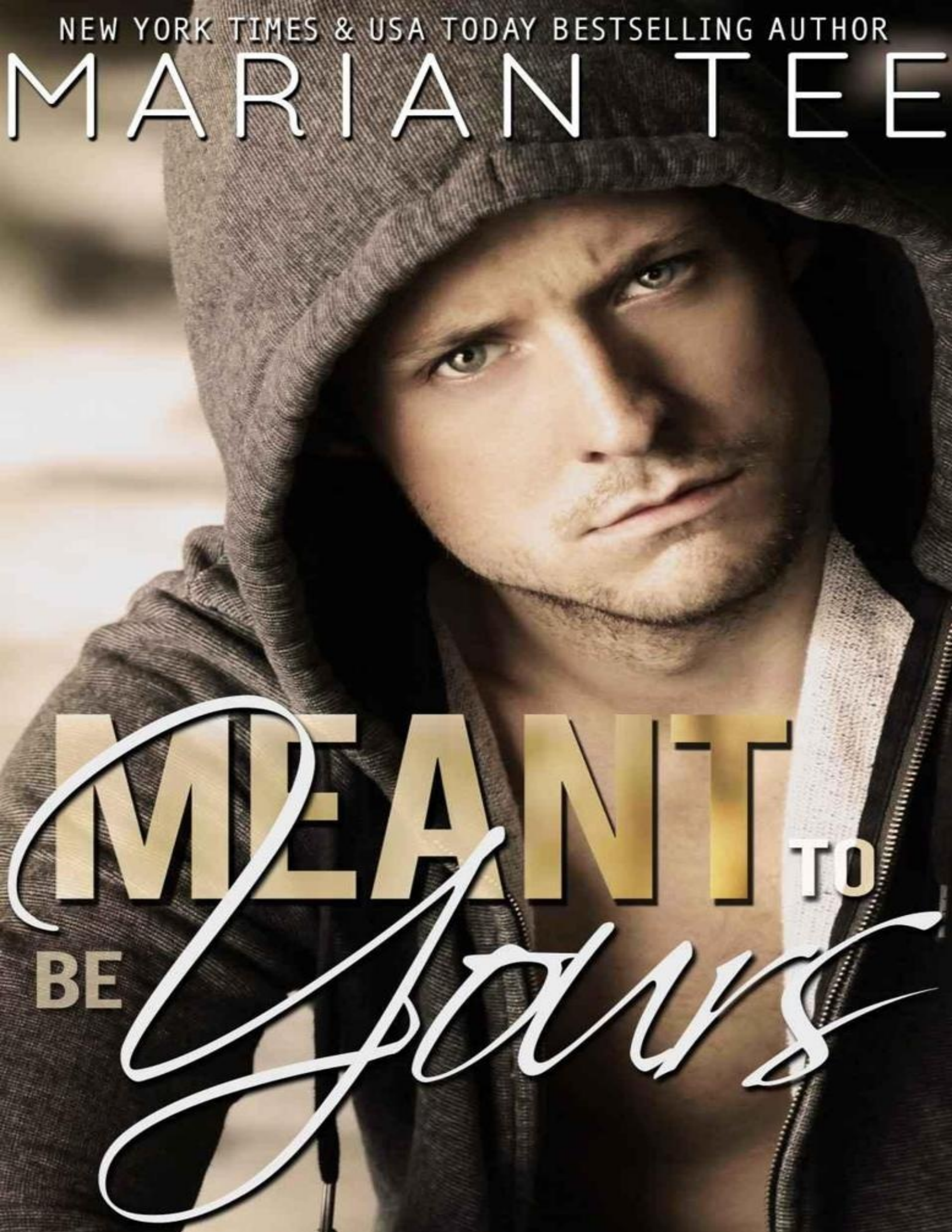
NEW YORK TIMES & USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MARIAN TEE



MEANT TO BE Yours

Meant to Be Yours
(Derek and Jaike's Story Book 2)
By Marian Tee

About Meant to Be Yours

After years of trying to deny her feelings, curvy 21-year-old bookworm Jaike Hepburn has succumbed to the inevitable. **She no longer cares what the whole school thinks if they find out the truth**: the devilishly wicked and gorgeous billionaire heir **Derek Christopoulos has become her Dom, and she his Sub.**

By belonging to Derek, Jaike realizes that time, space, privacy - all of it means nothing to Derek. **He wants to be WITH her**. **IN her**. Do everything **FOR her**. *Every second of the day.*

Life with her possessive Dom is beautifully twisted and dangerously addictive...**until the day Derek rips her heart into pieces.**

That's when Jaike realizes the truth.

He may be her one and only Dom, but she is just one of the many Subs in his bed.

You can read Unwillingly Yours (the first half of Derek and Jaike's story) as part of the **Captivated: 4-in-1 Friends Romance Boxed Set**.

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Wolf Fight

Wolf Games (Out Soon)
Wolf Kisses (Out Soon)

Meant to Be Yours
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Prologue

Derek Christopoulos slowly ran his hand down the silky back of the woman sleeping next to him. It was smooth, flawless, and sexy – exactly the way he liked it.

His fingers drifted further down until he reached the bed covers. As he inched them further down, the upper slopes of her bottom were slowly exposed.

Looking at them, Derek had a feeling her skin here would turn a pretty shade of pink if he gave it one little spank. Nothing particularly hard or painful, just something with enough pressure for her skin to react.

He thought of dominating her, possessing her, and fucking her like she was his and would always be his, and his cock jutted to life, fully engorged and aching for a pussy to pound into.

The woman in his bed stirred, and Derek waited for her to face him, his heart beating madly against his hard chest. Maybe with this woman, his instincts would finally be wrong. She could finally be the one—

She started to smile at him, but her smile disappeared and was replaced by a wary, nervous look on her face when her gaze met Derek's.

Derek lowered his head. He was breathing hard, silently, his fists clenching against the bed covers in impotent frustration.

She was *not* the one.

It was as if his ideal girl was a ghost, someone who did not exist. Disappointment hit him at the realization, his failure a bitter pill to swallow. It made him want to punch something, to roar out his anger. It made him want to lash out…but he didn't.

Because he was Derek Christopoulos, and everyone was counting on him to pretend his dark side didn't exist.

When he looked up, the darkness had completely disappeared from his storm-colored eyes. The girl in front of him visibly relaxed, and it was pathetically easy to read the way she convinced herself that she had just been imagining things.

Derek Christopoulos had not looked at her like he wanted to devour her, had not looked at her like he would take pleasure in her pain.

He was just a seventeen-year-old kid, for God's sake. She had to be crazy, thinking such thoughts. He was a kind and gentle soul, a young carefree playboy who had everything – money, looks, fame, and a loving family. He wouldn't have any reason to be so twisted.

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Derek found the look of relief in the girl's gaze sickening. With a smile that didn't reach his eyes, he pulled the woman close to him, kissing her so he

wouldn't have to see her face. Fucked her so neither of them would have to think.

But it wasn't enough. It was never enough these days, and the feeling of emptiness persisted even when hours had passed, his lover was gone, and he was getting inside the limousine with his parents.

"My baby boy looks so handsome," his mother teased, pinching his cheeks. His father, seated next to Samantha, rolled his eyes and gave his a son a dry look. *Humor her. You have no choice. She's your mother.*

Derek's lips twitched, but he obediently humored his mother, like he always did. He also pushed away all other dangerous thoughts in his mind, his discipline in keeping his personal problems far away from his public persona absolute.

Unfortunately, the pinching still hadn't stopped after five full minutes and Derek groaned, "*Mom*."

Samantha giggled, and even the normally aloof Richard smiled.

Derek moved to sit across his parents, deciding that it was best for his cheeks to put as much distance between himself and his mother.

"If you keep doing that to him, he'll end up moving out next time," Richard murmured teasingly to his wife, but his words were half-serious.

"I can't help it," she murmured back. "My little boy is just too cute for words." She reached for her husband's bowtie as she spoke. It didn't really need arranging, but she just wanted an excuse to touch Richard. She had always been a proud woman, but while she was cheerfully open with her affections with Derek, she couldn't manage to be the same with Richard. Even after all these years, she still felt self-conscious with Richard, still felt that she had to prove herself worthy of him because he had always been irritatingly successful in everything he did while she had been the proverbial ugly duckling of her family.

Richard surprised Samantha by catching her hand and bringing it to his lips. When her startled gaze met his, he said quietly, "Do not be nervous."

"I'm not."

"You are my wife. The woman I will only love. Nobody will look down on you." He pressed another kiss to her fingers. "I promise you, *kyria*, the time will come when you will look back on this and find yourself laughing at how unreasonably nervous you were."

She snorted.

His lips twitched. "Ah. That sound…a fond reminder of why I chose to marry an American heiress instead of a biddable Greek maiden—"

She snorted again, pulling her hand away from his hold. But the flush in her cheeks was unmistakable proof of the pleasure Samantha felt with her husband's words. Richard wasn't much for talk, but oh, when he spoke, there wasn't a time

when he failed to make her blush.

Her flush deepened when she glanced at Derek and saw the way he was rolling his eyes at her. “You always fall for whatever Dad says,” her son said.

“Of course she does,” Richard said mildly. “She is my wife. She’s meant to giggle and blush about everything I…” He ended with a grunt, Samantha having elbowed him painfully.

The ride to the party remained noisy with Samantha’s passionate protests and Richard’ deadpan responses. They were opposites in every way, and yet the love his parents shared was undeniable, an intangible force that sometimes made Derek’s heart clench. They were so damn perfect, it made him wonder why God had to punish them with a son as dark and twisted as he was.

When they reached their destination, Derek’s mask was in place. No matter what, he would make sure that he would never shame his parents, never do or say anything that would have them realize he was not normal.

The three of them stuck together on the red carpet as was their usual, portraying a united front that was nowadays rarely glimpsed among society’s most elite classes.

“Such a sweet boy. But what can you expect? His parents are perfect. It’s a no-brainer he’s just as perfect as he is.”

“I wonder if he’ll stay that way, though. Don’t you think that boy seems a little…it’s just like he’s hiding something.”

“I don’t care if he’s underage. I just know he’s going to fuck me senseless. He has that look about him. He’s nothing like his saintly father. I’d bet my money on that.”

The first time Derek heard people speak about him, he had wondered if they knew he could hear them. Had wondered if they wanted him to hear them and were all waiting for him to react. To drop his guard and reveal the truth about himself.

But now, he no longer cared. Now, he knew how to play the game as well as they did. He was an angel to those who took him at face value, but to those who saw a little too much – he was something else.

Like the sultry-looking woman standing a few feet from him, a taunting smile on her ruby-red lips.

Those who doubted him were usually women, and they all wanted the same thing.

He walked straight to her.

They looked into each other’s eyes, and there was no need to say a word.

Thirty minutes later, and they were inside one of the unused rooms on the second floor. The woman was on her knees, her hands on his dick.

“Why did you lock the door? Scared Daddy and Mommy would catch you with me?”

His fingers curled into her hair, and the strength in that grip had her swallowing and making her wet. A smile curved on his thin, beautiful lips, one that had her licking her own. And when he spoke, his deep dark tone surprised her, and more than that, it made her realize that Derek Christopoulos was no boy.

He might just be seventeen, but there was nothing boyish about the way he looked at her, the way he *owned* her when he said, “You’re wasting what little time I can spare you, Mrs. Klasky. Do you want my dick or not?”

“I want it.” She hated the way she sounded so needy, but she couldn’t help it. So long…it had been so long since she had met someone like him. A real Dom. One who was born to command women – Subs – like her.

“Then what are you waiting for?”

She closed her lips over his dick, and when she felt him swelling inside her mouth, moisture pooled between her thighs. When she felt him tightening his grip on her hair, she became even wetter.

When he came, she was happy to swallow every last drop, and when it was over, she looked up at him, wanting more of his authority over her. There was just something so deliciously thrilling in having a man like Derek Christopoulos take command of her, something so liberating in the knowledge that he had the power to do anything with her.

“D-did you like it?” she heard herself ask. A part of her was stunned that she had said the words, that she was actually asking someone more than ten years her junior something so immature.

He stroked her cheek. “Yes.” He traced her lips. “Do you want me to fuck you now?”

She whispered, “Yes.”

“Are you sure, Mrs. Klasky? I’m not the type of master who’s so easily pleased.”

From any other man, the words would have sounded conceited and irksome, something she’d normally answer with a slap to the man’s face. But from Derek Christopoulos, the words were thrillingly erotic, inflaming her body and making her pussy ache badly. She had heard of Doms like him, but she had only thought they were untrue, had thought they were only stories made up by dissatisfied Subs like her.

But this boy…this man…he was the real deal. A natural-born Dom, and to be owned by someone like him—

She moved away and arranged herself on all fours. It was said that with men like Derek, a woman had to “earn” the right to be fucked on her back.

And because she wanted to have that right, she waited, quietly, submissively.

Without warning, a cock penetrated her from behind. Thick and hard, filling her to the point that she felt she was close to bursting. It hurt so good, and when he began to move, one hand gripping her hair while the other held her by the hip, she began to cry because he was fucking her so beautifully hard.

The pleasure that rocked his body was sharp, hot, and impersonal. It had his cock happy, but his mind remained detached.

In three minutes, he would have the woman coming.

In ten minutes, he would have her begging to see him again, and he would make no promises except for one thing: that if she wanted him to fuck her again, she better mind her own business and never talk about him except as the perfect son of Richard and Samantha Christopoulos.

In twenty minutes, he would be back at the party, circulating like nothing had happened. He would act like the son every parent could ever hope for: handsome, intelligent, kind, charming, dutiful, and courteous. He would act like the boy every girl would want in a boyfriend: cool and popular, arrogant and demanding without being obnoxious about it.

He would be everything anyone and everyone wanted him to be.

Because of *her.*

Because he needed to believe that one day, he would still find *her.*

The more sensible part of Derek told him he was waiting for nothing, but he didn't want to believe that. He couldn't afford to believe that. If he did, then he might as well admit that he would go crazy one day.

Because that was what would happen. If he didn't find that one person he could share his darkness with—

No.

He couldn't let himself think that. She would come. He had waited for her for two years now, waited for her since the day he realized he was not…like the others. He could damn well wait for more. He would wait forever until the girl meant for him came.

And when she did…

God help her, because Derek had every intention of claiming her and never letting her go. He would be her heaven and hell, the one to cage her and give her wings to fly, the one to torment and satisfy her in ways no other man could. And she would be his...completely. Heart. Body. Soul.

Chapter One

Seven years later

At half-past nine, the elegant and spacious corridors of Blake Hall were often quiet and empty. Students with morning classes had already left while those with afternoon classes wouldn't be rising for a few hours. The usual silence, however, was shattered at one of the floors. The door of one of the dormitory's corner suites had just opened, and if anyone had cared to peek, what they'd see was likely to have rendered them speechless with shock.

A girl was clinging hard to the door sill as her companion tried to get her out of the room.

"Just come with me a bit," the man said in a coaxing voice.

His name was Derek Christopoulos, and he was inarguably the most famous student in Christopoulos University, an institution his own family had founded.

Tall, dark-haired, and with striking blue-gray eyes, his looks were as close to perfection as it could be humanly possible. His background was impeccable, his mother from an American clan that could rival the Vanderbilts, his father from a Greek family who had been active in the political arena even before the birth of Greece's democracy.

Even at twenty-four, Derek was considered legendary because of his wickedly irresistible charm. Women swooned over him while all the men wanted to be friends with him. Even political analysts had acknowledged Derek as one of the major reasons why his father kept getting elected. A father who had successfully raised someone like Derek Christopoulos to become smart, responsible, and *not* an asshole could definitely be trusted with a seat in the Senate.

It had been said that whatever Derek Christopoulos wanted, he could always get either with a smile or with his impressive skills of persuasion. Such a thing, however, was not evident that morning, as Derek tried to unsuccessfully reason with the girl he had been obsessed with for years.

"Don't be stubborn. Just let go—"

"I don't want to!" Her name was Jaike Hepburn, and she was almost as famous as Derek – but all for the wrong reasons. For over three years, students in Christopoulos University had known her as the quiet, studious, and extremely plain girlfriend of the Student Council President Angelo Valencia III.

As of yesterday, students knew her as TGTPCOBINDCGWAQM, an acronym that everyone only dared use behind Jaike's back. It meant *The Girlfriend the President Cheated on But Is Now Derek Christopoulos' Girlfriend with a Question Mark.* There were still a number of girls clinging hard to the

hope that last night's events were just a nightmare, and Derek Christopoulos hadn't really admitted to the world he was indeed taken.

Curvy and dark-haired, Jaike was dressed in one of her standard spinster outfits: loose blouse, loose slacks, and boring-looking leather flats. She was definitely not the type to attract someone like Derek Christopoulos, and she had always known that. Unfortunately, Derek didn't seem to think the same. Even worse, *her body* didn't think the same either, with the way it burned at the parts that Derek touched.

Jaike tightened her hold on the door sill. "How many times do I have to tell you?" Her words were part demand, part plea. "I don't want to—"

"But you don't have a choice, *koukla mou.*" Derek was torn between amusement and exasperation. God, she was so hardheaded. Always had been from the start. If he hadn't been born arrogant, her continuous rebuffs would have been ego crushing. While there were enough people in the world to get him on People's Sexiest Persons Alive list, Derek had lost count of the number of times Jaike had turned him down for a date.

Jaike shook her head vigorously. If only she could shout at him. But of course, she couldn't, not if she wanted to hide the fact that Derek had spent the night in her room. Everyone in uni knew how Derek was everything *but* a morning person. If they saw him now—

Her gaze strayed to him…and stayed there as Jaike found herself unwillingly captivated.

He still wore last night's clothes, but somehow, Jaike thought despairingly, a rumpled-looking Derek Christopoulos only appeared more gorgeous and so much sexier in her eyes. Bed-mussed blond hair that would make any woman wish she could run her fingers through, a day's stubble darkening his jaw that would make any woman wonder how it would feel like having it tickle their skin —

And oh God, his body. It was hell, sheer hell, knowing what she knew now. It was like she had developed X-ray vision overnight and now, even with the famous Greek playboy fully clothed, she *still* saw him as he was last night.

Naked, every inch of his smooth, bronze body exposed, every beautiful muscle defined, and his long, hard—

Derek was smirking at her. "Stare all you want, babe. I'm all yours."

"You wish!" Turning red, Jaike resumed struggling with a vengeance.

Laughing, he resumed trying to pull her away. In truth, he could have easily done so if he really wanted to, but that wouldn't be as fun as seeing Jaike hang on with all her might.

However, when another minute had passed—

Derek said in exasperation, “Just come with me.”

“I don’t want to. You said you were going to blindfold me!”

“Naturally. I wouldn’t trust you to keep your eyes closed.”

She said hotly, “I’m not the type to cheat—”

“True. But you also like doing everything *I don’t* want you to do.”

She opened her mouth then closed it again, deciding not to argue the point.

“So just let go—”

“Don’t want to!”

His smile disappeared. “If you don’t let go right this instant—”

“No, no, no—”

He let go of her hand. She started to sigh in relief, but the next moment she found herself shrieking instead as Derek suddenly hefted her up with an arm around her waist.

A silent gasp escaped her as she tried to wriggle free from his hold even as her legs kicked in the air. She wanted to shout at him but didn’t dare, not wanting the other students on her floor to wake up.

“Still not letting go?”

She shook her head fiercely.

“Are you sure? Because this position you’re in…” He gave her a thoughtful look. “Don’t you think if I reposition myself in front of you, my cock…your mouth…”

Jaike didn’t even have to think about it. “You can put me down now.” *Ass.*

Derek chuckled. “I know what you’re thinking.” But even as he spoke, he was already gently lowering her to the floor.

He ruffled her hair. “Good girl.”

She didn’t answer, afraid that her voice would give her away. Why did it feel like she was emitting stupid pink hearts in the air just because of those two words? It wasn’t like she wanted to be a good girl for him, did she?

“Ready?”

Jaike started in surprise as Derek dangled a black silk handkerchief in front of her eyes. She nodded, and he started to wrap the silk around her eyes. As her world darkened bit by bit, Jaike couldn’t deny the shameful feeling of excitement that rose inside her.

God, she was so, so twisted.

Something hot suddenly touched her ear, and a delicious shiver traveled down her body as she realized Derek was licking her ear. “*Derek*.” But instead of a whispered protest, his name ended up sounding like a helpless whimper.

Red-hot desire, laced with a fierce sense of protectiveness, blazed through him at the sound of his name on Jaike’s lips – proof that the girl he had

determinedly chased for such a long time was finally his. The girl he had been waiting for all his life was finally *his.*

As he held her hand, he told her half-seriously, “I should blindfold you more often. You sound so much more biddable—”

She growled as she tried to hit him. He dodged her easily, letting go of her hand, but she kept moving, trying to hit him—

Derek suddenly caught hold of her hand. “Not there, babe. That’s my cock.”

Jaike froze.

“But if you really want to touch it…”

Jaike shook her head quickly. “Of course not!”

“Are you sure? Because I can be easily persuaded—”

“Can you please just take me wherever it is you want us to go?”

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Jaike was quiet throughout the ride, and Derek didn’t force her to be otherwise, knowing the girl next to him needed time to think. That was better than the state he had found her in this morning.

She had looked so broken and lost at the rooftop it had his chest squeezing hard. It had made him want to shake some sense into her. Why did she have to be so damn stubborn, forcing herself to be so independent when she clearly needed him? When would she accept that surrendering to him was her destiny?

“We’re here, sir.” The driver’s words pulled Derek out of his thoughts.

“Thanks, Dodson. Just wait here - we’ll only be for a short while.” Shaking his head when his driver-slash-bodyguard made a move to come down and open the door for him, Derek opened his own door and stepped out. He hated having people fuss over him, and he only tolerated it when he was in the public eye. There wasn’t really a need for it, not when his family had undercover bodyguards tailing him all the time.

Bending down, Derek took Jaike’s hand, who tried to pull away when he tried to assist her out. His lips twitched at her instinctive resistance. “Don’t force me to carry you out, Jaike.”

At the warning, Jaike reluctantly gave in, doing her best not to jerk as Derek’s hand gripped hers once more. She couldn’t remember being *this* sensitive to Derek’s touch. It was as if every brush of their bodies against each other made her remember last night. And every time she did remember—

Jaike’s mouth went dry and she swallowed several times. She was really twisted. She had never been like this with Angelo, and he had been her boyfriend for three years.

When Jaike got out of the car, she immediately reached for the blindfold to uncover her eyes. But before her fingers could reach it, Derek had slapped her

hand away like a child caught with her hand in the cookie jar.

"That hurts," she yelped. Actually, it didn't hurt that much, but she was hoping she could guilt-trip him into releasing her.

Derek rolled his eyes, not even willing to dignify the words with an answer.

"It really did," she insisted.

"Just a few moments more, we're almost there," he said instead.

Wind chimes playing in the air told her they were going through a door, and then she heard a male voice greeting Derek by name. *He didn't even sound surprised that Derek had a blindfolded woman with him*, Jaike thought waspishly, making her snipe, "Do you do this often?"

Derek glanced down at Jaike in surprise. "Do what often?"

"Never mind," she muttered, feeling silly for caring. She felt Derek cup her chin and though she tried to turn her head away, it was impossible.

Derek repeated the question. He had a feeling whatever it was bothered Jaike greatly.

She started to shrug, but stopped when Derek's lips suddenly covered hers. She struggled right away, not knowing where they were and who might be looking. But it was no use. Derek's lips moved seductively against hers, his tongue shaping her lips but never quite going inside until she found herself tiptoeing. She didn't want to, but the way he kissed her—

Derek, sitting naked on her bed, his dick jutting proudly, big, strong, and hard—

Derek, saying in a voice made harsh with desire, "Say you're mine."

And Jaike, naked in front of him, shaking with desire for him, whispering, "Yours."

Her fingers clutched his shirt, a wordless plea for him to kiss her the way she wanted – the way a girl like her wanted to be kissed.

He whispered against her mouth, "Tell me what you were thinking." Before she could answer, he continued, in a voice that promised forbidden pleasure, "Tell me and I'll kiss you the way you want me to."

Derek licked her lower lip, slowly, thoroughly.

Jaike gasped.

"Tell me."

Her eyes closed against the blindfold. "I was wondering if you constantly bring girls here blindfolded."

"Why do you think that?" Derek was bemused. Of all things, he hadn't expected that.

"Because…the other guy…he didn't seem so surprised that I'm blindfolded —" She stopped talking when she heard Derek chuckle.

“You were jealous.”

She could hear the pleasure in his voice, underlined by his smirk. It had her struggling against his hold, but his arms only tightened around her.

“Let me go—”

“Nope. I wouldn’t want you to think I don’t keep my promises.”

“I don’t want—”

And then he was kissing her again, but this time it was *that* way. His tongue pushed between her lips, forcing them to part, and passion exploded inside her as their tongues touched. Her fingers clutched his shirt desperately, the only thing that kept her from falling to the floor. His kiss made her feel so beautifully weak, so wonderfully hot. It made her feel breathless and mindless—

Derek forced himself to slow down, to put a stop to the kiss and pull away. If he didn’t, he would end up making love to Jaike, never mind where they were. “Later, baby,” he promised before kissing her forehead.

Somehow, that kiss felt even more intimate, making her feel vulnerable.

She felt Derek touching her hair. A second later, the blindfold was off, and she blinked against the bright incandescent light shining down at them. At first, Jaike thought she was inside a really classy boutique, with its luxuriously elegant interior and its smiling attendant, a middle-aged gentleman with a genuine Rolex on his wrist, dressed in a suit and tie.

But then she saw the walls. Those cream-colored walls, with its expensive wallpaper, and…*whips.*

Various lengths, designs, but they were just that: whips.

The attendant caught sight of where she was looking and said proudly, “All of them are handmade, and only the finest leather’s used. The handles are gold-plated and if mademoiselle is interested, these whips also come with matching cuffs.”

Her stricken gaze followed the attendant as he walked towards one of the display cases. Inside it was an assortment of handcuffs, and all of them were studded with gems.

Next to it was another display case, and that was the real clincher. It was filled with butt plugs, and none of them even looked like it would fit her mouth.

Jaike made an about face and headed for the door. “I’m going.”

Derek laughed, easily catching hold of her hand and whirling her back to his side. “And that’s why I thought I had to blindfold you to get you here.” Looking at the store’s attendant, he asked, “Are they ready, Finlay?”

The older man beamed. “Of course, sir. If you would excuse me for a moment…” He headed towards a metal door, placing his hand on a scanning pad. A green light blinked on top of the door before it opened.

Such level of security had Jaike glancing nervously at Derek. “You’re not going to give me a…”

He understood right away what she couldn’t say and didn’t know whether to be insulted or relieved. “Marrying me is that bad?”

She said seriously, “Someone like you will always be bad for me, Derek. And vice versa.”

He shook his head. “You’re wrong.”

“You can’t be too sure—”

“You may think that we’re both bad for each other, but that could be a good thing, too.” He bent down and tweaked her nose as if in punishment. “And to think you seemed so smart.” Straightening, he asked, “Tell me, if two negative forces are combined…”

An exasperated smile touched her lips when she realized what he was implying. But she protested anyway, “It doesn’t work like that—”

“It does. Now, stop arguing since Finlay’s back with what I’ve ordered.”

Derek turned them both around to face Finlay, his arm around her waist preventing her from bolting once more when she saw what was inside the opened velvet box the attendant was carrying.

“Derek!”

It wasn’t a ring.

It was something…more.

For both of them, at least, it was something more.

She brushed her fingers against the circle of metal lying on the bed of white velvet. It was cold to touch and black as midnight. “What’s it made of?”

“Onyx.” He took it out of the box. “May I?”

The fierce light of possession burning in his stormy eyes made her swallow and nod. Oh God, how could she refuse him when he was looking at her like that? He was dying to own her – to call her his. And if she was honest, if she had been honest from the very start, she had been dying a little each day, too, not being able to belong to him.

Derek’s heart hammered against his chest as he slowly lowered the choker, circling it around her throat. With one loud click, he had the silver clasp locked in place. Placing his hands on her shoulders, he gently turned her around so they could see her reflection on the gilded full-length mirror mounted on the wall.

“Do you like it?”

She nodded. “It’s…b-beautiful.” And it was. The kind of beautiful that called out to her soul, a melody that only he could hum and she could hear.

Derek couldn’t stop gazing at Jaike’s reflection. His voice gravelly with desire, he demanded, “Do you know…God, do you know what this does to me,

seeing you wear something that symbolizes you're mine?"

His hand on her waist started to move up, caressing her back as it reached her nape, making her shiver, and then he was fisting her hair, the action making her mouth dry. The gesture was unbelievably primal, but somehow it felt heartbreakingly tender, too, and she didn't resist when he used his hold on her hair to guide her head sideways. Her neck arched towards the right.

Derek lowered his head, and she whimpered when he kissed the skin between the choker and her face. "Mine," he whispered.

He extended his other hand, and Jaike's eyes widened as Finlay walked back to them, bearing another tray with a smaller jewelry box this time. She watched Derek flip it open, and her eyes started to tear up when she saw that inside it was a matching ring. The body made of silver like the clasp of her necklace, but with a piece of onyx embedded in the middle.

Derek turned her around again, this time Jaike facing him. He placed the ring on her hand.

Understanding his silent command, she took the ring and carefully slid it on his finger.

Over her head, she heard him speak. "From here on, baby, I'm going to wear this with pride. I've always wanted to belong to you, and I have never been so damn happier when it came true."

She started to speak, but he shook his head.

He touched her throat, his fingers moving down to her choker. "But this one, we'll put aside for now. Wear it when it's the right time. I can wait. I want to wait for the day you'll be proud to let everyone know that you're mine."

Jaike couldn't believe what she was hearing. He was a terribly impatient man, but here he was, offering her a reprieve of sorts. "Why?" Her voice shook as she looked at him with a mixture of fear and confusion. "Didn't I already become yours when we—"

"Last night?" He shook his head when she nodded. He touched her heart and felt it throb and slam against her chest. Good. He was affecting her a lot more strongly now. "You're not mine where it counts, baby. And you know how I am." He kissed her forehead, her nose, her lips, the side of her neck, and finally, he lifted his hand off so he could place a kiss on her heart. "I want everything of you."

His lips twisted. "So hurry, dammit, and start falling in love with me."

Chapter Two

Jaike's phone suddenly rang, and she couldn't answer it fast enough. "Hello?" Oh my God, she could barely hear herself over her loudly beating heart.

Someone at the other end of the line answered, but her mind only heard gibberish. It was still whirling, unable to process what Derek Christopoulos had just said.

What happened didn't really happen, did it? It couldn't. And if it did – surely he didn't mean it? Because if he did, didn't that mean Derek Christopoulos as much admitted…to loving her?

"ARE YOU THERE, JAIKE?"

Jaike jumped at the loud voice speaking on the phone, the words jerking her out of her jumbled thoughts. "I'm sorry," she stammered. Her gaze strayed to Derek as she spoke. She couldn't help it. She needed to see his face, needed to know if he really meant it.

But for once, Derek's stormy eyes were closed to her.

"…someone's here trying to move things into your room, and we need you to confirm in person that this is something you wish."

This time, the dorm's resident head's words penetrated her mind, making Jaike's jaw drop in confusion. "I don't understand – someone's trying to move into *my* room?"

"Yes. That's why we need to have you sort this out as soon as possible—"

Jaike said without thinking, "I'll come back now. Just give me twenty."

The resident head sighed. "I'll see what I can do, but these guys might not listen to me."

When Jaike ended the call, she looked down at her shoes as she told Derek, "I just got a call from the resident head at my dorm. He says I have to go back. It's an emergency."

****

"She bolted?" Christien di Luca repeated Derek's words with a bark of laughter. Half-French and half-Greek, Derek's closest friend was considered by many as an incredibly successful negotiator because of his ruthlessness and smooth-talking ways. But none of the latter had been evident since Derek relayed Jaike's reaction to his near-confession about his feelings.

"Couldn't take a cab out of here fast enough. She left so quickly the security detail I had assigned to her almost missed her." Derek's tone was pissed, but his anger wasn't directed at his friend or even Jaike. He was furious with himself. One look at Jaike's panicked face and he knew he had moved too damn fast. He

should have taken it slow, allowed Jaike to think everything was *still* a sexy flirting game between them.

But he hadn't. And so he had paid the price, allowing Jaike to leave when his baser instincts told him to do the opposite. Derek told himself he should be thankful that she had not thrown the collar away. At least she had taken it with her. It could have been worse. She could have just returned it to him and told him she wasn't ready for it.

From the other end of the line, he could still hear Christien laughing.

"Shut up."

"Are you truly sure she returns your affection, *mon ami?"* Christien asked, but this time his tone was half-serious. Although he was known to be a man who was quick to smile and offer a pretty word, in reality he was all ice inside, and there were only a precious few Christien truly cared about. Derek was one of them, and he hated the thought of his friend having wasted all these years running after a girl who didn't have any feelings for him.

"I am." Derek meant it. But what he wasn't sure about, dammit, was whether Jaike was stubborn and afraid enough to keep denying the bond between them.

"I see." If Derek believed that Jaike Hepburn loved him, then he trusted his friend enough to believe the same thing – even if all evidence pointed to the contrary. Christien decided to change the subject, asking, "Where are you now?"

"On my way back as well."

"You know, if she freaked out over the collar, it's possible she could faint dead away when she realizes what we're doing here."

Derek grimaced. "That's why I'm the one driving now. I'm hoping I can get there before her but…" He flicked a look at the slow-moving traffic ahead of him. "Just make sure she doesn't see you, all right?"

"You want us to…*hide*?" Christien was skeptical, and rightly so. He was not a prideful man, but he was realistic. He and Derek were simply not the type of men that could easily blend in a crowd.

"Just do what you can. Or wait for me at the corner of her street."

One look at you guys and she'll know something's up."

Christien frowned. "I'll see if I can round up the guys and let them know what you've decided. But I'm not sure about Nick. I've been trying to call him for over an hour. He might just go straight to her place the moment he wakes up __"

Derek cursed. "He's still having late nights over Karla?"

"Wouldn't you if Jaike did what Karla did to him?"

****

Jaike stared in confusion at the ten-wheeler truck – *truck!* – parked in front of her dorm building. The driver didn't speak a word of English, but he did speak Greek, and that alone gave her a bad feeling. What was a Greek-speaking truck driver doing in front of her dorm building? Why was he insisting that he had stuff to move into her place?

"Well? Did you get to speak some sense into him?" Chuck, the resident head, demanded. He looked harassed, apparently having been busy all morning trying to calm down the other students of Blake Hall. They had not appreciated the truck driver's insistent honking waking them up.

"I'm sorry, Chuck, but I don't speak Greek, either." Gnawing on her lip in worry, she asked hopefully, "What about security?"

"You know that this truck wouldn't have been able to come in here without security clearing it. He's really meant to come here, but maybe he got the address wrong." Chuck's eyes suddenly lit up. "Isn't that Nick Christakos?"

Nick Christakos?

Jaike whirled around.

Chuck hadn't lied, she realized with even growing confusion. That was indeed Nick Christakos, one of the so-called BBFs, and everyone knew that Nick Christakos did *not* wake up any time before noon. So what was one of Derek's closest friends doing here?

As he continued walking in her direction, Jaike became more and more nervous. Like Derek, Nick exuded a kind of arrogance that only men who were aware of their effect on women – and didn't give a damn about it – possessed. Black-haired and blue-eyed, Nick Christakos always had women swooning all over him, and the fact that he had a twin only seemed to make him more attractive. It was as if most girls dreamt of having Nick *and* his twin together in one bed.

Nick's sleepy blue eyes gleamed in recognition when he looked up and saw Jaike. "Hello there." His voice was dark and velvety, the sound seductive even without Nick making an effort.

On Jaike, however, it had the opposite effect. The urge to bolt – again – was strong, but she told herself that doing so would make her a coward. And, dammit, she was tired of being a coward.

Cowardice was what had her choosing Angelo Valencia over Derek, she thought painfully, *and look at what that got her.*

Nick stopped right in front of her.

Jaike forced herself to look up. "H-hi."

Nick was amazed. He had heard a lot of things about Jaike Hepburn. How couldn't he when she was *all* Derek could talk about? Usually, words like

"bitchy" and "grumpy" came up – but they were always uttered in an affectionate tone. However, the girl in front of him looked nothing like a grumpy bitch. If anything, she looked like a cornered rabbit – and one that desperately wanted to hop away in terror.

Nick's lips almost twitched at the thought. Well, that was new. Normally, girls couldn't get close enough to him. At least this one was sure not to be unfaithful to his friend. *Unlike some other women.*

The way Nick's face suddenly darkened made Jaike wonder if she had said or done something wrong.

Nick forced himself to push the past away, seeing how Jaike was now looking at him with even greater apprehension. "I apologize. I'm normally not this rude."

She only nodded, unsure of what to say.

He looked around. "Are the others here?"

Jaike frowned in confusion. "Do you mean Derek?"

"Yeah. And the other guys? Christien? Reid? Anyone else?"

"I was with Derek a while ago, but I'm not sure if he's coming here."

Nick grunted. "Is that so? He wants us to do all the heavy lifting for him?" He shook his head in mock irritation.

Heavy lifting?

Slowly, she put one and one together to make a horrifying two. She gestured to the truck behind her. "This is going to be a stupid question, but is that truck over there—"

A grin flashed on Nick's face, making him appear more dazzling. "Yeah. That's *all* his stuff. If you didn't know before then you should know now – you've got yourself a really high-maintenance man, Jaike Hepburn."

****

"Any luck contacting Nick?" Derek asked the moment he stepped out of the car and joined Christien at the curb.

"Unfortunately, no. But I did manage to get a hold of Nathan. He says he's going to be a little late and will meet us at the dorm."

"Thanks, man. I got to call Reid, too. He should be here any moment…"

Christien gestured towards Derek's back. "Speak of the devil."

As Derek turned around, their other friend Reid Chalkias said with feigned disapproval, "I heard that." With Greek blood also running through his veins, Reid was tall, dark-haired, and olive-skinned like his friends. His green eyes, however, was testament to the mysterious half of his parentage. The most dangerous among them, Reid was known throughout school as the Prince of Darkness – and it was a name he fully embraced.

“I can’t believe you had us waking up this early to help you move,” Reid said with a shake of his head.

Derek shrugged. “Just consider it as another favor I owe you. I want to things to be as normal as possible between Jaike and me.” Ever since the start, he had sensed the way Jaike shied away from the fact that he was a Christopoulos – and everything that it stood for, such as power, money, and fame.

The three of them walked together, exchanging small talk and catching up with each other. Around them, girls who caught sight of them stared and whispered, something they were all used to and paid no heed.

“What about Nick?” Reid asked.

Christien suddenly stopped. “Isn’t that him?”

Derek’s gaze followed Christien’s line of sight and cursed when he indeed saw his other friend. Walking swiftly to Nick, he asked right away, “Did Jaike see you?”

Nick grimaced. “Worse than that.” He held up his hands in apology. “I’m sorry, man. I didn’t know you were keeping it a surprise from her—”

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Another thing about Jaike that he had long understood was her need for space. She liked taking her time with her decisions, and she hated feeling helpless. Finding out from another person that Derek was moving into her place would definitely make her retreat.

“It’s not your fault,” Derek said finally. “I had planned to tell her earlier but…things didn’t go as planned.” He looked around. “Where is she?”

Nick pointed to the back of the dorm. “She went there to make a call. Someone Marcy, I heard?”

“Thanks.” Derek started walking.

Nick caught up with him, and when he turned his head, he saw that his other friends had done the same.

“I’ll apologize with you. It’s partly my fault,” Nick said.

“I’m just coming with you guys because I’d like to see the great Derek Christopoulos grovel,” Reid said easily.

Derek flipped him the finger before asking Christien dryly, “And you, di Luca?”

Christien said politely, “Definitely the same as Reid.”

****

“I feel like I can’t breathe, Marcy.” Jaike plopped down on one of the stone benches. “How could he do something like this without even asking me first?” She placed her purse next to her, and she tried not to think about what was

inside. If she did, she had a feeling she'd just start hyperventilating. Derek Christopoulos was moving too fast – too fast for her practical mind and scarred heart to catch up with her stupidly infatuated body.

Marcy sighed over the phone. "I get you. I really get where you're coming from. It's a big step, you just broke up, you're one of those irritatingly independent girls who hate having a guy spend money on you—"

Jaike choked out a laugh. "Are you really trying to comfort me?"

"I made you laugh, didn't I?" Marcy retorted. "Take deep breaths, Jaike. I just want you to relax and calm down before you end up fainting like you did in our freshmen year—"

Knowing Marcy had a point, Jaike forced herself to take deep breaths, concentrating hard on calming herself down.

"Calm now?"

"Kind of."

"Then…listen to me first. I just want you to listen, okay?"

"Okay."

"Derek did a bad thing, not asking you first. But – can you blame him? We both know he's wanted you for a long time. Now that he has you, he probably wants to make sure that you'll be his forever."

"I get that, but…"

"Can't you just be happy about having a guy like Derek wanting you so much? Don't you think it's great that he doesn't even care if people find out how much he wants you?"

Jaike tried to speak, but instead she found her mind assaulted with a memory from the past, a nightmare she had once lived and wished she could forget. But she never could.

****

Jaike was seated alone at the dining table, trying to pretend she couldn't hear anything.

"Please, not with my child around." It was Diana, her mother, begging. Her voice sounded nervous and eager to please at the same time.

It was a tone Jaike was now used to hearing, a tone she hated because it meant her mother wasn't happy. These days, Uncle Tony always made her mother unhappy – even when he wasn't around, he somehow had the power to make Diana sad.

"If you really love Tony, you'll do what I asked. Remember what he said? What I command is his command."

Jaike shouldn't be able to hear those words. In all fairness to the man who was with her mother, he was doing his best to keep his tone down. But it was

pointless. Their kitchen and dining room had an open layout, with the breakfast counter where Diana and the man was only a few feet away from the table. And even if they had been standing farther away, that wouldn't have made a difference either. It was as if her ears had become extra sensitive with everything that had to do with Diana.

"Let me just get my daughter out of here—"

"I want her here. It makes things more exciting, don't you think?"

Jaike squeezed her eyes shut as she heard the telltale sound of fabric ripping. Was it her mother's skirt? Was it her mother's panties? Did it even matter? She knew what would happen next.

"Please…" Diana's gasp sounded like it was torn out of her.

The man grunted, as if relishing the sound of her mother's pain. It was followed by swooshing, rhythmic sounds, signifying something that Jaike shouldn't have understood…but she did.

It was another man having sex with her mother. And her mother was doing it because of Uncle Tony. That was what she couldn't understand at all. Why did Uncle Tony want other men doing this to Diana? Why did all the men think they could get away with what they were doing to Diana? Why did they never bother to ask Diana for permission? Why?

"Do you want it, bitch?"

Now, Jaike could hear their bodies pounding hard against the counter.

"Please, my daughter…"

Jaike squeezed her eyes shut, but it was no use. The tears started to fall. Opening her eyes, she forced herself to eat her cereal. She didn't want Diana to suffer more.

"See? She's still eating. She can't hear us. Now say you want it."

Diana started to choke loudly.

Jaike's hold over her spoon tightened. The other man was trying to strangle her mother. She wanted to cry, wanted to run to her mother to make it stop, but she didn't. She couldn't. If she did, that was what would kill Diana.

The knowledge that Jaike knew what was happening, from the very start.

"You're tough, bitch. That's what I like so much about you. So much spirit. But in the end, you'll do what I say. We both know that."

Another gasp from Diana, this time filled with even greater pain.

"If you don't say it, I'll tell Tony that you don't love him anymore. That you don't want him as your Master—"

Silence.

Jaike's tears ran down faster on her cheek. Please don't say it, Mom. Please, please, please.

But then she heard it.

"I want this."

The pounding resumed.

Slowly, Jaike forced herself to continue eating.

****

"Are you there, Jaike?"

"Yeah, I'm here." She wasn't surprised when she realized she was crying. Remembering that always made the tears fall, and she doubted there'd ever come a day it wouldn't. Even now, it hurt. Even now, it terrified her. She used to think she would never be like Diana, letting a man like Anthony Carras rule and ruin her life as he pleased, but since she met Derek Christopoulos?

She knew now.

She was her mother's daughter.

"I don't want this, Marcy. I don't want him moving in with me. I don't like that he didn't ask – I hate it. I hate the way he's taking over my life and that…" She couldn't say it, couldn't make herself admit out loud that she was *happy.* She was stupidly happy that Derek Christopoulos wanted to move in with her.

"I wish he was like Angelo," she burst out. Guilt nipped at her as she said the words, but she ignored it. "Angelo would never do something like this. He always respected my wishes, he was always considerate. If I said 'no', he wouldn't push. He was a much better man…" She trailed off as the hairs on her nape stood up all of a sudden.

Oh God.

Slowly, Jaike made herself turn around, and her worst fears were realized.

Derek stood behind her, and he was not alone. His friends were all with him, and it was clear on their faces they had heard every word she said.

Chapter Three

Jaike waited for Derek to say something – do anything that would give her a clue about what he was thinking and feeling. There was a crippling, sick feeling in her stomach, and she felt like throwing up.

I wish he was like Angelo.

He was a much better man.…

The words repeated itself inside Derek's mind, and all of it left an acid taste on his tongue. She wished he was like Angelo? *Bullshit.* If that was true, she would never have fallen apart so easily in his arms last night. If that was true, she would never have let him call her his. If that was fucking true, this passion between them – this drugging, all-consuming, obsessive passion – it would have died the moment she said 'yes' to another man and turned her back on him.

Angelo Valencia III might be a better man than Derek, with the way he was so fucking correct at all times, but he sure as hell knew Angelo could never be the man Jaike wanted and needed.

Derek, and only Derek, could be *that* man.

His hooded gaze went to Jaike, and his chest squeezed at how pale she looked. Stubborn, stubborn woman. It was so fucking clear what she wanted to do. Her eyes were begging him for forgiveness, her body quivering in her effort not to go to him. Why was she so damn stubborn?

Around him, his friends were silent, all of them able to read between the lines and patiently waiting for their cue from him.

Your call, his friends' stances were telling him. Did he want them to forget this? Remember this? Make it awkward for the girl standing so stiffly in front of them?

Finally, Derek said, "Jaike."

Tears stung Jaike's eyes as she heard Derek say her name. Why did she feel so damn happy just because he had said her name? Slowly, she clutched her chest, not liking the way her heart throbbed so painfully against it.

She had just shamed him in front of his friends. Didn't he know that? Shouldn't he be punishing her now? Shouldn't he be leaving her now?

When Derek no longer said anything, she couldn't help it. "What is it?" Oh God, she sounded so militant – so irritated when she knew she was the one who was wrong.

He said quietly, "Just take it back."

She stared at him, stricken.

"That's all you have to do, baby. Take it back and admit the truth."

Desperately, she searched his gaze for a sign of deception. He couldn't mean

it. No man could be as forgiving as him. No *Master*…no *Dom* could let her mistake go just like that.

But when she looked into his blue-gray eyes, all she could see was the truth.

And something else, something she was too terrified to name.

Jaike tried to make her throat work, but the words just couldn't come out. Anytime now, she thought numbly. Anytime now and he would punish her, would shout at her for being fickle, would hurt her—

But Derek did *none* of those.

Instead, he simply turned away.

She started to cry silently. She wanted to call him back so badly. *I'm sorry, please, come back, forgive me. I'm begging you. Please come back—*

But memories of Diana were playing in her mind again, working like a cage that kept the words locked inside her throat, never to be spoken.

"Jaike?"

When she looked up, she found herself staring up at Christien di Luca. She expected to see judgment or even disgust and fury in his gaze, and she wouldn't have blamed him. But instead, she saw…sympathy.

It made her cry harder.

Behind him, she saw that Derek was too far away to hear her now. She would have to shout if she wanted him to hear her. His other friends were with him, Reid Chalkias and Nick Christakos, and both of them were as silent as he was as they walked away.

When Christien saw where Jaike was looking, he asked quietly, "Do you want me to call him back for you?"

She shook her head, still crying. No matter how much she wanted to say yes, she knew that it was something she alone should do.

"If it makes any difference…I had never heard Derek happier than when he called us last night about moving in with you."

The words made Jaike want to sink to her knees and bawl her eyes out.

"I don't know exactly what he feels for you, but one thing I am certain of – you matter to him, more than anything else."

****

"And you haven't heard from him since then?" Marcy whispered, wide-eyed. Both of them were seated at the bleachers, having finished doing their laps.

Jaike shook her head. "Not a peep." She, too, whispered, knowing that everywhere she went, there were always people looking and trying to listen in on her conversations. It was something she was slowly getting used to.

"You're not going to apologize and take it back?"

“Why should I?” She shrugged, trying but failing to sound indifferent. “It’s his fault for eavesdropping.”

Marcy only raised a brow.

The look made her feel even more defensive, and she huddled more deeply under the terry robe she wore over her swimsuit. “What am I going to apologize for?” Jaike couldn’t meet her friend’s gaze as she uttered the words, knowing it for the lie it was.

Below them, the other students in their class were starting to leave, with only a handful left in the pool. Even their swimming coach was gathering her stuff from the front-row bleachers, and the sight of it made Jaike feel depressed. This was her last class for the day, and after it she had nowhere to go back to except home.

Funny how her home no longer felt like hers now.

Derek only had to spend one night in it and just like that, the place already felt like his.

“Why do you bother lying to yourself? You *miss* him and you regret hurting him like that.”

Marcy’s knowing words made her jolt, but Jaike denied them automatically, “I don’t miss him. I *am* sorry that he had to hear something like that, but I don’t miss him. I don’t.” When she glanced back at her friend, she saw Marcy glaring at her.

“Stop pretending to be so dense – and stop acting like you regret nothing. You messed up. We both know that. We also both know you *know* what you should say.” When Jaike still didn’t say anything, Marcy pressed on. “Just think about how *you* would feel if you heard Derek say the same thing—”

Jaike pointed out reasonably, “He wouldn’t have anything to compare to. He didn’t have a girlfriend before me.”

Marcy’s glare intensified. “Oh my God, Jaike, I swear, if you use that lawyer logic of yours on me—”

Jaike shrugged. “I’m not a lawyer yet.”

Whipping off the bath towel she had around her bikini-clad body, Marcy made a move to hit her friend with it.

Jaike immediately scooted away. “All right, I’m sorry! I know what you mean!” But Marcy hit her anyway, making Jaike yelp.

“I’ve always known you were stubborn, but you were never this *insanely* pigheaded,” Marcy muttered in disgust.

Jaike’s elbows dropped to her knees as she covered her face. “I can’t help it,” she said in a muffled voice. “I *panicked,* okay? You already warned me about not freaking out, but I did anyway. Everything about my past came back to

me…” She exhaled deeply. “We only had one night together, Marcy. One night and…he decided to move in with me the next day. Before that, he even gave me something…something that would let people know he *owns* me.”

Just the thought was enough to have her shudder.

Derek Christopoulos owning her?

God, it was both a dream and nightmare come true.

“And the most horrible thing about all of it,” Jaike whispered, “is that everything made me feel *excited*.”

She waited for Marcy to say a word, but there was nothing. Worried that her confession had made her only close friend disgusted with her, Jaike uncovered her face—

She gasped. “Derek?”

Chapter Four

What was it about Jaike Hepburn that made him want to kiss her and strangle her at the same time?

It was a question Derek had a feeling he would ask time and time again, no matter how many years they'd spend in each other's lives. A question he ultimately looked forward to having a reason to ask every day.

Looking back at Jaike, the urge to strangle her was slowly overpowering his urge to kiss her and never let her go.

The past few days had been a blur, with Derek nursing his hurt pride over bottle after bottle. His friends had kept him company, but it was clear in all their gazes they thought he was running away from his problems.

When he had resurfaced from his days-old hangover, he knew they were right.

The first time he had met Jaike, he had known right away she would not be easy to win over. And even so, he had gone after her. Had patiently and determinedly done his best to make himself a permanent fixture in her mind, body, and heart for three fucking years. After all that he had sacrificed for this girl, would he really give up just like that?

When his friends had seen him show up in school sober for the first time in days, they had all laughed, and even the normally serious Nathan Callis had ribbed him about it.

"You do know that this proves she's got you by the balls, don't you?" the usually quiet model had asked.

He retorted, "At least I don't have to squeeze my balls into a tiny pair of panties like some pretty boy here."

But it had only made Nathan laugh and clap Derek on the back. "Good luck, man. If what the others have told me is true, I'm guessing you'll need it."

Looking at the way Jaike was staring at him right now with narrowed eyes, Derek knew his friend was right.

Jaike couldn't believe Derek was really here. Was he real or was it her mind playing tricks on her because she was missing him too much? Imaginary or real, this Derek next to her taking Marcy's place was even more gorgeous than she allowed herself to remember. Black hair beautifully tousled, eyes the shade of blue-gray clouds, and his sleek, hard body clothed in something that would have looked too fancy on most other men.

He was perfect, in other words, and if he was real—

If he was really here—

She jabbed his shoulder, hard.

He grunted in pain.

She pulled her hand back as if burned.

He *was* real!

And he really was perfect, not just in looks. He was perfect also where it counted – or at least he was a better person than she was. The words made Jaike bite her lip hard. Those were the very words she had used when describing Angelo. How ironic that it was something she could use to describe Derek when comparing him…to herself.

"What are you doing here?" She wanted to face-palm herself at the tone of her voice, her defensiveness making her sound sharp.

Derek asked evenly, "What do you think?"

She shrugged.

Yes, he really was close to strangling her, Derek thought, torn between amusement and exasperation.

Jaike looked around – anywhere but Derek was good. And that was when she realized something.

"Where's everybody?" Why had she just noticed it was just the two of them in the entire pool area? There was not a single student around, not even anyone from maintenance. Her head snapped to Derek as she demanded, "Where's Marcy?"

"She saw me coming and thought it was better to leave us alone."

"And the others?"

He said innocently, "They thought the same thing."

"*All of them*?"

It was his turn to shrug.

So they really were alone then? A shiver ran down her spine at the realization, but it wasn't out of fear – and *that* was what scared her. Tearing her gaze away from Derek, she quickly stood up and started shoving her stuff back inside her gym bag. "I have to leave, too," she mumbled.

Jaike had already turned and taken a step away when Derek caught her wrist from behind. His touch burned, making her freeze and hold her breath. Such a small percentage of her body was under his fingers and yet it felt like her whole being was focused on that tiny part. Why did it feel like only that part of her body was alive and the rest of her that Derek wasn't touching was left for dead?

Behind her, Derek asked quietly, "Don't you want to end this now, baby?"

The term of endearment caught her off guard. Not looking at him, she choked out, "Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why are you still so nice to me after what you heard me say?" She

squeezed her eyes shut in shame. “After what I did to you in front of your friends?”

Derek tightened his hold around her wrist. “Because,” he said slowly, emphatically, “I knew you knew that it wasn’t true. Because I knew it was just your fear, maybe even your pride, talking.”

Her softness, her nearness, was driving him crazy and unable to resist it, he started stroking her hand, his thumb rubbing rhythmically against her knuckles. “I knew I was pushing you too far by wanting to move in with you right away. I knew I was pushing you too far by wanting you to wear my chain. And I knew I was pushing you too far when I wanted you to admit in front of my friends that it was really me you wanted.”

The tears began when Derek started speaking, and when he was done, the tears were falling furiously. She was the one who had wronged him, but he was the one who was practically apologizing to her.

Surely a Dom wasn’t supposed to do something like that for a Sub?

Or at least not a Dom like him…for a Sub like her?

When Derek tugged her hand to whirl her around and face him, she didn’t even think of refusing. When their gazes met, Derek asked quietly, “Could you say it now?” His other hand moved, and she watched with her breath in her throat as he reached for the knot of her bathrobe. One yank, and the bathrobe was unknotted. His other hand let her wrist go so he could take off the robe from her body.

And she let him.

She found herself no longer caring that they were in a public place, that anytime someone might enter and see them together, see what they were doing—

None of it mattered – not when Derek, her Dom, *her owner*, was looking at her like that.

She bit her lip when her robe fell soundlessly to the floor.

“Could you say it now, baby? Say what you’re feeling here.” Derek placed his hand above her heart.

The words entranced her, terrified her, and above all, they humbled her for Derek should never have had to say them in the first place. Because of her mother, Jaike had known a lot of Doms in her life. And none of them – God, none of them had been like Derek.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry for saying those things. I’m sorry for lying.” She covered the hand he held to her chest with her own. “You were right. Everything you said was right. I didn’t mean a word I said.”

Triumph that felt both tender and savage burst inside his chest. He wanted to haul Jaike into his arms, but he knew he couldn’t let it end there. For both their

sakes, he had to demand more or she would forever be taking one step forward, two steps back with their relationship.

"And what?" he demanded roughly. "Say it all, Jaike. This time, say it all." When he saw her lips quiver, he knew she understood him.

"*There's no better man for me than you—*"

The rest of her words were swallowed by his possessive kiss. Shock had her gasping against his lips but even so, she was already weaving her arms around his neck, her body molding pliantly against his. Passion and relief rocked inside her, making Jaike cry even as she returned his passionate kiss with equal fervor.

The first time she had met Derek Christopoulos, she had known right away that there was no man worse than him for her. Now, maybe it was time to acknowledge the other side of the coin. Now, maybe it was time for her to accept that there could be no better man for her other than Derek Christopoulos.

Without breaking their kiss, Derek swept her up in his arms and made his way to the pool. "Close your eyes."

At the command, Jaike immediately closed her eyes, not even thinking of disobeying her Dom this time. After everything she had done to him, after everything he had done for her, she was ready to give him almost anything.

She felt herself being lowered. "Stay still."

"Yes."

Moments passed and then she was being swept up in his arms once more. Jaike gasped when her bare arms brushed against muscled arms that were just as bare. When he pressed her tightly against his body, her swimsuit-covered breasts were flattened against his naked chest.

Nervously, she asked, "May I open my eyes now?"

"Not yet." He carried her into the pool, using the steps at the shallow end. Jaike's gasp of surprise had him smiling. "You can open your eyes now." She did so right away and when she gazed at him in bewilderment, he said with a wicked smile, "Did you really think I would not punish you for what you did?"

Jaike's mouth opened and closed. That was a very good question, and she was such an idiot for not thinking about it.

Lowering her when the water reached their waists, he continued, "You had us waste days, baby. Precious days that we could have spent together. That deserves a punishment, don't you think?"

Chapter Five

Derek expected her to say no, to try to bolt or even look at him in fear. But he should have known his Jaike would do something entirely courageous and unexpected.

Her eyes meeting his, she whispered, “Yes,” and then she bowed her head like a properly obedient Sub.

Just like that, and his cock was hard and throbbing, the lapping water around it having absolutely no effect on his erection.

“Look at me,” he commanded.

Trembling, Jaike raised her gaze to Derek’s.

“Take off your swimsuit.”

She gasped. “But what if…” She looked around them fearfully.

He said quietly, “If you truly trust me, then you would know I’d never do anything to abuse your trust.” In truth, he had his bodyguards stationed around the pool area, three feet away from the doors. No one would be able to get in without having a gun pointed at their heads. He had been that strict in his command to assure his privacy and Jaike’s.

But all of that, his beautiful stubborn Sub was not supposed to know. Not until she learned to yield to him as she should.

Looking at Jaike, he asked, “Are you going to do it, baby?”

Swallowing, she answered by reaching for the straps of her swimsuit. It was a plain navy one piece, nothing fancy, but the way Derek was looking at her now made Jaike feel like she had the skimpiest bikini on. Her fingers shook as she clumsily pulled the straps down. Her cheeks were on fire as she wriggled out of it, knowing this made her breasts bounce and jiggle in front of Derek.

When she was done, she took her time folding her swimsuit before placing it on the marbled tiles surrounding the pool. It only bought her little time, and in the end she had no choice but to look back at Derek.

The hungry desire in his gaze made her swallow. Never, never had a man looked at her the way Derek was looking at her now, not even Angelo. It was as if he would give up everything just to have a taste of her body, and the knowledge that she affected him that much made her desire grow to the same heights. Right or wrong, she wanted him that much, too. Oh God, how she wanted him.

His gaze moved downwards and Jaike realized that he was staring at her naked breasts. When she looked down, a whimper of embarrassment escaped her at the sight of her aroused nipples. The lapping water only made her nipples more sensitive, and her breasts started to ache hard.

“I’m going to do a lot of things to your body. It’s going to make you scream – I like hearing you scream, so be sure to scream as loudly as you can, baby. Do you understand?”

Jaike’s voice was breathless and obedient as she whispered, “Yes.”

“What I’ll do to you will make you want me to fuck you so bad. It’s going to make you want to come, but that’s where your punishment lies.” Derek closed the distance between them. “No matter what I do, you are absolutely forbidden to come.” His voice hardened, a Dom who expected his Sub’s full obedience and trust. “Do you understand?”

She whispered, “Yes.”

And her punishment began.

It started innocuously enough, sweet, tender kisses rained all over her face, the kind that made her tremble and feel like crying again because it reminded her of words Derek had once spoken.

Hurry up and fall in love with me.

And then his lips took hers again, and his passion took a darker turn. The kiss was rough and deep, and with his hands starting to move, there was absolutely no chance for Jaike to stay in control. As she felt Derek’s hands cupping her breasts and kneading them, she could only cling to him, pressing her breasts deeper into his touch while she kissed him back.

Their tongues tangled as he began to tweak her nipples, pinching and then rubbing, twisting and then stroking. It was pure torture, beautiful and painful, and she couldn’t get enough of it. She could only sob for more.

“Please…”

He lifted his head back, his fingers still torturing her nipples. “Please what?”

“Please…”

“Say it.”

“Please kiss my breasts.”

His smile was a work of art, devastatingly beautiful and undeniably cruel. “*No*.” And his hands were gone from her breasts, making her scream in frustration.

Laughing at the sound, relishing the proof of Jaike’s desire, he held her by the waist and started walking, forcing Jaike to walk back until she hit the wall of the pool. “Stretch your arms against the tiles.”

She did as asked, her arms and body forming the shape of a T.

“They’re to stay like that until I say otherwise. Do you understand?”

She nodded. “Ye—” The word turned into a strangled moan as she felt his fingers on her pussy. Being in water had it wet, but when he started to stroke her folds with his fingers, her pussy became wet from a different kind of moisture.

The way he touched her was pure torture as well. Sometimes, it was long and leisurely, other times it was brisk and hard. Either way, it had her pussy trembling badly, yearning painfully for his penetration.

"Please, please, Derek, please." She wanted his fingers, his cock – oh God, she just wanted him to make her pussy feel full.

But he only smiled, in a way that turned his face into something cruelly beautiful. For some reason, it just made Jaike want him even more, and a part of her wondered if this was why Diana had been so in love with Anthony Carras. There was just something so liberating in giving yourself completely to a man – especially if it was a man who knew exactly what to do to make a woman's body sing.

The way Jaike looked at him, the sound of her begging him for release – all of it had Derek clenching his teeth hard. He wanted so badly to give in, but he controlled himself ruthlessly, knowing that this kind of anticipation would make their eventual union the kind that neither of them would ever forget.

When Jaike felt his thumb against her clitoris, that was the moment she realized nothing before it had been punishment. This was the real test, the real struggle of preventing her body from claiming the release it now so desperately sought.

"Derek, please." She clutched the tiles hard, feeling like her mind was about to break at the effort it took to control her body from coming.

"How badly do you want it, baby?" His voice was raspy with suppressed need, and she dimly realized that he was suffering as much as she was. Another Dom would have rightfully taken his release while withholding it from his Sub, but not her Derek. Not her Dom.

"I want it," she whispered.

His smile turned feral with his possessive need for her as he demanded, "How much do you want it? Tell me."

She tried to lift her hips to get him to fill her pussy, but this only made him press her hips back to the wall, his fingers leaving her pussy completely abandoned.

Jaike cried out. "Please!"

"Tell me!"

Her hips tried to lift itself up against his hold, but it was no use. Breaking down, she screamed, "I want you! I want you so much I think of you every minute of the day!"

No sooner than she had said the words, his body slammed against hers, making Jaike gasp. When she felt Derek holding his cock and teasing the entrance of her pussy, her gasp turned into a keening cry of need.

Her fingers dug into his hard shoulders. “Oh God, please. Please give it to me.” But no matter how she twisted and writhed, she could only have the head of his cock brush against her slick folds, touching it but never quite entering.

“Do you want my cock, Jaike?”

“Yes!”

“Say it then.”

“I want your cock.” She sobbed the words out. “I want your cock, Derek.”

“Do you think you’ll get it now?”

She glared at him, frustration and desire warring inside her.

He repeated his question, in a commanding voice this time, making it clear he expected an answer.

She tried to take him by surprise, pushing her hips forcefully against him. But it only made him laugh, easily keeping his cock from sliding into her warm pussy.

Jaike snarled, “No. I obviously won’t get your cock inside me.” God, she so wanted to come. It was all she could think about, and it made her body shake like an alcoholic suffering from withdrawal symptoms.

“Are you mad at me, baby?” He came back to her, holding his cock and using it to rub circles around her folds.

Jaike sobbed, “Yes.”

The way she was staring at him made him grit his teeth. This was supposed to be her punishment, dammit, but why did it feel like he was cutting his nose to spite his face? His voice harsh with desire, he demanded, “Do you think I’m being cruel? Do you think you don’t deserve this?”

She wanted to say yes, but she couldn’t. She could only cling hard to his body, begging him with her hips, seducing him by brushing her naked breasts against his chest. “No,” she choked out, her voice echoing throughout the vast pool center.

At her answer, he carried her up, taking Jaike by surprise. The next thing she knew, he had her seated on the edge of the pool, her legs dangling in the water. Mind confused, body aching, she looked down at him and saw her suffering mirrored in his gaze.

“Am I the only one you can think of right now?”

“Yes.”

“Do you know now – do you fucking understand that I am and will always be the only one who can make you feel like this?”

Tears pricked her eyes, but she blinked them away as she whispered, “Yes.”

“Good.” He lifted himself up with effortless grace, and Jaike couldn’t stop herself from staring at his naked form as Derek seated himself next to her.

Tipping her chin up, he told her, “We’re going home now.”

“W-what?”

“I won’t let you come here.”

“*What?*” This time, she sounded like she was about to cry.

“A punishment is a punishment, and bad girls like you need to learn your lesson.” He helped her up to her feet, satisfaction warming his body when he saw the way desire had her wobbling on her feet.

“When we get home, that’s when I’ll let you come. That’s when I’ll make you mine and we’ll fuck each other’s brains out.” He kissed her hard. “But before that, you are not allowed to come. Not even a single drop of come, or I’ll be extremely disappointed.”

His words made her want him even more, and she mulishly wondered if that had been Derek’s intention all along for saying it.

“Tell me you understand, Jaike.”

She growled, “Yes.”

Her tone had him smiling. “Are you furious with me?”

“Yes.”

He laughed. “That’s good. That’s going to make tonight even more pleasurable. So keep getting mad at me. It only means I’ll be the only thing you think about.” He pulled her to his side. “Now, let’s get you dressed.”

It was pure torture once more, with Derek caressing her body as he helped her dress. His hands would brush deliberately against her breasts, but he wouldn’t touch her nipples. He would accidentally stroke her pussy but his fingers would never go inside, not even the tips.

The torture went on when he asked her to dress him. It required her to look at him, really look at him, and the beauty of his naked form only served to sharpen her desire, the sensation so strong it was painfully acute.

Helping him put his shirt on made her want to lick his nipples, but she knew without being told that doing so would be dangerous. Anything hotter than what she was doing now and she would come. She just knew she would.

Getting him to wear his jeans had her kneeling and at eye level with his cock. It was so hard, so long and big, it made her dizzy just thinking about how it would feel to have Derek’s cock pounding into her.

By the time he was fully dressed and he had pulled her back up to her feet, Jaike’s lips were completely dry, her throat parched. She told him half-seriously, “I think I want you so much, I’m dehydrated.”

Derek blinked at the unexpected words before barking in laughter. Taking hold of her hand, he pulled her to him, saying soothingly, “I’ll get you something to drink right away.”

She glared at him.

He laughed harder. He couldn't help it. "I know you want, err, something else to, err, eat—" He paused, waiting for her to protest, but she didn't.

Ah, God, did she really want him that much?

Just the thought that she did made it nearly impossible to walk, his cock almost bursting out of his boxers and making his jeans feel painfully tight. "Dammit." He cupped her face and made her look at him. "You're trying to punish me too, aren't you?"

She shook her head. "I can't even remember my name. I just know I want you—"

He kissed her again, harder this time, his tongue sweeping in. He couldn't help it, knowing she was being honest with him. This would teach him about trying to punish his lovely Sub. Every time he did, it was obvious it would only backfire on him, leaving Derek even more frustrated than Jaike was.

Outside the pool center, he told her, "Stay here and wait for me. I'll get you something to drink and then after that, we'll go home and we'll fuck. Right away. Understood?"

She could only nod, wide-eyed. It wasn't as if his tone allowed for any argument.

As he started to leave, Jaike noticed the bodyguards around them. She recognized some of them by face and knew they were all Derek's. "Derek?"

He stopped walking and turned back to her. "What is it?"

"I..." She hurried to him, not wanting any of his bodyguards to accidentally hear her as she muttered self-consciously, "Why won't you ask any one of them to get my drink?" It wasn't that she wanted him to act like a spoiled brat. She just wanted him close to her.

Derek only had to take one look at Jaike's face to know why she had asked the question. His teeth gnashed against each other as he did his best to suppress his need for her. Goddammit, why was it taking her so long to understand the truth about her feelings? What had happened to her in the past that had made her fearful and distrust her emotions so much?

Just one word from him, and he knew his father's expert staff could uncover every skeleton in her closet. But he would not do that. He wanted to earn Jaike's trust, wanted to wait until she was the one to tell him about herself – he wanted to feel like he deserved it when the day would come and she would tell him that she loved *him.* All of him, even the side he could only reveal to the girl he loved.

Looking down at her, he admitted the truth in an uneven undertone. "I'm doing my best to make things normal between us. From the very first time we met, you held my being a Christopoulos against me."

"I…"

"Don't deny it. You did."

She turned red. "I didn't mean to."

"Don't get me wrong, baby. I'm not mad at all about it. If anything, it just makes me want you more. At least I can be sure you're with me for my body and not my money."

She opened her mouth to protest—

He asked wickedly, "Unless of course you're with me for another reason?" His blue-gray eyes gleamed. "Perhaps because you're in love with me?"

She shut up. *That* was something she wasn't ready to talk about, and if it meant admitting she was with him for his body, well, so be it.

He laughed. "My stubborn Sub. One day, you'll realize how well I know you."

"I already know." She couldn't help sounding disgruntled. "And I still don't understand how it happened. How you know me so well…"

He kissed her on the forehead. "I know you that well because you're meant for me. And soon, you'll realize that you know me just as well." He stepped away. "Now, be a good girl and stay here while I get a drink for you like any other normal boyfriend would do."

She couldn't help but smile as she watched him walk away. *Normal boyfriend?* There wouldn't ever be a time someone like Derek Christopoulos could be described as normal. Not someone as perfect as he was.

"Ms. Hepburn?"

She looked back in surprise and saw one of Derek's bodyguards holding her bag.

"Sorry!" She had been so…so…so sexually infatuated with Derek she hadn't realized she had forgotten her bag at the gym.

"We're happy to carry it for you, Ms. Hepburn. But I heard your phone beeping inside it and it might be an important call."

"Oh. Thank you." Taking the bag from Derek's bodyguard, she unzipped it and rummaged through the contents for her phone. "Aha," she exclaimed when she found it, unaware that doing so made Derek's entire security team exchange grins. Most of them had been with Derek since birth, and it was their first time to see their employer date someone as refreshingly genuine as Jaike.

It was Marcy, sending her a text message.

Don't freak out. And I mean it.

I just heard the news, and I made sure to confirm it before texting you.

Angelo and Rosie have broken up – and the people who were there heard him say very clearly that he still loves you…and that he's only loved ever you.

The phone slipped from her hand.

“Baby? What’s wrong?”

Her head jerked up. She was so stunned to see Derek back that she could only wordlessly accept the bottled water he handed to her. By the time she recovered, he had already crouched down and was reaching for her phone.

“No!”

But it was too late.

Derek would have given the phone back immediately to Jaike if one of the words on her screen hadn’t jumped out at him.

It was a name.

Angelo.

Chapter Six

"Say something." They were the first words she spoke since Derek had read Marcy's message on her phone. He had been just as silent, unbearably so. And he hadn't touched her the whole time, not even once.

A small part of her had been grateful for his silence. It had allowed her some much-needed time to think. She just couldn't understand why Angelo would say something like that. He loved her? He was still in love with her? He was the only girl he had ever loved?

The thought sent a painful, bitter twinge to her heart.

If all those were true, then why had he betrayed her like that?

She looked at Derek again. "Derek—"

He shook his head, not looking at her as he said curtly, "Not here."

By the time they reached her room, her heart was in her throat and it didn't help that there were even more people looking at them now. News definitely traveled at lightning speed in Christopoulos University, especially when it had to do with a guy like Derek.

When she got home, she wasn't even surprised that Derek had somehow managed to have all his things moved in it. Again, without her permission – but this time she didn't give a damn. All she cared about was knowing what Derek thought about Marcy's message. She wanted to ask him about it, but after his cutting response a while ago, it was hard to find the courage to talk about it again.

So instead she found herself babbling, "Did you get your friends to help you get your stuff in here?"

His back to her as he locked the main door shut, Derek only shook his head in response.

Her heart sank a little at that, but she refused to feel defeated. She felt so panicky, and she didn't like it. She knew she had nothing to be guilty about, but even so, it was how she felt. She had already hurt Derek once when she told him she wished he was Angelo. She didn't want him hurt like that ever again.

But how could she let him know that when he refused to talk to her?

Derek knew he was not being fair to Jaike. He knew it, but he couldn't damn well help it. *Goddamn Angelo Valencia.* Why the fuck did he have to say something like that? Even though Derek hated Angelo completely, he also knew the other man was not the type to lie. If he really had said something like that, then he must have meant them. And if he had, what now?

Was he supposed to let Jaike go to the "better" man?

Was he supposed to forget he had once tasted her body, that she had once

become his?

"I r-redecorated my bedroom."

The words from Jaike were completely unexpected, making Derek's head snap towards her.

Jaike swallowed when she found herself at the center of his attention. Gathering her courage and praying he wouldn't shut her down again, she asked, "W-would you like to see it?"

Jaike's words had Derek brooding. Did she really want him to see it, or was this just her guilt talking? Did she want to go back to Angelo's arms now but was unable to because she felt she owed it to Derek to stay with him?

He heard himself saying, "I want to see it."

A tense, hesitant smile broke over her face. "G-great. Follow me then."

Derek did, and regret washed over him at the stiff way Jaike held herself. He had frightened her, made her feel insecure about herself, dammit. And to think all he wanted to do was love her.

When he entered the bedroom, Derek was surprised to find the entire room decorated in shades of lime green and black. It was a ghastly combination, and he couldn't figure out why she had selected the colors.

"Black's my favorite color," she told him after a beat.

Since lime green was his, he understood right away what she couldn't make herself say directly.

She waited for him to say something.

But he only looked at her, and the way he did made her heart beat fast in terror. It was as if he was thinking if there were enough reasons for him to stay with her.

"Derek?" She stopped when she was right in front of him. She had barely survived when Angelo abandoned her. If Derek was to do the same thing, she knew it would devastate her completely – a betrayal that she was certain she wouldn't ever be able to recover from.

"Please say something," she whispered.

But he still didn't, and the look on his face forced Jaike to look away. It was as if he had turned into stone, and nothing she could say would ever reach him. "Derek, please." She thought about explaining herself, about what she thought the first time she read Marcy's message. "Please say something. Angelo—"

Derek spat something in Greek, something she didn't understand but distinctly sounded like a curse. A second later, he had pushed her to the bed and he was lying on top of her, his eyes wild with rage and desire. In an instant, she realized that he had misunderstood. She had wanted to explain about Angelo, but instead he thought she had called him by another man's name.

“Never say his name in my presence again. *Never*.” His tone was dangerously soft. Almost barbaric.

The moment he heard Jaike call him by another man’s name, something inside him had snapped. She was supposed to be the one. She was supposed to be the one he had been waiting for all his goddamn life so why, dammit, why did she want another man?

“I will never give you to him, not even if you beg me for it.” He kissed her hard, his passion no longer controllable, fury lending his lust a painfully sharp edge. He tore her clothes away from her body, all the while waiting for her to scream at him, to tell him he was being a boor, to scream at him that he was practically raping her.

But she didn’t, and somehow it only made him angrier.

“Fight me,” he growled down at her even as he tore her bra away. “I don’t want your fucking pity. If you don’t want me to take your virginity—” He ripped her panties violently from her body. “Then fight me!”

He waited for her to look at him like he was a monster. But she didn’t.

Instead, all she did was reach out to him, her hands shaking as she cupped his face. “I don’t pity you.”

Jaike’s heart ached when Derek only gazed at her with guarded eyes. To the world, Angelo Valencia might appear the kinder man compared to Derek, but Angelo was a bastard when and where it mattered. Angelo had betrayed her while Derek, he hadn’t abandoned her, had never stopped wanting her all these years even if fear had pushed her to seek safety in another man’s arms.

She whispered. “I wasn’t calling you by his name, Derek,”

Her words had him whitening, and she couldn’t help but stroke his cheek, wanting even more to comfort him. “I’m telling the truth. I only said it because I wanted to explain…” She inhaled deeply. “I wanted you to know that even if he said those things, it *doesn’t* matter to me. I have you.” Blinking back tears, she whispered, “I choose you—”

Derek pulled her down to kiss her, fiercely, and she returned the kiss with abandon. When he let her go, she was breathless, but his eyes were still wild and feral, his tone harsh as he said, “You are mine, Jaike. Tell me you understand that.”

“I do.”

His hand gripped her hair. “I will never let you go. Not even if you beg me to. You were meant to be mine. *Mine*.”

The possessive light in his gaze made her swallow. “Yours—” She couldn’t say anything else after that, with Derek kissing her once more. His kisses and caresses still had the feeling of urgency to them, as if Derek still doubted her

word. Jaike knew that it was her fault. After what she had said about wanting him to be like Angelo, she couldn't blame him for doubting her.

Wrapping her arms around his neck, she tried to make up for it by forcing herself to ignore her fears. Every cell of her body was screaming for her to protect herself, to keep even a small bit of her untouched and safe from his possession. But she forced all such thoughts out of her mind and instead concentrated on making sure she was as open and honest as she could be about how much she wanted him.

Her fingers curled in his hair as his head moved down her body, his mouth touching her breast. She cried out his name when he started sucking on her nipple, passionately and urgently, as if he wanted to brand her breasts with his touch. When he bit her nipple a little bit too hard, she winced but didn't say a word of protest, bearing the pain silently.

But even without her saying a word, it was as if Derek sensed her pain anyway because the next second he was stroking her breast in a soothing motion, his tongue slowly and tenderly swirling around her nipple as if in apology.

Another twinge to her heart, but this time it was not bittersweet. This time, it tasted a lot like ambrosia, temptingly sweet as a promise of eternity.

"Kiss me whatever way you want," she heard herself whisper, her voice embarrassingly husky. A part of her couldn't believe she was saying such words, but another part of her wondered how she could not. It was time to face the truth. She wanted to belong to Derek completely, and this was the only way to do it.

Jaike's words had him groaning, and what little was left of his control disappeared, leaving him mad with desire. This time, he could no longer think, his need to possess Jaike's body taking over him completely.

He laid kisses down her body, licking her navel before he moved further down until he could push her thighs wide open. He pushed them wider and wider until they formed a wide V and allowed him an eyeful of her beautiful, wet flesh.

When she tried to cover it, he growled, "No!"

"Then please stop staring—"

He looked up at her with fierce eyes. "But you told me it's mine."

The words had her swallowing and then slowly, her hands fell back to her sides.

Her unexpected submissiveness made his cock ache harder, and his desire no longer knew any bounds. He dipped his head, his only thought to destroy her as much as she destroyed him. He wanted both of them wrecked with passion until they could no longer think or breathe.

Jaike's body arched off the bed, a gasp falling past her lips as she felt his tongue sliding up and down her folds. "Derek!" Her fingers dug into his head as

she felt his tongue slip inside her pussy.

As he fucked her with his tongue, she couldn't help moving her hips up and down to meet the wet hard thrusts, her fingers twisting around his hair as she tried to get her pussy closer and closer to his tongue.

Wave after wave of pleasure hit her, its intensity making her vision blur. When she felt his thumb joining in the action, brushing against her clitoris, she knew she was getting close. "Derek, Derek, Derek…" She couldn't stop herself from chanting his name over and over, her tone becoming high pitched when two long fingers also slid inside her, matching the thrusts of his tongue.

Pleasure started to form into a ball inside her, spreading heat throughout her body. "Derek!" She was so unbearably close that she knew she would come any minute now.

When Derek felt Jaike's inner muscles clenching against his fingers, he knew it was time. He stroked her faster, his fingers and tongue working harder to arouse her flesh while his thumb kept her clitoris on fire.

Soon, her muscles had contracted so tightly around his fingers it was hard for him to take them out before thrusting them back in.

"DEREEEEEEEEEK!"

She was there all of a sudden, her body curving up as her orgasm hit her like a sensual explosion that left her body jerking hard against his. Every streak of come pulsing out of her had their bodies slapping against each other, and throughout it he never stopped thrusting his fingers in and out of her, prolonging the pleasure until she was begging for him to stop.

He lifted his head, growling, "Never." And he proved he meant it by lifting his body up and replacing his tongue and fingers with his cock. He pushed it in inch by inch, giving her time to get used to the sensation of being filled to this extent.

Jaike could only hold on to Derek as she looked down between their bodies, her arousal slowly climbing back to its peak as she continued to stare at the way his cock was making its way inside her.

"God, Derek…" A moan escaped her as more of his cock made it inside her still quivering pussy. "You feel like too much."

He said tautly, "Unfortunately, that's only half of it."

Her eyes widened. "Half? What—aaaaaaah!" Although the words were true, it had also been a distraction and Derek used it wisely, his cock sliding home and pushing past her virginal barrier in one go.

"Derek!" The scream was part pain, part pleasure, her whole body rejoicing at the knowledge that it now completely belonged to its Master. Her dazed eyes searching for his gaze, she whispered, "I'm yours now."

“Yes.” He raised himself up with his arms, pulling his cock almost all the way out of her before slowly pushing it back into her. All the while, his gaze was on her face, his body stirring at the way she moaned in pleasure when he started thrusting in and out of her.

He kept his pace steady and slow, wanting her well used to his possession before he did anything else. When her legs wrapped around his waist, Derek knew it was his cue, and he began pounding into her then, hard and fast.

Jaike’s senses reeled when Derek’s thrusts became fast and frenzied. Each thrust wrung a cry out of her, and she could only sob his name and tighten her legs around him while he took complete control of her body.

Even though she felt like she was falling apart in his arms, she couldn’t help but want more and she cried it out loud. “Please, Derek, more. Harder. Harder. Harder. Haaaaaaardeeeeeeeeer—”

Suddenly, she was there again, her orgasm taking her completely by surprise. As her body shook with her second release, Derek didn’t stop pounding into her. A moment later, she felt his hard body freeze. Her gaze flew to his face just in time to see it clench in need, his lips forming her name silently as his cock pumped its seed into her. His large body shuddered with each spurt of come, but still he kept pounding into her.

She wrapped her arms around him the moment his weight settled down on her. She should be afraid right now. She should be very afraid because she was so damn happy. Surely this was the kind of happiness that had fooled Diana into thinking she loved Anthony Carras and he had loved her back?

That was what she should feel, but she didn’t.

In Derek’s arms, she felt safe. She felt cherished. She felt like she belonged.

Inside her, Derek’s cock started to stir again.

Her eyes flew up to him in shock. “Again?”

And she was also surprised when she realized that the feral light in Derek’s stormy gaze hadn’t completely died, that his doubts about her desire to belong to him hadn’t been completely erased.

“I need to make sure your body won’t forget it’s mine.”

It was all he said before the agonizingly exquisite pleasure of falling apart in his arms started all over again. Before she knew it, he had rolled himself to his back and he was slowly impaling her with his cock—

She whimpered as she felt her pussy widening to accommodate him in this new position. Somehow, she felt even fuller, and she could feel herself turning red all over when she saw that Derek was watching her every expression.

“You should stop staring,” she half-begged, half-demanded.

“No. You’re mine.” It was all he said before he had her bouncing on his

cock, his mouth latching on to her nipple.

Throughout the night, there was no rest for her, Derek making her come again and again until she was limp and near to passing out, her voice hoarse from crying his name out so many times.

Only when Jaike was sleeping did Derek slowly come to his senses. When he did, he could only stare at the girl lying so innocently next to him, aghast and disgusted by his selfish ways. What the fuck had come over him? Had he been so fucking jealous and scared of losing her to Angelo that he had practically fucked her to unconsciousness?

He should feel guilty about what he did, but apparently he was more a monster than he himself had realized. Because right now, looking at Jaike and remembering what they had just done, all he wanted was to fuck her again.

When Jaike slowly woke up, she found Derek fully clothed and seated at the edge of her bed. Her eyes blinked open groggily. “Derek?”

He said tonelessly, “Let’s break up.”

Chapter Seven

Jaike shot to a seated position on her bed, keeping the covers close to her naked form by crossing her arms over her chest. “Excuse me?” Maybe she had just dreamt it – maybe it was a fleeting nightmare she remembered. Surely Derek couldn’t have just said those words.

“You heard me.”

“I don’t think I did.”

After a beat, Derek said flatly, “We should break up. That’s what I said. We should—”

She said stiffly, “You don’t have to repeat it again.” She counted quietly to herself. One, two, three…

She was not going to freak out.

Seven, eight, nine…

Even if it felt like he was dumping her right after he had taken her virginity…

Twelve, thirteen—

Fuck being calm about it.

She grabbed a pillow and hit his face as hard as she could. She kept hitting him and hitting him, not wanting to stop because if she did then he would see her —

“Stop it.” Derek finally managed to take hold of her hands and pull it down. Looking at her, he was aghast to find her crying. On the other hand, the baser side of him also noticed that the covers had fallen to her waist, leaving her upper half completely bare. Every time her chest heaved, her glorious breasts would rise and fall with it, presenting Derek with a temptation that his cock urged him not to resist.

“Why are you crying?” he demanded.

“What kind of stupid question is that?”

He had to ask, even if knowing the answer could rip his heart into half. “Do you hate me that much?” He told himself to wait for an answer, to be a fucking man and face the consequences of his actions. But he couldn’t. He didn’t want to hear her answer because even just for today, he wanted to pretend he still had a chance with her. That he could still make it up to her.

“I’m sorry,” he said harshly. “You didn’t deserve the way I treated you last night. I know saying I’m sorry isn’t enough, but I’m saying it still. I’m sorry for acting like an animal—”

Jaike couldn’t believe her ears. “I-is that w-why you want us to break up?”

“What other reason is there?”

He looked at her like she was dumb as a post, and she couldn't help looking back at him the same way.

"What other reason?" she echoed incredulously. "Are you serious? We...we…we did *that* last night and the next thing I know, you're breaking up with me. Of course it's going to make me think all you wanted was that and now that you have it, you…"

The whole time she had been talking, Derek had stared at her in disbelief. When she choked off, he demanded, "Are you stupid?"

She snapped back, "Are *you* stupid? Why would you even think that I'd want us to break up because of how much you wanted me last night?"

"Because it's not normal," he gritted out. "It was your first time and I couldn't stop myself. I wanted to fuck you again and again because I was jealous. And even seeing you asleep and tired, I still wanted to fuck you. I wanted to hear you say over and over that you're mine!" He looked at her bitterly. "Now you tell me that's not twisted and fucked up."

Her eyes looking straight into his, she said softly, "It *is* twisted and fucked up."

His head bowed, the pain of her words taking him completely by surprise. But he had asked for that, hadn't he?

When she started to speak again, his body tensed, preparing itself for far greater pain, for a final rejection.

"Even if it is like that, Derek, what made you think I didn't want it?"

His head shot up, and that was when he saw the smile wobbling on her delicate lips. It told him what he had never really allowed himself to think in certain terms.

Jaike *was* the one he had been waiting for all his life.

"I've always known I was different." Derek's gaze captured Jaike's as he started to tell her about his childhood. "By the time I was sixteen, I became restless and I fucked any and every girl who came my way."

The words had Jaike flinching, pain flashing in her dark eyes.

It had him groaning and ignoring her struggles, he pulled her onto his lap and wrapped his arms tightly around her. "I'm sorry, baby, but I want – need – you to hear the truth. We both need this."

She confessed shakily, "It hurts. Just thinking about you with another girl…"

"It's all in the past," he said fiercely. "And it will stay in the past, got that?" But doubts still clouded her gaze, making him sigh. He pressed a kiss to her forehead. "I did it because I was looking for that special someone who would understand me. I've always thought that somewhere in this world, there'd be a

girl who wouldn't mind I was possessive to a fault. That I would want to own her and be mine completely. Every time I met someone that I thought would be compatible with me, I'd show a little of that side of myself, and you know what happens?"

She shook her head.

His lips twisted. "They get scared. They'd try to hide it of course. I'm the heir to two billion-dollar fortunes, after all. But I could smell, I could *feel* their fear, and of course I knew they weren't the one." He cupped her face. "Until you."

Her eyes widened.

"So be honest with me, baby. Are you afraid of me?" He found himself holding his breath.

She shook her head. "I'm only afraid of myself – of how much you mean to me. How much you've *always* meant to me from the very start."

The words had him kissing her tenderly, a brush of lips that somehow felt more intimate than any caress. Derek was always sweet and affectionate, charmingly so, but this was the first time she had experienced his tenderness. If it was up to her, she'd make sure that this tender side of his would only be hers to see, forever.

"Jaike?"

"Y-yes?"

"In case you still doubt it, let me say it very clearly now." He traced her lips. "I love you. I have loved you from the first day I saw you, and I will love you forever."

Pleasure like no other exploded inside her at hearing the words. But at the same time, despair hit because she knew, even without trying, that she couldn't make herself say the words. Not so soon, not after what happened between her and Angelo. Not when she was still trying to come to terms with how similar she was to Diana.

She didn't want to be her mother's daughter, but everything seemed to be pointing in that direction.

She looked at Derek miserably. "I want to say the words—"

He placed a finger on her lips. "You don't have to force it."

Her eyes widened.

"How many times do I have to tell you? You were always been meant to be mine, and I was always been meant to be yours. You already love me. You were born loving me, Jaike Hepburn. Now, you just have to wait until it's the right time for your heart to realize what your body already knows."

She wanted to hope. Oh God, how she wished she could believe what he

was saying was true. “Do you really believe it?” she whispered.

“Do you trust me?”

This she could answer readily. “Yes.”

“Then trust me when I tell you my words are true. You already love me.” His lips curved in a breathtaking smile. “If you want, we can start with your body. Every time you cry out my name, it’s your body saying you love me.”

In another second, he had flipped her on her back and he was pulling her hips up.

Oh my God, what had just happened?

When she felt Derek pushing her legs wide open, she said again, “Derek?” Her voice was tinged with alarm. When he didn’t answer, she peeked at him over her shoulder and gasped when she saw him unzipping himself.

“Derek!” But her voice soon turned into a moan as she felt him wetting the slits of her pussy with the head of his cock. Soon she was soaking wet, and she moaned long and loud when she felt him pushing his cock inside her.

She shivered when he breathed into her ear, whispering, “Make as much noise as you want. It’s one way of saying you love me. And you want to say it, don’t you?”

She closed her eyes, unable to help pushing her hips back against him so she could have more of his cock. And as he started to thrust in and out of her, she slowly found the courage to admit the truth. “Yes.” She wanted to say the words. She hoped that one day she could say the words without thinking that she was being her mother’s daughter.

When Jaike woke again, she wasn’t surprised to find her body heavy and pleasantly sore. Derek hadn’t been content to make love to her just once this morning. Before leaving, he had managed to make love to her in the shower and just when he had been about to go out, he had turned away from the door, carried her to the sofa, and made love to her all over again, with both of them still fully clothed.

The memories made her smile and blush. She had never allowed herself to dream of what life would be like if she was Derek Christopoulos’ girlfriend, but so far, it was really, really good.

Since it was a Saturday, she had nowhere to go and preferred to wait for Derek to come back. She decided to spend the time cleaning her room, and as she started dusting her books one by one, a letter slowly fell out.

With a frown, Jaike bent down and reached for it. Opening the envelope, she pulled out the piece of paper in it. The handwriting was instantly recognizable.

Angelo had written her a letter?

Chapter Eight

Jaike stood in front of the full-length mirror at the girls' locker room and nervously studied her appearance. She had done her best to look good – or at least normal. In other words, *not nerdy.* But she didn't think she had succeeded. With her hair tied up, her shirt nothing but a plain white tee, and her denim shorts and sneakers just as plain, she looked more like a high school girl on her first trip to college.

With a sigh, she turned away and headed for the door. Stupid Derek. Showoff Derek. Insensitive Derek. Didn't he know it was too soon for them to be seen together?

Or was it?

Again, Angelo's letter entered her mind, causing her to stumble on her own feet. She placed a hand on the lockers, the only way to keep her upright as words from Angelo's letter swarmed in her mind. Angelo was Anthony Carras' nephew. Anthony was his favorite uncle. Anthony – her Uncle Tony, the man who had ultimately caused her mother's death. Her fists clenched in disbelief and frustration. How could a man like Anthony Carras be related to Angelo Valencia?

When I learned about my uncle's connection to your mother's death, I was deeply ashamed. We had always known he was not…right in his mind, but we never thought he would end up hurting another person the way he had caused harm to your mother. With all my heart, I beg your forgiveness. My whole family begs your forgiveness.

At first, all I wanted was to ensure your well being. We set up your scholarship and made sure you were taken care of for the rest of your life. But then I met you. And just like that, all my plans were ruined. I knew I could never leave your life just like that. Even if I knew I could only have you on borrowed time, I didn't care – I wanted to have a chance to be with you…

Forcing you to leave me, forcing myself to hurt you was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. But I had to do it, cara. It was the only way for you to leave your comfort zone and free yourself to discover your true strength. With me, you would always be scared of the shadows, and I owe it to you to let you go.

If you can ever forgive me…

I will be waiting.

And this time, you will know the real me.

Yours,
A Dom who once had you in his life.

Jaike wiped her eyes, unsurprised to find herself crying at the mere memory of Angelo's letter. She couldn't believe he had carried the burden of such a secret the whole time they had been together. He really was an angel, to feel like he had to pay for the sins of his blood. How could he ever think that she'd hate him for being related to Anthony Carras?

No matter how much she had suffered because of his uncle, in the end she knew that he was *not* Anthony and would never be like him.

Thinking about Angelo made her heart constrict, and if she was honest with herself, Jaike knew a part of her was tempted to run back to him. Because Angelo was right – she had always considered him the safe choice. With him, she was never afraid of losing herself completely. But with Derek?

Derek Christopoulos, the man who had captured her heart from the very first time they met.

Derek, the man who made her want to submit to him in every way.

Derek, the man who had told her he loved her, had been in love with her all along—

Heat engulfed her body, and something fierce and warm filled her chest, caused by an emotion she dared not name.

Someone knocked on the door, jerking Jaike out of her thoughts.

"Ms. Hepburn?"

Startled to hear herself addressed like that, she answered in a tentative voice. "Yes?"

"Mr. Christopoulos would like to know if you are all right."

"Umm…yes. I am." Why wouldn't she be? She was only in the locker room.

A pause.

"The thing is, Mr. Christopoulos wants to see you right away." The man outside the locker room cleared his throat. "He says I am to tell you that 'he wants to see the love of his life right now'. And if that does not get you out of the locker room, I am to say that he will do what you two did—"

"I'm coming out!" She practically burst out of the locker room, face flaming. She was so right about him. Stupid, insensitive, showoff Derek.

Michael – one of the many bodyguards who constantly followed Derek around – appeared relieved upon seeing her and swiftly escorted Jaike to the gym. She tried to get him to walk with her but the older man insisted on walking behind her, telling Jaike it was the only way for him to do his job properly.

“But there’s no risk to me here,” she protested.

Michael only looked at her like she was crazy. “Mr. Christopoulos had your name included in every establishment that has his family on the VIP list. I would say you’ve been a potential target for kidnapping for almost a week now, ma’am.”

Her mind whirled with Michael’s revelation. Derek was like a whirlwind, with the way he kept turning her life upside down. She had every intention of calling him out on it, but when she got to the gym and saw the smile that curved on Derek’s lips upon seeing her, Jaike completely forgot about her anger.

He was half-lying on the basketball court’s floor, leaning against his elbows, a small distance apart from the other players who were taking a break while the rest continued to shoot hoops. It was her first time to see Derek wearing a basketball jersey, and darn it, but he looked extremely sexy, with the way his muscular body glistened with sweat.

He crooked a finger at her.

Jaike knew she should refuse, but she couldn’t. Instead, her feet moved on their own, and when she was close enough, Derek suddenly yanked her down, causing her to fall onto his lap.

“Derek!”

Laughing, he answered by fisting her hair and smothering the rest of her words with a kiss. She could feel herself turning red in embarrassment, knowing that everyone would see them kissing. But even so, Jaike couldn’t help responding to Derek’s possessive kiss, her fingers curling against his chest as her lips moved under his own, her tongue shyly mating with his.

When Derek finally broke the kiss, they were both breathing hard and there was a fierce glint of desire in his stormy gaze. “I missed you, Jaike Hepburn.”

She tried to return the words but couldn’t. So she leaned down and placed a quick kiss on his cheek instead.

When she pulled away, she was surprised to see Derek’s cheeks flushed.

Around them, the entire squad burst into laughter.

“Oh my God,” a falsetto voice Jaike recognized as Reid Chalkias’, the school’s most popular player on its varsity team, gasped behind them. “Is that Derek Christopoulos blushing after his girlfriend just kissed him?”

Jaike and Derek turned a deeper shade of red at the same time.

Derek reached for a lock of her hair, twirling it around his finger. “I can’t help it,” he said gruffly. “I’ve been after this girl for years, and this is the first time she’s kissed me on her own.”

Oooooooh. The whole team hooted and elbowed each other at Derek’s words.

Jaike was mortified. “You didn’t have to let them know that!”

Derek only shrugged. “Why not?” He flashed her a wicked grin. “I love you and I’m proud that you’re mine now.” Leaning forward, he bumped his nose lightly against hers, a cute and tender gesture that she would never have expected from someone as sophisticated as Derek. “Soon,” he whispered, “you’ll be the same. You’ll be as proud as I am about being my girlfriend.”

She turned warm all over at his words. When they were together like this, life didn’t seem as scary and her fears about them becoming like Diana and Anthony were easy to ignore. She whispered back shyly, “I already am. I’m proud to be your girlfriend, Derek.”

Behind them, Reid was laughing again. “What the fuck? Christopoulos is blushing again.”

****

More days passed, with each being more glorious than the last. Jaike couldn’t remember being this happy. It felt bad and traitorous to think so, but she couldn’t even recall being this giddy in all the years she had been with Angelo. Perhaps if both of them had been more honest with each other, things could have been different.

But with Derek?

Every day was…magical.

Like now.

“Time to get up, baby.”

Derek scooped a sleepy Jaike into his arms, settling her on his lap with her back against his chest while he played with her breasts and teased her pussy.

By the time Jaike was fully awake, she was soaking wet between her legs and whimpering Derek’s name.

At the sound of her moans, Derek lifted her up and then lowered her back down again, causing Jaike to whimper as she felt herself being impaled on his cock.

“Morning sex,” Derek whispered huskily into her ear, “is supposed to make your brain cells become more active. That’s why,” he added piously, “I’ve decided to wake you up every day with this.”

Jaike could only nod. Whether that was true or not didn’t matter. She would be happy if he chose to wake her up every day like this.

After, Derek carried her to the shower, hot water already running in the tub. “Don’t be too long.”

When she came out of the shower, Jaike expected Derek to be sleeping since all his classes were scheduled after lunch. But instead, the bedroom was empty and she found him in her suite’s mini kitchen, setting the table.

“You don’t have to do that,” she protested. “You should be sleeping. Didn’t you come home late from poker night?” Before, she had stumbled all over the word ‘home’ but now, she found it wonderfully easy to say. She knew her suite at Blake Hall was nothing like any of the palatial homes that Derek’s family possessed but even so, that was how it felt now. Wherever Derek was would always be home.

Derek yanked her down on his lap, something she had noticed he liked to do every so often. “Just eat your breakfast like a good girl.”

“I’d like to,” she said breathlessly, “but not when you’re doing that.”

He was tickling her ear with his hot breath the whole time she was talking, making her think of anything *but* breakfast. There was also something big and hard poking her below, and that was a major distraction, too.

Derek sighed. “Fine.” He cupped her face, placing a short sweet kiss on her lips before reluctantly setting her down on the seat next to him. “Go and eat your breakfast then.”

When she was done, he waved off her offer to clean up. “I’ll do that later.” At her doubtful look, he said in exasperation, “I promise I won’t break any more of your plates.”

“I only have three left, Derek.”

“I said I promise, didn’t I? Now let’s go.”

She was confused. “Let’s go…where?” She was rooted to the spot, watching Derek walk to the door in his sweat pants and hoodie.

Derek looked back at her with a raised eyebrow. “Are you going to move or what?”

“B-but where are you going?” She slowly walked to his side.

He opened the door. “Duh. Walking you to class of course.”

Her eyes widened.

Derek grabbed her hand. “You’re really going to be late at this rate.”

And she had been dumbstruck the whole time they walked to her first class of the day, unable to believe that Derek Christopoulos had woken up early just to, well, walk with her. By the time they reached her school building, everyone was staring at them, and she knew what they were all thinking. It was obvious that Derek had just gotten up from bed, with his bed-tousled hair. Just as obvious was *why* he was up—

Derek tipped her chin up. “What time does your class end?”

“Umm, five?”

“I’ll be outside your room waiting for you.” He kissed her on the forehead and began walking away.

She could only look at him, her heart nearly bursting with happiness. She so

wanted to say the words then, but something was still stopping her.

Derek turned around and began walking backward as he called out her name. “Jaike?”

She blushed because she felt everyone looking at Derek when he said her name. It was as if everyone wanted to be Jaike – *his* Jaike. “Yeah?”

He grinned, that beautiful wicked grin of his that never failed to make her blush and her body throb. “I love you!”

Oh God.

Oh God.

Oh God.

Jaike couldn’t help but cover her face in embarrassment even as more of that unnamable emotion filled her heart. When she finally looked up, Derek was gone, and she reluctantly turned away.

One day, she told herself. She’d be able to tell him she loved him back. *One day, she’d be free from—*

A shadow fell in front of her, making Jaike look up.

She stilled in shock when she realized who it was.

He looked far from his usually immaculate self. He had shadows under his eyes, and stubble darkened his usually clean-shaven face. When their gazes met, Angelo sucked in his breath.

“You read my letter, haven’t you?” he whispered.

****

When Derek got back home, the first thing he saw was Jaike’s organizer, lying forgotten on the center table. Should he text her about it? But then, knowing Jaike, she’d probably deny she needed it even if she did. His Sub always did hate relying on him and only allowed herself to be obedient and submissive when they were in bed.

Grabbing the organizer, Derek left the room again and jogged back to school. He tried to recall what her first class was. Taxation? Literature?

He was about to approach the first student he came across when Derek happened to turn around and saw—

No.

He closed his eyes but when he opened them, Derek could see them through the cafeteria’s glass windows. They were seated at one of the corner booths, with Jaike’s head bent down.

What the hell was she doing with Angelo Valencia?

His heart exploded in pain when he saw the other man reach for Jaike’s hands…and she didn’t pull away. She didn’t fucking pull away.

Slowly, Derek turned away and started walking back to Blake Hall. On his

way, he took out his phone and sent her a message.

You forgot your organizer. I'll head back there to give it to you.

Jaike replied right away.

It's okay. I'm already in class.

Chapter Nine

Jaike's emotions were in a turmoil as she found herself seated in front of Angelo. Just like that, memories of their time together came to her and it made her want to cry. When she found out he had cheated on her, all she could remember was the devastating pain of his betrayal. But now that she knew the truth, now she could remember the good times they had shared.

He had loved to comb her hair, with Jaike seated on the floor while he was on the couch, running the comb through her locks. Unlike Derek, who liked spending most of his time out of the house, Angelo had been the opposite. He was content staying in her place, both of them reading together, their hands entwined.

He had been her best friend for three years, she acknowledged painfully. But the secret Angelo hid from her had also kept him from being something else – even if he had been her boyfriend.

When he suddenly reached for her hands, she couldn't make herself pull away, knowing it would hurt Angelo if she did.

"Cara, are you mad at me? Is that why you are unable to look at me now?"

Her head jerked up. "No. Of course not." Her voice broke. "How could I… after what you've done for me?"

His lips formed a bitter smile. "You mean what I've done *to* you."

She shook her head vigorously. "No. What you've done for me," she repeated emphatically. Swallowing, she said haltingly, "I won't deny I was shocked when I found out about the relationship between you and…him. But Angelo, you're not him—"

"I was the one who argued against my mother's decision to put him in an institution. I thought he was being more arrogant than usual, that was all." Angelo's hands tightened over hers. "I didn't know," he said painfully, "that he was cruel like that. I didn't know he was treating your mother like that—"

"You couldn't have known. No one could have known except those he and my mother chose to involve in their…games." She couldn't help cringing as she said the word, knowing how unsuitable it was to describe the many horrible ways Diana had to prove her love for Anthony Carras.

Angelo said jerkily, "I know I have no right to ask you of this now but…are you…are you and Christopoulos okay?"

Jaike blinked back tears. Angelo was a proud man, and she knew how much it cost him to ask that question. "Yes," she answered chokingly. "We're okay. We're…*happy*."

"Do you love him?"

Did she love Derek?

She gazed at Angelo, and it struck her then, the resemblance he shared with his uncle. Looking at Angelo reminded her of all that had been safe and peaceful in her life. With Angelo, she had nothing to fear about being her mother's daughter. But she had not been living, either.

With Derek, every little thing he did, every word he said and every way he looked at her – all of it made her heart beat madly. There wasn't ever a second she was afraid of losing herself in him.

Slowly, she said, "I can't answer that, Angelo. When I say it for the first time…" Her smile was fragile and strong at the same time, a smile tinged with both fear and hope. "I want to say it to him first."

At Jaike's quiet words, the piece of his heart that belonged to Jaike shattered, a death that was long overdue. It saddened and freed Angelo at the same time, and he knew he had no one to blame but himself. He could have taken a risk from the very start, telling Jaike his real feelings. He could have been like Christopoulos, who had worn his heart on his sleeve and didn't give a damn about what other people said – or even when Jaike herself had pushed him away.

Maybe, if he hadn't had too many walls around his own heart, things would not have turned out this way.

But he hadn't, and so the better man – the one more deserving of Jaike – had won.

****

Jaike was on her way back to class when her phone beeped. As she fumbled for her phone in her bag, she couldn't help but think back at how her talk with Angelo went. She had always thought that when they would talk again, she would end up crying or raging at him. But now? After what Angelo had revealed in his letter, it was impossible not to understand him. Not to forgive him.

When she found her phone, she saw the message was from Derek.

Derek: *You forgot your organizer. I'll head back there to give it to you.*

Jaike: *It's okay. I'm already in class.*

Biting her lip, she wondered if now was a good time to tell him about Angelo and decided not to. That was something they should talk about in person.

Jaike: I think I'm going to skip classes. Are you still at home?

Derek: No. I have some stuff to do for the family. How about we go out later tonight? I have a surprise for you.

Jaike gulped. The last time he had a surprise for her, she ended up receiving a collar. What would she end up getting tonight? An engagement ring?

Jaike: Just tell me – is it going to make me cry?

Derek: Absolutely.

Jaike: Do I need to wear a blindfold?

Derek: Yes. See you later.

Jaike: See you.

She waited for Derek's usual way of ending their text conversations. He either said 'I love you' with 'I want to fuck you', but now there was none. It made her uneasy, but she told herself she was worrying over nothing. Tonight, she promised herself. She would surprise Derek, too. She would wear a turtleneck and under it her collar, and when he took off her clothes – that was when he'd see it. That was when she'd tell him she loved him.

****

"It's done. She's coming." Derek shoved his phone back in his pocket and faced his friends.

Nick shook his head. "I don't think this is a good idea." He and his twin were seated at the couch, identical in every way except for their preference in clothing. While Nick always looked like the young tycoon he was, Jason had more laidback tastes, preferring to dress in shirts and jeans.

They were at the Christakos' head office, a place they occasionally used to enjoy a drink when they tired of the crowds in Christien's nightclubs.

He headed to the bar at the corner, where Reid was pouring whiskey into several shot glasses. "Thank you for letting me use your showroom." Reid's house parties were an urban legend in their school, notorious for the wicked and depraved acts that often took place in it. The "showroom" was located at the back of Reid's property, with one of its rooms made up of two-way mirrors. It was often used for BDSM activities between students who knew early on they were Doms and Subs. As Derek was no exhibitionist, he never had a reason to go to the showroom. But for Jaike, he was more than willing to make an exception.

"You know, Derek, I'm never the one to be the voice of reason among us but…" Reid's green eyes were serious as he said, "I don't think what you're planning to do is a good idea."

"If you want a consensus on how rash you are being, then you have it." This from Christien, who stood next to the windows, which boasted of Miami's panoramic cityscape. "You should talk to her first—"

"I gave her the chance to tell the truth," Derek cut his friend off, his tone savage. "But she *lied.* She fucking lied." His fists clenched in impotent rage. "I've told her endless times that I loved her. And she never said it back. I fucking thought she only needed time, but of course now I know the truth." A hollow laugh escaped him. "She can *never* love someone like me."

“When you do this,” Nathan said, “she may never forgive you.”

He answered flatly, “That’s fine. I don’t think I’ll be able to forgive her either.”

Chapter Ten

So this was Reid Chalkias' home, Jaike thought. It was nothing like she expected. Secured with high walls and automated gates, the property appeared more like a military fortress, especially with the guards regularly patrolling its perimeters. Why would a varsity athlete with a playboy reputation need this kind of security? She thought of asking but decided it wasn't worth risking her life for. She had a feeling the answer would be that…*classified.*

Everyone around her was wearing masks. She was, too, a simple black one that covered half of her face. It had come with Derek's written instructions, which also included not talking to anyone at the party except Reid himself.

People around her turned to stare and whisper as she walked past them. She couldn't fault them. She was the only one here who wasn't dressed for swimming. She was gawking, too, unable to believe how lurid the goings-on were around her. There were girls frolicking at the illuminated infinity pool, and they were all topless. At the far end of one of the landscaped gardens, she could have sworn she saw another girl on her knees, giving head to a guy.

She had heard about the Prince of Darkness' parties being "wild", but now she knew that was a vast understatement.

This was beyond wild. This was immoral, and she couldn't understand why Derek wanted to meet with her here. The sick feeling in her stomach came back, stronger this time. It had been there since she had her talk with Angelo. *It was probably guilt*, Jaike thought with a gulp. She had the strongest urge to tell Derek right away about what happened, but she was terrified of doing it over the phone. If she did and he got mad, she had to be there with him to make sure Derek understood nothing had happened. She didn't want Derek to disappear on her again like before.

Her masked escort took her to a pathway lined with stone steps that wove around the house. At the end of the pathway was Reid Chalkias, mask in hand. Dressed completely in black, he really did look like the Prince of Darkness, with the way his sinfully good-looking appearance beckoned women around him to indulge in debauchery.

He was the proverbial bad boy, irresistible and ruthless in the way he loved and discarded the women who came to him.

"Is Derek inside?" She couldn't help stammering, feeling extremely ill at ease with the way she stood out like a sore thumb in her surroundings.

She expected Reid to laugh at how awkward she was, but his tone was surprisingly gentle when he answered. "Yes."

She might be imagining it, but she thought she could see regret darkening

his green eyes as he continued, “This part of my property, however, requires Subs to come in blindfolded.”

Jaike’s whole world fell out of its axis at the word Reid had just used. *Sub.* How did he know? Had Derek told him?

Reid looked at her straight in the eye. “If you are not a Sub, I advise you not to go in there.”

Jaike’s nails dug deep into her palms. She wanted to run away. This really didn’t feel right. No one was supposed to know that about her. Surely Derek knew that? But…he had promised her a surprise. He loved her. He would never do anything to hurt her. If she really trusted him—

Ignoring her clamoring instincts, she forced herself to nod. “I’m…a Sub.” Her body shook as she admitted the truth. “I’m…Derek Christopoulos’ Sub.”

Reid’s eyes became hooded. “And so you are.” Stepping forward, he pulled out a silk handkerchief from his pocket and carefully wrapped it around Jaike’s eyes. “We have very simple rules inside the showroom.”

Her stomach dropped at the term Reid used to describe the place behind him. *The showroom?* More alarm bells rang inside her head, but she told herself she had nothing to fear. She trusted Derek. He loved her. He would never do anything to hurt her.

“A Sub is not allowed to speak. All you can do is to listen to orders and follow them as well as you can. It’s how things work at the showroom. Only Doms are allowed to speak inside.”

Stunned, she asked, “T-there’s more than one Dom inside?”

“No.” Reid’s tone was expressionless as he answered Jaike honestly. He waited for her to ask another question – the one that truly mattered. Goddammit, he wished she would ask and then they could put a stop to this bullshit. Maybe, maybe then he could save his friend from committing possibly the worst mistake of his life.

But Jaike didn’t.

A smile of relief broke over her face, and Reid cursed silently at the innocent reaction. He had a feeling this would not end the way Derek Christopoulos expected it – and in the end, Derek would only have himself to blame.

****

The showroom was cold. It was the first thing that struck her, and she found herself thankful she had chosen to wear her turtleneck. Without it, her teeth would probably start chattering anytime now.

Reid was long gone, having left her at some place inside the showroom, commanding her not to move before leaving her. She listened to the sound of

footsteps receding and when she heard the door close, Jaike couldn't help but shiver, realizing that she was alone with—

"I'm the Dom here, and what I say goes."

Derek.

She would have known his voice anywhere. He sounded like he was a good distance away from her, too far for her to reach out and touch. His voice was cold and clear, certainly nothing like the warm, husky tone he often used with her. She wanted to ask what this was about but bit her lip instead, telling herself she owed it to Derek to show her trust. She would be the perfect Sub for him, would do whatever he wanted. She loved him, and what he wanted she wanted, too. It would always be so because he was a man she could trust. The *only* man she could trust with her heart.

"I want you to touch yourself."

Touch herself?

"Start with your breasts. Play with it."

Swallowing, she did as asked. Her hands shook as she cupped her breasts and started kneading them. Fear and desire blended together inside her body as she continued to touch herself.

"Play with your nipples."

Her fingers slowly crept up, tweaking her own nipples. A silent cry escaped her as she imagined it was Derek playing with her nipples. She didn't understand why he wanted her to do this, but she would do it.

"Keep one hand on your nipple. Keep tugging it. Use your other hand to touch your pussy. Just slide your hand inside your panties and start stroking yourself."

Her hand dipped inside her panties, and she began stroking herself. Silent whimpers escaped her at the combined pleasure of her nipple being tugged and her pussy being stroked.

"Now push one finger inside you. Start thrusting."

Her finger started to move in and out of her own pussy.

"Move your hips up and down to meet your finger's thrusts. I want to see on your face how much you want it."

At Derek's command, she lifted her hips up and down, meeting the thrust of her finger. She began rubbing and tweaking her nipple harder as the pleasure began to build inside of her.

"Pretend it's me fucking you with my cock. It's not as big, but I want you to pretend anyway. If you want to be my Sub, I want to see how good you are at fucking. One look at your face and a man should know how much you want it."

She did as asked, letting all her inhibitions go. Her mouth parted in desire,

and she felt her cheeks heating up as she thrust her finger in and out of her faster and harder, wishing it could really be as big as Derek's cock.

"Now, I want you to come. Do what it takes and come."

She thought of Derek licking her pussy, his tongue swirling against her clitoris and biting her lip hard, she thrust her finger inside her as deeply as she could. It was more than enough, fireworks exploding behind her eyelids as the wetness gushed out of her pussy, soaking her finger completely.

"Call my name out as you come."

She moaned, "Derek—"

And that was when she realized she was not alone, with other girls echoing the very same thing.

Derek.

Derek.

Derek.

Derek.

Derek.

Oh God, there were too many to count—

She tore the blindfold from her eyes and found herself gazing straight at Derek's cold blue-gray eyes.

Her wild gaze took in her surroundings and this time, an audible gasp broke out of her as she saw that there were at least twenty other women inside the "showroom"—

Oh God, the showroom.

Glass all around her, and now she knew why it was called the showroom.

Other Doms were watching them now. Other Doms had been watching from the very start.

"Why?" The word was torn out of her. A part of her expected some of the Subs to stop what they were doing, to stop goddamn coming at Derek's command, but none of them did. *They were the perfect Subs,* she thought dully, *because they weren't stupid like her.* They only wanted Derek with their bodies. She – she was her mother's daughter. She had wanted Derek as a Dom with her heart.

"Why not?" His words were a cruel purr, his voice like a sword, cold, beautiful, and deadly.

She tried to back away from him as he walked forward, but either she was too slow or he was too fast. In an instant, Derek captured her by the shoulders, and she started to cry as he touched her ear with his tongue. Before, it would have made her feel excited and cherished. Now, it only made her feel like a whore.

“You’re my Sub, and everything I want, you’ll do, won’t you?” When Derek pulled away, the first thing he saw were the tears shining in her eyes. Her gaze was filled with betrayal, but it only made him want to lash out in his rage. She fucking dared to look at him like that when she was the one who had been leading him on all along?

“Did you really think I loved you?” he snarled.

He expected her to deny it, was ready to hurl more insults at her so he could make her feel like the cheap slut she was.

But she didn’t deny it.

Her voice dull, Jaike said, “Yes.” She looked at Derek but could no longer see him. All she saw was her past and present becoming one. She was her mother’s daughter. Blood would tell, and she had to accept that.

Tears streamed down her face. The pain inside her was excruciating, making her wish she could just die. As she thought about what she came here to do, she began to laugh, slowly, softly at first and then hysterically.

“Why did you even have to pretend you were in love with me, *Master*?” That was what Diana called Anthony when he was in one of his moods. He liked whipping her mother once in a while, and he liked hearing her sob ‘I love you, Master’ over and over as his whip tore her back open.

The way Jaike was laughing and talking made Derek feel like he was missing something. It was clear she was no longer herself and even though his blood still churned with rage at her betrayal, he couldn’t bear seeing her like this. He couldn’t bear other people seeing her like this.

Derek looked straight at the two-way windows, knowing his friend would be there, keeping an eye on things. “Reid, get everyone out of here.”

Jaike jerked at the name, and then she began to laugh harder. Of course his friends were watching, too. More tears fell, mingling with her unstoppable laughter. “Please don’t have them leave on my account.” As the door opened and men began to take the Subs away, she sang, “Let them stay. Let them hear how good the Master is at fooling me.”

She took off her turtleneck—

The blood drained from Derek’s face when he saw what was underneath it.

His choker.

The one she had never worn since they had left the shop…until now.

What the fuck did that mean?

“Jaike—” He reached for her, a cold, debilitating sense of fear wrapping itself around him, telling him if he didn’t hold on to her now, she would be gone from him forever.

But Jaike danced away from him. She threw her turtleneck to the floor.

Stroking the collar around her neck lovingly, she looked at him and said, “This is how good you are at fooling me, Master. I came here wearing this because I wanted to surprise you. I wanted you to see me wearing this while I told you I love you—”

Derek couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Jaike…loved him?

Jaike said brightly, “But that’s not all, Master.” She watched the last of the Subs leave and frowned. “Don’t go! I haven’t said the best part yet!” But none of them looked back, all of them set on following their Dom’s command. They really were the ideal Subs. And she was—

nothing.

Because she was her mother’s daughter and Diana was nothing. So Jaike was nothing, too.

She whirled around to face Derek, and looking at him, she felt like someone else was taking over her body, someone who couldn’t be hurt because she was the perfect Sub.

“I met with Angelo this morning. Did you know that?” Jaike knew she was the one speaking, but it was as if she was hearing another woman say the words. All she could do was watch and wait for her to self-destruct.

Derek’s chest squeezed at the name. But this time, it was not rage that made him feel cold inside. This time it was fear and the slowly dawning realization that he might have gotten everything so fucking wrong.

“You see, a few days ago I found a letter in my bookshelf. It was from Angelo. He’s the nephew of Anthony. My mother’s Dom. Did you know that? I didn’t know that. He told me he loved me in his letter. Not in so many words, but you get the picture. Well, I turned Angelo down. Because I love you. And I thought about telling you that I met him, but I didn’t want you to be mad so I thought I’d tell you later – and now is later so now I’m telling you.”

When Derek started for her, there was a look on his face that made her babble faster even as she tried backing away. “I’m my mother’s daughter. Did I tell you that, too? She liked making her Dom happy, and I want to make my Dom happy. I want you happy.”

“Jaike—”

She backed away faster from his touch. “You know Anthony, her Dom? He liked to hurt her, and she was okay with it because she loved him. I’m okay with you hurting me because I love—” Jaike screamed when Derek caught her and hauled her into his arms.

“No, don’t touch me! I’m not—”

“I love you—”

Something snapped inside her at the words, and she began to sob. She

wanted to speak, wanted to tell him to stop lying. Couldn't he stop lying? Couldn't he stop hurting her? Didn't he see how it killed her to hear his lies?

But she couldn't.

All she could do was cry as she tried to struggle out of his arms.

Derek's face was ashen, everything inside him bleeding as the truth of Jaike's words finally hit him. "Jaike, please…"

But still she struggled, and he was forced to let her go, fearing if he didn't, she would end up hurting herself.

Jaike slid down to her knees the moment Derek released her. She wanted to stop sobbing but she couldn't. Her eyes began to swell and her throat began to hurt, but she couldn't stop sobbing.

Derek crouched down in front of her. "Jaike, I'm sorry," he whispered hoarsely. "Please stop crying."

But still the ravaging sound continued, her body shaking with each sob.

"I love you, Jaike. I really love you."

But when the words only made her cry harder, Derek knew there was only one thing left to do.

Thirty minutes later, a taut-looking Angelo strode into the showroom, having broken all speed limits the moment he received Derek Christopoulos' message.

When he saw Jaike huddled on the floor, sobbing, wearing only a bra and jeans, rage turned his vision black and without a word, he stalked to Derek and threw a punch at the other man's face.

Derek didn't avoid the punch, and his head snapped sideways as the other man's fist connected with his jaw. "You can hit me as many times as you want later, but right now you need to…" His jaw clenched and he tasted blood inside his mouth. "Jaike needs you."

"I trusted her with you, Christopoulos." His tone became vicious. "Never again." Angelo turned his back on Derek and walked swiftly to the girl who shared his life for more than three years, the only girl he had allowed into his heart – and the only girl who had managed to break it.

"Jaike?"

Was she dreaming, or did she really hear Angelo's voice saying her name?

Slowly, she looked up, fearing that she had gone really insane.

But it was really Angelo.

It really was him.

"A-Angelo?"

"I'm going to take you away now."

She shook her head. "You can't. I'm not…I'm not good enough for you."

She remembered what she had done for Derek, what people had seen her do for Derek, and she started to cry again. “I’m…dirty. I’m—”

“The only girl I want,” Angelo finished fiercely. He took off his shirt and helped her into it. After, he carefully drew Jaike to him and carried her in his arms as he got back to his feet. The way she couldn’t stop shivering in his arms made him curse. What the fuck had Christopoulos done to her that made her seem like she was about to break any moment?

Derek’s heart shattered in pieces as Angelo started to walk away with Jaike in his arms. “Jaike—” But he stopped himself from speaking when Jaike began to cry again. It was as if the mere sound of his voice had become a trigger for her tears, a reminder of the pain he had caused her.

As Jaike slowly disappeared from his view, his own vision became blurry as he remembered her words.

I turned Angelo down. Because I love you. And I thought about telling you that I met him, but I didn’t want you to be mad so I thought I’d tell you later – and now is later so now I’m telling you...

I’m my mother’s daughter. Did I tell you that, too? She liked to make her Dom happy, and I want to make my Dom happy. I want you happy.

You know Anthony, her Dom? He liked to hurt her, and she was okay with it because she loved him. I’m okay with you hurting me because I love—

Derek crashed to his knees. “*Jaike*!” The pain inside him was like a virus, making his heart feel like it was being ripped into shreds, again and again. “I’m so damn sorry, Jaike. I’m so damn sorry.” His eyes closed, but all he could see was how his cruelty had driven Jaike down to her knees, hysterical and unable to stop crying.

I love you, Jaike.

He thought the words. He spoke the words out loud. It was the only thing he felt that could connect him to Jaike, the girl he had lost.

Jaike was gone. He had pushed her into the arms of another man again, a better man and this time, it was for good.

Chapter Eleven

Angelo carried her the whole time, from the moment he took her out of the car and all the way up to his bedroom on the second floor. Unlike most other students, Angelo preferred to stay off campus. He had always been a man who liked his privacy, and right now Jaike was thankful for it. This way, she would be far, far away from everyone once news broke out that she and Derek were no longer together.

She had been to his place several times, a luxurious apartment decorated with minimalist elegance. She had really liked his place, but tonight she was blind to its beauty. All she could see and feel was pain.

Pain that her stupidity over Derek caused.

Pain she suffered because she was her mother's daughter.

The thought made her curl in a ball on Angelo's bed. She was so tired of crying, but she couldn't stop, the tears falling every time she thought of Derek. Shame engulfed her as she recalled what she had done – and who had seen her do it.

Why? Why had he done that? Why?

She felt the bed dip and knew Angelo had seated himself next to her. When she felt his hand stroke her hair, she couldn't help but flinch.

Seeing it, Angelo withdrew his hand. He demanded rawly, "What did he do to you, Jaike?"

She shook her head, curling herself into a smaller ball.

Angelo wished he could do something for her, but he knew, just looking at Jaike, that this was something she had to solve on her own. "You can stay here for as long as you want. I hope you know that. And anytime you want to talk about it – whatever you want to talk about – I'm here for you. *Always.*"

****

"You're sure you saw her go inside Valencia's home?" Derek listened to Jaike's security detail as he clicked to download the photos her bodyguard sent him. His fists clenched and unclenched when the photos revealed Jaike in the other man's arms, looking like a fragile doll, the high-resolution photo revealing the lifelessness of her expression.

He had done that to her. He had promised Jaike he was worth trusting, had sworn he would never hurt her but in the end, he had broken his word and because of it, he had ended up breaking her, too.

When the guard finished with his report, Derek commanded him to stay there. "Call me if anything's up, thanks." As soon as he was done with the call, he checked his inbox and exhaled when he saw the incoming message from his

father's staff.

He downloaded the report, and his face whitened with pain as he started to discover the truth about Jaike's background.

As he read about Anthony Carras, he began to piece the clues together. He began to understand what drove Angelo to play the role of a guardian angel in her life. Now, he understood all the fears Jaike had struggled to conquer by saying yes to be his Sub and accepting him as her Dom. Now, he understood he had little chance of getting her back.

But because he was not the type to give up, he called her phone anyway.

Please.

Please.

Please just let me hear the sound of your voice.

****

Jaike's phone began to ring in the middle of the night. Even without looking at it, she knew instinctively who it was. Her rational side told her she should ignore it, but because she was her mother's daughter, she found herself crawling towards the bedside table and reaching for her bag. She shook out its contents, and her phone was the first thing to tumble out.

Her fingers trembled as she reached for it and answered the call. "Hello?"

Derek's breath hissed in relief when he heard Jaike's voice. "Thank God you answered."

Her eyes began to ache as the tears started to form.

Over the line, he heard her begin to cry and an expletive escaped Derek. "I'm sorry, Jaike," he said hoarsely. "Please, please don't cry. Let me explain."

But still she cried.

"God, Jaike, let me come to you," he begged. "Let me comfort you. I love you. I love you. I truly love you." He drew a deep shaking breath. "This morning, I came back to school. I wanted to give you your organizer, and that's when I saw you…"

He waited for her to say something, but when she didn't, he doggedly persevered, wanting Jaike to know the truth, every horrible bit of it. "I saw you with Valencia. He held your hand and you let him. I thought…I thought you've been playing with me all this time and that I was just your rebound." He swallowed. "I wanted to give you a chance, so I texted you—"

She whispered, "I lied. I didn't want to talk about it over the phone. I thought I should explain it to you in person because if you were hurt by it, I w-wanted…" She broke off, choking. "I w-wanted to be there to comfort you."

Derek's throat constricted at the words. "I'm sorry. I was so fucking jealous…there was a part of me that always questioned whether someone could

really love me and…God, when I saw you with Valencia…" His eyes closed as he remembered the agony he felt at seeing Jaike with another man. "*I snapped.* I have loved you for so long, Jaike. You were – are – my soul mate, the only girl made for me. It killed me to see you two together, and all I could think of then was revenge." Humiliation seeped into his voice, and he gripped his phone hard as he made his confession. "I knew your pride and independence were what mattered to you the most, so I did what I could to destroy it."

Derek's words washed over her like a cure she no longer needed. She was numb all over, her heart encased in unbreakable ice. A heart that didn't feel would never be hurt, and that was all she wanted. She would never let another man break her again. *Never again*. *Never.* It was all she could think of.

And because that was what she wanted, she said very clearly to Derek, "Thank you for explaining your actions, Derek. I forgive you. But I never want to see you again. I never want to talk to you again."

****

When Angelo went to check on Jaike the next morning, he was stunned and alarmed to find her gone from his bedroom. Taking the stairs two at a time, he came to an abrupt halt when he found her seated in his living room. She had changed into one of the outfits she had in stock in his home, clothes he hadn't been able to bear throwing away.

She stood up immediately at the sight of him, and right away he knew that Jaike had changed. Something was different about her – and whatever it was, it wasn't a good thing.

"Thank you for letting me stay overnight at your place."

The moment she spoke, Angelo knew what was wrong. It was like the Jaike he had known all these years had disappeared, the Jaike who had been a wonderful and enjoyable mass of contradictions, strong but vulnerable at the same time, shy but brave, solitary but compassionate. That Jaike was gone. The Jaike before him was cold, her heart no longer sad but not happy, either.

"You know you don't have to leave."

She shook her head. "I can't be near you, Angelo. Not right now. I care for you, and it makes me…weak. I don't want to be weak anymore." A smile briefly flashed on her lips, but it didn't reach her eyes. "I'm sorry, Angelo. I just need to be alone right now. Thank you again. I appreciate all the help you've given me."

This time, when she left, he didn't stop her.

Chapter Twelve

When she and Derek had been with each other, it was as if time flew. But now that she was alone, she realized that time moved at a different place when a person's heart wasn't exactly…intact.

The first thing she did when she got home was send a message to Derek to have his things taken away while she stayed at Marcy's place.

He had called her the moment he received her message.

She answered it, but only because she had something to say. "Please respect my wishes, Derek. I don't want anything in my home to remind me of you. I hope you understand that." She paused. "And please, please don't call me again." She hung up before he could answer and afterwards, she stared at her phone for a long moment.

She was waiting for herself to break down in tears, but she didn't.

That was good, Jaike told herself. Maybe one day, she could stop herself from remembering, too.

But more days passed, and still she remembered.

She would be in her shower and she'd remember the times he ran a bath for her. She'd be eating alone at her table and she'd remember the time he prepared breakfast for her. She'd walk to school and she would remember the time he woke up early to accompany her.

Everywhere she went…everyone she talked to…everything she saw…

Why couldn't she forget him?

Why?

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"If you really can't bear to go back to your place, you should think of selling it," Marcy suggested as they stepped inside the elevator that would whizz them up to her fourth-floor room at Margaret Hall.

"I can't. It's not mine. It's Angelo's." She had finally opened up to Marcy and told her everything, from what she had witnessed of her mother's toxic relationship with her lover – and what she, too, had ended up doing for Derek in the name of love. She had half-expected her best friend to change after her confession, but she didn't. In fact, a good thing had come out of it, with Marcy being more forgiving towards Angelo.

Marcy rolled her eyes at her friend's answer. "It's not like he's going to take it back from you. The guy's *still* in love with you, for heaven's sake."

Jaike flushed. "He's not in love with me, okay? He was just guilty about what I went through, which is stupid of course. He was never to blame for what my mom and his uncle did."

Marcy began, “I know you’re still in your man-hating phase—”

She said stiffly, “It’s *not* a phase.”

Marcy shook her shoulders. “*It is.*” Her voice gentled. “It’s been *weeks,* Jaike. And no matter what you do, you can’t make yourself forget him, can you?”

Jaike didn’t answer. She didn’t want to.

The elevator doors opened and Jaike quickly stepped out, hoping it would put an end to the conversation. But it didn’t.

Marcy spun her friend around to face her. “Listen to me. I know Derek Christopoulos did a shitty thing. He probably did the shittiest thing a man could do to his girlfriend, and I’m not going to argue about that. But Jaike, you need to remember one thing. He did that fucked-up thing because he thought you betrayed him.”

“But I didn’t,” Jaike cried out.

“You’re missing the picture,” Marcy cried back. “He did it because he has always loved you and he was *hurt.* He’s not like Anthony Carras, who never loved your mother. He’s not even like Angelo, who didn’t have the guts to tell you about his feelings and risk your rejection. Derek loved you from the start – and we both know he’ll love you forever. He messed up, we all know that, but is it worth throwing away your happiness?”

“It is.” She didn’t even have to think about it. “It is, Marcy, because if it happens again, I really will go crazy. I won’t just kill myself like Diana did.” She closed her eyes, trying to shake the images of her mother’s lifeless body hanging from the ceiling out of her mind, but it was pointless. That was yet another thing she wouldn’t ever forget. “I’d probably end up killing him, too.”

“Then kill me.”

That voice—

Jaike spun around and saw Derek step out of the shadows. It was the first time she had seen him since…that time. He was thinner now, paler, like he had been sick. He was still gorgeous, but his usual vitality was nowhere to be seen, and the wicked amusement that usually gleamed in his glorious blue-gray eyes was gone as well.

“Can we talk?”

Jaike’s head snapped towards Marcy, about to beg her friend to help her escape, but Marcy was already shaking her head.

“You have to talk to him sooner or later.” Marcy wanted to cry at the way Jaike looked at her. It was as if Jaike felt Marcy was abandoning her. “Just talk to him and I promise, if things still don’t work out, I’ll never talk to you about him again. I’ll be the first to kick his ass if he tries to come near you.”

She drew her friend close for a quick, tight hug, and she started to cry when she felt how frozen with fear Jaike was. “Please, Jaike. Please just talk to him once. I just want to see you start living again.”

Marcy pulled away before Jaike could answer and a second later, her friend had disappeared inside her unit. Just like that, she was alone with Derek.

Behind her, she heard Derek speak again, his tone low and humble like she had never heard from him before. “Please, Jaike. I just want to talk.”

She wrapped her arms around herself. *Please, please stay intact.* Squeezing her eyes shut, she uttered the prayer inside her mind, knowing that if she allowed Derek to break her heart again, there wouldn’t be any way to mend it afterwards.

“Jaike?”

She forced herself to face him again, her breath catching the moment their gazes clashed. It hurt. Oh God, how it hurt to look at him again. Everything about *that night* came back and her heart started to crack.

“I’m sorry,” he rasped out when he saw the unimaginable pain flashing in Jaike’s dark eyes. She looked so damn beautiful, like an angel of light after having spent an eternity in darkness. He wanted to snatch her into his arms and tell her over and over that he loved her and he would never hurt her again.

But words were cheap, and it was a humiliating lesson he himself had taught her the night he broke her heart. He knew that now, too, and this time he was determined to let his own actions speak for himself.

“I’m sorry that even knowing how much I’ve hurt you, I’m still selfishly trying to get you back. I’m sorry that even knowing you deserve someone better than me – someone like Angelo Valencia, I still want you to be mine.”

When he paused, she forced herself to look at him and ask, “Is that all?” She saw him flinch at the coldness of her tone and told herself he deserved it.

“It’s not. I also want to tell you I love you. I love you so fucking much I know the day that I forgive myself will never come. I love you so much it would be my greatest happiness to be a slave to you and make it up to you. I love you so much that I know no other man could ever match my feelings for you. Or even come fucking close to how I feel about you.”

Derek stepped forward, and that was when she saw the envelope he held in his hands. He offered it to her wordlessly. Her mind screamed at her not to take it, but her hands were already moving on its own volition. If she needed a reminder that she was her mother’s daughter and Diana’s weakness was her own, this was it.

The reminder gave her the strength to sound completely bored as she asked, “What’s this for?”

“An invitation. Tomorrow is my family’s fundraiser, and I’d like you to

meet my parents. I want them to meet the girl I love even just once – even if you'll never come back to me again."

The words left her painfully confused. She felt like she was missing something, but she couldn't grasp what it was. "I don't understand why you need me to meet them."

His lips twisted in a crooked smile. "Just come. You can bring anyone you want to bring – Marcy, Valencia, anyone. When you're there, you'll understand."

Chapter Thirteen

The fundraiser held by the Christopoulos family was star-studded, something she should have expected but failed to. Held at the grand ballroom of Aehrenthal Hotel, the red carpet event was clearly a success, with media reporters by the dozens jockeying outside to take the best photos of the guests.

Walking down the red carpet had been a nerve-wracking experience, and it made Jaike feel glad that she had not come alone. On one side was her best friend, Marcy, who looked resplendent in one of her usual glittery designer outfits. And on her other side was Marcus, the secret she had been keeping from everyone.

Marcus was a gorgeous half-Italian, a few years older than her and heir to a fortune that could probably rival Derek's. Like Derek, he was a natural-born Dom. But unlike Derek, the knowledge had not allowed him to lead a normal life. It had broken him, the way understanding her baser nature had broken Jaike. It was because of that they had met, with Jaike and Marcus sharing the same therapist. A bond had instantly formed between them, and they had kept in contact with each other through emails, seeing in each other the kind of confidante they could always trust. Broken people always stuck together. It was a fact of life.

"You're fidgeting again, bella," Marcus whispered in her ear as his arm went around her waist.

He had never been this tactile before, but she supposed things were different now.

"Sorry, I'm just nervous."

"You shouldn't be. I'm here for you, whatever happens."

She looked up at him with a grateful smile. "I know." And she did know, but somehow she still couldn't stop herself from feeling restless. There was something about this night that she couldn't quite place, and it was driving her crazy.

Marcus' gaze strayed to her throat, where her fingers were playing with the choker around it. "Do you want to take it off?"

She shook her head quickly. "Never." Marcus' choker was her strength. It reminded her that she belonged to someone she could really trust, someone who would never be able to break her heart. No matter what Derek planned now, she would be ready for it because she had Marcus.

Beside her, Marcy whispered, "Do you see him anywhere?"

"No," Jaike whispered back, not bothering to pretend she didn't know who her friend was talking about.

When they descended the ballroom's sweeping staircase, usherettes dressed in formal gowns were ready to take them to their table, which Jaike realized uncomfortably was right smack at the center.

Again, something about the whole setup nagged at her, but still the truth eluded her. She was frowning so hard, immersed so deeply in her thoughts, that she didn't realize someone had taken the seat across her until she heard someone say her name.

Jaike was stunned to find Christien di Luca smiling at her across the table, looking even more sophisticated than usual in his pinstriped suit. "Hello, Jaike. It's nice to see you again."

"H-hello."

Christien offered his hand to Marcus. "Christien di Luca."

"Marcus Ravelli," Marcus answered smoothly, accepting the other man's hand for a shake.

After greeting Marcy as well, Christien's gaze returned to Jaike, his eyes sober. "As this feels as good a time as any, I wanted to apologize to you for being a part of what happened that time." Christien chose not to mince words, knowing that speaking about what happened in a sincere but matter-of-fact manner would be the best way to minimize Jaike's discomfort.

"I will not lie. Derek had been so lost in his pain that night that he allowed us to invite as many Doms as possible to the event. However, we didn't let him know that there were only the five of us present – me, Nick and Jason Christakos, Reid Chalkias, and Nathan Callis. Also…" His tone became soft and gentle, and just by that alone, Jaike braced herself, knowing that what he was going to say next could hurt her.

"All of us turned our backs the moment you entered that room. None of us saw a thing."

"*None*?" Her voice wobbled. She wanted to be sure, really sure that Christien wasn't lying to help her save face. "Don't lie to me, please. I can't—"

"I swear on my grave. *None* of us saw anything. We had a feeling it would not end…well."

Jaike's breath swooshed out of her, and she suddenly felt like a burden had been lifted from her shoulders. "Thank you," she said shakily. "You didn't have to tell me that, but thank you."

"I had to," Christien said calmly. "Because my friend is still and will always be in love with you, and I want to help him win you back."

Jaike was struck speechless at the words, and even more so when she saw who was walking towards them. It was all of Derek's friends – the Christakos twins, the famous model Nathan Callis, and of course the Prince of Darkness

himself.

She suddenly remembered the last time she had talked to Reid, and now she understood why he had been so guarded then. He had even given her time to ask the right question, but she hadn't. Because, then, she had chosen to trust Derek.

Her resolve strengthened at the memory. *Never again. Never again. Never again.*

Cameras around them began to flash when the men took the remaining vacant seats on Jaike's table. She could easily overhear what the reporters around them were gossiping about. At her table, she was the only one who wasn't famous, and everyone was wondering whether it was her or Marcy who had managed to snag one of the BBFs as a boyfriend.

Throughout it, the other men had introduced themselves to Marcy and Marcus, all of them effortlessly courteous. But the moment the round of greetings ended, Derek's friends apologized to her one at a time.

"If it's any consolation, Jaike, I told him it was a bad idea. I only had to meet you once to know you were someone he could trust." This from Nick, and Jaike knew by the distant look in his brilliant blue eyes that he was comparing her to his ex.

"What Derek did was unspeakable," Nick's twin Jason told her quietly. "But it was a mistake born from love, and I hope because of that, you will consider giving him another chance."

"I've known Derek for a long time, Jaike. We both have darkness inside us, but you know what makes him different from me?" Reid asked. "He never lost hope that someone like you would come along. All his life, he had only wanted one thing – to have a girl he could truly love. And that was you."

Everyone turned to Nathan.

The model, who looked even more ethereal than usual in his all-white tux, only shrugged his broad shoulders in response. "I can't think of anything to say yet."

His friends cursed him in Greek, which made Jaike laugh nervously.

Turning to Marcus, she whispered, "I'm scared. I think I want to leave."

"If it's what you want, then we will leave, bella. I won't let anyone stop us." His tone became steely at the end, and she knew it was a promise Marcus meant to keep.

She started to stand, and Marcus pulled out the chair for her.

Marcy stood up as well. "Are we going?"

Jaike nodded. As she started to turn to Derek's friends, thinking of something to say, she felt the hairs on her nape stand and she knew she was too late.

He was here.

Whirling around, she found Derek walking towards her, accompanied by an older couple. The man stood tall and powerful, his resemblance to Derek so strong he could only be Derek's father. The woman next to him was a beautiful elegant blonde, who Jaike guessed uneasily was his mother.

What was he planning? She just didn't get it at all.

Derek stopped right in front of Jaike. The first thing he noticed about her was the choker around her neck – and it was not his.

Jaike knew the moment Derek realized what she was wearing and what it meant. His eyes darkened in torment and she held her breath, telling herself that she was ready to have Derek look at her with betrayal.

But he didn't. His eyes only became hooded, his face a stoic mask as his gaze slid to Marcus.

"I don't believe we've met," Derek said, his tone cool.

"Marcus Ravelli." Marcus offered his hand.

"Derek Christopoulos."

"I know. The man I'm supposed to thank."

Derek's brow rose. "For the invitation to this party?"

Marcus' arm curved around Jaike's waist as he pulled her to him. "No. If you had not lost Jaike, she would never have come to me."

The words were unexpected, causing Jaike to look up at Marcus in shock.

It took a moment for Derek to speak. "I see." He looked at Jaike, searching for any sign – any damn sign that would tell him this night wouldn't end in vain.

But even now, Jaike couldn't meet his gaze.

She was looking at the man next to her, and the way her body trustingly stayed close to Ravelli made Derek realize that Jaike had really chosen another man to be her Dom. *Why not Angelo?* Derek wondered. The moment he thought of the question, the answer came to him in a flash, and it was another sin to lay at his feet.

She had not chosen Derek or even Angelo to be her Dom because they were both threats to her heart. She had chosen this man because somehow, she was sure that this man would never have the power to hurt her.

He looked at Jaike. *Look at me, baby. Look at me.*

But she didn't. She was no longer the Jaike he knew, no longer the Jaike who was capable of loving, and it was all his fault.

"Derek? Don't you think it's time to introduce us?" His mother's gentle words drew him out of his thoughts.

The cynical part of him was telling him it was too late, but Derek stubbornly ignored it. He had to try. He had to try just one last time. "I'm sorry. Mom, Dad,

it’s my pleasure to introduce Jaike Hepburn.”

Jaike couldn’t believe this was really happening. But it was, and she couldn’t find it in herself to be rude. Derek’s parents had done nothing to her. They didn’t deserve to be snubbed.

Managing a smile, she quickly offered her hand. “I’m honored to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Christopoulos.”

“Please call me Richard,” the older Christopoulos said warmly as he shook Jaike’s hand. “I have heard wonderful things about you.”

“You’re very beautiful, dear,” Derek’s mother said. “As expected from the girl that my son’s in love with.”

Jaike paled.

Behind her, Marcy gasped.

Beside her, Marcus remained silent, but his gaze became watchful and considering.

“You’re all he’s talked about. He was very adamant we had to meet you now. Apparently, he’s done something foolishly hurtful to you. He’s always been passionate, this boy of mine, and sometimes, it clouds his judgment.” Her voice softened. “Whatever he’s done, I apologize for it, too. But I also want you to know Derek’s a very good man. I hope you could give him a chance—”

Her husband cleared his throat. “Sweetheart, maybe you should also give Ms. Hepburn a chance to speak.”

His wife laughed. “I did let my mouth run away, didn't I?” She surprised Jaike by stepping forward and placing a kiss on her cheek. “Whatever happens tonight, my dear, please know that I will never hold you to blame.”

And then they were walking away, leaving Jaike dazed and terrified. She turned to Marcus. “Please, let’s go now—”

“Jaike?” It was Derek.

Her tone became more insistent. “Marcus?”

But to her horror, she found Marcus’ gaze filled with regret. “Bella—”

“Don’t believe him, Marcus! He doesn’t deserve a chance! I chose you, remember? You can’t let him—”

“Jaike, I love you.”

The words had her spinning around in disbelief. “How dare you?” she gasped, stricken. “How can you even think of saying that—”

And that was when it dawned on her.

What this whole setup was.

He had recreated that night for Jaike, and now he was giving her his heart on a platter.

This night was for her to take her revenge, an eye for an eye, one crushed

heart for another.

Not making any effort to lower his voice, Derek repeated, “I love you, Jaike. I will always love you.” He knew, by the look at Jaike’s face, that she finally understood what this was all about.

“How much?” she asked. “How much do you love me?”

“More than anything.” His voice lowered. “If you want to truly make me pay, you should use this opportunity to let everyone know what I did to you.” A smile that didn’t reach his eyes touched his lips. “All my life, I’ve hidden that side of me so I wouldn’t hurt my father’s chances in politics. So speak of it now, and it shall be another sin I can never forgive myself for.”

Jaike shook her head. “I won’t hurt others because of what you did.”

“Then ask me to do anything,” Derek gritted out. “Tell me to do anything – I just want a way to make it up to you.”

“Kneel down and kiss my feet.”

Before she was done speaking, he had already gone down on his knees and when she finished, he was already bending down to kiss her feet. She wanted to stop him. She wanted to cry. She wanted to demand why. Why was he doing this to her when he didn’t really love her? If he really loved her, he would never have been able to do that to her. If he had been someone she could really trust, he would never have hurt her like that. Never would have treated her the way Anthony Carras treated her mother.

Derek’s lips touched her feet.

Behind her, Marcy whispered, “Oh, Jaike.”

Guilt made her heart blaze with pain, but she steeled her heart, telling herself that she deserved this. That it was her right to make him pay.

Derek raised his head. “What else do you want me to do?”

The humility in his tone, the lack of hatred in his eyes, made her feel even more horrible. “Did I tell you to stop kissing my feet?” she heard herself snap.

Everyone around them had already fallen silent, and photographers eagerly taking shots of what was happening were the only sounds in the room.

Derek’s head started to lower.

“Jaike!”

Marcy’s aghast tone made her cringe in shame. Oh God, what was she doing? Why was Derek letting her do this? Before Derek could reach her feet, she reacted instinctively, kicking him away. It was completely unexpected, and Derek fell on his back.

She started to cry even as she screamed, “Have you had enough then?”

Derek slowly raised himself up. “No.” His tone was raw with regret, and when he looked at her, his eyes still didn’t possess even a hint of hatred. All she

could see there was love—for her.

"I love you, Jaike, and whatever you want, I'll do—"

She shook her head wildly. "If I told you to crawl to me naked, will you?"

"Yes." Derek reached for his tie.

He must be bluffing. Surely this was just a bluff. He wouldn't really crawl for her, much less naked. "Don't think I'll stop you from doing it!"

Derek threw his tie on the floor. "I will do it. For you. Anything you want, I'll do."

"Then make it fast," Jaike spat. "Because you're wasting my time."

Derek threw off his shirt.

When he reached for his belt, that was the moment she had to close her eyes, no longer able to bear the sight of Derek stripping himself of his clothes and his pride. Because of her. Because of what she was making him do.

After throwing his belt to the floor, Derek found himself looking at Jaike. She had her eyes squeezed shut, and her body was so stiff it was as if she was made of stone. She was crying silently, and the sight of it broke his heart.

That was when he made the decision.

Closing the distance between them, he took hold of her face. His hands shook as he did because he knew this was the last time – this was really the last time he could touch her. For her sake, he had to let her go.

Jaike broke down, her sobs becoming volatile the moment she felt Derek's touch. Her eyes still squeezed shut, she demanded, "Have you given up?"

"No."

"Then what are you doing? Why did you stop?"

"I had to. I can't bear to see you like this. You're not a bad person – you never were, but if I keep forcing you to love me again, you will be. And I don't want that. I can see it in your eyes – I can hear it in your voice, you don't even want me to do this." Slowly, he placed a kiss on her forehead and as he did, he whispered fiercely against her skin, "I love you. I will always love you. And because I love you, I'm letting you go. I only want the best for you, baby, and now I know…" His own voice broke. "I'm not the best for you."

He pulled away. "I'll grant you your wish this time, baby. You'll never see me again, never hear from me again. And one day, I hope that you'll be able to forget me and find love again." He didn't wait for her answer. He couldn't. He wouldn't be able to bear it because whatever she said, it would just mean the end.

Jaike was frozen, her mind unable to comprehend the fact that Derek was really leaving. She had won. He had given up, and she was able to prove to herself that she was right to be strong. She was right to keep him at a distance.

But the victory tasted hollow on her tongue.

As Derek walked further away, her vision began to blur and Jaike's view of him became distorted. Her heart cracked bit by bit, and the more it cracked, the more she felt. She was supposed to be happy she had done this to Derek, so why could she only feel fear and despair?

Derek was nearing the door now.

She closed her eyes, trying to remember how he had hurt her.

But instead, all she could remember was how much he had loved her.

She remembered how Derek never lost his temper with her, no matter how bitchy she was to him.

"Get out of my way, Derek."

"Not until you say please."

She bared her teeth. "Please."

Derek released her with a heart-stopping grin. "That was the first time I heard a girl say 'please' like she wanted to kill me."

She remembered the times she had been the one to mess up and Derek had forgiven her, unhesitatingly, unconditionally. She remembered talking about him behind his back, comparing him to Angelo and making him sound second-best.

And all Derek had said was, *"Just take it back. That's all you have to do, baby. Take it back and admit the truth."*

He hadn't asked for an apology, for his pound of flesh. He just wanted her to admit the truth.

That she was scared, that she loved him.

Once, memories had caged her in the past. Now, the memories she had shared with Derek freed her.

"Derek!" Jaike broke into a run. "Derek!" She was crying so hard she couldn't see where she was going, but she didn't stop running, flying up the staircase. "Derek," she screamed. "Derek, come back!"

She burst out of the ballroom's doors, but there was no sign of Derek. She screamed and sobbed his name over and over as she slid to her knees.

A shadow fell over her.

Derek stood before her, breathing hard like he had just run a mile to get back to her. That was almost close to the truth since he had been about to cross the lobby's doors when he heard Jaike screaming his name.

She looked so pale and frightened that his own heart slammed against his chest in apprehension. "Baby, what's wrong?"

"I'm sorry, Derek. I'm sorry for trying to shame you."

He was so stunned by the words, he couldn't speak.

When Derek didn't say a word, her fear heightened and her tone became

desperate. “I was scared. I was scared I would be like my mother because I loved you too much. But now I know – love doesn’t make us perfect to each other. It won’t stop us from making mistakes, but one thing it will always do is make us…better people.” She choked out a sob. “*You* made me better, Derek. You made me strong. You made me happy. And you made me want to live. I love you, Derek. Please take me back.”

Derek’s head spun at what Jaike was saying. Letting her go had been the most painful thing he had done, but he had done it for her. Now, with her in front of him, it felt surreal, and he could only shake his head—

Jaike’s heart broke as she saw Derek shake his head. Was she too late? She couldn’t be, could she?

“Please.” She tried to think of a way to keep him with her, to make him see that their love was worth another chance, and only one thing came to her.

Slowly, she lowered herself.

When Derek saw Jaike bending down, her lips about to touch his own feet, the sight of it had him groaning and breaking free from his momentary paralysis. “Jaike, no!” He slid down to his knees and hauled her into his arms. “I love you, baby. I love you.”

Her arms wrapped tightly around him, her whole body shaking. “I love you,” she blubbered back to him. “I love you so much it s-scares me.” She choked on her tears. “But w-what’s scarier is n-not h-having y-you in m-my l-life.”

“Never, baby.” He rained hungry kisses on her face. “You’re mine, remember? You were meant to be mine, and I’m meant to be yours.”

Epilogue

Years later

A certain award-winning restaurant in Miami was closed to the public one Tuesday night, the entire place reserved for the intimate birthday celebration of Senator Richard Christopoulos' only son. The whole night had been filled with music and laughter, the invitation list made up entirely of Derek Christopoulos' friends. Media presence was zilch, and outside the restaurant, bodyguards were stationed at every corner to ensure the occasion remained private.

Inside, everyone's attention was glued to the screen as Derek was presented with a surprise collage of video greetings from his closest friends.

First was his own cousin Leandro Christopoulos, a famous ex-biker, together with his equally famous girlfriend, Bobby Granger, who had long made a name for herself in the field of philanthropy. "Happy birthday, cousin," Leandro drawled in his Greek-accented voice. "Bobby and I regret not being there to celebrate your birthday with you."

Bobby inserted, "Actually, I would have *loved* to attend, but this man beside me—"

Leandro countered, "—acts only as a concerned father-to-be would. The doctor has told us that she requires rest—"

"Which means, you know, avoiding strenuous physical activity. Flying back to America for your cousin's party is *not* stressful—" The rest of her words was cut off by Leandro's kiss.

When Leandro pulled away, "As you see, cousin, women become more disobedient when they are expecting. A fair warning to you – I expect the same from your lovely, stubborn Jaike."

The whole room burst into laughter.

Another couple showed up on the screen. "Happy birthday, Derek." Throughout his greeting, Nick Christakos' voice remained crisp and cool, as expected from someone who had started building his business empire at eighteen. Beside him was a stunning brunette, who despite having recorded the greeting at a nightclub was made to wear sunglasses by her fiancé. It was a puzzle to the media but a running joke among their friends. Everyone knew that Lilac had the most expressive violet eyes, something that Nick jealously kept to himself by having Lilac wear dark glasses as often as possible.

Lilac only spoke at the end, her stammer barely evident as she said with a smile, "H-happy birthday, Derek. T-thank you for being a w-wise advisor to Nick."

Beside her, Nick was rolling his eyes. "Just because he's older doesn't make

him wise."

"That's n-not it at all. I'm s-saying he's w-wise because he knew you l-loved me before you realized it yourself." She gave him an impish smile. "Wise, right?"

A pause, then Nick said seriously, "I think the shades aren't enough. I should have you wear a mask next time, too. I don't want others to see you smiling, either."

"*Nick.*"

Nick's twin and his own girlfriend Keanne were up next. The greeting was recorded straight from Keanne's vineyard in France. They stood barefoot in front of the camera, with Jason's jeans rolled up to his knees. The color of their feet made it clear they had been stomping on grapes before the recording.

"Ciao, Derek *et* Jaike! Joyeux anniversaire!" She rattled on the rest of her message in French.

When she was done speaking, Jason said, "Happy birthday to my good friend Derek. Since I know you don't speak French, let me translate my girlfriend's message. She says 'happy birthday, and may the day come that Jaike realizes she's engaged to a frog and not a prince—"

Keanne gasped. "That was not what I said!"

Jason looked at her in sham innocence. "My bad. I guess I'm the one who doesn't speak French."

Seated at one of the corner tables in the restaurant, Keanne shook her head as she watched her and Jason's video greeting. "It's clear to see you had so much fun ribbing him, *mon coeur.*"

"True," Jason said unrepentantly. "My way of saying 'asshole' to the man who always sided with my older brother."

Her eyes narrowed and she asked sweetly, "Perhaps you're still holding a grudge for the time Derek thoughtfully warned you off Lilac?" She was of course only teasing. She was long over her jealousy of Lilac, whom Jason was once attracted to.

Jason cursed under his breath at Keanne's look of hurt. Him and his big mouth. "Actually," he said hastily, "I didn't mean to say he was an asshole. I meant he was an angel, for helping me realize how lucky I was to have a girl like you."

More video greetings followed, from the President of the Afxisi club and his bride, the Prince of Darkness and Derek's best friend, who had also been unable to attend tonight's dinner because it happened to coincide with his regular scheduled trip to New England.

The last video was from Jaike.

From the audience, Derek's heart swelled with love and pride at the sight of her. They had been together for years, but every day, the feelings he had for her just kept growing. A smile curved on his lips as he watched Jaike swallow and clear her throat several times. Although this was a self-recording, Christien had been in charge of the editing. This, Derek realized, was what Christien had texted him about.

Happy birthday. I apologize for not being able to make it to tonight's party, but I have made sure my gift for you will be fantastic. It is Jaike as you – and the others – have never seen before.

Jaike was looking at the camera. "I have no idea how to rewind this thing or restart the recording, so please just cut it?" She paused, as if waiting for Christien to answer. A moment later, she laughed to herself. "Oh my God, I forgot I was talking to the camera. I'm so nervous. Can you tell?"

Derek could – and everyone else in the room probably did.

Jaike cleared her throat one more time. She looked down at the piece of paper she held in her hands. "I'm going to read my message. I hope it's okay. I'm just not good at impromptu speeches. Actually, this isn't even entirely original since I based it on Martin Luther King's speech."

Derek barked in laughter. Oh yes, that was his Jaike all right. She was asked to give him a personal greeting on his birthday, and she had to base it on a freedom fighter's speech.

She took a deep breath. "Here goes." One last deep breath. "I have a Dom."

Silence – from the video and the entire restaurant.

A second later, the screen showed Jaike moaning in embarrassment, and the whole crowd burst into laughter. "Oh my God, oh my God, cut that out. I meant I have a *dream.* A *dream*! Please cut that out, Christien. Please?"

****

From the restaurant's AV control room, Jaike let out a moan that was exactly the same as what she had done in the video. How could Christien *not* edit that part out? She knew it. She just knew she shouldn't have trusted Derek's friend to do things properly. It didn't matter that the world thought him extremely serious and professional. Yeah right! He was Derek's friend, after all. Of course he'd be up to mischief.

The door behind her suddenly opened, and then Derek was there, grinning at her. "You have a Dom?"

She covered her face in embarrassment. "Shut up!"

Laughing, he kicked the door shut behind him and a second later, Jaike found herself swept up in his arms.

"Derek," she protested laughingly. "Put me down!"

“No.”

Gazing down at him, she said wonderingly, “You look so happy. What happened?”

He rolled his eyes. “You really have to ask? You called me your Dom in front of everyone.”

She groaned, hiding her face against the crook of his neck. “Don’t remind me, please.”

“I’ll *always* remind you of it. I’ve never been so fucking happy to hear something in my entire life. Something like that should be rewarded.”

Something about the tone of his voice had her pulling away so she could peer at his face. When she saw the wicked glint in Derek’s eyes, she immediately shook her head. “Oh, no. Derek, there are still guests out there, and they’re probably looking for you—Derek!” He had her back against the door, his hand going under her dress. A second later, she heard the sound of ripping fabric and knew he had just torn her panties away.

“Derek!” But this time, her voice sounded more like a moan filled with desire. She shuddered at the sound of Derek unzipping himself and when she felt the head of his engorged cock rub against her bare pussy, all thoughts of protesting flew out of her mind.

She wrapped her arms and legs around Derek just as he slammed into her, causing the door to shake alarmingly behind her.

“Table,” she gasped.

His mouth locked on hers even as he carried her to the table, his cock burning hot inside her pussy. He laid her on the table, her legs dangling over the edge. She barely had time to breathe before Derek was pulling out and then shoving his cock back into her, fucking her hard, fast, and deep.

His thrusts drove her wild, and she found herself wildly looking for something to clutch. Her hand hit some of the control buttons, and she dimly heard something click, but by then it was too late. She was already lost, and the only thing she could do was chant Derek’s name as he pounded into her again and again.

“Tell me what you want, baby,” he groaned.

“H-harder.”

He did as she asked, and she screamed. “Y-yes. L-like t-that…” She moaned. “Oh God, so hard.” Knowing how much he liked to hear her talk while having sex, she closed her eyes and made herself forget all about her inhibitions. “So hard, Derek. You’re so hard. I don’t think I’ll ever find someone with a cock like yours.”

Derek groaned against her ear, his balls tightening at Jaike’s words.

“You’re my Dom, the only Dom I ever want…aaah!” A scream escaped her as Derek took in one silk-covered nipple into his mouth even as his hips jerked wildly against hers, his body slamming into her again and again.

Raking her nails across his back, she said throatily, “I love the way you fuck me. You make me feel so good…I love the way you pound into my pussy…you pound it like…” She stopped, unable to think of anything else to say.

Over her body, Derek stilled. He released her nipple and looked at Jaike. His smile was strained, revealing the effort it cost him to stop his thrusts. But his voice was wicked as he asked, “Pound it like…what?” Before she could answer, he reached down for her clitoris and began to flick it with his thumb.

Her mind went blank. “You…ah…” Oh my God, the way he was pinching her clit pushed her to the edge, and she knew she was about to come any moment now.

He started thrusting in and out of her again. “Pound it like what, baby?”

She blurted out, “Pound it like a judge?”

He burst into laughter. “A judge?” He had expected her to say ‘hammer’, which was normal, but trust Jaike to think something strange—

And then it became clear to him, why Jaike the law school student had thought he pounded it like a judge. Apparently, his cock was hard as a gavel.

He kissed her hard. “I love you, Jaike. Always.” He laughed and groaned as he said the words before he started fucking her hard, shoving his cock as deep as possible into her wet and quivering pussy.

“Love you.” It was all she could gasp before she came, her fingers digging deep into his shoulders as her body arched and her inner muscles clutching his cock like a velvety fist with every streak of come that pulsed out of her.

The first instance he felt Jaike’s warm release had him groaning, and the second had him losing control, his thrusts becoming frenzied as he fucked her hard. Derek roared her name as he came, his fingers gripping her buttocks tightly as he erupted inside her, filling her pussy with his seed until she was dripping with it.

Jaike was still trying to catch her breath under Derek when she heard a knock on the door.

Clearing her throat, she called out shakily, “Yes?”

“Umm, Jaike?” It was Marcy.

“Err…coming out in a sec,” she lied.

Behind the door, Marcy choked. “Take your time.”

Jaike frowned at Derek in confusion, but Derek only shrugged. He had the look of a well-satisfied man about him, and Jaike knew when he was in this mood, there was no point even trying to talk sensibly with him. All he wanted to

do during moments like this was—

She arched her neck with a sigh as Derek nuzzled her skin. “Love you,” he murmured.

“Love you,” she whispered back.

“Jaike?”

“Y-yeah?” Her voice came out strangled, with Derek nuzzling his way down her breasts.

“I just want you to know that…”

“That?” She bit back a whimper as Derek started sucking on her nipple.

“You accidentally switched on the intercom.”

Jaike froze.

Derek’s head lifted from her breast.

“Noooooooo—”

Derek burst into laughter.

“And, umm, it’s still on right now.”

“Oh my Gooooooooood—”

“And…” Marcy paused. “Pound it like a judge, *really*?”

****

More than a thousand miles away, Christien di Luca slowly parked his car at the driveway of a well-kept Tudor mansion. It was a place he visited several times a year, with almost everyone back home assuming he was paying his respects to his old relatives.

That, however, was only partially correct.

He knocked on the door.

A second later, it flew open. “Christien!” A young woman with curly blonde hair and twinkling brown eyes beamed at him just before launching herself at him.

Laughing, he caught her and pressed a kiss on her forehead.

Pulling away from him, the girl said breathlessly, “I missed you so much.”

He tapped her nose affectionately. “I missed you, too, little rabbit.”

She tugged him inside. “Come in and let’s get you warm.” As they walked down the hallway and into the living room, she called out, “Grandpa, my fiancé is here!”

The End
Watch out for the next BBF story!

Thank you for reading Meant to Be Yours. It took a while, but the story of Derek and Jaike is finally complete. This won’t be the last you’ll see of them,

though, as we have more BBF books coming out in succession.

I hope you enjoyed this book, and if you did, I'd love it if you could leave a review for Meant to Be Yours. Please let me know if you did by emailing me or dropping me a line on my website, Facebook page, or Twitter. I'd love to thank you personally!

If you'd like to know more about my upcoming books, please consider subscribing to my newsletter.

I'd also like to take this time to invite you to **download HEART RACER for FREE** if you haven't read it yet. It's the first Heart Racer book and it's a two-part story.

It's the story of Derek's cousin Leandro Christopoulos, a Greek-American ex-bike racer who's in need of a fake girlfriend. When he sees curvy, snarky and Young Philanthropist of the Year awardee Roberta Bobby Granger *naked,* he knows he's found his perfect match – and he doesn't care if he has to lie and tell Bobby he's in love with her as long as he gets what he wants.

ENJOY AN EXCERPT FROM HEART RACER

"Excuse me." The guy on *her* table taking *her* seat was tall – enough for him to be almost the same height as she was even while seated. Maybe the fact would have been intimidating to others, but not her.

When he still didn't turn around, she cleared her throat and said more loudly, "Excuse me!"

He turned slowly, his move screaming of reluctance, and it made Bobby grit her teeth. The glass of soya milk on her tray slid a little to the left. *Drat.* "That's my seat, mister," Bobby said as she adjusted her hold on the tray. "So if you could please—" Bobby looked up and forgot the rest of what she had to say.

Bobby blinked.

Twice.

Thrice.

Beautiful was her first thought.

Was it truly possible for anyone to be this beautiful? It didn't seem fair. Midnight black hair and olive skin that spoke of a Mediterranean heritage as well as stormy blue eyes fringed with long dark lashes that she would personally kill for. He wore a simple white shirt and a rugged-looking pair of jeans, and he had what looked like a *griffin* tattoo wrapped around his arm.

When she didn't say anything, he turned his back on her.

Beautiful…and rude!

Bobby's temper snapped. "Excuse me," she said again, this time between clenched teeth. Her arms were beginning to ache at the weight of the tray as well, making her even more annoyed.

What the hell was her problem? The sound of the pissed-off voice had Leandro Christopoulos closing his eyes. This girl seemed to be more insistent than most. Or maybe it was because he was in America and people weren't yet familiar with his moods. Back home, girls had known by his reputation that Leandro didn't care to have his privacy interrupted unless he had given the signal for them to approach him. Otherwise, he was left alone – like he should be now.

"EXCUSE ME."

The words and how the girl was practically hissing at him had Leandro incredulous. He turned around again and demanded curtly, "What do you want?" He just wanted this over with.

He looked at her more closely this time. Auburn hair that had him almost snorting. *Typical.* Flashing green eyes and an oval face that was flushed with anger. His gaze traveled down. Oversized buttoned-up blouse – *boyfriend shirt*

was how his younger sister described it, if he remembered correctly – paired with regular jeans and flats.

She told him frostily, “You’re in my seat.”

He made a show of looking around and even checking the back of his chair. “I don’t see anything here that has your name on it.”

Bobby gasped, unable to believe someone so beautiful could be such an *ass*! *But she should have expected it,* she thought, teeth gnashing. Beautiful people were always like this. She really should have known better.

Juggling her tray because her arms were killing her already, “I left my book on the table so that people would know I reserved it.”

Following her gaze, Leandro saw that she had indeed left a book on the table – something he had failed to notice because he had been too distracted with his thoughts. Leandro rarely found himself in the wrong, and the fact that he was now didn’t sit well with him at all.

He said brusquely, “You may sit down on the other chair then.” He waved towards the vacant chair opposite him like a king bestowing a favor on a slave.

May? She may sit down? Who the hell did he think he was? Fed up completely now, Bobby slammed the tray down on the table. “Are you *dense*? I was here *first* so I have the right to kick you out of the chair.”

Leandro answered by slowly looking at the girl up and down. She was – what? Two inches over five feet? He was more than a foot taller than she was and probably double her weight. He said dismissively, “You can try.”

Why, the—

Without hesitation, Bobby kicked him in the shin. *Hard.*

The sudden pain on his shin almost had Leandro cursing. His gaze snapped back to the girl, incredulity and rage lining his voice as he growled, “What was that for?”

“You have to ask?” she snapped back. He suddenly shot to his feet and Bobby almost took a step back. He really *was* tall. And *lethal.* There was an air of danger about him that she was only beginning to realize and the words *I take it back* hovered on her lips.

If this guy went berserk and Hulk-smashed everything in his sight, she was pretty sure she would be his first victim.

So say sorry, her conscience urged. *You know you were rude first.*

Bobby stubbornly pushed the thought away. Rude or not, she just couldn’t make herself say sorry. She was too proud to do it.

When the girl didn’t even say sorry and simply glared up at him mutinously, Leandro found himself experiencing a strong urge to pull her across his lap and put a stinging slap to her backside. Girls in his homeland were not like this. They

knew their place, and it was to respect and serve the men in their life.

His gaze swiftly scanned their surroundings and saw that everyone inside the cafeteria was looking at them. He knew he had to leave the table. It galled him to admit that she had indeed “claimed” the table first, but Leandro knew it was true.

However, he did not intend to let her have the last word.

He gestured to the table. “It’s all yours.”

“It really is—”

Leandro stepped forward, held her by the nape, and closed his lips over hers.

She froze, shock rendering her immobile. When her lips instinctively parted in surprise, Leandro did not hesitate to deepen the kiss, his tongue moving in to brand her with his taste, making sure that she would never forget *him* and his kiss.

Leandro meant to seduce her, but what he didn’t count on was being seduced in return. Her mouth was a unique blend of sweet and spice, their sexual chemistry combustible in its explosive heat. This close, he was suddenly and explicitly aware of her softness, her womanly scent, and when his cock rose, balls aching with need, Leandro tore himself away abruptly.

Even as his body protested the sudden absence of contact, Leandro managed to look into the red-headed virago’s eyes with a cold glare. “I’m on to you, *mégaira*. All that noise was for me to notice you, wasn’t it?”

As the words sank in, she let out a loud gasp, and Leandro added silkily, “Next time, you only need to ask.”

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About the Author

Marian Tee is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of steamy romantic comedies. She is Filipino-Chinese, has lived all her life in the Philippines, and is a frustrated *mangaka*. She is addicted to horror flicks, misses hip hop dancing, and loves all things Japanese.

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