

**DARE**

**By Layla Valentine**

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This work was previously published under my older pen name, Evelyn  
Troy

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## **Chapter One**

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Jasmine reached out blindly and turned off the water in her shower by touch, twisting the knob until the hot rain ceased flowing down onto her head. She wiped at her eyes and shook her wet hair against her shoulders, tilting her head back and taking a deep breath. She smiled to herself, opening her eyes and stepping out of the shower. In less than an hour and a half she would be on her way to an exclusive event, on the arm of a wealthy date. Grabbing her towel and wrapping it around her body, Jasmine grinned as she thought about the dress she had purchased for the evening ahead.

She dried herself off quickly, glancing in the mirror for just a moment before she stepped through the bathroom and into her bedroom. Jasmine had been looking forward to the date all week; in fact, she had been more and more eager for the day to arrive. It seemed as though the bright patch—meeting with a good-looking guy on the flight home from her business trip—had been immediately destroyed the moment she walked into work on Monday morning, and the only thing that Jasmine could think of to keep herself from walking out of the office without a single backward glance was the knowledge that she would be going out on the weekend.

The previous evening, after work, Jasmine had made her way to the chic shopping center in the wealthier part of the city, intent on finding something to wear to the event. It hadn't occurred to her when she had accepted the date from James, but nothing she owned was suitable for the kind of atmosphere he'd promised. Besides, she had told herself that going shopping for a dress would prolong the experience, give her more to savor.

Almost timidly, she had stepped through the doors of one boutique-style department store after another: Saks, Neiman Marcus, and finally Nordstrom. She had decided that

she simply couldn't afford anything in the first two stores, even though the designer dresses draped on mannequins and hanging from sturdy hangers were more beautiful than anything she had ever owned. Nordstrom, while expensive, was at least within the kind of budget that Jasmine had to hold herself to. Even for an outing among the wealthy, she couldn't justify spending three thousand dollars for a dress she'd only ever wear a few times. She had combed through the formal wear at Nordstrom until a clerk found her and ushered her into the dressing rooms, offering to bring her water and asking about where she was going and what sort of event it would be.

*If I ever have to spend a few hundred on a dress again in my life, I know exactly where to go,* Jasmine thought as she looked lovingly at the plastic garment bag shrouding the dress she had finally decided to buy. The dress itself—heavy black, floral lace over a sheath that perfectly matched her skin tone, cut a few inches above the knee and with a deliciously plunging halter neck—would have been reason enough to go back whenever there was an opportunity; the service she'd received had solidified the inclination. She had left the store almost a thousand dollars poorer, but with a dress, heels, and purse that would make any of her coworkers die with envy at the sight of her.

But first, before she could put on the outfit, Jasmine had to get herself ready. She toweled off and draped her bathrobe around herself before going back into the bathroom. Jasmine had never really considered herself a raving beauty—her dark brown hair was almost stick-straight naturally, and her big green eyes had been compared by more than one of her boyfriends to those of a fish—but she had learned how to make the best of her striking looks. Jasmine blow-dried her hair, tousling it generously with her fingers and lifting sections with a brush to get at the roots.

As soon as her hair was the way she wanted it, Jasmine turned her attention to her makeup. A little bit of neutral eye shadow, liner, and mascara, light foundation and blush, and some deep red lipstick, and Jasmine admired herself in the mirror; she definitely looked as though she should be at an event like the one James had invited her to. Jasmine smiled to herself, stepping out of the bathroom.

She strode towards her dresser and opened the top drawer, rummaging around for a few moments as she considered what to wear underneath her outfit. She pulled out a bra and a pair of panties: thin, fine, almost translucent lace the color of sand, just perfect for the dress. It wouldn't look like she was wearing anything at all underneath the gown—which was exactly what Jasmine wanted.

As she dressed, Jasmine's thoughts turned to the chance encounter that had led to her date. Giggling, she shook her head at the absurdity of it. She had been flying back from a trip to meet with a prospective business partner for the company she worked for. For once, the department had sprung for a business class ticket instead of just sending her economy, though Jasmine thought that had more to do with the upcoming budgetary meeting—and the department's desire to have more money to spend next year—than it did with any thought to her comfort or status. As she was settling into her seat, James had come hurrying down the aisle, his laptop case gripped tightly.

He had been wearing a tailored suit, with what Jasmine was sure was a pure silk tie, and when he sat down in the seat next to hers, he'd glanced at her with the kind of interest that Jasmine knew only too well.

"I just had to stop in duty-free," he told her, grinning. "And then of course, I got stopped, helped some cute little old lady with her busted-up bag...and nearly missed my own flight home."



“At least you got in your good deed for the day,” Jasmine had countered, and James—whose name she hadn’t learned yet—had grinned again at that, flashing perfectly straight, pearly-white teeth.

“I did at that,” he had agreed. “And for my reward, I get to spend the next few hours seated next to the prettiest woman on the plane.”

They got to talking; Jasmine explained that she was heading home from an important meeting, admitting that she was not exactly an extremely important person—an assistant manager, little more than an errand girl for the department manager—but James insisted that what she lacked in status, she more than made up for in intelligence and beauty.

“You know, you could always go somewhere else—get a leg up,” he had suggested.

Jasmine had shrugged off the suggestion. “If I leave on terms like that, they’d probably just find a way to blacklist me,” she had said, sighing.

She wasn’t sure if this was true; she didn’t think that her department head really had as much clout as he claimed, but she wasn’t about to risk finding out.

James was somewhat cagier, giving her few details about his job, but after a couple of complimentary glasses of champagne, Jasmine found herself listening intently to his description of an upcoming event.

“I don’t have a date for it,” he’d told her finally. “I haven’t had time to find one. When I saw you, I thought—I hoped—you might be interested in going. If you don’t have plans for next weekend, that is.”

Jasmine had shrugged. She didn't have any plans; normally her job was too intensive for her to manage anything like a real social life, but something about James' invitation had intrigued her, and she found herself accepting. She had given him her phone number, and he had confirmed their date early in the week, telling her that he had all of the details; all she needed to do was be ready to leave at 8pm on the night of the event.

Jasmine touched up her makeup, standing before her mirror and turning her head one way and then the other. She inserted one earring and then the other—small, elegant pearl drops—and draped a pearl pendant around her neck, letting the larger drop fall just above her cleavage. *Perfect*, she thought, grinning at herself impudently in the mirror. James had thought she'd looked gorgeous before—he would be totally blown away at how she looked fully cleaned up, in an expensive dress and shoes.

She took a deep breath, turning her head back and forth slowly, turning her body in a circle in front of the mirror. Her curvy shape was emphasized by the cut of the dress, the hem showing the best part of her legs. She went into the living room, and smoothed the skirt of the dress over her thighs, waiting as patiently as her excitement would allow.

She checked the time; in her urgency to get herself absolutely perfectly ready, she'd finished with fifteen minutes to spare. Jasmine's thoughts turned to the work week that had ended only hours before; she had told James during the flight that she was overworked and underappreciated by her department—but it was almost as if telling someone else about it had been an incitement to even worse.

Jasmine had arrived early on Monday, prepared to debrief her boss and the other assistants about her meeting with the prospective new business partners. She more than a

little displeased that they could spare no more than a few minutes discussing it, barely even congratulating her on sealing the deal before moving onto the topic of the next major partnership the company was looking to secure.

Jasmine had hoped that the business trip was a portent—finally—of new responsibilities, but the meeting on Monday had showed her that she was mistaken. The new proposal was going to another assistant manager, Alan; but just because he was taking point on the potential new partner, didn't mean that Jasmine was freed of the responsibility of preparing the proposal. All of the research and composition had been her responsibility, on top of her normal work, which she was already behind on—the trip out of town had given her few opportunities to keep up with the normal day-to-day of her job. All week, Jasmine had eaten lunch at her desk, unable to get away because of the volume of her assignments. She had stayed late and come in early, but nobody had remarked on it at all. Alan just took it for granted that Jasmine was doing all of his work, while Jasmine's boss Frank simply accepted that she had been successful in signing on the new partners without even acknowledging the work this had required.

For four years, Jasmine had been working in the New Business department of Crius Enterprises, working her way up from a temp position to her current post as one of the assistant managers. At first, she had hoped that the position would be her ticket to advancement. She had worked hard, making Frank look good, taking on whatever additional responsibilities her bosses put on the table. But instead of being offered a promotion or even a substantial pay raise, she had been kept to a three percent "courtesy" increase every year—the same increase that someone who just came in and left on time and managed not to screw up could expect—and the same job title she had had when she first started.

Over the last year, Jasmine had come to the frustrating conclusion that she had progressed as far within the company as she was ever going to. James' comment to her—his suggestion that she could jump ship and find another company to work for—was one she had considered more than once; but in spite of the fact that she did want more respect, more money, and at least the possibility of moving up the corporate ladder, Jasmine had not yet been able to bring herself to do more than put her resume out on the job boards; she certainly didn't have enough confidence in herself to look more actively. She knew that there would come a time when she would have to make the decision to take more proactive steps, but she was afraid of the risks that such a step would entail.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a firm, fast knock on the door.

Jasmine stood up quickly. "Coming!" she called out, smoothing the dress over her legs and turning her head to make sure she hadn't wrinkled the back of the dress as she sat.

She took a deep breath and composed herself, walking to the door in a few quick steps. Jasmine grinned coyly at the thought of how James would react to the sight of her and, without even checking who was knocking, she opened the door in one fast movement.

She started, confused, when the opened door revealed not James but instead an older man, dressed in a crisp, pressed, black suit.

"Ms. Phillips?" he asked.

Staring at him, confused, Jasmine's gaze caught the brass name tag on his lapel, proclaiming that the man standing before her was named John.

“Ah—yes?” she said, smiling politely.

“I’m John, it’s a pleasure to meet you. James is waiting for you downstairs in the car—I’m the chauffeur.”

Jasmine smiled more genuinely now, a soft chuckle leaving her lips. She grabbed her purse and looked inside to make sure she had everything she needed.

“I’ll let you lead the way,” she said, taking out her keys.

She stepped through her door, closing and locking it behind her, and gestured for John to lead the way down the stairs to the front of the building, where she assumed the car he drove was parked.

*A chauffeur, no less,* she thought, shaking her head slightly. Of course James had hired a chauffeur; it only made sense.

She followed John downstairs, imagining the looks on the faces of her colleagues and bosses if they ever found out where she had gone and with whom. It was a nice little break, and a private source of amusement that while they didn’t appreciate her, someone else certainly did.

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## **Chapter Two**

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Jasmine watched as the chauffeur opened the door to the back seat of a long, sleek limousine. Inside, she saw James waiting for her, seated with a little smile.

“You look absolutely stunning,” he said, gesturing for her to join him.

Jasmine returned the smile, inclining her head slightly towards John in a silent thank you before carefully sliding down onto the seat.

John closed the door behind her and Jasmine took in the opulent interior of the limo: the seats were leather, a lush bouquet of fresh flowers decorated a small, low bar set off to the side, and the floor was covered in a thick, clean cream carpet. The interior smelled absolutely pristine—something she hadn’t previously considered to be a mark of luxury, but which added to the sense of care and wealth of the vehicle—and the man who had hired it.

“You don’t look too bad yourself,” she said, turning her attention back to James.

He was dressed in a tuxedo—one that she was fairly certain he hadn’t rented—and it fit him like a glove. He leaned forward slightly as the car sprang to life, moving silkily away from the curb in front of her apartment building.

“I thought you’d enjoy a little pre-dinner drink,” James said, flashing another charming, bright smile as he gestured towards a silver bucket, the gold foil of a bottle of champagne protruding above the rim. He opened the bottle, giving her a brief glimpse at the Moët label before pouring a glass into a crystal flute and handing it to her.

Jasmine sat back against the plush seat, waiting until James had served himself a glass as well before raising her own to him.

"I can't thank you enough for inviting me," she told him, lightly clinking her glass against his before taking a quick sip of the champagne.

The bubbles fizzed up into her nose, almost making her sneeze, but the taste was unlike anything she'd had before, and Jasmine suddenly realized that she had never had proper champagne in her life. She'd only ever drunk cheap knockoffs; the kind of low-rent luxury that masqueraded as the real thing but never quite attained it.

"No need to thank me," James replied. "I'd be laughed out of the room if I didn't show up with a beautiful woman on my arm—so as you can see, it's completely selfishly motivated."

Jasmine chuckled, taking another sip of the champagne.

As they drove, Jasmine began to relax, losing some of her trepidation about the magnitude of the event. She and James talked about their respective weeks, with Jasmine once more omitting the name of the company she worked for, but detailing the various ways in which she had been wronged by her bosses and colleagues.

As James spoke, it seemed to Jasmine that he was really talking more about his status at work than his actual job.

"I received an invitation to another charity event next week; it would be great to have such a beautiful woman on my arm then, too," James said.

Jasmine grinned, but after fifteen minutes the conversation began to thin. James told her that he was an important



person; that he was working out a new business partnership and would soon be even wealthier. He showed her his American Express Platinum card.

"I have about a million rewards points—enough for a trip to Europe, first class."

*Is this really what rich people talk about? Their credit cards, rewards points, their business dealings?*

Jasmine feigned more interest than she really felt. She tried to remember if James had had more to talk about when they had first met on the plane, but she couldn't remember.

*At least it will be a decent night out. Good food, alcohol, and I can enjoy myself.*

She checked her makeup quickly as they approached the venue—a luxury hotel in the heart of the city. Even if her date was something of a dud, she could still enjoy herself.

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## **Chapter Three**

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When they arrived at the hotel, James helped her out of the car, and Jasmine felt the little tingle of excitement waking up inside of her again. *This can't be a total waste of an evening*, Jasmine thought to herself.

James presented his invitation at the door, and Jasmine looked past the ushers into the almost full ballroom; while some of the glittering dresses were the very same ones she had rejected as being out of her budget, she didn't feel as though her outfit would be out of place.

Jasmine formed her lips into a polite smile as James led her into the room, straightening her shoulders and looking all around her.

Within a few minutes, however, it became clear to Jasmine that her job was to be seen—and not heard. James introduced her to people, but began talking before she could even make good on the introductions, telling whomever he spoke to that she was a model, that they had met in business class on a trip from Cancun, and a dozen more falsehoods. He lied so convincingly that for brief moments, Jasmine wondered if he had paid any attention at all to her story; but she quickly realized that it was more that he didn't care what her actual story was. She was simply arm-candy, a trophy he could carry around to bolster his status at the party.

*I should have known*, she thought with more than a little resentment as James finally led her to the table bearing his name on a little placard.

Jasmine barely paid attention to the room around her as she looked over the menu for the dinner part of the event, smiling when James mentioned her name and glancing at whomever he was speaking to.

His words became a dull drone in her mind as she perused the delicious-sounding dishes on offer, almost unable to decide what she wanted to select for herself. She had heard of some things—foie gras, confit of duck, *pâte à choux*—before, but she had never tried any of them.

“What sounds interesting?” James asked, leaning in just a little closer.

Jasmine blushed slightly, smiling with something like genuine interest.

“They all sound so good I can’t make up my mind,” she admitted.

“Well, you don’t really have to; it is small plates after all. We could share anything that catches your fancy.”

The words were like magic; when the waiter came around, dressed impeccably in a black tuxedo with a crisp white linen shirt and a perfectly knotted tie, she enthusiastically ordered everything she had never had the opportunity to try in her life, with James’ beaming approval.

The food arrived quickly, and the atmosphere between them lightened as they shared the extravagant selection of foods: a tartlet with foie gras, seared scallop wrapped in wild boar bacon, and a tiny amuse-bouche with pear and ripe Stilton.

James made sure that her wine glass was kept full. “It’s what any well-bred gentleman would do at an event like this,” he said with a little grin when she thanked him.

The band began to play, and Jasmine noticed that while most of the luminaries took to the dance floor, James was content to mingle with those who stayed behind. In fact, as soon as the regular dinner service was done, he left her at the table.

Jasmine sipped her wine, wishing that she had the nerve to go out onto the floor alone, and glancing around every few moments to check on her date; he had told her while they ate that he was specifically interested in “making connections” with the people gathered there, forming relationships with potential investors. Jasmine had been as politely encouraging as she could be—she couldn’t remember what he had said his business was—but now she was regretting it. With no one to talk to, she was certain that she looked pathetic, expensive dress and all.

Just as her boredom and irritation were peaking, Jasmine’s restless gaze landed on the one person she least expected to see at the event. Alexis Kyrkos, the Greek CEO of Crius Enterprises, was standing alone, just a few feet away, seemingly watching the party from the outside. His handsome, olive-skinned face looked almost as bored as she felt, his dark eyes gazing absently with an almost glassy look to them. He had a wine glass in his hand, but didn’t seem to be actively drinking from it.

Jasmine stared at him in a mixture of shock and dismay; it seemed impossible to think that Alexis might let James keep her cover of being some kind of model arm-candy. Why hadn’t she even considered the possibility that Kyrkos would be here? It was exactly the kind of event that a rich guy would go to—James’ attendance being proof in point.

*But then there’s something about James I can’t quite put my finger on. Wouldn’t a billionaire have a more prestigious business card? And more to talk about?* Jasmine fidgeted in her seat. She did not want to be exposed as nothing more than a middle manager at an event like this.

Just as Jasmine was considering how best to make her exit gracefully, before Kyrkos’ gaze could fall on her, James came back to the table.

“Hey,” he said, grinning. “You would not believe who I just met—the CEO of Marchman Capital. He’s really interested.”

Jasmine smiled politely. “That’s so great!” she said, trying to focus on James instead of on the CEO of her company. She couldn’t quite shake the belief that if she thought about him too much, he would somehow sense her thinking about him and come over to her. “You know—I was just thinking— isn’t there some kind of, I don’t know, after party we could escape to?” Jasmine forced herself to smile more broadly. “This one seems to be winding down now.”

James glanced around. “Nah, still lots of people to meet and mingle with,” he said.

Jasmine’s heart beat faster as James scanned the room.

“Hey that’s Alexis Kyrkos!” he said, and Jasmine felt her stomach sink to her feet. “I’ve met him a few times—we should go over and say hello. He’s a sucker for a pretty face, I’d be much more interesting to him with you on my arm.”

Jasmine tried to think of an excuse for why she shouldn’t meet Kyrkos; she had not exactly been forthcoming about the company she worked for, and while she had complained to James about her treatment there, she had made her role in the company seem much more important than it was.

Jasmine couldn’t get her thoughts together quickly enough to avoid James eagerly taking her arm.

“Shouldn’t you talk to him by yourself?” she asked, feeling increasingly panicked. “I mean, if you’ve already met him a few times...”

James shook his head. “I’ve never really made an impression on him; he knows my name, but I think he

considers me a minor league guy—not important enough to invest in.” He beamed at her. “He’s got an eye for beautiful women, though; maybe if I introduce you to him, he’ll be more interested in talking to me.”

Jasmine smiled tightly, unable to think of a good reason that she could actually give James for why Alexis Kyrkos would not be interested in him because he had her as a date. *Well at least you’ll get your fifteen minutes of fame, being thrown out of an event like this after the scene that’s about to erupt,* she thought wryly.

As they crossed the ballroom, it occurred to Jasmine—in spite of her panic—that Kyrkos made James look cheap by comparison. She had met the CEO a few times, when he conducted inspections of her department, but up close, the sight of him still made quite the impression. Kyrkos was tall, easily over six foot. His curly, dark brown hair was combed back off of his face, slick and clean, the ends barely brushing the collar of his crisply pressed tuxedo. His dark eyes were perfectly clear, even as he stared out vacantly over the crowd.

Jasmine felt a little frisson of attraction—Kyrkos filled out a tuxedo beautifully, his broad, muscular shoulders and narrow hips perfectly draped by the well-cut fabric.

“Alexis Kyrkos,” James said, grinning slightly. “It’s good to see you here!”

Jasmine’s heart lurched inside of her chest as Kyrkos’ gaze turned onto them; dismay turned to confusion as his brown eyes showed only the barest flicker of uninterested recognition.

“James, right?” Kyrkos said, shaking James’ hand hesitantly. “And who is this lovely woman on your arm?”

His interest visibly piqued as he slowly looked Jasmine up and down. Jasmine stared back at him, barely able to conceal her shock. She had already met him a few times at work, enough to warrant at least some recognition, surely.

"Meet Jasmine Phillips," James said brightly. "And she is a beauty, isn't she?"

Jasmine smiled tightly as James nudged her forward, waiting for the moment when Kyrkos would recognize her, and know her for who she was. But he only shook her hand firmly, looking her over once more.

"Just how do you know someone so stunning, James? The last time we met, you were going stag."

"We met on a recent trip, actually. Jasmine here is very accomplished—great head for business, she's been advising me about my company."

As the two men chatted, Jasmine felt herself once more relegated to the status of decoration, though Kyrkos looked at her more often than James did, and with much more interest in his gaze.

Jasmine bit back the anger she felt at the fact that Kyrkos had not recognized her. *Okay, he has hundreds of employees, but you would think that he would at least register the name. The jerk. He's met me what—three times? Four?*

On the other hand, Jasmine told herself that at least there wouldn't be any kind of scene, with James figuring out how much she'd overplayed the importance of her role within the company she worked for. She decided that she might as well play along, and smiled appropriately whenever either man's gaze turned towards her. It was better than nothing, Jasmine thought.



While she was relegated to mostly silence, she might as well enjoy the view; Jasmine couldn't deny that Kyrkos was gorgeous. *He'd be even more gorgeous if he could remember his own employees' names*, she thought resentfully.

She looked around, trying to focus and avoid seeming bored, but after a while the need to do or say something was too much to bear.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," Jasmine said, smiling at the two men. "I just need to visit the ladies'. Do you mind?" James looked at Kyrkos and shrugged slightly.

"We'd hate to be deprived of your lovely presence, but I hope we'll see you soon," James said, and Jasmine smiled, simpering as best as she could.

She turned on her heel and made her way towards the restrooms, relaxing her jaw out of the polite smile she had been forced to hold all evening. Glancing around, she saw more than one woman on her way to the same destination, stretching their faces out of the same 'polite company' smiles.

Jasmine stepped into a stall, sitting down slowly and closing her eyes; she needed the solitude more than she needed to use the facilities.

It was difficult for her to know which feeling did—should—dominate. Irritation at James for his networking, anger at Kyrkos for not recognizing her, fear of what would happen if she was exposed as the mid-level office flunky that she was. She wanted to leave, and yet she didn't want the evening to be a complete waste of her time.

Jasmine stood and exited the stall. The night couldn't be a total loss; she would find James, maybe convince him to take her home. As boring as he had been, maybe he was good in bed.

After washing her hands and touching up her makeup, Jasmine took a deep breath and stepped back out of the restroom, looking around for James. Surely even he had become bored with the evening by now; there were only so many potential business partners for him to meet, and considering how quickly he had been moving around the room, she had to believe that he had met them all. Her gaze traveled around the big, well-lit room until it fell on him, in a distant corner.

James was standing with a tall, leggy blonde in a slinky dress slit up almost to her hips; his intentions were plain for Jasmine to see. He flashed his toothy grin at the woman, saying something that made her laugh.

Jasmine's irritation flared once more, and she clenched her teeth. *Son of a bitch can't even stick with the date he brought*, she thought angrily. Her resentment at this final proof that she was nothing more than arm-candy gave Jasmine the resolve to do whatever it would take to salvage the evening; if he didn't care about her except as a prop to his status, then she would amuse herself elsewhere.

Claiming a champagne flute from one of the passing waiters, Jasmine made her way towards the dance floor. *Maybe I'll find someone richer than he is*, she thought with a flicker of amusement. *Someone who appreciates me. That will serve him right.*

Jasmine surveyed her prospects. Her gaze trailed around the room, taking in the sight of wealthy men with dates who were just as obviously trophy girlfriends as she was. While it might be fun to divert someone's attention away from his

date, Jasmine thought the drama that would ensue was much less worth it than the look on James' face when she left with someone else—someone single.

Jasmine's roving eye finally found Alexis Kyrkos in the crowd, and she smiled slowly to herself. Kyrkos had come alone; he hadn't needed a girl to bolster his reputation or status.

*James used me to become ever-so-interesting to him, Jasmine thought, biting her bottom lip. I can be much more interesting without him simpering like a southern belle.*

She strode towards Kyrkos, sipping her champagne and swaying her hips slightly to the beat of the music.

"It seems that James was less than patient in waiting for my return," she said, smiling brightly.

Kyrkos turned his head to look at her and for a moment his eyes betrayed no recognition—and then his pupils dilated, and he smiled slightly.

"Yes, I'm afraid I'll have to take the blame for him wandering off," he said, inclining his head in tacit apology. "I made an excuse for myself. He was less than interesting without your sparkling presence."

Jasmine chuckled. "Trust me," she said, taking a quick breath. "I am well aware."

"I thought you were practically his business partner," Kyrkos commented, raising one dark brown eyebrow in inquiry.

"I haven't known him very long; definitely not long enough to be giving him any real advice—besides, I doubt he'd take it from me."

*If you even had a clue who I was, you'd know that James was lying through his teeth,* Jasmine thought, though she was careful to keep her expression polite and amused.

"So are you one of James' employees? Or an entrepreneur in your own right?" he inquired.

Jasmine thought quickly; if Kyrkos didn't have a clue that she was an employee in his very own company, it wouldn't do to reveal too much.

She retreated into the story that she had given James when they first met, careful not to reveal the name of the company or enough details about where she worked to give any clues to Kyrkos. He seemed interested, watching her face intently, but Jasmine could tell that his attention was more on her figure than on her words.

After a few moments, his gaze started to drift, and she remembered how bored he had seemed, even talking to James before she'd left their company.

"You know," she said quickly, glancing around the room. "I always hate going to these things."

Kyrkos raised an eyebrow. "Then why do you come to them?"

Jasmine held his gaze for a long moment, leaning in slightly.

"Sheer, blind hope that I might actually meet someone interesting, Mr. Kyrkos," she told him, lowering her voice conspiratorially.

He chuckled. "Please, my friends call me Alexis. It's plain as day that you're just as bored as I am," he said, his lips twitching into a grin. "How do you recommend we fix this mutual problem?"

Jasmine licked her lips, glancing around. Everything seemed so prim and proper. The only interesting person in the entire room seemed to be Alexis himself; and if she didn't think quickly, she was going to lose him.

"Did you ever play 'truth or dare' as a kid?"

Alexis' deep brown eyes flickered with confusion for just a moment—and then he smiled, slowly but broadly.

"I did," Alexis said. He glanced around the room. "Are you proposing we play a round here?"

Jasmine licked her lips again, following Alexis' gaze. "I believe I am," she said, smiling slowly. "Are you willing?"

Alexis bit his bottom lip, glancing around once more. "Which of us goes first?"

Jasmine's heart beat faster in her chest. "My idea—you dare me first."

Alexis led Jasmine towards the dance floor, his hand warm on the small of her back. He swung her into a slow, swaying dance, and Jasmine waited, wondering just what his dare would be.

"Since you've already picked 'dare,'" Alexis murmured, his lips only inches away from her ear. "I dare you to take your panties off right here." Jasmine's cheeks burned at the suggestion and she heard Alexis chuckle. "You are wearing panties, aren't you?" Jasmine nodded.

The dance floor was full—so full in fact that she thought she might be able to get away with the request, provided she did it a certain way.

“Accepted,” she whispered, moving slightly closer to him. She swayed her hips a little more aggressively even as she brought one hand back around to her side, letting it fall from Alexis’ shoulder.

Jasmine slithered, twisting a little against the billionaire as she furtively shifted the waistband of her panties over her hips underneath her dress. Shifting subtly, she wriggled the delicate fabric down along her thighs, to her knees. Bringing her legs together she let them fall to the floor at her feet, her cheeks burning even more intensely.

“Oh! Oops,” she said, pulling back from Alexis slightly. She pitched her voice a little louder—not enough to be overheard by everyone around them, but enough for casual conversation. “I seem to have dropped something.”

She quickly crouched down, stepping out of the pool of fabric and picking up her panties quickly. Slipping them into Alexis’ pocket, she began to dance once more.

“Well done,” Alexis murmured approvingly. “You should dance with your legs a little more spread; get the full effect.”

Jasmine’s blush intensified and she bit her bottom lip, feeling thrilled and deliciously exposed in equal measure.

“It’s my turn now,” she pointed out, and Alexis nodded.

“Dare, of course; I don’t think either of us is terribly interested in boring old truth.”

Jasmine grinned. “Hmm,” she said, glancing around the room over Alexis’ shoulder. “I dare you...to cop a feel of that woman’s ass—the one to your right. See if *she* is wearing any panties under her dress.”

Alexis glanced in the direction of the woman in question. He raised a dark eyebrow, licking his lips. Jasmine felt his hand leave the small of her back, and looked down to see him lay it flat across the other woman's buttocks, giving the slightest of squeezes before immediately retreating. She snickered softly, turning her face against Alexis' shoulder to hide her amusement.

There was no alarm, no outcry. The woman, Jasmine realized, probably thought that her date had done it.

"My turn?" Alexis murmured in her ear.

Jasmine nodded, taking a deep breath to compose herself. *This night is definitely much more interesting now*, she thought, shivering as a cold brush of air slid along her inner thighs.

Jasmine nearly forgot James completely as the game escalated, with Alexis suggesting more and more dangerous dares. She found herself carefully flashing one of the other wealthy men on the dance floor, pretending that her dress had slipped; later asking one of the waiters if he knew where she could buy some cocaine—hurrying away before he could make good on the offer to sell her some.

Finally, as the night began to wear down, most of the wealthy men and women—and their dates—making their exits, Jasmine finally remembered James.

"It's your turn, my dear," Alexis told her as they danced, their bodies swaying together.

"Remember my date?" Jasmine asked, glancing around the room to make sure that James hadn't already left.

Sure enough, there he was, still chatting with the leggy blonde she had seen him talking to when she left the restroom, though a businessman had now joined them.

Alexis nodded. "Don't tell me you want me to convince him to pay attention to you? I thought we were having a good time."

Jasmine chuckled. "No. I want you to embarrass him." She licked her lips, thinking quickly. "I dare you to go over there and make a comment—something that will make the girl want to find greener pastures."

Alexis glanced in James' direction, and Jasmine saw the amusement in his eyes. He nodded quickly.

"You'll have to excuse me for just a moment," Alexis said. He gave her hip a lingering caress through the fabric of her dress, and left her, walking across the dance floor.

Jasmine moved off to the side, hiding among a few of the other women, and watched as Alexis stepped up to James.

She couldn't hear what was said, but it was impossible to fight down the sharp giggle of amusement that rose up in her throat as the leggy blonde's eyes widened, and she quickly left James' side. Jasmine bit her bottom lip to stifle her amusement as the anonymous businessman left as well.

James' face was as red as a beet as Alexis walked away. He looked ready to run out of the party, forgetting Jasmine entirely, and for a moment, Jasmine felt a spurt of apprehension at being ditched—but then reminded herself that there were plenty of other ways for her to get home.

"What did you say?" she asked when he rejoined her.



"I suddenly remembered that he had had a case of gonorrhoea the last time I saw him, and asked if he'd gotten it cured yet," Alexis replied with a little, wolfish grin.

A peal of laughter burst through Jasmine's lips before she could suppress it, and she leaned against him, shaking her head.

"That was beautiful," she told him.

Alexis smiled. "Hardly worth making a dare out of it, really" he said, leaning in a little closer to her ear. "I would have done it anyway; a guy who would flirt with someone other than his date for half the night deserves to be shamed."

"I appreciate the sentiment," Jasmine said.

She looked up at him; in spite of her irritation at the fact that he hadn't even recognized her, she couldn't help but appreciate the fact that he'd turned her night around.

"It's your turn, I think," she said, raising an eyebrow.

Alexis glanced around the room and Jasmine followed his gaze, wondering what thoughts were going on behind his bright eyes. Most of the guests had already left, although a few were lingering to get the most out of the still circulating glasses of wine and champagne, or to talk business.

"For my turn..." Alexis said slowly, "I dare you to come upstairs with me. I have a room here, and I'd hate to end the night so soon."

Jasmine bit her bottom lip, wondering if now was the time to reveal the truth of who she was—that she was one of his employees, not some high-powered executive. On the other hand, he clearly didn't have a clue about her true identity,

and what's more, seemed like he might be the most interesting person she had met in months.

Jasmine reasoned that she might as well get as much as possible out of the evening.

"Lead the way," she said, grinning up at him.

~

## **Chapter Four**

~

Jasmine felt herself tingling all over, cold air slipping along her inner thighs to caress her already slick folds as she followed Alexis through the hallway leading to his hotel suite. She bit her bottom lip, wondering if the decision she was making was a good one. Alexis knew nothing about her other than what she had told him; he had no reason to suspect her.

Jasmine waited, squirming slightly, as he inserted a key card into the locking mechanism of his door. She heard the heavy thunk, and Alexis propelled her into the room ahead of him.

The suite was beautiful, and Jasmine's eyes widened as she took it all in. It was as far away from the usual hotel furnishings as fine wine was from two buck chuck. The floors were gorgeous hardwood, peeking out from underneath thick, ornate oriental rugs. The couch was closer to the size of a bed, with cushions that looked as though they would perfectly cocoon whoever sat on them.

"This is...wow," Jasmine said, turning to look at Alexis as he closed the door behind them.

"It's one of the rooms I like staying in best," he said, gesturing for Jasmine to take a seat on the couch. "What would you like to drink?"

Jasmine considered. "Do you have the makings of a rum and coke?" she asked, sitting down hesitantly. Just as she suspected, she barely sank into the cushions—or at least, as she sank into them, they cradled her body in deep comfort.

"Of course," he said, smiling slightly. He strode across the room to a low, well-stocked bar, and Jasmine watched his deft movements as he took up a crystal tumbler; he dropped a few ice cubes inside before pouring a shot from an

expensive-looking bottle of rum. "Lime, too?" he asked, glancing at her over his shoulder.

Jasmine felt a jolt of something work through her spine. "Sure," she said, smiling tensely.

Alexis nodded and picked up a lime from a basket on the end of the bar. He sliced a wedge from it and squeezed it into the ice and rum before cracking open a small can of coke to fill it to the top.

Alexis poured himself a glass of red wine and moved away from the bar, joining Jasmine on the couch and extending the cocktail towards her.

"I believe it's your turn, you know," he said.

Jasmine blushed; he was right—he had dared her to continue their night together and join him in his room, and she had accepted the dare. By the rules of the game, it was her turn.

Jasmine took a long sip of her drink, trying to regain her composure. She could already feel the heat building up between her hips; as much as she had resented him at the beginning of the evening, she couldn't deny the attraction she had felt the moment they had started playing the game together. Even so, she couldn't quite bring herself to make a dare out of asking him to sleep with her.

"You're allowed to forfeit your turn if you want," Alexis said, giving her a little, confident smile. "I promise I won't tell anyone what a chicken you are."

His jibe stung Jasmine's pride awake, and she bit her bottom lip, trying to think of something that would be close to what she really wanted, without being so desperate as to use the game as a gambit to have sex with him.

"All right," she said quickly. "I dare you to get me off... using nothing but your hands."

Alexis held her gaze for a long moment, and Jasmine wondered if she had gone too far. *He probably has dozens of girls throwing themselves at him*, she thought bitterly. *What was I thinking?*

"I accept the challenge," Alexis said, smiling slowly. "But if I'm going to do it, we do it my way; that's only fair, right?"

Jasmine nipped at the inside of her bottom lip, her heart beating faster. She had been with what she considered plenty of men, though she had only had a few one-night stands. None of them had been able to get her off that way; but from the confidence in Alexis' eyes, she thought that he probably had more experience than her—and he, at least, seemed to think he would be more than capable of it.

"Okay," she said, setting her glass down, and Alexis' lips twitched with something in between a smile and a laugh.

"Come with me," Alexis said, standing in a quick, fluid movement. He extended his hand and she took it, letting him help her to her feet. "This does seem like more of a dare for the bedroom, don't you think?" he asked, walking in the direction of a small, ornately carved door tucked away between bookshelves.

Alexis opened the door and propelled Jasmine through ahead of him, reaching absently along the wall and flipping a switch.

Lights shimmered in the four corners of the bedroom, illuminating a huge four-poster bed with thick blankets and enormous pillows, more lush rugs, two dressers and a

wardrobe, along with a low wooden desk that gleamed with polish.

Alexis reached out, his hands gliding over her body slowly, trailing over the curve from her breasts down to her waist, over her hips. He reached around to her back, finding the zipper on her dress, and tugged it down slowly, the sound almost overwhelming the rush of blood in Jasmine's ears.

"You have to know that I've been thinking about getting you out of this dress as soon as I saw you in it," Alexis murmured lowly, making Jasmine blush.

His hands slid up along her spine, caressing, sending a tingle of pleasure through her body as he parted her hair, finding the bow that tied the halter-top of her dress. He tugged the ends of the bow and Jasmine shivered as the fabric whispered against her skin, falling to the floor with only a moment's hesitation at her hips.

Alexis stepped back slightly, and Jasmine trembled as he took in the sight of her. He licked his lips, his hands opening and closing as he seemed to inspect her slowly. He met her gaze once more, his eyes darkening as he reached around to her back another time. Jasmine gasped softly as Alexis' fingers unhooked the clasp of her bra.

"This is very nice too," Alexis murmured. "But I can do so much better with it off of you, Jasmine."

He guided the fine, lacy fabric away from her skin, drawing the straps down her arms with a caressing touch.

"Remember," Jasmine said, her voice cracking slightly, "just your hands."

He met her gaze and nodded. "I remember," he said, smiling. "But there's a few things we need to do first."

Jasmine frowned. "What would those be?"

Alexis' gaze trailed over her body once more, caressing her without touch.

"You must consent to have your own hands tied," he said.

"Tied?"

Jasmine felt her heart flutter, beating faster in her chest. She had never tried it with anyone else, even though a couple of her ex-boyfriends had been interested in the idea. It had never seemed to be worth the loss of control.

"Yes," Alexis replied. "Tied up, at your wrists."

Jasmine bit her bottom lip; she had to admit she was intrigued.

"Okay," she said finally.

"Another thing," Alexis told her, his face taking on serious lines. "I will give you a safe word; if you use the word at any point, I will stop immediately. If you are uncomfortable, even for just a moment, with what I'm doing to you—with being tied up, or anything else—you say the safe word, and everything stops, I untie you and do whatever you need to feel comfortable and safe once more."

Jasmine looked at him, her heart beating now not just with arousal but also more than a little fear.

"Do you think I'll need it?" she asked him, swallowing against a tight feeling in her throat.

"I hope not," Alexis said, giving her a little smile. "But if you do, it'll be available to you. The safe word is 'narcissus.' That



way, you can't possibly mean anything else, and you can remember it. Say it for me now?"

Jasmine took a deep breath. "Narcissus?"

She felt silly just saying it, but he was right; she couldn't imagine a context where she could say it by mistake, and certainly it would be easy to remember.

"Bring your hands together at the wrist," he told her.

Jasmine raised an eyebrow, but did as he requested, placing one wrist over the other, extending her hands in front of her.

Alexis turned away, opening one of the drawers in one of the dressers. Jasmine's eyes widened as he withdrew what seemed to be a large coil of silken rope, matte black with tassels on the ends. He unfurled the rope, stepping close to her once more.

Jasmine's skin tingled with apprehension and anticipation as Alexis wrapped and wound the rope around her wrists. The soft material tightened as he made one knot after another, inextricably binding her wrists together, trapping her hands in place.

As he tightened the last knot, Alexis pushed her arms down lightly, letting them fall against her body, her hands almost covering her already wet pussy.

"This is very nice," he said, smiling slowly. "Very nice indeed. I can definitely work with this. You remember the safe word, Jasmine?"

She nodded, wondering why she hadn't said it already; wondering why she was going along with this.

Alexis' hands began to touch and caress her everywhere seemingly all at once, cupping her breasts, trailing down to her hips, making Jasmine twist and writhe in instinctive reaction, hungry for more already.

He teased her, rolling her nipples between his fingertips until they hardened into firm little nubs, the attention sending jolts of pleasure through her body seemingly straight to her moist pussy.

She trembled, tugging instinctively at the silk rope that bound her wrists together, her breath catching in her throat as she moaned.

His hands slid down along the curves of her body, slipping between her legs. His fingertips barely brushed against her slick folds, his touch feather-light, stroking up and down.

Jasmine whimpered, pushing her hips down to get better contact, but Alexis deftly avoided her, his fingertips maintaining the barest of touches against her labia.

"So impatient," he murmured, smiling slightly.

"I dared you to get me off," Jasmine protested, twisting and shifting her hips as Alexis' fingers continued to slip and slide along her drenched folds. He chuckled lowly, pressing his fingertips more firmly against her, between her folds, barely avoiding her clit.

"And I told you that I would do it—my way," he countered, rubbing slowly along her inner labia. "You agreed to it, Jasmine."

Jasmine's moan shifted into a whimper, her breath catching as she writhed and arched, struggling to get better contact in spite of Alexis' teasing. She pulled and tugged at the binds around her wrists, torn between wishing that she

could bring herself to use the safe word—and regain the use of her hands—and not wanting the teasing to ever stop.

Alexis pushed her slowly backward, steadying her until they came to the room's enormous bed. He lowered her gently onto her back, spreading her legs with a lingering caress.

"It would be delightful to be able to use my mouth," he said, leaning in close, and Jasmine arched up, attempting to pull him down, to bring him close enough to kiss her. "Ah-ah-ah," Alexis said, evading her. "Your dare specified hands only, Jasmine."

She shivered, her fingernails digging into her palms as she clenched her teeth. Alexis trailed his fingertips up and down along her labia, his feather-light caress almost tickling.

He withdrew his fingers and Jasmine groaned, pushing her hips down to try and recapture the sensation of his touch.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," he murmured, bringing his hands up to her breasts once more. He twisted her nipples almost cruelly, making Jasmine cry out, her back arching off of the bed. "Patience, Jasmine," he told her firmly.

His fingertips shifted on her tender breasts, caressing and rubbing, soothing her until she trembled with need. Jasmine moaned out, biting her bottom lip as Alexis teased her, alternating between caressing, soft touches and sharp pinches and twists to her sensitive nipples.

When Jasmine was certain that she couldn't possibly take the teasing for one moment longer, able to feel the soaking wet sensation between her labia, Alexis trailed his hands down over her body once more, giving her hip a playful pinch before he barely grazed her labia with his fingertips.

“Please—please...” Jasmine whimpered in desperation, twisting and writhing on the bed.

Alexis chuckled lowly, pressing his fingers between her labia, rubbing up and down along the length of her folds. He spread her slowly, and Jasmine cried out with pleasure as he began to stroke and rub her clit, sending hot and cold jolts of sensation crackling through every nerve, making it nearly impossible for her to hold back; but she wanted to savor the feeling, wanted it to last as long as possible.

Alexis teased her relentlessly, stroking her pleasure center until she was at the very edge of orgasm before dipping down to her inner labia, until Jasmine was panting and gasping, the silken ropes biting into her wrists from her struggles. He plunged two fingers inside of her, rubbing along her inner walls as they flexed with reaction.

“Good girl,” Alexis murmured, his thumb moving to swirl around her clit in tight circles that made it impossible to think.

His fingers moved deeper and deeper inside of her, pressing against her inner walls, as his thumb continued to work her clit, and Jasmine’s hips moved as if with a mind of their own, twisting and bucking on the bed, her body straining and struggling to get what was now more than a desire—it was an absolute need.

Jasmine nearly choked on a cry that tore through her throat as Alexis’ fingertips brushed her G-spot. She thought she heard him chuckle at the reaction, rubbing against her pleasure center once more, slowly and deliberately.

Alexis worked her faster and faster, wriggling his fingers inside of her, brushing against the sensitive spot inside of her while his thumb stroked and rubbed her clit, and in what seemed like mere moments it was impossible for Jasmine to

hold back any longer; she screamed as wave after wave of pleasure crashed through her body, crackling through every nerve, making her pitch and arch mindlessly on the bed. She was only dimly aware of the feeling of the ropes at her wrists, lost in the sensations that blocked out all thought.

He continued his assaults on her only too willing body, rubbing constantly against her pleasure centers, making Jasmine cry out over and over again until she felt the faintest flicker of fear that he might never stop—that it was too much, that she couldn't take so much pleasure.

Jasmine sagged, every muscle going limp, and felt Alexis' fingers slow as tingles worked up and down along her bones, crackling through her veins. Aftershocks of her orgasm made her tremble as everything went black, her mind a million miles away.

She came back to herself slowly; twinges of aching soreness echoed through her arms, countering the lingering haze of pleasure that seemed to flow like warm honey in her veins. Jasmine opened her eyes to see Alexis looking down at her, his eyes full of unmistakable lust.

"You know, you're quite beautiful when you come," he said, his lips only inches away from her skin.

"Thanks," Jasmine smiled weakly. The ropes still bound her wrists and she tugged at them, feeling oddly self-conscious as her self-awareness came back to her. "Going to untie me?" she asked.

Alexis grinned slowly. "I believe it's my turn to choose the dare," he pointed out.

Jasmine blinked, frowning; only then remembering that her current situation was due to the dare she had given him.

"It is your turn," she said cautiously. "Does your dare for me have to do with staying tied up?"

Alexis nodded. "I dare you to do whatever I say for the next hour, let's say. Submit to me completely."

Jasmine licked her lips, uncertain. That was a very broad dare; she wondered if she could convince him to let her decide with her clothes on and her hands untied.

"You can use your safe word at any time, and it won't be a forfeit," Alexis added. "You do remember the safe word, don't you?"

Jasmine racked her mind. "Narcissus?" she said, making it not quite a question.

Alexis nodded. "Good girl," he said approvingly, a smile twitching at the corners of his lips. "The dare is for your submission; if you decide that you're uncomfortable at any point, you can stop. Use the safe word and I will immediately pause in what we're doing, untie you, whatever it is you need to feel safe once more. We can even stop completely and you can go home."

Jasmine considered the dare. She definitely wanted more of what Alexis had given her already—even if she felt vulnerable with her hands bound, and even if she had never done anything like what he was suggesting before. There was also her pride to consider; if she declined the dare, he would technically have won the game.

"I accept," she said. "If you don't stop when I use the safe word..." Alexis shook his head.

"There is absolutely no chance that that would happen." He kissed her lips lightly, and Jasmine felt her whole body tingling. "Submission is all about giving yourself up with the

expectation that you can trust someone to stop if it becomes too much. If you ever feel the need, you use the safe word and everything will stop.”

Jasmine took a deep breath and nodded. In an instant, it seemed, Alexis’ demeanor changed; his bright eyes lit up with something more than lust, and he slid off of the bed in a quick movement. He reached down, pulling Jasmine up and steadying her on her feet for just a moment before he gave her hip a quick, jolting slap.

“You’ve behaved very badly tonight, Jasmine,” he told her firmly. “Humiliating your date, flashing strangers...” Alexis shook his head, clucking his tongue against his teeth. “I believe you’re in need of punishment, don’t you?” He raised one dark eyebrow, and Jasmine nodded uncertainly.

Alexis turned her to face the bed and gave her a careful push, sending her sprawling onto her stomach. Jasmine yelped in surprise, barely getting her hands out in front of her to catch herself; her heart beating faster in a mixture of fear and excitement. She trembled slightly as she heard Alexis moving away from her and looked over her shoulder.

“Ah! No, Jasmine,” he said, not even glancing at her. “Look straight ahead, at the headboard.”

Biting her bottom lip, Jasmine turned her head once more, her ears straining at the sounds coming from behind her. She heard the silky rumble of a drawer being opened, clattering and clanking as he rummaged through whatever contents might be there. Her skin tingled and crawled with anticipation; she itched with the temptation to turn and look at what it was he had in mind—but she knew that somehow, Alexis would know she was watching.

A few moments later, she heard the drawer close, and the muffled sounds of footsteps approaching her.

“Have you ever been paddled before, Jasmine?” Alexis’ voice was soft—but no less firm, and Jasmine shook her head in automatic obedience. She could almost feel him smiling behind her. “I want you to count every blow you receive. Out loud.”

“Okay,” Jasmine said, her voice cracking slightly as instinctive fear welled up inside her. Part of her mind screamed at her to use the safe word, to get out of the situation immediately; even though she trusted that he would let her go when it all became too much. But deeper inside of her mind was a wildly burning curiosity—she wanted to know how far she would go, how much she was willing to let Alexis do to her.

She gasped as his fingers brushed against the curve of her hips, caressing her slowly. Jasmine trembled and twitched as Alexis’ touch lingered, exploring the swell of her ass cheeks. He pulled her hips up into the air, positioning her just where he wanted her, then Jasmine felt something else—cold and hard—brush against the back of her thigh. Alexis’ hands left her body and for a long moment, Jasmine felt panic; she lay still, fighting against the incredible vulnerability that washed through her.

“Patience, little one,” Alexis murmured. “Your punishment is going to come. Don’t be so eager for it.”

Jasmine bit back a retort that she was not eager for it at all—not only did she know that a retort would bring her more punishment, she knew he was right: she was eager for it.

Jasmine forced herself to remain still, not to arch or move into the teasing touches. She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath, just as Alexis’ hands retreated. Just when the waiting became unbearable, Jasmine heard the faint sound



of something rustling, a faint whistling sound of something moving through the air.

Jasmine cried out as she felt an explosion of heat against the curve of her right buttock, almost drowning out the sound of the paddle landing against her skin with a loud smack. Complete silence deafened her for an instant.

"I instructed you to count each blow, Jasmine," Alexis told her firmly.

"O-okay," Jasmine said, trembling.

"No," he said, his voice sharp. "Not 'okay.' You will say 'Yes, Sir,' or 'No, Sir.' Is that understood?"

Jasmine took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. "Yes, Sir," she said. She licked her lips, swallowing against the tightness in her throat. "One."

The faint rustling sound filled her ears again, and once more, Jasmine yelped as the paddle came down against her skin, this time on her left ass cheek.

"T-t-two," she managed to say. Her eyes began to sting and burn, but in spite of the pain Jasmine was shocked to realize that her pussy was becoming wet once more, her fluids beginning to flow. She clenched her teeth against the yelp that rose up through her throat when the paddle slammed against her right buttock once more, the blow overlapping the first. "Three!"

Alexis took his time, moving his blows to cover seemingly every inch of her ass. Tears began to flow down Jasmine's cheeks as she counted: four, five, all the way through ten. She trembled all over, her knees weak beneath her, her body swaying—uncertain of whether it wanted another blow or if it wanted her to try and flee. With every new wave of

pain and heat, her mind struggled: should she shout out the safe word and make the whole thing come to a stop, or did she want more?

After the tenth blow, Jasmine steeled herself for the eleventh—only to feel the softness of Alexis' hand brushing against her warm, tingling skin instead. She gasped, a whimper trembling out of her throat as she exhaled.

"I think ten is enough for tonight, since you've never been paddled before," Alexis murmured from behind her. "Don't you, little one?" J

Jasmine nodded, for a moment unable to speak. She swallowed, taking a breath.

"Yes, Sir," she finally said.

Alexis' fingers trailed over her hot, abused flesh; his gentle caress almost too much sensation to bear. Jasmine moaned as two fingers slid down, between her legs, rubbing against her soaking wet labia.

"But your punishment isn't over," he said, his voice as hard as ever. Jasmine groaned in dismay. "You might actually find this next part harder to bear."

"P-please, Sir," Jasmine murmured, rubbing her face against the blankets to try and dry her tears.

"Ah-ah-ah," Alexis told her, and she could picture him behind her, shaking his head. "You agreed to submit to me. I can't have mercy on you—what good would discipline be if I threw it aside just to please you?"

Jasmine bit her lip, wondering if she should say the safe word, wondering if she could take any more of what Alexis had in store for her; but she couldn't quite bring herself to

do it. Every nerve in her body was awake, tingling and crackling, hungry for more.

"Yes, Sir," she said, closing her eyes and swallowing.

"Good girl." Alexis' fingers retreated, and Jasmine heard the soft sound of the paddle clinking as he put it down. "For the next part of your punishment, you are not allowed to let yourself climax until you are given permission. Do you understand? No matter how much you want it, no matter how close it is, even if you can taste it—if I haven't told you to come for me, Jasmine, you will not do it—or I will have to punish you for that, as well."

"I understand, Sir," Jasmine said, feeling dismay wash through her.

"Good."

He lifted her up by the shoulders, his touch surprisingly gentle, but no less firm for it; power seemed to vibrate through his hands. He steadied her on her feet before turning her around and pushing her onto the bed on her back once more.

"You look so lovely like this, Jasmine," Alexis told her, a faint smile twitching at the corners of his lips. He trailed his hands over her body, caressing her lightly, and Jasmine shivered, biting her bottom lip. "Make as much noise as you like. Just remember: no coming until I give you permission."

Alexis stepped back, turning towards one of the dressers and walking across the room, leaving Jasmine alone and vulnerable. She let her head fall back against the blankets, taking slow, deep breaths. Once more she heard the clatter of him rummaging in one of the drawers, and her skin began to tingle with anticipation.

Alexis' footfalls filled Jasmine's ears once more, and she lifted her head to watch him approach. His hands were full with things that Jasmine could barely identify in the light of the room.

Jasmine bit her bottom lip as Alexis put the various toys down and reached out to spread her legs wide. His fingers danced along her inner thighs in a half-tickling caress, making her shiver. Jasmine gasped as he brought his fingertips up against her slick folds, barely brushing against her, sending a tingle all the way through her body.

When his fingers withdrew once more, Jasmine closed her eyes, steeling herself as she heard something click. A buzzing hum filled her ears, and in the next moment Alexis brought something cold and hard to just barely graze her labia. He stroked slowly up and down along her folds, not quite pressing against her, and Jasmine squirmed and writhed, struggling for better contact.

She heard him chuckle, withdrawing the vibrating probe, and Jasmine whimpered, needing more—on the point of begging for it already. Alexis waited until her whimpers and struggles subsided, and pressed the vibrator against her once more, pushing it just between her labia and sliding it up and down, barely missing her clit.

For what seemed like hours, Alexis teased and Jasmine struggled and writhed, torn between the need for more and the command not to reach orgasm without permission. Time lost all meaning as Alexis brought one toy after another to bear on her: vibrating clips on her nipples that sent a steady, throbbing hum through her body, a vibrating wand against her pussy—one that he pressed against her clit for precious, delicious seconds and then withdrew, leaving Jasmine whimpering and keening with need. His fingers slid inside of her, and he unerringly found her G-spot as he pressed a vibrator against her clit.

"Remember, Jasmine," he said, his firm voice cutting through the electric hum and the haze of lust that clouded her mind. "No coming without permission."

"Yes—yes, Sir," she gasped, arching on the bed, tugging mindlessly at the bindings on her wrist. She felt like an animal—as if everything in her mind had dissolved except for the need to obey Alexis' command, and her desperate the need for relief.

Jasmine lost all track of time, all ability to think as Alexis teased her, withdrawing all stimulation at the very moment when she thought all control was on the verge of deserting her.

Alexis finally withdrew the vibrators, leaving Jasmine shivering and needy, writhing on the bed. Her pussy was soaking wet, her whole body tingling. Jasmine gasped and panted, trembling as she reeled. Just as she began to calm, she felt him slip down between her legs, his fingertips grazing her. Jasmine's breath caught in her throat as she felt his hot breath brushing against her drenched folds. Alexis gently spread her labia and buried his face against her pussy, licking and sucking, and Jasmine cried out, her back writhing up off of the bed.

She clenched her hands into fists, her fingernails digging into her skin while her hips moved instinctively. Alexis slid his tongue up and down, barely swiping the tip against her clit before moving down to her slick inner labia. Jasmine moaned out over and over again, struggling to keep herself under control, fighting to keep from reaching orgasm as he worshiped her with lips and tongue.

"Please, Sir—please!" the words ripped out of Jasmine's throat as she struggled, reaching down with her bound hands to grab instinctively at his head. Alexis pulled back,

looking up at her, his eyes dark with lust. He moved her hands away, pinning them against her abdomen.

The next moment Alexis buried his mouth against her once more, licking and sucking, bringing the tip of his tongue against her clit to swirl and flicker against the bead of nerves. Jasmine cried out, gasping and panting, as she struggled to maintain control against the rising tide of her orgasm. She was certain in that moment that if she couldn't come—if he didn't give her permission—that she would die. Plea after plea flew from her lips as she fought to keep control, and still he continued to torment her.

Just when she thought that she couldn't possibly hold back any longer, that she would climax even without permission, Alexis pulled back again.

"I think that is enough torture for now, don't you think?" he asked her, licking his lips, and Jasmine nodded, unable to speak for a moment.

"Y-yes, Sir. Yes, it is," she replied finally.

Alexis chuckled and Jasmine watched as he stripped off the remains of his tuxedo, slowly revealing a strong, tanned, muscular body. His broad, hard chest was speckled with dark hair, his arms lightly furred with it up to the elbow. As he stripped his underwear off, his cock sprung free, fully hard and larger than she had even fantasized. Jasmine drank in the sight of him for a moment, and Alexis seemed to enjoy her gaze as he quickly rolled on a condom.

Seconds later, he descended upon her, covering her body with his own. Jasmine shivered as she felt his cock brush against her slick folds. He rocked his hips against hers, rubbing his length along her labia, the tip barely brushing against her clit.

“Beg me to fuck you, Jasmine,” he murmured lowly in her ear.

Jasmine trembled, biting her bottom lip; she didn’t want to beg—but the feeling of Alexis’ thick, hard cock rubbing against her steadily, with every movement of his hips, made it nearly impossible for her to resist.

“Come on, Jasmine,” Alexis murmured again.

“Please, Sir,” Jasmine cried out, pushing her hips down, struggling to force him to take her. “Please fuck me, Sir. Please, please—please fuck me until I come.”

Alexis chuckled lowly. “I’ll fuck you until I feel like allowing you to come,” he told her, shifting his hips against her.

He thrust into her slowly, filling her up inch by inch, and Jasmine moaned out loud. She gasped as he began to move inside of her, pushing past the resistance of her body. Alexis rocked his hips, rubbing all along her inner walls.

Jasmine threw her head back, eyes closed, hands pulling at the silk ropes that tied her wrists together. She pushed her hips down to meet his thrusts, twisting and writhing underneath him; she could feel her pleasure building up, becoming more and more intense by the moment.

She bit her bottom lip and clenched her teeth, struggling against the silk ropes binding her wrists together. She wanted—needed—so badly to be able to come, as Alexis pushed deeper and deeper inside of her, every other thrust of his hips bringing the tip of his cock up against her G-spot.

Jasmine whimpered and moaned, twisting her hips as she fell into rhythm with his thrusts, taking him deeper and deeper.

“Please, Sir,” Jasmine cried out, her whole body tingling, hot and cold flashes of pleasure crackling through her nerves. “Please let me come—please. Please.” Alexis thrust harder and faster into her, rubbing up against her G-spot. “Please! Please! I need to come—I want it so badly! Please.”

She whimpered as she struggled to keep from tumbling over the edge of her self-control and into the abyss of pleasure. While she pleaded, Alexis held his silence save for a few moans as Jasmine’s muscles flexed around his hard cock.

Finally, when Jasmine was certain she would lose her last shreds of control in just a matter of heartbeats, Alexis’ lips brushed against her ear.

“Come for me, Jasmine,” he murmured, his voice a purring growl in her ear.

Jasmine cried out, every muscle in her body flexing and relaxing in spasms; the words were like a key unlocking a vault full of water. Wave after wave of orgasm washed through her, blotting out all thought, and Jasmine heard herself shrieking with pleasure. She barely heard Alexis’ moan of pleasure, barely felt his cock twitching inside of her.

As Alexis reached his own climax, thrusting hard and fast, deep inside of her, Jasmine’s orgasm intensified. After a few moments of unspeakable pleasure, Jasmine collapsed against the bed, eyes closed, darkness washing through her as the final spasms of her pleasure began to abate.



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## **Chapter Five**

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Jasmine came back to herself slowly, aware of the lingering soreness in her wrists—and suddenly that the silk rope binding them was gone.

She heard Alexis murmuring praise in her ear, and felt him touching her everywhere, soothingly caressing her.

“You did so well, Jasmine. You were so good.”

Jasmine opened her eyes, looking up to see Alexis’ face. She smiled weakly, stretching even as she felt the pull of sore muscles she wasn’t aware has been used.

“That was amazing,” she said, taking a deep breath and exhaling slowly, shaking her head. “Quite literally mind-blowing.”

Alexis grinned more broadly, giving her a lingering caress before he sat up in the bed.

“I believe the hour is well and truly up,” he said. “Do you want to call this game of truth or dare a tie?”

Jasmine considered the question. She could feel the fatigue settling into her bones as the delirious haze of orgasm dissipated, and knew that she should get home.

“Let me think about that while I get dressed,” she said, giving him a little grin.

Her legs felt unsteady underneath her as she slipped out of the bed. Looking down at her arms, Jasmine could see she still had marks where the ropes had rubbed her skin—but she thought, giving them a cursory examination, that they’d easily fade over the rest of the weekend. The last thing she wanted was to have to wear long sleeves to the office on Monday thanks to a tryst with the company CEO. She felt a

flicker of fear and disbelief that she had essentially just had sex with not just her own boss, but her boss' boss' boss—as high up in the company as one could get. She shook the thought away and dressed quickly, accepting her wrinkled panties from Alexis' hand.

She glanced at herself in the mirror; she certainly didn't look as obvious as the few times she'd done the "walk of shame" in college. Her body still tingled all over from the intense orgasms she'd received at Alexis' hands—at his command. She took a deep breath, her heart beating faster in her chest, and turned to look at him as she stopped by the door to the bedroom of his suite.

"I actually am not quite sure I want to end it on a tie—not just yet," she said, giving him a little grin. "I dare you to call me and arrange another meet-up sometime."

Jasmine took out one of the business cards that James had left in her keeping and turned it over, writing her own number and name on the back and leaving it on the desk as she walked quickly to the door, without even giving him a chance to tell her whether or not he accepted her dare.

By the time Jasmine's cab reached her building, fatigue had set in in earnest. She climbed the stairs slowly, leaning and listing against the wall in the stairwell and pausing on the landings as she considered what she had done. The date with James had been the goal of the evening; but that had fizzled. *At least I was able to salvage the evening*, she thought, smiling to herself as she unlocked her door and stepped into her apartment.

Stripping off her clothes, she groped in the darkness of her bedroom for her makeup remover cloths, then fell into bed without even attempting to find pajamas or a nightgown to wear. She wiped her makeup away as best as her tired, fumbling hands would allow, letting the used cloth slip out of

her fingers and onto the nightstand before sinking into a deep, unworried sleep.

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## **Chapter Six**

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When she woke on Saturday morning, Jasmine's first impulse was to check her phone for missed calls; there was one from one of her girlfriends, but nothing else. She sighed but forced herself to get out of bed and go about her normal business nonetheless. *It was a one-night stand. Don't worry about it... Even if it was the most amazing sex of your life.* Jasmine shuddered, remembering how deftly Alexis had gotten her off using little more than his hands. She had had a few boyfriends in the past who had attempted to bring her to orgasm that way, all with minimal success.

And then there had been the tremendously confusing and satisfying act of submitting to Alexis. It was something completely out of Jasmine's experience, something that in any other context she would never have even considered; more than one of her boyfriends had asked if she would be okay with being tied up and dominated—and she had entirely rejected the idea. But somehow, in the context of their game, she had been persuaded—and Jasmine was so glad that she had.

She took a shower, bringing her phone into the bathroom with her just in case Alexis thought to call her that day. As Jasmine's hands moved over her body, scrubbing away the lingering residue of her encounter, she couldn't help the vivid flashes of memory that bubbled up in her mind: Alexis twisting and rolling her nipples with almost cruel sharpness, the feeling of him inside of her, the way he had looked fully naked. She had seen him several times in his capacity as CEO of the company—but while she had always found him attractive, she had never allowed herself to give much thought to what he would look like underneath his sharp, tailored suits.

As Jasmine went about her weekend chores, forcing herself back into a kind of normalcy, she kept her phone by her side at all times, fully charged, just in case. Each time the phone

rang, she jumped, fumbling with anticipation and eagerness to answer it. Of course it was never Alexis, and she had to pretend to be much more enthusiastic than she felt when talking to her friends. As Saturday dragged on, Jasmine's stomach roiled inside of her, twisting and pitching with anxiety. *Should have had him give me his number*, she thought as she washed the dishes from her lunch in the sink. *That way, at least I would hold some power over the situation. But then he could have rejected it, given me a fake number or no number at all.*

As daytime became evening, Jasmine's thoughts turned to the fact that at the end of the day, she had committed one of the cardinal sins: sleeping with the boss. Alexis Kyrkos was the CEO of the company she worked for; he was the single most powerful person who existed in her life—practically, from a career standpoint, God himself. He could have her fired without having to have any real grounds for it. Even as she folded her laundry and put it away, Jasmine's mind gnawed away at the idea. It would be only too easy for Kyrkos to get her employee files, to look up her name; even a cursory search online for her information would reveal her place of employment, even though she'd set her privacy levels as carefully and as strictly as possible.

On Sunday morning, sitting in her living room and pretending to watch TV, Jasmine's thoughts were occupied by what she considered the only too probable circumstances: Kyrkos could have done an online search for her name, curious about just what sort of woman he had spent most of his evening with, and that search could have led him to discover that she was not at all who she had said she was. *Such a great idea to give him your real name, Jasmine*, she thought bitterly. She had thought that Alexis would have recognized her immediately; that the worst thing she could have faced at that point was the possibility of him outing her in front of everyone.

But now, in the aftermath of the best night of sex of her entire life, Jasmine thought that it would have been better for her to have risked Alexis recognizing her; apparently, she thought wryly, in spite of having been introduced to her a handful of times professionally, she was unremarkable to him. *He is all about a pretty face, but somehow my face wasn't pretty enough when he met me in the office.*

Jasmine tried to avoid fidgeting as she sat at home, waiting for the call to arrive; but she couldn't help it as she checked her phone every five minutes. Had she given him the wrong number? Had she written it so quickly that one of the digits had been blurred? Jasmine cleaned her apartment twice on Sunday, just for something to do, worried that she had been found out and that as soon as she reported into work on Monday morning, she would be called into HR and fired.

Even if he hadn't already figured out who she was, Jasmine thought anxiously, he had seen her at the office before—even if she hadn't made an impression on him. She had to think that he would recognize a woman who he'd slept with. Surely, she had made enough of an impression on him this time for him to recognize her when he saw her. He could come into her department on one of his inspection tours, or just to speak with the various department heads; and he would see her, recognize her. And then—at that point—there would either be an incredible scene, or she would get her marching orders in the next few days.

*But what if he doesn't recognize me?* The thought intruded on the panic, calming everything down. It had taken an expensive dress, jewelry, makeup, and the proper setting for Alexis to notice her in the first place; in the office setting once more, in her usual steadfastly professional attire and minimal makeup, would he even notice that she existed, much less recognize her from the party and the evening of sex that followed? Or would his gaze merely slide over her



as another insignificant assistant manager, someone he didn't even truly have time to hear the name of?

It could be fun, if she could pull it off, Jasmine thought as she ate dinner on Sunday night. The office was huge; she was one of over a dozen people in the same position, albeit in different departments. What were the odds that Alexis would choose to come to her section anytime soon? It would give her a bit of something back for all the humiliation and disrespect that her job dished out to her daily—to be sleeping with the CEO all along, with no one the wiser for who she was. She could—if Alexis would arrange another meeting—toy with him, pretending to be the person she had claimed to be, and then go back to being her office-flunky self with thoughts of just how much dirt she had on the company's chief.

As she stripped down for bed, Jasmine realized that she couldn't really be angry with Alexis for not recognizing her, not anymore, anyway. Her hopes depended on him not noticing, not recollecting the name she had given him.

Slipping naked between the sheets, she began to remember their evening together more and more vividly, calling details to mind that she hadn't even considered before. She remembered the way he had taken charge of the situation so early in the evening; he had immediately gotten into the game—he had set the bar for their dares so high right from the start, with the command to take off her panties right there in the middle of the dance floor. Jasmine's hands began to wander over her body, touching and teasing, as she remembered the way that he had caressed her. She could still call to mind the feeling of her hands bound in front of her, the tug of the silk rope against her skin, the way it had pressed into her wrists, making them ache, reminding her constantly of her vulnerable position.

As her fingers drifted downward, barely brushing her already slick labia, Jasmine drifted out of memory and into fantasy. What would it like to really submit to Alexis again? Now that they had had one session together—would he push her farther? His comment about taking it easy on her because she had never been paddled before echoed in her mind. What other kinds of toys did he have? Jasmine shivered as her fingertips found her clit and she began to stroke and rub herself, her fluids flowing more freely now. The vibrating clips he had put on her nipples gave her hints of darker, more thrilling toys—she imagined cuffs and clamps, whips and restraints that would make her even more vulnerable, that would leave her with red-hot stripes across her skin instead of diffused hotspots that went away after a few hours. She might even have a tryst with him in his office, making up an excuse for her proximity, and let him whip her, only to go back to her desk later and feel the burning tingle for hours afterward.

As her mind dreamed up more and more feverish fantasies for what she would let Alexis do to her, Jasmine's fingers worked her pussy faster, rubbing her clit in tight, swirling circles, two fingers drifting down to her inner labia to slide inside of her body, curling and wriggling, brushing her inner walls. She felt her muscles tightening in spasms around her fingers as she came closer and closer to orgasm just from the thought of being Alexis's plaything, as she thought of all of the things she would allow him to do to her—if she got the chance.

She cried out in the darkness, every muscle tensing as she reached a quick, heady orgasm, her fluids gushing around her fingers. Jasmine continued to work herself as the climax intensified, moaning out again and again, imagining Alexis's fingers working inside of her and against her clit instead of her own. As the spasms began to abate, she withdrew her fingers slowly, panting, her heart racing in her chest from the pleasure crackling through her veins. It was a pale

substitute for what Alexis had given her, but Jasmine found herself drifting off to thoughts of what their next meeting together might bring, smiling as she fell asleep.

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## **Chapter Seven**

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As the weekend passed into the work week, Jasmine found herself becoming more and more agitated by the fact that Alexis hadn't called or even sent her a text to confirm whether or not he would take her dare—much less to arrange an actual meeting. Monday came and went, and then Tuesday, Wednesday, and although she checked her phone regularly, starting whenever she heard it buzz in her purse or whenever it rang at home, it was never him.

The days stretched into a week, and Jasmine's thoughts vacillated as to why she hadn't heard from him. From moment to moment she would decide that it was because he had figured out who she was and wanted nothing to do with her, or that he was simply the kind of guy who could give a woman the best pleasure of her life and then fall off the face of the planet. Maybe he had only ever intended it to be a one-night stand, and she'd been a fool to even suggest that they could meet again—much less dare him to do it. Had she been mistaken about what a good time he had had? He'd certainly reached orgasm; Jasmine could remember the sticky-slick feeling of his come leaking along her labia, the feeling of it soaking into her panties on the cab ride home. He had been so full of praise for her after they had finished that it was difficult to imagine that it might have all been an act.

And yet, he had been so quick to suggest that the game be over, that they consider it a tie. Jasmine's stomach twisted inside of her as she tried to decide how to feel about the man; as the week dragged on to its conclusion on Friday with no call, no message, no contact of any form from Alexis, Jasmine felt more and more irritable.

To make matters worse, it seemed as though her boss and colleagues were determined to grind her into talc. Jasmine again found herself working late and coming in early, to prepare the brief and proposal that one of her fellow

assistant managers would pitch to a client that she would have no part and no credit in attaching, were the proposal meeting to be a success. Her boss nitpicked her work, saying that something in the presentation looked “college-level, not professional,” even though the graphic in question had been developed with revisions from her boss himself, through the in-house design team. He had checked off on every stage, and Jasmine found herself in the unenviable position of having to go to the art department on Thursday afternoon to tell them that they would have to start afresh, with a Monday morning deadline.

That weekend, Jasmine found herself staying in, less because she hoped Alexis would contact her and more because the idea of being out, pretending to have a good time, was more onerous than staying in and drinking a bottle of wine while she watched TV. *The least he could do would be to text me and let me know he’s not interested,* she thought irritably, sipping at the white merlot in her glass more quickly. *I’m a big girl. I wouldn’t have liked it, but it’s not like I’d go all Single White Female on him or something like that.*

She let her friend convince her to meet for brunch on Sunday in an effort to convince herself that she wasn’t going to let Alexis Kyrkos get her down. Jasmine put on a dress—not as nice as the one that she had bought for the charity ball, but still nice, and went to meet her friends. Despite telling herself over and over that she was completely and totally over Alexis, that she didn’t even want him to message her and that she would just move on as if it were any one-night stand, the second her phone buzzed in her bag she had it out and was checking it.

“Look at Ms. Connected here,” Alicia said, rolling her eyes as Jasmine unlocked the screen hurriedly to see who was calling. It was one of her friends from college and Jasmine let it roll over to voicemail.

“Expecting someone special?” Mary-Alice asked with a raised eyebrow. “You never did tell us how the date last weekend went.”

Jasmine shrugged. “It was a bust,” she said. “Nothing worth writing home about. Dude was just there to mingle and network, and he wanted arm-candy to make a good impression.”

She hadn’t told anyone at all about meeting Alexis. At first this was because she couldn’t afford for the information to even risk becoming general knowledge given that she planned to sleep with him again, then as the days went by without any contact, because she didn’t want to seem more pathetic than she was.

She spent the entire brunch date distracted, barely able to force herself to keep up with the conversation. Her irritation at Alexis blossomed into full-fledged resentment. He could at least have spared a moment before she left his hotel room to tell her that he wasn’t going to call, to decline the dare. She hadn’t given him very much time, but if he had told her to stop or wait, she would have, and he could have let her down then, instead of dragging out the misery of her uncertainty.

When she returned to work the following week, Jasmine found herself thinking about Alexis, up in his office on the top floor of the building, totally unaware of the fact that the woman he had slept with a little over a week before was only a dozen or so floors away from him. If he came into her section for whatever reason—to talk to her boss, or on his way to another department—he probably wouldn’t even notice her, Jasmine thought resentfully. He would walk right past her, could probably even be introduced to her again, and wouldn’t even bat an eyelash. *He’s a billionaire*, Jasmine thought as she worked on yet another project that had been

shifted to her because her colleagues had “more vital” work to do. *He’s a CEO with more money than sense; he’s probably slept with a hundred women by now and can’t remember a single one.*

In counterpoint to these bitter self-reflections, Jasmine couldn’t help the flashes of memories of their hours together; the genuine way that Alexis had praised her, the feeling of his hands trailing over her body. He had genuinely enjoyed spending the evening with her—Jasmine knew that she wasn’t deluding herself about that. But whether his interest and enjoyment were simply something that he took for granted, or he had figured out her deception, he was clearly not interested in her now.

After a long meeting, Jasmine found herself back at her desk, simmering with indignation. Her work had once more been called into question, and she had had to bite back angry retorts when her boss asked if her head was really “in the game” on the presentation she was preparing for another colleague. She wanted to blurt out that she had slept with the CEO of the company a week and a half before, so maybe that was the cause of her distraction. She wanted to say that if her boss was so concerned about the damned presentation, he should get the person who was actually delivering it to work on it, instead of adding it to her already endless to-do list.

When the subject of covering the front desk for the department secretary’s lunch came up, Jasmine had known without having to even wait to hear it that her name would be forwarded. “I’ve got a lot on my plate,” she had protested, keeping the tone of her voice as polite as possible.

“You can get Dmitri to log you in remotely and just work from there. Take your lunch hour afterwards.”



“Even during the lunch break, the phone rings constantly; I’m not going to be able to get work done if I’m routing calls every two minutes,” Jasmine had said, smiling to take the edge off of her words. “You told me earlier this week that this is a very time-sensitive project—I want to make sure that it’s done to standard and to speed.”

“I have the highest faith in your abilities, Jasmine. I know you’ll get it done.”

*Funny how he has the highest faith in my abilities when he’s asking me to do something that’s going to derail every project I’m on, but whenever I’m actually able to devote all my energy to something I’ve got it all wrong.*

Checking her phone, Jasmine saw that she still hadn’t received any contact from Alexis. Bile rose up in her throat and she sat back in her chair, considering her options. She could just forget the whole thing, chalk it up to one of those experiences that you have that you only tell a few close friends about if you mention it at all, and move on with her life. But for Alexis not to at least have given her some indication that he didn’t intend to call her or arrange any further meetings with her left a bitter taste. The abuse she had taken in the meeting seemed only to make his neglect even more obvious.

She worried at her bottom lip, looking at her computer screen without quite seeing it. Suddenly, the chime that announces a new email started her out of her resentful, bitter thoughts. Sitting up, she opened it to see it was a missive about an upcoming business partnership: a new client with deep pockets. Jasmine’s resentments and bitterness crystallized into something like a plan, and she found herself smiling. It wouldn’t ruin the company, but it would put a dent in Alexis’ pocket. *Now what if Wilson-Davies were to hear about this upcoming partnership with enough time to make a counter-bid?* She opened up a tab on

her browser and logged into the encryption system; she didn't want any whisper of the leak to get back and be logged to her computer, or even the company's IP address.

To be doubly sure, Jasmine quickly opened up a new email account, using a fake name. She scrolled through the company's directory on their site, finding the best person to leak the information to: someone in the new acquisitions department of Wilson-Davies. Smiling to herself, Jasmine entered the email address into the field on the new message and carefully composed the missive. She gave sparse details about the process and no reason for the leak, simply saying that she thought the person the email was addressed to would want to know about it. After reading the email a few times over to make sure she didn't sound too much like a spiteful employee, or like someone who couldn't be trusted—who might be lying—Jasmine clicked send, and logged out of the email account and encryption system the moment she got a notification that it had gone through.

The rest of Wednesday seemed to go more pleasantly after that, and Jasmine even managed to get a little bit of work done from the secretary's desk, humming to herself contentedly. Crius Enterprises wouldn't be ruined by what she had done, and it couldn't possibly be traced to her in any way, but when the deal fell through, Alexis would have to take a loss for the quarter, which would be revenge enough, even if it meant that fewer people in her department would get bonuses. *I always seem to be ineligible for bonuses anyway, so it's not like it's going to hurt me*, Jasmine thought, smiling to herself once more as she considered who it would actually hurt: her boss, a couple of her colleagues who saw her as little more than a glorified workhorse, and of course, Alexis, who hadn't had the grace to at least tell her that he had no intention of following up. It probably wouldn't hurt him that badly, and Jasmine was enough of an adult to recognize that what she had done was incredibly petty, but it gave her satisfaction to

do it. It was a small way of getting back at the people who had abused her or used her in some way, and if small was all she could manage, then she would take advantage of what little revenge she could get.

She found herself leaving not at the usual late hour, but right on time, crowding into the elevator with several other employees.

"Not burning the late night oil today?" Todd from Accounting asked.

Jasmine shrugged. "I'm trying to develop what they call work-life balance," she said. "I can't be effective if I'm slaving away all the time. I'm going to go home, have a nice bath, and drink a glass or two of wine."

"Good call," Sherry, the assistant manager in the graphic design department said. "So good in fact that I think I'll follow your example."

Jasmine fell silent as conversation buzzed around her, relieved that for once she was doing just what she wanted to be doing.

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## **Chapter Eight**

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Just as she was lounging in her living room after work on Thursday night following her petty sabotage, having given up all hope of ever hearing from Alexis Kyrkos again, Jasmine's phone rang from across the room. Rolling her eyes, fully expecting that the call would be from someone at work, she took her time crossing the room to take the phone off of the charger.

As she unlocked the screen, Jasmine frowned at the unfamiliar number. *Probably a telemarketer or scammer*, she thought. *At least I could enjoy messing around with whoever it is.*

"Hello?"

"Jasmine Phillips?"

Jasmine's heart beat faster in her chest as she recognized the voice on the other end. It was Alexis Kyrkos. She took a quick breath; this could either be very good or very bad.

"Speaking. Who is this?" She caught her bottom lip between her teeth, trying to suppress the rush of adrenaline in her system. On the other end of the line, she heard Kyrkos chuckle.

"I think you know exactly who it is—it's Alexis."

Jasmine's lips twitched into a sardonic smile. "Alexis who?"

"Alexis Kyrkos," he said, his voice still full of amusement. "I'll refrain from asking how easy it was to forget me with all the other Alexis's you know."

Jasmine clenched her teeth for a moment in annoyance. "Well, you see, I can remember you quite clearly; but since I haven't heard from you in so long, I assumed you'd

chickened out of the dare and weren't man enough to admit it and take a forfeit."

Alexis chuckled again, the sound sending a shiver down Jasmine's spine—it was almost exactly the way he had laughed when he had been punishing her, telling her not to be so eager.

"You didn't specify in your dare when I should contact you," he countered. "That's really more your fault than mine, don't you think?"

Jasmine's lips twisted as she racked her mind for something to say to argue that point. He was right; she hadn't actually given him a time frame.

"Hard to believe that you could be such a successful CEO if you usually take this long to follow up," she countered, bringing the phone with her to the couch and muting the TV.

"Ah, but this isn't business—it's personal. I'm sure you can understand that my personal life is entirely at the whim of my career." Jasmine pressed her lips together.

"So are you calling me to tell me you're taking the forfeit?" Jasmine snorted.

"I was actually calling to arrange the meeting you dared me to make with you—unless you're no longer interested?" It wasn't quite a question.

Jasmine's skin tingled. Part of her mind insisted that after the insulting delay, she should reject the offer; she should just say that he had waited too long, and give him a forfeit that he could either take or leave. Something humiliating. The other part of her mind raged with curiosity—curiosity awakened by her first encounter with Alexis, that wouldn't

be satisfied until she had tried the kind of games that he played once more.

"What exactly are you proposing?" Jasmine asked, needing more time to think but knowing that too long a silence would be taken for rejection. She heard the sound of movement on the other end and wondered where Alexis was, what he was doing.

"Come by my place," he said. "We'll have drinks, talk a little, see where the night takes us."

Jasmine worried at her bottom lip, tapping her toes on the floor. She took a deep breath. "Okay," she said finally. "I'll come by." She could feel Alexis smiling, sense it even without seeing it.

"I'll send a driver for you, if you'll give me your address."

Jasmine hesitated. Her apartment was not in the tony part of town, and as she considered the proposition in front of her, she thought of one or two other things that she needed to do to prepare—things that she needed to get done before she left for Alexis's suite.

"I can get myself over there," she said quickly. "I remember the address well enough. A girl's got to keep some secrets after all."

"Keep all the secrets you want," Alexis said. "But I would like to see you here in the next two hours."

Jasmine glanced at the time. It was doable; she could get ready and take a cab to Alexis's hotel room.

"Two hours," Jasmine agreed. "I'll be there."

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## **Chapter Nine**

~



Jasmine ended the phone call quickly and slipped out of her pajamas, pulling on the outfit she had worn to work. The shops would still be open, she thought quickly as she hurried downstairs from her apartment. She had to keep up the facade of being a wealthy, powerful executive; she couldn't be seen in the same dress that she had worn the night she met him—that would be too obvious. And the rest of her clothes marked her status just as obviously.

She went into Nordstrom once more, looking around quickly. She would buy another dress—something more casual, but still every bit as pricy—and then return it to the store the next day. Jasmine knew that she would have to be careful; if she got it stained she might find herself facing an uphill climb to return it, even though Jasmine had heard that Nordstrom had one of the most relaxed return policies of any of the major department stores.

A clerk approached and Jasmine greeted her offer to help with a grin.

"I hate to do this to you," she said. "But I have a very, very important date to get to and less than two hours to get there."

"Man of your dreams?" The clerk, a middle-aged woman with an impeccable dress suit, asked.

Jasmine shrugged, not quite wanting to lie to her. "Something like that. I need something kind of casual, but still gorgeous."

The woman looked her up and down slowly, and then led Jasmine towards a particular section of the women's wear department.

Less than twenty minutes later, Jasmine was leaving the store, clutching her garment back protectively. It was exactly what she wanted—the kind of thing that Jasmine could easily imagine herself wearing for a night out in an alternate universe where she was exactly who she had told Alexis she was. The filmy, light material of the black dress clung to the curves of her body, almost showing off more than it hid, with thin straps at the shoulders and a plunging neckline that Jasmine thought she would only be daring enough to be seen in once. It would go perfectly with the expensive black pumps she had already invested in, and while it would be a shame to return it the next day, Jasmine knew that as much as she loved it, she couldn't really afford it.

She took a quick shower, deciding that it would be better to simply coil and twist her hair up into a bun rather than waste time styling it the way she had the night she'd originally met Alexis. Jasmine did her makeup just as quickly, using a light hand to emphasize her cheekbones and the depth of her eyes, adding just a swipe of color to her lips before she slithered into the slinky black dress, smoothing it over the satin of her matching bra and underwear set. She dabbed a little bit of perfume at her wrists, between her breasts, at the nape of her neck, and stepped into her shoes, compulsively checking the time; she had a little more than twenty minutes to get to Alexis's hotel.

Jasmine fidgeted as she waited the final few moments before the cab arrived outside of her building. She gave the driver the address, and sat back in the seat, looking around at the passing traffic and street signs, the fluttering images of buildings sweeping past the window. *Should I call him if I run into traffic? Oh god, how would that make me look? He'd know in an instant that I must have done more than just take a shower and throw something on.* Jasmine's thoughts whirled around in swirling wisps, but she forced herself to take deep breaths. Alexis wouldn't expect her to be exactly

on the hour, would he? He'd know that there were such things as traffic, and that the last-minute invitation probably would have thrown her whole evening into disarray. He might even punish her for it, use it as an excuse. The thought made Jasmine smile slightly, anticipating the possibilities.

She tipped the driver generously and rushed into the hotel building, barely remembering the floor and room number. Jasmine stopped in her quick sprint to the elevators, thinking it was entirely possible that she'd get there and find it impossible to actually reach the vaunted level that Alexis inhabited. Looking around, she spotted a reception desk and forced herself to stride more slowly than she wanted to towards it, reminding herself that she still had five minutes before the time limit that Alexis had arbitrarily placed on her; surely the elevator couldn't take that long.

"I'm here to see Alexis Kyrkos," Jasmine said when the woman looked up. "Is there a special access key for the elevator?"

The woman smiled and shook her head. "No, but I will call his room and inform him you're on the way up. The suites at that level have individual security, he'll be able to let you in."

Jasmine nodded, giving the woman a quick smile before she turned back towards the elevators. She forced herself to walk sedately, not wanting to look like a minion on the way to an intense meeting with her boss—even if that was something like what the actual situation was. Jasmine heard the soft murmur of the woman's voice behind her and took deep breaths to slow the rabbit-flutter of her heart as she walked the last several steps to the elevator bank.

Once she was inside the elevator, Jasmine forced herself to relax even more deeply, taking long, slow breaths as the car

made its way up through the floors. Alexis would know at least that she was on her way up; he couldn't call her late for that. She had actually arrived at the hotel punctually—surely he wouldn't decide at the last minute to give up on her even if it took the elevator ten minutes to get to his floor.

Jasmine watched the light flick on and off as the car she was in made its way upward. She tapped her foot, wondering why she was so eager to get to Alexis; after all, he had put her off for over a week and a half—he could wait a few extra minutes, couldn't he? She took a final deep breath as the elevator chimed, announcing her arrival on the floor she had selected.

Jasmine strode down the hall quickly with no one to see her, remembering both the slightly tipsy walk towards the suite as well as her later departure down the same hall, no longer tipsy but every bit as fuzzy-headed from the multiple orgasms she had experienced.

She found the discreetly marked door and knocked on it three times, swallowing against the tightness in her throat. She heard the sound of something on the other side of the door—a beeping sound, and then a clattering, clinking sound of locks. The next moment, the door opened to show Alexis, wearing a fitted black tee shirt and jeans.

“Didn't you have work today?” she asked him, raising an eyebrow.

“It's been two hours since I got home; more than enough time to change clothes. Or did you wear that delicious ensemble to your office today?”

Jasmine grinned, shaking her head, and Alexis pulled her through the doorway, closing the door behind them.

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## **Chapter Ten**

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Alexis led her into the living room of the suite, gesturing to the couch, and Jasmine sat down carefully. *No need to get the dress any more ruffled than I have to*, she thought, smoothing the slinky material against her thighs.

"What would you like to drink?" Alexis asked her.

Jasmine shrugged, considering. "Gin and tonic? It's a warm night."

Alexis smiled slowly and strode towards the bar. Jasmine couldn't help but admire him as he moved around, cutting a lime and adding ice to a glass before mixing up the drink for her. He poured himself a glass of wine and joined her on the couch.

"You seemed annoyed at how long it took me to act on your dare," Alexis said.

Jasmine shrugged; she didn't want him to know how annoyed—she didn't want him to know how invested she had become in the pleasure he had given her.

"It seemed to take you a long time to follow through," she said.

Alexis grinned slightly, taking a sip of his wine. "You're a busy woman yourself, aren't you?"

Jasmine nodded—it was true, even if the reason for her busy life was not what she had represented to Alexis.

"Since I have fulfilled the dare by arranging another meeting, I think that makes it your turn," Alexis said, setting his glass down. "Although since it has been a very long time, as you pointed out—maybe we can start slow and build up to more?"

Jasmine smiled, sipping the cold, tart cocktail and considering the offer. "I dare you to call the front desk and make a completely absurd request," she told him, leaning comfortably against the back of the couch.

Alexis raised a dark eyebrow but stood, moving to the in-room phone. He brought the handset with him and dialed three numbers in quick succession.

"Yes—I would like to order something from room service," he said smoothly. "Please send up four women dressed up as members of The Beatles." There was a pause. "Early era—no need for fake beards or psychedelic clothes." Another pause and Jasmine took another sip of her cocktail to cover the burst of giggles that threatened to erupt from her lips. "I'd like to see them by tomorrow night at eight o'clock. Please make sure they are also properly trained to play at least five songs." Jasmine snorted, nearly choking on the liquid still in her mouth. "I will be very disappointed if you can't make this happen, Miranda."

There was that firmness—that same quality that Alexis's voice had when he was dominating her, and it sent a thrill through Jasmine's spine. She heard the muffled sound of some kind of response, and then Alexis ended the call, turning off the phone and glancing at her.

"Absurd enough?"

"I hope you enjoy The Beatles' music," Jasmine said, raising her glass in acceptance of his execution of the dare.

"I'll cancel the order after you leave," Alexis said with a shrug. "They'll just be relieved not to have to find four women who can play instruments and sing in less than twenty-four hours." Alexis took another sip of his wine and licked his lips. "My turn for a dare, I think?"

Jasmine, nodded, her heart beating faster with anticipation.

As she drank her cocktail, and then another, Jasmine found herself becoming more and more drawn into the back-and-forth of the game between herself and Alexis; she challenged him to strip down to his underwear and run through the hallway of his floor singing the national anthem. He challenged her to knock on his neighbor's door and pretend to be a high-class escort, looking for Alexis's room, while Jasmine challenged him to ask one of the female neighbors he had on the floor of only ten suites for the number of a male escort service.

Finally, Alexis turned his avid gaze on her; it was his turn to make the challenge, and Jasmine's skin tingled with anticipation at the thought of what he might ask her to do.

"I dare you to come with me into the bedroom," Alexis said.

Jasmine licked her lips, swallowing down the last of her cocktail.

"Okay," she said quickly.

She stood, and Alexis claimed the cocktail tumbler from her, setting it down on the coffee table alongside his wine glass. He took her hand and led her across the living room, his fingertips brushing along her wrist. He opened the door to the bedroom, and Jasmine shivered with anticipation as he led her into the room, reaching out to flip the light switch on. He closed the door behind them, and looked her up and down slowly.

"You look so good in that dress," he said softly. Alexis reached out, trailing his hands over the curves of her body. He brought his gaze up to meet her eyes. "Take your clothes off, Jasmine."



His hands came away from her, and Jasmine moved slightly, tempted to immediately follow his command; it had been uttered in the same dominant, confident tone he had used in their first encounter. But she stopped herself, stepping back from him slightly.

Alexis raised an eyebrow, crossing his arms over his chest. "Is there a reason you're not complying with my order?"

Jasmine grinned slightly. "You didn't dare me," she pointed out. "Besides, it's not even your turn, it's mine."

Alexis chuckled, his gaze trailing over her body. He took a step back.

"I don't want you to participate because you're being dared," he said, meeting her gaze once more. "I want you to agree to participate because you want to." He shrugged, holding her gaze and smiling slightly. "I thought we had a good time at our last encounter, and you were very promising as a submissive. I just want to try that again, don't you?" The smile broadened slowly. "I doubt you came here thinking that I would just have a couple of drinks and make out with you on the couch, right?"

"Not exactly," Jasmine admitted. She bit her bottom lip, watching Alexis closely. "I can still use the safe word, right?"

"Do you remember it?" Jasmine nodded.

"Narcissus," she said.

Alexis smiled again. "Then the choice is yours, isn't it?" He extended his hands, moving to sit down on the edge of the enormous bed.

Jasmine considered the proposition; it was what she was here for, wasn't it? The allure of Alexis's dominant demeanor and the "punishment" he had given her the first time they had been together had spurred both her irritation at the delay in meeting again and her interest in showing up when he called.

She reached around to her back, finding the zipper to her dress by touch. Jasmine tugged the zipper down slowly, watching Alexis watching her. She slid the straps down over her shoulders and let them fall along her arms before guiding the slinky, silky material of the dress along the curves of her body, pausing at her bust and then at her waist, enjoying the slight catch in Alexis's almost silent breathing as more of her body was revealed.

She let the dress fall to the floor and stepped out of it, standing before him in nothing but her underwear and heels, feeling oddly self-conscious, yet proud at the same time.

Jasmine turned her back on Alexis, reaching around to the clasp of her bra. She unhooked it, turning around to face him as she slowly peeled the satiny material away from her skin, gathering it to barely cover her breasts. She pulled it away as soon as she was facing Alexis completely once more, letting her full breasts bounce slightly as she freed them from the constraints of the garment, and tossing the fabric aside without paying attention to where it went. Finally, she hooked her fingers in the waistband of her panties, holding Alexis's gaze. She tugged the satiny material down over her hips and sank down with it slowly, guiding it down to her knees. She stood once more, letting her panties fall to her ankles, and then stepped out of them, standing completely naked before Alexis save for her heels; when she moved to kick them off, Alexis shook his head briefly.

“Those can stay on,” he said, a smile twitching at the corners of his lips. “They won’t get in the way.”

Alexis stood in a fluid, graceful movement, closing the distance between them, and Jasmine gasped as his hands trailed over her body, caressing and teasing her. He cupped her breasts, giving them a gentle squeeze and wrapping his fingers around her rapidly hardening nipples. Alexis twisted and rolled them, sending jolts of pleasure through her body that made Jasmine moan out.

She whimpered slightly as his hands finally fell away, looking sharply up at his face with a frown of confusion.

“Sir?” She was almost stunned at how easy it was to fall into the role he had given her, just from the simple act of stripping for him and agreeing to submit to him.

“I want you to join me in a little game,” Alexis said, holding her gaze with a faint smile. “I have some toys; they’re used to punish bad little girls like you.” Jasmine nodded, pressing her lips together to prevent the questions bubbling up inside her from spilling out. “I will use five of them on you, while you’re blindfolded. If you can identify them, I’ll finger you until you’re on the edge of climax. If you can’t identify them, I’ll use them to punish you.”

Jasmine’s eyes widened; this was more than she had expected—certainly it was miles ahead of what he had done with her in their first encounter. She had agreed to submit to him, and Alexis had said that she could use the safe word whenever she felt uncomfortable, unsafe—but did it count in a situation like this? *Am I really uncomfortable with it though? I came here expecting something like the first time. This is something like the first time—only more so.*

She took a deep breath. If she really couldn't handle what Alexis was going to do to her, she could use the safe word and it would be over; he had made that clear.

"Are you interested in playing, Jasmine?"

Jasmine exhaled. "Yes, Sir," she said.

Alexis smiled slowly. "Excellent."

He gave her hips a lingering caress and then stepped away from her, walking towards one of the dressers in the room. She tried not to fidget as he opened the drawer, his back turned to her. Jasmine bit her bottom lip, her skin tingling in anticipation. She forced herself to breathe slowly and deeply, swallowing against the tightness in her throat.

Alexis turned back towards her, striding across the room with a long, opaque scarf in his hands, along with lengths of more of the silk rope that Jasmine remembered from their first encounter. Alexis set the rope aside. "First things first," he said quietly, losing none of his dominant demeanor.

Jasmine forced herself to remain still as he raised the scarf up to her face, in spite of the chills that ran through her spine. Jasmine swallowed as her vision was utterly covered and obscured. There was a whisper of fabric as the scarf tightened around her head, tugging slightly as Alexis knotted it just above the tight bun in her hair. She closed her eyes even though she knew it made no difference; Jasmine could feel her eyelashes against the silk of the scarf. Everything around her was darkness—the blindfold was so tight that even though she instinctively turned her head, opened her eyes to attempt to look, none of the room's light broke through.

"That's enough," Alexis said.

Jasmine flinched slightly, instinctively, as Alexis's hands closed around her wrists. She felt the tickle of the silk rope against her skin.

She gasped as the rope tightened around her wrists; Jasmine felt the pull and tug, felt the silky lengths coiling around her arms again and again until she was well and truly trapped. No matter how she pulled at her wrists, they would not budge—the rope bit more firmly into her skin and after a moment she stopped. "You have to trust me now, Jasmine," Alexis said firmly. "I won't let you trip or fall." He tugged slightly at her bound wrists and she took a step, her head turning as the sound of her footfalls on the thick carpet seemed impossibly loud. She let Alexis lead her through the room, without having any idea of where she was in space, utterly blind and vulnerable.

Alexis lifted her arms above her head and Jasmine felt the ropes tighten. Her shoulders tensed at the position, and she knew that she wouldn't be able to hold her arms up forever in the way Alexis had them—they would start to ache, and then they would simply fall.

"Relax," he told her after a moment.

Jasmine tentatively complied, and found that she was unable to bring her arms down; they were attached to something over her head, leaving her whole body exposed and available for whatever Alexis had in store for her. Even relaxing didn't quite ease the strain on her shoulders. Jasmine knew that she would be sore the next day—an idea that she relished.

She heard him leave her—his footfalls filling her ears, more sensitive to sound with her vision utterly gone, and Jasmine shivered at the feeling of the cold air of the room brushing against her skin, caressing her everywhere in Alexis's absence. She inhaled sharply as she heard the drawer

opening again, as she heard the clink and clatter of various objects. She couldn't even begin to imagine what he might take out of that drawer, what might be in it. Jasmine swallowed. *You can use the safe word at any time*, she reminded herself.

"Are we ready to begin?" Alexis's voice was on the other side of the room still, all of the movement stopped.

"Y-yes, Sir," Jasmine replied.

She took a deep breath, steadying herself, as she heard him coming towards her slowly, deliberately taking his time. She heard the clatter of him putting something down—several things, and Jasmine turned her head in the direction of the sound, trying to make it out.

"No. No anticipating, no trying to think, Jasmine. You need to devote all your attention to what's happening. Are you ready?"

She nodded, licking her lips before answering out loud.

"Yes, Sir," she said.

"Very good."

Alexis's hands trailed over her body slowly and Jasmine shivered, arching into his touch. He cupped her breasts, massaging them slowly and then bringing his thumb and forefinger around her nipples. Jasmine moaned as he twisted and rolled the firm nubs, sending jolts of pleasure through her body.

"Here we are," he murmured lowly, his lips only inches from hers. "First test, little one."

His hands left her and Jasmine groaned with frustration; she was already slick with desire—she had forgotten the game she had agreed to almost completely.

The next moment, something cold closed around her left nipple, and Jasmine cried out as it tightened, sending icy spurs of sensation into her breast. The cold clamp tightened around her sensitive nipple, and she let out an involuntary squeal, twisting and arching to get away from it—but it went nowhere. The next moment, Alexis’s hand was on her hip, gripping tightly.

“Don’t struggle, Jasmine. We’re not finished with this.”

Jasmine clenched her teeth, breathing slowly through her nose. As soon as she had calmed, she felt the sharp, tight coldness wrap around her other nipple, sending a new wave of sensation through her body.

Jasmine strained against the bindings that held her arms over her head, panting as the cold pleasure and pain crackled through her body. It was so much—too much. And yet, she couldn’t bring herself to say the safe word.

After a few moments that seemed like an eternity, Alexis spoke once more. “There now, how do you like this?” Jasmine let out a whimpering cry, and Alexis chuckled lowly. “Can you tell me what you think those are?”

Jasmine shuddered, struggling to think, trying to form the words.

“Y-y-yes, Sir,” she said finally, taking a few slow breaths. “They—they’re—they’re clamps, Sir.” Jasmine writhed, unable to help herself as the sensation somehow intensified; every movement sent new waves of pain and pleasure through her body that she couldn’t quite comprehend.

“Almost a shame,” Alexis told her, amusement in his voice. “Of course, you do know that if you really like one of these devices, you can just guess wrong on purpose.”

Jasmine whimpered. “Yes, Sir.”

“Do you want to make another guess?”

Jasmine tugged at her wrists, torn between the instinct to get free and the desire for more. “N-no, Sir, I don’t,” she answered.

Alexis chuckled lowly and one by one, the pressure and cold pain in her nipples vanished. Jasmine moaned as the blood flowed back into her nipples, sending tingles through her breasts, relief and a lingering ache making her sway.

“Next item,” Alexis said briskly.

Jasmine bit her bottom lip, steeling herself, even though she couldn’t see anything, couldn’t imagine what tricks Alexis had in his possession—only that it was likely to be every bit as painful as the first thing, and maybe more so. There was a soft rustle of fabric, something thick and heavy, and Jasmine winced, her hands tightening into fists as she instinctively arched away from the sound.

“I told you not to try and anticipate,” Alexis told her, clucking his tongue against his teeth.

Jasmine steadied herself, clenching her teeth but not wavering.

Instead of the blow she somehow expected, she felt the softest, lightest brush against the skin of her abdomen, a caress of some rough fabric. She frowned. The fabric tickled and scratched at the same time, rubbing against her lightly,



drifting down from the peak of her breast along the curve of her waist, down to the soaking wet folds of her pussy.

“What do you think this is?” Alexis asked.

“That’s not fair!” Jasmine blurted out. “How can I identify it if you’re not—not punishing me with it?”

Alexis chuckled, and in the next instant Jasmine felt his fingers close around her right nipple, twisting it savagely. She cried out, the already sensitive point flaring with pain that sent a jolt through her body.

“I never said I would be fair,” Alexis told her, his firm voice almost mocking. Jasmine groaned in frustration. “What do you think it is?”

She racked her mind, trying to remember any detail that might give her the answer. The only thing she could identify about the item was that it was made of leather.

“Something—something leather, that’s all I know, Sir,” Jasmine admitted, her voice cracking with uncertainty and fear. She could sense Alexis smiling, even if she couldn’t see him.

“You’re correct that it’s leather,” he said. “But since you can’t tell me what it is, I will have to use it on you—so you can learn.”

Jasmine nodded, resigning herself to the punishment that awaited her.

She heard another rustle of the heavy leather—and realized that it had to be multiple strips of the material. The moment after her realization, Jasmine felt a flash of red-hot pain along her rib cage, tongues of tingling heat wrapping around to her back. She yelped, instinctively moving to dodge the blow too late; Alexis’s hand closed on her shoulder, already

aching from the unusual position, and he held her in place, firmly rooted to the spot.

Jasmine cried out as a new explosion of tingling heat landed against her left breast, just above her nipple, and then another one in rapid succession against her right breast, one stripe coiling around the nipple itself, sending a white-hot jolt through her. The fiery tongues danced over the front of her body, landing against her hip, between her thighs, barely missing her soaking wet pussy, and in spite of the pain from the biting leather, Jasmine felt herself becoming more and more turned on by the moment, her entire body tingling with sensation, every nerve awake.

"This, my lovely little one, is a flogger," Alexis said, punctuating his explanation with another blow just below her breasts. "It paints such nice red stripes against the skin—I really wish you could see it." Jasmine shivered as she felt the rough leather strips brushing against her, sending a crackle of cold to overlay the heat of a previous blow, almost too much to bear. "Another time I might use it against you again—so you'll want to remember the term for it. Say it for me."

"It's a flogger, Sir," Jasmine said, surprised at the clarity of her words. The tickling, scratchy feeling deserted her, replaced by Alexis's caressing hands.

"Very good."

Jasmine moaned as she felt his lips brush along the column of her throat, moving from just above her collarbones to her mouth. Alexis kissed her briefly, cupping one of her breasts, sending a new wave of sensation through her body that made her gasp.

"Next item. You're one for two, that's not bad."

Jasmine took advantage of the momentary break to lick her lips, her throat dry from the panting and cries. She realized that the blindfold was wet against her skin—that she could feel tears beginning to trickle from her eyes, soaking into the fabric. And yet—and yet—she still didn't want to use the safe word. She wanted to see what the third object would be.

Jasmine started as she felt something cold brush against the curve of her ass, and wondered—not for the first time—where in the room she was. The object brushing against her was hard—as Jasmine turned her puzzled mind towards it, frowning in thought, struggling to gain even the slightest information her sensitive skin could pick up, she thought that it felt something like the handle of her hair brush at home. But this was a punishment item—it couldn't be something like a vibrator, one of the wands that Alexis had used in their first encounter.

“What do you think it is?”

Jasmine bit her bottom lip; it was obvious that Alexis was determined to make the identification as difficult as possible.

“A paddle, Sir?” she asked, trying to remember if she had seen the handle on the one he had used before.

“Very close,” Alexis told her. “So close, in fact, that I will give you another attempt.”

Once more it brushed against her skin, and Jasmine could discern ridges in whatever material coated the object. She shivered, keening with frustration.

“I don't know, Sir! If—if it's not a paddle—I don't know.”

She felt the warmth of Alexis's hand against her jaw, his fingers lightly caressing her cheek.

"You tried very hard for this," he murmured lowly, his breath hot against her ear. "But you know the rules, Jasmine."

She nodded, her head falling forward as she gave herself up to the punishment that she knew Alexis would inflict.

Jasmine heard movement from behind her, but the pop of the object's impact against her skin was lost in the gasp that ripped through her throat as a sharp, rectangular flare of tingling heat jolted the curve of her right buttock. She felt a few softer taps against her skin, heard the slap of leather, and then another bright, glittering pop of fire landed against her left ass cheek, followed by another just at the apex of her right buttock. Alexis landed blows in rapid succession, leaving Jasmine panting and gasping for breath, whimpering and moaning as her body struggled against the bindings. Instinct told her to try and flee the fiery assault, but she couldn't get her wrists free, and then Alexis once more held her firmly in place and she writhed to no avail.

"This is a riding crop," Alexis told her, delivering one final blow to her inner thigh that made Jasmine yelp. "It's not my favorite item to use, but it can be effective, don't you think?"

Jasmine nodded mutely, unable to form words, her body tingling all over. She wasn't even aware of the pulling ache in her shoulders, the throbbing in her feet from standing in her high heels for so long; every part of her mind was focused on the lingering heat along her front and against her ass. She felt Alexis's arms coil around her from behind, felt the hardness of his muscled body pressed against her back, and leaned into him, even as the movement brought fresh waves of pain.

After a moment of stillness, she felt Alexis's arms uncoil, felt him step back from her.

"I think you've nearly reached your limit. Is that right, Jasmine?"

She nodded. "Yes, Sir."

She felt the brush of his lips against her shoulder, the heat of his breath along the back of her neck.

"One more, then. A chance to end this in a tie."

Jasmine could barely hold herself up; she was so exhausted and yet so turned on that her knees felt as though they'd been transformed into jelly, her legs boneless underneath her. She heard movement behind her and whimpered, anticipating yet another impossible-to-guess sensation.

Instead, she heard a faint whistling sound, shrieking as a sharp crease of fire lit up the backs of her thighs, horizontal, just underneath the curve of her ass. Pain exploded through her, and Jasmine would have fallen to her knees had her wrists not been bound over her head. She sagged, groaning and struggling to get free.

"Jasmine, stop." At the command, she forced herself to be still. "I think you can give me an answer for what that is, can't you?"

Jasmine panted as she struggled to think in words. "Cane. Cane. It's a cane, Sir."

The words tumbled out, jumbling together as she steeled herself for another blow that never came. Instead, she felt Alexis's lips against her skin once more, felt his arms wrap around her waist from behind.

"Good, very good," he murmured against her ear. "I think that's enough punishment for tonight, don't you?"

“Yes, Sir,” Jasmine said, her voice a half-moan of relief.  
“Thank you, Sir.”

Alexis chuckled. “If you want to thank me,” he told her, his voice losing none of his firmness in a whisper, “you’ll have to use more than words. You know that, right?”

Jasmine nodded, even though she didn’t quite understand what he was saying. She felt tugging at her wrists, and then her arms carefully, slowly came down from their position over her head, pins and needles racing through her nerves, competing with the lingering effects of her punishment.

Alexis’s hands rested on her shoulders, and Jasmine felt herself falling to her knees, struggling to catch herself—dismay filling her as she realized that her blindness made the distance between her face and the floor difficult to judge. She felt Alexis steady her until she could hold herself up, and then the blindfold came away in one swift movement. The light was almost too bright, and she winced, closing her eyes until they could adjust.

She watched Alexis unzip his fly, tugging his pants down over his lean, narrow hips and letting them fall to the floor. Her eyes widened as his cock sprung free, fully hard, immediately, realizing in the back of her mind that Alexis had been wearing nothing underneath his jeans at all.

“Show me how grateful you are,” Alexis told her.

He brought the tip of his cock close to her lips, looking down at her with his bright eyes full of lust, one dark eyebrow raised. Immediately, Jasmine knew what he wanted.

She leaned forward, opening her mouth, and took the tip of his cock between her lips, sucking and licking him languidly. She closed her eyes, summoning her focus—wanting to give

him as much pleasure as he had given her pain, wanting to bring him to orgasm as quickly as possible. She swirled her tongue around the tip even as she took more and more of him into her mouth, worshiping the hot, velvety flesh between her lips, bringing her bound wrists up so that she could wrap her fingers around the base of his cock with one hand and cup his soft, tight balls with the other.

Alexis groaned as Jasmine pleased him, his hips beginning to move, and she opened her eyes to look up at him. His hand rested at the curve of her neck, not pushing or pulling, his fingers rubbing lightly through her hair as he responded to her lips and tongue. His dark eyes were almost black with desire, and Jasmine smiled to herself, sucking harder, slithering her wet tongue around him, along the sensitive underside of his erection.

After only a few moments, she felt his cock beginning to twitch—but before she could make good on her desire to make him come, Alexis pushed her gently away, his hand on her shoulder the only thing preventing her from falling backward. Jasmine frowned, looking up at him in mute appeal and query.

“Not tonight,” Alexis told her, smiling slightly. “Another time, maybe, I’ll finish in your mouth and watch you swallow every last drop. But not tonight.”

He lifted her up quickly, and Jasmine gasped as he managed to untie the ropes, unbinding her wrists in three sharp movements before tossing the rope aside.

He picked her up, one arm resting against the sharp, fiery pain along the crease of her ass, and before Jasmine could do more than marvel at his strength, she found herself falling. She landed on the soft bed with a yelp as the impact sent a jolt through her, every welt flaring with renewed pain.

"I want you to come in the next five minutes, Jasmine. Do you think you can do that for me?" Alexis raised an eyebrow.

Jasmine nodded, even though she wasn't sure that either of them would actually be able to keep an eye on the time, and Alexis covered her body with his own.

Jasmine moaned out as she felt Alexis's hot, hard cock rubbing against her, sliding between her soaking wet folds. The next instant, he thrust into her, filling her up in a fast, hard movement that seemed to rip the breath right out of her lungs.

Alexis began rocking his hips right away, pushing deeper and deeper inside of her, and Jasmine let all control go, her body moving in reaction to his thrusts, her hips falling into his rhythm. Alexis's hands danced all over her body as he pounded against her, shifting and twisting his hips. Jasmine moaned out over and over again, writhing underneath him, touching him everywhere her hands could reach.

Alexis kissed her hungrily, swallowing down her moans and cries, and Jasmine struggled between the desire to savor the delicious feeling of his cock inside of her and the need to come before he could somehow rescind his permission.

All at once, it felt as if something tightly knotted deep between her hips unraveled, and Jasmine broke away from Alexis's lips, gasping and crying out as wave after wave of pleasure washed through her.

Her orgasm intensified as Alexis sped up his thrusts, his hips smacking into hers, his fingers slipping down between their bodies to stroke and rub her pleasure center. Jasmine grabbed at the sheets, then at Alexis's body, struggling to remain anchored to something as the sensations coursed through her, blotting out all thought. She heard Alexis's low



moan of pleasure and then felt the sticky-slick gush of his come flooding into her as the spasms finally began to abate.

She opened her eyes to the feeling of Alexis's hands trailing over her body in gentle caresses, and the sound of his voice in her ears.

"You did so well, Jasmine. You were beautiful to behold." As she turned to look up at him, Alexis smiled. "In fact, I think you came in three minutes, not five."

Jasmine blushed, burying her face against his chest. "I was determined," she told him.

She slipped free of his embrace and sat up, looking blearily around the room.

"It suits you," Alexis said, sitting up with her. "You can stay the night, you know."

Jasmine shrugged, thinking ruefully of the gown she'd left on the floor. She would have to return it—and she didn't want to take the infamous walk of shame in it the next morning. Better by far to go home now, tingling and sore but adrift on satisfied pleasure, and make sure it was clean enough to go back to the store.

"I'm okay," she said, giving him a smile. "Busy day tomorrow."

She climbed out of the bed, but as she searched out her underwear, a thought tugged at her. Jasmine slipped on her panties and turned to look at Alexis, watching her from the bed still.

"Why do you do that?"

"Do what?" Alexis raised an eyebrow.

"The thing after. Where you tell me how good I was and how beautiful and all that."

Alexis smiled slowly. "Think about it as after care," he said. "Responsible practice for what we've done together. You need to feel safe and comforted after taking abuse like that."

Jasmine considered; certainly she had responded to the compliments—but it was less than flattering to think that he might say them to every girl he brought into the room.

"Just because it's responsible practice doesn't mean it's not true," he said, as if reading her thoughts. "You were beautiful. You did very, very well." He smiled again.

Jasmine found the dress pooled on the floor and slithered into it, zipping it up and making sure the straps lay flat against her skin.

"I appreciate the clarification," she said, giving him another smile. Her heart beating quickly, she pressed her lips together, trying to decide if she was quite daring enough for the idea that flitted through her mind. "I believe we left the game at my turn— isn't that right?"

Alexis frowned for a moment before breaking into a smile, his bright eyes glowing with amusement.

"We did at that," he agreed.

"Then I dare you to take me on a date this coming weekend. None of this open-ended shit anymore."

Alexis laughed. "I accept the dare," he said, inclining his head slightly towards her. "I have one condition, though. There's a function I would like you to attend with me; a ball that's happening this Saturday. Are you willing?"

Jasmine held his gaze for a long moment and took in the flicker of dark lust in his eyes and knew that it would not just be a standard ball.

“Sure,” she said, giving him another impish grin.

Before she could say anything else, Jasmine turned on her heel and left the room, barely remembering to grab her purse on the way out.

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## **Chapter Eleven**

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Friday went by remarkably fast. For once, even though she was exposed to just as much drudgery as ever, Jasmine was able to get through the day without any irritation. The lingering soreness where Alexis had used the crop and the flogger reminded her of their time together every time she shifted in her chair, or got up to walk to the restroom or to get coffee. She smiled to herself, breezing through the shouting from her boss when she told him that, deadline or no, she wasn't going to stay late to finish Larry's presentation for him.

As she worked, Jasmine wondered whether Alexis was in the building too; while he was totally unaware of her being in the office, she was acutely aware of the fact that he was possibly only several floors away from her. Was he thinking of her? Was he wondering where she was, what she was doing? The possibility of it made her tingle all over.

Also on Jasmine's mind was the fact that she needed to return the dress; she couldn't be seen wearing it twice—and on top of that, she couldn't afford it. As she worked through the day, she considered whether it would make sense to exchange it; considering the date that she had planned with Alexis, along with the ball he had planned afterwards, it would make sense to have something else to wear. She did, after all, have to keep up the facade for as long as she could. She couldn't be caught in something less than exquisite when she saw him again the next night.

When she had arrived home from her tryst with Alexis, Jasmine had checked over the dress carefully; there was no sign of stain or tear or anything to show what she had been up to while she had it on, or while she was taking it off. There shouldn't be any problem returning it. And Jasmine thought that Nordstrom would rather she exchange the dress for another one than just return it outright.

As Friday drew to a close, Jasmine hurried out of the office, thinking—in a paranoid flash—that it would not do to accidentally run into Alexis leaving the building. *It's not all that likely, but it would be just my kind of luck*, Jasmine thought. She bit her bottom lip, keeping to herself as she rode the elevator down to the lobby.

By the time she'd arrived at the first floor, Jasmine had decided that she would go home, get her dress, and go out shopping immediately. That way, she would have plenty of time to compare and think about just what she wanted to wear.

Arriving home, Jasmine spared only enough time to change out of her work clothes before grabbing the dress and carrying it carefully out of the apartment. She tried to think of what she would say in order to smooth the exchange; hopefully, if the store's reputation were anything to go by, it wouldn't be needed; they would simply take it from her and someone would lead her to a new gown for the next occasion. She thought to herself about what she would need; it would have to be cocktail length, in order to fit in both during the date and during the ball after it. Crucially, it had to be something within the same price range as the dress she had bought already, so that her store credit would cover it.

It occurred to Jasmine as she stepped into the store that she didn't actually know where Alexis planned to take her before the ball. She put the thought aside; he wouldn't be taking her bowling, or anything of that nature, she knew. A man of Alexis Kyrkos' wealth would not take a girl on such a whimsical and inexpensive first date—he would save that for when he got to know her better, if it ever came up at all.

Although she felt anxious and even a little bit guilty returning the dress, Jasmine found that it was exactly as easy as she had been told it would be by popular rumor:

they simply accepted the return and not a single eyebrow was raised when she said that she wanted to use the credit from the dress to buy something else. *I can't make a habit out of this*, she told herself firmly as the woman running the returns desk called a clerk to help her pick something out. *Next time I come in here—after I return this dress, at least—I will come with money to spare and buy something I intend to actually keep. Shoes, makeup, or something.*

Jasmine was grateful that the person helping her this time was not the same woman she had bought the previous dress from; she would have felt even guiltier about returning it if she had to work with the friendly clerk from before. Instead, a woman of about her age led her towards the womenswear section, asking about the occasion and her style, questions that Jasmine found comforting—although she knew that was exactly the point.

Into the dressing room she went with a handful of dresses, all the length that she had specified, based on what the clerk had thought would fit the occasion and her body type.

“I’ll find you some other things to look at while you’re trying those on,” the woman suggested with a smile, and Jasmine nodded.

After an hour of going through various options, Jasmine left the store with a complete outfit, suitable for the night she thought she had planned with Alexis: a beautiful dress, cream-colored with intricate green and gold embroidery, strapless with a hem that fell down to just above her knee, and heels that coordinated perfectly.

Jasmine carried the dress and shoes home carefully and put them aside, smiling with contentment. *Maybe there's some way I can cut my costs and expenses to make this doable.* Jasmine gave the garment bag and shoebox a lingering glance, sighing and thinking about Alexis’s likely reaction to

her in the dress. She had seen herself in the mirror and knew that she looked absolutely delicious.



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## **Chapter Twelve**

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Jasmine woke up on Saturday morning, restless and already thinking about how she should get ready for the date. Alexis had sent her a brief text message on Friday night, telling her to be ready at six—that they would go to happy hour and “maybe have a snack,” before going to the ball he had mentioned the night before. Other than that, she had no information from him; but Jasmine thought, as she brewed a pot of coffee and prepared her breakfast, that it was more than enough for her to know that it was actually going to happen.

She decided to spend the entire day in preparation for the evening; she would take a long, hot bath and relax, and take her time on her makeup, carefully picking out her jewelry for the evening.

She ate a leisurely breakfast, wondering to herself where Alexis was, and what he was doing. She wondered what he had for breakfast, if he ate breakfast at all. *He did offer to let you stay the night on Thursday,* she thought wryly. *You could have known the answers to these questions by now.* But if she had stayed the night, she would have had to hurry home, shower, and get ready for work. Of course, Alexis would have to get ready for work too, but she had the added need of making sure the least amount of harm possible came to the dress that she had intended to return. The longer she wore it the more likely it would get damaged in some way.

Jasmine figured that Alexis almost certainly was not experiencing the same level of excitement for the evening that she was. To the best of her knowledge, most guys didn’t experience the jitters in the same way that women generally did—though she’d had a few guys who were nervous first dates—and Alexis seemed more in control of his emotions than any man she had met before.

The welts from the flogging and the punishment with the riding crop had gone almost entirely away; her nipples were no longer sore, even. And yet, as she went into her bedroom, stripping off her pajamas, the memory of the evening was just as vivid in Jasmine's mind as when she had stumbled into her bedroom at the end of the night, still stinging and tingling from the various punishments.

She sat down at the edge of her bed, shivering as she remembered the delicious vulnerability of being tied up, blindfolded, absolutely at Alexis's mercy. She could have used the safe word at any time, she knew; and yet, no matter how intense it had gotten, she had never been able to quite bring herself to utter it. *He knew when I'd had enough*, she realized. He had originally specified that he was going to test her with five punishment objects—not four.

Jasmine found herself lying back against the sheets of her bed, closing her eyes as her body heated up at the memory of the night. Her hands began to wander over her naked body, caressing and teasing, as she called up every detail.

Jasmine remembered the sound of Alexis' lilting voice in her ears—the tight control, the absolute confidence in his commands and in her total willingness to comply with them. *"I never said I would be fair,"* he had told her, when she had protested the fact that he'd made identifying the flogger too difficult. The amusement in his voice made Jasmine shiver again as her hand drifted down between her legs. She found herself already wet, her labia slick as her fingertips danced along them, attempting to mimic the feather-light touch that Alexis did so well. She realized too that Alexis had deliberately made the last test—the cane—easy for her, just as he had made the first object easy to identify.

Jasmine began to stroke her clit slowly, almost meditatively as she dared to imagine what it would be like to be Alexis's submissive—not in the short term, but in a more stable,

long-term arrangement. Hadn't he said that he wanted her to submit to him because she wanted to, and not because he dared her? *Assuming tonight goes well*, she thought, biting her bottom lip as her fingertips swirled around her pleasure center, *then good God do I ever want to*.

Jasmine's body twitched as she remembered the way the flogger had danced over her skin, flicking tongues of tingling heat across her breasts, her abdomen, her hips, her thighs. How long had Alexis been doing that particular punishment, to be so good at it?

Jasmine let her thoughts travel further back, to their first session together. She had had not anticipated that Alexis could possibly get the kind of reaction out of her that he had.

She shivered and writhed on her bed, reaching one hand up to cup her breast, finding the nipple and giving it a firm, rough tweak that made her gasp as sensation shot from her breast straight to her pussy.

Jasmine's fluids flowed more freely against her fingers as she slid them along her folds, rubbing her clit with her thumb as she slid two fingers deep inside of her pussy. She moaned, imagining that it was Alexis instead of her own touch, rubbing along her inner walls. It wasn't the same—it wasn't as deliciously sexy—but as Jasmine remembered both the way that Alexis had gotten her off with his hands, as well as the way he had paddled her afterward, it didn't matter. She tingled all over with hot and cold flashes of sensation, her pleasure mounting more and more with every moment as she teased herself.

Jasmine reached orgasm with a shudder, moaning as the image of Alexis, looking down at her with his dark eyes full of lust, flickered through her mind. She gasped and

shivered, hips moving automatically, sustaining her orgasm for as long as she could.

After several long moments, as the spasms of pleasure began to abate, Jasmine fell limp against her mattress, withdrawing her fingers and panting to catch her breath. The climax hadn't been as good as what Alexis had given her—but it was enough, for the moment, to satisfy her.

As soon as her breath slowed and her pulse went back to normal, Jasmine forced herself to get out of bed. *Let's see just how thoroughly I can get myself ready for this evening,* she thought.

Jasmine drew a deep, hot bath and sank into it, closing her eyes and letting the heat seep in through her skin. She let her mind drift for a long time, floating in the blind, hazy pleasure of the orgasm she had given herself. She smiled, thinking that even if it wasn't as good as what Alexis had given her, it didn't matter.

She could easily imagine the possibility of the night leading to something more than drinks and dancing at some event. The look in his eyes as he laid out the condition of taking her out on a date had told Jasmine clearly that he had more in mind. She wondered idly as she scrubbed and soaped her body, standing up out of the warm water to make sure she reached every inch of skin with the lather—just what kind of ball had he invited her to?

She spent the rest of the day preparing, and by the time she was done, Jasmine's skin was silky soft all over, her nails carefully done to coordinate with her dress and shoes. She had not even a strand of hair on her body from the waist down, and as she padded around her apartment preparing lunch the robe she wore tickled her sensitive skin.

Jasmine lounged around for a little while after lunch, making sure that the polish was dry on her hands and feet, idly watching TV as she forced herself not to fidget, not to give into the urge to walk around, to clean something, from the excess of nervous energy flowing through her body.

As the time to leave drew closer, Jasmine began her final preparations: she slipped into the creamy, nude-colored underwear set she had chosen to wear under her new dress, looking herself over in the mirror with a smile; when Alexis made her strip again, as she was almost certain he would, back at his hotel, she would look as though she was wearing next to nothing underneath her clothes. The lace of her bra was so fine, so delicate, that as her nipples hardened in the slight chill of the room, they strained at the fabric, and the dusky pink of her areolas was visible through the meshwork.

She went back into the bathroom and twisted her hair into an elegant chignon, tilting her head one way and then the other to make sure it looked even, and felt the way it should. Jasmine rarely had the patience to put much thought into her hair; for her daily routine, she usually did little more than wear it straight or pull it back into a tight, low-maintenance bun. But a date with Alexis—that was enough of an occasion to pull out all the stops, to put forth some effort into looking absolutely stunning.

Jasmine chose her makeup carefully, deciding on a shade of eye shadow only slightly darker than her natural skin tone, and lining her big, dark eyes with a pencil that just matched the green in the embroidery on her dress. She dusted her cheeks lightly with blush—just enough to give a hint of color, to provide some contrast and give her cheekbones some depth. She swiped a pink-toned lip color across her lips, adding a little at a time until it was just enough to show. Admiring the effect in the mirror, Jasmine decided that she would, in fact, live up to the incredible dress she had found; she would look just as stunning, if not more so, than the

night she had met Alexis—and without looking as though she was incredibly invested in the date.

Thirty minutes before she had to leave the apartment, Jasmine slipped into the dress, brushing its slightly crinkling folds along her hips and thighs. The cut of the gown was flawless along the curves of her body, making the most of her bust and the flare of her hips, showing just enough of her legs to be subtly provocative without looking either needlessly short or prudishly long, an effect that would be heightened when she slipped her feet into the shoes.

She called a cab and brought her shoes into the living room as she waited for the notification that her driver had arrived, her heart beating faster as she wondered just what Alexis was doing at that precise moment. *Probably only just now getting dressed*, she thought wryly.

Jasmine shrugged off the possibility that she was much more interested and invested in the date than Alexis was—it was a night out at a fancy party; she should be invested in it.

When the call came, she slipped the shoes onto her feet, took a moment to admire herself in the mirror next to the front door, and decided she was absolutely as flawless as she possibly could be.

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## **Chapter Thirteen**

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As Jasmine rode in the cab to the bar Alexis had told her to meet him at, she looked at her phone for the first time all day. It probably had been unwise for her not to pay attention to it, but she had thought in the back of her mind that not looking at it would mean she wouldn't risk finding out that Alexis had canceled on her.

Instead of any untoward message from Alexis, as she unlocked her screen Jasmine saw a missed call from James. *That is weird as hell*, she thought, frowning. She had been certain after not hearing from him after the party that she'd shaken him off her trail for good; certainly after the humiliation of that particular event, she had thought he was totally uninterested in hearing from her. He'd abandoned her, why would he want to have anything to do with her?

After a moment, Jasmine dismissed the issue. It wasn't worth thinking about. James would give up on her—probably the call had been nothing more than an invitation for sex, which she would gladly do without. She had more important things to think about—and much more inviting prospects than a guy who had treated her as nothing more than arm candy and a tool to gain someone's attention.

The cab arrived at the bar, and Jasmine stirred herself out of her reverie enough to pay the driver, along with a good tip. She took a deep breath as she stepped onto the curb, looking up at the sign. The subtle decor of the exterior, the clean lines, promised an exclusive experience that Jasmine thought she would never forget—no matter what happened between her and Alexis.

Jasmine threw her shoulders back and stepped up to the front door, telling herself that she belonged, and that she would blend right in—or stand out—just as she liked.

As she stepped into the bar, she heard the quiet murmur of voices, a discreetly tinkling piano off in one corner. Everything about the bar promised unobtrusive comfort and beauty. Jasmine's traveling gaze caught the bright glimmer of cut crystal, the yellow warmth of candlelight and the soft white of clean tablecloths.

Jasmine licked her lips, glancing around until she caught sight of Alexis, tucked into a booth which was barely visible from the front door. Jasmine felt a delicate shiver run through her spine. Dressed in a perfectly tailored, pitch black suit, with burnished gold tie, he looked just as stunning as she did.

Jasmine took a deep breath, swallowing against the instinctive tightness in her throat that rose up at the sight of him. She gathered her composure and strode across the room quickly, her shoulders back, lips curled in the slightest of smiles.

As she approached the booth where Alexis sat, he looked up, his bright eyes widening slightly as he saw her. Jasmine felt her cheeks heating but didn't pause, taking the last few steps then sinking down carefully onto the seat opposite Alexis with her smile still firmly in place.

"You are a vision," Alexis said, recovering so quickly that Jasmine wondered if she had imagined the look of appreciation in his eyes.

"I'm glad we were on the same page," Jasmine said, keeping her voice carefully level as she pointed to the tie around his neck.

"A little bit of serendipity," Alexis said with a grin. "What will you have to drink?"

Jasmine considered the question, glancing around for ideas. Of course, there was no convenient menu with specials and signature cocktails for the bar listed; it was far too exclusive a place.

"Anything you can imagine wanting, they can prepare for you," Alexis told her.

"What are you having?" Jasmine asked, glancing at his drink: it was in a martini glass, pale brown alcohol with a twist of orange peel.

"A Manhattan," Alexis confirmed. "I don't normally drink hard liquor early in the evening, but considering the event we're going to I thought it would be fair."

Jasmine grinned. "I'd love an Old Fashioned," she said.

Alexis raised a hand and a waitress in perfectly pressed, clean white shirt and black slacks appeared at the table within moments.

"An Old Fashioned for the lady, please," he said quietly.

Jasmine glanced around the room again, wanting to commit everything to memory.

"Have you never been here before?"

Jasmine turned her attention back onto Alexis.

"I don't actually go out very much," she said. It wasn't precisely a lie; she had gone out to several bars before she had reached a rank where she was so overworked that the most she wanted to do on a Friday or Saturday night was sit at home with a glass of wine. "Too busy, you know."

Alexis smiled slightly. "All work and no play..." He raised his glass to his lips and took a brief sip. "I also took the liberty of ordering a few things to eat while we're here. The ball starts at seven; I thought we would arrive by seven-thirty."

Jasmine nodded. "No sense in getting there exactly on time," she agreed.

"It means that by the time we arrive, most of the press vultures will be gone. It's easier to let them have their fill of the attention-hogs who actually want to be splashed all over the tabloids, and then come after they've gone off to file their reports," he said, and Jasmine nodded. "I hope you weren't too tired yesterday morning when you got into the office."

Jasmine licked her lips. "It was worth it," she said, smiling slightly. "I would have taken you up on your offer to stay the night, but I had a presentation first thing."

"You take a personal interest in acquisitions at your firm," Alexis said, something flickering in his eyes like suspicion. "Normally someone of your rank would relegate a presentation to a manager, no?"

Jasmine's heart pounded in her chest. "Well, if you want something done right, you do it yourself," she countered. Her drink arrived and Jasmine took a sip, needing the alcohol to steady her nerves. She decided it was better to change the subject. "How was your Friday?"

"Very good, overall," Alexis said, the faint ghost of a smile curving his lips once more.

Jasmine took another sip of her drink, marveling at the taste of it, savoring the bitter-fiery-sweet tang of it rolling against her tongue.

“But I hate talking about myself; I’d rather hear more about you.” His raised eyebrow told Jasmine clearly that her attempt to change the subject hadn’t gone unnoticed.

She racked her brain, trying to remember exactly what she had told him about herself. As she sipped her drink, she tried to expand on the history she had given him, telling him a heavily edited account of her college years.

“And now here you are, just a handful of years later, a major executive at a marketing firm,” Alexis said, something flickering through his bright eyes that Jasmine thought might have been suspicion. “It’s no wonder you haven’t had much time to go out—you must have been working all the hours of the day and most of the night to get ahead so quickly.”

Jasmine smiled nervously. “Do you think we have time for another round?” she asked him, and Alexis glanced at his watch and nodded.

“One more, and then we’ll head over to the party.” He raised his hand and ordered second drinks for them both. “You must have impressed someone at the firm very much indeed. What was your starting position?”

Jasmine floundered, trying to remember what she could of the company she had told him she worked for. She had done the briefing on getting them as a potential client for Alexis’s company—but they had fallen through, and it had been months since she had thought about them.

“I was working under Grant Hughes,” she said, thanking whatever deities existed that she remembered the name of the chief marketing officer. “I actually met him at an event my school sponsored, and I guess he liked me enough to give me a chance.”

Alexis smiled slightly, and Jasmine felt herself relaxing.

Their drinks arrived and she turned the subject away from her work life, saying that since it was the weekend, she didn't want to think business.

"I'm interested in hearing about what you do in your free time," she said, sipping her drink slowly. "I know you don't like talking about yourself, but it only seems fair after the grilling you just gave me."

Alexis sat back against the booth's bench, shrugging slightly as he looked at her. "I don't really enjoy hobbies so much—of course, you are already aware of the one hobby I do keep moderately involved in. I like to read, and I can spend hours on Wikipedia. It's almost embarrassing."

"I can too, actually," Jasmine said, the alcohol beginning to have an effect on her. "When I first started working—with Grant—there were, of course, a few things that I had no real clue about." Alexis chuckled. "Well, he hired me for my *potential*, after all." Alexis nodded, and Jasmine licked her lips, tasting the lingering flavor of the Old Fashioned. "So I found myself looking things up, and falling into Wikipedia holes... and the habit kind of stuck, even once I'd mastered everything I needed to know to get ahead in the company."

"Information is power," Alexis said, raising his glass. "I try to be as well-informed as possible, no matter the situation. And learning for its own sake has rewards. Of course, even when I'm on a site like that looking for information..." he shrugged again. "It's not always fully trustworthy."

They discussed the merits of crowd-sourced information, their academic interests, the books they had read, and as Jasmine finished her second drink she felt warmth spreading through her. She wasn't drunk—not more than slightly buzzed—but she was certain that whatever suspicions Alexis

might have had about her meteoric rise up the ladder, she had somehow managed to dispel them. At least, she hoped so. *If I haven't, then this situation is probably not going to last very long. I should take advantage of every moment.*

Alexis finished his drink and set the glass aside, taking a deep breath and exhaling a satisfied sigh. "I think I'm finally in the right state of mind to go to this event," he said. He raised an eyebrow. "How are you feeling?"

Jasmine picked up her purse and nodded slightly. "If you'll give me just a moment to visit the ladies' room, I'll touch up my lipstick and then I'll be perfectly ready."

Alexis inclined his head towards her slightly, gesturing in the direction of the restrooms, and Jasmine stood, steadying herself on the new heels she had bought the day before, and walked in the direction he had indicated, telling herself that any show of even remote tipsiness would be a travesty in a bar like this.

She made it into the hallway that housed the restrooms and stepped inside, taking a deep breath. Her heart was beating faster in her chest; but she wasn't afraid that she would be found out—rather she was anxious to get through the next part of the night, fairly certain that the tail-end of the event they were going to would include an invitation from Alexis to spend some time alone. Her skin tingled as she anticipated it; it would be even better than the first two times, somehow, she knew.

As soon as she rejoined him at the table, Alexis stood.

"I assume you're fine with taking my car to the ball?" he asked her. "I've just settled the bill."

Jasmine nodded and Alexis reached out, taking her hand and folding it against the crook of his arm with a courtly gesture.

"I'm getting the feeling that you're not exactly thrilled about going to this ball," Jasmine said as they stepped out of the bar.

Alexis guided her towards a waiting car: black, sleek, it looked exactly the way she had imagined. A driver came out and opened the back door.

As Jasmine settled against the plush, buttery leather seat, Alexis slid in next to her, pulling the door shut.

"It's not my favorite way to spend an evening," he admitted. "But it's one of those things you just have to do. I'm sure you've spent many boring evenings with similar groups of people."

Jasmine laughed. "Considering you met me on such a boring evening..." she let the suggestion hang in the air, and Alexis laughed too.

"You're right. Which is why I invited you. You were able to salvage what had been becoming a disaster of an evening for me, and I had hoped you would be able to repeat that magic in a new venue. Unfortunately, unlike your previous date, I plan to be very attentive."

Jasmine chuckled. "In that case, unlike my previous date, I doubt you'll leave the venue utterly humiliated by someone blabbing to a prospective hookup and business partner that you have—what was it, gonorrhea?"

Alexis grinned, his teeth glinting in the faint light of the car's interior.

"I would certainly hope not" he said. "But if I do abandon you, I give you complete permission to embarrass me. I'd



have to lose my mind for something like that to happen, and I'd have it coming."

"Duly noted," Jasmine said, her skin tingling as Alexis's hand came down lightly along her knee. "It's important that you high-ranking people—higher ranking than us regular executives anyway—be kept honest. I don't want you getting a big head."

Alexis licked his lips. "We will see about the big head. But I appreciate your willingness to keep the night interesting for me."

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## **Chapter Fourteen**

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It was only a short drive to the drive to the hotel which was hosting the ball; Jasmine thought that she almost could have walked it, but was glad—considering her dress and shoes, and how expensive they were—that she didn't have to.

True to Alexis' prediction, there were no flashes of paparazzi taking pictures as they stepped out of the car together, though Jasmine could see evidence of them having been there earlier.

Alexis led her up the few steps to the entrance of the hotel, and handed his invitation to a guard, who cross-referenced his name from a clipboard.

"Welcome to the ball, Mr. Kyrkos," the man said, gesturing for them both to go in.

Jasmine looked around as they made their way towards the ballroom that had been reserved for the event, trying to discern just what cause it was for.

"It's a fundraiser," Alexis said, interpreting her glances around for seeking information. "Of course, by arriving late we pretty much have already informed them that neither of us has any intention of making an ostentatious appearance."

Jasmine snickered. Alexis's lack of interest was glaringly obvious, and she wished, for just a moment, that she had the kind of clout, money and position in life to be able to shrug off the extravagance of a gala that she had been invited to and pay no attention to it at all.

She followed Alexis's lead, ceasing to look for hints and clues and telling herself that just like before, with James, the event was nothing more than an excuse to go out and have a good time. She and Alexis would dance, talk, maybe have

a few drinks, and then—with any luck—they would leave, to spend the night in his hotel room together. She had already decided that since she didn't have to work the next day, she would absolutely accept any offer from him to stay the night, assuming that he made one.

They stepped into the ballroom together and Jasmine assessed the event quickly; most of the people gathered were at least twenty years older than her, some of them thirty years older. A dozen couples were on the dance floor, but the majority of people in the room seemed to be gathered in small groups at the tables, discussing one thing or another.

"The main event of the evening is always the speeches," Alexis murmured in her ear. "So of course I wanted to avoid that."

Jasmine held back a laugh at his sardonic words, keeping her face composed. "Aren't you supposed to be a philanthropist?" she asked, lowering her voice.

"I am," Alexis said, giving her arm a gentle squeeze. "But I prefer to work with individuals and know just where my money is going and what it's doing for them. Situations like these—ostentatious money grabs—are only good for one thing, and only then if you have a suitable date."

"Oh, so I'm suitable?"

Alexis flashed a quick grin at her. "You are more than suitable. Gorgeous, poised—and certain to be endlessly entertaining to me. I couldn't think of anyone better than you."

They sat at the table that had been reserved for them and surveyed the room, trying to find something that could provide some amusement. After a few moments, she started

to think that the group of people assembled at the ball could not possibly have been duller.

"It feels like I might actually fall asleep if I pay attention to my surroundings. Everyone is so..."

"Smug? Self-satisfied? Stultifying?"

Jasmine snorted, biting back a laugh.

Alexis leaned in closer. "Shall we see if the magic from our last outing will repeat itself?"

Jasmine's eyes widened and she felt her heart speed up in her chest.

"Are you suggesting a continuation of our game?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I am," Alexis confirmed. "And since you dared me to take you on a date, it's my turn. I dare you to follow me."

Jasmine glanced around; there was nothing at all holding her to the event in progress.

"I accept," she said, smiling slightly.

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## **Chapter Fifteen**

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Jasmine followed Alexis out of the ballroom and into a corridor, her skin tingling and her body heating up with every step. The music faded behind her as she glanced around; there were only a few people coming and going, most of them servers with trays full of either drinks or empty glasses headed back towards the kitchens.

Alexis opened a door and propelled Jasmine through it. Looking around, she could see that it was some kind of staging area—a server cut through on her way to the ballroom, but apart from that it was deserted. The room boasted a few low chairs, and a gas fireplace that was currently shut off.

“Now, where can we get a little bit of privacy in here?” Alexis asked, not looking at her.

Jasmine’s heart beat faster in her chest. The room was deserted now, but she couldn’t help thinking that at any moment there would be one of the staff members coming through, on their way to the kitchen or back out to the ballroom.

Alexis’s hand gave hers a squeeze. “Bingo.”

He pulled her in his wake as he made his way across the room, and Jasmine realized that they were headed for a tiny alcove, with thick drapes that hung nearly from ceiling to the floor.

Alexis pulled the curtains aside and gestured for Jasmine to step into the little recess. She had to wonder what its real purpose was, because while there was a ledge, there wasn’t anything to indicate that it was actually intended for any kind of private conversation.

He pulled the curtains around them, and immediately his hands came to life along the curves of Jasmine's body, caressing and teasing her.

"How quiet do you think you're capable of being, Jasmine?" he asked her, his voice a tense whisper in her ear. "We're alone right now but that could change at any minute."

Jasmine's cheeks burned as one of Alexis's hands slid down along the skirt of her dress and she realized just what he intended to do.

"I-I think I can be pretty quiet," she murmured, panting.

Alexis reached up, his eyes glowing in the semi-darkness as he smiled slightly. He tugged the front of her dress down to reveal her bra and raised an eyebrow in appreciation.

"Later, I'm going to take a little more time to appreciate this," he said, cupping her breasts through the fine lace of her bra. "But for now, let's give you a little test, hmm?"

Jasmine nodded, clenching her teeth against a gasp as Alexis's fingers closed around her nipples, pinching them lightly.

"Very good, little one. Very good."

He brushed his lips against hers, his hands trailing down along her body slowly. Jasmine shivered as she felt his fingertips grazing along her thighs, along the hem of her dress. He found the waistband of her panties and tugged them down over her hips, dragging the thin material downwards along her thighs.

Alexis broke away from the kiss, and Jasmine, sensing what he wanted her to do, stepped out of her panties as he brought them down along her legs.



Alexis grinned slightly, flourishing the lacy, damp material. "This will help. Open your mouth, little one."

Jasmine balked, understanding what he was implying, and Alexis raised an eyebrow.

"Your choice to submit to me or walk out of here," Alexis said lowly.

Jasmine took a slow breath. She could submit, or she could use the safe word. She could still walk out, but she didn't want to. Every nerve of her body was screaming at her to stay and see what happened next.

Jasmine swallowed nervously and opened her mouth. Alexis rolled her panties into a ball and pushed them between her lips, just past her teeth. Jasmine could taste her own fluids on her tongue and realized that she was not just aroused, she was soaking wet already.

Alexis's hands slipped up beneath her dress once more. "Do you remember how much you enjoyed me getting you off with my fingers, the first time we were together?" he asked, his voice a low, purring growl in her ear.

Jasmine nodded, breathing in sharply as Alexis's fingertips danced along her drenched folds. She shivered against him as Alexis stroked her with a feather-light touch, teasing her.

"You're so smooth," he murmured softly. "Did you do this for me?"

Jasmine nodded again, her breath catching. Alexis's fingers pressed against her, slipping between her labia, and he rubbed her slowly, finding her clit by touch. Jasmine inhaled sharply, trembling between the wall and his hard, muscled body.

Alexis worked her steadily with his fingers, and Jasmine struggled to keep herself quiet as he stroked and rubbed, teasing her clit and then working his way down to her inner labia. Alexis brushed his lips along her throat, and Jasmine's jaw clenched as he slid two fingers inside of her slowly, rubbing along her inner walls. It felt impossible to hold back the moans building up from her chest, but somehow she managed, shivering and trembling, her knees like jelly underneath her.

Alexis brought her to the edge of orgasm in what seemed like a matter of moments, and Jasmine writhed, soft whimpers leaving her lips in spite of the panties wadded in her mouth. He kissed and nipped along the column of her throat, sharp bursts of almost-pain and softer, warm caresses from his lips vying with the rubbing, stroking touch of his fingers inside and outside of her pussy.

Jasmine's hips moved, twisting and pushing down to meet Alexis's touches, and she clenched her teeth, struggling to fight the noises that threatened to rip through her throat at every moment.

Just when she was on the edge, about to tumble over into climax, Alexis's fingers retreated.

"Very good again, Jasmine," he murmured, his voice low and growling in her ear. "I'm starting to think you're a natural at this."

Jasmine shivered, grabbing at him convulsively, her whole body racked with the tingling, crackling sensations of her denied orgasm.

She shook her head at the idea that she was "a natural," fidgeting and squirming as she tried to get contact between Alexis's fingers and her pussy once more.

"We'll have to work on your patience, though," Alexis told her, chuckling lowly.

He lifted her skirt up around her waist, and then Jasmine felt her weight leaving her feet. Alexis pinned her against the wall at her hips, caressing her briefly.

He removed the panties from her mouth. "Training wheels off," he murmured, letting the soaked fabric fall to the floor.

Jasmine nodded; she could feel the hard ridge of Alexis's erection pressing against her. She wanted him—she needed him. She wasn't sure if she could keep herself from moaning and crying out; it had seemed so difficult even moments before, when he had been fingering her, driving her wild with his touch.

Alexis claimed her lips with his own, kissing her hungrily. Jasmine felt his fingers brushing against her and realized that he was unbuttoning and unzipping the fly of his pants. She deepened the kiss as she felt Alexis's cock spring free from the confines of his clothing, brushing her drenched folds as she wrapped her legs around his waist.

"Remember," Alexis murmured, barely breaking from her lips. "Someone could walk in at any moment. Do you want us to be thrown out?"

Jasmine heard a soft, almost growling sound leave her throat as she kissed Alexis even more hungrily, pushing her hips down to rub against his hot, hard cock.

"I will keep quiet," she murmured, her voice barely a whisper. "If you can."

She felt Alexis's lips curve against hers in a smile and the next moment he thrust up into her, filling her up all at once, challenging her.

Jasmine's hands grabbed at his shoulders, her muscles tightening convulsively as she inhaled sharply through her nose. Alexis began moving inside of her, thrusting hard and fast, and Jasmine barely let her lips break from his, struggling to temper the moans that built up inside of her.

Every movement of Alexis's hips pushed his cock deeper and deeper, rubbing along her inner walls, barely missing her G-spot, and the friction between their bodies sent tingles through her clit, making it nearly impossible to think—to remember that she had to keep as silent as humanly possible.

Jasmine twisted and writhed, trapped between Alexis and the wall. Her hands wandered over his back, exploring the hard lines of his body through the fabric of his clothes as they moved together. Little sounds built up in her chest, rising up to her lips only to be muffled against Alexis's mouth. Cold and hot flashes of pleasure rushed through her, tingling at her nerve endings as her muscles flexed around Alexis's cock, her body coming closer and closer to orgasm with each moment.

She twisted her hips, shifting them as much as the confined space between Alexis's body and the wall would allow, intent on making him come first—if he came, then she would win, she'd be able to stay nearly silent.

But Alexis slipped one hand between their bodies, seemingly equally determined to win himself, and Jasmine gasped as his fingertips rubbed and stroked her clit in counterpoint to his thrusts.

She pressed her lips together, clenching her teeth, as her pleasure mounted, bringing her to the edge. Alexis's cock brushed against her G-spot, sending a jolt of such intense pleasure through her that all Jasmine could do was bury her face against his neck, the moan that ripped through her muffled against his tanned skin.

In a matter of moments, it seemed, she was unable to hold back any longer. Jasmine's legs tightened around Alexis's waist, her muscles contracting and flexing in spasms she couldn't control as wave after wave of pleasure rushed through her body.

Her orgasm intensified, and Jasmine clenched her teeth, struggling against the moans that rose up inside of her with every thrust of Alexis's hips, as he brushed against her G-spot over and over again, his fingertips working her clit in swirling circles that made it impossible to think.

She felt his cock twitching inside of her, and after a few moments Alexis's entire body tensed. Jasmine let out a soft, almost-whimpering moan as she felt the hot, sticky-slick gush of his come flooding into her. Alexis somehow managed to remain nearly completely silent, bringing Jasmine's lips to his to kiss her eagerly as he thrust into her a few final, fast times, the barest hint of a moan vibrating against her tongue.

They both sagged against the wall, holding each other up, and Jasmine panted softly as aftershocks of her climax rippled through her body.

For just a moment, she wondered about the dress—about whether they had somehow managed to rip or damage it—but the haze of pleasure that fogged her mind made it unimportant. *So what if I can't return it?* She thought idly, resting her forehead against Alexis's shoulder. *Why would I want to now that it's seen this kind of action? I will find a goddamn way to keep it.*

After a few moments, Alexis pulled back, setting her gently on her feet and steadying her against the wall.

"We'll have to sneak back out soon," he murmured, fixing his clothing and zipping his fly. "After all...someone's bound to come in here with the same idea we had."

Imagining some of the people she had seen—mostly older couples and silver-haired men with dates whose mid-twenties ages proclaimed them to be kept women, Jasmine shuddered. The last thing she wanted was to be stuck watching the others at the ball making out because she and Alexis had slipped into one of the only private spots in the ballroom suite.

She rearranged her clothes, giving herself a cursory inspection; there were no rips or tears, no obvious stains that she could make out. The skirt of her dress was slightly wrinkled, but she thought that no one would really be paying that level of attention to her—and of course, she thought with a blush, even if they did, it wasn't like she had done anything too obvious.

Alexis retrieved her panties from the floor and handed them to her with a satisfied, amused grin. Jasmine's blush deepened and she slipped them on, shivering at the cold and damp feeling of them against her skin. *I'll live*, she told herself, smoothing the folds of her skirt over her thighs.

"Ready?" Alexis asked her.

Jasmine nodded and he pulled aside the heavy drapes and leading her quickly out of the alcove. There was no one in the room—not even a server cutting through to the kitchen. He led her once more through the corridor, straight-backed and absolutely confident, and Jasmine followed his lead. She

threw her shoulders back and looked straight ahead, giving his hand a playful squeeze.

"I believe it's your turn to dare me," Alexis murmured, leaning in close, and Jasmine shivered at the feeling of his hot breath against her skin.

She considered her options as he led her back into the ballroom, snagging two glances of champagne from a passing tray and handing her one.

Jasmine smiled, feeling the warmth spreading through her body. She could feel the wetness of her fluids and Alexis's come mingling, soaking into her panties, but it was almost like a dirty secret, a joke she was playing on the whole, respectable room.

"I dare you to dance with me," she said quickly.

Alexis raised an eyebrow, but his lips twitched into a smile, and he nodded.

"Take a sip and set your glass down, and we'll dance."

Jasmine did as she was told, taking a long sip of the champagne and setting it down at their table. Alexis followed suit and took her hand once more, leading her onto the dance floor.

Alexis's hands slid down along to her body, coming to a rest just above her hips, and then shifting to the small of her back. Jasmine draped her arms around his broad shoulders, falling into his rhythm, her body swaying as they both fell into the beat of the music.

Jasmine closed her eyes, resting her cheek lightly against Alexis's shoulder, barely leaning against him as they found their way along the dance floor. She sighed, realizing that

she was content more than just because of the orgasm she had experienced only moments before.

As they danced, slowly moving their feet, bodies pressed together lightly, Jasmine thought about the strange set of circumstances that had led her to this particular moment; the fact that she had picked Alexis on a whim, of all the people she could have chosen as revenge on James for abandoning her. She had started after him partly out of irritation for the way she was treated at work—and the fact that Alexis had not recognized her, even though he'd met her several times. Over the course of their trysts together, somehow the fact of his lack of notice seemed a silly resentment to hang onto; she had long since forgiven him.

In fact, Jasmine realized as they danced together that she had gone beyond just viewing Alexis as a method and subject of revenge for the troubles and irritations of her life, and had actually started to have real—if only nascent—feelings towards him.

"You must have found time to take lessons," Alexis murmured against her ear. "You're the first woman I've danced with who hasn't stepped on my feet."

Jasmine chuckled softly, pulling back to look up into his eyes. For the first time since they had met, she saw more than just lust, or suspicion, or amusement in the deep brown of his gaze; she saw something warmer.

"Maybe I'm a natural at this, too," Jasmine countered, smiling up at him.

*Even if it leaves me broke, I am keeping this damn dress,* she thought, pressing against Alexis's body just a little more firmly. She could just feel the heat of him through his clothes, and thought that once the evening was over, he



would almost certainly invite her to come back to his room; an invitation she fully intended to accept.

“That wouldn’t surprise me,” Alexis murmured in her ear. “You seem to be a natural at many things.”

He didn’t miss a beat as one song segued into another, merely picking up his pace to match the rhythm of the music.

Jasmine was perfectly in step with him, and as she swayed against his body, matching his steps, she wished that the night could go on forever this way—even as she felt the lingering heat in her body, the hunger for more than just a quickie, as exciting as it had been in the little alcove. It was too perfect, too wonderful. She knew that it couldn’t last—that even without the concerns of her career, she had no idea of what kind of man Alexis was—that in spite of his warmth towards her, she knew he wasn’t exactly serious.

The second song ended and a movement in the corner of her eye interrupted Jasmine’s reverie. Alexis glanced away from her face, frowning with perturbed recognition.

Turning to look in the direction of the movement, Jasmine’s eyes widened as she spotted James, making his way towards them with a smug smile on his face. Jasmine’s heart pounded.

“James? What are you doing here?”

James laughed, stopping only a few feet away from the two of them.

“I could ask you the same thing,” he said, looking from Jasmine to Alexis. “What’s a lowly assistant manager like you doing at a campaign fundraiser with Alexis Kyrkos?”

Jasmine's stomach flopped over and she looked at Alexis, whose dark eyes had widened at the news.

As the people around them started to move away, pretending to have urgent business elsewhere, Jasmine's mind reeled as she struggled to think of some way to recover the situation. She opened her mouth and closed it, her heart pounding in her chest. She had no idea what to say...

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## **Chapter Sixteen**

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For a long moment, Jasmine could only stare at the two men in shock. Her knees felt as though they were made of rubber, insubstantial and weak underneath her. James' self-satisfied grin deepened into a smug smirk, his eyes gleaming. "You must have her mistaken for someone else," Alexis said quickly. Jasmine's mouth and throat went dry as she saw Alexis frown in displeasure. "And I'd appreciate it if you would apologize to this lovely woman right now for interrupting us."

"Not mistaken at all," James said, looking—if anything—more pleased than ever; positively gleeful. "She works at your company, in fact. Of course, she lied to me too—I thought she was much higher up in the food chain than she was." Alexis' frown intensified and he shook his head.

"You're an idiot," he told James. Without even looking at her, he gestured up and down, indicating the beautiful ensemble that Jasmine wore. "Does she look like a middle manager to you?"

"Doesn't matter what she looks like; you're slumming it with one of your own employees," James said, almost laughing. "Just ask her."

Jasmine had thought that she couldn't possibly have been more aghast at the situation, but as James and Alexis both turned to look at her, her started to spin and her heart began beating even faster. She felt her face burn as the blood rushed into her cheeks, roaring in her ears, then flooded away, leaving her dizzy.

Jasmine opened her mouth slightly, intent on making some response—any response—but nothing came. Her mind was blank. She closed her mouth and pressed her lips together as her eyes began to sting. Jasmine looked from James' smug, grinning face to Alexis's concerned, irritated one. She

couldn't think of anything to say. She couldn't bring herself to lie about what had happened, and she couldn't make herself tell the truth, to say it out loud. She took a deep breath, glancing around the room to see just how much of a scene James had caused; the rest of the ball's guests were ignoring them—either out of politeness or because they were simply uninterested in their little drama.

"I have to go," she said, not looking at James and barely managing to glance at Alexis.

Jasmine wove her way through the ballroom, unable to make herself look back and see whether either man was following her. Her heart raced in her chest, and she resisted the incipient tears burning at the corners of her eyes. She was *not* going to cry in the middle of a ballroom full of people; she was not going to dignify James' sneaky plot by running out of the room in tears.

Jasmine briefly lost herself in the hallways leading through the venue, blindly taking turns this way or that as she tried to extricate herself. She eventually found the signs leading to the ballroom and followed them in reverse, swallowing against the tight feeling in her throat. She had no idea what she was going to do once she made it out of the venue, but she knew she couldn't stick around; she had to get away. She paused as she came to the public entrance, the one through which she and Alexis had entered the building; there hadn't been any reporters or paparazzi around when they'd come in, but that didn't mean there weren't any there now. The last thing she wanted was to get her picture snapped as the last of her self-control dissolved and she began to sob.

Jasmine turned on her heel, heading back the way she came. She avoided the ballroom itself, following the waiters in the halls and working her way through the building. Her vision blurred and Jasmine stopped, leaning against a wall.

With any luck, anyone walking past her would just think that she was one of the tipsier revelers, not someone whose life had just been pulled out from under her. She took a deep breath, blinking several times to clear away the lingering impulse of tears, and forced herself to move forward once more. She had to get out before one of the two men thought to come after her—even if she was taking a rather unorthodox route out of the building.

Finally—finally—she found an exit. She plunged through the back door and into the harsh light of the alley behind the venue, then paused, disoriented. *Maybe this wasn't as great an idea as I thought.* She gathered up the shreds of her dignity and peered around the narrow, concrete-lined area, trying to decide how best to get around the huge building and back onto the street.

Unsure of what her plan was, Jasmine set off, slipping out of the well-lit perimeter and into the darkness, swallowed up by the space between the hotel and the building behind it. Thoughts flitted through her mind of the kinds of things that happened to women in dark alleys, but she pressed on, reminding herself that the door she'd gone through would have locked automatically behind her, and the only way out now was through. She turned left at the corner, following the line of the building along a sidewalk, looking around occasionally to make sure she wasn't being pursued. Jasmine's feet began to ache as she tried to find her way to the front of the building; it seemed like an interminable distance, especially after navigating the maze of the interior.

As she came to one of the front corners of the venue, Jasmine exhaled in relief. She at least wasn't going to be wandering around for hours. She crossed the side street separating the hotel from the next building over, found a conveniently placed bench in front of the closed restaurant, and sat down heavily, for the moment unconcerned about the dress, her shoes, and the expense of all of her clothing.

For a few moments, all Jasmine could do was wallow in self pity. She brought her hands to her face and leaned forward, shaking and trembling as she gave into the shame, anger, and disappointment that washed over her in waves. Hot tears rolled down her cheeks as she relived the confrontation in her mind, remembering James' smug self-satisfaction and Alexis's disbelief. She knew she really should have been direct with Alexis from the very beginning, or at least once they reached his hotel room on that first evening together. She could have avoided the whole situation if she had just been upfront about who she was—but if she'd done that, the dalliance would have come to an end—and may never have started at all.

Jasmine's stomach churned at the thought of James' betrayal, at her miserable bad luck. "If I had just checked my damned phone," she thought, shaking her head. "How did he figure out where we'd be?" Her head was swimming. Jasmine shook her head, looking out onto the street in front of her. She was exhausted; her feet ached from walking in the heels. Her ankles throbbed, her calves tingled with the promise of pain to come, and her temples felt tight. Jasmine decided that it was long past time to figure out how she was going to get home.

A few taxis glided up and down the street, looking for fares from the hotel, or the restaurants and bars that lined the tony downtown block. Jasmine grimaced as she rose to her feet and dusted off her dress, grateful that at least she had a little money and could afford a cab home. She looked down at her dress as she stepped up to the curb, frowning. As much as she hated the idea of returning it, she knew she couldn't justify keeping it, even if it was absolutely perfect on her. "Just the reminder I needed after a night like this," she said to herself, raising a hand to hail one of the passing cabs.

After several drivers flew past without even seeing her, a taxi finally screeched to a stop just inches from the curb, and the driver leaned out to look her over. "You don't look like the kind of lady who would need a cab," he said, raising an eyebrow. Jasmine shrugged. "Well, I am that kind of lady," she said, sniffing back the last of her disappointed tears. She quickly dabbed at her eyes and nose. "I'm not really having a great night, but I can afford fare and I need to get home."

"Get in, then," the driver said. He unlocked the back door of the car and Jasmine climbed in, exhaling slowly in relief. She gave the driver her address and sat back, looking through the window. Thankfully he didn't try very hard to talk to her, and she watched the cityscape flow past the window as the cab made its way through the stream of traffic. Fortunately, Jasmine thought as she glanced at the meter, her apartment wasn't that far away. She would just be able to afford the fare in cash.

"I'm really sorry," Jasmine said, handing over the money as the driver pulled up to the curb and parked. "I'd like to be able to give you a better tip." He glanced at the folded bills and shrugged.

"Better than I've gotten all night," he said with a slight smile. "One of those wealthy men at the big ball didn't tip me at all, though he had me haul him to the other end of the city."

Jasmine smiled in sympathy before climbing carefully out of the cab and walking up to her building. Hesitating on the threshold, she glanced around. Her feet were killing her. There was no one around that she could see; so Jasmine slipped her feet out of the shoes, bundling the pumps under her arm as she dug her keys out of her purse.



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## **Chapter Seventeen**

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The next morning, Jasmine woke up reluctantly, aching all over. Eyes still closed, face buried against her pillow, she cataloged the twinges: the balls of her feet buzzed with lingering pressure from the shoes, her calves felt tight, her ankles weak. Her temples throbbed, and it felt as though someone had driven ice picks into her eyes while she'd slept. *I didn't even have that much to drink*, she thought resentfully. The thought of what she had done last night brought back the humiliation of James' ambush and Jasmine groaned, burrowing deeper into her blankets.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid*, she thought, thinking of all the ways she could have possibly avoided the events of last night. She could have given James a fake name, instead of her real one; she could have paid attention to her phone and had some kind of advance warning of his intentions—which would have given her time to come up with something to say to Alexis when he questioned her about James' unfortunately true story. She could have told the security working the event that James was stalking her and not to let him in. A dozen things sprang to her aching, tired brain, none of which she had thought to do when it actually mattered.

"Well," Jasmine said, as she rolled onto her back, pulling away from the mass of the pillows. "That's obviously all over now." She sighed, scrubbing at her face with her hands. She took a deep breath and exhaled sharply, determined to push the issue from her mind. It was fun while it lasted, but she knew her surreptitious departure would have made it all too clear to Alexis that James was right. Yes, that was the end of her fling with the billionaire.

She forced herself out of bed and decided to spend the whole day pampering herself. The night before, Jasmine had barely had the energy to wipe the makeup off of her face, much less to properly wash up. She would have her coffee,

eat some breakfast, and spend the rest of the day loafing around the apartment; Jasmine frowned at the thought that she had work the next day. *I'll cross that bridge when I come to it*, she told herself firmly.

Jasmine went about her planned day of pampering, taking a long, hot bath instead of her usual quick shower, carefully applying lotion all over her body, smearing a rose-scented clay mask over her face and lounging in her bathrobe while snacking on grapes and cheese. She tried to keep her mind off Alexis, and the potential disaster that his new knowledge could wreak on her career, but her mind kept stubbornly circling around to it. Guiltily, Jasmine realized that she'd kind of earned James' revenge, with the dare she had given Alexis to humiliate him in front of the people he was trying to impress. "Hey—wait a second," she said out loud, looking up from the sink where she was rinsing the face mask off. "He abandoned me first." Maybe she had taken it a little far, but it wasn't as though James had been entirely innocent.

Jasmine couldn't quite rid her mind of flashbacks to her brief fling with Alexis. She closed her eyes, shivering at the mental images, the sensations jolting her almost as vividly as they had when she and Alexis had actually been together. If he had known, the first night he'd taken her up to his room, that she was one of his employees, would it have changed anything? Or would he have immediately abandoned the thought of having anything to do with her? *Well that's something I'll never know*, she thought, grudgingly.

It was difficult not to dwell on how stupid she'd been, and on how much she resented James. She had no idea where he lived or where he was working, so it wasn't as though she'd have a chance to counter his act of betrayal. But did she really want to? Wasn't it enough already? Deep down, Jasmine thought that if she did have the information needed to get back at James, she probably wouldn't hesitate.

As Jasmine went through the motions, indulging in the activities that would normally have cheered her up completely from a bad night out, she realized with dread that it would be nearly impossible to avoid running into Alexis at work the next day. Now that he knew Jasmine was his employee, he would seek her out; and even if James' outburst hadn't immediately convinced him, Jasmine was sure he would have confirmed it as soon as he left the ball. She could already sense the awkwardness and pain of talking to Alexis at work when he was almost certainly going to tell her he didn't want to see her anymore.

"And then," she said to herself out loud, her voice echoing slightly in the empty apartment, "I'm going to have to keep showing up to work every day, knowing he's there, and being invisible again. She shook her head, closing her eyes at the unexpected rush of pain she felt at the idea of Alexis rejecting her. She hadn't been aware she'd been so strongly attracted to him. She knew she'd been interested—her body tingled with heat at the memory of just how interested she had been—but she hadn't thought she'd been growing attached to the reclusive and eccentric billionaire. "God, I let him do things to me that I'd never—ugh." Jasmine wasn't sure if she felt more hurt or ashamed, more guilty or resentful that her dalliance was coming to a conclusive end, thanks to James' scheme.

She forced herself to go to bed early, knowing that the next day would be a monstrous one. Trying to relax enough to fall asleep became impossible when Jasmine realized that being rejected by Alexis might not be the end of her problems—he might be so angry as to fire her. Not only would she lose the most interesting lover she'd ever been with, she'd lose everything. Jasmine's eyes stung at the thought. Taking a few slow breaths, she reminded herself that she'd never seen any sign of Alexis being vindictive. Even if he was, she would survive. But it still made her throat burn with bile to

think that James might have totally ruined her life, and she might be left with no way of getting back at him. Jasmine pulled the blankets over her head and tried to will herself to sleep, even as a sinking sense of dread began to wash through her at just how much she stood to lose.

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## **Chapter Eighteen**

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The next morning, Jasmine's alarm screen helpfully reminded her that it was Monday. She thought she had managed maybe three or four hours of sleep the entire night, despite how tired she had been and how early she'd gone to bed.

For a moment she considered the possibility of calling in sick. "I have sick time," she said to herself as she set the alarm to snooze. "I could just call HR, tell them I have a stomach bug." It was a tempting idea, but at the same time it would only mean she found more work on her desk on Tuesday and her inevitable confrontation with Alexis would only be postponed for another day. It wouldn't help her avoid any of it; it would only make her life harder. Jasmine sighed, closing her eyes as though she might be able to fall asleep and make up for the hours she'd missed before the alarm went off again.

Five minutes later, she dragged herself out of her bed, and went through the motions of getting ready for work. She decided on a pair of flats instead of heels, due to the lingering soreness in her feet, and pulled together the most comfortable, professional outfit she possessed: a skirt and sweater set, with one of her only nice bra-and-panty sets underneath. It might at least help her feel more confident and maintain her composure when the moment came.

Jasmine pulled her hair back into a smart bun, put on a little makeup, and concentrated on putting one foot in front of the other until she was out of the door. Once inside her car, she turned her music up as loud as she could stand for the drive to the office. For once her thoughts were too consumed with the dread of what the day at work would bring to even notice the traffic. Before she even got close to the building in the middle of the city, Jasmine's heart had begun to beat faster. At least, she thought, if they were going to fire her outright—if Alexis had decided to show his displeasure that

way—then she would probably be in and out of the office in under an hour. It didn't seem like the kind of thing that they would wait all day to do.

But if Alexis decided that he wanted to leave her menial job untouched, if he was just going to tell her he wasn't going to see her anymore—that would be torture of a different kind. She would have to deal with rumors flying around the office, with judgmental glances and gleeful whispering. She gritted her teeth, hands tight on the steering wheel. Her stomach felt like it had been lined with lead at some point during her uneasy sleep, and the coffee she made herself drink did nothing to ease the sensation.

As she pulled into her usual parking spot, Jasmine took a deep breath and made herself exhale slowly, closing her eyes. However she had to do it, she would get through the day. "I've had worse things happen to me," she said to herself, though it was difficult in that moment to actually believe it.

Jasmine plastered a smile on her face and made her way upstairs to her floor of the building. She walked across the office to her desk and sat down, barely saying hello to her colleagues. Her heart was pounding rabbit-fast in her chest, her blood roaring in her ears, and it took all of Jasmine's efforts to suppress a rising flush of color from forming in her cheeks. She heard two of her coworkers laughing in their cubicles a few feet away and automatically assumed that they must be laughing about her; they must have heard a rumor, or worse, the truth about what had happened. She sat down at her desk and switched on her computer, trying desperately to push the thought from her mind.

Jasmine waited all morning for one of the managers in the new business department to show up at her desk. She was half-expecting someone from HR to appear, their face grave, and ask her to follow them into the conference room. She



waited for some indication of her fate, but there was nothing at all. Everything—every last detail—was exactly as it had been on the previous Monday. “Jasmine, how are you doing on that proposal for Alan?” her boss had asked on his way through the office.

“It’s coming along,” Jasmine had said, smiling tightly. “Although I really think it makes more sense for Alan to put together his own proposal—the biggest barrier that I have is in getting information back from him to put it into the framework.”

“Alan’s a busy guy, have some patience,” had been her boss’ advice, and he moved away before Jasmine could say anything else.

An hour before lunch, a notification flashed on her screen, and Jasmine hurried off to the weekly strategy meeting which had until that point completely slipped her mind.

The meeting went on for what seemed like days; Jasmine felt the sweat prickling at the small of her back as she waited for them to be interrupted by someone from HR asking to “borrow” her. In the meantime, she thought she might as well raise the issue of assistant managers making their own presentations and proposals.

“I really think it would be a better way to use everyone’s time,” Jasmine suggested. “The people going out to these potential clients and partners have all the information—and while I’m happy to be a team player, a lot of these presentations are time-critical.”

“But since you’re not going on many of these proposal meetings, Jasmine, surely you have the time,” Alan pointed out, smiling in a way that made Jasmine want to ensure her termination by reaching across the table to slap him. Instead, she took a breath and mentally counted to five.

"I do have a lot of work on my plate," she said, smiling as sweetly as she could manage. "And now I'm having to cover the reception desk several days a week, it's more difficult to get my own work done—much less other people's work."

"Well you've demonstrated that you can handle the load, Jasmine," her boss said, and the expression on his face made her add his name to the list of people she wanted to physically injure. "Maybe you could come up with a form to streamline the process for yourself? That would probably make more sense than asking people to take on more of the work you do so well."

Jasmine gritted her teeth and kept her mouth closed, knowing that she couldn't possibly say anything that would be taken seriously by anyone present.

By the end of the day, still hungry from the hurried lunch she had scarfed down in between covering for the receptionist and a surprise meeting that no one had informed her of until it was scheduled to start, Jasmine realized that she had forgotten entirely about the looming threat of the aftermath between her and Alexis Kyrkos. As she walked to the elevator to get to her car, she was baffled that she hadn't heard anything at all. If nothing else, she had expected that he would stop by her desk, or at least send her an email, now that he knew she was his employee. As she trudged out to her car, Jasmine reasoned that the silence itself was a message; Alexis had obviously decided that he would sever all ties and treat the entire fling as if it had never happened.

Jasmine pulled out of her parking spot, bleary-eyed with fatigue and roiling with resentment at the way her boss and coworkers had treated her throughout the day. She pulled one hand free of the steering wheel to rub at her eyes. Really, she told herself, it was better this way; they could

both avoid the embarrassment of the situation by pretending that it had never happened, and move on with their lives. But she couldn't help feeling a stirring of the familiar ache at realizing that it was well and truly over between her and Alexis, no matter how she tried to suppress it.

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## **Chapter Nineteen**

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As she sat at home, trying to relax and convince herself that this outcome was for the best, Jasmine's thoughts turned against her will to her trysts with the billionaire. She squirmed on the couch, keeping her eyes on the TV in front of her even as memories filtered through her brain. Her body warmed up as she remembered the feeling of the flogger, the cane, and the ropes around her wrists. Her hands began to wander as she mentally relived the way Alexis had acceded to her dare—getting her off with nothing but his hands, while she was tied up, helpless. She remembered the controlled murmur of his voice; the confident, dominant demeanor he had taken on as soon as she submitted to him.

"Fuck it," she said out loud, standing up from the couch and going into her bedroom to retrieve her laptop. Feeling slightly pathetic, Jasmine searched the internet for news about Alexis Kyrkos, wondering what he was doing at that moment. *Billionaire CEO of Crius to Attend Glittering Society Event*, one of the headlines read.

Jasmine's eyes widened as she clicked on the link, reading the details. The event was scheduled to start in about an hour and Alexis was going to be there. She pressed her lips together, a temptation wriggling its way through her mind.

She didn't think she could get away with wearing the same dress she had a few nights before. But did she want to risk the displeasure of the clerks at Nordstrom by putting them through yet another exchange? Surely they had caught on to the strategy she was using, and it wasn't really fair to expect them to keep taking the hit her returns made on their daily numbers. But at the same time, Nordstrom was a huge corporation, and it wasn't as though they would take a huge hit that night—they would break even if she exchanged the dress, rather than simply returning it.

Jasmine hurried to the shopping center and made her way to the customer service desk. She told the clerk that she had a last minute engagement, and would like to use the credit from her dress to find something to wear. As if this was a perfectly normal situation—and for all Jasmine knew, it might be—the clerk directed her into the women’s section and called an attendant to help her. Jasmine fought down the sense that she was gaming the system, guilty in the knowledge that eventually she would outright return one of the extravagant dresses and get her money back for good.

Within thirty minutes she had found the gown she needed. Jasmine didn’t take a shower; she didn’t have the time. She refreshed her perfume and cleansed her face of the makeup she had worn to work. She kept her hair in the bun she had put it into that morning, smoothing the stray hairs down with a little gel, and got herself ready. Her heart beat faster and faster as the event’s opening time approached—and when it passed. “It’s okay,” Jasmine told herself. “He’ll be there for at least a couple of hours.”

She took her own car to the address mentioned in the article and parked several blocks away, grateful that she’d had the foresight to slip a pair of folding ballet flats in her purse. When Jasmine was just outside of the perimeter of the event she slipped her feet into the heels she had chosen to go with the dress. The gown was simple but elegant, black with gold floral trceries over the skirt, with a square-cut neck that showed just enough cleavage from her full breasts. She slipped the flats back into her purse and strode confidently towards the entrance of the museum where the party was being held, grateful that the paparazzi had decamped for the evening, now that the most celebrated guests had all arrived.

Jasmine realized the flaw in her plan to ambush Alexis when she approached the entry only to be confronted by two guards, dressed in sharp, black suits.

"Excuse me, ma'am, this is a private event," one of the men said.

Jasmine's heart pounded and, for just a few heartbeats, she floundered mentally. "I'm quite aware that it's a private event," she said quickly, giving each of the men a quick smile. "In fact it's a private event that I am already late for." She infused a soft accent into her voice—a mixture of English and French, brought on by the impulse to sound slightly foreign. "If you will excuse me, please?" She started to move forward.

"Do you have an invitation?" one of the men said. "We're required to check."

Jasmine crossed her arms over her chest, putting on the most indignant expression she could manage. "I'm sorry, but since I was already running late, I didn't think that searching my hotel room for an hour to find a piece of paper would make sense," Jasmine said. "If you feel like you must check my name then I understand that, but you are currently wasting my time."

The two guards glanced at each other, and then looked over Jasmine minutely, taking in the expensive gown, the shoes, and the touches of jewelry.

"Let her in, Clyde," the second guard said. "They aren't paying us enough to hassle someone who's put in this much effort to be here."

They stepped aside and Jasmine strode past quickly, her knees trembling. It hadn't escaped her thoughts that the men could just as easily have decided she was trying to cause trouble—especially as, ultimately, she was—and called the police to take her in.

She found her way into the part of the museum set aside for the event, and tried to slow her heartbeat down as she slipped into the crowd. At least, she thought, glancing around furtively, she fit in with the general look of the people attending. If nothing else, she wasn't the one person in the room sporting a cheap dress and trying to make it look classier than it was.

Jasmine wandered through the room, smiling at the murmured compliments and inclining her head as one person after another greeted her, trying her best to pretend as though she belonged. In reality, the sole focus of her interest was finding Alexis. If she could approach him, she might be able to convince him to at least give her the chance to explain herself, even if he didn't want to continue seeing her. Jasmine circled the room again and again, even drifting into the other museum exhibit areas, in the hopes of finding Alexis. If he was such a publicized addition to the evening, shouldn't he be at the center of the ceremonies? Jasmine struggled to suppress her growing irritation as her shoes began pinching her toes.

She deftly helped herself to a glass of champagne, and to one or two of the hors d'oeuvres being circulated through the room, trying to do something about the gnawing feeling in her stomach as the minutes flowed past without any sight of Alexis. Jasmine frowned and then remembered herself, forcing the polite smile back onto her face as she trailed through the room, trying not to appear too obvious in her search for the man of the evening.

Just as her irritation was peaking, Jasmine felt a light tap on her shoulder. For an instant, she thought—she hoped—it was Alexis; that he had somehow managed to sneak up on her. A second flash of thought suggested it was the event security, coming to belatedly eject her from the party. When she turned around, however, Jasmine came face to face with the last person she expected to see again: James. He was



smiling broadly, his gaze taking in every inch of her outfit with more than polite appreciation.

"Looking for Alexis?" he asked her, raising an eyebrow.

"Not that it's any of your business," Jasmine said tartly, though she was careful to keep her voice low.

"You won't find him here," James said, steering her towards one of the quieter corners of the room. Jasmine was too shocked to resist his maneuver, and too aware of the scene it would cause if she did.

"What are you talking about?" Jasmine asked, carefully maintaining the pleased and serene social facade she had put up the moment she entered the room.

"He's not here—didn't even come," James said with a shrug. "He canceled at the last minute."

Jasmine blinked, pressing her lips together as she absorbed the information. Disappointment washed through her, along with an undercurrent of irritation at the fact that she had gone to such an effort for no reason at all. But as she stood in the corner with James, staring at him in disbelief, a question flickered through her mind: what was *he* doing at the event? *Probably still thinks he can scam a job off of Alexis, or get him to invest in whatever it is he does,* Jasmine thought irritably.

"That's a shame," she said, recovering her nonchalance. "Sucks to get all dolled up with no one to talk to."

As James gave her another long, admiring look, another idea flitted through Jasmine's mind; she may not be able to talk to Alexis, but with James there she definitely had someone to talk to. She had given up any thought of getting revenge on the man who'd betrayed her secret to Alexis, mostly

because she had had no real, solid idea of where he lived or worked. But now, with him right in front of her, and no chance of speaking to the man she really wanted to see, Jasmine couldn't help but entertain an idea.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news," James said, though Jasmine could hear he was far from sincere.

"Well, it's just as well anyway," Jasmine shrugged. "At least there's someone here I know a little bit. How have you been, James?"

In her mind it baffled her that James could possibly think she wanted to have anything to do with him, but he was so full of his own sense of self-worth that he never questioned it. Jasmine threw herself into her most flirtatious mode, listening with apparent interest as James rattled on about his business dealings. She claimed another glass of champagne to fortify her, and forced herself to smile and simper in a way she knew James would respond to.

"So tell me all about your dates with Alexis Kyrkos," James said, leaning in close with a conspiratorial whisper. Jasmine laughed, thinking that James was the absolute last person she would confess the details of her 'dates' with Alexis to.

"It's not important," Jasmine said, dismissing the idea. "I don't kiss and tell, anyway." She licked her lips. "I will say, though, that from what I know of him—both as a date and as my boss—he's not half the businessman you are."

James beamed at that, his eyes gleaming with self-satisfaction. Jasmine struggled not to roll her eyes as she filled James' ears with little hints of her amazement at his acumen, and interest in his taste. She thought to herself that he might be the most boring man who'd ever betrayed her, so thoroughly convinced of his own merits that he could never begin to realize his mediocrity. *How in the world did I*

*think going to that event with him would be a great idea?* Except—inadvertently—it had been. Not for James' company, but for the opportunity to meet Alexis on something like equal footing, rather than as his employee.

As the guests began to leave, James pulled Jasmine closer to him, trying to entrance her with his words. "You know, this party's wearing thin—I know a much better place to go."

Jasmine grinned, feeling a mixture of anticipation and disgust. "Oh do you?" she asked.

James nodded quickly. "I've got a great place, not too far from here. My apartment is gorgeous—you'd love it. Balcony overlooking the city, hardwood floors, and, of course, a very, very nice bedroom. I even have a little bar. It's probably not as grand as Alexis' place..."

Jasmine shrugged, consciously deepening her smile and holding James' gaze. "It sounds like just where I want to be," she told him, leaning in so close that they were nearly touching.

"Do you want to ride with me, or follow in your car?" James asked. "I hired a limo again, it's a really nice ride."

Jasmine considered accepting, but decided against it; if she was going to do what she was thinking of doing, she didn't want to have to walk all the way back to her car or find a cab by James' building.

"I'll follow you," she said, giving James another simpering smile.

James led her out of the museum, keeping a light hold on her arm as he guided her through the doors and kissing her on the cheek as they parted. Jasmine gently tugged herself free, gesturing down the street. "I'm a couple of blocks

down," she said. "I didn't think my old car would give the best impression."

James nodded sagely. "I'll get my driver to wait a block north of here," he told her.

As soon as she was out of his line of sight, Jasmine slipped off her heels and pulled the flats out of her purse, tugging them onto her feet so as to make the trek to her car as quickly as possible. Grinning to herself mischievously, she hurried the few blocks to her car and unlocked the door, tossing her purse into the passenger seat before turning the key in the ignition.

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## **Chapter Twenty**

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As James led Jasmine through the hallway of his floor, she noticed that while the building was in one of the nicer parts of the city, the hallway looked more than a little shabby; her gaze picked out worn spots in the dark green carpet and a stain on one of the walls. She pushed aside her misgivings as they arrived at what must have been James' door, before he unlocked it and ushered her inside.

"It's a great old building," James said proudly, gesturing around the room.

Jasmine beamed appreciatively, but once more her gaze settled on subtle details that showed the reality was much less impressive than James' hype. The hardwood floors he had spoken of showed signs of obvious wear and tear, and the furniture was all IKEA—one of the pieces was in fact something she had in her own apartment. The bar James had boasted about was nothing more than a low ledge attached to the wall at the end of the living room, with a few desultory bottles displayed. It wasn't a terrible apartment, but it was clear to Jasmine that James had nowhere near Alexis' means.

"Want me to fix you a drink? I've got a really great twenty-five-year-old Scotch."

Jasmine shook her head. "I was hoping you'd be willing to give me a little tour," she said, taking his hand. "I assume this is the kitchen..." she gestured to the open-plan kitchen space and James laughed.

"And through here is the bedroom," he told her, pointing.

"You did promise to show it to me," Jasmine commented, twitching her hips ever so slightly. *If I have to do this for much longer I'm going to gag.* But she kept her most sultry expression on her face, meeting James' hopeful gaze.

"You're right, I did." James opened the door to the room and guided Jasmine inside.

"You know," Jasmine said, beginning to formulate the final stages of her plan. "I know I said I don't kiss and tell, but I feel like you're pretty trustworthy."

She scanned the bedroom quickly; it was neat but not quite clean, and on one wall was a picture that made Jasmine's stomach lurch: it was James, with a woman and a child. From the resemblance between James and the child, along with the intimacy of the photo, Jasmine surmised that they were James' son and wife, or girlfriend. Jasmine's sense of revulsion deepened, but she was careful not to betray it.

"I'll take your secrets to my grave," James said, pantomiming pulling a zipper across his lips and throwing away the tab.

"Well, did you know that Alexis is into some...interesting things?" Jasmine asked him, twisting and shifting on her feet as she gave James a teasing smile.

"What kind of interesting things?" James' eyes lit up, and Jasmine hesitated slightly.

"Hmm. Are you sure I can trust you?" James nodded eagerly. Jasmine leaned in and brushed her lips against his, dancing away before he could grab her. "He's a real kinky bastard," she said with a little, intriguing grin. "He loves to tie a girl up and tease her until she's out of her mind, so turned on she can't stand it."

"That sounds exciting," James said, his voice slightly hoarse. "Does he do other stuff, too?"

"Mmhmm," Jasmine said, glancing around the room. "He's got a whole dungeon. Whips and chains and all kinds of things you can't even imagine." She gave a little shiver of delight. "I have to admit it was a lot of fun."

"Looks like it," James swallowed, his cheeks flushing slightly. "You want me to see if I can get up to Alexis's standards?" he raised an eyebrow at the challenge, but Jasmine shook her head slowly.

"Actually I was thinking, it might be fun to be on the other side," she licked her lips, looking James up and down. "Alexis certainly seemed to enjoy it."

James hesitated as he realized what she meant, but before he could voice his decision, Jasmine moved to the tie rack she'd spotted on the dresser. She snatched up a handful of ties, realizing quickly that most of them were silk-synthetic blends and quirking her lips in a half-smile before she turned to face James once more.

"Come on, it'll be fun," she said, cooing slightly. "You'll love it, I promise." She moved close to him, kissing him lightly on the lips and pulling back once more before he could grab her. "Please?"

James relented, shaking his head in amazement. "It could be fun," he agreed.

Jasmine glanced around the room and took in the four-poster bed, nodding to herself as the final pieces of her plan began to fall into place. She led him quickly to the bed, flirting as he began to hesitate once again.

Jasmine pressed him onto the bed into a reclining position, taking one of his arms by the wrist. She pulled it towards the headboard and slipped the silky material of the tie around the post, coiling it around James' wrist and tying the



length of fabric as tightly as she could. James hissed, instinctively tugging at the binding.

"Calm down, sweetie," Jasmine said, letting her breasts brush against him. "You'll love this."

She grabbed his other hand and attached it to the opposite post, not knowing if she was doing it the "right" way, concerned only with making it as difficult as possible for James to pull his wrist free.

Jasmine knew she needed to keep the charade up for a little longer. "I noticed you admiring my dress," she said, climbing down off the bed but staying in James' field of vision. "I always did think it was such a shame you never got a chance to see what was under it that night." James nodded eagerly, his gaze fixed on her.

Jasmine found the zipper on the back of her dress, and then turned round for effect. She slowly began to unzip herself, teasingly revealing only a centimeter of her back at a time, and swaying slightly as the material loosened. She heard James' breath coming faster, his excitement building.

Jasmine slithered out of her dress and turned to face her victim, smiling as confidently as Alexis ever had. "You know, I don't think it's fair that I should be the only one who's naked. We're doing this for me, too, right?" James nodded, only too eager to move the game forward. "But with you all tied up like that, it'll be hard to undress you. I'll be right back, sweetie."

Jasmine grinned to herself as she turned and strode out of the bedroom. She could feel James watching her movements, sensing his gaze on her ass as she swished her hips as tantalizingly as possible.

She went into the kitchen and opened the drawers one-by-one, as quietly as possible, not wanting to alert James to his fate. She found what she was looking for in the third drawer: a pair of clean, sharp shears, slightly serrated on the blades. They would certainly get the job done.

She came back into the room quickly, brandishing the shears with a flourish. James' face went pale.

"What are you going to do with those?" he asked, tugging at the ties that bound him to the headboard.

Jasmine grinned. "I just need a little help getting you naked the way I want," she told him lightly.

"No—Jasmine, this is an expensive suit!"

Jasmine frowned. "Is that any way to talk to your mistress, James?" she asked, crossing her arms over her chest. "Besides, you're a man of means—you can replace the suit easily, can't you?" She raised an eyebrow in challenge.

James relented, though he didn't look too pleased as Jasmine advanced on him, climbing up at the foot of the bed. She slipped off his shoes, leaving his socks in place, and tossed them across the room without looking to see where they landed.

James' body was tense, and Jasmine felt him twitch as she made the first sharp snip with the shears, right at the hem of his trousers. She followed the crease upwards, the sharp metal cutting through the fabric like butter, filling her ears with the sound of material ripping and parting. With a few rapid cuts, she was able to tug the remains of James' pants away from his body and cast them aside.

"Isn't this so much better?" she asked, her fingertips brushing across the bulge at the front of James' jockey shorts.

"Y-yes," James said, the word almost a question.

Next, Jasmine went to work on his suit jacket, snipping along the sleeve seams and along the shoulder right to the collar. A few sharp tugs brought the material away and Jasmine let it flutter to the floor.

James looked up at her, fascinated and horrified, and Jasmine grinned in satisfaction. James was holding absolutely still and she could sense his fear, almost taste it, like crisp, clean wine. His face betrayed his anxiety that she might nip him with the blades and make him bleed. Jasmine cut his shirt and tie to pieces, then half-ripped his boxer-briefs off of his body, leaving him completely naked.

"Now, I think I was in the middle of something," Jasmine said, climbing down from the bed and setting the scissors down on the floor.

"You were," James agreed, his voice harsh. His cock was already fully hard; not that Jasmine had any intention of doing anything to it. She sauntered back into the middle of the room and gathered up her dress, slithering into it quickly.

"I wanted to start over, to really give you the full effect," Jasmine said, giving him a playful look over her shoulder as she zipped the garment up. "In fact," Jasmine turned to face him. "Why don't you close your eyes and count to ten, and I'll make a big entrance?" James obediently complied, and Jasmine started to walk to the door of the bedroom. "Start counting, sweetie!" she called to him.

James began to count, his voice cracking with excitement and desire, and Jasmine stifled a laugh as she collected her purse.

She strode to through the living room as James continued to count, seemingly oblivious to his fate. The lock on the front door to the apartment gave her a bit of trouble, but Jasmine had the door open before James got to ten. She stepped through the door and let it slam shut behind her, quickly making her way down the hall as she imagined the look on his face when he realized what she'd done.

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## **Chapter Twenty-One**

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As she started for home, still grinning at the predicament she had left James in, something tickled at the back of Jasmine's mind. All of a sudden, she remembered she'd left her phone charger on her desk. It wasn't all that important—if her phone died she'd get by—but now it was on her mind, she couldn't quite resist the urge to head back to the office. It would just be a quick errand, after all; even if it was a bit late to be wandering around the building. Jasmine glanced at the time; the building would be locked by now, but her key card would let her in.

She drove deeper into the city, towards the office. She knew that it was an unnecessary errand, but since she was out she might as well get it done.

The parking garage attached to the building was eerily quiet, echoing with the last few ticks of her warm engine as Jasmine stepped out of her car. She suppressed a chill as it worked through her spine. "It's fine," she said quietly to herself, wincing slightly as her voice murmured back to her from the corners of the structure. Jasmine gave herself a shake and continued walking towards the entrance of the office building, even as the echoes of her steps gave her a creepy, uninvited feeling.

There were no guards in sight. For a moment Jasmine reflected on how silly she was trekking to the office in the middle of the night, but taking a deep breath she rummaged in her purse for her ID and key card. Pressing the chip against the reader on the door, Jasmine smiled as the light flashed green and the door unlocked. "Well, that settles that," she said to herself.

Jasmine stepped through the door and made her way across the lobby, ignoring the faint echoes of her footfalls. One of the guards appeared from the security office and raised an eyebrow at her.

"Hey," Jasmine said, forcing her face into the most agreeable expression she could summon. "I just realized I forgot something at my desk and wanted to grab it while I was out."

The guard looked her over and Jasmine showed her ID. "As long as you're not planning on bombing the building," he said, shrugging and moving on to his rounds.

Jasmine shook her head to herself, smiling in relief as she strode towards the elevator bank. She punched the button for her floor, shifting her weight on her feet. Jasmine had changed into her flats once more on getting into the car, but wandering around the museum in high heels had had its effect. Not as bad as a few nights before, but she could still feel the throbbing in the balls of her feet.

She waited impatiently as the elevator made its way through the floors, trying not to feel awkward about what she was doing. People went into the office in the middle of the night all the time, didn't they? A forgotten phone, a set of keys, something that they took out of their purse and forgot about until they needed it again. "I'm not being weird," Jasmine announced to the silence of the elevator.

Finally, the chime announced the car's arrival at her floor, and the doors slid open. The new business department was tucked away, through the lobby and deep in the open-plan office space, but it would be easier to navigate now no one was around.

Jasmine waved at the man standing by reception. "Just needed to grab something from my desk," she said cheerily, and the man shrugged and turned back to the trashcan he was emptying.

Jasmine pressed her ID card to the reader at the door separating the lobby from the office and was pleased when the light once more flashed green.

The hallway was dark, and Jasmine couldn't help feeling that the silent, lifeless space was almost more eerie than the parking garage. She pushed forward nonetheless, making her way past the doors of private offices, the dens and warrens of people who had made it higher up on the corporate ladder than she had. It was hard not to feel a flash of resentment; some of the offices belonged to her bosses—both her direct supervisor and the other department heads who plagued her on a daily basis. She shook her head, telling herself that she wasn't in the office to dwell on the wrongs that others had done her; she was there to get her charger and get out.

But as she turned into the part of the office that housed the rest of her department, Jasmine was surprised to see that the lights were on. She paused, frowning. *Probably the cleaning guy*, she thought to herself, her anxiety lessening as she heard nothing to indicate that something was wrong. The cleaning guy must have come through and left the lights on, that made sense. Jasmine continued on, stepping quickly and quietly through the hive of cubicles, watching her feet to avoid tripping over any random chairs or cables that might be snaking out.

She made her way to her section of the office on autopilot, before she finally looked up. Jasmine stopped short at the sight that greeted her; standing there at her desk, examining one of her mind-teaser puzzles was Alexis Kyrkos.



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## **Chapter Twenty-Two**

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"Hi," Jasmine said, her mouth suddenly dry. "This is—unexpected."

Alexis looked up from the paper in his hands, a wry smile on his lips. "That it is," he said quietly, setting the puzzle down on her desk.

"I left my charger behind," Jasmine mumbled, gesturing to the item in question. "I thought I'd just, ah—grab it from my desk, and get myself home."

Alexis looked at her for a long moment and Jasmine wondered if something more interesting than her phone charger had prompted her to come to the office; if some instinct had brought her here. But that was ridiculous. She could no more track Alexis Kyrkos mentally than she could instantly find her keys in the house.

"You look wonderful," Alexis said, his gaze trailing down over the lines of her body. "I'd recognize you anywhere, dressed like this," he said with a faint smile. "That is a beautiful gown."

Jasmine nodded, blushing as she remembered all too vividly why she had bought the gown in the first place. Now, here she was, face to face with Alexis Kyrkos, and she couldn't bring herself to explain her actions, the lies she had told. The entire purpose of getting dressed up was moot if she couldn't force the words out of her mouth, but how could she when they wouldn't even form in her brain?

"Thank you," Jasmine said, her throat tight. "I was at an—um—at a party this evening." She felt the heat intensifying in her cheeks.

Alexis raised one dark eyebrow at her, his lips twitching in what Jasmine thought might have become a smile if he hadn't suppressed the impulse.

"I hope you've had a good evening, then," he said. His gaze darted down to her feet and Jasmine saw his eyes widen slightly in surprise.

She shrugged. "My heels were starting to hurt my feet so I changed," she said, licking her lips. *This may be the most awkward situation I've been in since high school*, she thought.

Alexis nodded, glancing once more at her desk. He opened his mouth as if to say something, then closed it. Before Jasmine could begin to speak, spurred by the need to say anything to cut through the silence, Alexis turned to look at her again.

"I could recognize you anywhere dressed like that, but I didn't so much as notice you when you were sitting right here, in my own building," he said, sounding almost rueful. He reached down and picked up a picture of Jasmine beaming alongside a few of her former coworkers. It had been taken in better times, when she had been more optimistic about working her way upward; when she had actually gone out with coworkers for happy hour.

"You actually met me, I think. Three times, maybe," Jasmine said, the words tumbling out more from the need to say something than from actual intention. Alexis chuckled.

"Here you've been, all along. I've even been introduced to you. And yet I pay so little attention to my own employees that when you walked right up to me at that event I could have sworn I'd never seen you before in my life." He shook his head, setting the picture down and looking at Jasmine. "I'm sorry." Alexis sighed slightly.

"It's—I mean, I was dolled up, and you had no reason to expect to see me..."

Alexis shook his head, dismissing her defense. "If I'd met you three times, then all three times I thought I was being introduced to a new person. I didn't even take enough notice to recognize you the second or third time." He frowned slightly, picking up another photo from her desk and examining it. "No, Jasmine, the fault is with me." He sighed. "Just think, if it had even remotely occurred to me to notice what a beautiful woman you were..." he shook his head.

"In fairness, it's not like I told you who I was," Jasmine pointed out. "I could have introduced myself as one of your employees."

"And thrown your drink in my face when I didn't remember who you were?" Alexis raised an eyebrow.

Jasmine blushed. "I'm not that type of woman and I'd hope you know that by now," she said, her voice slightly tart. "But I had at least half a dozen chances to tell you the truth and I didn't. So the fault does lie at least partially with me."

Alexis put down the photo and turned to face her more fully. "If I had paid even a little bit of attention when you were first introduced to me, here in the office," Alexis said, his gaze trailing over her body, "I would have seen this beautiful, strong young woman." His lips twitched in the start of a smile. "Instead I didn't even learn your name, much less notice your face, your delicious body, and the heat within you..." Alexis shook his head, his face falling. "What an opportunity to just let slip away."

"It's not like I was dressed this way when you came through the office," Jasmine said, gesturing at the gown. "I was dressed to blend in."

Alexis smiled. "Not a good enough excuse," he said. "After all, you were dressed to blend in at that event, weren't you?" He raised an eyebrow and Jasmine grinned in spite of the awkwardness.

"Sort of," she admitted, fidgeting slightly. "I didn't want to stand out for the wrong reasons, at least."

Alexis nodded. Before Jasmine could protest or even truly comprehend what was going on, he stepped forward, closing the last distance between them.

"Well I hope you'll accept my apology," Alexis said, looking down into her eyes.

Jasmine nodded, her heart starting to beat faster in a way that had nothing to do with nervousness.

Alexis wrapped his arms around her in a tight embrace, and Jasmine automatically moved to reciprocate, bringing her arms up around his broad shoulders. She breathed in the scent of his cologne, the warm smell of his body, and felt something inside of her that she didn't know was tense loosen.

Alexis brought one hand up underneath her jaw, tilting her face up, and he claimed her lips with his own, at first brushing with a feather-light caress before quickly deepening the embrace. His arm tightened around her waist, pressing her body against his as he kissed her more and more hungrily. He swiped his tongue across her lips and Jasmine opened her mouth, trembling just slightly as she started to feel the first stirrings of heat within her body.

Alexis' hands began to wander, trailing over her curves and Jasmine heard a sound—somewhere between a moan, a

gasp, and a whimper—leave her lips, which were muffled against his.

He broke away from the kiss just as abruptly as he had started it. “Do you accept my apology, Jasmine?” She nodded, too breathless to really think about it, and Alexis smiled. “And I believe you made an apology to me,” he said, his eyes darkening with an emotion that was only too familiar. “Are you willing to endure a little punishment for your duplicity?” Jasmine’s eyes widened and she nodded quickly; this was better than she could have anticipated. “You remember the safe word, right?”

“Narcissus?”

Alexis nodded. “Good. Then we can begin.”

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## **Chapter Twenty-Three**

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Jasmine started as Alexis swept his arm across the surface of her desk, clearing the area on the other side of her computer and sending the files and knickknacks tumbling to the floor with a clatter. He turned to look at her, his gaze moving slowly as he took in every inch of her body.

“Take off the dress,” he said, meeting her eyes.

Jasmine hesitated briefly—suddenly keenly aware that she was in the middle of her office, even if it was late at night. “Did you not hear me, Jasmine?”

Jasmine swallowed against the tightness in her throat and nodded, taking a step back from Alexis.

She reached around to her back, found the zipper to her dress and tugged it down slowly. Alexis was opening and closing the drawers of Jasmine’s desk, and she wondered—with a sense of nervousness and intrigue—what he might be looking for. She slipped her dress down over her body, letting it fall past her knees before stepping out of it.

Alexis turned to look at her, and his gaze traveled over her appreciatively, lingering at her hips and breasts. “Shame you changed your shoes,” he said. “I’m sure the heels were beautiful on you.”

Jasmine blushed slightly under his intent, appraising glance, and Alexis smiled. He brought his hands up to his neck and began to undo his tie, quickly and deftly slipping the silk fabric through his collar.

With a crook of his finger he beckoned Jasmine towards him and she obeyed, moving closer.

“Turn your back to me,” Alexis said, slipping his tie back and forth through his fingers.



Jasmine turned around, her whole body trembling slightly in anticipation, and Alexis deftly pulled her arms behind her, folding them against the small of her back. Jasmine held still, breathing slowly as she felt the brush of the silk against her skin. With a few deft tugs, her wrists were immobilized, her shoulders pulled back by the way that Alexis had positioned her. Alexis turned her to face her and cupped her jaw in his hand, tilting her face to kiss her briefly on the lips.

“Tell me why I’m punishing you,” he said firmly. There was no remnant of doubt in his demeanor; the commanding, dominant presence was there once more.

“B-because I deceived you, sir,” Jasmine said, shivering in the knowledge that they were in the middle of a public office. Even if no other employees came in, there were cleaning staff and security guards present in the building—any of whom could appear at any moment.

Alexis nodded slowly, trailing his hands over her body, cupping her breasts through the thin fabric of her bra. He placed his fingers over her hardening nipples and began to twist and roll, sending jolts of pleasure through Jasmine’s body. She gasped, arching into his touch and gritting her teeth to suppress the rising moan in her throat.

“You are correct, Jasmine,” Alexis said, and Jasmine shivered as the material rasped against her tender skin. For a moment Alexis’s fingers left her, as he pulled the material down, revealing Jasmine’s full breasts and nearly tearing the fragile lace in the process. “That calls for very strict punishment indeed. It’s a shame you weren’t able to meet me in a more suitable location...but we can make do.” Alexis held Jasmine’s gaze as he reached into her desk drawer and moved his hand around, making the contents clatter and clink.

Jasmine felt an expectant thrill travel down her spine as Alexis brought up his hand revealing two large binder clips. *That can't be for...those are going to hurt so much—use the safe word!* But Jasmine couldn't quite make herself do it; despite her instinctive fear, she was curious about how the clips would feel on her body. She clenched her teeth, meeting Alexis's gaze.

With his finger and thumb he squeezed the levers of one of the clips, opening it with a soft squeaking sound. He set the other clip down on the desk and his eyes widened as he cupped her breast, rolling and twisting her nipple until it was completely firm. Jasmine heard another soft squeak, and resisted the temptation to look down. She felt a brush of cold, and then a sudden, sharp jolt of pain that shot from her breast seemingly straight to her pussy as the binder clip closed around her nipple.

Jasmine gasped, curling in on herself instinctively, her wrists tugging at their bindings as her body screamed at her to get rid of the clip. And yet—and yet—she could feel her pussy heating up; feel the muscles tightening as a rush of fluids started to flow.

"Ah-ah-ah," Alexis said, pulling her back into a standing position. "You agreed to your punishment, Jasmine. If you want to stop, you must say the safe word; otherwise I expect you to stay very still and accept this."

Jasmine nodded, her throat tightening as her nipple throbbed with pain.

Alexis cupped her other breast, teasing and rolling her nipple until it was a hard nub, and Jasmine steeled herself as she heard the squeaking of the second binder clip opening. She closed her eyes; once more felt the silky brush of cold, followed by searing pain as the clip closed on her sensitive nipple, jolting her entire body. Unable to stop herself, she

whimpered and fidgeted, struggling with her bindings, her eyes stinging with tears. These were not the carefully padded clamps that Alexis had used before; this was real pain. Every throb from her nipples sent waves of sensation through her body, and—to her surprise—Jasmine felt herself getting wetter and wetter in spite of the impulse to free herself of the cold, pinching clamps.

“Stop that,” Alexis said sharply.

Jasmine took a deep breath, opening her eyes. She slowly forced herself to stillness, a soft, steady whimper rising up through her throat only to be muffled by her pressed-together lips.

Jasmine watched as Alexis stripped off his jacket, laying it over the back of her desk chair before he turned to the drawer again. She caught a look of inspiration on his face as he rummaged, and Jasmine felt a mixture of dread and intrigue in equal measure. What could he have possibly found that made him look so pleased?

Alexis withdrew his hand, turning to face her once more. “Deceit is a terrible thing, Jasmine,” Alexis said. “Bend over your desk.” Jasmine’s eyes widened. “If I have to tell you again, your punishment is going to be much more severe.”

She leaned forward, stepping towards the area that Alexis had cleared, but the way her arms were bound made it difficult to balance. Before she could tell Alexis what was wrong, she felt his hand on her shoulder, pushing her down firmly. Jasmine groaned as her breasts pressed against the hard wooden desktop, the clips clinking as her body made contact.

“Push your hips back and up,” Alexis told her. “Get up on the balls of your feet—I want your lovely little ass as high in the air as you can get it.”

Trembling, struggling with the uncomfortable position, Jasmine did as she was told.

Alexis's trailed his fingertips over her body, giving her hand a brief, almost affectionate squeeze before coming to rest on the curve of her ass. "This will never do," he said, and she heard him cluck his tongue against his teeth. "This entirely ruins the beautiful picture I had in my mind." He lifted the waistband of her panties and snapped it against her skin, and Jasmine could picture him shaking his head in disappointment. His fingers drifted down, along the curve of her buttocks, between her thighs, and Jasmine moaned as he began to rub her vulva through the thin lace, testing and teasing her. "These will have to go."

But instead of feeling Alexis tugging the fabric down over her hips, Jasmine heard the clatter of something moving in her desk. She heard the sharp snipping sound of blades coming together and realized with a shock that Alexis intended to do exactly what she had done to James earlier that evening. His fingers brushed against her skin as he lifted the lace of her panties at one hip. Jasmine heard a quick, bright snip—and the fabric fell away. Alexis found the opposite seam at her other hip and quickly cut through it, pulling the material away from her body and leaving her completely bare from the waist down.

Alexis's hands trailed over her once more, caressing with a feather-light touch that made Jasmine tremble. She knew that there was to be more punishment; at any moment she expected that Alexis's hand would come down against her. Instead, his fingers drifted down between her legs and Jasmine moaned as he found her clit, stroking and rubbing her until she was soaking wet, her fluids sliding down along her inner thighs. She was so wrapped up in the pleasure he was giving her that she didn't hear the sound of more rustling and clattering in her desk drawer, the slide of plastic

against metal. She whimpered in disappointment as Alexis's fingers suddenly left her slick folds, pressing her face against the cold wood of her desk and shivering with need.

Jasmine sensed the slightest bit of movement behind her, before a wide line of fiery pain slashed across the curve of her ass, making her yelp in surprise and dismay. Alexis' firm hand pressed down on her back, right between her shoulders, pinning her down, and Jasmine cried out as she felt the stinging stripe flash across her ass again, and again. She realized that Alexis was spanking her with her own ruler; that the long, perfectly straight lines of fire crisscrossing her ass cheeks were from an item in her desk. One sharp blow landed across the backs of her thighs and Jasmine sagged, her knees going weak.

"Get your ass back up in the air, Jasmine," Alexis told her firmly, though his fingers caressed the nape of her neck softly. "I expect you to complete your punishment."

"Yes, Sir," Jasmine said, her voice coming out in a sob. She realized she could feel the wet heat of tears steadily rolling down her face—she was actually crying. The throbbing ache in her nipples joined the fiery, searing pain across her ass and thighs, creating a symphony of sensations inside her body that turned her on even more. The ruler came down against the curve of her ass again and again, until Jasmine lost count of the number of blows, able only to experience the stinging stripes of fire against her tender skin.

Finally, Alexis relented. Over the sound of her own panting gasps, Jasmine heard the clatter of the ruler falling back into her drawer. His fingers grazed her hot, abused skin with a delicate touch that made Jasmine moan, shivering and trembling. It was almost too much to bear.

"I would love to take a picture of this," Alexis told her musingly. "You have no idea how lovely you look, Jasmine."

His fingers drifted down between her legs and Jasmine cried out as Alexis plunged two of them inside her. "Do you want to apologize to me again for lying?"

Jasmine barely heard the question. She was trapped, locked away in a world of sensations; pain and pleasure fogging her mind. A fast, sharp slap of Alexis' hand against her already-abused ass brought Jasmine back to herself, and she shook her head—not to refuse the command, but to try and recall the question.

"I-I'm sorry, Sir, that I lied to you," Jasmine said, her voice shaking as much as her body. "I promise I'll never do it again."

Once more Alexis caressed her, his thumb rubbing against her swollen clit. "I think you've earned a reward," he said, his voice heavy with desire.

Jasmine reeled as Alexis's fingers withdrew from her pussy, his hands pulling her up off the desk.

He turned her to face him and his gaze lit on the clips still closed on her nipples. "You wear these so well," he told her with a slight grin.

Jasmine gasped and whimpered as he teasingly opened and closed the clips, relief washing through her only to be replaced by renewed pain. Finally Alexis removed them altogether, setting them on her desk with a little metallic clatter.

He lifted her onto the desk almost effortlessly, and Jasmine winced as the pressure against her stinging, aching ass cheeks renewed the fiery pain she felt there.

Alexis stepped back, and Jasmine watched him strip off his clothes with quick, deft movements, tugging the tails of his

shirt out of his belted trousers, his fingers flying over the buttons. She licked her dry lips as Alexis unbuckled his belt and unzipped his fly, before pushing his pants and boxers down over his hips, revealing his thick, fully hard cock to her hungry eyes.

Alexis pulled Jasmine to the edge of her desk, spreading her legs wide and draping them around his waist. He leaned forward, kissing her hungrily on the lips as his hands wandered over her body, teasing and caressing.

"You have ten minutes to come for me, Jasmine," he murmured, barely breaking away from her mouth. "If you can't manage that, then that's just too bad."

He thrust into her and Jasmine cried out, throwing her head back, barely noticing when the back of her head hit the cubicle wall. Alexis began to rock his hips, pushing deeper and deeper inside of her with every movement. Jasmine moaned out as his hard cock rubbed along her inner walls; she could barely feel the pain against her ass anymore.

Jasmine struggled and writhed, tugging at her bound wrists, twisting her hips to take Alexis's cock deeper inside of her as his hips pounded into hers. She barely registered the sounds of the desk shaking, the metallic squeaking as their weight rocked against it.

Alexis groaned as Jasmine's muscles flexed around him in erratic spasms, her pleasure mounting more and more with every passing moment. Alexis reached down between their bodies, his fingers brushing against her slick vulva above his cock. He found her clit, and Jasmine cried out, gasping and panting as crackling jolts of pleasure coursed through her body.

She had no idea how much time had passed, if it had been ten minutes or ten hours, but as Alexis continued to thrust

into her hard and fast, Jasmine lost all control, giving into the sensations coursing through her. She cried out, moaning his name over and over again as wave after wave of pleasure, so intense it might have been pain, washed through her.

Jasmine shuddered as her orgasm hit her, almost scared by the overwhelming pleasure that came with it. She was barely aware of Alexis' body tensing against her; barely felt the twitching of his cock as he reached his climax and moaned her name out long and low. Jasmine fell back against the cubicle wall, panting, gasping and shuddering with the aftershocks of her pleasure.

After a long time—Jasmine never knew how long—she came back to herself. She realized that her arms were untied and that she was curled up on in Alexis's lap on her desk chair. Alexis's hands trailed over her, soothing and caressing.

"You did so well, Jasmine," Alexis murmured, brushing his lips against her ear. "You were so beautiful, tied up, taking your punishment like a good little slave." As she stirred against him, Alexis' caresses slowed, and he gave her one final kiss on her temple. "Can you stand?" he asked. Jasmine considered the question and nodded.

Alexis carefully slid her off his lap, settling her on her feet. Jasmine looked around, seeing Alexis had partially re-dressed himself and catching sight of her crumpled dress and the ruins of her panties.

As if he could read her mind, Alexis turned her face to meet his gaze. "I will replace your underwear," he said. He buttoned up his shirt and picked up his suit jacket. "But right now I have to leave."

Jasmine nodded slowly, still slightly dazed from the aftershocks of pleasure running through her nerves. A



thought tugged at her mind. "Why weren't you at the museum event tonight?" she asked, tugging her bra back into place and picking her panties off of the floor.

"I couldn't stand to be surrounded by a bunch of sycophants yet again," Alexis said, shrugging as he tugged his necktie into place along his collar. He deftly tied it, giving her a little grin. "I've missed you, you know. I've never met a woman with your uninhibited spirit; the way you abandon yourself to pleasure is inspiring." Alexis brushed his lips against hers briefly, and gave her hand a squeeze. "In fact, I do believe you're due a promotion soon." He held her gaze for a moment and smiled again. "I'll be in touch."

He turned and left, and Jasmine leaned against her desk, bereft of strength. She realized with a start that she was almost completely naked, in the office, where anyone in the building might see her. She dressed quickly and shoved the remains of her panties into her purse.

Barely remembering to grab her charger cable from her desk, she hurried to the elevator and out of the building. In spite of the ache in her hips, and the fatigue gnawing at her mind and bones, Jasmine felt more alive than she had in days; she felt as if everything that had gone so terribly wrong might finally be going right.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Four**

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Despite her late night, the next morning Jasmine was up and out of her bed the moment her alarm went off, wincing slightly against the soreness she could still feel across her ass and in her nipples. She dressed quickly in an outfit she knew wouldn't put too much pressure on the abused, tender parts of her body: a pair of comfortable, loose pants and a soft, loose blouse, over a soft, satin bra and matching thong. She slipped her feet into a pair of flats, and brewed her coffee, almost whistling with happiness as she left her apartment.

Jasmine hadn't felt so good about going to work in months, maybe even years. Alexis' cryptic comment about her receiving a promotion gave her mixed feelings; while she didn't want to get ahead simply because she was sleeping with the CEO of the company, the prospect of some kind of improvement in her circumstances was very appealing.

Even if Alexis hadn't made that remark, Jasmine thought she still would have been almost as happy to return to work that morning. Finally Alexis knew who she was, and what's more, he was still attracted to her and apparently interested in continuing their trysts. That was enough to make her feel content, and the lingering pain of her punishment was more than worth it after the incredible orgasm Alexis had given her.

She was pleased to find, as she pulled into her usual spot in the parking garage, that she was exactly on time. Jasmine grinned to herself, wondering idly if Alexis was already in his office, way up on the top floor of the building. She wondered if he was thinking of her, and if he had already put some kind of plan in motion for the promotion he had mentioned.

Jasmine arrived at her floor, stepping out of the crowded elevator and frowning at the sight that greeted her. The young receptionist was searching frantically through papers

at her desk, her face pale and worried. Jasmine decided there must have been some kind of check-in issue and shrugged it off. She proceeded to the door of the office proper, pressing her ID card to the reader and unlocking the door without comment.

When she stepped through the hall and into the open office, Jasmine was greeted by an even more chaotic scene. None of the managers were in their private offices; they were moving from one cubicle to the next, talking in low voices. The employees were up and about, most glued to their phones, creating a cacophony of noise.

Jasmine had never seen anything like it in the entire time she had been with the company. "What the hell?" she asked, to no one in particular. Even if Alexis had managed to push through her promotion overnight, it wasn't the sort of thing that would put the entire office on alert. Her boss and direct coworkers would have been affected—but not the entire floor. Jasmine looked around, trying to piece together what was happening.

Macy, who sat in Jasmine's section but actually belonged to Account Management, nearly collided with Jasmine on her way from the printer. "Sorry!" she said, giving Jasmine a quick, strained smile.

"What's going on?" Jasmine asked, gesturing to the flurry of activity.

Macy's eyes widened. "You don't know?"

Jasmine shook her head. "I just got in like, a minute ago."

Macy stared at Jasmine in surprise, before pulling her out of the flow of traffic. "We just lost a contract to a rival business. Williams-Davies, I think," Macy explained quickly. "They're saying that a leak about the contract came from

this office—and probably this floor.” Macy whistled lowly. “I would not like to be whoever was responsible for that.” She looked around and gave Jasmine a rueful grin. “Gotta get back to my desk, anyway, my manager’s looking for this report.”

Jasmine watched as her coworker darted away, her heart starting to pound in her chest. She knew very well that the leak had indeed come from the office. What’s more, she knew that it had come from her computer. Jasmine was appalled at the chaos created by her little prank, performed on a whim. She had never imagined that she would have caused such a crisis for the company. What would Alexis think when he found out?

Jasmine’s stomach lurched inside of her. Once again she had almost certainly ruined everything. She was going to lose her job—and beyond that, she was going to lose Alexis.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Five**

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Jasmine staggered to her chair, numbly dodging frantic coworkers moving to and fro through the office. She couldn't quite believe it, but her little attempt at a prank had apparently resulted in a major crisis. Surely it wasn't as big a deal as the people in the office around her were making it? It didn't make sense; the contract involved wasn't even among the biggest slated for the year.

It finally occurred to Jasmine that the reason for the chaos around her was not just that the client had backed out of the deal—it was that the leak that led to the rival company's successful counter-offer had come from within the company. And very soon everyone would know it had come from her. If the rival company had managed to undercut Crius simply by accurately guessing their bid amount, that would be one thing—but this was something much worse.

"They think there's a mole, someone in the pay of Williams-Davies," Jasmine heard one of her coworkers telling another. Jasmine wondered if she'd feel better or worse if she had received a payoff in exchange for betraying the company.

Telling herself that it had been an act of revenge for being overlooked, overworked, and underappreciated didn't help her much; rather, it seemed petty, when managers were going through people's desks and people from HR were taking down names. If anyone in the office was doing anything that fell even remotely short of the company's standards, Jasmine's petty little rebellion had sealed their pink slip. From everything that was happening, it seemed that the managers were looking for any excuse to lay people off. There would be a dozen of Jasmine's colleagues looking for new jobs the next day, and she, most likely, would be one of them.

Jasmine finally turned her computer on and tried to focus on her work, even as managers stopped by her desk to ask for

her login information and accounts. She had taken so many precautions when she'd enacted her little scheme, but if they could figure out the leak had come from within the office, it was surely only a matter of time before they figured out from whom.

Although people around her started to get to work, it was obvious to Jasmine that the tension in the office hadn't decreased one iota; the department heads weren't back in their office and no one was taking any leisurely trips to the break room for coffee. Everyone was doing their best to look absolutely absorbed in their work, and Jasmine was no exception.

Despite maintaining an outward appearance of concentration, Jasmine's mind was frantic; reeling and tumbling through potential outcomes of the situation. If Alexis found out she had been the one behind the breach, their newly re-established rapport would be destroyed, all because of one vengeful moment.

*Hindsight is 20/20*, Jasmine thought bitterly as she tried to focus on the proposal in front of her. Her skin was crawling with anticipation that at any moment she would hear someone call her out, she would turn to see an HR person and they would escort her out of the building. Absurd, panicked fantasies formed in her head of the FBI or FTC barging into the office and leading out in handcuffs, past all of her coworkers and Alexis, who would of course never again acknowledge her existence. She would not only be without a job but in jail, possibly for most of her remaining life. All because she had been feeling vindictive and had thought it would give her some satisfaction to put one over on Alexis Kyrkos and her bosses.

An email went out to the entire office, and Jasmine started in her seat when her computer came to life with the multiple sharp pings that accompanied a message marked urgent in



the system. The subject line read, *Office-wide Meeting, Attendance Mandatory*. Attached to the email was a read receipt and an event notification for her calendar. The email itself simply said that in light of recent events an office-wide meeting would be held at 11am. Jasmine's stomach twisted and rolled and she worried she might throw up at any moment.

As the meeting approached, Jasmine realized she had gotten almost none of her work done; she had been so wrapped up in her guilty conscience—arguing with herself over whether she should feel worse for Alexis or for the people in her department who would be fired over things unrelated to her actual crime—that the proposal stood on her screen just as incomplete as it had been when she sat down to work on it. *I doubt anyone's going to be getting much work done today*, she told herself soothingly, as she locked down her console and gathered up her purse and a few other things in preparation for the meeting.

There had been very few office-wide meetings in her tenure at Crius. As Jasmine filed into the huge conference room with the rest of the people on her floor, it was clear that no one really knew what to expect. A meeting like this was such a rarity that for a moment she couldn't even remember what company-wide event had last prompted one.

The room buzzed with murmured conversations as the managers and a few HR representatives filed in and closed the door behind them. Nobody wanted to speak too loudly, nor could anyone keep schtum, murmuring rumors to each other in the close confines of the packed conference room. Jasmine had barely managed to snag a chair for herself and the managers leading the meeting had had to bring in their own from their offices. Jasmine took a deep breath, willing her rabbit-fast pulse to slow down. To the best of her knowledge, no one in the office had a clue that she was responsible for the leak.

"If we could have everyone's attention, please." One of the HR reps, a tall, thin, red-haired woman, waved her hands in the air. "As you may be aware, there has been an information breach in this office."

"If you thought we didn't know then you're clearly not very good at your job," someone commented from the midst of the standing crowd.

The HR woman frowned. "In any case," she said, her cheeks flushing slightly, "it's obviously important to us to identify the source of the leak. If there's been one, we need to find out if there have been many."

"How do you know we haven't lost a ton of contracts because of this already?" someone else asked from the throng.

"The truth is, we don't," one of the managers admitted. "For now, we're treating this as a one-off event, until the evidence suggests otherwise."

"We were hoping some of you might have some information on who was handling this particular prospect, so we can narrow down the pool of who the source could be," the HR woman said.

"That's half the office, if not everyone!" someone shouted. "Don't you have anything to go on other than it happened here?"

"Yeah—if you could figure out it was here, you should be able to figure out which desk it was. This sounds like your problem!"

"We're working on that," said another one of the managers, a nondescript-looking woman Jasmine had only seen a

couple of times before. "Until we can trace the computer that was used, we want to make sure we're not investigating people who have nothing to do with this. So if you can help us out—it's in your best interests to do so."

"I know Tom was the initial contact," someone in the crowd called out.

"Becky Roberts was in charge of getting the client details!"

Voices began calling out names of people in the department, and Jasmine forced herself to stay quiet as the accusations started to fly. The HR reps were taking down names and the managers were nodding—no one was trying to bring order to the meeting at all.

"Alan—weren't you supposed to be the proposal contact?" someone from Jasmine's department called out. Alan scowled.

"Then I would have the least interest in leaking information to our competitors, wouldn't I?" he said bitterly.

"Not if you were in their pay!" someone retorted.

Alan flushed a deep red, his gaze traveling around the room in frantic anger. "Jasmine has just as much access to the information as I do!" he said sharply, turning his glare onto her. "And she's spent the last three meetings bitching about her work load and how she shouldn't have to do proposals for the rest of us; wouldn't she be a better candidate for a mole than me?"

Jasmine felt her cheeks burning with a mixture of guilt and anger; Alan didn't have a clue that it was her, he was just throwing her under the bus to take the heat off of himself.

“Excuse me?” she retorted. “So because I do all of your work for you I’m a candidate to betray the company? No way! I’m less likely than a snake like you to try and help out our competition.”

The room quickly erupted into full-blown chaos, and the managers finally tried to bring some kind of order to the situation by reminding people it was just names they wanted, not insults and bickering.

Eventually, the accusations began to slow, though Jasmine could tell the resentful coworkers were far from finished with betraying each other. It was easy to predict that the witch-hunt would continue for days. People would be spying on each other, turning each other in for any little nuisance, and overloading the HR department with complaints and investigations that had little or nothing to do with the original crime.

The managers eventually called the meeting to a close with a look of anxious exhaustion on their faces, shaking their heads and talking among themselves as the office workers started to file out, back towards their desks.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Six**

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Jasmine walked back to her desk, trying to shake off her panic that Alan had inadvertently given the management a good lead in throwing her name onto the list of suspects.

If nothing else, she thought, her feelings of irritation towards Alan had been well-founded. The fact that she actually was the person responsible for the leak—even though Alan hadn't known it—made it hard for her to be completely irritated with him, but she resented the fact that he had persisted in accusing her because he was angry, because she was an easy target, and because he resented her for pushing for him to have to do his own work, instead of farming it out to her.

As she neared her desk, Jasmine felt her phone vibrate in her purse and frowned. Who would be texting her in the middle of the day? To her shock, as she opened her message app, Jasmine saw it was from Alexis. Her heart started to beat faster and she nearly stopped in her tracks. Giving herself a shake, she took the last few steps to her desk and sat down before opening the message.

*Come to my office, Jasmine. I've told the receptionist to expect you. If you have to give your managers an excuse, let me know.*

Jasmine stared at the message in a mixture of shock, fear, and anticipation. Part of her was certain Alexis had figured out she had leaked the information—that she would go up to his office and be summarily fired. How he could have figured it out, when the managers in her own department didn't have a clue, was beyond her, but she couldn't rule out the possibility that as CEO of the company, the intelligent billionaire might have other means of accessing information than through the painstakingly slow wheels of HR.

Jasmine closed her eyes and took a breath. If Alexis had somehow gotten to the bottom of the leak, he was at least confronting her about it in private. Maybe, she thought, she could get out of the situation without being led away in cuffs. She would undeniably end up getting fired, but at least the whole office might not know all about her disgrace. She might even have the opportunity to explain herself.

Jasmine swallowed against the tightness in her throat, and tried to decide if she needed to give her boss an excuse for meeting with Alexis Kyrkos. *If I told him I needed to go upstairs to talk to the CEO of the company, he'd have a million questions for me. I'll just leave a note saying I had to take care of something upstairs.* She took up her post-it pad and scribbled a quick note that she was away from her desk and would be back shortly.

Jasmine texted Alexis to say she was on her way, and slipped the phone into her purse. If she was going to be fired, she might as well have that with her; she assumed that the contents of her desk would be mailed to her following her being escorted out of the building. Jasmine walked to the elevator, trying to subtly avoid making eye contact with her coworkers. She didn't want any questions about where she was going; she didn't want to have to tell anyone why she was going to see Alexis.

She stepped into the elevator and selected the top floor, closing her eyes to try and gather the shreds of her confidence. She had a long way to go, and the elevator was moving as slowly as molasses. She thought once again about what she had done; for what was perhaps the tenth time that morning, she tried to figure out what had possessed her. Certainly, she'd felt a strong sense of irritation at Alexis for having sex with her—the best sex of her life—then falling off the radar. She had been peeved at her coworkers, especially her boss, and annoyed that Alexis hadn't recognized her from the beginning.

And yet, had it really been worth it? At the time it had seemed like such a small act of revenge, but based on the furor that morning, her petty sabotage was a much bigger deal. She couldn't quite bring herself to think she didn't deserve to be fired; but the prospect of trying to find a new job after leaking confidential information was daunting. If she had really thought about it at the time, instead of indulging her bitterness and resentment towards the company, and Alexis in particular, maybe she would have reconsidered her actions.

There was also the fact that this would surely be a much more damning than her original lie to Alexis about who she was. Where Alexis had been able to forgive her for not being upfront about working for his company, he certainly would not be able to forgive her sabotage of a potentially lucrative contract. Jasmine had destroyed her career, and any possibility of ever forming a real connection with Alexis, over a moment of irritability and resentment. Of course, she thought to herself, she hadn't known that then. At the time she had thought Alexis had viewed her as a one-night stand and abandoned her; she hadn't known he was planning on seeing her again.

Her thoughts twisted around in her mind as the elevator made its way up through the floors to the executive offices. Jasmine was so lost in her thoughts that when the elevator finally chimed to announce her arrival on the top floor, she nearly jumped out of her shoes.

Taking a deep breath, she stepped through the doors and into the lobby of Alexis's office. In keeping with his status, he had the entire top floor of the building to himself. Jasmine looked around the lobby; it was definitely a more distinguished space than the reception area of her own floor, or even the main lobby of the building. The floor was a rich, deeply veined marble, dark wood paneling covered the



walls, and deep green potted shrubs were tucked into the corners.

The reception desk was impressive. A sharply-dressed woman with dark hair and a pointed nose was hard at work on something, her attention focused on her computer screen.

As Jasmine stepped from the carpet in front of the elevator, her shoes clacking slightly on the marble, the woman looked up, smiling slightly in polite interest. "Can I help you?" she asked.

Jasmine took a quick breath, trying to slow the pounding of her heart. "I'm here to see Alexis Kyrkos," she said, licking her suddenly dry lips. "My name is Jasmine. He said he was expecting me."

The receptionist nodded and Jasmine caught a furtive once-over glance from the slightly older woman. "He did tell me you were coming up. I'll buzz you through."

Jasmine tried to divine some kind of clue about her situation from the woman's reaction, but as she pressed a button on the desk and Jasmine heard the buzz at the door, the woman's facial expression gave nothing away.

Jasmine gathered her composure, telling herself that she was not going to lose it in front of either Alexis or his receptionist. She strode towards the unlocked door and turned the knob. One way or another, she was about to find out if Alexis knew about her betrayal, and what he intended to do about it.

Jasmine pulled the door open and stepped through it, telling herself that she would only be getting what she deserved.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Seven**

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Alexis' office was enormous. Jasmine was taken aback by the scale of it, even though she already knew he had the entire floor to himself. For just a moment, she allowed herself to take in the grandeur: a seating area with comfortable couches gathered around a coffee table, a low bar with a selection of expensive-looking wines and liquors at one end, and an espresso and coffee setup at the other. Fresh fruits in a wide, oblong bowl, that were ripe enough to emit a soft fragrance into the air. The carpet beneath her feet felt softly dense, in a pristine, deep green that coordinated with the dark, gleaming wood of the furniture.

Alexis was seated at a desk at the far end of the office, looking at his computer. As Jasmine closed the door behind her, the lock turned over with a muted metallic thunk, and Alexis looked up.

"Ah—Jasmine, do come in."

Jasmine was perplexed; while Alexis looked stressed, absorbed in something, he didn't appear to be upset at her. She walked across the office and approached the desk, struggling to control the trembling in her knees. It seemed like an impossibly long walk from the door, and Jasmine felt her cheeks warming as Alexis' gaze traveled over her body, taking in every detail just as sharply as he had the night before.

"I hope you haven't had your routine too thrown around by this scandal," he said.

Jasmine forced herself to shrug. *If he knows that I'm the one behind it, why is he drawing it out? And if he doesn't know—why did he have me come up to him?*

"It's been an interesting day already," Jasmine told him, finally reaching the space in front of the desk.

The desk itself was just as impressive as everything else in the room; broad, polished and clean. Alexis' paperwork was stringently organized, not scattered the way Jasmine's own papers always seemed to be. As always, Alexis looked absolutely immaculate: his suit crisply ironed, dark blond hair neatly combed; everything polished and sharp. He leaned back in his broad, tall leather chair, threading his fingers behind his head.

"I'm sure we'll get to the bottom of it eventually," he said. "In the meantime, I'm at my wit's end. Everything has to be reported to me, so in addition to trying to keep this company running, I'm getting a deluge of emails about the crisis." He shook his head, rubbing his temples with his fingertips.

"Oh God, it must be miserable for you," Jasmine said, her sense of guilt deepening. Of course Alexis would have to hear everything about the investigation, he was the CEO. And even a crisis like the one she had caused, the company couldn't come grinding to a halt. She had created an exponentially growing pile of additional work for him out of nothing more than spite. Alexis flashed a toothy grin, bringing his hands away from his head and leaning forward in his chair.

"Which brings me to why I asked you up," he said, licking his lips. "As it turns out, finding out you're my employee couldn't have happened at a better time." Alexis's eyes darkened slightly as he looked her over once more. "You're right there, only a handful of floors underneath my very office. You must be fairly stressed out yourself." Alexis stood up in a quick, fluid movement, striding around the immense desk and coming to a stop only inches away from her. "I was thinking that we could both relieve a little stress." Jasmine felt a tingle of warmth work through her body as Alexis's voice dropped into a low almost-purr.

"That's very thoughtful of you," she said, her heart beating faster with a mixture of guilt and the beginnings of arousal.

Alexis cupped her jaw with his hand, tilting Jasmine's face up slightly, and leaned in, closing the distance between them to brush his lips against hers. He deepened the kiss, his hands trailing over her body slowly, caressing and teasing her through the fabric of her clothes, and for a moment, Jasmine's mind was far too occupied with the feeling of his touch, the taste of his lips, to really think about the harm she had done. His hands moved up to cup her breasts, giving them a careful squeeze, and Jasmine gasped, breaking away from Alexis' lips slightly as the rougher touch sent a jolt through her; her nipples were still tender from the punishment he had doled out the night before.

Alexis pulled back slightly, looking down with concern. "You're still sore," he half-asked, brushing his fingers against her breasts more carefully, soothing her. Jasmine nodded, and Alexis's lips twitched in a smile that conflicted with the concern in his eyes. "How's your ass?"

Jasmine blushed. Every time she had shifted in her chair that morning, she'd felt the lingering sting of the blows dealt with her own ruler, the crisscrossing of heat and tingling from the strikes. When she had been getting ready for work, she'd seen that there were still faint red welts in stripes across the curve of her buttocks.

"Why do you think I'm wearing comfortable clothes today?" she asked, rhetorically.

Despite her outward coolness, the break in the growing sexual tension had brought Jasmine's mind back to the wrong she had done Alexis. Even as he brushed his lips along the column of her throat, his hands moving to the hem of her blouse, she couldn't quite suppress her guilt,

knowing Alexis had no clue that she was the reason he was up against it. *At least I can relieve some of his stress, right?* the selfish part of her mind insisted. She could give Alexis the relief he craved—and then she would come clean

Alexis carefully pulled Jasmine's shirt over her head, let it fall to the floor and kissed her once more, his hands carefully sliding along the curves of her body. He brushed his fingertips against the soft satin fabric of her bra and Jasmine moaned; although her nipples were still deeply tender, his gentle touch was more pleasure than pain. He tugged down the cups of her bra and Jasmine shivered, nipping at Alexis' bottom lip as her desire rose, her mind torn between guilt and need. She reached up and tugged his jacket down over his shoulders, guiding it over his arms. The warmth of his body, the feeling of the muscles rippling under his skin, was almost enough to conquer her misgivings.

Alexis lifted her up carefully, and Jasmine felt a flicker of pain across her buttocks as he settled her on the edge of his desk. He cupped her breasts once more, running his thumbs lightly against her tender, sensitive nipples.

Jasmine gasped as Alexis broke away from her lips, ducking his head down to claim with his mouth first one, then her other nipple. He sucked and licked, sending crackling tingles of pleasure and pain through Jasmine's nerves, making her hotter and wetter with every stroke. One of his hands drifted down, sliding along Jasmine's body, between her legs. He began to touch her through the fabric of her clothes, rubbing softly up and down along her crotch with his fingers. Jasmine let out a slight, whimpering moan, her hips beginning to move under the impetus of Alexis' teasing touches as she squirmed with pleasure at the feeling of his mouth against her aching nipples.

Even as her body heated up, Jasmine couldn't quite pull her mind out of the tight circle of self-reproach that plagued her.

She tried to tell herself that giving Alexis some pleasure was worth putting off her confession, but it was difficult to convince herself as he touched her so carefully.

“I can tell you’re still—” Alexis kissed her lips lightly. “Very sensitive,” he murmured. “So no punishment for you today. Just pure pleasure—I think we both deserve that, don’t you?”

Jasmine inhaled sharply as Alexis’s fingers found her clit through her clothes. She was soaking wet, her inner muscles flexing and tightening in anticipation.

“M-maybe,” Jasmine said, tilting her face up to Alexis’.

He kissed her more eagerly and she tried to force her hands into action, but all she could think of was the fact that Alexis wouldn’t need the relief of sex if it weren’t for her petty attempt at revenge. Of course, his work was stressful anyway, and he might have found a reason to call her up to his office even if he wasn’t dealing with the crisis, but she couldn’t help but feel like she had no right taking pleasure from him, not when she had done so much wrong.

Her thoughts were interrupted as Alexis’s hand slipped under the waistband of her soft trousers, slithering into the front of her panties, and Jasmine let out a low, soft moan as his fingers brushed against her slick vulva.

“Almost makes it all worthwhile,” Alexis murmured against her lips, his fingers working down between her labia, finding her clit. He stroked and rubbed her slowly, sending jolts of sensation through her body, and Jasmine desperately tried to give into the pleasure he was giving her. But even as she felt herself becoming wetter, her body tingling and moving in automatic, writhing twists, still more guilt piled up in her mind. Jasmine felt her throat tightening, her eyes beginning to sting. She breathed as slowly and steadily as possible, but

as her heart beat faster with desire, she couldn't fight the adrenaline that began to flow through her body. Alexis rocked his hips against her, rubbing the hardening ridge of his cock against her inner thigh. *Just give him this. Give yourself this. It's not like it would hurt him any more to have sex one more time before he finds it out.*

Jasmine shivered, shaking her head to try and get the guilty thoughts out of her mind; to bury herself in the rising lust and need that Alexis was inspiring. She realized that tears were beginning to well up in her eyes and her throat was tightening savagely as a sob tried to work its way up from her chest.

Alexis pulled back quickly, looking down into her face. "Are you sure you're okay?" he asked her. "I can take it easy, Jasmine. I'm not going to hurt you." He paused, frowning, his eyebrows knitted together in a picture of concern. "I didn't take it too far last night, did I?"

Jasmine shook her head as her tears began to flow, running down her cheeks. She had sworn to herself that she was not going to lose her cool and start crying in Alexis' office—but she also wasn't expecting to be called up for a tryst instead of an accusation.

Jasmine slipped off of the desk quickly, picking up her blouse from the floor. "I'm really sorry, Alexis," she said, her breath coming in sobs as she struggled to maintain enough composure to get out of the office uneventfully. "I can't do this. I'm sorry."

Alexis didn't stop her from tugging her shirt over her head and smoothing it against her body, but as soon as she was clothed once more, he took hold of her shoulders lightly. "Please, tell me what's wrong," he said, holding her gaze. "If I pushed you too hard, if last night was too much for you, let me apologize."



Jasmine shook her head, sniffing as she struggled to regain her composure. "No—no, it's not that, it's not you. It's not—it's not what happened last night," she said, wiping uselessly at her cheeks. "I really need to leave."

"Tell me what's going on." Alexis' voice contained just a subtle hint of the dominant persona he'd adopted in the bedroom. Even if she hadn't intended on telling him, Jasmine would have found it hard to resist the command.

"It was me," she said quickly, breaking out of his loose embrace and starting towards the door quickly. "I'm the one who leaked the information. I'm the one who's putting the whole company through this whole crisis. It's my fault."

Jasmine hurried to the door, hoping against hope that it wasn't locked. It opened to her desperate grab, and she tried to get through quickly, reminding herself as she stepped into the lobby that she didn't need to alert everyone in the office to her new disgrace.

She kept her head down as she made her way to the elevator, hoping that the woman behind the desk was too absorbed in her task to notice her exit. Inside the elevator Jasmine punched the button for the garage access floor and leaned against the wall, trying to stifle the sobs rolling up from the pit of her stomach.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Eight**

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The next morning, Jasmine was on her couch, staring at her TV with a cup of coffee on the table in front of her. She was numb with a mixture of shock and grief; with one stupid decision she had managed to totally ruin her life.

The previous afternoon she had hurried home, barely managing to scrape together an email to HR and her manager saying she'd been taken ill with a stomach bug. She knew it looked suspicious, but the fact that she actually was guilty meant that it didn't matter all that much. *If I was innocent, I'd be worried that my disappearance would count as evidence against me.* She had barely managed to make it home without wrecking her car on the way, her eyes clouding over with tears every few minutes as new waves of grief and self-reproach flowed through her.

She had stumbled through her front door, stripped off her clothes, and thrown herself into bed, giving into the tears that had fought for so long to overtake her. She had cried until the last of the racking sobs began to abate and before throwing on her bathrobe and padding into the kitchen. She had found a bottle of wine in the fridge and bypassed even the idea of a glass, instead bringing the entire bottle through to the living room where she sank down on the couch and drank, slowly but steadily, until the entire bottle was gone. Sometime later she had forced herself to eat something but it wasn't long before she was curled up on the couch, shaking and crying again.

When her alarm had gone off the next morning, she had hesitated for several minutes, trying to decide whether to go to work and deal with the consequences—turn herself in and accept her firing—or hide away at home. Pain was throbbing in her temples and her stomach twisted, roiling inside of her; she wasn't sure how much of that was the wine hangover, and how much of it was her guilty conscience at how hugely, albeit unintentionally, she had hurt Alexis.

Eventually, the shrill sound of her alarm filling her ears, Jasmine had decided she couldn't deal with work that day, whether or not the news of her betrayal had filtered through to HR.

She had managed to mostly subdue her hangover, drinking water before adding caffeine to the mix, then forcing herself to eat something to sop up the lingering alcohol in her system. She sent an email saying that she was still sick with the same bug. She had no idea if anyone accepted her excuse, but thankfully she received confirmation that her sick pay would apply.

Sitting in her living room, considering the ruin she had made of her life, Jasmine tried to form some kind of plan. She sighed, realizing she would have to do some serious work on her resume considering she was about to be fired or resign over an issue of corporate sabotage. It certainly wasn't the most promising thing to have on her record when looking for new jobs. Of course, Jasmine thought—feeling a flicker of hope—she didn't have to tell whoever she interviewed with about the specifics of her leaving Crius. She couldn't guarantee that a potential employer wouldn't call the HR department to follow up on her reasons for leaving, but she could hope.

Even as she began to hope at the possibility of salvaging something from the tatters of her life, Jasmine realized to her horror that what she had done was technically a crime; she could even be thrown in jail. "Oh God," she said, nearly dropping her coffee mug on the floor as her fingers spasmed with fear. Unlikely as it was that she would be jailed for corporate espionage—she wasn't exactly being employed by a Crius rival—Alexis could still bring a suit against her. He could sue for the value of the lost contract, as well as seeking damages that would ensure that she was absolutely penniless for the rest of her life; no matter what kind of job

she ended up in, the government would take every penny that wasn't needed for basic food, bills, and housing.

*Alexis wouldn't do that, would he?* He had been so concerned for her well-being, so gentle and caring when he realized she was still aching and sensitive from her punishment. He had immediately assumed that her crying was due to being in physical pain; that he had somehow traumatized her. Surely someone who cared about her wouldn't just have her thrown into jail, or leave her penniless for the rest of her life. He would be able to forgive her, wouldn't he?

*You don't even know him!* Jasmine's eyes stung with fresh tears as she realized the reality of their relationship. She had met him a few times as his employee—times he couldn't even recall. They had met in a chance encounter at a party she wasn't even really supposed to be attending, and had had sex a few times, that was all. Granted, Jasmine was confident she had satisfied him every bit as much as he had pleased her—but would that be enough of a connection for a man as dedicated to his company as Alexis Kyrkos? Or would her betrayal be all the more reason for him to want to hurt her as much as possible? It occurred to Jasmine that, deep down, she had no idea what kind of person Alexis was. She didn't know him at all, in spite of the feelings she had begun to form, in spite of the way her body responded to his touch, his dominant presence and soothing after-punishment words.

Jasmine buried her face in her hands and sunk down into the back of the couch, shaking as new waves of grief flowed through her. She had ruined the best thing she'd ever had—and she didn't even know to what extent she'd really had it. Alexis had been willing to forgive her lying to him, but there was no way he would forgive something as massive as the stupid scheme she had enacted against the company. Jasmine didn't think anyone would be able to forgive that.

She curled in on herself as the tears began to fall anew,  
giving in to the misery that consumed her.

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## **Chapter Twenty-Nine**

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Once her tears had abated, Jasmine was left with just the misery of knowing that thanks to a momentary lapse in judgment she had destroyed her entire life. She stood to get herself more coffee, deciding it was time to look over her resume again.

Jasmine stepped into her kitchen, considering what she could possibly do to improve her resume. There was plenty of experience from Crius that she could add, but this would only increase the likelihood of her boss being asked questions, and there was nothing to stop him sharing the reason for her departure from Crius with any potential new employer.

She sighed as she poured coffee into her mug, reaching out blindly to the handle on the front of the fridge. But before she could get the door open and reach for the milk, the sound of quick, firm knocking at the front door interrupted her morose reflections. She frowned. *Probably someone trying to sell something*, Jasmine thought irritably. *Just what I need on a day like today*. Jasmine extracted the gallon of milk from her fridge and set it on the counter, smoothing her clothes over her body. Thankfully she had taken a shower as part of her attempt to get over her hangover.

Jasmine crossed the kitchen and stepped up to the door, unlocking the knob and deadbolt in quick succession without even looking through the peephole to confirm who was outside; she wasn't expecting any visitors. She opened the door quickly, and began to say that whatever it was the person wanted to sell her, she wasn't interested.

Instead of a salesman, Jasmine's gaze fell on the one man she least expected to see on her doorstep. Alexis Kyrkos was right in front of her, immaculately groomed and dressed in his usual tailored suit. For a moment Jasmine thought



that she must be hallucinating; she was losing her mind over him; over her grief at destroying her life and career.

But as Jasmine stood there staring for a long moment, Alexis began to smile. "Are you going to let me come in? I can understand if you don't feel like talking."

Jasmine shook herself and opened the door a little wider, stepping back to let him into her apartment.

"I never expected to see you here," she said, swallowing against the sudden tight feeling in her throat. "I mean—how did you even get my address?"

"Personnel file," he told her, grinning, then moved to sit down at her kitchen table.

Jasmine closed the door automatically, trying to work out why Alexis was not only in her apartment, but why he hadn't brought police, lawyers, or people from HR with him. This seemed like a private meeting and Jasmine didn't know what to think.

"Ah—would you like some coffee? The pot is still fresh," she said. She glanced around her apartment, realizing that while it was neat, it wasn't quite clean. She felt embarrassed that Alexis should see her the way that she was in the moment, her eyes still red from tears, not even wearing the professional attire she wore to work, but a slightly ragged pair of jeans and well-washed tee shirt.

"Please, that would be kind," Alexis said, watching her intently.

Jasmine took a deep breath, attempting to still the trembling in her hands, the rapid fluttering of her heart. She forced herself to focus on pouring another coffee, then hesitated with her hand on the sugar jar.

“Do—do you take milk or sugar?” Jasmine could only just bring herself to look at him.

“Milk, no sugar,” he said.

Jasmine set the mug on the table in front of him then retrieved her mug and stirred sugar into the liquid, waiting for Alexis to tell her what had brought him to her apartment.

The silence stretched out and Jasmine felt increasingly uncomfortable with each passing moment. “So,” she said, taking a sip of her coffee, “this is, interesting.” She licked her lips and glanced at Alexis. He set his mug on the table and sat back slightly in his chair.

“I like what you’ve done with the place,” Alexis said, looking around.

Jasmine blushed, shrugging. “It’s what I can afford.”

“You’ve done well within your means—and I know you’re not getting paid half of what you’re worth.”

Jasmine picked at imaginary lint on her tablecloth, consumed with questions as to what Alexis was doing in her apartment, after she had come clean. She worried at her bottom lip for a moment, trailing her fingertip around the rim of her mug.

“What brings you here, Alexis?” Jasmine asked, taking a deep breath. “I mean—not that I’m not—not that you’re not welcome. I’m just a little curious.” Her palms felt clammy; her heart beat a little faster in her chest.

Alexis met Jasmine’s gaze and smiled again. “I think you’re smart enough to have an idea of why I’m here,” he said quietly. “It’s about what you told me yesterday.”

Jasmine nodded. "So, is this you telling me I can leave quietly, but we'll never see each other again?"

Alexis shook his head. "In the grand scheme of things, that contract is..." he hesitated for just a moment. "It's not a minor thing, but it's not so major that I couldn't forgive it." He took another sip of coffee. "This is very good, by the way." He smiled slightly. "We've lost bigger contracts for worse reasons. If the client's willing to simply go for the lowest bidder, that's their problem." Alexis gave a little shrug. The next moment, his gaze pinned her down, bright and intense. "I can forgive you leaking the information, but what I am curious about is why you did it?"

That was a question Jasmine had expected to come from the HR person giving her an exit interview, not from Alexis himself. She pressed her lips together, feeling a slight sting in her eyes once more. *This is stupid*, Jasmine thought. *Just tell him. There's no point lying anymore.* She took a deep breath and drained half of her coffee in two swift gulps.

"The reason I did it was really stupid, impulsive, and petty," she said, looking down at her hands, unable to meet Alexis's gaze. "It was after the first night we spent together, when I was waiting for you to call me." In the corner of her eye, she saw Alexis nodding. "I was having a rough time at work, and...I guess that, along with feeling like you were spurning me..." Jasmine took a deep breath and sighed. "I felt small, insignificant. Tiny." Jasmine swallowed again. "And I thought that if I could pull a little prank, get a little bit of my own back on the company..." Jasmine shrugged. "I know it was dumb, but I never expected it to be this big of a deal. I thought maybe I could screw over my boss, put a little dent in the company earnings for the quarter, and that would be it." Jasmine took a breath before looking up to meet Alexis's gaze once more, terrified of what she might see.

"That makes sense," Alexis said, nodding slowly. "It seemed like the kind of thing a person would do on an impulse." He smiled slightly, then drained his mug, and Jasmine wondered if he was going to make his excuses and leave. Alexis put down his mug and watched her for a moment. "I could forgive you for that," he told her, and Jasmine felt a trickle of hope tingling through her. "But there's one thing we'll have to do first."

Jasmine stared back at him, her mouth open in confusion.

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## **Chapter Thirty**

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Alexis stood quickly, moving around the table to Jasmine in an instant. He wrapped his arms around her waist and lifted her gently out of the chair, holding her body tightly against his. Jasmine could feel the tension in him; feel the heat of him through his clothes. Alexis tilted her face up and as Jasmine met his gaze; she could see there was more than forgiveness in his eyes.

"I can forgive you for what you've done to my company," Alexis said, his voice low, almost purring in her ear. He brushed his lips against hers, sending a rush of heat through Jasmine's body. "But I can't have you thinking you can just throw a tantrum like that and expect no consequences." He smiled wickedly.

"W-what?" Jasmine's eyes widened as her stirring arousal shifted into fear.

Alexis chuckled lowly. "This is much worse than your deception, wouldn't you agree? I think you need to be punished."

Jasmine stared at Alexis as she realized the meaning of his words; he wasn't going to call the cops, he wasn't going to bring her life to ruin—he was using her transgression as an excuse for another tryst together.

"Yes, Sir," she said breathlessly, warming up to the role-play. "I agree, I need to be punished."

Alexis kissed her lightly on the lips again. "And you still remember the safe word?" he asked her, his hands beginning to wander over the curves of her body.

"I do," Jasmine said. Alexis's smile deepened and his hands slid down to clasp hers.

"Then let's go into your room," Alexis said. "So we can begin your punishment."

Jasmine felt a flicker of misgiving; Alexis was in her space, in her apartment, and she was concerned about the state of her room, compared to the grandeur of his penthouse suite.

Alexis tugged her gently forward through the apartment, and Jasmine saw that he was looking for her bedroom. She led him towards the open door, pushing down her misgivings.

Alexis stepped into the room behind her and looked around. "Very nice," he said, pulling her close and giving her a quick kiss. "I think we can put together a proper punishment for you. He pulled back from Jasmine and looked her over slowly, his gaze lingering on the curves of her body. "Strip."

Jasmine hesitated for only a moment, but as Alexis began to move around the room, looking into her different drawers, she knew that if she tried to protest, she would only make it worse. She took a deep breath and tugged her shirt up, pulling it past her head and letting it fall to the floor. She tried to ignore the fact that she could hear things rustling as Alexis explored her room, she tried to suppress the skin-crawling feeling that came with having her space invaded. *Not invaded. I invited him in. I agreed to this.*

She heard the sounds of movement coming to a stop as she tugged her jeans down over her hips. Jasmine glanced over to see Alexis watching her as she worked the tough, worn denim down along her thighs and past her knees. She stepped out of the pants, standing before Alexis in nothing more than her bra and panties.

In spite of her misgivings, Jasmine realized that she was incredibly turned on. She could feel her pussy starting to heat up, the fluids beginning to flow. She turned her back to

Alexis and unhooked the clasp of her bra, slowly and carefully sliding the straps down her arms. She turned to face him and brought the cups of her bra away from her breasts, the firm, full mounds bouncing slightly as she let the bra fall to the floor.

“Continue, Jasmine,” Alexis said sharply, and Jasmine hooked her fingers in the waistband of her panties.

She felt a flicker of embarrassment; she hadn’t exactly chosen her underwear to be seen. But she could see Alexis barely even noticed her clothing—he was focused on her body, while working something in his hands that she couldn’t see.

When she had stepped out of her panties, Jasmine stood in front of Alexis completely naked. She felt vulnerable and almost afraid. Her nipples were still slightly sore from the punishment two days before—not enough to really hurt, but enough for her to feel a moment’s trepidation at the thought of more punishment.

Alexis crossed the room, his gaze caressing her body. “Well, Jasmine,” he said, his hands reaching out to touch and explore her curves. He cupped her breasts, and she shivered at the sensitivity in her nipples. “You’ve been very bad indeed. You’ve cost me thousands of dollars.” Jasmine nodded, arching into Alexis’ teasing touches. His hands drifted down to cup her buttocks, squeezing lightly. “Two punishments in three days—not exactly promising.” He smiled slightly.

“I’m very sorry, Sir,” Jasmine said.

Alexis brought one hand up, pressing his finger against her lips. “No apology yet. First the punishment, then you can apologize.” Jasmine nodded, unable to speak as Alexis undid his tie in quick movements, tugging it free of his collar. “I



think you know what I want from you by now," he said, a faint trace of amusement in his voice.

Jasmine obediently turned her back to him, folded her arms behind her and rested them against the curve just above her buttocks. The silk of the tie brushed against her skin, and Jasmine resisted the urge to pull away as it coiled around her wrists, immobilizing them. Alexis' hands trailed over her body, caressing and teasing her, and she shivered as his fingertips brushed against her sensitive nipples.

Alexis guided Jasmine the few steps to her bed where he sat down, removing his blazer. He pulled Jasmine over his lap, positioning her across his thighs so that her upper body hung over one side, her ass up in the air. He pinned her down with one strong arm against the small of her back, and Jasmine shivered as his other hand slid along the curve of her ass slowly, caressing her.

"Tsk, tsk, Jasmine," Alexis said quietly, his fingertips playing over one of the lingering red welts that striped her ass. "I certainly hope that in the future, I won't be forced to punish you twice in three days. It could become tiresome."

Before Jasmine could reply, Alexis' fingers ceased to caress, and he brought his hand down flat against the curve of her ass in a sharp, quick blow. Jasmine yelped, arching and struggling instinctively, but Alexis held her in place as he struck her a second, third, and fourth time in rapid succession.

Jasmine trembled, whimpering helplessly, as each blow of Alexis' hand sent a shock of tingling pain through her body, heat rising up in each place where he struck. In spite of the pain—or maybe because of it—Jasmine felt her body heating up, her pussy becoming wetter and wetter.

Alexis struck her again and again, mostly focusing on the fleshy curve of her buttocks, but surprising Jasmine as his hand found new, sensitive areas, at the crease where her ass met her thigh, and just below the small of her back. Jasmine gasped, shivering helplessly and struggling against the bindings on her wrists. Her eyes stung and she realized tears were beginning to flow, dropping to the floor as Alexis' blows came harder and faster, each one jolting her whole body.

Right when Jasmine thought she couldn't take another strike, the blows abruptly stopped. Alexis began caressing and kneading her buttocks, and Jasmine moaned in a mixture of relief and overwhelming pleasure. Her ass tingled and burned from the blows, but her pussy was soaking wet. Jasmine panted for breath, her mouth dry and her heart pounding.

Just when she was starting to become accustomed to Alexis' teasing touches, he pulled her up off his lap. Jasmine reeled, the sudden change in position making her dizzy until Alexis steadied her. His gaze on her was intent as he brought his thumbs up to her face, carefully wiping away her tears.

"You are not through being punished yet, Jasmine," he told her firmly. "What you did at work was almost as bad as your deceiving me." He cupped her breasts in his hands, giving them a quick squeeze and Jasmine groaned as the pressure on her sensitive nipples sent a ripple of new pain through her body.

Alexis released the mounds of flesh after a moment, only to begin lightly tweaking her nipples—not as hard as he had rained blows across her ass, but enough to send jolts of electric pain and pleasure through her body. She instinctively leaned back and Alexis clucked his tongue against his teeth, shaking his head in disapproval, sending a fresh chill of apprehension through Jasmine's body.

He turned her around and gave her a careful push, sending Jasmine sprawling on her back onto the surface of her bed.

"Clearly I can't entirely trust you to accept your punishment gracefully," he said, shaking his head once more.

"I'm sorry, Sir," Jasmine said, her voice cracking as Alexis started to walk away from the bed. "I swear, I swear I'll take my punishment. I won't try and get away..."

Alexis didn't listen. He walked around the foot of the bed and out of her range of vision. Jasmine heard him opening the drawers to her bedside table and a rush of embarrassment flooded her.

"Ooh, naughty girl," Alexis said, and Jasmine heard a telltale plastic clatter. She shivered, uncomfortably aware that Alexis was going through the drawer where she kept her toys. "This will do nicely."

Jasmine swallowed with anticipation as she heard Alexis' footfalls on her floor. Her eyes widened as he moved back into her range of vision, his arms full of her toys, as well as one or two things that she didn't recognize.

Alexis looked down at her, smiling slightly as he set down the contents of her drawer. He pulled Jasmine down until her hips were at the edge of the bed, and spread her legs wide; her entire body open to him. "If I'd thought ahead, I would have brought more supplies," Alexis said, sighing as if deeply disappointed.

He picked up one of the selection of items and showed it to Jasmine. It was one of her own vibrators: a pink, plastic wand, not quite as thick or long as Alexis' cock, but the closest thing Jasmine owned. He pressed the button on its

base and Jasmine clenched her teeth as it came to life, buzzing and humming.

"This is still part of your punishment, make no mistake," Alexis said, then trailed the tip of the vibrator along her inner thighs, and Jasmine trembled, twisting and fidgeting as he teased her. "You are not allowed to come. You have to lay right here and hold back until I give you permission."

"Y-yes, Sir," Jasmine said, closing her eyes as the buzzing, humming vibrator moved closer and closer to her soaking wet vulva. Alexis barely brushed it against her labia, and Jasmine inhaled sharply, her whole body tensing.

He teased her relentlessly, bringing it right up against Jasmine's slick folds before retreating, again and again. He began to work the buzzing wand between her labia, barely missing her clit, making her wetter and wetter as she twisted and writhed helplessly. Alexis pinned her down at the hips with his free arm, his body keeping her legs spread as he played with her, changing the speed of the vibrating pulses, barely pressing against her clit, moving all over until Jasmine was certain she couldn't take anymore.

The vibrator withdrew, leaving Jasmine panting, soaking wet and tingling with need. "I think you still need a thorough explanation of your position," Alexis said, his voice rough with desire. "Wouldn't you agree, Jasmine?"

She struggled to catch her breath, licking her dry lips and swallowing against the tightness in her throat. "Yes—yes, Sir, I do," she managed to say, her voice cracking.

She felt Alexis' hands spread her legs even wider and out of her range of vision, heard something else click, followed by a new buzzing hum. Smooth leather straps brushed against her skin, then tightened around her hips and thighs, and Jasmine moaned out as she felt slick plastic, buzzing with

steady vibrations, come to rest against her clit. Alexis tightened the straps until the vibrating node was pressed right against her pleasure center, making her tingle all over with hot and cold flashes of pleasure.

As she adjusted to the sensation, remembering—almost too late—that she wasn't allowed to climax until she received permission, Jasmine heard a liquid, squirting sound cut through the hum that traveled through her clit to the rest of her body. Before her lust-hazed mind could work out what the sound was, she felt Alexis' fingers slipping and sliding down from her pussy and along the crease of her ass. She gasped as his fingertips—slicker than she would have thought possible—swirled and then pressed against her asshole, rubbing against the tight pucker. A startled whimper left her throat as Alexis worked her slowly, pressing unyieldingly past the resistance of the tight ring of muscle.

Jasmine squirmed at the slick, slippery feeling of Alexis's finger sliding into her, wriggling and massaging her as she writhed. It felt strange—but it didn't hurt, particularly as the vibrator continued to buzz and hum against her clit, making it basically impossible to feel anything but pleasure. Her cheeks flushed, and Jasmine knew she should feel more violated as Alexis worked his slick finger slowly and steadily deeper, spreading the slickness along her tight inner muscles. He slipped a second finger inside her, making Jasmine whimper and moan with a mixture of confusion and desire. It felt strange but also wonderful.

"Ahh, you like that don't you," Alexis teased.

"Y-y-yes, Sir," Jasmine said, arching and twisting as Alexis' fingers massaged her.

He spread his fingers apart slowly, moving them in and out, and Jasmine was shocked at how much pleasure it gave her,

mingled with the buzzing hum of the vibrator against her clit. She was struggling to hold back and obey his command that she not reach orgasm. At first, it had seemed easy, but it became harder and harder to resist the temptation to come as Alexis teased, her pleasure building ceaselessly inside her body.

Jasmine clenched her teeth, whimpering as the sensations edged towards becoming torturous, struggling to hold herself together between the buzzing against her clit, the possessive, playing fingers inside her, and the sheer pleasure crackling along her nerves that she wasn't able to give into.

"Who do you belong to, Jasmine?" Alexis asked, and she gasped as she felt his teeth nipping at her inner thigh. "Tell me who you belong to."

"You! You, I belong to you, Sir," the words ripped out of Jasmine's throat, tumbling through her lips as she pitched and writhed.

"Are you ever going to betray me again?" Alexis's voice, slightly ragged with desire, was as confident and demanding as ever.

"N-no, Sir. Never again, I promise." Jasmine's voice rose into a wail as she struggled to retain her self-control. "Please, Sir, please let me come. I can't take anymore, please!" But the torture of having to hold back continued, with Alexis' fingers working her, the buzzing vibrator sending tingling, electric flashes through her body.

Then, suddenly, Alexis' fingers retreated. Jasmine heard a click, and the buzzing against her clit ceased, the straps holding the toy against her body loosening. Jasmine gasped, squirming as she reeled in the aftermath of her unfulfilled desire. She panted, shivering; almost crying so intense was

her feeling of need. Jasmine was trapped in a hazy torment of pleasure without relief, unable to keep track of time as she tingled hot and cold.

Jasmine started as she felt Alexis' hands on her shoulders, pulling her up off of her back. She blinked, shaking her head, and saw that Alexis had stripped out of the last of his clothes. He stood before her completely naked, his cock fully and proudly erect, a little smear of precum shining at the tip.

"Do you want to repeat your apology to me?" Alexis asked, his fingers threading and tangling in her hair as he looked down into her eyes.

"Yes?" Jasmine said, confused. She had forgotten entirely why she was being tortured—the details of her betrayal lost in the haze of her arousal.

Alexis chuckled quietly. "Don't you remember? You were being punished for committing a heinous crime against me and my company, Jasmine. You did a very, very bad thing."

Jasmine frowned in confusion for just a moment longer before the memory of what she had done finally filtered through her lust-addled brain. She gave Alexis a dazed smile, nodding and swallowing against her dry throat.

"I'm very sorry, Sir," Jasmine said, looking up into Alexis' eyes. "I'm sorry I betrayed you and I'm sorry I harmed the company. I promise I will never do anything like that again."

Alexis nodded, caressing her cheek lightly with his thumb. "I appreciate the apology," he said. "But I think we both know you need to do more than that. I want you to show me how sorry you are."

Jasmine raised an eyebrow in query, and Alexis grinned. He tilted her head slightly, bringing the tip of his cock close to her lips, and Jasmine understood in a flash what he wanted.

She opened her mouth slightly, wrapping her lips around the hot, hard flesh as she began to suck and lick eagerly.

Jasmine took Alexis into her mouth gradually, worshiping him with her lips and tongue, moaning as his precum began to flow, coating her mouth. Alexis moaned out, his fingers tightening in her hair; his hips beginning to move as Jasmine worked to give him as much pleasure as he had given her.

Alexis' cock began to twitch between her lips, his body tensing as he came closer and closer to orgasm, and he gently pulled Jasmine away, stroking her cheek lightly. She looked up, disappointed that she wasn't allowed to bring him to orgasm, just as she hadn't been allowed to climax herself.

"Yes, I think you're appropriately sorry for what you did," Alexis said, brushing his thumb against her lips. "And I think you've earned the right to come for me."

Alexis pressed her onto her back and covered her body with his own. Jasmine struggled, wishing she could get her wrists free; wanting to wrap her arms around his shoulders and hold her body tightly to his. Alexis rocked his hips against hers, rubbing his cock along the length of her labia, barely brushing against her clit.

Jasmine whimpered as he teased, not quite penetrating her, not allowing her the satisfaction she craved. Before she could beg him for what she needed, however, Alexis guided the tip of his cock to the opening of her pussy and thrust into her all at once, hard and fast. Jasmine gasped, bringing her hips up to meet Alexis' thrusts as he pushed deeper and deeper inside of her.



"You've been such a good girl," Alexis murmured, kissing her. "Do you want to come for me, Jasmine?" Jasmine nodded, moaning against his lips, so turned on that she was unable to verbalize her desires. "You have five minutes; five minutes to come all over my cock."

Jasmine whimpered, squirming and writhing as Alexis' hips pounded into hers. He held himself up, thrusting deeper inside of her body, his cock rubbing along her inner walls.

She had no idea how much time had passed as she twisted and arched beneath him, her pleasure mounting with every thrust. In what seemed like far less than five minutes the sensations coursing through her reached a peak, every muscle in her body tensing.

"Come for me, Jasmine," Alexis commanded, his voice tight with desire. "Come for me right now."

Jasmine cried out, throwing her head back as wave after wave of pleasure washed over her, so intense it was almost frightening. Jasmine cried out Alexis' name as her orgasm intensified, lost in the pleasure that crackled through her nerves.

Eventually, her spasms of pleasure started to slow down, but when she felt the twitching of Alexis' cock inside of her, heard his long, deep groan of pleasure and the hot, sticky-slick rush of his orgasm, she plunged once more into the depths of her pleasure, moaning out as she shook and trembled, lost to it all.

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## **Chapter Thirty-One**

~

The first thing Jasmine was aware of as she finally came back to herself was the fact that her shoulders ached, but her arms were free. As the darkness began to fall away, she heard Alexis murmuring in her ear.

"You did so well, Jasmine. You took your punishment like such a good girl."

She felt his hands trailing over her body and realized he was cradling her in his arms, holding her tightly against his body. She could still feel the aftershocks of her unbelievable orgasm coursing through her, making her legs feel remote and unreal.

Jasmine opened her eyes, hazily looking up at Alexis. "Hey," she said, smiling slightly. She was exhausted, elated; nothing in the world seemed to matter.

"You're back among the living," Alexis smiled, brushing his lips against her temple.

Jasmine chuckled softly, cuddling closer to him. "That was amazing," she said, shaking her head slightly in disbelief. Jasmine shifted on the bed and felt the lingering slickness along her ass.

"Another time," Alexis murmured in her ear, "I'm going to make good on that admission you made of belonging to me."

Jasmine frowned in confusion. "Hmm?"

He chuckled, kissing her lips. "I saw how much you enjoyed me playing with your tight little ass," Alexis told her. "I'd be a fool not to explore that with you. But I think you've had enough for now."

Jasmine nodded. She wasn't sure she would be able to get her brain functioning for the rest of the day, never mind her body.

"Don't you need to get back at the office?" she asked, suddenly realizing that they must have been together for quite some time.

Alexis shrugged. "Not just yet," he told her, kissing her lightly again. "One of the tenets of being a good Master is ensuring the appropriate amount of aftercare with the slave." Alexis held Jasmine's body tightly against his. "If I didn't have time to make sure you recovered from your punishment, I never would have started it."

Jasmine could only dimly understand what he was saying, but she nodded acceptance of his explanation.

Alexis held her a little longer, telling her how wonderfully she had done, how beautiful she was, how much pleasure it had given him watching her struggle to control herself.

"You, my dear, are a perfect little slave," he murmured, one hand dipping down between her legs to stroke her slowly. "That is a difficult quality to find. I'd be prepared to forgive you of far greater sins than those you've committed." Jasmine giggled and Alexis flashed her a grin, sitting up and pulling her towards him for a long, hungry kiss.

"Now you have been," he told her finally. "And I do have to go now, unfortunately." Alexis sighed, and began to dress quickly. "Take the rest of the day off to relax, Jasmine; you've endured a lot." He gave her another brief smile. "But I will expect to see you at work tomorrow." Jasmine looked at him in shock. "You will be absolutely welcome, no questions asked."

Alexis leaned in and kissed her one final time, tousling her hair playfully before walking out of her bedroom.

Jasmine stared after him, confused and exhausted after the emotional stresses of the day; he was absolutely right that she would need the rest of the day to recuperate.

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## **Chapter Thirty-Two**

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The next day, Jasmine woke up before her alarm, her whole body tingling with the memory of her afternoon with Alexis, and his promise that she would not be fired. Since he had told her before leaving that he would see her at work, Jasmine decided that even if her buttocks were a little sore from multiple spankings, and even if she still felt tender between her legs, and along her nipples, she was going to dress up and look her best.

She took advantage of her early awakening to take a long shower and do her makeup carefully before sectioning her hair and braiding it. In spite of what Alexis had said the day before, Jasmine knew that accusations would likely still be flying around the office and she not only wanted to look her best for Alexis, but to avoid anyone suspecting that the reason for her absence had been because she was guilty.

She ate breakfast with an appetite she hadn't known she possessed, and left for the office fifteen minutes early. Jasmine felt almost as though she'd taken a drug, the lingering pleasure and relief in her body was so strong. Not only was she not going to lose her job in disgrace, but she hadn't lost him either. She had gone from the depths of despair to unparalleled joy in a matter of hours, and the prospect of continuing to see Alexis intrigued her as much as his hint at exploring her enjoyment of being played with anally.

Waiting at a stoplight, Jasmine shivered at the memory of Alexis' fingers working inside of her. She had never let anyone touch her like that before—and yet when Alexis had done it, it had felt so right, and so good.

In spite of Alexis' assurance that she would be welcome in the office, Jasmine dreaded her coworkers finding out what she'd done. The source of the leak would doubtlessly be revealed eventually, and the fact that she wouldn't be fired

for it was almost worse. Jasmine took a deep breath as she pulled into her usual parking spot, determined to hold her head up high and deal with the rumors as best as she could.

In contrast to two days before, as Jasmine walked into the office, she found everyone oddly muted. While she could understand the initial furor decreasing over time, as everyone adjusted to the investigation, the atmosphere was different somehow.

"Oh, hey, you're in today," one of Jasmine's coworkers, a woman named Alana, said with a somewhat hesitant smile.

"Yeah," Jasmine said, taking a quick breath as she glanced around the office. "Don't talk to me about yesterday; I was sick as a dog, puking my brains out."

Alana nodded sympathetically, looking Jasmine over quickly. "You're looking great today," she said, giving her a respectful nod.

"Lots of hard work went into this," Jasmine told her wryly. "I thought it would make me feel better." She started to ask Alana what was going on, but the woman smiled sadly and said she had better get back to her desk before her boss came looking.

Jasmine tried to shake off her misgivings, but as she continued to her desk she wondered what could possibly have caused the furtive, almost awed glances that came her way. On spotting her, all of her colleagues looked as though they wanted to talk to her, to ask her some pressing question, before looking away just as quickly. Jasmine thought to herself with the first stirrings of dread and alarm that they must all have found out that she had been the source of the leak—and were wondering how she had managed not to get fired.



Jasmine reached her desk in a state of confusion and set her purse down, reaching over to turn on her computer. Soon enough, she was sure, she would find out what was going on. It was bad enough knowing she was the reason for the furor days before; having no idea of the cause of this new disturbance made her even more nervous. She pulled her chair out and was about to sink down into her seat, but a sound behind her—a murmur of conversation followed by the clearing of a throat—stopped her.

“I’m glad I caught you before you got started for the day.”

Jasmine’s eyes widened as she recognized Alexis’ voice. Her heart started to beat faster in her chest as she turned around to see him standing a few feet away, behind her.

Alexis grinned slightly. “I came to inform you that your services will no longer be needed here,” Alexis said.

Jasmine felt her stomach give a lurch—he had told her she would be welcomed back to work! “What?” Jasmine asked, eyes stinging as she gripped the back of her chair tightly.

Alexis’s lips twitched with a smile. “You will no longer be needed here, because you are going to be working upstairs,” Alexis said. “In light of your recent performance, I would like to offer you a position working directly under me.”

Jasmine stared at him in shock as the rest of the department burst into polite applause. It didn’t even matter to her that her coworkers were probably not in the slightest pleased for her to be receiving such a great promotion.

She took a deep breath and smiled. “What can I say—I accept,” she announced, loud enough to be heard over the cheers.

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## **Chapter Thirty-Three**

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Jasmine was in a state of shock as Alexis led her out of the office and down to the ground floor, where his private car waited.

“What’s the point in working directly under me if you can’t come away from the office with me?” Alexis asked playfully, propelling her towards the door the driver held open.

Jasmine climbed in, bemused and relieved. “This is way, way more than I anticipated,” she said, finally remembering that before her sabotage had come to light, Alexis had mentioned that she was due for a promotion; the furor of the ensuing days had led her to forget his comment entirely.

Alexis climbed in behind her and reached for a metal bucket containing a chilled bottle of champagne. The driver closed them in and walked around to the front compartment, leaving them in privacy, and with a quick, deft gesture, Alexis opened the bottle.

“I did actually look over your performance record before I made my decision,” Alexis said, smiling slightly. “It seemed to me like you’ve been held back from several promotion opportunities and besides, I can see more than just professional advantages to having you working directly under me. Personal reasons, let’s say.” He poured the champagne into two waiting flutes and handed one to Jasmine as the car pulled away from the curb.

“Personal reasons?”

Alexis nodded, clinking his glass against hers before taking a sip. “I have another offer to make you—one that I didn’t want the whole office to be privy to,” he told her, and Jasmine raised an eyebrow in query. “I want you to be my girlfriend. Of course, if you agree, everyone will know about

it eventually, since we'll be showing up together to all the ridiculous events I'm obligated to attend."

Jasmine shook her head, grinning. "You really want me to be your girlfriend?" she asked, even more surprised than she had been at the offer of her promotion.

Alexis nodded, holding her gaze. "Like, my real girlfriend, not just someone I..." he grinned.

"Oh, there will be plenty of that. I don't think we'll ever exhaust how much fun we can have together," Jasmine laughed, taking another sip of her champagne. "Okay, I will be your girlfriend," she said, unable to stop smiling even as her cheeks began to ache.

They had nearly finished the bottle by the time the car pulled up to Alexis' hotel, and Jasmine felt almost as though she was floating on air, barely able to contain the happiness that filled her. Alexis led her up to his penthouse suite eagerly, his hands trailing over her body in a possessive caress in the empty elevator, his lips hungry against hers.

As soon as the door to the suite was closed behind them, Alexis began stripping off her clothes, touching and teasing her everywhere, cupping her breasts through the thin lace of her bra and rolling her nipples between her fingers. Almost immediately, Jasmine was powerfully aroused; her whole body humming with desire.

"I can't wait to have you in the office with me," Alexis murmured into her neck as his hand slipped up between her legs, his palm rubbing through her panties against her already slick folds. "At my beck and call, always available to be punished and teased..." Jasmine shivered at the picture the words formed in her mind. "And then at the end of the day, I can bring you home and make you come for me over and over again, until you beg me to stop."

Alexis guided Jasmine to the couch in the lounge area, pressing her onto her back and covering her body with his own as the last of their clothes fell away. They moved together as one, touching each other all over, kissing anywhere their lips could reach. Jasmine felt her pleasure building up every moment, her body tingling with it. In what seemed like mere moments she clutched Alexis' shoulders, pressing her body against his as wave after wave of pleasure coursed through her, making her tremble and shiver from the force of it.

They lounged together in the aftershocks of their mutual orgasm, and Jasmine rested her cheek against Alexis' shoulder, happier than she had been in months.

"You know," she said as her heartbeat finally began to slow, the last spasms of pleasure abating. "I should really thank James for being such an asshole on that date we had."

Alexis laughed. "Maybe I'll invest a small sum in his company out of gratitude," he said, trailing his hands languorously over her body. He kissed her lightly on the lips, pulling her closer on the couch. "My dearest Jasmine, when you told me yesterday that I'd made you feel small..." he shook his head, his bright eyes full of regret. "You are a beautiful, intelligent, sexually aware woman. You should never feel small or insignificant." He kissed her again.

"I'm sure you didn't do it deliberately," Jasmine said when he released her lips.

Alexis smiled, shaking his head. "No, but it's still my fault. From now on, I am going to make sure that your work is always rewarded, that your beautiful, submissive soul is satisfied, and that you never, ever want for anything."

Jasmine's eyes widened. "That is—kind of extreme," she said, laughing a little bit. "I would happily settle for just being...happy."

Alexis grinned, kissing her hungrily. His hands began to caress her again with an unmistakable intent, and Jasmine realized that Alexis was going to spend the rest of the day—and however many days to come—holding her in his arms, giving her pleasure after pleasure.

"What good is it being a billionaire if I can't spoil my girlfriend?" he asked. "Of course, when you misbehave, you must be prepared for me to punish you severely."

Jasmine grinned at him mischievously. "I'll ensure there are a dozen typos in the first thing you have me write for you, then."

Alexis raised a dark eyebrow, then once again covered her body with his own. "I'm going to have to invest in some work-friendly toys to keep you in line," he murmured, rocking his hips against hers, edging towards her. "In the meantime, however..."

And as Alexis filled her up once more, Jasmine realized that she would never have a better boss—or a better boyfriend—than Alexis Kyrkos.

**The End**