barely spoke two words to him. She even managed to take over his creative flow. Having his back patio re-constructed into a mini studio, he would sit in silence and draw, paint or sculpt whatever came to mind. Lately, the only thing that had come to mind was Rebekah. Like his father and his father before him, the women they had been destined to be with for the rest of their lives, had been the one person that was a constant on their mind and in their heart. Was history repeating itself? Had he found the one person to he was destined to be with? Only time would tell.

## Chapter 16 – A Night to Remember

Rebekah looked at the clock on the wall in her kitchen – 4:45 p.m. By the looks of the clear sky, it was going to be a beautiful evening all around. All the ingredients she needed for dinner were prepared. The only thing she needed to do was put them all together and start cooking. The prime rib she had picked up earlier, had been marinating for about two hours. She had massaged it with an herb and oil marinade and let it set, before exposing it to her fresh cilantro, salt, pepper, and other ground seasoned dry rub for an hour. She had preheated her rotisserie oven, one of her perks she added when she moved in, before running up to shower so it would be ready when she came back down to place it in the oven.

By 5:05 she was out of her shower and getting dressed. She went downstairs and check the roast she placed in the oven before her shower, allowing the meat enough time to cook and be piping hot when Jake arrives. By 6:15 she was ready to add the light seasoning to her new baby potatoes and let them set for a while before sticking them in the oven to roast. The asparagus would be the last item to cook. She had already prepared her mini berry fruit pies, which were now cooling on the rack, anxiously awaiting her light cream topping before putting them in the refrigerator to cool and solidify the topping.

6:45 – the roast was golden brown and the new baby potatoes had cooked to near perfection. She put the asparagus on to cook for a short time – she didn't want them too soft and limp, nor did she want them too stiff and crunchy. Checking to make sure she had everything together – potatoes, salad, roast, dessert chilling in the fridge next to the wine and vegetables steaming on the stove – yes, she was ready. She had even managed to get dressed and do her hair while preparing dinner.

It wasn't long after she set the table that she heard a knock on her door. *Don't be nervous! Don't be nervous!* She was like a school girl once again.

She opened the door and she stopped and watched as he stood there smiling at her. Jake carried a bottle of wine in one hand, and an envelope of papers in the other.

"Hi. I hope I am not too early?"

"No not at all. In fact, you're right on time; please, come in."

"I know I said I was going to come by a little early but I had a few calls to return."



“Don’t even worry about it.”

Before Jake walked in, he glanced down the walkway towards the entry gate. Although he didn’t see anything, he could have sworn he had seen a man – or someone, walk from her front door and quickly out the front gate when they saw Jake headed in their direction. It had started to get a little cloudy, and the sun hadn’t gone completely down yet, but he couldn’t make out who it may have been.

“Something wrong, Jake?”

Turning his head to look back at her, he smiled and gave a reassuring wink, “No, nothing’s wrong. I thought I – no, nothing’s wrong at all.”

Jake took a whiff of the air and let his head fall back as he closed his eyes.

*Mission accomplished – at least he likes the smell!* “Dinner is almost ready.”

Jake walked in and was taken aback by the insatiable aroma of home cooking. Just the perfumes of the meal alone made his mouth water. The sight of her was making his pants swell. She was the only thing that distracted him from the tantalizing smell of her home cooking.

Rebekah looked beautiful tonight; from the top of her head where she had tresses of curls, intricately falling from the bun in her hair all the way down to her polished toe nails peaking out of the bottom of her dress. She didn’t out do herself in some expensive frock, but rather a simple, but elegant, semi-form fitting sun dress that went all the way down to the floor and clung well to her curves.

It was royal blue in color with a mesh of tiny white, green, and purple flowers. They weren’t scattered over the dress; instead they were in mini bouquets deliberately placed in certain areas – one bouquet was placed on her right breast, one on her left hip, while the bottom three inches of the dress was laced with a trail of tiny white baby’s breath flowers all around. A slit stopped just a couple of inches above her knee, giving it a touch of class and sexuality. The top of her dress tied around her neck, allowing her breasts to lay somewhat freely inside the material while she completed the outfit with a pearl white knitted mesh sweater.

Jake thought she was breath taking. As she closed the door, she noticed he couldn’t stop looking at her. His steel gray eyes looked her up and down as a smile grew across his face. She couldn’t help but to smile back.

“I – uh – I brought some wine.” He went to hand her the wine, but the hand that held the documents went up instead.

“Um – I don’t think we can drink this.” She said as she looked at him as he just stared. Jake looked down at the bottle still in his other hand. Realizing what he had

done, she could see the rose color filling his cheeks as he pulled the documents back and handed her the bottle – making sure a second time that his intended actions were correct.

“Oh my - Château de St.-Cosme 2010 from Rhône Valley, France – you shouldn’t have.” She went to kiss his cheek in appreciation, but he turned and their lips met sending fireworks off between them. Jake wrapped his free arm around her waist, holding her there to savor their kiss. Rebekah felt her knees go weak and held on to the expensive bottle of wine, for fear of buckling and losing her grip.

Jake’s tongue commanded her lips to part, allowing him to taste her fully. A soft moan escaped his lips and he pressed her tight against him, devouring her mouth with his own. He dropped the envelope and cradled her face. She tasted of nectar and he was smitten. It took every ounce of self-restraint he could muster to pull himself away from her.

Not letting go of her, he placed his forehead to hers and spoke in a hungry voice, “Mmmm – we better have dinner now, or we’ll never get to it.” He kissed her lips again before continuing, “And all that cooking – which, by the way, smells almost as mouthwatering as you taste.” He kissed her again.

Rebekah couldn’t believe this was happening to her. She had longed for this since the day she saw him. She was beyond giddy inside listening to him speak.

“I – I think you’re right. Mmm – have a seat and I’ll bring out dinner.” Jake bit at her lip one last time before releasing his hold on her. Rebekah had to walk slowly to the kitchen, squeezing her legs together with each step until she was out of sight.

Jake went into the dining area and sat down at the beautifully set table. She didn’t hold back. She set the table like her mother had taught her when she was little – wine glasses, water glasses, saucer, dinner plate and all the necessary eating utensils and servers placed perfectly on the cream linen covered table. An array of candles together with the flowers he brought her was its centerpiece.

She was a surprise a minute and he liked it. He noticed that she had set them across from each other, at the head and foot of the table. *Oh no, baby- this is not going to do.* Jake took the place setting from one end of the table and set it closer. He wanted as little distance between them as possible tonight and every moment going forward.

As he set down the last piece, Rebekah walked in with the prime rib.

“Oh, baby girl, that smells like heaven.” He walked over to her, took it out of her hands, and placed it on the table for her. She noticed he had moved the setting and smiled.

“I – uh – I thought it would be more comfortable; that way we wouldn’t have to yell across the table.” Jake smiled at Rebekah as she touched his hand before returning to the kitchen for the remaining dishes. Instead of bringing the dishes out one at a time, she began to place them on the mahogany and gold dinner cart when Jake walked in.

“Here, let me help you with that.” He took her hand and helped her to stand. Inches separated the two of them. She could feel his rapid breathing. He stood there for what seemed to be an eternity, holding her hand against his chest. He couldn’t help but to look deep into her eyes. He wanted to take her right then and there, but decided he wanted the time to be just right.

He kissed her hand lightly and reached for the last dish. Rebekah walked over to the revolving kitchen door and held it open as Jake pushed the dinner cart through. The spread was to die for. Jake could hardly wait to eat.

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Dinner was great. Jake and Rebekah talked for an hour or more before and during dinner. They talked about their childhoods and reminisced over their embarrassing, and not-so-embarrassing moments in high school. They spoke of regretful one-nighters and first love. To Jake’s chagrin, he confessed about his somewhat geeky behavior, when he had to wear a set of braces and head gear for a year, due to a car accident he had been in with two of his older brothers.

Russell and Byron had been taking Jake out to get a new motorcycle after getting all A’s on his report card. Jake was always a straight “A” student, except for a couple of semesters in high school when he had received a C or two because of a girl. Veronica Parrish had been the epitome of perfection in high school, and Jake was smitten. While their relationship lasted nearly an entire school year, Veronica was not the girl Jake thought she was.

“Seriously, I thought we were going to be together forever. She said all the right things, did all the right things. She even came over and spent quality time with my family. It wasn’t until towards the end of the school year when I learned that she wasn’t the person I thought she was.”

“Oh? How so? I-I mean if you don’t mind me asking?”

Jake smiled at her then rubbed her arm before responding, “Not at all sweetheart. My life is an open book where you are concerned.” He leaned over and kissed her before going on with his story.

“Well, it was junior year. We had done the whole homecoming thing and everything – I mean, we attended *a lot* of the school functions together; from dances to the field trips – even the overnight trips. We were almost inseparable.

“One day, I had been called into the guidance counselor’s office because I was behind in Biology.” Jake rolled his eyes at the statement causing Rebekah to hide her laugh.

He noticed and winked at her, grabbed her hand and continued on, “Anyway, I was given a handful of assignments to complete in a week, which meant that we wouldn’t be able to go to spring formal together if they weren’t completed. I was a little pissed, but her – not so much. Little did I know that she had already made plans with my best friend, Howie Dunbar – of the Manhattan Dunbar’s. They were this well-to-do family that came from oil or something.”

“Anyway, I was grounded until I could get the assignments done. I lost my car and a couple other choice privileges – which I really didn’t mind. The one thing that bothered me was that I couldn’t go to that dance with Veronica. I finished the assignments and turned them in ahead of schedule and hoped and prayed my parents would let me go to the dance.” Jake cleared his throat, took a drink of wine and was noticeably getting agitated by the memory.

“The night before the dance, a couple of guys from the wrestling team came by to talk and such and got to talking about Veronica. It was weird because they were talking like they had just seen her.

“They said that she had gotten out of the back of How’s car, and was fixing her clothes – you know, re-buttoning, straightening, etc.”

“Wow. I’m sorry.”

“Yeah – well, not half as sorry as I was. Come to find out, not only was it she that was getting out of the back of his car, but another girl was still in there; and they said, from what they could see, there were at least two other guys in there – one on each end of this girl and good ‘ol Howie was sitting there, stuffing his "*Johnson*" back in his jeans.

“, I pretty much lost my best friend and my best girl all in one night. My brother’s decided to take me out to get a bike to cheer me up and for passing Bio. We – uh – we were going through the intersection when a suped up car came out of nowhere and plowed into us.”

“Ouch – nothing serious I hope. Or – was it?”

“Well, my brothers were pretty banged up, but I got the ass end of the deal; broken arm, leg broken, and a mouth full of busted teeth – hence the headgear I had to endure for a year.”

“Wow – and the driver? What happened to him?”

Jake looked solemn. The pain in his face was quite visible. It took a minute to respond, but finally did.

“Yeah – well, he wasn’t so lucky. Turns out he had been drinking and got into a fight with some guy who was chasing after him. Ran the light when he hit us. He – he died instantly. Half of him was hanging out of his truck – literally.”

A tear developed and he brushed it away hoping Rebekah wouldn’t see. She saw it all – the pain and hurt he felt as well as the betrayal of his best friend and girl.

“Yeah – he died instantly – it was Howie. Apparently, he owed someone a heap of money and they went looking for him to collect that day. Guess he figured he might as well enjoy himself before getting beat to a pulp.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“When I finally woke in the hospital – Veronica was right there – the doting girlfriend. I confronted her about what she did – with Howie. She didn’t really say much. Funny thing was – she didn’t deny what had happened. Needless to say, I decided from that day forward that I wasn’t going to let another woman do to me like Veronica did.”

Jake took a long gulp of his wine and finished off the glass. Rebekah sat there speechless.

He looked blankly into the distance while he continued, “She didn’t even bat an eye when she told me about how it was my best friend that hit us and died that day.” He gave her a double take and finished, “Oh, come on baby girl. I see it as fate, kismet if you will. Veronica turned out to be the bane of my existence in high school, and I knew something was up with Eliza, but I wasn’t sure what until almost a month before we broke up. She had been dancing around certain subjects and being more and more discreet. It was like flipping a switch; one minute I knew everything - the next – nothing.”

“But you cared about her.”

Jake looked at Rebekah as though he was losing his best friend all over again. “Yes, I cared about her. She didn’t care about me in the same way, though. I’m fine with that. In retrospect, I found that the feelings I thought I had for her were not as deep as I tried to tell myself they were. Fortunately,” He got up from his chair and stood before her while he continued. “I found myself caring for someone, someone so much more.”

He held out his hand for Rebekah to take. Rising before him, she could feel his body heat radiating between them. Jake looked longingly into the soulful eyes gazing back at him. He raised his hand and moved the ringlet of hair that had fallen in front of her face.

“You are so beautiful, Rebekah.” His words were soft, but affirmative.

Rebekah tried to turn away, but Jake caught her under her chin and made clear on his statement. “Don’t do that baby girl. YOU are beautiful. You have the most amazing smile; an infectious laugh. You make me want you more and more every time

I'm near you." He began caressing her arms up and down as he continued to look into her eyes.

"I don't think there is a man alive right now that wants you as much as I do." Before she could respond, Jake covered her mouth with his own. The connection between them was undeniable. He made her ache in places she forgot she had.

Jake's tongue parted her lips and invaded her mouth with a vengeance. She followed his lead and their tongues danced in unison. Moans escaped Rebekah's mouth before she knew what happened. That was all Jake needed to know he was headed in the right direction.

Jake's strong, rugged hands felt good against her skin, as he slid the sweater off her shoulders and let it drop to the floor. He ran his hands up and down her bare arms, causing a jolt of electricity to course throughout her body. He could feel her tremble under his touch.

He stopped long enough to catch his breath and pose a question, "Hey, you're trembling. Are you okay, Rebekah?"

Rebekah opened her eyes and took a deep breath as she replied, "I'm good. I – just never felt this way – needing to be so close to someone." Jake looked at her with wanton need. Her eyes looked forever soulful as he took in all of her. As if examining every part of her features, Jake massaged her physically, emotionally. He wanted to know what every part of her was like. He had never wanted anyone or anything as much as he wanted her at that moment.

"You have no idea how much I want you right now."

"Actually, I do – perhaps as much as I want you."

Jake's breathing stilled as he looked at her and saw the truth in her eyes. She wanted him and that caused his entire being to ache for her. Without hesitation, Jake grabbed Rebekah at the back of her neck and, without another word, devoured her mouth with his. Time seemed to stand still for the two of them at that moment.

Jake wrapped an arm around her and pulled her closer. Slowly, he backed up, maneuvering their way to the living room while their lips still connected each other. The CD that had been playing earlier had begun its second round. The light sound of the jazz music caused Jake to sway back and forth with Rebekah when they reached the couch. Their lips separated their connection, but their bodies did not.

"Mmmm. Miles Coltrane. I love this." Jake looked down at her and smiled as she looked back a little amazed by his knowledge of the musician.

“Very good; he’s one of my favorites. I am an oldies fanatic – Ella, Al, Barry – I also like Harry and Michael along with a few others.”

“And here I thought you would be a hip-hop Presario.”

“Ha ha – not exactly. However, I do enjoy a good dance beat every now and then. Keeps the heart pumping, you know.” Doing a little jiggle as he clung to her sent him spinning.

“Well – you are definitely a woman after my own heart Miss Waters.”

You have no idea how true that is. Rebekah cleared her throat before responding. However, Jake had other ideas. Before she could utter a word, his mouth was all over hers again. She felt the tingle of excitement run through her body as Jake’s tongue tasted every inch of her mouth. Rebekah could do nothing but surrender to him.

He felt her relax beneath his touch and took that as a sign that there was no turning back. She wanted to be with him in the most carnal sense. Jake pulled himself away from her. He looked her up and down and felt the ache in his pants grow larger, making him unconsciously reach down and massaging himself.

Rebekah couldn’t help but notice, catching her breath as she felt her own moistness building between her legs. Without so much as a word, Rebekah reached up behind her neck and untied her dress, letting it fall and allowing her breasts to become exposed. Jake watched as Rebekah’s chest rose and fell, and her nipples puckered as his breath grazed them.

He stepped closer to her and watched as she held tight to the fallen material. His breathing was husky and his eyes changed to a darker, smoky gray that caused her to stop fidgeting and become entranced. He moved her arms from their protective barrier that held the material. Her hands fell to her sides and she inhaled – nervously exhaled.

Her breasts were soft and thick, chocolate mounds that made his mouth water. He hoped they would melt in his mouth as the thought of suckling them raced through his mind. The ache in his pants became more apparent as his beast kicked at the cloth and metal that engaged it. Jake took a chance and reached his hand up, enclosing her breast. Rebekah let out a moan as his hand kneaded her flesh, gently squeezing her taut nipple.

Rebekah, being no wallflower, found Jake’s boiling point – massaging his manhood through his jeans. She watched as his head fell back and his eyes rolled closed. Moans escaped his throat in a low growl as she continued. She closed her eyes and felt her way around. She could feel the length and girth of his shaft as it painfully expanded, desperately looking for an exit.

Jake liked the way she massaged him, even if it weren't flesh-to-flesh. He knew that once that would happen, he would need all of her.

"Baby, you're killing me." Jake stood stiff, trying hard to compose himself.

She stopped massaging him and opened her eyes. She watched his deep breathing and responded, "I want you Jake – now." That was all she had to say. His head snapped forward and he looked down at her as desire filled him. Unable to stop himself, he leaned over to kiss her – confessing before he did so, "I've been waiting for you to say that – I want to be inside you so bad."

His mouth covered hers again. His hand still on her breast, he squeezed – again sending electricity throughout her body, making her moan and press closer to him. Gently he traced the outside of her lips with his tongue, nibbling at them ever now and then. Her hand again massaged him through his jeans. He grabbed her hand and helped her to squeeze him slightly, causing him to inhale as if he were sucking in all the air in the room.

It took but a moment for Jake to walk Rebekah around to the front of the couch. There in front of the fire, he dropped to his knees – all the while, not breaking the heated gaze he and she shared between them. He sat there on his knees staring up at her, waiting for her approval. Once she nodded, accepting his advances, Jake pressed her hand to his lips and kissed her palm gently. The electricity that surged through her body earlier was nothing compared to the gentleness of that kiss. From her hand, Jake trailed kisses throughout her mid-section, kneading her thickness. Before she could make her way to the floor and join him, Jake stood, slightly hunched over, and took one of her exposed nipples into his mouth.

Rebekah thought she would lose consciousness at the sensation. Her knees became weak and her head began to spin – so much so that she thought she saw a face looking through her picture window. But she didn't care. *Let them get an eyeful of me. Let them see Jake wanting me.* With that thought, she grabbed the back of his head and pressed him deeper into her breast. Jake accepted her invitation by nibbling and sucking that much harder. Rebekah winced in pain every now and then, but it was a good pain, and she too welcomed it.

Jake's mouth shifted back and forth from one nipple to the other – giving each equal attention. Rebekah could barely contain herself as she dug her hands into his hair to savor his tantalizing tongue massages. Jake stopped long enough to pull his shirt over his head. Then slowly, and methodically, he started to unbutton his pants when Rebekah stopped him.

"The lights."

"I want to see you, baby."

“Please, for now.” Rebekah was secure with herself for the most part, but she was way too nervous to have every curve of her body in the spotlight for this moment. “The fireplace should be enough light, right?” Her statement was barely audible, and with slight pleading look in her eyes, Jake abided by her wishes and walked to the lamp adjacent the couch and turned out the light.

The only light left was the one in the dining room that she shyly pointed to. He smiled, walked back over to her, and instead of kissing her on the lips, he bent down and suckled her nipple, causing her to cry out a little until she was silenced by his mouth muffling her excitement. Satisfied that he made his point, he walked into the dining room and dimmed the chandelier.

What should have taken him mere seconds, took Jake about a minute or so. Uncertain, Rebekah called out his name – no answer. Even though a wall separated them, the entry way showed the light was off and no movement.

“Jake – is everything alright?”

“Everything is fine, baby girl.” Jokingly, he added, “I just wanted to make sure all the lights were out in the kitchen and your door was locked – I don’t want us to be disturbed for the rest of the night.”

He walked over to her and kissed her – affirming that it was *she* he wanted – and no one else.

He lowered the undone dress she had covered herself back up with in his absence. He couldn’t help but to stand and stare lovingly into her eyes.

“You don’t need to cover yourself for me, Rebekah. I’m not going anywhere. Here – here is where I want to be.”

She nodded in acceptance before allowing Jake to fully remove her dress. A chill rose up her as it dropped to the floor. Jake leaned down and kissed the side of her neck and her ear before grabbing the throw blanket off the back of the couch, laying it on the floor; and than taking her hand, leading her to where they blanket lay.

Having removed their shoes before their final descent, Jake was able to stand there in awe of her. The only thing between them and this night were the remnants of his jeans, and her underwear. That was soon to change. His cock was on the brink of busting out of his jeans. Gazing at her, he slowly slid the zipper down his jeans, freeing his confined manliness. Rebekah could only look down and stare in fascination. Jake was a big man – in every sense of the word. The well-endowed Adonis before her left very little to the imagination, even with his boxer briefs still on.

Having shed his jeans, he was able to stand more comfortably before her. His penis jumped to attention once or twice causing Rebekah to graze the growing wetness between her legs. Jake watched her every move, knowing that wanting her was what he had longed for these past months felt right. He walked towards her, removing her hand that lay still between her thighs and replaced it with his own.

His mouth dropped open slightly at the silkiness he felt there. This is what he did to her – this is how he made her feel. Her lace undies couldn't hide her need for him, no matter how much she may have wanted them to.

Jake kissed her one more time before dropping to his knees. He was face to face with her wetness. He drew her in closer, inhaling her musky, sexual scent. Having not removed his hand from before, he was able to stroke her labia through her barely there material, allowing the moistness to build. He removed his hand long enough slide his fingers into his mouth and taste the honey that lingered there.

Rolling his eyes shut, he moaned at what he thought to be a pure taste of heaven. Slowly, he pushed her thighs apart, exposing her entry a little more. Placing his lips just below her navel, he began his descent of kisses, while removing her now saturated panties. Her panties were pulled down as far as her thighs when she moaned and cried out at the same time when Jake's tongue made its way between the folds of her pussy.

One lick and they were done for. Jake practically ripped her panties from her thighs to get in deeper. Slipping the remaining piece of her undies from her leg, Jake lifted one leg and set it on the coffee table so he could have better access for the task at hand. She stood like a statue, watching as Jake sat before her on his knees, preparing her for tantalizing pleasure.

Still in his boxer briefs, she looked down and watched as his cock jumped up and down begging for freedom. Gently, Jake used his thumb and began massaging her clit. Rubbing it back and forth; each time he got to her entry, he would slide the tip of his thumb inside, making her catch her breath. It came to a point where she began silently chanting obscenities 'fuck and shit' and even 'oh my God' could be heard trailing from her lips.

Jake suddenly stepped it up further and began fingering her, then licking her clit and fingering her at the same time in stimulating rhythm. He watched her as she licked her lips and massaged her breasts with each stroke he made with his fingers and tongue. He slowed long enough to help her lay down on the floor. As she lay there, they stood and removed his shorts.

Standing before her, she watched him stroke himself before reaching over to his jeans and pulling a condom from his pocket. He looked at her coyly before she asked, "Expecting this?"

Getting back down on his knees and continuing to stroke himself before setting the condom on the table, he smiled and replied, "Hoping is more appropriate. You have no idea how long I have wanted to be with you."

"Oh, I think I do."

Jake crawled up to meet Rebekah's mouth and shared the taste of her. The salty, musky remnants of her covered his mouth. She tasted good on his lips. Jake laid her flat in front of the fire. He rubbed his hand across her stomach and down her chocolate thighs, spreading them again.

As he lay on top of her, he began to press his nakedness against her. His shaft was hard and thick; thicker than Craig or Ryan. She felt the length of him press against her pelvis. She felt his heart beat through his erection and it made her squirm.

He slid off her for a moment and gazed at her. It was all Jake could do to keep from taking her right at that second. Without warning, he slid his hand between her thighs and slid not one, but two fingers deep inside of her. Her hips gyrated against his hand as he slid them in and out, going deeper and deeper. He watched her writhing to his rhythm as he fashioned the condom onto his shaft with his other hand. It barely fit. Slowly he removed his fingers from within her folds, bent down and suckled her clit once more. Her cream glistened over her pubic hairs and thighs.

Crawling up to her lips, he spread her legs in commanding fashion with his own, and she obeyed. His man beast jumped, slapping against her pelvis waiting for the signal to enter. Without hesitation, Rebekah reached down and grabbed the massive beast, positioning it at her entry. Her touch caused Jake to wince in pain. The slightest touch of her sent him into a frenzy. She squeezed a little, acknowledging that he was where she wanted him to be and she was ready for him.

Kissing her gently, the tip of his shaft entered her tight hole. The sensation was too much. Jake had to stop and breathe before continuing. Pushing harder he entered her and she let out an exhaled cry. She was extremely tight and he felt that his girth could hurt her.

"Oh shit," were the only words he could muster as he continued to enter her. She buried her face against his shoulder and dug her nails into him, causing his push further.

Her moans were echoing in his ear and he stopped long enough to ask, "Am I hurting you? I can stop."

"Don't you dare stop!" She commanded. Jake looked at her in surprise. He could see the pain and enjoyment on her face.

“Please, Jake – don’t stop.” She pleaded with him. His heart burst as he did what she asked. He didn’t fill her to the hilt – yet. He continued to slide in and out in rhythmic succession. He continued to grind against her pelvis, all the while muffling her cries and moans with kisses as she dug her nails deeper into his flesh. The pain of her clawing at his back only made him want to pound her more.

He could feel himself almost hit the end of her as he began to drive in deeper. The tightness of her pussy and the pain his cock gave to her was enough to send her to the brink. He held her tight as he pounded her and grinded against her. It wasn’t long before she was able to take him in fully and feel him hit her G-spot repeatedly.

The faster he went, the more she wanted it. Sweat dripped from his now saturated hair, down onto her breasts. He didn’t break the rhythm as he moved one arm and steadying her leg onto his shoulder, taking her to the hilt and making his beast disappear inside her. The smooth slick movements made their bodies slapped together in unison. The faster he went the more suction her dripping, swollen honey pot produced.

Unable to delay the inevitable any longer, Jake produced on last long, hard thrust, causing them to explode at the same time and allowing him to finally collapse on top of her. They were completely spent. They fought to catch gulps of air between them. Soaked from head to toe, the heat from the fireplace gave them little, if any, comfort. Rebekah tried to reach for the remote that turned on the air conditioner but was stopped when Jake blurted out, “Aw – don’t move, please.”

She soon realized by the throbbing of her inner walls that she and Jake were still very much attached and he wasn’t finished yet.

“Just – ah - lay here for a minute – don’t - oh – shit.” It was too late. Her movement stirred something in him to cause him to head for a second round and there was no stopping it. His cock throbbed for more attention and Jake needed to finish what he started.

She couldn’t believe the stamina this man had. He was still thick and hard and very much inside of her. It was like she was swollen around him, unable to break free – not that she wanted to. His throbbing caused her juices to stir, causing him to slide in and out of her once more. This time it was quick – maybe five - ten minutes tops. She couldn’t tell – everything was a blur after the first thrust.

Jake rode her like a wild bronco, and she took it all. His thrusts were rough and deliberate. He needed to finish filling her. He needed to feel her cum again and have her juices surround his cock like before. Within minutes they rose to their peak. Rebekah matched him thrust for thrust. Jake moaned ferociously next to her ear as he exploded once again.

They lay there, as still as possible as Jake shrank to a sub-normal size; however, he still needed to take care in separating the two of them; not just because of his still potent size, but because of the mess that would follow.

Jake leaned over and kissed her before fully releasing himself and sitting back on his knees.

“Why Miss Waters, I do believe you are blushing.” He was looking down at her swollen sex, watching as the pink lining protruded from her chocolate walls. Gently running a finger up and down the opening, Rebekah couldn’t help but to wince and wiggle slightly.

“Yes, well – I believe I have *you* to thank for that Mr. Turner.”

“Come on.”

Jake stood then helped Rebekah to her feet. Grabbing the blanket off the floor, he wrapped it around her. “Where are we going?”

Jake wrapped his arms around her and began leading her to the downstairs bathroom.

“I think a nice long soak will fix that right up, don’t you?” He looked down at her and kissed her nose when they reach the bathroom just outside of Rebekah’s guest room. It was beautifully decorated in coral and sea foam green – from the shower curtain all the way down to the matching rugs and toiletries. Rebekah hand painted the sea shell borders across the top and bottom of the bathroom walls.

The tub itself was a perk from her father. He had the entire bathroom redesigned to her specifications but added his own touch to the tub; he had it made in the shape of a huge oyster shell. The grooves in the bottom matched the built-in shell-like cover that had been tiled into the wall itself. The walls and tile were an ornate Greek marble that caused the outline of the tub to display that much more. The tub faucets were champagne bronze and matched the ones in the sink.

When they entered, Jake walked over and tossed the used condom into the trash after wrapping it up. He grabbed one of the gold and cream-colored towels off the shelf and wrapped it around his waist.

“Whoa – what are you doing, baby girl?”

“I was going to run a bath.”

“No, no, no. Let me do that for you. I am here to serve you. After all – it’s the least I can do after causing your – eh hmmm – delicate state.” Jake winked at her before leading her over to the vanity. She sat slowly and crossed her legs even slower.

Rebekah sat and watched as Jake ran her bubble bath, lit the candles she had placed throughout the bathroom, and even helped her into the massive tub, with him as her cushion.

There they lay, caressing and relaxing; kissing and massaging. They talked about the little things and the boring things.

“How did you get this scar?” Rebekah asked as Jake lay behind her with his arms wrapped tight. She noticed the scar trailing down his right arm. It was barely visible, but there nonetheless.

“This one? Oh – well, this is the scar, or at least one of them, that changed my football career. Not that I really wanted one of course.”

“Oh my – you can barely see it.” Rebekah ran a finger down the scar that started from his elbow and ended just above his wrist. He laid his head back against the designed headrest that housed an air pillow.

“Mmmm – Well, 247 stitches and two sessions of cosmetic surgery to minimize the scarring somewhat helped. Just another reminder is all.”

Rebekah looked over her shoulder at him and smiled. He leaned in and kissed her before squeezing her tight and leaning back again.

“Jake?”

“Mmmm-”

“What is this? I – I mean, what is this we’re doing?”

“I’m not sure I follow, baby girl.”

Rebekah sat up and turned sideways towards Jake. She swallowed hard before explaining her question.

Making circles and pointing at herself and Jake, she went on, “this – you and me. What are we doing? Is it just sexual or is it more than that?”

Jake’s softened features turned hard. He was taken aback by her question and it showed.

“You’re kidding, right?” Jake scratched at the goatee he let grow in during the week. “Is that what you think I’m doing here, Rebekah? Do you honestly think I am just here to get laid?”

Rebekah regretted asking him after hearing the hurt tone in his voice. Jake stood in the tub and helped her up. She kept her eyes on his expression the entire time, watching how her question hurt his feelings.

Jake walked over and grabbed a towel and wrapped it around Rebekah before wrapping his own around his waist.

“Jake, I’m sorry. I just want to know.”

Before Rebekah could say anything else, Jake had grabbed her arms and stood there trembling. He wanted to shake her, but instead, leaned down and gave her a kiss he wanted her to remember.

As their lips parted, Rebekah heard him whisper against her lips, “Just breathe.”

Rebekah took a deep breath and opened her eyes and saw the familiar gray eyes that she had been fascinated by all evening.

“I’m not going anywhere, Rebekah. This is where I want to be.”

He kissed her again before taking her hand and walking out of the bathroom and back into the living room – where they would make love again, and again.

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The fire was low and the lights were all out. They lay on the living room floor curled up together under a comforter taken off the bed in the spare room.

Jake was holding Rebekah close to him as they slumbered. The Santa Ana winds were racing outside, causing buildings to creek and dust to fly. Not completely asleep, but not fully awake, Jake opened his eyes and was startled into consciousness by what he thought was a figure standing just beyond his reach. Jake sat straight up and looked around but didn’t see anything.

To sooth his imagination, he got up and walked around, but still saw nothing. He put his boxers back on and walked into the bathroom, splashed water on his face and walked over towards the kitchen.

Jake drank down two glasses of water before he noticed the shadow outside the back door. As he walked closer, the shadow seemed to disappear.

He unlocked the door and stepped outside – he saw nothing out of the ordinary in her back-yard area. Jake walked back inside and was startled to see Rebekah standing there.

“Shit – baby you scared me. What are you doing up?”

“I could ask you the same question. Is everything alright?”

Jake locked and latched the back door, walked over to her, and kissed her forward.

“Everything is fine – may have just been a cat or raccoon. I – uh – I also wanted to check your back door and make sure it was locked.”

“Thank you. Lately I think I have been forgetting to lock it.”

“Oh? Did something happen?” Jake hid his concern for her and nonchalantly kissed her temple before sitting down next to her.

“Oh – it doesn’t matter – like I said – I probably just forgot.”

“Rebekah – did something happen?” He began to grow angry at the thought of harm coming to her.

“No – nothing happened. It’s silly really.”

Jake grabbed his t-shirt and put it on her. She looked good in it he thought. He sat there and waited for her to continue – rock hard and aching for release; however, his concern for her well being was more important – especially after what he thought he saw.

“It’s no big deal, really. The other night, my alarm went off a couple of times throughout the night. I thought that it was someone in the house, but when I went downstairs, no one was there.”

“Did you call the police or something?”

“No – I didn’t see anyone and nothing was out of place so I didn’t think much else of it. I heard a couple of cats outside scratching at my back door and figured that I didn’t close my door completely and they caused it to go off.”

Jake now knew that what he saw was just that – a person standing outside her back door. Anger filled him at the thought of someone trying to hurt her.

“Promise me, if it happens again, you’ll call me if no one else, ok?”

“Ok. Jake –”

“Yeah –” He said as he touched Rebekah’s face with clear concern in his eyes.

“You’re starting to scare me a little. Did you see something outside?”



Jake tried to change his expression to hide his growing concern. He kissed her passionately before he responded, “Nothing for you to fear baby. Come on, let’s go to bed.”

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## Chapter 17 – The Shadow Speaks

*He* stood in Rebekah's room watching as she took a shower. The scent of her soap made him ache. He wanted to get in that shower and have his way with her. She was getting ready to head out – on a date. That's just not going to work. She needs to know that the slightest thing will set *him* off, and she doesn't want that.

*He* didn't like that outfit she picked out. He thinks it makes her look ugly. He pulled the party dress out she wore the night he saw her out with her friends. Hanging it across the other clothes in her closet, he looked at it and began massaging himself. The night he saw her in it caused him to go to the men's room and jack off in one of the stalls. Seeing it now made him semi-hard and the need to release again.

Unzipping his trousers, he reached in and let his member fall out. He prided himself on his phallus. He saw it as the perfect sex piece that any woman would be proud to have inside of her. He began stroking it and squeezing his balls at the same time. After a couple of minutes, he could feel himself about to reach his climax when he heard the shower shut off. With his piece wiggling about he shut the closet door but couldn't close it completely because of the dress.

The door creaked, and he walked quickly out of the room and down the hallway right as Rebekah stepped out of the bathroom. "Hello?" She said. *He* held his breath and his penis in his hand, gingerly walked down the hall to the stairs and out of sight. *That was close. I should have just thrown her on the bed and fucked her, but I'm no rapist.* Putting himself back in place, he quietly slipped out of her house through the back door. Lock picking and key making were hobbies he picked up along the way. He was able to leave again, undetected.

*He* would go to her home, her business, even when she was out with her friends, and just watch her. He had a need to see her – to be around her. *He* knew who she was and what she did. But did she truly know *him*? Did she know all those times she went out with friends and was given a "complimentary drink" that it came from him? Did she know the anonymous flowers she received at work a few times were from him as well? The man that cut her off one afternoon after leaving a restaurant – did she know that *he* tracked the man down and nearly killed him because of it? Yeah, he knew her.

*The things a man would do for a woman – even if that bitch didn't know it.*

The need to have her grew to an overwhelming obsession for *him*. From the first time he saw her, he knew that she was the one he wanted. He's seen her out with

friends – on dates, and it was a torture session. *He* wanted to be the one buying her dinner, getting closer to her – not them. Every time a man approached her, he would want to walk up to him and snap his neck.

She was what made him who he is. At first, he enjoyed watching her from afar. However, when the men started to come into the picture, it was practically unbearable. This new man was touching her, kissing her, making love to her, when it should have been *him*. *His* silent rage was getting the best of him. It was on the brink of boiling over and he needed to release it – soon.

Going over to her place and watching her when the “other man” wasn’t around put him at ease. It didn’t completely settle the ache he had for her, but it made him feel better when he saw her – alone. But now, now he had the jerk to deal with and he wasn’t having it. He had already rid himself of one person in her life – looks like he was going to have to do the same again.

He was able to slip by the neighbors without them noticing, dressed the way he did. During the day when he went there – it could have been questionable to see *him* lurking about her back yard – but hell, who is going to question someone dressed as a grounds keeper or maintenance man? At night *he* was rarely, if ever, noticeable. His dark clothes camouflaged him well most part. He could slip in and out without even so much as raising an eyebrow in his direction. He thought he was that good.

That night he drove to the nearest bar and went inside. He needed something to calm his aching need and clear his head. The strip club he frequented was a good start – until he needed to get back to business – back to *her*.

Downing a shot of Crown Royal, his mind began to race; going back to a place he wanted to be familiar to him – meeting her. The first time he saw her, she was celebrating a friend’s birthday with that old crone of a planner. He could have easily choked the life out of that old broad any time he wanted to. Unfortunately, too many people would miss her – too many people would be around her at any given moment. He’d bide his time.

That night, Rebekah had put on that pretty red number he pulled out. He liked her in that skimpy little frock. She showed off her cleavage and thick legs. She was daring that night. Her round ass and thickness are what turned him on the most.

He sat in the corner of the club when he saw her walk in with about six of her friends, including the old lady of all people. Rebekah was a sight to behold. She made many heads turn that night. Men came up to her in droves wanting to dance with her. That’s when he started seeking her out at every given chance.

He watched her walk back and forth from the bar to her table. She was a hot commodity and he wanted her. Those other women he had been fascinated with paled

in comparison to her. Her smile was golden and it touched him. He knew he wouldn't stand a chance being so enamored by her. He himself was very good looking. However, he believed the scar on his face was a deal breaker.

After a couple of hours, and four spritzers later, he was going to make his move and ask her to dance. She sat there alone. All her friends were on the dance floor. The old lady had left, as well she should. *What old person comes to a night club anyway?* He thought it odd that this beautiful specimen would even be seen with such an old bitty.

He saw that she had turned down the last few men who had asked her to dance. *He* thought she was waiting for him to ask her. Slowly he approached her. His six-foot frame had been pushed, bumped into, and nearly knocked over by some of the club's patrons. However, that didn't stop him.

He wasn't scrawny in the slightest. He managed to push a few people out of his way as he continued his mission. A couple of women had stopped him to ask him to dance, but he ignored them. Walking past them, he managed to stop a couple of feet from this woman that fascinated him so.

His sandy blond hair covered half of his face so it was hard to see him. As he approached, she could feel someone behind her, so she turned around.

In a barely audible voice, he asked, "Would you like to dance?"

"I'm sorry, what?"

He realized he had to move a little closer. He kept his head down to cover the scar he thought to be so hideous. He moved within a foot of her and spoke louder, "I – I said, would you like to dance?"

She looked at him for a moment, waiting. Finally, one of her friends came back to the table and he started to walk away until she touched him. Her touch set him on fire.

"Sure, ok. One more for the road, I guess." She stood and took him by the arm and walked on to the dance floor as a slow song began. He was about to turn around and leave the floor when she grabbed his large hand.

"I thought you wanted to dance?" She questioned him.

"I didn't realize it was going to be a slow song."

Her heels put her almost at eye level with him. He never looked up at her as she wrapped his arm around her waist. He would turn his head as she put her own arm around his neck and placed her other hand in his, all the while keeping his face concealed with his mane.

“So – what’s your name?” She asked the tall, quiet, stranger.

“My name?”

“Yes, your name. You do have one, right?”

She could barely see his cold, steel blue eyes through his blond hair.

“My name is Rebekah.”

Taking a deep breath before clearing his throat, he finally spoke, “My name is Brycen – Brycen Corbett – but you can call me Bryce.” His voice was soft and deep but not so much so like a baritone.

“Nice to meet you Bryce.”

He acknowledged with a nod, allowing his hair to bounce around over his face as they continued to dance. She could feel his heart racing as they moved around on the dance floor. His hands were trembling as they touched her. She thought for sure he was going to break down. She rubbed his arms which seemed to sooth him a bit. He stiffened up and continued to dance.

As the song slowed, so did their dancing until they finally stopped. He stood here for a moment, still holding her. She didn’t mind him holding her, but the tempo had increased and the other people on the dance floor began to move around them more. A few people had already bumped into them before she could lead him off the dance floor.

They were half way to her table when he stopped, causing her to jerk and nearly fall.

“Would you like to join us, Bryce?”

Some might think that his frame was a bit intimidating. He had the body of someone who liked to work out quite frequently but didn’t over do it. Looking at the group of people, he declined.

“Well, if you change your mind, you’re more than welcome.”

“Thank you.” He went to leave, but before he could turn to go, she reached up and kissed him at the corner of his mouth. He instantly became overheated by her kiss.

As she stood back, he glanced at her through his shaggy mane. For the first time she could see the deep blue eyes behind all that blond hair. He reached up and slowly touched his face, exposing a portion of the scar that he desperately tried to hide. Realizing that he had shared too much of himself, he backed up to turn and walk away, but instead backed into a couple of people who were none too pleased.

“Hey, man! Watch where the hell you’re going.” Being shoved back in Rebekah’s direction almost caused him to topple over on her. He immediately caught himself and turned around at the two men who were both about six inches shorter than he. He was about to apologize until one man lunged at him with both fists blazing. Catching him around the neck, he began to squeeze. The man was helpless. The second man went to hit Bryce and was met with a hand covering his face. Soon the man was slammed against the bar with such force that it rendered him unconscious.

All Rebekah could do was call out his name in the hopes he would stop.

“Bryce – that’s enough!”

He stopped and let the first man fall to the floor. As he turned around, he saw the stunned look on *his beloveds* face. Without realizing it, he had exposed the scar that started from his right temple and ended in the shape of a hook just at the curve of his jawline. While to her and others around her, it was not as grotesque as he had envisioned it; to him it reminded him of Quasimodo or Igor. The scar itself was merely a scratch along his face.

He saw it as the most hideous thing imaginable. The look on Rebekah’s face was endearing, but he, however, saw it as disgust. Unable to bear the shame, he lowered his head and pushed his way out of the club, with Rebekah quickly on his heels.

“Bryce, wait. Please.” Rebekah had chased him halfway through the immense parking lot before he finally stopped.

“Go away, please.”

“No – not until you look at me.” She walked up to him and touched his shoulder. Like being singed with a hot poker, he flinched and slightly moved away. She grabbed his hand before he could escape fully. If he was going to leave, he was going to have to take her with him.

“What do you want from me? You had your fun. You had your laugh.”

“That’s not true at all. Look at me, please.”

He had refused to look at her at first. Her insistence broke him. He turned. She could see that his eyes were filled with anger and hurt. The lights from the parking lot were bright enough for her to get a better look at him – and he her.

He looked at her and caught his breath. She was ever the vision that he remembered seeing when she first walked in that night. Her hair had been in tight curls and ended just past her shoulders. She wore just enough makeup for someone to notice, also to let her natural beauty shine through. He couldn’t keep his eyes off her.

His steel blue eyes were radiant. His jawline was very masculine; his nose was perfect except for the slight bump which made his features more pronounced. She lifted her hand to move the hair from covering his scar. Before she could see it completely, he had grabbed her hand, stopping her.

“Please – don’t.” He begged her as his bottom lip began to tremble. As if to comfort him, she placed her hand on his cheek. The heat from her touch resonated throughout his body. He closed his eyes to welcome it. She had been the endearing woman that he saw her to be that night.

She placed her other hand on his face and watched as tears began to fall from his eyes. No woman had ever touched him like she did – her touches were gentle and loving.

Her heart broke for him. For some reason she was drawn to him that night and she didn’t know why. It wasn’t so much an attraction to him, although he was very good looking. It was more of a nurturing attraction on her part. It was love at first sight for him.

She wiped the tears from his face and kissed their lingering trails. On sheer impulse she allowed her mouth to cover his. He didn’t know what was happening but he welcomed it. Their mouths parted and he was done for. He needed to have her – he needed to have every part of her – to feel every part of her against him. He needed to be inside her.

He’s kisses became more demanding and she could barely breathe. She hadn’t intended it to go as far as it had – or was going, but it did. It had gone from soft pecks to full blown assault. Bryce had begun to grope her body as if she were the last woman on earth. His hands explored every inch of her. He wanted to leave nothing untouched.

“Wait – Bryce. I can’t breathe.”

Bryce stopped and stepped back. He felt a bit ashamed as the ache in his groin caused his head to pound.

“I’m sorry – I didn’t mean to attack you like that.”

“No harm done, really.” She was attracted to Bryce, for sure, but she wasn’t sure how far she wanted things to go. She had had a few drinks – one or two she bought and one from some admirer, and she was afraid she would regret it in the morning. She wasn’t a one-night-stand type of person, but after Nigel, she was prepared to throw caution to the wind and have fun. Besides, he seemed harmless enough.

“I need to leave, or I’m not going to stop myself next time. Goodnight, Rebekah.”

Rebekah watched as he began to walk away. He was almost to his car when he felt a hand on his arm.

Turning around, she could see the ache in his eyes as he tried to get a grip on his emotions. The muscles in his jaw flexed as he looked at her, looked away, and then looked at her again.

“You have no idea what you’re getting into Rebekah.”

“Show me.”

Bryce looked at her. The desire was there, however, it had been masked by the animal need that was trying to claw its way out. Without a second’s notice, Bryce grabbed the back of her hair and kissed her hard on the mouth. She couldn’t pull away – but right now, she didn’t want to. If she was going to do this, she may as well let it happen. He was not gentle in his kisses at that moment. He suckled on her bottom lips and traced his tongue down the side of her throat with deliberate intent.

He hated wanting her as much as he did. He had no clue about who she was or where she was from. He didn’t care. He just wanted her. He needed to have her – no matter what. He wanted to possess her tonight and she would allow it.

He remembered he parked his car in a dark corner of the lot for his own privacy that night and wanted to pat himself on the back for doing so. By the looks of things, he intended to take advantage of that darkness – that privacy. His car of choice that night had been his sports car – a Ferrari 458. He pulled her to the darkness where he parked. His ache was intense and he needed release.

Rebekah stood behind him waiting for him to open her door.

“Bryce? Are you alright?”

He had to squeeze the ache between his legs before he could turn around. His breathing was heavy and the need was clear in his eyes when he looked at her. She watched him exhale then inhale over and over. His body was a solid mass of muscle. She hadn’t realized it until now – now when he pulled her close – now when he was determined to have his way with her.

Rebekah thought of retreating but she couldn’t control her own need to enjoy the fruits of *his* labor. He was hot, Adonis-like and had a hard-on for her a mile long. *Girl – this one-nighter may take a couple nights.* That voice was a pest – but right.

Bryce turned and looked at her. He was surprised to see that she was not startled by him or his actions towards her. He believed from the look in her eyes that she wanted this as badly as he did.



Bryce didn't waste any time. He kissed her for the longest time, pushing her up against his car, not allowing her to move. Slowly and methodically his hands nervously made their way up and down her body. He pulled his lips from hers and used his tongue to trail down her neck and between her breasts. She could hear him whimper slightly as he pushed himself against her.

Rebekah's head was spinning. She wasn't sure if it was the mixed drinks she had or Bryce's intensity. Perhaps both – at that moment she didn't really care. She had needs just like everyone else and if she was going to allow Bryce to tame her needs – then it was going to be all or nothing.

Bryce slid a dress and bra strap off her shoulder. He kneaded her breast with his hand while kissing on her exposed flesh, hoping to taste even more. He had managed to secure one of his muscular legs between her own as he gyrated against her. She could feel the length of him press against her wetness and she all but exploded. He wasn't kind when he pressed himself against her.

Slowly, he slid a hand up her thigh, and stopped at her slickened panties. The intensity of his assault caught her completely off guard. Before she could stop him, Bryce slid not one, not two, but three fingers deep within her crevice, causing her to grab an arm with one hand, and steady herself on his shoulder with the other. She was about to cry out in both pleasure and pain when she felt his lips covering hers – silencing her.

His hand moved back and forth with a vengeance. He would not relent. She came hard – feeling its drain her. It was quick and deliberate what he did. Was this what he was going to do to her later? He didn't stop stroking her kitten until she exploded again, and that didn't take long.

His fingers stayed in place within her – no massaging – no movement. Slowly he slid them out; but instead of removing them from between her legs, he grabbed hold of the lace underwear she had on and tugged at them.

"Take them off - now." He didn't let go as he stood back a little. Instead, he began pulling them down her thick thighs and down to her ankles, helping her slip out of them. She didn't know what to think at that point. She was in a daze. She couldn't believe she let him do that to her in the parking lot.

She stood there catching her breath and watching him as he licked at one finger, licked his lips, and then rolled her panties up in his hand, slipping them into his pocket. He opened her car door and held it until she was securely seated. Once behind the wheel, he drove – without saying another word.

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The assault on her in the parking lot was nothing compared to what would transpire behind closed doors. They pulled up to what appeared to be a long road next to the entrance of a palatial estate in the hills. He pulled up to the side of the abundantly large mansion and parked his car in front of the 5-car garage and handed a man his keys, then went around and helped her out of the car. As they walked to the side entrance of the property, Rebekah couldn't help but to ask, "Is this your home?"

"It's my parent's home. I live in the house just behind it." He opened the side gate and allowed her to walk ahead of him. The larger home was quite exquisite. From what she could see, it was the length of a football field and just as wide. The two-story home was built from Italian marble and granite. The windows on each side were covered with black rod iron as well as the gates surrounding the property.

Passing the pool, Rebekah saw a rather modern looking second home. It was elegant but simple. It was not built with the same marble and granite. Instead it was a red brick, two story home with a chimney on either side. Walking inside, crystal chandeliers lit up each room. The staircase as you walked in was made of oak. There was not much in the line of furniture. Straight ahead and down two steps as you entered, an expensive 10-piece sectional took up a nice portion of the living room. The coffee table and end tables were smoked crystal and brass. There was no television. There were only a few pictures and paintings on the wall.

"You have a beautiful home, Bryce."

"Thanks. Not something I would have decorated myself – I let my mother do it – rather, she insisted. I just told her no floral prints, please."

"Well, it's lovely, just the same."

Rebekah could hear him close the door behind them – and lock it.

"I don't normally do this. In fact, it's my first time."

Bryce looked at her with an almost menacing intent. He took her clutch out of her hand and sat it on the antique chair just inside the foyer. His hair continued to cover the scar she had already seen. His insecurities almost got the better of him until she stood before him, gingerly moving the hair from his face, exposing his strong features. His eyes sad, continued to look in every direction but hers, until she spoke.

Softly she said, "Hey, I'm right here."

He tried to ignore her but couldn't. She could see how hard it was for him to acknowledge that someone wasn't running away from him. His grip tightened at her sides. He couldn't help but to lean down and kiss her. He was nervous, and it showed. She had gotten under his skin before he could bat an eyelash.

He pulled away from her for a split second before picking her up, throwing her over his shoulder like a caveman, and carrying her upstairs. He could hear her giggles as they descended the long, dark corridor. He set her down inside the doorway to a rather large and dark room. Flipping the light switch, the only light that came on was the one on the nightstand next to a California King four poster oak bed.

The room was covered in dark wood, dark covers on the bed, dark carpet, and dark window coverings.

“So – this is your room. It’s very cozy [*and cold, and dark*]. Do you always keep it this dark?”

“Yes – sometimes. Something I have grown accustomed to.” He walked to the desk across from the bed and laid his sports jacket on the back of it before taking a seat. He sat and watched her as she lingered about, checking everything out. The fireplace on the back wall was already lit, making the room nice and toasty. The copper-type statues adorned the columns of the fireplace, giving it a more authentic appeal.

She ran her fingers across the bedpost, trying to capture some type of sensation from it. *Oooh girl – to be tied to that – mmm – mmm – mmm*. A slight smile formed on her lips as she continued to look the room over. She then slipped off her heels to walk across the black mink and Canada Lynx fur rug that lay in front of the fireplace. The feel of the fur between her toes made her moan slightly, catching his attention.

He stood, and like a predator stalking its prey, silently maneuvered his way to her. His physique was a mass of solid muscle. The veins in his neck were clearly noticeable, even with the flickering light from the fireplace. Even through his dress shirt, the muscles on his chest and biceps strained against the material. The bulge in his slacks was a dead giveaway as to how he was feeling now.

He stood behind her, rubbing her arms, praying this will go well. As he wrapped his arms around her, she leaned into him, waiting. He pushed away from her and turned her around. There was determination in his eyes. He studied her before talking.

“You don’t have to be here, Rebekah. I can take you back to the club, or home, for that matter.”

“Bryce – I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t want to be.” She stood on her tiptoes and pecked his cheek before turning to walk away, sending a spark throughout his body. She never had the opportunity to walk away. Within seconds he was all over her.

He had gently, but deliberately, grabbed her by the throat, causing her to stop and look up at him. His features looked dominating under the glow of the firelight. Pulling her closer he began kissing her with forceful determination. His kisses were strong against her lips. She had never known a man who could part her lips and infiltrate her

mouth the way his tongue did. All she could do was grab his arms to keep herself steady, and even that was a challenge. In one swift movement, Bryce had her in his arms and was carrying her to the bed. He stopped kissing her now swollen lips. Looking down at her, he helped her to stand and slowly removed what was left of her clothing.

Rebekah was a bit shy about standing completely naked in front of him, but he didn't allow her time to think about it. He had slid her out of her red dress and tossed it onto the chair behind him. He removed her bra and exposed her larger than life breasts.

Her sex throbbed and she tightened her legs together. However, Bryce saw her actions and quickly parted them. His hand, large and manly rubbed her sex from front to back. It covered her whole honeypot. He could feel the heat rising from it and began to lick his lips. He squeezed her folds, causing the wetness of them to secrete – moistening his hand. He was in awe of the way it felt.

Her nipples had perked up by the thrill he was giving her down there. He lowered his head long enough to suck hard and pull deliberately at her nipple. She cried out in pain as he released it and watched as it bounced her breast back and forth.

She reached out to unbutton his dress shirt and was stopped abruptly. Bryce grabbed her hand, preventing her from going any further.

"I-I'll do it." He took a step back and unbuttoned his shirt and removed it. He was a beautiful specimen of a man, even though he still had a t-shirt on. It was crying to be removed from the mass of muscle that stood before her.

She didn't understand why he wouldn't let her help. It couldn't have been the tattoos that were covering parts up his upper torso – or could it? She had noticed an array of them underneath the t-shirt. As he slowly removed the t-shirt – she saw much more. From his elbows up to both shoulders, he had a masquerade of tattoos. A couple of them were of naked women, but a majority was Celtic symbols with splotches of other unrecognizable designs. Some of the tattoos were like stone figures he had in his room.

Once the t-shirt was gone, he stood there waiting. She stood and walked around him, admiring the artwork and the detail and hard work that had been put into each one. She also noticed that some of the tattoos covered scars. In fact, almost every tattoo he had, except for the Dara Celtic Knots that encircled each upper arm, covered scars of some sort.

She reached out to touch him and could feel him shake beneath her skin. *So, this is why.* She had forgotten about her own insecurities as she was in awe of his beauty. His arms were tight and muscular – nary an inch of fat to be had. His waist was symmetrical with his size. Her fingertips were killing him. The sensation was almost unbearable.

She stood as close as she could behind him. His scent was intoxicating. The smell of man soap and cologne mixed in with his body chemistry caused her nostrils to flare in acceptance.

She pressed herself against his back and sent shockwaves throughout his body. Had the fireplace not been burning, one would think he was freezing to death the way his body quivered as her nipples grazed his spine. Slowly, she wrapped her arms around him, long enough to run her nails down his torso nearly sending him over the edge. He let out a small cry as he exhaled deeply.

He swallowed hard before continuing, "Damn woman, you're killing me." Her hands did not stop at the clawing of his flesh, she found herself reaching the buckle of his belt and ran her hands down the length of his member.

Unable to take her "teasing" any longer, he grabbed one of her hands and held it tight.

"If you want something, all you have to do is ask, Rebekah."

She looked at him and ran her tongue across her lips. That was all he needed. He pulled her close to him. Reaching up, he grabbed one of her breasts and squeezed. He wanted her to feel the pleasure and the pain of it. He liked the fact that she didn't pull away.

He bent down to kiss her one last time before whispering to her, "I need you, Rebekah. I need to feel you – and I'm going to fuck you." His breathing was heavy as he continued, "You're going to enjoy everything I do to you. You're going to give everything you are to me. We're going to do it over, and over, and over again."

He turned his body, and she was shocked to see he had pulled his cock out of his pants. It stood straight up with a slight curve at the tip, hitting just below his navel. She caught her breath as she watched him skim out of the remainder of his clothing. He stood statuesque before her. A full specimen of man. His hard on twitched as if bowing before her.

She reached one hand up to his chest and traced the outline of a Celtic symbol. Her touch singed his flesh. Before he could react, she wrapped her other hand around his man beast and began to stroke. He flinched as if it were painful, then relaxed a bit. He took in her massage, leaning his head back and tried to steady himself to the sheer fascination of her stroking him.

"Rebekah, stop – please."

She ignored his plea and continued. With each stroke she felt him grow harder and harder. The veins protruding from his cock pulsated against her skin.

Unable to control himself, he grabbed her stroking hand and held it in place – squeezing her hand around his piece until her fingers began to go numb. She watched the pain in his face subside as he slowly released their grip. He took a deep breath and looked down at her through wanton eyes. It was time. Without hesitation, he lifted her off her feet and lay her across the bed. Her thickness was exposed. Her wetness was exposed. He climbed onto the bed and spread her legs with his knees. Grabbing the beast between his legs, she watched as he rolled the condom effortlessly onto it with one hand.

As if falling on top of her, he landed on his hands just over her stomach. Gently blowing into her navel, she could feel the chills begin to form. He bent over and ran his tongue across then around its circumference before looking up at her. The man had pure determination in his eyes when he spoke. The smirk on his face was menacing.

“You should have asked me to take you back, princess.” She looked at him puzzled and was suddenly caught off guard and put into a tailspin when she felt his mouth clamp down on her clitoris. His sucking action took her to a whole new level of pleasure. He didn’t relent. He sucked and pulled and tugged at her innocent bulb over and over. The only part of him that was touching any part of her was his mouth, working its magic on that nub.

He began licking her from front to back, running his tongue along the crevice of her entry. He sucked up her juices and nibbled at her flesh until he was sure she was ready. She was in sheer heaven over his assault and had no idea he was finished with his meal until she felt the pressure of him enter her. He managed to slide up to her, and slide inside her in one move. Not even the slight curve of his cock gave him away until it was too late.

Moans and cries escaped her throat as he dug in and out of her repeatedly. He did not let up as he pounded against her. He was like a well-oiled machine. He kept his pace up and never slowed down. Sweat beaded off his body, down every muscle. He stopped long enough to flip her over and re-enter her from behind. She lay there helpless as his pumping continued. Then, as quickly as it began – it stopped.

Her inner walls were so numb she didn’t feel him explode, let alone herself. The only way she knew he had reached his climax was when he fell on top of her and cried out in triumph.

He gently climbed off her and stood. Gingerly removing the spent rubber from his phallus, he watched as she tried to climb off the bed. It was a slow process, and then he realized he may have gone too far.

“Oh, shit. I-I’m so sorry. I should have paid more attention. I ‘m sorry – I couldn’t help myself.” She heard the desperation in his voice as she reached the floor and stood

straight. Rebekah grabbed her quivering stomach and looked at the pain and guilt that filled Brycen's eyes.

"I'm fine – really. Just – uh – just wasn't expecting-"

"I'm sorry. Here – let me help you."

Brycen went to touch her and she flinched a little. He took a step back and realized she feared him. Brycen put his head down in defeat.

"Do you have a shower I can use?"

Brycen took a deep breath and grabbed his robe from behind the door and placed it around her, before covering himself. This time she allowed him to take her hand and lead her to the bathroom. He handed her towels and such and began to walk away when he heard her say, "Do you want to get in with me? It looks big enough for two."

He turned to look at her and saw a slight smile form on her face. He removed his shorts and took her hand. The water felt good against his skin. She began to caress and fondle him, making him hard again. She squeezed hard and a surge of energy ran through him. He watched as she knelt before him and began what seemed to be to him, the most mind-blowing blowjob.

Unable to contain his need to have her again, he lifted her up and placed her onto his phallus and rammed hard against her. No condom, no kindness. She cried out as he took her repeatedly. Steam from the shower filled the room. Everything after that was a blur.

Suddenly, Brycen shook his head and heard the blaring of music coming from the speaker. The woman he ached for was not there. He was still sitting in front of the stage as the strippers continued to do their thing. *Fuck!* Consumed by anger, he looked at the mirror behind the dancers, and hated the face staring back at him. His life was shot to hell and it showed. He let some *bitch* control his life and he wasn't having any of it. His anger with himself grew. He slammed down his second glass of whiskey and walked out of the club into the daylight.

Chapter 18 – You Belong to Me

All was silent this night. Brycen entered her home without making a sound. He was getting good at it. He remembered how he had jimmied the lock the first time so that it would appear to be locked when it wasn't. He was pissed off – down right angry tonight; more so than usual. She had been with this joker long enough. It was getting time for him to go.

Quietly he crept upstairs and down the hall. He wasn't the same man he was a year or so ago. He was angry and vengeful. He had lost everything overnight, and he blamed it all on her. As he looked around the corner into her room, he was disgusted by what he saw. Slowly he inched his way inside.

He could see their legs intertwined with one another as they slept in her bed. It was 4 o'clock in the morning and all he wanted to do was jump on the bed and beat the crap out of him. He was in HIS spot. He was kissing on HIS woman. Just the thought of it was pissing him off. Seeing it first hand made him fume at the mouth.

How could she lay there with him – naked and let him use her like that? Quietly, he walked around the room, measuring things up. It had been nearly three weeks since Jake first made love to his woman. They had been together almost every night since. It was driving him crazy.

Brycen had remembered how he almost got caught as he watched this dude laying on the living room floor with his woman – the two of them smelling like sex. It made him want to vomit. He had to go outside and compose himself. If it weren't for that damned cat he kicked as he walked outside, he would have gone back in and stuck that bastard like the pig he was.

Staring at him from the outside; that son of a bitch was just standing at the sink half naked, thinking he owned the place. Should have gone in and stuck a knife in his belly and let him bleed like a stuck pig. That'd show him and her just who they were messing with.

That lawyer sure got dealt with last week – made sure he knew what was going on. Lucky he still breathing. He couldn't believe that his woman even looked at that dude. He ran into Markus one night after Markus found out about her and Jake. Markus was neither pleased nor amused by his findings. He was even less so with this man confronting him.

Markus had gone to see Rebekah when she told him the week before things had changed and she was no longer available. He didn't quite understand what that meant, so he wanted to talk to her face to face and find out just what was going on.

When he arrived at her place, Jake answered the door. "Hi, how's it going?" Markus stood there confused so Jake continued, "Can I help you with something?"

"Uh – good – is Rebekah here?" Markus wasn't sure what to make of the white man answering Rebekah's door, but wanted to find that out from her.

"Sure. Come on in." Jake moved aside and let the man enter while he called for Rebekah. "Babe, someone is here for you."

"Babe? What the...?" Is this what she was trying to tell me? Markus looked shocked when he heard this man call Rebekah 'babe' – and she responded.

"Markus – what are you doing here?" She stood at the bottom of the stairs looking and the two of them by the door. Jake gave her a slight nod and closed the door, crossed his arms – and stood there waiting for the man's response.

Looking at Jake and then back at Rebekah, Markus choked out a reply, "I – uh – I came by to find out what you meant by – do you think we can talk in private, or something?"

Jake realized this was the man she had the lunch date with the first night he and Rebekah were together. He was also the man that tried to take liberties with her when she didn't want them – Rebekah told him everything.

"Jake, this is Markus. He's the friend I told you about."

"Hey, nice to meet you." Jake reached out his hand for Markus to accept but got a more slightly chilly response before he conceded.

"Hi. Uh – Beckie, about that talk?" Markus nonchalantly dismissed Jake. Jake had to laugh a little to maintain his composure.

Jake walked over to Rebekah and touched her arm. "I'll leave you two to talk. I'll be upstairs - if you need me, sweetie." Jake leaned down and kissed her temple – all while looking at Markus – then made his way upstairs.

Markus waited until Jake was out of sight to comment on the display of affection. "Beckie – really?"

"What? Jake?"

"Is this why you don't want to go out with me anymore – cuz you're doing some white dude?"

“Seriously Markus? I can’t believe you just said that.”

“I’m sorry – no, no I’m not sorry. I can’t believe you stiffin’ me for some powder face.”

“That’s enough, Markus. Now you listen to me-”

Markus’ voice continued to climb, causing Jake to stand at the top of the stairs.

“No – you listen, woman,” Markus grabbed Rebekah by the arms. Jake was downstairs in what seemed to be one movement. Jake grabbed Markus by the arm, separating the two of them.

“Hey – that’s enough. Take your hands off her.” Pushing Markus back, he stood between the two and continued.

“I think it’s time for you to leave. It’s clear that things didn’t work out between the two of you. Be the big man and walk away – please.”

Markus squared his shoulders and tried to stare Jake down. Jake, who was clearly three or four inches taller than Markus, folded his arms over his chest, exposing his rather muscular biceps and waited for Markus to make his move.

“Oh – so you speak for her as well as fuck her?” Markus didn’t see the right hook coming that landed square on his jaw, causing him to fall flat on his back. Jake started at Markus to finish what he started, but Rebekah grabbed his arm, causing him to instantly stop, changing his expression from the ferocious and angry man she only saw when he was hurt, to the soft, caring, and loving man she had come to know almost overnight.

Jake turned to her and saw the concern in her eyes. “Are you alright, baby girl?” He ran his hands up and down her arms, then grabbed her hands and kissed them. He heard Markus rise to his feet but kept his attention on Rebekah. *He* had been spying and heard it all – Markus’ disrespect towards Rebekah; Markus’ disrespect towards Rebekah. *He* would do more than punch the bastard.

“Beckie – I – I’m sorry. I just wanted – shit – I just wanted it to be me.” Rebekah looked around Jake then moved him to the side.

“I’m sorry too, Markus. I am sorry that you must be so narrow-minded when it comes to relationships and people. I’m sorry that you think its okay to cut people down because of their choice in who they want to be with, especially if isn’t with you. I think you need to leave – now.”

Markus wanted to hold Rebekah and beg for her forgiveness but knew there would be consequences if it did happen. Markus looked at Jake and wiped his mouth. "I'm sorry, man." Then he walked out of the door.

He waited for Markus to come out of the community and followed him towards his car. Markus hadn't really paid attention to him. Thinking the guy was another resident, he continued to walk to his car until he felt the man grab him from behind and slam him to the ground.

"Fuck man – I said I was sorry."

"You're going to be sorry, mother fucker." *He* pinned Markus to the ground out of distance from the gate and onlookers. Markus realized that this was someone else and not Jake. *He* pressed his knee against Markus' neck and pulled his arm up, causing him to cry out.

"Come on man. You're breaking my arm."

"I haven't broken it yet. I will do more damage than that fucker did if you so much as breathe in her direction – you feel me?"

"Yeah – yeah – let me go – please!"

"You better jump in your car and not look back, or there will definitely be a problem. Now get the fuck outta here."

He jerked Markus back up to his feet and shoved him towards his car. Markus did as he said all while holding his arm, trying to massage the pain away. The hoodie *he* wore hid his face. He watched Markus jump into his car and speed away. *He* was satisfied Markus took *his* threat seriously and stayed away from Rebekah. But now look at what she's with.

He stood there in front of the closet. The memories pounded against his head, causing his eyes to ache. He looked over to see Jake stirring in the bed. Slowly, *he* made his way out of the bedroom and back down the stairs to the spare bedroom, where he had entered through the window. It was the one window that had not been wired to the alarm.

He wasn't ready to leave just yet. When rummaging through the bedroom, he found a pair of her underwear, like he had done before. These were laced, off white panties – his favorite pair. He had taken them from her drawer before. He eyed them up and down and felt himself grow hard. Knowing that she had worn it drove *him* wild. His hardness was painful being caged inside of his pants.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he unzipped his pants, pulled out his member, wrapped her panties around it and began to stroke. He squeezed hard so that he could

endure some pain as he got himself off. It only took a minute or two for him to reach his climax. *He* blamed it on stress and the betrayal he believed she had done. With his member drained, all over the panties, he almost continued *his* routine of washing them out in the sink and stuffing them in the bottom of the hamper in the laundry room.

However, this time, it was different. Instead of washing them out, he neatly placed them on the railing at the bottom of the stairwell. It was time to step things up a notch. Play time was over, and he needed to show these two that *he* wasn't going to be made a fool of – again. As he walked away, he realized that if he left them and the police were notified, he'd be caught for certain.

No sooner had he grabbed them off the railing, he heard movement upstairs. He casually walked to the back bedroom and into the closet. There he waited. The soaked panties became discomforting for him. It was not his intention to keep the ejaculated underwear in his hand.

He heard whoever it was that came downstairs, walk towards the bedroom he was hiding in. His breathing stilled as the light flicked on then back off again.

Jake walked back to the kitchen and stopped. The window in that room was open. He remembers checking it before they went upstairs that night. Slowly he walked back to the bedroom, this time he didn't turn on the light. *He* was going to be ready this time. When he saw Jake walk to the window and look out, he slowly made his way out of the closet, then back in again. It was too close for comfort. He didn't want to confront him unless necessary.

Jake closed the window and locked it as a cat jumped off the window seal.

“Jake – is everything alright?”

“Yeah baby girl, everything's fine. Just forgot to lock the window down here. Damn cat outside. You know, you really need to stop encouraging them unless you really want them as pets.”

Rebekah walked into the room and wrapped her arms around his waist. “I have no idea what you're talking about.” Her coyness was insatiable. Jake bent down and kissed her with carnal demand.

“Ha ha – you know exactly what I'm talking about. That food and water dish didn't appear outside all by itself.”

Rebekah laughed a little as she turned and headed out the door. Before she could fully descend, Jake grabbed her around the waist. His hands kneaded her flesh under her t-shirt. *He* watched through the French closet doors. The sight was making him sick. This man was all over her - assaulting her.

He watched as the man lifted her shirt and began fondling her breasts – licking them, kissing them, sucking them. She ran her fingers through his hair; he grabbed her ass and massaged it. He was beginning to stir in the closet. He'd almost forgotten where he was. Before a sound could be made, he stilled himself and waited. Their petting turned into a sexual escapade right there in the hallway. He pinned her against the wall in the hallway and had his way with her – *bastard*.

He couldn't see anything, but he could hear plenty. Their panting was making him crazy. The moans coming from her were almost unbearable. He had become erect during the sexual escapades in the hallway, and he couldn't help but to pleasure himself in the closet. While his expulsion of fluids only took him a minute or two – or less, the couple was still going at it hot and heavy. When they finally reached their climax, their acknowledgement of pleasure echoed throughout the first floor.

He wanted to vomit. Moreover, he wanted to trade places with that man that just made love to the woman he yearned for only steps away – again. He was drawn to her and he hadn't even met her face to face yet – not formally anyway. He waited until the coast was clear and made his way back out the bedroom window – making sure no trace of him was left behind.

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Walking back to his car he had carefully hidden down a parallel street not far away, he was able to calm his nerves and think of what his next step would be. The women he'd encountered over these past months paled in comparison to Rebekah. He had been stalking her for some time.

He couldn't help but to smile at all the times he got close to her – at meetings when she was working for law firms; at clubs with her friends; even at home while she slept. He was always there – watching. Even his fantasies of her were earth shattering in his mind. He was able to take control of her and everything around to suit his need and purpose.

He dreamed of her almost every night; making love to her and holding her close. He wanted to be her keeper, her lover, her protector. He wanted to own every part of her being, and in his dreams he did.

Tonight, tonight was a little too close for comfort, though. Now with her *man whore* in the picture, he may not be able to get as close to her any longer. They seemed inseparable. The last few weeks had been unbearable – watching him come over to her place and stay; watching her go over to his place and stay; all the while knowing what the two of them were doing all night.

There had been a few nights, like tonight, where he had been cornered in a closet or another room – listening to them panting and sweating all over each other. He'd

never known two people to get it on as much as they did. The thought of that man being inside her, sickened him to his core. Disgusted, he pounded his fists on the steering wheel as he drove down the street and out of her neighborhood.

He made it home before the sun came up. Walking inside, he was greeted by his dog, Max. The full bred English bulldog was as long as he was wide. While he was an overweight mutt, he was strong – and loyal. He waited at the door patiently for his master to come home when he ventured out at night. Brycen didn't have many friends to speak of. Max was the best friend he had.

After greeting his obedient canine, he set his keys down on the table in the foyer and walked upstairs to grab a shower before sleeping the morning away. It had been another long night for him and he needed that hot shower to help relieve all the tension that had built up.

Getting out of the shower he noticed he had a couple of missed calls – one being his mother. As usual she had to know why he didn't arrive back home until this morning and what had he been doing all night. Brycen deleted the voicemail and dropped down on his bed. The muscles in his jaw flexed as he tried to relax. She was on his mind way too much – especially since they had not yet met face to face. *This woman is going to be the death of me if I don't get her.* Closing his eyes, he tried to go to sleep.

It had been about an hour since he laid there naked on his bed and went to sleep. Aside from scars, he was damn near perfect. A knock at the front door caused him to stir. He covered his head with his pillow and tried to drown out the voices downstairs.

"I do believe he is sleeping, Miss."

The scantily clad woman squeezed Henry, the houseman's cheeks as she walked by, her three-inch 'hooker heels' clanging underneath her feet.

"He won't be for long." She winked as she went upstairs. Henry closed the front door. Once she had disappeared up the staircase, Henry took his handkerchief out of his pocket, and wiped his face. Henry didn't much care for the busty, half-naked brunette that frequented the house at all hours of the day and night. He knew of her type and wished she would leave and not return – shame he couldn't tell Brycen that.

She opened the door of Brycen's room to see him face up, sprawled eagle on the bed. The temptation was too much to resist. She came in, closed the door behind her and locked it quietly. Quietly she took off her shoes and then her clothes and crept up to the bed. She was not like Rebekah. Her body was well toned and over tanned. As a headlining stripper, she made the necessary alterations to her body to make it perfect – larger breasts, tucks here and there, vagina and nipple piercings, and a few other changes through the help of modern medicine – and Brycen's money.

She stood there between his legs and watched as his penis lay there, slumbering, and then jump as if on queue. She ran her hands up her legs to her nipples. Taking her other hand, she ran it between her legs, massaging her own folds and making herself wet.

“So, are you just going to stand there, or what?”

The muffled question came from beneath the pillow over Brycen’s head. He knew she was in the room before she opened the door. The perfume she liked made it to his room and into his nostrils before she had even gotten to the top of the stairs.

She stood there – still quiet – still naked. Brycen raised the pillow from his face. His hair, still damp from his shower, changed the color from the sun-soaked dishwater blond to more of a dirty blond – desperately needing a new style. He sat up straight on the bed and looked her up and down.

“What are you doing here Nikki? I thought I told you if I wanted something I’d send for you.”

“I know lover, but – a lady can get lonely waiting for y-”

Brycen had jumped up and grabbed her around the neck before she could finish her sentence. Now on her tip toes, she was able to look him in the eye – almost – as he spoke.

“You really need to learn how to listen baby – and believe me when I say – you are far from a lady.” Brycen slammed his mouth against her, hard enough to make her bottom lip bleed slightly. As their lips parted, they both licked the minute trace of blood from their lips. Brycen looked at her then down at his growing erection. She looked up at him and smiled before he threw her onto the bed. She landed on her back laughing, “Wow babe, you know I like it rough. He had secured a condom on his manhood within a matter of seconds. He stood before her stroking himself to maintain his stiffness. She laid there on the bed, legs bent rubbing her clit, waiting for him to join her. *She’s not what he wanted – but will do for now.* He didn’t want to look her in the eye today. He grabbed one leg and flipped her over and slid her on her hand and knees to the edge of the bed. He gave no warning when he rammed his nine-inch beast inside her.

“Ow! Yeah baby – do – it –” He ignored her moans and words as he continued to drill in and out of her; deeper and deeper. He grabbed hold of her hips, watching himself as he cock disappeared inside her. She took him with ease. His girth was almost the size of a soda can. She had no problem taking him; she had done it so often it.

She screamed his name a few more times while adding expletives and pet names like Greek god and dirty bastard. She didn’t know how to shut up. Brycen figured the only way that would happen is if he finished quickly and kicked her out so that he could

go back to sleep. Brycen yawned and slapped her ass a few times before ramming it home. She came with a vengeance. He pulled out before getting off himself. He was more tired than horny. He was more tired of her. The more he fucked her, the more he accepted that she wasn't Rebekah and never would be.

Ripping the condom from his penis and then tossing it in the trash he gave her an order, "Get out –and don't come back unless I send for you." He snatched her from off the bed and led her to where she stripped her clothes off. Forcing her to pick them up, he continued, "I mean it – DO NOT come back here unless I have sent for you, Nikki. I've been working on a project and I don't want any distractions."

"Fine lover, I just wanted a little tease this morning. Can't blame a girl for trying, right?" She batted her eyes at him while she slipped the mini dress back over her head and trench coat over her arm.

"You know, Brycen, I just wanted to be close to you. It's been a while – and – well, I've missed you." She touched his face and kissed his lips.

He looked at her through tired eyes and responded, "I know, baby. You need to understand and hear me when I say that it's just a matter of time. I need to concentrate on other things now, and you – well," he ran a finger from her lips down between her breasts. "You my dear Nicolette – are a major distraction. Now, be a good kitten – and go." His words were ice cold, but they hit the mark. She looked at him, he looked through her and opened the door, waiting for her exit.

He called down to Henry to let him know that his guest was leaving, but he already had the front door open. Nikki stormed down the stairs and out the front door – having it close tightly behind her.

"Will there be anything else, sir?" Henry called up in a gentlemanly tone, waiting for a response.

"No, Henry. That'll be all – just – just make sure I am not disturbed for the rest of the morning."

"Very well, sir." He waited for Brycen to close his door before he descended back to the kitchen.

Brycen walked back over to his bed, threw the spread onto the floor, and lay back down. He rubbed his face and then folded his hands behind his head. Nikki was a sexual distraction to him for a moment, but it would never go beyond that. He didn't love her – he barely even liked her. He met her the same night he saw Rebekah for the first time. Scoping out strip clubs was not one of his daily routines, but that night – he needed some sort of release; when he saw Nikki, he knew she would curb his insatiable appetite.



Slowly, Brycen pulled the pillow back over his eyes, and drifted off to sleep – to dream – about Rebekah.

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## **Chapter 19 – It's A Yes or No Answer**

The first couple of weeks together were somewhat awkward. Rebekah was still in awe over the fact that they were together at all, and Jake just loved spending every moment possible with her. One morning Rebekah woke up to the barking of Ms. Furlong's twin Pekinese dogs. She yawned and stretched and looked over at Jake to make sure she wasn't just dreaming about the last two weeks. It had become a ritual for her to wake up and stare at him, mentally pinching herself for reassurance it was all very real.

Nope – he was still there. He had one arm draped over her, and the other draped over the side of the bed; his head half way under the pillow still sound asleep. She couldn't keep from staring at him, until his one visible eye slowly opened and stared back at her.

"Mmm – morning baby girl. You okay?" Jake pulled her closer to him before lifting his head and kissing her just above her breast.

"Yeah – great. Just making sure I wasn't dreaming or hallucinating."

Jake looked at her and smiled. "You are definitely not hallucinating – and I must say that if I myself am dreaming, then please – please don't wake me up!" He leaned in and kissed her lips softly. "Morning baby."

"Good morning." She leaned over and returned the kiss. Her heart pounded as he drew her closer. He held tight to her kiss and he shifted his body half way on top of hers.

"You know, I could do this all day – all night."

She giggled at his statement before responding, "Um, didn't we just do that?"

"Not all night, no. It could have gone all night, but what kind of man would I be if I didn't let you get rest?"

Rebekah laughed out loud before wiggling out of his grip.

"Hey! Where are you going?"

"I'm going to powder my nose. I won't be long." She smiled before she disappeared into the bathroom.

She came back out wearing her black and pink silk chiffon robe over what appeared to be an oversized t-shirt. She saw Jake sitting up, on his cell phone, in what seemed to be a heated discussion.

“Listen, I’m not having this discussion with you again.” Jake looked up at Rebekah and held out a hand for her to take. She took his hand and he pulled her close, sitting her next to him on the bed as he continued, “You need to move on. I have to go. I’d appreciate it if you didn’t call back.”

“Is everything alright, Jake?”

He took a deep breath and rubbed her arm and leg before responding, “Yeah – everything’s fine.” He looked deep into her eyes, “You are so beautiful, Rebekah. I wish this could last forever.”

Rebekah felt the butterflies in her stomach flutter about as she just stared at him. “Jake, I-”

Jake kissed her before she could continue. It was tender, sweet, and passionate the way he was with her.

“Sshhh – I know this is new for you. It’s new for me too. I – I don’t want to lose this. I want to see where this leads us. I can’t remember a time when I have been this happy, this at ease. I have you to thank for that. You’ve shown me what real love should be like.” He touched the side of her face and watched as her eyes filled with tears.

“Hey – I didn’t say it to make you cry, baby girl. I meant every word of it. I’m not losing you – not now – hopefully not ever. I’ve wanted you far too long.” He smiled at her before kissing her again.

He placed his phone back on the nightstand and held her close. The nightstand on his side housed a few of his personal effects – extra watch, cologne, shaving kit. He had even managed to sneak a couple of his shirts over and stow them away in the closet, as well as a few essentials in the nightstand drawer. She didn’t mind at all. In fact, she welcomed it. He had even insisted she do the same. In his master bedroom, he made it a point to square away the other nightstand and a dresser drawer – just in case. So far, she had managed to bring a toothbrush and a change of clothes or two. She knew she would feel more at home doing her personal hygiene in her own bathroom for the time being – however, when she wasn’t looking, Jake had managed to purchase things he thought she might need and stash them under the bathroom sink – just in case.

Jake reached for his watch to see the time. “I should get in the shower. I have a meeting with my grandmother today. She wants to go over something with me but didn’t say what.”

“Oh? I hope everything is alright with her. I know you’ve mentioned her a few times. Sounds like a lovely woman.”

“Would you like to meet her sometime? I can arrange to bring you along today if you like.”

“I wouldn’t want to intrude; besides, I have a meeting with my partner this afternoon anyway. Rain check?”

He kissed her on the nose before getting up. Rebekah scooted over enough for him to get by. He stood before her – naked in all his manliness. She couldn’t help but lick her lips. His man meat jump and she quickly turned her head.

Jake caught her blushing and laughed. “Don’t worry baby. I’m not going to accost you this morning. But do be prepared for a fun filled evening.”

“Fun filled. Well – that could be interesting.”

He helped her to stand and wrapped his arms around her, holding her close. He bent down and kissed her mouth with authority. She reciprocated, running her hands up and down his back, waist, and butt. He pushed himself against her slightly, and a moan escaped both of their lips as they separated.

“Ok then – I’m going to go now.” Jake kissed her quickly and walked over to the ottoman and picked up his trousers and put them on. It was excruciating trying to stuff his alert manhood into his pants.

“I thought you were going to take a shower?”

“Oh – I am; just not here. I’ve only kissed you and looked what happens.” He pointed to his protruding erection in his pants. “I need to deflate and make some calls before my meeting today.” Once fully clothed, he walked back over to Rebekah, bent down, and kissed her – grabbing his keys and wallet off the nightstand at the same time.

“You have a good day at work today, okay?” He kissed her one last time before leaving.

She watched as he disappeared out of the room and down the hall. As the door closed, she walked to her window and watched as he walked home. As she was turning to walk a way, she noticed a figure approach the walkway. A tall man in a cap stood staring at Jake as he left her home; then the man looked up at her in the window. The second he saw her, he quickly turned and walked out of the community. He was too quick for her to recognize. The only thing she could tell was that he was tall, blond and had cold, steel blue eyes.

A chill came over her. She rushed downstairs and made sure her door was locked. She wasn't sure why but seeing him sent a chill through her bones.

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That afternoon at work, she couldn't help but to think about this man. It scared her to think he would do harm to Jake. As luck would have it, her thoughts were happily interrupted by a text from Jake.

Hey – headed to my meeting now. How about we do a quick lunch after? You can meet my grandmother.

She smiled and was about to respond when she was interrupted by Sheila bringing in a delivery.

“These just came for you, Rebekah. No card, so –”

Sheila brought in a large spring arrangement, full of pansies, sunflowers, violets, carnations, and every other spring flower available.

“These are beautiful. You said no card?”

“No, the driver said that he was told to just deliver them. They are pretty, that's for sure.”

“Yes.” Rebekah's curiosity was getting the better of her. Usually when Jake has something delivered, a note or card come with it.

She was about to say something else when her phone rang.

“Hey sweetheart.”

“Hey you. They are lovely, thank you.”

Jake took a second and made a questioning response, “Um – you're welcome? Did I get you something and forget about it?”

Now she was thoroughly puzzled. “The flowers – I just received them.”

Silence filled the air. “Um – they aren't from me, honey.”

“Well – who could they be from?”

“Hhhmmm – perhaps that Markus character? Maybe because of the way he acted the other night when he came by?”

Rebekah thought about it. “No – this isn't something he would do; especially after that confrontation. I doubt we will ever hear from him again.”

“Yeah, well. Let’s hope not. Anyway, I just arrived at my meeting. Are you up for meeting my grandmother today?”

“Sure, I am just about to go into my meeting as well. Call you when I am done?”

“Sounds good baby. Hey –”

“Yes, Jake?” Silence filled the air again. It was like waiting for that sweet little old lady to cross the street.

“I – I – hmmm”

“What is it, Jake?”

He took a deep breath and sighed. “I’ll see you after while.”

Strange – “Okay, bye.”

“Bye babe.” Jake hung up the phone. Still sitting in his car, he closed his eyes in defeat and whispered to himself – *I love you, Rebekah*. It had been just that simple. Three little words he has been afraid to say to the one person who has understood him better than anyone. Those three little words that struck fear into him that she would not feel the same way.

He got out of his car and headed over to the building.

The name on the building was a name to be reckoned with – *Abernathy & Associates*. He tried talking his grandmother into changing it to Turner but couldn’t get her to budge just yet. She had been contemplating the name change for a while but didn’t see a reason – until now.

Jake entered the large ornate building. The old masonry building had a lot of character. With his paintings, his brother’s construction touchups and his sister and grandmother’s flair for design, it became one of the poshest buildings in the district.

He always loved seeing the inside of her building. She had tried to talk him into refinishing the other half and making it his art gallery, but he declined. Although, he had been thinking about starting up a new project, the possibilities of making that open space next to her building into something extraordinary were endless.

Gail walked out of her office and spotted Jake walking up to the reception desk.

“AJ, darling, how are you?”

Jake bent down to hug and kiss his grandmother. He loved her with everything in him. “Grandmother, how are you?”

“I’m doing just delightful now that you’re here. Did your father tell you why I wanted you here?”

“Dad? No – I haven’t talked to him in a couple of days. I mean, he mentioned that you wanted to meet with me about something but wouldn’t say what. Is everything alright? You’re not sick again, are you?”

Jake couldn’t help but be protective of her well-being. She dismissed his question with a wave of her hand and allowed him to escort her down the hall.

“Sheila, my dear that will be all. You run along and enjoy the rest of the day.”

“Yes ma’am.” Sheila gathered her things and was out the door before she could say goodbye.

“She has been a godsend I tell you. You wouldn’t think she knows a thing about administration, but she keeps this company running like a well-oiled machine. Here we are dear.”

She and Jake entered the conference room together and sat down. “So, grandmother, what’s so important that you needed to see me?” Jake heard a familiar voice coming down the hall. The woman was talking to the chef about the upcoming event – *his* upcoming event.

Gail couldn’t help but to snicker a little as Jake looked at her and then back at the door, waiting for the familiar voice to show her face.

“Thank you, Bernard.” She entered the conference room and stopped in her tracks. Jake stood and was taken aback by who he saw.

“Jake, what are you –?”

“Rebekah – you – you’re – here.”

Rebekah looked at Gail. She was totally confused. “Gail?”

“Rebekah, darling you know my grandson, AJ – or Jake as you call him.” Gail couldn’t help but to smile as she watched them just staring at one another.

“Your – grand – son.” Rebekah wanted to crawl under a rock. She couldn’t count the number of times she sat with Gail, telling sorted details of her new love interest.

Jake turned three shades of red, having realized he had shared his feelings for Rebekah, in confidence with his grandmother – her partner.

“Oh my God, oh my god.” Rebekah started to get flush and felt the room spinning.

“Grandmother, what’s going on? Rebekah’s your partner?”

Rebekah looked at Jake in amazement, “You make that sound like it’s a bad thing.” She barked at him.

“That’s not what I meant and you know it baby girl. I – grandmother –”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake you two. Sit down.” Gail’s words caused them to become quiet and sit on her command. She straightened her jacket and proceeded on.

“Now, you two need to understand something. For the longest time I have wanted nothing but the best for you, Alexander Jacob.” Rebekah looked at him in shock as his grandmother used his full name. He waved his hand, dismissing any sarcasm he knew she was about to say.

“And you, Rebekah Elise. I love you like my own and have wanted nothing but happiness for you as well. Now, as I see it, this couldn’t have come at a more opportune time. Especially since Gladys and I have been trying to get the two of you together since the day you bought that townhouse young man. Making sure she told you about Rebekah and what she had to offer in business – well, I figured that would be the best way to get you two together.”

“Grandmother!”

“Oh, don’t grandmother me my boy. It was fate and you know it. I was just happy to see you come to your senses where that Eliza girl was concerned.”

Gail rolled her eyes at the mention of her name. Jake looked at her in shock and was about to respond when she cut him off.

“My boy let me ask you a question.”

Jake sighed and shuttered at the thought of the next words coming out of her mouth. “Yes, grandmother.”

“You must be honest when answering me – because *you* know that *I* will know if you’re lying.”

She was right; she’d know if he were lying. Something he could never do with her. “Of course, grandmother.”

“Do you love this woman?”

Jake closed his eyes and counted to ten. He knew her question – he was just afraid to give his answer. However, on impulse and at the glare his grandmother had given him, he was compelled to tell the truth.

He looked at Rebekah, without hesitation, took her hand before answering. “Yes, yes I do love her.”

Rebekah’s heart skipped a beat and her eyes started to swell up with tears. Gail turned to Rebekah about to ask the same question, but Rebekah answered before the question could pass Gail’s lips.

“Yes, yes I do.”

Gail looked at her and smiled – trying to look serious and seeing the bond between she and Jake was impenetrable, she continued.

“I – uh – I haven’t asked the question child.”

All Rebekah could do was stare into the deepest, grayest eyes across from her.

“Well, okay then. I guess that settles that.” Gail was about to stand when they both looked at her and Jake replied, “I’m sorry, grandmother – did you say something?”

Gail laughed and stood as she responded, “No darling, not a thing. You two enjoy your day.”

Jake stood, still holding Rebekah’s hand. Letting go, he walked over to Gail and held her close. “I love you grandmother.”

“I love you too, Jaybird.” Jake laughed and blushed at the pet name he remembered her giving him. “Wait a minute – is this why you wanted to meet with me?”

Gail released her hold on Jake and walked over to Rebekah and gave her a squeeze. Looking at Jake, she replied “This was part of the reason, the other is in the works as we speak, my boy. I have made a few changes – some that I am sure will make everyone very happy.”

Gail walked out of the conference room.

Jake stood there for a moment before looking down at Rebekah. He walked over to her and knelt in front of her. Taking her hands in his own, he looked deep into her soul. Her heart began to beat faster as he held her gaze.

“Rebekah – I – I love you. I’ve loved you longer than I’m willing to admit. I don’t know if it was the first day when our hands touched, or the first day I helped you with your mail – but somewhere down the line, I fell in love with you.”

A rush of tears fell down Rebekah’s face. She was overwhelmed, and overjoyed, by his confession.

“I hoped that I wasn’t the only one who felt this way. I love you, Jake. I love you more than you could possibly know.”

Jake reached up and kissed her softly. Together they stood and held each other close.

“You do know this changes everything, right?”

Rebekah looked at him a bit puzzled. “You lost me; what do you mean?”

Rebekah searched his eyes for a hidden answer and found it. “Well,” he said holding her close, “I seriously think we – you and I – need to rethink this living arrangement thing we have going on.”

“I – I don’t follow.”

Jake kissed her forehead before looking into her eyes and continuing on, “Well, I just think that it makes no sense us having two separate places a few yards away from one another. I’m thinking maybe we should combine the two?”

Rebekah looked at him in shock. *Is he getting ready to ask me something?* “I know it’s too soon to propose but,”

Rebekah shook her head, “N-no – it’s not too soon at all.”

Jake laughed and held her out a distance.

“I know it’s presumptive of me to think you’d say ‘yes’,”

“N-not presumptive at all!”

Laughing at the excited expression across her face, he continued, “Okay, Rebekah, I love you. I love you more than I could have possibly thought to love someone in such a short amount of time. But I do – I love you more than life itself. I want to grow old with you. I want to have kids with you and raise them together. I want us to be together now and always. Will you –Rebekah *Elise* Waters, do me the most distinguished honor, of becoming my lover, friend, partner in life – my wife?”

“Yes – yes I will. I love you so much.” The kisses they shared paled in comparison to the joy they felt in each other’s hearts at that very moment.

“Now – I don’t have a ring – oh wait a minute.” Jake reached into his blazer pocket and pulled out the traditional black velveteen box with signature initials across the top.

“Have you been carrying this around the entire time?”

Jake looked at the box as he twirled it around in his hand. “I’d be lying if I said no. I’ve been trying to tell you how I’ve felt for the past week. I know it’s sudden. We can take our time, set the date for some time next year – get better acquainted – meet the families. They’re going to love you, pretty lady.”

“I know mine will be equally thrilled with you. Char already thinks you’re awesome.”

“I know that if they are half as loving as you are, I already love them. As for Char – well I must thank her in person for that little peek-a-boo nighty she sent you before. She has good taste.”

“Ha ha – I’ll be sure to tell her when I talk to her.”

“I love you – soon to be Mrs. Alexander Jacob Turner.”

“I love you back, Mr. Turner. You have no idea how happy you’ve made me today.”

“Well, I’m sure you have a way – or two – of showing me just how happy.”

Their kiss ignited a fire within them that needed no help fueling. “Come on, baby girl, let’s get out of here and make some pre-wedding memories.”

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Epilogue

Brycen had become enraged over Rebekah's upcoming nuptials. It was apparent that the steps he had taken in the past – following her, leaving anonymous gifts here and there, didn't faze her in the slightest. He was going to have to step things up a notch. He'd start by introducing himself to her. The only way he knew he could get closer to her would be to become a client. These past six months had been excruciating seeing them together.

It wasn't enough that he asked her to marry him – he had to move her somewhere that he would have little access to. It was unnerving. *Who did this bastard think he was?*

Brycen slammed his fist against the empty wall of her once furniture filled townhouse. The FOR-SALE sign was gone, replaced by a sign stating IN ESCROW. Purchasing the townhouse anonymously made it easier for him to cut corners and remain in the shadows. He swore that if she didn't live there – he didn't want anyone else to live there either.

This would be his own private getaway – away from the prying eyes of his mother and servants – away from Nikki.

I'm going to make you mine Rebekah. You belong to me.