

Raven J. Spencer

Harem



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Robin

Last night, I dreamed that I was going to join a harem. I had answered an obscure ad, filled out some paperwork, and against all odds, they called me back. I wasn't going to be plunged into a life of endless leisure and sex right away, no, I'd move in with a mentor for a while. That mentor would teach me everything I needed to know about the woman in whose inner circle I might or might not end up—for, you know, a life of endless leisure and sex. If I were to pass, I'd live in the harem for another six months at least. After that, I could decide whether or not I wanted to stay. In a heartbeat every dream I ever had would be in reach. After those six months—or a year—I could take the money and travel, Europe, South America, whatever came to mind. I could make a down payment on a house, or, if I happened to become the lady's favorite, even pay it off. I would never have to worry about money, ever again.

In return, I would be hers to do with as she pleased, within limits, of course. The contract forbids any form of abuse—that would be grounds for immediate termination. Food, housing, health insurance, all of that would be taken care of. Even if I never got to see her, I'd come out of it with enough money to tide me over for a few months, but of course, that wasn't the goal. I would give it my best. Not just because I was desperate for a change, but because the concept was such a taboo breaker. It freaked me out as much as it excited me. In the days leading up to day one, I couldn't sleep. I kept imagining what she would be like. In my mind, I skipped from my time with the mentor straight to the moment when I'd be invited to the inner sanctum. I would make her want me. I knew how to. If anything, I could probably teach the mentor lady something.

I stand in my bedroom, my packed suitcase on my bed, my heart beating fast. The cab is going to be here in a few minutes, and then there's no turning back. Silly—the point of no return came and went a while ago, when I signed the contract. Should I have invested in a lawyer, have them go over it? I read it about two dozen times and didn't find anything alarming, other than perhaps the fact that it sounds too good to be true.

The woman in question is about a decade older than me, attractive, rich, all the clichés you could possibly apply. I assume she wants to test the boundaries of what money can buy. Who am I to blame her for that? I'm

going to benefit from it, big time, and so will the other women who were crazy enough to sign up. Does that mean she has a dozen of “mentors,” women who are what, trying out the applicants? Or a number lower than that, and they’re going to sleep with more than one applicant? Part of the contract is an extensive medical record—everyone is going to be just fine with everyone else.

What will her fantasies be like? Ordinary, as in two people together, or would she want to push the envelope, voyeurism, exhibitionism, orgies? There was nothing about BDSM in the contract, so I take for granted that it won’t be an issue. Other than that, I’m open to pretty much everything, aren’t I? I could possibly write a book about my experience later.

There’s the small, extremely unlikely chance that I might fall in love. I shake my head at this ridiculous idea, then jump as the cab driver honks outside.

This is it. There’s no excuse—it’s official that I must have lost my mind. I’m joining a harem. It wasn’t a dream after all.

* * * *

The size of Addison Belmont’s estate is stunning. From the gate, it takes minutes until we see the first house. The driver checks the address, but it’s not the number I was given. We come across a mansion of expanses I’ve only ever seen in movies, and past it, there’s finally the house in which I’ll spend the next few weeks. I give him a generous tip, because once I leave this place behind, I’ll be rich. I won’t have to spend any money on food, clothes or the roof over my head for weeks to come.

It’s the perfect plan.

It’s also slightly terrifying. I left a copy of the paperwork in a safety deposit box, but who would come looking? I am single, both of my parents passed away, and I haven’t been good at keeping friends lately. There are a couple who would probably miss me after some time. I’ll be thinking of them once I return a millionaire.

Surreal.

Yet, I’ve signed a contract that says if I live with Addison for six months and satisfy her in every way possible, this is how she’s going to pay me back.

As strange as that might sound, the prospect of not having to emotionally invest suits me perfectly. I’ve done that before, got burned, and didn’t learn

from it. Not this time. One million dollars for half a year of casual sex in a harem, it's a good deal in my book.

The woman who opens the door to me is tall, attractive, I notice.

"Hi, I'm Robin. I think you're expecting me."

Her expression is carefully neutral as she shakes my hand.

"I'm Elizabeth, your mentor. Come on in, let's get you settled."

She takes my suitcase, and I follow her into the spacious house. It's not as big as the mansion, but quite luxurious nonetheless, open and modern. It doesn't scream harem at first sight, yet, she's the one who will initiate me. This is all crazy, not to mention the taboo attached to it, but I am interested. I am eager. This is supposed to go well for me, and it will be. I am certain.

"How many of us are here? In this house, I mean."

"It's just us," she says. "No distractions."

"Okay. Fine with me."

We go upstairs, where she opens a door and lets me step into a bedroom that's the size of my apartment. A king size bed. Lots of room for... whatever. I notice that it would be easy to fasten handcuffs to the headboard. Not that I usually pay attention to these things, but I just filled out pages and pages of questionnaire detailing what I'd be willing to do in bed—so that detail catches my eye. There is no distraction, as she's promised, from the concept of what we are going to do. I assume that the training will start today or tomorrow. Why would they wait longer?

"It's very nice," I say which is the understatement of the year. I don't want to sound desperate. I'm not. I didn't come here for easy money. At least that's not all of my motivation. "Can I take a shower first? I mean...I had one this morning, but if you—"

"Wait." Her expression has turned from surprised to amused in a matter of seconds. "Of course you can freshen up for dinner if you like, but your training starts tomorrow. Today, I'll just show you around and explain a few things. The kitchen, as you saw, is downstairs. There'll be some staff during the day, but they don't stay over night. There's a pool in the back, and we'll see some other rooms for exercise on the first floor."

"I'm sure I'll get plenty of exercise," I joke, though I can't help feeling a little out of my depth. This is not a casual social situation, like interacting with a woman who caught my eye at a bar.

I don't have to wonder if she's going to take me home. I'm already here.

“Well, there are different kinds. Your physical and psychological wellbeing is important to us.”

On the ground floor, we step into a room with a full glass front, allowing the view of a lush garden with a pool. There are mats and a couple of exercise machines on one side. Wow. I had to send in a medical, but I didn't expect they would make me do an exercise routine.

Elizabeth noticed that I've gone silent. She lays a hand on my back, the contact oddly comforting.

“Don't be afraid. We're not training for a marathon or the Olympics. It's just a short day-to-day exercise.”

“And those?” I point to the thick, colourful pillows on the other side.

“Guided imagery,” she says.

I let that sink in. Elizabeth waits patiently for the realization to come to me.

“Like an imaginary x-rated movie?”

“A little bit like that, but classier. It's not just about a close-up on the act, you know.” I imagine sitting on one of those pillows, listening to her voice that is already extremely pleasant to me, relating sexual images...wow.

“Actually, I don't know, but I guess I'll find out.”

“Oh, come on. You've had fantasies at times when you couldn't do anything about them at the moment, right? We'll build on that. It will help you reduce stress and be more open to pleasure. I promise.”

“I look forward to it, then.”

I remember reading about certain rules, different subjects for different weeks, but I'm sure that curriculum is flexible. It's just the two of us in this house—who's going to check?

Everything seems legit and according to the contract, so I'm starting to relax. This is exactly what I've been looking for. Sex, safe, without romantic expectations weighing anyone down. Chances are Elizabeth has done this a few times before. She appears confident and comfortable as she leads me from room to room.

“Great. You can unpack, and I will get you for dinner.”

“Thank you.”

She said the training was going to start tomorrow, but I believe we could get a little better acquainted after the meal. I can't wait.

* * * *

I sink back into the warm water, sighing in pleasure. This was an odd, but I believe successful, first day. Elizabeth seems okay, if a little distant. I assume it has to do with the setup—she’s an employee after all, paid to be a mentor. She did run my bath though.

I’m quite excited about the lessons we’re going to have, lots of sex without regrets or taboos. No romance involved. This is all about learning to please the harem’s keeper, and I’m willing and ready to please within the framework of the contract. I’m more than able as well, but Elizabeth is going to improve my skills over the next few weeks.

Fantasizing about the subject, I close my eyes. My hand has a mind on its own, wandering over my left breast, my stomach and between my legs.

I jump when someone else’s hand comes into play.

“Not yet,” Elizabeth, who has joined me in the bathroom, whispers. My eyes snap open. She’s sitting next to the tub, reaching into the warm water, touching me gently. My heart is starting to pound. I am certain that she’s merely teasing me, and we’ll get right to it on the first day after all. After imagining the scene for so long, casual sex with a purpose with an intensely attractive woman, it’s finally coming true.

After a mere brush of fingertips against my clit, she gets up, picks up a towel and dries her hand.

“That’s okay. You know I signed all the consent forms. I can’t wait to get started.”

A small amused smile tugs at the corners of her lips.

“No, that’s not how it works. When you’re done, come find me downstairs, and we’ll talk some more.”

“Talk about what? I read every single page of the contract—more than once.”

“Don’t touch yourself,” she says and turns for the door. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

I don’t understand, but I slip into new sexy lingerie and the satin robe. I’ll make it easy on her. It’s not like there’s anything left to talk about.

Elizabeth waits for me in the spacious den, looking me up and down, but not commenting on my appearance. Oh well. I’m fine with casual. She doesn’t have to court me. On the table, there’s a bottle of wine and two glasses. Okay. Maybe a little courtship.

“I am not allowed to touch myself, but wine in the middle of the week is okay?” I joke.

“I believe you answered some questions regarding alcohol,” she says, unimpressed. “We monitor it. As long as it’s not too much, it’s fine.”

“Okay. So what is it you wanted to tell me?”

She leans back into the couch, studying me. “Sit.”

I take a seat next to her.

“You read that the first week is all about easing you into your new life.”

“I’m easy already. I signed up to be part of a harem.”

Again, the smile comes and goes quickly, as if she doesn’t quite allow herself to be charmed by my wits.

“It’s about experiencing discipline.”

“Um...ouch?”

“Not that kind. Are you taking this seriously or not?”

I realize that I’ve crossed a line. “I am. Sorry. I guess there was something left I didn’t understand.”

“That’s not a problem, but we should clear it up right away. There is no sex in the first week, not between us, not solo.”

I can feel my jaw drop. “Okay, I misread the timeline, but...why? Isn’t that what it’s all about?”

“It’s about pleasure, yes, mainly sexual. Controlling yourself is part of it. You might not always be the favorite.”

I resist the urge to come back with a sarcastic retort, and listen instead. This is not what I had expected.

“One week and nothing? What happens after the first week?”

“You may pleasure me,” she says calmly.

“I’d definitely like that.”

“You already know that it’s not about you in the first place, but with week three, reciprocation comes in.”

“Two weeks, no orgasm. Those are odd rules for a harem.” I take a deep breath, aware that my cheeks feel warm. I feel warm in other places too, and ready. Two weeks seem like an eternity.

“Not really. You hone your perception, sharpen your senses. Believe me, all of this will be extremely helpful once you are part of the harem.”

I’m not so sure. The laden atmosphere in this house, the luxury and soft fabrics everywhere, not to mention gorgeous Elizabeth, make it hard to think about anything but sex.

“How would you even notice if I did it under the blanket, or in the bathroom?”

“Page 17, paragraph 3.”

“What?” I’m a bit embarrassed by this undignified squeal, but...come on. “There are no cameras where the toilet is, right?”

“No. We trust that applicants play by the rules. Any other questions?”

I am tempted to chug the wine, but take a careful sip. For the first time since I came here, I realize I wasn’t prepared for everything. I’ve gone one week without sex before, so that won’t be a problem. Given the circumstances, it’s just...odd.

“All right then. I’ll be a good girl. What are we going to do if we don’t do that?”

“I’ll have some materials for you, and you can familiarize yourself more with the surroundings and rules. Don’t worry, there’ll be enough time for everything.”

I realize she’s absolutely serious. This project turns out to be a lot different from what I expected, even with the intense questionnaire. It’s no casual hook-up, that much is for sure. It sounds more like a temporary arranged marriage.

“Okay, in the first week, we get to know each other. I understand. Well...” I raise my glass. “To success.”

She gives me a bemused smile, but clinks her glass against mine.

“To success.”

I’m finally starting to settle down. This is a good gig. I’m on my way to a million dollars, and the path to wealth leads through this gorgeous woman. More like over, and under. The heat rushes to my face, excitement, not embarrassment. It’s far too late for the latter.

* * * *

The alarm is a warm, melodic tone, mellow and not annoying as alarms go, but at six-forty-five, it’s still early.

“I didn’t expect that in a harem,” I mutter to myself, reluctantly pushing the sheets aside and then realizing I’m naked. Next, I notice Elizabeth standing in the room.

“You can come down to the kitchen for breakfast when you’re ready,” she says. “We have a lot to do.”

She said I could wear some night gear from the drawers, or sleep naked. I chose the latter. I didn’t miss the way her gaze traveled over my body before I covered myself with the soft sheet again. Despite her subtle hint to hurry up, I snuggle back into the covers for a moment, enjoying the soft

fabric on my skin, comforting, and, in places, exciting. Who needs discipline in a harem? It's all about one specific purpose. Perhaps that's part of the first test? See if I can tempt her?

The options for sleep wear are what you'd expect, silk and satin. The day to day clothes I find in the closet are surprisingly casual, shirts, shorts and skirts. Training. It's not a metaphor.

Eventually, I shower and dress, and then go downstairs in search of Elizabeth. In the kitchen, the table is set in appealing colors. Juice, fruit, cottage cheese. I frown at the absence of eggs and, I admit I hoped for it, bacon. This looks pretty...healthy.

Thank God there's coffee. I remember what she said about alcohol.

"Did you sleep well?" Elizabeth asks. I notice that she's dressed a little less casually. That's interesting. It sets the scene, lets me know without a doubt who's in control. It's not uncomfortable—on the contrary. I sit down, only now realizing how soft the fabric of my underwear is, its brush against skin leading to pleasant sensations...and it's only seven in the morning.

She studies me as if she's well aware.

"Yes, pretty good, thank you." I take in the display in front of me. "I didn't know I was going to have to lose weight. That was nowhere in the contract."

That seems to startle her. "We're not going to make you lose weight," she says. "It's just about moderation."

"I've tried that before, but there's usually too much going on."

"You won't have any stress here, and the rewards..." A smile tugs at the corners of her lips. "Will be of a different kind."

I feel breathless imagining what kinds of rewards this mouth might offer me. Really. There's no need to draw this out for a week. I can't wait to get to work.

"That sounds good." Wow. Could I sound any needier?

"After breakfast, I'll show you around some more, and then we can get to your workout. Don't worry, I'll explain everything before we start."

"I'm not worried," I say. "I look forward to it."

I almost forgot about the exercise machines—the workout is an actual workout, not the moment where she tears off my clothes and has her way with me. Another quick shower, and we move on to guided imagery.

I have attended a self-awareness class before, but this is different.

As I sit on the huge pillow, I'm overly aware of Elizabeth's presence in the room, close to me. Her voice is warm and seductive, leading me into safe spaces, through beautiful landscapes and sceneries. When she finally takes me to the imaginary bedroom, and on soft cool sheets, there's not a hint of resistance. Elizabeth describes in detail the kisses and touches I'm sharing with the imaginary woman, from the first soft brush of fingertips to climax. Even though all of it happens only in my mind, I feel every sensation, every touch...and I can't keep that moan from spilling over my lips. Her hands are on my shoulders, and I can feel her breath brush against my neck.

"Hold the image," she whispers.

"I'm going to..." Come. Wow. It's just words, and images in my head. I never knew this could get me so close.

"No. Not yet. You are in control."

I don't feel like it. The erotic imagery has aroused me. My nipples are hard peaks, desire manifesting itself in the pulse between my legs, warm, wet. That imaginary partner could be anyone, but in my mind, it's her.

"This is not fair."

"You can do it. Enjoy it."

Slowly, I manage to control my breathing, walk myself back from the brink.

"I always thought that was a myth," I confess once the session is over. "I've never been this close...without any touching."

"There would be no need for your training if you already knew everything."

"I guess you're right about that. What's next?"

* * * *

I get a tour of the rest of the building. Elizabeth shows me the door to her suite, but doesn't ask me inside. I guess with the premise of our relationship, it's important that we both keep some private spaces. There's a small but exclusive library. She points me to a shelf with a variety of folders.

"Of course you may read whatever you want, but this is recommended for week one."

I take the folder and a couple of books with me. Finally, she shows me the roof terrace, and I'm amazed that we can see the ocean from here.

"I didn't think it was that close."

“Addison wanted to build something that awakens all the senses. It’s not just about sex.”

I turn to her, seeing something in her expression I can’t decipher.

“But it’s about that, too, right? We don’t have to pretend. I have to admit, it’s a little strange, but I like all those additional experiences. I understand you are doing something more special, and classy...” Okay, I’ve gone off topic, ranting a bit too much. “What I mean to say is, we don’t have to wait. I’m ready.”

Her smile is warm and affectionate. This time, I have no trouble detecting what else is there. I’m on the right track, I know it.

“No, you’re not,” Elizabeth says. “Not today, anyway, or this week—but you will be.”

The absolute confidence in her voice sends a pleasant shiver down my spine.

“You’re going to tease me and make me wait?”

“It’s the kind of situation you’ll have to be prepared for.”

She stands in front of me, brushing her hand over the side of my face. I can’t help it, I lean into the touch. Her other hand touches against my breast, just barely.

“It’s about seduction,” she whispers close to my ear. “Neither of us gets paid by the hour. There’s time for everything.”

“Empty promises, I’m starting to think.”

“You’ll be fine.”

It’s as much a promise as it is a command, and every fiber of me reacts to that. Those are going to be interesting few weeks, before I am declared ready to serve in Addison’s harem. I thought a lot about her before I came here, about her motivations to build a place like this, what she would be like—what it would be like to have casual sex with a woman like that, someone wealthy and powerful enough to break all the rules.

I am not thinking about her all that much now.

That night, Elizabeth has taken over my fantasies, and she has added a few new ones thanks to the guided imagery.

Maybe I can’t touch myself to relieve the tension, but I can imagine. More than ever before. I fall asleep wishing she was there with me, breaking another set of rules.

I only met her yesterday, and I want her so much. There’s no need to question it, or worry about it. Nothing about this situation is normal, but for

one million dollars in the near future, I'm along for the ride.

* * * *

Only four days, and I feel like I'm going stir crazy. I spend my days reading about sexual pleasure, thinking about it, preparing my body and mind to give and receive it, yet...nothing. Week two will be a one-way street, but at least I'll get to do something other than imagine.

Life with Elizabeth is a seduction of the senses, making me helpless and unable to resist. I sleep naked in the soft sheets, flinching at the brush of fabric against sensitive areas. Forget about it—at this point, my body seems to have transformed into one giant erogenous zone. I dream about sex, with her, with nameless women, waking up with my heart pounding, and no chance of relief.

The food is amazing, light and healthy, and I don't even mind the mandatory workout. Everything is intentional, from the lighting to the décor, every little detail has its purpose.

In the morning, we do guided imagery, about sexual situations that might arise. I'm allowed to let my mind conjure the images, but at the same time, I have to control my body's reaction to it. Mere imagination might make me come the next time.

Elizabeth, of course, is always vigilant. "Breathe," she orders. "Take a step back."

I don't want to. But if I ever want to make it near the woman who started all of this, who is my ticket to a sorrow-free life, I have to follow the rules. With difficulty, I draw myself back from the brink. Again.

In the afternoon, I learn some more about the various toys she showed me earlier, everything about their use and what they are supposed to do...I'm eager to have them on me, in me. As it is, I have to wait. There is no escape.

Elizabeth seems to be satisfied with my progress, at least she doesn't say otherwise. That means I'm still in the running. If I'm doing well, why not skip a step or two? Do they ever do that?

I want to talk to her about it some more. Thursday proves to be another sleepless night, and so I put on my robe and go to her room, determined to get some answers, if not an orgasm. I knock on the door and open it, freezing at the sight.

She is lying on the bed naked, another woman between her thighs, pleasuring her. The sight and sounds of the scene go straight to my core—I feel feverish. When our eyes meet, I don't look away. Neither does she. Her

hands reach down to tangle in the woman's hair, as if pulling her closer. I am breathless with desire. I want to be her. I want to be that woman. I want to be in the bed with both of them. I study Elizabeth's expression at the height of pleasure, her body stiffening, and I think about how she'll be all mine in a matter of days.

I can't help it. My hand moves inside my robe, and between my legs. I sigh, trembling at the prospect of relief.

"Robin. Stop it."

The other woman gives me a curious look as Elizabeth gets to her feet and puts on a robe.

"Oh please." I mean to convey annoyance, but it sounds more like begging. "Isn't that a bit hypocritical? I can't do anything while you have your girlfriend go down on you?"

There's definitely amusement in the woman's smile. She might not be the girlfriend after all, but another apprentice. I thought I was the only one in this house? Is this girl ahead of me?

"That's the way it is, take it or leave it," Elizabeth says curtly. "Go back to your room. We'll talk tomorrow."

Even when she's ordering me around, her voice makes me melt. I'd like to get something out of it before I'm gone altogether...

"No. Come on. Four days. I'm ready for the next level."

She joins me outside the bedroom, and closes the door behind her.

"You sneaking around at night shows me exactly that you're not ready. Three more days."

"What if I'm better than her? I'll show you right now."

"Don't overestimate yourself," she tells me. "Go back to sleep. I'd like you to get an early start tomorrow."

"That's unbelievable." I stalk back to my room, annoyed and ready to quit the next day. I never thought I could be this impatient, this...driven, but the past few days have peeled away layers of my everyday persona. I'm not even sure I like what's underneath.

Breathe.

"I'm sorry for snapping at you."

Elizabeth has followed me. I don't turn around. She moves in closer, behind me. Intending to torture me some more, I have no doubt.

"All right. Apology accepted. Good night."

She cups my breasts in her hands, lightly, but the contact is like striking a match.

“You can do this,” Elizabeth whispers. “I know it. Just three more days.”

“Three more days and you’ll be having all the fun.”

“Ten more days and multiple orgasms will be a daily occurrence.”

“Promises, promises.”

“Does that sound good?” She squeezes gently, my nipples hard against her palms.

“I have no choice but to trust you.” I sigh, mostly as a reaction to her letting go, and turn around. “I swear I didn’t mean to walk in on you, but I still think I can do better.”

Elizabeth leans in, her hands on my face as she kisses me breathless.

“We’ll see,” she says and leaves my room.

I go back to bed, soon lulled into dreams that become a lot more specific.

* * * *

Breakfast, workout, guided imagery. Lunch, sex toys 101. Free time in which I do a few laps in the pool. Instructions on erotic massage, relaxing the body head to toe leading towards an incredible climax.

“Does it ever get old for you?” I wonder when we sit out on the deck with a glass of wine, a soft breeze caressing the skin.

“What do you mean?”

“Mentoring. The sex, the...classes, all of it?”

“Not so far, no. I teach pleasure, I get quite a bit out of it myself, and...” She laughs wryly. “The money isn’t bad either. I’m not worried about retirement.”

“Wow. That’s more than most people can say about themselves.”

“True,” she admits and takes another sip.

“Do you ever have a favorite?”

“That’s not my choice to make. I only accompany you for a certain period of time.”

I guess that’s fair, even though it makes me a bit sentimental for her. Well, I’ll do my best so she’ll have good memories of me. Make no mistake, I am going to be the favorite, for long enough that when I leave here, I’ll be able to live the life I choose. Buy a nice house, travel, put some away for the future. I’m not going to waste this chance of a lifetime.

“Maybe I’ll start a blog later,” I joke. “My new knowledge on sex toys alone should be enough to make me go viral.”

She smiles at that. “Don’t think too much about the future right now. Your ability to be in the moment will be part of your evaluation.”

“My evaluation will be fine. I’ll be sleeping with the person who’s going to write it, remember?”

Elizabeth smiles.

* * * *

The weekend seems endless, but finally, Monday morning rolls around. I’m up and ready about five. I have brushed my hair until it shines. My skin is soft, the scent of the lotion lingering. Just in case—I am mostly resigned to the fact that breakfast, workout and guided imagery will be first as usual. Maybe she’ll give me some direction of what she’ll want me to do.

I was mistaken:

Elizabeth comes to my room around six.

“It’s Monday,” I say.

She takes off the robe. Underneath, she’s naked. For a moment, I just stare, reminded of the scene I witnessed in her bedroom...and my own bragging. No pressure.

“Monday indeed.”

I step in front of her, brushing my hand over her hair, then her back, grateful I can finally touch her.

“You have no idea,” I tell her in a lusty whisper. “How much I’ve wanted this. I’ve been dreaming about you every night.” Her nipples rise under my fingertips, and I caress them, then lean in to lick them. It’s quiet in the room, so it’s easy to detect the change in her breathing. Her hands are in my hair now. I bet she’s feeling every flick of my tongue as a jolt between her legs.

She promised me multiple orgasms in the next week. I feel like I have to prove myself.

“You’re impatient,” she says when I get to my knees.

“Aren’t you?” A brief touch leaves my fingers wet, my hunger intensifying. I guess I have my answer. She moans softly when I lean in to pleasure her with my tongue, my hands on her hips. A brush against her swollen clit, then I suck gently, and her voice rises. I’ll make sure she remembers me.

She’s close now. Chances are she has given this scenario some serious thought before...

“Slow down,” she rasps. “Take your time.”

Still mentoring. I change my pace, brushing my fingertips over her inner thighs. I don't see much of a point in drawing this out endlessly when we have so much time, but whatever she wants. I make it last. I am precise. When she says, "now," I give her the right pace and pressure to come.

I get up, licking my lips, satisfied with the expression on her face, even though the heat between my legs is almost unbearable.

"Another time before breakfast?" I suggest. Once she's in the bed with me, and I'm all over her, something might happen for me as well.

"You're a good student," she says mildly.

"Wasn't that more than good?"

I kiss her, then pull her onto the bed with me, a moment later on top of her. She wraps her legs around me, and I press into her, moaning when I feel her wetness against mine. A few quick movements, and this would be so good for both of us. Better than good.

"Remember the rules," Elizabeth shatters my illusion.

She's not going to touch me. I'm not supposed to get off for another week. Damn rules.

However, I'm distracted from my own woes when I explore her, feel her react to me even though she just climaxed moments ago.

"That's quick," I say. "Should I be flattered?"

"If you want." Her words turn into a gasp when my fingers glide into her. Two for now. I move them in and out slowly, monitoring her reactions.

"You're so wet," I whisper. "It must have been hard for you too, waiting all this time, following all those silly rules. Of course, there was the other girl, but did she do it like this?"

Her body clenches around my fingers, tightening and relaxing to let me in even deeper. I'm sure that under different circumstances, she'd have a comeback to that. As it is, she can only enjoy.

I add another finger, and she moans, pressing into my hand.

"I'm supposed to take it real slow, right?"

My thumb brushes over her clit lightly, making her flinch.

"You catch on quick."

"I'm motivated. I like compliments from gorgeous women," I say, pressing into her again, velvet heat against my fingertips.

"Stay focused."

"Look who's talking." When the moment comes, I'm ready, continuing the gentle thrusts and stimulation to her clit until she's completely still.

After a few minutes of silence, I ask, “So? Did I make the grade?”
“Not bad,” she says. “Let’s have something to eat. I’m starving.”

* * * *

I am hungry too, and the coffee is heaven sent, but it’s hard to ignore the one-sidedness of this new phase.

If I fidget enough on my chair, I might be able to...The image is enough to make me shiver. At the same time, my resistance is wearing down. I want to be that A student, graduate with a master’s in lesbian sex. I want to be everything the woman who is giving me this chance, dreams of. I want to please Elizabeth. That is, I assume, a normal progression after the intimacy we’ve shared, in living together, the guided imageries and sex.

“What else is on the agenda for today? We try out some of those toys?”

“No,” she says, putting a spoonful of jam on her toast. “On the first day, we keep it more vanilla.”

“Oh. All right. Why do people even say that, vanilla? It seems condescending. Not like you can’t get a damn good orgasm from it.”

“It’s just a term...but I do see your point.”

“I hoped you would. When do we get to the toys?”

“Most of them? Week three.”

My surprise must have shown on my face. Elizabeth explains to me. “We will use some vibrators, but except for fingers and tongue, there’s no penetration this week.”

“Oh,” I say again and feel instantly stupid for it. Did I miss something here? “It’s a power move.”

She doesn’t confirm nor deny it.

“Are those her choices or yours? I mean...I’m supposed to learn all of it, aren’t I?”

Not that it matters so much to me. I am ready for fingers, tongue and toys to be used on me, and I checked that on the list. With measurements, even.

“We’ll see after the next two weeks,” she says. “Some of it depends on the progress we make, but if you must know, those are her choices.”

“Okay. I can live with that. Vanilla for today, and fun with vibrators later this week. Can you give me a little preview what you’ve planned for me in week three?”

“Still working on the patience issue, I see,” she says and laughs. “Let’s finish up here. Time for workout.”

“There I thought we already did that...”

I feel better and I feel worse.

We spend part of the afternoon in bed where I once again prove my skills. I think I made her scream a little, but that might be wishful thinking on my part. It seems like my senses are heightened, tormenting me, so maybe I exaggerated her reaction. She looks satisfied and a bit tired when we take dinner in the living room, in PJs. The soft fabric excites me every time I move. And it's only Monday.

The next day goes by in a similar fashion, but finally, on Wednesday, I'm allowed some props. I use the oval vibrating object with a generous amount of cherry-flavored lubricant.

The lessons of the past few days come to mind, my own struggle to control my body, honing my perception to grant her the most pleasure possible. Elizabeth lies back against the pillow, her legs open, giving me all the access I need. I try different settings, noting her reaction to each of them, to every move I make. She whimpers. I sympathize—the sound alone is enough to push me towards that invisible brink.

It's not about me. At this moment, it is all about her, regardless of where she or I might be a few weeks from now. I massage her with the vibrator, careful to use the perfect amount of pressure, until she comes.

"You remember your lessons," she says, her tone breathless as it should be.

"I do. And you're the perfect teacher."

I know the sensations are still reverberating in her body, causing a delightful echo. Building on that, I let her feel my tongue again, teasing her, owning her once more. She's writhing underneath me, and I'm drunk with power, making the most of each second. I can do this, step away from my own needs and focus completely on her...I'll be paid some good money for that skill, at some point as a favorite. Right now, I realize, it has nothing to do with the prospect of money, and everything with this insane lust I feel for her. Its ferocity is taking me by surprise.

Yes, I thought she was attractive when she opened the door to me. I got frustrated with the first week rules. Now, I'm enjoying myself, and I'm not even thinking about next week when she'll return the favor. If I did, something inside me would be unleashed, something I can't let happen yet.

With a sated sigh, Elizabeth leans back into the pillows, the ultimate picture of deep relaxation, the kind you can only get from the perfect orgasm. I am practically glowing with pride.

“So, how was that?” I ask. I know the answer already, but a little flattery never harms.

“There’s always room for improvement,” she says, laughing when I throw a pillow at her. Unexpectedly, she pulls me back down, hand fisting in my hair as she kisses me deeply, waking my own raging need once more. For a split-second, I think, hope, pray she’ll skip to week three, but I’m not that lucky.

“Come on,” she says. “Let’s get something to eat.”

We have dinner on the balcony. The moon is rising on the horizon, setting a romantic, melancholy mood. I don’t have to wonder why I do this, getting a higher education in how to please a woman. There’s safe fun and financial security in my future, and who in their right mind would say no to that?

“How many women have you mentored before?” I ask. In the beginning, I was occupied with the moment when I would be allowed relief, and what life with the woman in charge would be like. The past few days, my focus has shifted to Elizabeth, even though she’ll only be a temporary companion.

“Eleven,” she says without hesitation, and my jaw drops.

“Eleven?”

“That’s what I said, yes,” she confirmed, looking amused.

I ponder that for a moment. Elizabeth clarifies, “You have to understand that we try to make it as transparent as possible, but still not everyone finishes the program. Four of them left after the first two weeks.”

“Why?” I ask, intrigued.

“They reconsider. Casual sex is one thing, but being here is not like hooking up in a bar and having a one-night-stand. It’s not supposed to be a romance either, and some couldn’t find the middle ground.”

“Can you? Always find the middle ground?”

“I have a lot to be grateful for. I get to guide women on their path, and either way, they learn something important about themselves. I respect each of them. I’ve never fallen in love if that’s what you wanted to know.”

Yes, perhaps that’s what I wanted to know. We sit in relative silence, with the sound of the waves in the distance.

“I bet it wasn’t a career counselor who made you aware of this job.”

“I’ve known Addison for a long time. She started this project when I was in a pretty bad place—morally, not financially—and she asked me to come on board.” Elizabeth holds my gaze, and I listen, spell-bound. “I was a

teacher for adults, and then a therapist. Whatever achievements I made, it seemed like there was always bureaucracy in the way.”

“So you gave sexual healing a try?”

“My work here is only a part of it. I actually make enough money to invest in places where I was employed before. Meanwhile, yes, I try to do the best for each woman that comes here. Teaching her that pleasure counts.”

“Here I thought this was all about lounging by the pool and eating grapes,” I joke.

“Oh, you’ll be able to have all the grapes you want, no problem.”

I’m distracted by the revelations she just made. I had a hard time imagining what she had done before this. Elizabeth seems happy and serene, running this house, taking care of me.

Teaching women to make her climax in preparation for Addison. Teaching them to receive pleasure.

“Don’t you ever feel lonely?”

“Not really,” she says without hesitation. “I’m busy. I haven’t been alone much for the past couple of years.”

“Whatever happens from here, I’m glad I met you.” Where did that come from? The wine, the moonlight?

Elizabeth smiles. “Me too.”

I turn in early that night, tired but a lot less restless than I’ve been in some time, ever since I knocked on the door, to be honest. I slip into a deep sleep, the sound of the waves still on my mind even though I can’t hear them now. My dreams are vague, but warm, and sensual, and Elizabeth stars in each of them.

I know that my relationship with her, and the one I’m going to have with Addison, is not exactly on equal footing, but for a while, for a week or two, I’ll be able to pretend. Why this matters, I’m not sure, but I look forward to it, body and mind.

* * * *

Sunday morning, before breakfast, I take a look at the riches in the closet once more. Elizabeth enjoyed everything I did to her with my fingers and tongue, and she directed me to do it even better than I imagined I could.

Starting tomorrow, things will be different. I take in the various toys, some with a vibrating function, others to use with a harness. Just looking at them, imagining which ones she might want to use on me, makes the

muscles at my core tighten. There are lubricants in different flavors. I already tried and tasted cherry on her, the memory sending a pleasant shiver down my spine.

There are padded cuffs and silk ties. The structure of the program tells me a lot about Addison's preferences. Elizabeth said they match hers, at least when it comes to the toys. I wonder if she likes to be blindfolded or tied down, and doesn't mention it when preparing women for the life by Addison's side. Either way, I said yes to both in the paperwork.

It's a sunny day, the dining room bright when we have breakfast. Elizabeth doesn't talk much, pensive all morning. It soon becomes clear that we're back to the tormenting. When we do the guided imagery, she sits close, her hands brushing over my breasts, nipples tightening, the chain reaction inevitable. Tomorrow. That's all I can think.

I spend some time in the afternoon reading, but I have trouble concentrating, focusing my mind on something other than the question of what will happen on Monday. Or, to be more precise, what will happen first. A few laps in the pool help some with the nervous energy. After washing off the chlorine in the shower, I lie on my bed for a few minutes, on the verge of falling asleep before dinner. Not a good idea—I'll be up all night.

I flinch when I hear the door open, and Elizabeth walks inside. My eyes are still closed, but the scent of her perfume is unmistakable, and really, who else would it be?

She draws the sheet aside, revealing my naked body. A body made for pleasure. I'm proud of...

"Wait." My eyes snap open when she draws a single finger down my chest and stomach. "It's still Sunday."

"It's Monday somewhere," Elizabeth whispers, brushing my clit gently. "You've been patient. You deserve a reward."

"I am not going to argue with you."

Her fingers are wet, gliding over me with ease. I want them in me so badly, but of course, everything in this house is about timing.

"Good."

I moan as I feel her tongue against my nipple, teasing, playing, while her fingertips find every sweet spot. Her warm skin against mine feels intoxicating. At this moment I know that whatever sexual magic Addison has to offer, I'll never forget about Elizabeth. There are tears in my eyes when she finally opens me up to her probing fingers, pressing into me. I am

completely in sync with her rhythm, my hips rising to meet her hand. I've never experienced pure joy like this, or so it seems.

I want this to go on forever, and she makes it feel like it does. Her mouth is on mine when my climax starts, but she moves to my neck, allowing for the scream to come out.

"You must be hungry," she says, stroking my damp hair. "How about a small break, and then we continue?"

* * * *

The life of a harem girl—eating strawberry ice cream for dessert, naked, in bed. I haven't done so badly for myself, have I?

Elizabeth regards me with an affectionate smile. "Am I forgiven for making you wait?"

I lick the spoon, unable to hold back the sigh. The pleasure comes just as much from the creamy richness of the ice cream as it does from the hot jolts deep inside of me, echoes of our earlier activities. It's not over yet. This must be paradise.

"We're getting there," I say.

"Yeah, I guess I deserve that. When you're done, I can give it another try."

I take another spoonful. "Definitely."

"You said yes to almost all of the toys. You have a lot of experience?"

That sounds almost a bit too business-like from the woman who made me scream twenty minutes ago. I ignore the notion and decide to go with the truth.

"Not a whole lot, but I'm willing to experiment more. I think I mentioned that somewhere."

"Okay. Good. We're still early in the process. There's lots of time to try different things."

Elizabeth gets to her feet, and I don't take my eyes off her for a moment. Only now, I realize that she brought a bag with her, containing...I take a deep breath at the sight of the harness and dildo. It's not that big, but there's something about this setting...In one or two previous relationships, we played around with something vibrating, giggling all the way from the sex shop to the moment we actually tried it. I've never been particularly interested in a one-way-street, but as Elizabeth said, this is not about romance. I'll be paid eventually.

A moment ago, I was enjoying a sweet treat, but watching her fastening the harness ignites another, deeper hunger. I should be adjusting, but it still catches me off guard.

“Relax,” she whispers. “We’ll go slow.”

I lie down, opening my legs slightly for her to fit herself in between. As she leans down to kiss me, the smooth object brushes against me, hell, yes, I’m ready to try new things.

The play of her fingers gets me in the mood in no time, and then she sits back to coat the toy with a gel, colorless and without scent that I can detect. She strokes my hips and inner thighs until I’m trembling in anticipation. For most of my adult life, I wasn’t sure what exactly an object like this can add to your sex life that fingers can’t. Another lesson to learn, I guess. I shiver as I feel the tip of the toy against me, invading me, and then gliding inside inch by inch.

“Oh.” Not the most eloquent reaction, but it’s all I have.

“Are you okay?” Her voice is soft and calming. My body is all but calm, enthusiastic and quivering with the gentle penetration. Okay isn’t quite the right word.

“It’s good,” I gasp.

When she’s deep enough inside for me to feel the soft leather of the harness, Elizabeth pauses, gauging my reaction. Every breath makes me clench around the object, reminding me of its presence. She pulls back slowly, and pushes back in. There’s an unexpected sensation building, even more heat from the gel.

Elizabeth leans forward, over me, and I draw a sharp breath when the slight change of angle registers.

“Yes. Please.” I’ll be able to entertain Addison with my knowledge on a variety of subjects, but not in bed, not if and when she does this to me.

Not if she does it as well as Elizabeth.

I push back, taking her deep inside, taking her in. Her hair is falling forward, her expression one of concentration. Even though the setting doesn’t provide much for her in terms of stimulation, I am certain that she is enjoying herself—because I’m whimpering, and moaning, and it’s all because of her. The orgasm comes with unfamiliar and amazing sensations, and it leaves me trembling.

“How are you feeling?” Elizabeth asks after she’s disposed of toy and harness.

“Seriously?”

“Yes. Being able to have a frank conversation is part of the lesson.”

“Oh, sure. You’re going to take notes.”

“Later,” she says with a wry smile, “I have a good memory.”

“Okay, let’s see. Wow. I loved it.”

She waits, and I realize that was not specific enough. “Everything. The gel...that caught me off guard. In a good way. Anything else you want to know?”

“That’s fine for today.” This time, the kiss is chaste. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

A part of me is disappointed when she leaves, but it’s nothing unexpected. After all, this is still business. Week three continues tomorrow. I better get some rest while I can.

* * * *

Oh God, this is so much better than workout and guided imagery. I’m on cloud infinity, flying high. At eight in the morning, Elizabeth has me on my hands and knees, her grip on my hips firm and unrelenting. The dildo is about the same size as the one she used yesterday, but slightly curved, finding different spots to brush against. I feel a drop of sweat snaking down my spine as I struggle to keep myself up.

I love everything she’s doing to me, and I tell her so in a breathless whisper.

“Never stop. Please, don’t stop.”

She keeps one hand on my hip, the other one cupping my breast and squeezing. Then her fingers are between my legs, massaging my clit while she still moves in and out of me, a bit slower now. I’m close to crying, from want, from frustration, and I enjoy every minute of it. My legs are shaking.

“You are perfect. You’re going to be a favorite for sure.”

Somehow, this wasn’t something I wanted to hear at this moment. I know it can’t last, but while we’re together, I want to be *her* favorite, the perfect lover, the one to make her forget the other eleven, and every woman before in her life. I might be a bit high on ego as well, but how can I not when I’m experiencing complete bliss?

The next thrust pushes me over the brink, into a state of pure happiness. I’m beginning to understand what this environment has done for me, taking good care of my body aside from regular orgasms—the food, the relaxation techniques and the exercise.

“I love you.”

My words are muffled against the pillow, but even so, a few seconds later, I feel the need to clarify. “I mean... You know how I mean it. I’ve never had orgasms like this. It’s sorcery.”

Elizabeth laughs. She seems relieved. “It has nothing to do with sorcery, just paying attention and knowing your body.

“Well, you know mine pretty well by now.”

She surprises me by lying down next to me, holding me close.

“Are you sure that’s within the rules?”

“Why not?” she asks back, her hand tracing the curves of my body. It’s less sexual, and more tender now. “Let’s sleep for a bit. There’s more to come.”

* * * *

After lunch, I feel a bit queasy. I don’t make the connection until a trip to the bathroom reveals unwelcome red. Damn. A woman my age shouldn’t forget about the monthly nuisance, but I did. I wrote down a date in my calendar and the questionnaire, but in the time I spent here, I completely ignored the upcoming event.

“You’re too fucking early,” I say out loud.

“Are you okay?” Elizabeth asks when I exit the bathroom.

“Actually, no. Week three has been amazing so far, but I’m afraid someone’s put a stop to it.”

It takes her only a couple of seconds to make the connection.

“That’s not a problem. This is why we train more than one woman at a time, to account for that. Just let me know when you’re done and we’ll continue where we left off?”

“Well, I don’t have a choice, do I?” I’m a little relieved though, that week three isn’t going to be cut short. Even though it was unavoidable, this development is making me cranky.

“Don’t worry. We plan for this. Not every woman is on the pill and so... sometimes you just have to wait it out. There’s no disadvantage for you.”

“Except cramps.”

“Well, yeah. How about we take a little walk?”

“As in outside?”

“Yes, as in outside. I’ll invite us for dinner in one of the other houses later. This seems like a good time.”

“To meet the competition?”

“I wouldn’t think of her as competition. If you both go all the way and your cycles don’t sync, you might be working together at some point.”

Even though I find it hard to imagine any of it at the moment, I’m a bit stunned at the reminder. Another box I checked quickly. Addison might not be the only woman I’ll have sex with. I might be having sex with another woman in front of her, or be an observer. I’m sure that in two or three days from now, the thought will be more appealing. Right now, I don’t feel motivated to do anything, though a walk will probably help.

She takes me all the way down to the ocean, and indeed, the salty air and water swirling around my feet takes care of my grumpiness. Ibuprofen does the same with any physical pains.

“It’s weird,” I say. “I know I was going to meet the others at some point. It just seems like we’ve been together for a long time. It’s been pretty intense so far.”

“That’s the point. You’re going to meet Quinn and her mentor, and around week five or six, we’re going to have her over for a test.”

“You’re saying that with a straight face.”

Elizabeth shrugs. “She’s gone through the same training as you have. You’re going to have an opportunity to show what you’ve learned.”

“I thought I already did that.”

“With me, yes, you passed with flying colors. Quinn is doing well, too, but you get familiar with your mentor. At some point, you have to let go and be able to focus on another person.”

“Wow. I’m going to be a sexual genius.” As soon as I said the words, I wince at an unpleasant twinge that pokes through the cocoon of painkillers. Yeah, in a while, but not for a few days.

“They’re going to love you,” Elizabeth predicts.

“If you say so.”

She doesn’t answer to that, just smiles. It’s not such a bad day after all.

* * * *

We get ready late in the afternoon. I choose a sundress that’s not too tight around the middle, and sandals, pulling my hair back in a ponytail. Elizabeth is wearing white, her dress ending just below the knees. If I wasn’t in this unfortunate temporary situation, I’d change our plans for the evening.

As it is, I hope good food and a glass of wine will distract me.

We walk across the yard, past the main building, to the other side of the estate. I cast a curious look at the sprawling mansion that is Addison's home. What's going on behind those doors?

Some of the applicants might have checked other boxes, though I was told that it has no impact on being accepted if you mentioned preferences like discipline, light spankings, or other things. To be honest, I haven't done about half of the things I agreed to, not because I was afraid of them, but I haven't found the partner to try them with.

Kimberly, Quinn's mentor, greets us at the door and welcomes us into the house. Its layout is similar to the one Elizabeth and I inhabit. There are five built in a circle around the mansion.

"Elizabeth, Robin, it's good to see you. Come in."

In the living area, Quinn is waiting. In my mind, I call her Miss California. Tall, blonde and tan, she intimidates me. However, when we shake hands, her smile is open and friendly. Maybe I just have to get over myself.

I wonder if she, too, is pondering that we might be performing for Addison one day. Or at which point the other has arrived in their lessons.

Kimberly serves us a fruity crisp white wine for a cocktail. She and Elizabeth start a conversation, while Quinn and I struggle to come up with the adequate words for some small talk. We signed up to be part of a modern day harem. There's no way this can not be awkward.

"You started week three, right?" Quinn asks. "It's been pretty amazing, but wow, that first week was torture."

I can't deny it. I cast a quick glance at Elizabeth before I answer.

"Yeah. When did you start?"

"I'm in the middle of week three. The best so far," she says with a wink. "Although, I liked the second too. I sure learned a lot."

I think of the cherry-flavored lubricant, blush, and quickly take a sip of my wine.

"I suppose we might see each other around," I venture.

"Yes. Have you ever been inside the main house? It's huge. I look forward to actually being a part of it all."

"What did you do before you came here?" I ask, curious.

"I was a stock broker. I got tired of the numbers."

I am too much taken off guard by her answer to find any words, and the next moment, Kimberly asks us to the table. Somehow I imagined everyone

applying for a place in the harem would be someone like me, not poor, but definitely hoping for a better financial future. Why did they accept me? Why her? I guess I will have my answer once I meet Addison.

* * * *

Tea, massages, painkillers, chocolate—Elizabeth provides me with everything necessary to make it through another unwelcome visitor of the month. I love her for her patience, but I’m starting to get restless.

“The other woman, who was that? Another protégée for the harem?” I ask. Week three was off to such a great start. I pretty much forgot about the woman I caught Elizabeth with, but now that I have to wait, I want to know if she’s been here meanwhile. Elizabeth doesn’t need to follow any rules outside of her relationship with me.

“She used to be. You’re allowed to visit your mentor if it’s cleared with everybody, but frankly, it doesn’t happen that often.”

“Why did it happen with her?”

A shrug. “Means and opportunity. I don’t know. I guess I was a bit nervous about you.”

“Why?” I ask, baffled.

“I wasn’t sure you’d stay, and...I wanted you to. Addison will love you.”

“That’s encouraging.”

“I’m not just saying that. I was wrong. You’ll fit in perfectly.”

“Does she have a type? I mean...I don’t look like Quinn at all.”

“It’s not just about looks. Why do you think the questionnaire is so long?”

She has a point there. Addison puts her applicants under a microscope, and that’s before day one of the training starts.

“Okay. In any case I’m glad we can continue tomorrow.”

“Me too,” Elizabeth says. The longing tone of her voice makes me think that she hasn’t seen the other girl since the last time after all.

* * * *

With a bit of an unwanted delay, week three of my training—technically week four on the calendar—continues. We practice with the different types of dildos, materials, various vibrating devices, that I read about the other week. I am more than eager now that I know what Elizabeth can do for me, but she notices even the tiniest bit of discomfort, making me take a break when I’m a bit sore.

“Oh come on, I’m fine. I might even break a record today.”

“That is not what we’re after, remember?”

“If it’s not, why are you dangling all these shiny objects in front of me?”

She makes a face, and I grin, sitting up in bed. “I get it, not the best metaphor. They are shiny though. And they fit me nicely.”

“You’re a handful today.”

“I’m horny and you’re not doing anything about it.”

“Maybe you need to be reminded of how to take it slow.”

She’s so quick, I don’t even notice the cuffs until it’s too late and I’m tethered to the bed.

“That works,” I affirm.

“I’m glad, because you’ll be in them for a little while.” She blindfolds me as well.

“Your safe word?”

I don’t have to think about it for long. “Grapes. Sour grapes if you don’t do anything soon.”

Even her laughter is turning me on in this hyper-sensitive, vulnerable state. The mattress shifts slightly, but she is not touching me.

“What’s going on?”

I jump at the sound of the vibrator, but it’s not doing anything for me. Instead, I hear her breathing change, a sigh turning into a moan.

“Really?”

“Patience. It’s a lesson you need to remember every once in a while. You’re ready when I say you are.”

“Fuck. You can’t be serious.”

She is, though, enjoying whatever she is doing at the moment with that buzzing object.

“There’s no reason for you to be grumpy anymore.”

She has no idea. While she’s enjoying herself, I can’t touch her, I can’t feel what she feels, and I know, it’s so good... Taking a deep breath, I try to calm myself. Right. It’s all part of the game, pardon me, the training.

I read about this once.

Orgasm denial.

I can tell from the movement on the bed that she got hers.

“Grapes. Please. I’m good.”

“Well done, baby,” she praises me in a warm, sated voice. “Is it okay to leave the cuffs and the blindfold, or do you want them off?”

“They can stay if you please don’t keep me hanging any longer.”

No, I don't sound whiny. This is serious negotiation.

"You'll be okay," she whispers softly. I sigh in relief when she's on top of me, moving against me, warm, wet.

I like it better when she's like that because of me.

But week three is mine.

She works her way down my body, butterfly kisses, soft brushes of lips and tongue until she's right where I need her—and she has all the control.

* * * *

In the beginning, time seemed to have slowed down, almost to a halt. All of a sudden, the days are flying by. Week four. Elizabeth stays in bed with me one night, spooning me. After a while, her breathing deepens. I don't dare move, amazed at the feel of her arms around me. I don't want her to go.

I want time to stop.

I'm not even sure if I want to be with Addison, but of course I'd never tell Elizabeth, because...This would be ridiculous, all the time and money invested in me, the time I invested...no. I'm going to be in a harem, sex and sweets and grapes, and so much of it that I won't have time to think of this moment.

It's going to be beautiful, and in six months or later, I'll return to reality a rich woman.

The present moment feels deceptively beautiful...and rich.

* * * *

"Quinn and Sophia are going to come over tonight."

We have breakfast in the sunlit kitchen. Elizabeth appears restless as she stands at the counter, drinking her coffee.

"That's tonight. You can sit down to eat? Wait, who's Sophia?"

Elizabeth has been sleeping in my bed every night of the past week. We haven't talked about it. I don't think it's necessary. Too many words could only mess up a good thing.

"Sophia's from another house. She and Quinn will partner with you for the test."

"What's it going to be like?"

I'm not sure how I feel about it, but for sure, I'm not going to break my contract. Quinn seemed nice enough. All the applicants have been thoroughly vetted, and we all want the same thing, so it will be safe, physically and emotionally. Right?

More than anything, I trust Elizabeth to keep me safe. If she said yes to this, it's going to be all right. I pull back from my meandering thoughts, returning to the present.

"Elizabeth?"

"There's nothing you have to worry about," she says, finally pulling herself a chair. "Part of this is your ability to adapt to different situations. You'll see. It's going to be all right."

"Are you all right?" I ask, and she gives me a wry smile.

"Why wouldn't I be? You're doing great. I'm going to get the teacher of the year trophy."

"There's such a thing?"

"No, there's no such thing." At least, her laughter seems genuine. "Finish up here. We're going to do a light routine for the workout, and you can skip the imagery for today."

I take a sip of freshly pressed orange juice. Except from that one-day chocolate craving for obvious reasons, my diet has been amazing. I wonder if I could keep it up on the outside, in an environment that will come with much more stress... Then again, once I leave, I won't have any monetary worries.

"Okay. Kimberly will be there too? And the other mentor?"

"No. Tonight, it will be just the four of us."

For some reason, that makes me blush hotly. With everything we've done, adding a couple more people shouldn't be this big, should it?

"I'll be observing," Elizabeth clarifies.

I shake my head, laughing. "I love it when you talk about these things like it's something people do every day."

"Well, it actually is something people do every day. Now hurry up, we have lots to do."

* * * *

Elizabeth wasn't kidding. After workout and shower, she gives me a long, sensual massage. I'm not sure if I want to nap or climax or both, but there's no time for either. The memory of her hands on my body sends shivers down my spine, but she won't go any further.

Do the other women go through the same preparations at the hands of their mentors right now?

As time goes by, I get a little more nervous—after all, this is a new level of exposure. Elizabeth, while doing my hair, snaps at me.

“Could you sit still for five seconds?”

“Sorry.” I don’t take offense, imagining that there’s something on the line for her as well. There might not be a trophy, but possible competition among mentors, about who produces the perfect harem girl, happy, pliant, ready to please, and be pleased if that’s what Addison wants.

Eleven other women. Not all of them made it into the main house for a six-month’s life of leisure. I’m going to have to perform tonight.

I’m not sure if Elizabeth is more worried about me or her, and that worries me.

For the occasion, I am wearing a white wrap-around dress, no bra, just a slip—there’s no need to pretend.

We will all have dinner together after the test. I wonder if we’ll all be naked. Elizabeth chuckles when I share that idea with her.

“No naked dinner,” she says. “You’ll have enough time to put on some clothes.” My success doesn’t last—she goes back to fussing and brooding.

At precisely five minutes to four, the doorbell rings.

Miss California—Quinn—hugs me. “Hi Robin. I’m so glad we’re finally here.”

Sophia, the other woman, gives me a more reserved smile. She, too, is stunningly beautiful, and I’m having one of those moments where I wonder if I lost my mind thinking this could ever work out for me.

But there’s no denying I’m good with my hands, and my tongue. That has to count for something.

For the occasion, Elizabeth has prepared another room in the house. A panoramic window gives a lovely view of the ocean in the distance, but I don’t think anyone pays attention. Everyone’s focus is on the huge bed in the center of it.

Elizabeth’s expression is somber.

“Okay, ladies, there are two parts to this test. The first one is sort of staged, and I’ll give you instructions in a minute. For the second one, get creative. You have all been successful in your lessons so far. Impress me.”

Perhaps she thinks her business-like tone makes it easier on all of us, but I don’t feel that way. In fact, I’m not sure what to think of the situation.

I exchange a questioning look with the two others. We all wait for the instructions.

“Robin, you go first,” she says. “Take off your clothes, lie down. Feet to the headboard.”

I want to be in a harem. I can't get self-conscious now, can I? I comply quickly, lying on the bed as per her instructions.

"Quinn, get up here."

Quinn strips out of her own dress and bikinis, and joins me, settling between my legs. Being in this position is odd, vulnerable, and it would be more exciting if Elizabeth wasn't so clearly unhappy with it. Much as I understand, time is not coming to a halt. I like her. I'm madly attracted to her, and maybe there's a hint of more...It doesn't matter. We couldn't go anywhere from here, so why pretend?

Sophia, now naked as well, lies by my side and starts caressing my breasts.

Quinn's hands are on my thighs, parting them further. I imagine Addison lounging in an armchair, watching, while we have no idea what her intention might be. She might be joining in, or pick one of us.

Fingertips brush my clit, gliding between the lips of my sex, probing.

"Robin, open your eyes, please."

It's not Addison at this point, of course, and Elizabeth doesn't do this for her pleasure. She stands leaning against the wall, arms crossed over her chest, her expression unreadable. I want to do well for her. I want Addison to know that she's done a great job.

I want Elizabeth to know that I cherish every experience we've shared, and that there's a difference from my body reacting to the stimulation it receives from Miss California's skilled tongue. I try to imagine the image Elizabeth has in front of her, and wonder if it's arousing her. Maybe I'll be able to take advantage of that later?

The fantasy of taking care of her tonight after our guests have gone home makes my own arousal spike, and Quinn's unrelenting actions lead to results.

The next task is for Quinn and me to tease Sophia with everything we've learned so far. Feather light touches, just a quick flick of the tongue, a brush of the soft fabric before we tie her wrists together and blindfold her. Her safe word is marshmallows. We have no time to speculate on the origin.

I got a bit agitated with Elizabeth when she did it to me, but I have to admit it's a power trip to be on the other side. Sophia whimpers, helpless underneath the tender caresses, denied release every time she comes close. A brief contact with the vibrator, then Quinn presses it against my clit instead. I gasp, taken off guard, but ready and willing once more.

Sophia moans in frustration. I cast a quick look at Elizabeth, hoping for some praise. She looks pensive, as if what we're doing isn't all that important to her.

I take the vibrator from Quinn and, using the highest setting, stroke Sophia with it until she orgasms, crying out with relief. If I broke protocol here, so be it. Surely there's a difference between erotic and cruel, even considering we all signed contracts?

"Very good," Elizabeth says, though I'm not certain she actually means it. "Take a breath, think about what you want to do."

"Shouldn't we do something for Quinn?" Sophia asks.

"Remember, you're not here for a threesome."

Quinn laughs good-naturedly. "So, in the real harem, they might just ignore me."

"That's possible."

"But we can choose, right?" Sophia confirms. "I think it's only fair."

I'm almost glad she's taking the initiative here, because I have trouble coming up with a scenario. Which is strange. I'm in bed with two highly attractive women, and anything is possible. I should be a little more grateful.

Sophia picks up a dildo and a harness, and, when she's done with the prep work, lies on the bed the same way I did.

"That'll work," Quinn declares in a warm lusty tone. No wonder she's eager—she's the only one who didn't get to climax yet, well, except for Elizabeth who's only here to observe. She doesn't seem inclined to do anything else.

I watch Quinn sit on Sophia's lap, taking the toy inside herself at the same time, slowly, until her thighs meet Sophia's, and she gasps. "Wow." After a few moments of adjustment, she starts moving up and down, and I move in behind Quinn, caressing her breasts, her stomach, her clit.

Nothing personal. It's all business, even with Elizabeth silent and brooding in the corner.

It's a good thing that I've learned this much about making a woman feel better.

* * * *

To my disappointment, she doesn't come to my bed that night, or the nights after.

“Is something wrong? Did I do something wrong?” On the evening of the third night, I have to ask. Elizabeth has barely talked to me, and most of my orgasms came with assisted by batteries and fantasies of her. I had to do walks on the beach by myself a couple of times.

“There’s nothing wrong,” she says. I’m struck by the tenderness in her tone.

“But... lately...” I don’t know how to say this. For the past few nights, we’ve been cuddling in bed, and now you won’t even look at me?

She studies me for a moment before looking away, and all of a sudden I realize what’s going on. Part of the deal. Not long from now, she’ll sign my report card, A+ all the way, and that will be it. There was never more to it than that. All right. I take a deep breath. We can deal with this like adults, can we?

“Okay. I get it. Your job is almost done here.”

“You’ll be amazing,” she predicts. “You’re going to have lots of fun. Addison is great, and in a few months from now, you’ll be able to do whatever you want.” After a moment of hesitation, she adds, “You must know that I wish you nothing but the best—but our time isn’t over yet.”

“You have any more surprises for me?”

“Maybe. Why don’t we have a cocktail with Addison tonight?”

I can’t even think of one reply with the mixed emotions swirling inside of me. This is it, meeting the woman who is rich enough to have gotten this show on the road, whose pleasure will be my main objective for the better part of this year. I am excited. I am dismayed at the same time, for no sensible reasons.

“I think it’s a great idea,” I say, and then I lean over to kiss her. She kisses me back with surprising passion, surprising given the fact that nothing much happened in the past few days. I’m on my back on the couch a moment later, and her hand is underneath my skirt, brushing aside the fabric of my panties.

“You’ll get to know each other. It’s time,” Elizabeth whispers, the play of her fingers making me barely capable to focus on her words. It’s like magic, her touch, her voice, it never fails to ignite the heat at my core, and my body is warm, welcoming, wet for her as always.

If I didn’t know better, I’d think I was falling for her—it’s the context, the complete absence of distractions. Life with the mentor is one big test run for the harem life. It means nothing in the big scheme of things.

Right now, though, being with Elizabeth means everything. Feeling her against me, in me. I whimper with pure joy.

Part of me is questioning whether I really need a million dollars. I could be happy spending my days here, reading and studying at my leisure, walking on the beach and thinking up ways to make *her* happy. Truly, deeply happy like I am right now.

I am not naïve. This is probably not the first time an applicant developed feelings for her mentor. We're all human. That doesn't mean there's a happy ending on the horizon. This is a transitory time, a preparation. Come to think of it, even the months with Addison will be. The real life will start around Christmas this year. I'll be able to do so many things I only ever dreamed of before, put away money for the future, give to causes that are important to me, help out friends, and travel.

Back to the present where I'm lying on the couch with my legs open and my skirt hiked up to my waist, surrendering to Elizabeth's magic touch. Her fingers press deep into me, her thumb against my clit driving me closer to the perfect bliss.

"Come for me," she demands.

I'm good. I'm better than good. My hips buck against her as the wave of sensation rolls over me, long, glorious seconds.

"I'm sorry, what were we talking about?" I ask, dazed.

Finally I make her laugh again.

"We should get ready. Cocktails at Addison's."

"Oh. I thought we'd have time to..." I put my hand on her thigh, moving it further up slowly.

"Later." It's hard to say no to her, and given our respective roles, it's not really my place either.

* * * *

My outfit for the occasion is a bit dressier than when we had Quinn and Sophia over. Elizabeth, too, dresses up in a midnight blue gown and strap sandals. It's a good thing we don't have to walk far. Come to think of it, no one around here seems to wear heels a lot.

I feel better now that we got some of the tension out of the way. A lot depends on this upcoming moment, and maybe I shouldn't be nonchalant about it...but everything has gone okay so far. Why should it stop here?

"You're gorgeous," I tell Elizabeth. I'm still high on happy hormones.

“Thanks.” She brushes a hand over my hair. “You look amazing too. There’s just one thing missing. Come with me.”

To my surprise, we’re going to the bedroom.

“Please, don’t mess with the hair now. It took some time to—” I stop, intrigued when she opens the certain closet, choosing a tube and a bullet vibe.

“I’ll be careful with the hair,” Elizabeth promises. “Just this one little accessory.”

“What? I can’t wear this when we’re going to dinner at Addison’s.”

“Just cocktails. And why not?”

Despite my faint protest, muscles are tightening in interesting places, sharply so when she picks up the remote.

“You can take off your shoes. Or lie down if you want to. It’ll take a minute, your hair will be fine.”

I give her a doubtful look, but Elizabeth has already started coating the vibrator with the clear lubricant.

“I can’t believe you’re doing this now...What if she notices?”

“Addison has a modern day harem. You really think she’s offended by the sight of a beautiful woman trying not to show that she’s having an orgasm?”

“Wow, you were really prepared for this.”

I step out of my shoes and grip the edges of the dresser.

“Go ahead. What could go wrong?”

“You’ll be fine.”

“This is one of Addison’s ideas?”

“No,” she whispers against my back. “It’s my personal fetish.”

With the vibrator in place, it’s time to leave, and once again, she’s holding all the cards.

* * * *

It’s my first time to see the inside of the mansion, and even though the outside has given me some indication, I’m still in awe. Every square foot screams luxury, though everything is tasteful, nothing tacky. We walk across a wide open space in the lobby to a sitting area further in. A couple of women pass us by on the way. They’re chatting and laughing. Another woman is reading a book, curled up in an armchair.

Another is sprawled on a couch, her partner kneeling in front of her... whoa. I didn’t expect this to be going on in the open.

Addison waits for us on top of the giant staircase. I hope I don't make a fool of myself and slip on the marble. Elizabeth's hand is on my back, and she seems nowhere near as impressed by the sights as I am.

Addison.

She's a few years older than Elizabeth, an attractive woman I would have definitely given more than a second glance in a bar. I don't find it hard to imagine that she keeps a regiment similar to the ones for the applicants, healthy food with a few indulgences, regular exercise, and relaxation techniques. She looks relaxed and happy.

When we arrive upstairs, she first greets Elizabeth, kissing her on both cheeks, then she turns to me.

"Robin, it's so nice to finally meet you. I hear you're already the teacher's favorite."

"Well, she's only teaching one person at the moment, so it's not that hard." I bite my lip. I didn't mean a slightly sarcastic comment to be the first words she hears from me.

However, Addison has a sense of humor about the situation. "I guess that's correct. Still, you made it all the way here which means we made the right choice picking you. Come with me. I know we usually go easy on the alcohol, but we definitely have something to celebrate. I had some cocktails prepared for you. But first, I'd like to show you something."

Elizabeth falls a little behind as we walk further into the hallway. Addison sure is chatty. I'm still taking it all in, wondering if another test is going to come up.

"Here," she says, unlocking a door. "I didn't want to let you go back without showing you where you're going to live."

I didn't think anything could surprise me anymore, but I was wrong. Elizabeth and I might occupy a pretty comfortable living space, but the rooms I'm exploring in the next few minutes are something else. Huge windows, comfy spaces, a giant walk-in closet.

"For sure, I'd love you to be in the common areas as much as possible, but everyone needs privacy every once in a while. So when you're not with me, this is where you can retreat."

"This is...pretty amazing. Thank you," I add. When I look around, I realize Elizabeth has stayed in the hallway.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"I assume you have many of them, so sure, ask away."

“How did you come up with this idea?”

“Now, that’s a good one. And I’m sure the notion that I might be filthy rich and bored has crossed your mind. I’ll admit to being filthy rich, but the harem wasn’t born out of boredom. Elizabeth might have told you about the business model we’ve adopted and adjusted to our needs.”

“From the sex parties.”

“Yes, exactly. As you’ve probably noticed, this is not just for me.” She laughs. “Okay, it’s mostly for me, but I thought I could make it something meaningful. The women who live here, no matter how long they stay, get to know their bodies well. They learn about pleasure. So much about women’s pleasure is mocked and regulated and dismissed in the world that I thought, screw it—pardon my language. I’m going to do something that pisses off patriarchy lovers.”

In spite of me, I have to smile. She sure is enticing. “I would have thought a harem is as patriarchal as it gets.”

“So are sex parties, usually, but not the ones at A Perfect Dream. Maybe you’ll want to go someday. When there are only women, it makes all the difference.”

“I can imagine.”

“I’m sure you can after weeks with Elizabeth. Don’t tell her that, but she’s the best mentor I have. Now, can I offer you a drink?”

“Yes, please. And thank you for the opportunity.”

I jump a little when inside me, the vibrator buzzes to life. It’s not like anyone can hear it, but I sure can’t ignore it’s there. She could have waited until we sat down! I keep walking. The sensations are distracting when so much out of context like this, but nonetheless pleasant.

Addison leads us to another giant room that holds a bar—an actual, complete bar in the midst of this immense building. She speaks to the bartender, and we sit down in a booth curving around a round table. The change of angle does miraculous things, making me flinch. Luckily, a person from the wait staff arrives with a tray full of colourful cocktails. We toast, and I take a hasty sip, almost choking on it when the vibrations stop. I glare at Elizabeth who gives me a mild smile.

“Doing okay?” she asks.

“Never been better,” I mutter.

Addison observes the scene with amusement, no doubt aware of what is going on. No need to be embarrassed, right? I’m going to have many more

almost and real orgasms in her presence. It's business. And pleasure.

That's what we are all here for.

"Robin, why don't you tell me a bit about your plans. I read what you said in the questionnaire, but I'd like to hear more."

"It's not really anything special," I admit. "I'd like to help out a couple of friends, and some charities. Put some away for the future, and I'd love to go to Greece and Italy for a month or so."

"Paying it forward is always good, and you know we support the same charities. What about your travel plans? Did you always want to go there?"

I realize that Elizabeth is watching attentively.

"I've wanted to see Capri for a long time. The Amalfi Coast. And the Acropolis. I've seen lots of pictures." On social media boards, I almost said. I'm sure Addison has seen all those places and many more.

"It's beautiful," she says. "I'm glad I'll be able to make that dream come true for you."

"Me too."

Elizabeth's timing is perfect and kind of ruthless. I try hard not to fidget on the chair. Every movement intensifies the sensations, but then again, sitting still is impossible.

"Being here is a dream," I add. It's true—every once in a while, the dream becomes slightly strange, but for the most part, it's delightful. The present moment? A bit of both.

"You are adorable, Robin. I can't wait until Elizabeth gives you to me."

I smile, thinking it must look a bit strained, and I barely suppress the gasp when warm fingers slide underneath my skirt, massaging me through the thin fabric of my slip. I'm on the edge of my seat, and that's not a metaphor. Highest setting now. I can't resist any longer.

I'm pretty proud of myself for sitting as still and upright as I can through the brutal jolts of heat inside of me, the additional stimulation from insistent fingertips.

"Yes," I mumble. "I look forward to it, too."

I can never retaliate in the same way. When Elizabeth finally lets me take care of her, I am too eager to please, too turned on by the taste and feel of her, her hands in my hair, to draw it out too long. No matter what she says. This is not a session. I listened and learned everything, and in a few weeks from now, I'll be pleasing Addison, in ways quick or slow.

This, it's for both of us.

That night, she sleeps in the bed with me once more.

* * * *

It is strange to think that our time is going to come to an end. I might meet Quinn or Sophia again. The first time went well, and it's not like one of us will change our minds.

When I wake up that morning, Elizabeth is gone already. I find her in the kitchen, fully dressed, breakfast ready.

"What's on the agenda today?" I ask.

"Nothing," she says and takes a sip of her coffee. "We're doing something different today. I'm tired of being stuck inside and I'm sure you are too. We are going to town."

"I thought we did that a few times," I say, making her laugh.

"Not that way. You'll see. There are actual people out there who have no idea what we do here."

"That's probably for the better. Are you going to make me wear that vibrator again?"

Her eyes darken, and I'm almost sure she'll say yes. I was wrong.

"Not this time. I know it's an odd thing to say given the circumstances, but not everything is about sex."

"Not true. You have totally convinced me that it is."

Nevertheless, we drive away from Addison's vast estate later that morning. I'm amazed at how long it takes to leave it behind—I don't remember driving this long when I first came here. Of course, my mind was on many different things that day.

It doesn't surprise me that Elizabeth drives a convertible. I lean back in my seat and enjoy the warm breeze in my hair. Six more months in these beautiful surroundings—it's not really a hardship. I can visit Elizabeth. I'll most certainly want to. It's hard to imagine not talking to her every day.

There will be another woman in my place.

I ignore the pang of jealousy at the thought.

We explore the main street and later have lunch at a café with a sea view. I take a look at the bracelet Elizabeth bought me from a local store. Silver and rubies. It's good to be away from the house for a bit, though we're both aware of the weight of something unspoken.

I wish the circumstances were different, that I could have met her before I signed myself over to the keeper of a harem—but in that scenario, she

would still be working for Addison, training women to assume the role of the favorite.

There is no other scenario for us. It makes me a little sad, so I remind myself of Athens and Capri.

It's over coffee and dessert that the idea starts nagging at the back of my mind.

"What if I came to see you at the end of those six months? Would you come to Europe with me?"

Her face lights up for a moment. The echoing jolt of happiness within myself, a glorious feeling way beyond the sexual attraction we've established, should have been a warning.

"I don't think I could," she says. "I'd have to train someone new."

"Come on. You can never take a vacation? Addison didn't strike me as that kind of boss."

"In any case, I couldn't leave for more than a couple of weeks...I'm surprised though."

"Why? We've lived together for nearly two months. You know everything about me, and you have given me more orgasms than any lover I've ever had. Why on earth wouldn't I want you with me?"

I see the conflicting emotions warring in her expression, and all of a sudden I understand, more than ever before, everything.

"That too," I say softly. "We can't change everything about the circumstances, but we could spend that time together...if you want, that is."

"Oh...wow. I'm not sure how to do this. I would love to go on that vacation with you, but I'm not sure I can wait six months."

"Why? Do you have any plans? Were you..." Going to leave?

"I don't know. Probably not, but even if I was, I can't decide for both of us. You signed a contract, and I assume..."

"Don't assume." I lay my hand over hers. "I know it's complicated...but I wish it too, that we could just step away from it all."

"I would never ask that of you. You have plans."

"What if I changed my plans?"

"No. Forget I said anything. I'm sorry. Addison likes you already. You will have the time of your life."

I remain silent, not because I think she's right, but because I need to think about what I'm going to say. We leave the café both lost in thought.

More shopping, a walk on the beach, and we return home for dinner. Home. That's what it feels like. Will it be the same in Addison's mansion, in my own rooms or the common areas where women are free to hang out or make out?

Somehow I doubt it. I've been happy. I'm in love, and I believe Elizabeth is too, but there's nothing we can do about it. Money or love, apparently you can't have it all. That's why Addison used her money to build a harem and pays mentors to teach women to cater to her every need.

"I love you." I say it again, out of the blue, when we retreat to the living room with a glass of wine after dinner. It bears repeating.

Elizabeth's smile is full of melancholy. Maybe we're a bit tipsy as well. I emptied the rest of the bottle into our glasses earlier.

"I love you too—and every moment of the journey. I know that you can't quit, but maybe it's time for me to move on."

"Please, don't. I'll come visit you. Hey, I could become a mentor too—there's no rule against fraternizing, is there?"

"This is all crazy talk. Let's just finish this best we can."

"Addison will give you two weeks off. I'll convince her. You know I can do it."

"I have no doubt," she says. The tone of her voice is closer to tears than it is to laughter.

* * * *

Addison is not to blame for this mess. I put myself out there, got accepted, and I have done a good job so far. I aim to please. In the darkness of the bedroom, when there's nothing left between us, I can admit the truth: I want to run away with Elizabeth. I indulge the fantasy when her hands explore my body with the confidence of the skilled familiar lover she is.

I have never been so open to anyone, body and mind. I am sure she can read me, detect all my conflicts and dreams. Beaches, historical landmarks, another journey together.

It's not going to happen, any of it, because she won't wait for me, and I cannot lose the chance at one million dollars. It's the jackpot, and I won't have to work hard for it...but maybe what I stand to lose, can't offset any amount of money.

"You are drifting, baby," she whispers. "I want you right here with me."

"Where else would I be?" I moan, a helpless needy sound, as she eases the toy into me. It's fastened to a harness, its shape causing interesting

sensations with each gentle push, distracting me from those other matters swirling around us. Time. Timing. We'll have to make do with what we have, and that's pretty amazing.

"I'll never forget about you," I promise, straining against her, urging her to go deeper, faster. I cry out when she complies, so close to completion. I hear her gasp as my fingernails dig into her skin, but I can't help it, overwhelmed by an incredible high.

I come to the sobering conclusion—no one else can ever make me feel that way.

And maybe that was the million dollar prize.

* * * *

There's a phone call, fairly early in the morning. We still lie together, limbs entwined in a romantic tangle. Elizabeth makes an unintelligible but clearly grumpy sound and answers. She sits up in bed, all of a sudden very still.

Bad news?

I look at her in alarm, and she makes a dismissive gesture.

"Yes, I'll make sure everything is ready. Thanks for the heads-up. Yes, of course. I'll see you then."

After ending the call, she looks lost in thought.

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes, very much," she mumbles, doing nothing to alleviate my concerns.

"Elizabeth?"

"It's fine," she says curtly, getting up and dressing in a robe. "You should start packing up your personal things. You'll be moving to the main house tomorrow."

"What?"

Her expression softens, and she leans forward, taking my hands.

"Don't worry. It's true, you're ready. You did well in every lesson, and there's nothing more I can teach you. We'll start after breakfast, and someone will come over to help you."

"Someone, when?"

I can't help panicking, for more reasons I can deal with at the moment.

"Tomorrow afternoon, or morning, depending how much time you need."

"I didn't bring much. What are you going to do? Is there someone new coming?"

“No, not that quickly. I’ll have to wrap up everything with Addison before we can look at new applications.”

So this is it. It wasn’t a dream after all, my time with Elizabeth, or joining a harem. Considering what I’ve done in the past weeks, I have no reason to freak out like I do, but of course this has nothing to do with new sexual skills I’ve learned.

Tomorrow. That is too soon.

“Can’t we wait until next week?”

“What would it change?” she asks and then turns away abruptly to leave the room.

What am I going to do?

I stick to the rules, that’s what I always do. As it is expected of me, I pack up my personal belongings, some that I brought, most of the clothes gifts courtesy of Addison. The boxes are ready by lunchtime. After we eat, Elizabeth does one more guided imagery session for me, all focused on the first time with a new lover.

I don’t want to hear any of it, losing my concentration a few times, but she doesn’t chastise me. I’m not even sure if she notices.

She’s gone all afternoon, and I wander around the house, saying goodbye to each memory—

No.

I can’t do this.

I’m in love with Elizabeth, have been for some time now. This is a one in a million chance, and I’m about to give it away. How stupid is that? What else am I waiting for?

The certainty grows stronger with every minute, now that I dared having the thought.

Other women have left, in the first week, or later.

If I remember correctly, there will be some expenses paid for the weeks I wasn’t working. Maybe not enough to stay in Europe for a month or pay off my friends’ mortgage, but it will be enough—because we’ll have everything else.

I’m starting to get worried.

Elizabeth isn’t coming home.

What if something happened to her? From the day I moved in, I’ve never been alone. She’s always been here. What is going on?

Around eight, there's a knock on the door. By now, I'm frantic. I can't call the police, or Addison, or anyone else. Nobody is telling me anything.

"I'm Isabel," says the woman when I open the front door to her. "Are you ready? I just got notice that we can move you in tonight."

"Why? Where is Elizabeth?"

"I'm not sure where she is now, but I spoke to her." She smiles. "That's good news. She says you're ready."

I'm not. I've never been less ready.

"I need to talk to her."

"I'm sorry, but I don't know how to reach her. You can talk to Addison about it tomorrow. Let's just do this, okay?"

Like in a trance, I step aside and pick up one of the boxes, she takes another one. When the trunk of her car is filled, she waits until I sit in the passenger seat and fasten the seatbelt.

"Seems a little silly, right, a car ride for a distance like that, but it's definitely faster." Isabel lays a hand on my arm. "Hey. I know this can be pretty overwhelming at first, that's why we prefer to do it quick. You'll adjust in no time."

Why did she do that to me? Just leave, not giving me any opportunity to say how I feel?

Except I did, and nothing I told her was enough to make her think I might be willing to forget about the money. Damn it.

Still. She didn't need to bail on me like that. We could have had a few more hours, to talk, to—right, it's unlikely that we would have done much talking. Probably we would have engaged in pleasant ways to avoid that conversation.

"It's just a surprise," I mutter.

How will this work out? All of a sudden, I feel out of my depth. It was Elizabeth's task to get me ready for this moment, and all I want to do is run.

Will there be another test? Or will I go right to Addison's—bedroom?

* * * *

Dinner is served in my room, and the woman who brings it informs me that Addison will see me for breakfast tomorrow.

That is still...soon.

I lie awake that night, resenting Elizabeth for leaving me here alone, resenting myself for letting it—everything—get this far. How could I not think this would get me in trouble one way or another?

The truth is I was flirting with casual, trying to pretend that could be me, pretending I'm not a hopeless romantic. I think about the many manuals I've read, detailed descriptions of what each toy can do for you, then trying out a carefully chosen sample with her. Every once in a while, after week two being entirely dedicated to that purpose, she'd let me touch her, pleasure her—tongue, fingers, the occasional vibrator for external use, but nothing beyond that.

The memories leave me with a strange mix of arousal and apprehension. It's Addison I signed up for. She seems nice from what I can tell—of course you can't get to know a person in one evening, can you? I think back to the moment Elizabeth came to me in the bathroom, on the first night, touching me. If I'm honest, I fell for her right there.

Nobody cares.

Not even Elizabeth cares, as it seems, and so I have to figure out a way to get through the next six months before I can head out and buy my ticket. Perhaps I'll make it a one-way—there's nothing left here for me.

For the first time since I met Elizabeth, I cry.

* * * *

On my way to Addison's suite, I walk past another common area. Here, it looks more like an actual harem, with a few modern touches. The women are wearing negligees and robes, some of them enjoying a cup of coffee. No one's in a hurry, everyone is in a good mood.

I don't see Quinn or Sophia. Is either of them with Addison right now? Is that why she's asking for me? Sex before breakfast wasn't an unusual occurrence between me and Elizabeth. I am nervous—not necessarily excited in a good way, not even when I see two of the women kissing tenderly. The others glance after me curiously.

I'm a day early, so perhaps Quinn and Sophia are still with their respective mentors. It's only Elizabeth who couldn't wait one more damn day to get rid of me.

My knock on Addison's door is a bit harsh, laden with my current emotion. I take a deep breath, willing to calm myself. Not her fault.

"There you are, excellent. I know we have a few things to cover, but there's no reason we can't do it over breakfast."

"Isabel told me Elizabeth left."

Whoa—I didn't mean that to be the first thing I'd say.

“That’s true. I’m sorry I can’t tell you any details, but you’ll be glad to hear that she’s fine and wishes you well.”

“Okay.”

The table is set for two, though the food would definitely be enough for more. Addison gestures for me to sit, and I do. She pours coffee for me, then laughs. “You’d think a person builds a harem so she doesn’t have to do anything, right? I can’t help it. I still want to court my women a little bit, know that they are here for more than the money.”

I blush and quickly reach for a buttery croissant. The jam tastes homemade. I barely managed to eat anything last night, now, I’m hungry.

“It’s working. This is delicious.”

I have so many questions, about Elizabeth, where she is, about their relationship, and was leaving really her choice? I’m not exactly sure what’s stopping me. It can’t hurt, though, to get a feel for what the situation is, to get her on my side.

“I have to admit I’m still not sure how this works. I’ve seen other women here...and for the test, of course. I wonder how you choose.”

“I try to get to know all of you better. That’s why the questionnaire is so intense. And after that it’s part of the fantasy. That’s all there is to it, don’t you think?”

“Why me?”

“I liked you right away. Elizabeth liked you too, and she always makes good choices, so here we are.”

“Yeah...”

I really hope she won’t require my services right away. I need time. To think. Whatever good that will do.

“You are already moved in. You know where everything is?”

“There was a map in the bedroom, so yes, thank you.”

Any time now. I hold my breath as she says, “Why don’t you take the time to explore a little bit more? I’d like to see you tonight.” Her smile tells me everything she doesn’t say in words. This is so bad. I shouldn’t lead her on, shouldn’t pretend...Then again, she doesn’t expect anything but my knowledge.

I can do this.

I’ll have to.

It could be so much worse.

“One more thing,” Addison says. “You’re a little overdressed. As you’ve seen, most of the women like something more comfortable.”

“Something you can get out of quickly if need be?” I laugh nervously.

“That too,” she admits.

After we finish breakfast, Addison sees me to the door of the suite. Before I leave, she embraces me from behind, kissing my neck.

Relax. She’s entitled to do that. I checked all those boxes. Her hands wander over my breasts, and one of them slides underneath my skirt.

“I look forward to seeing you tonight,” she whispers.

“Same here.”

When did I become such a good actor?

* * * *

A mind overwhelmed with stress isn’t open for pleasure, yours or your partner’s. That’s what the constant relaxation training and guided imagery to magical and safe places are for.

I would dream of walking in the sun, among world-famous ruins, along beaches, hand in hand with her. Come to think of it, the latter was real. I can easily conjure up the sensations, but today, they fail to calm me.

I feel trapped, and it’s only the first full day.

I feel guilty too.

There was no rule, no law that said I couldn’t have been the one to make that first step, insist on daring something new. I had fooled myself into thinking all of this was safe, money, sex, luxury, without getting attached.

I prepare myself for the evening, stand in front of the mirror naked for a whole minute. I have never been in better shape, daily exercise and a diet that reduced alcohol and sugar to a bare minimum doing the trick. No stress-eating candy, but multiple orgasms instead.

I should be grateful, right?

As per Addison’s instructions, I dress in the silk negligee and robe, no underwear. There is some sort of excitement after all, nerves fluttering, but it’s not the way I imagined it. I wish the past couple of days had been another test, and Elizabeth would be waiting for me in the master suite. With or without Addison, I don’t care—I want her to be there.

The fantasy, finally, is what puts me on the right track. It might be bittersweet, but my body doesn’t care much for nuances. It only remembers the pure bliss at Elizabeth’s hands.

It's time, and I make my way to Addison's suite in the soft, comfortable strapless sandals that all the women use here.

"Robin, come on in. We've been waiting for you."

My heart skips a beat. It's not Elizabeth sitting in the armchair, but Sophia. "I think you know each other already."

Sophia smiles. "Oh yes. We studied together."

Addison in black, Sophia in off-white, they make a stunning couple. Addison's robe is of a slightly different design. More expensive, too, I imagine, because everything in here is hers—even me and Sophia, for a period of six months at least.

"Welcome." Sophia gets up from her chair to walk over to me, and kisses me, deeply. I remember my lessons, but more than that, I have to suspend every notion that this is weird, making out with a woman I barely know in front of another. Then again, I've done more than make out with Sophia already, and Addison has been paying for everything I've done in the past weeks—no reason to have reservations now.

I want to get through this best I can, and I don't want to think of Elizabeth, but that might be the only thing to save me. I kiss Sophia back, place my hands on her waist to pull her closer. Addison steps behind me, kissing my neck like she did the other day. I close my eyes, and the sensations of two pairs of hands on me unite with the images on my mind in a stunning outcome. Maybe I'm just that easy, and love, falling in love, is not meant to be for me.

Sophia teases and tantalizes, caressing my nipples through the thin fabric of the negligee, kneeling to kiss my stomach while Addison lifts up the garment, working her way further down until she's tonguing my sex expertly.

"I know you're good," Addison whispers. "Sophia aced all her lessons too. Can you tell why?"

I have no choice but to lean back against her, which gives Sophia more access in return. Elizabeth did this to me many times, and she enjoyed it too, when I was the one on my knees. I'm trembling, the only answer I can give a moan. I don't think Addison expected anything else.

Then, the sensation is gone, and my eyes snap open. Sophia straightens, licking her lips. Addison takes my hand.

"We don't rush anything here, sweetie. We have all the time in the world."

I follow her to the bed on weak knees. “I remember that part of the training.”

Every step comes with a twinge, reminding me of the unfinished business. I might not even get there tonight, depending on Addison’s wishes.

We get naked, Sophia between us. I’ll admit that the concept intrigued me from the moment I first read about it. Get all the tests done, get that out of the way, and once you’re in, there’s nothing but leisure and satisfaction. For her, first, but we get to experience the untapped potential within ourselves. Sex without any guilt or expectations beyond the obvious.

Addison holds my hand once more, placing it between Sophia’s thighs. I take the hint and touch her, feel warm wetness coat my fingers.

“She enjoyed doing that to you. I enjoyed it too.”

It’s not my time and place yet. Addison has a dark red vibrator for Sophia whose breathing changes even at the sight of the object. I watch as Addison draws it over her clit before turning it on, then again, letting Sophia feel the full power of the vibrations.

I feel oddly left out at this moment, not sure what’s expected of me, so I wait.

Sophia expresses her bliss in no uncertain terms as the toy enters her, gliding deeper with every movement of her hips. Maybe I could just sneak out and...?

“Robin,” Addison commands softly. “Come on over here.”

...or maybe not.

Sophia has taken matters into her own hands, so to speak, and Addison pulls me into her arms, gently directing me where she wants me to be.

“Don’t go too fast. You know what to do.”

I sure do. Sophia pleasures herself with the vibrator, clearly not just show for Addison, but for her own benefit—twice—while I perform my first real harem duty. I’m good at it too, because Addison yields to my every manipulation of her body, every change of pace that drives her to the brink and then draws her back from it, until I allow her to come.

I’m not sure what I’m supposed to feel, or if I feel anything at all beyond the obvious physical reaction. She brushes her hand over my hair.

“Beautiful. How about we take a moment to have dinner?”

There are two bathrooms off the suite. She disappears in one of them, while Sophia and I share the other. I’m a bit perplexed, unsettled, and, of

course, still unsatisfied.

Lessons of weeks one and two, it's not about me.

Sophia regards me curiously. "Don't worry, you're doing great. Addison doesn't ask anything impossible."

"You've been here for how long?"

"Almost a week," she says. "When we did the test, I was at the end of my week."

"Oh. Okay. Did you see Quinn?"

She shakes her head. "She should be here soon, unless she decided to leave early."

"Leave early? Why would anyone do that at this point?" There it is again, the nagging guilt. I could have.

"There's always a reason." Sophia shrugs. "I plan on being here until the end, don't you? This is a once in a lifetime chance."

"Yeah, it is."

We join Addison in the dining area where a light dinner waits for us—brown rice, chicken, vegetables, and a white wine. All of a sudden I am annoyed with the ever-present health-conscious food. I could go with a burger, red meat, red wine, maybe a Martini or two, and chocolate cake. For all my high and mighty aspirations, I might spend a part of my million on a junk food binge. Forget about relaxation and exercise.

I don't share any of those thoughts, instead eat and engage in small talk. If I'm sent home early, I might have a date with fantasy later.

However, after dinner—fresh mango with cottage cheese for dessert—we resume our earlier activities, after brushing teeth and redoing hair and a touch of makeup.

We aren't rushed, that's for sure.

Everything in this house takes so damn long, I think when I'm the one at the center once more, the two women touching and caressing, playing with me. A thumb brushing over my clit, fingers opening me up, everything is too soft, too slow, too gentle.

But it's not about me.

Two fingers inside me, Sophia adds a third. I gasp, finally feeling like this is going somewhere, that they are not going to deceive me until I fall asleep from sheer exhaustion. She moves out of the way, and her fingers are replaced with the dildo Addison is wearing. Cool and smooth, slightly less

wide, it enters me easily. Finally, Addison wastes no more time, each of her thrusts deliberate, deep, pushing me further to the point of no return.

I close my eyes remembering the first time with Elizabeth, and many times after that, her keeping me waiting until there was nothing but ravenous pulsing need. And through it all, I simply loved being with her every day, talking about big or small things, and knowing she cared. At least I thought she did, but for the moment, the notion is enough. My body stiffens and then pleasure floods every space until I lie still, my heart racing.

Six months of torturing myself with memories, fantasies about what could have been leading to mind-blowing orgasms? I can do it.

* * * *

I had expected it to be like that for at least a while: Sophia, a plethora of toys, some meals together and threesomes, maybe the occasional orgy.

However, on the first weekend, Addison takes me to dinner in town.

“We have a business arrangement,” she says when I express my surprise. “You are not a hostage in my house.”

I’m glad she makes that clear, because my thoughts have wandered in all the wrong directions lately.

“There are some things I still don’t understand,” I admit. “I mean...I passed all my tests, obviously, and I’m impressed with how much I learned. I didn’t know there was so much to learn about sex, and there were boxes I didn’t check on the questionnaire.”

Her affectionate smile tells me she’s completely aware of which boxes I checked. I’m not going to ask her about the profile of any of the other women. Sophia’s. Quinn’s. She moved in this Friday, so she hasn’t quit after all. No, we all knew what we were doing.

“That’s the main incentive, for sure, but it doesn’t mean there can’t be anything else. You can have an emotional connection with someone temporarily. That doesn’t mean you have to walk away hurt and scared for the next time you put yourself out there.”

I wonder if she’s talking about the two of us. I don’t want to disappoint her. Addison is a no-nonsense person, calm, relaxing to be around, but I don’t feel a deep emotional connection. Not yet. Maybe not ever. I’m aware of what is hindering me, and perhaps she is too. What reason did Elizabeth give her when she left?

This part is difficult. I miss her so much it hurts. Yet, every moment of pleasure is because of her, the intimacy written on my body, indelible.

“Does that work for anybody? I mean...I want to do the best I can, but one of the things that drew me towards the—project—is that there was no need for romance. Life can be beautiful without it. It doesn't mean you don't make an effort for the person, but you stay away from all those entanglements that can hurt you.”

“The question is; can you really stop yourself? Look at me. I am surrounded by smart, funny and beautiful women. Do I fall in love? All the time. The feeling isn't always mutual, but that's not the point. I enjoy giving them something, an awareness of what they want from life, what is possible. It doesn't hurt either one of us.”

Depending on where you stand, this sounds either completely sensible—or crazy.

Addison laughs when I tell her my thoughts. “Well, you didn't run away, so I assume you're at least still intrigued. My house isn't Bluebeard's castle.”

“No,” I say, laughing, too. “There's no beard anywhere around.”

That night, Sophia doesn't join us. We take a bath together that includes the use of vibrating toys. Afterwards, Addison gives me a massage, using almond-scented oil. I am in a stage of total bliss, warm, pliant, expecting the sensual ministrations to turn sexual at any point.

What I didn't expect was the sweeping wave of emotion catching up with me, and I don't even realize what's happening until I am sobbing into the pillow. I am pretty sure that's not part of pleasing the woman of the house, the realization making me cry harder.

Addison covers me with the sheet, running a gentle hand down my back.

“I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.” What, I'm not even sure, but I sound pathetic.

“It's okay. Nothing to be sorry about. Are you going to tell me about it?”

“It's not your problem. Again, I'm sorry.” I sit up and reach for the tissues on the nightstand. “Let me just go wash my face. I'll be right back and you can think about...what you want to do.”

Wrapped in the sheet, I get up and flee for the bathroom where I try to make myself presentable again. The almond scent is clinging to my skin. It's nice, so why do I feel like I want to take another shower? What is wrong with me?

There's no reason to cause drama like this. There's nothing wrong with falling in love, Addison said so—it doesn't have to hurt you. She's rich enough to send adventurous women home with a million dollars, after months of sexual experimentation. Elizabeth alone trained eleven women plus me. Even if not everyone made it until the end, that would still be a substantial investment. She must know what she's talking about, right?

When I return to the bedroom, Addison pats the space in the bed beside her.

"Come here," she says. "Let's get some sleep."

"What? I thought..."

"There'll be another day. I have an early start tomorrow, so this is good." When we've turned off the light, she adds, "I think you and Elizabeth should talk. Before or after the six months are up, that's up to you, but clearing the air would be good for both of you."

"There's nothing to clear." My voice sounds level, even though the tears are falling anew. "She didn't even bother saying goodbye."

"She had her reasons too. This is not the usual way to end the training."

I wait a few heartbeats, sad, worried. "Is she okay?"

"Nothing happened to her," Addison says. "But if there's a lack of closure on either side, you should take care of that before you go to Athens."

I let the hope flourish for a moment, then crush it with everything I have.

"There is no point. I am here now. Are you sure you don't want to ravish my body another time?"

"The offer is tempting, but I'll have to take a rain check. More ravishing tomorrow. Good night, Robin."

* * * *

I'm trying hard to find comfort in Addison's theory, about the possibility to fall in love at any time, several times, with different people. All without the hurt of having invested too much, of having the other person walk out on you when you least expect it.

If I could talk to Elizabeth, perhaps we could both come to the conclusion that that's what it was, a period of being in love, attraction, infatuation that we can cherish in our memories?

If only it was that easy.

For Addison, it is.

I can't ignore that she's quite taken with me, and so I try to avoid any serious conversation, especially regarding Elizabeth. I let her ravish my

body, and listen to her talk about her work.

One time, Quinn joins us, and I'm instantly reminded of the test, when Elizabeth was watching us, so clearly unhappy with the setting. I should have known then and there, but I was too blinded by...what? The prospect of money? The certainty that I would never get emotionally involved with another person again? I don't even know anymore.

The curse of the month rolls around, and Quinn takes my place.

The days are even longer, more opportunity to think about her, what could have been. I'm bored and restless, and once more at a loss.

There's only one way to solve this. It's not a good time to make decisions when you're in pain, so I wait another day until at least the physical one has mostly passed. Then I ask for an appointment with Addison.

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Elizabeth

Eleven women. The first two left in the middle of week one, bored with the routine, realizing that this wasn't what they wanted after all. Similar with the one that came to me during week two and told me it wasn't personal—but she was reconsidering the future relationship with Addison that would be a one-way street in parts. The remaining eight were quite happy with week three, trying out the various toys they'd read about, but still, another one dropped out.

Addison and I developed the program together. Mentors would assess how applicants were doing when focused on one person—the mentor—and then pair them with another applicant—maybe two if they were doing well.

Robin was doing well, even though she, in a rather subtle way, kept questioning the premise. She made me question it as well, and that is where the trouble started.

I remember the others, their names, their faces, and their eagerness to be part of something taboo-breaking. Robin haunts me.

Since I packed up my things at the mentor house and said goodbye to Addison, I haven't spoken to anyone.

It's not the kind of small talk you can have with your neighbor or the barista in the coffee shop down the street—I just quit my job training harem girls. No, not actual girls. No, it's not as bad as it sounds. But maybe it is.

I don't know anymore.

I've been drinking, and crying, and resenting Addison for having such a magnetic pull with women, not just because of her money. I was once drawn to her for other reasons, and then we became friends...Everything is in disarray now. Perhaps it's not Addison's fault, or Robin's. It's mine.

I had never slept in an applicant's bed, other than for a few minutes after a marathon session when your body demands immediate rest. At night, I cuddled up to her, held her, because I made myself believe it would help ease her into the next phase.

There's no next phase for me. I arranged tests for applicants before her, coordinated with Kimberly and the other mentors to determine their ability to relate to another applicant in case the occasion arose.

I hated to do it for Robin, hated to see her engage with the other women. It was on my mind before, but that was the moment that told me I had to do

something. When I got the call, I knew I couldn't send her off to Addison like the others. Because I couldn't bear to see her go.

Because I wanted her for myself.

This is crazy, I know. The women I taught came to us in the hope of leaving with a million dollars at some point. Mentors present a stepping stone, a temporary partnership. That's what Addison and I decided, that's all I ever wanted—or so I thought.

“Are you sure that she is ready to come to the main house?” Addison asked me when I turned in my resignation. “You speak very fondly of her.”

“I am fond of all of them,” I returned. “It's time for me to move on.”

“I can't say I'm happy about this. You're the best teacher I have.”

I shrugged, giving her a wry smile. “It's just sex, right? It's not rocket science.”

“You didn't use to talk that way.”

“I'm talking that way now. Bye, Addison.”

I have no reason to resent her. Because of her, I am living comfortably in a nice condo with a view. It's all paid for, so the only thing I'll have to pay in the future are taxes, and perhaps updates, but I'm not worried. It pays well to be a mentor, if only for a few years. Addison knew that everyone who came to her regarding the harem, would have an inexplicable gap in their résumé, and she's been taking care of everyone. Financially. And with a letter of recommendation in case we wanted to go back into our old fields. That's not an urgent decision for me. The urgency lay elsewhere, and I messed up. I'll never see her again—she'll be going home with lots of money, and no doubt going on her dream trip not long after.

I've watched videos on the internet. Capri. The Acropolis. Beautiful places.

We sold a lie.

You can get involved with someone and enjoy yourself, no strings attached, time after time, until you let your guard down.

That's when it happens.

I feel terrible about running out on her like I did. If nothing else, I'll have to apologize to her. For that, I'll have to wait six months or go back to the place where she is sleeping in Addison's bed. It will hurt either way.

* * * *

To my surprise, Addison picks up right away.

“So good to hear from you. How are you doing?”

I'm miserable, and you know exactly why. I bite back the useless retort. Better cut to the chase.

"I need to talk to Robin. The rules allow for a visit with an old mentor."

"I wasn't going to argue with you," she says, sounding surprised I would even bring that up. "You're coming here, yes? I'll make sure you have somewhere to talk in private."

"Thank you."

"She's doing fine, but I think talking to you will be good for her. She's been wondering about the way you left, never giving her a chance to say goodbye."

I press my hand against my forehead, trying to ignore the absurdity of the situation. If Addison says Robin is doing fine, it can only mean one thing, and I don't want to imagine. It's more than closure that I need, but I'm not going to get it. It's not about me. It's about the apology I owe her.

"I'm aware. That was wrong. I want to explain."

"Elizabeth. You know there are always many options."

"I'm not so sure about that. Tomorrow at six, is that okay?" I don't know why I choose this number. Maybe it's because I'm still trying to uphold appearances. I worked diligently at the house, always. I might be a tad embarrassed that I haven't done anything in the past few days other than lounge in bed, get a coffee every once in a while, drink and cry. It's a relief, actually. I couldn't show that side to Robin, couldn't admit to myself that I love her.

The picture is getting much clearer.

"Five-thirty. You can eat with us if you like."

"No, I don't think so, but thanks. I'll be there."

After ending the call, I go back to bed, wondering what I really want to achieve tomorrow...and how much of it is pure fantasy. I fall asleep, slipping into a beautifully obscene dream about her. I wake up with my heart pounding, a moan on my lips, warm wetness between my thighs.

A quick glance to the clock on the nightstand tells me it's only fourteen minutes after ten. She might be doing everything I fantasized about, to Addison, or another woman as part of a performance. The thought serves as a cruel cold shower. I have one night and another day to get through.

* * * *

It's a bit frantic, but with purpose that I clean up my apartment in the morning. I check what's in the fridge. I go over my finances, and I get rid of

the empty bottles.

I owe Addison.

When I told Robin my reasons for quitting previous jobs, I didn't lie, but I left out parts of the truth. Not only did I feel like I couldn't make much of a difference in other people's lives, I wasn't making any in mine either.

My divorce wasn't exactly traumatizing, but still an incision. In my mid-thirties, I finally started to figure out what it all meant. Getting back in the dating game proved to be difficult and trying. I had a few inconsequential relationships, then, at a charity event, I ran into Addison. She took my life onto an entirely different path, and here I am, about to...What? Let her down? Betray her?

That's a matter of interpretation.

We'll see how it goes.

I knock on the door at precisely 5:24. Addison comes to the door, greeting me with a hug, and she leads me through the vast space to her office. After spending more time in the real world than I have in years, the scenery amazes me. I had gotten used to walking around in places where women make out like this, uncaring about spectators. Everyone looks happy, and I believe they truly are. That's why it was time for me to leave. I wasn't, not anymore.

"Thanks for coming," Addison says as if it was her idea. "I'll leave you and Robin alone in a bit, but I wanted to talk to you first."

"I imagine."

We sit down.

"Would you like something to drink? A cocktail, or a coffee?"

I've had quite a bit of caffeine today, but nonetheless, I believe a vanilla latte from Addison's coffee bar would help calm my nerves. Addison gets up at my request.

"That's okay, I can make it myself if you don't mind."

"Sure, go ahead."

The task at hand gives me something to focus on, which is a good thing. I am successful, but nearly drop my cup when she says, "I meant it when I said Robin is doing fine. You did a phenomenal job, before you decided to run out on her."

I don't want to hear any of this.

"We tried the swing last weekend."

Is she trying to bait me, or did I come here defensive and cranky already?

“Really. I can’t remember any of those items in the questionnaire.”

“Oh, sometimes you have to try things out, you know that, Elizabeth. Questionnaires can be adjusted.”

“Whatever. I’d like to talk to her.”

“Yes, that’s what you came here for, and I’m good with that. I just want to warn you.”

“That sounds serious.”

“I am. I’m not sure what your intentions are at this point, but what Robin needs to hear from you is that you were wrong, and that you have her back. That is all. Let her finish her time here. You could take a vacation in the meantime, and then come back to do your job.”

I shake my head with a wry smile. It’s not like I expected this to be easy. Addison truly believes in this mission, giving as much pleasure to as many women as possible, and getting quite a bit of her own in the process. But she wants what she wants.

“I’m sorry. I’m not coming back.” For starters. “And I’d like to see how Robin feels before I make any other judgment.”

“How she feels about what? She’s been in the house for a few weeks, doing well for herself. She’s going to leave with a million dollars. From what I can tell, she’s feeling good about it, and you should be happy for her. In fact, you should be proud of yourself, because you played a big part in it. I like her. I want her to see this through.”

“It’s a harem, not a graduate program.”

“True. How many of your class became millionaires? Look, no one says the world is always just. We make compromises, but I think it’s fair to say that we have made very few lately. Leave it alone.”

I know she has a point, but my gut reaction is still the same. I want to slap her, childish as that is. The swing. I don’t know why I focus on that point—they have probably done so many other things, and I’m aware of each of them, because I either tried them out with Robin, took her on a fantasy journey or made her read about them. Addison is right—I’m no innocent in this, and neither is Robin.

That doesn’t change how I feel about her.

“Has she ever expressed that she wants to leave?”

“Not to my face,” Addison says. “I’m starting to question the wisdom of this meeting.”

“I want to see her,” I insist.

“Yes, sure, I’ll get her. You can go in the sitting room downstairs. It’s more comfortable, and...” A smile plays over her lips. I was once attracted to Addison. I thought I could be one of the women hanging around the pool or one of the common areas—until I became a mentor, her best teacher. “Whatever happens, happens,” Addison finishes. “I’ll await you both for dinner at six-thirty.” She lays a hand on my arm. “Don’t mess this up for her. She’s on the right track.”

“I’m not going to mess anything up.”

“Even better. You come find me when you’re done. I’ve had the chef make your favorite.”

I’m not sure I care for food at this point, feeling a bit queasy, because I have no idea what’s going to happen in the next half hour or so.

I want her to be happy.

I was hoping that I deserve to be happy just as much, but I’m not sure both can be true.

* * * *

I wait for Robin in the sitting room, much aware how literally everything in this house is designed to serve as a space for sexual activities. Every couch and armchair is oversized and comfortable. I sit up straight, on the edge. That’s not a metaphor, though it could be.

When she arrives, the look on her face tells me that she didn’t expect to see me, at least not today. I don’t know if that is good or bad. I’m on my feet in an instant, but then, for some reason, I hesitate. She moves forward and envelopes me in a close hug. That moment, I am certain. No matter what Addison says, I can’t wait six months for a maybe. Today will bring clarity for all of us, one way or another.

Both of us are reluctant to let go. Not just because holding each other feels right. Once we sit down to talk, everything will change.

I think back to when I first met her, a woman curious for experiments, searching but a bit aimless at the same time. She is even more beautiful than I remember. Like all the women who went through training successfully, she is wearing a negligee and a robe, an outfit that was derived from the silk robes at the A Perfect Dream parties. Addison took me a couple of times because she thought it would inspire me for my role as a mentor.

I’m not sure it did, but I got what I wanted, a life outside conventions that exist even in our community.

“You look great,” I finally say.

“You don’t have to—”

I can’t let her talk now, or I’ll never finish this. “Look, before you say anything else. I want you to know I’m sorry I ran out on you. I want to explain...but if I’m honest, that’s only one of the reasons I came here. I had to work up my courage for all of them.”

I have her attention now.

“I didn’t want to stand in your way. One million dollars, it’s a game changer. If you don’t get crazy with it, you can live comfortably for the rest of your life. I wanted that for you.”

“Not anymore?” she asks softly.

“I couldn’t bear being there on that day. I love you...and I can’t go on not knowing whether there was something you wanted me to say, something you were waiting for.”

“What difference does it make now?”

“You could come home with me today.”

There, it’s out in the open. Her eyes widen, and then, to my dismay, I see tears in them.

“I mean it. I was stupid not to tell you before, but I was so sure you’d want to—”

It sounds even worse in retrospect. “Like I said, stupid. Please, don’t cry.”

“It’s a little late for all of that, isn’t it? You helped design the program, the whole idea, so you know...everything. Do you still love me even knowing what I’ve done?”

“I do.”

She sits in the armchair, leaning forward, crying.

“Robin.”

“I didn’t know what to think! It was never just about the money. Maybe in the beginning, but then I was thinking about what we could have together, if only we wanted to—and then you were gone. The best thing I could do was make my peace with the situation.

“Make your peace? What do you mean?” I used to know everything that went on behind these doors. Addison and I made the rules together. She wouldn’t overstep any of those boundaries just because she could?

Finally, she looks up at me.

“When I came here, I didn’t mind the concept of having sex with someone without all the romantic BS attached. After all, I didn’t know you

either. I guess it's fair to say you spoiled that for me." Robin shrugs wearily. "I feel like there's no way I can go back if I don't finish what I started, because who will put up with what I've done? At least, I'll have the money."

My heart is breaking a little more with every word. "Did you hear what I just said? I love you. I want you to come home with me."

"No. I can't. Please understand. I got it wrong the first time, I know, but there are no second chances. I need to get ready for dinner. Thanks for coming."

"Robin, wait."

She doesn't resist when I pull her to me and kiss her, gently, the kiss soon turning deep and passionate, leaving both of us breathless. Screw all those complications—underneath them, the truth still comes across, loud and clear.

"I can't," she says again and leaves, but I've heard too much to give up. It looks like I'm going to dinner after all.

* * * *

As a mentor, you try to do your best to prepare the protégée for their role. Everyone has at least a bit of an idea of what it means to be in a harem—there's a clear power play in the picture, and once they are a few weeks into the training, they understand it and go along with it. They choose it for a reason. They enjoy it. Addison and I are dressed. Robin and Sophia wear the sensual silk garments when we take our seats in the dining room. There's an obvious difference of power in that. Sophia doesn't seem to mind, judging from her body language. Robin looks thoughtful, avoiding my gaze. I can't tear mine away from her, my inner turmoil a mix of concern, hope and lust.

"I take it you two had a good conversation," Addison says. It's disconcerting. Lately I've been feeling such resentment towards her—doesn't she understand anything? This is not for everyone. I won't lie—for a while I enjoyed the role of a mentor, taking the taboo out of sex and giving women tools that would be helpful far beyond the time they spent with me or Addison. Escape for six months into a decadent paradise and come home a millionaire.

It doesn't work for everyone.

It wasn't working for Robin or me.

Now, Robin's gaze is on me as well. She cleaned herself up for dinner, but I can see her eyes are still slightly red-rimmed. I hate causing her pain. That wasn't what I came here for, tantalize with impossible ideas.

I had a plan.

"I think we figured some things out," I say, a delayed response to Addison's statement.

"Will you be back as a mentor?" Sophia asks.

"No. That part is definitely over."

The tension in the room is unmistakable, and finally, Addison asks Robin and Sophia to leave. "You can take dessert in the suite, and get ready. I'll join you later."

Each of us is aware of the not so subtle power play. Robin holds my gaze for a long moment before she says, "Goodbye Elizabeth."

I'm still absorbing the blow when the door of the dining room has long closed behind them.

"What did you expect?" Addison asks gently. "No, wait. I know. You need to make a decision. Whether you come back or not—"

"I'm not coming back."

"Okay. That doesn't mean we can't still be friends, right?"

"I'm not sure what it means," I say and get up. "Thanks for dinner. I'll see myself out."

"Elizabeth, don't be silly. You know how this works. It made sense when we designed all of this together. It still does. In less than a year from now, all of us will have moved on."

"I don't know if we can still be friends."

"Well...let me know when you have figured it out."

I leave the room, walk across common areas where there are always women laughing and chatting together, reading, or engaging in other, more intimate activities. This whole place is designed to be Addison's personal paradise, but in their spare time, the women who live here are pretty much free to do whatever they want. If they want to leave within the first six months after a successful training period, the deal is off. It's not the worst kind of life you can imagine—if it's what you choose. It's not supposed to hurt.

I walk away from the estate, knowing that my life will never be the same. I'm a few steps away from my car when I hear her voice.

"Elizabeth, wait for me!"

I spin around, dumbfounded as Robin comes running after me, wearing nothing but the negligee and the slippers that are standard wear in this house.

It feels like a dream, and at the same time, nothing has ever been more real. I meet her halfway, pull her close to me.

“I want to come home with you,” she whispers.

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Robin

The urgency has been building ever since I had that conversation with Addison, where I realized that we had come to an impasse. She wanted me to clear up things with Elizabeth and cut ties if necessary.

It's not what I want. I want to get away from the explanations and justifications, and the fantasies I've imposed on myself when I can have something real. I still can. I replayed everything Elizabeth said to me, in my head, and decided that I trust her.

"What are you doing?"

Addison must have sensed that something was up, not that anyone needed to be especially observant for that. I couldn't go back to the bedroom with Sophia, get ready to act out another fantasy for any of us.

I meet her gaze, trying to convey all my determination, best I can in my sparsely dressed state. Elizabeth said yes. She wants me to come with her.

"I'm leaving," I say.

"Don't be silly. I won't even start about how you signed a contract, but... You like it here. You enjoy yourself, and you want to throw all of that away for what? Romance?"

I give Elizabeth a quick sideways glance, aware of her irritation.

"That's not for you to decide," she says.

"Stop making a scene, you two. Robin, go back in the house. You're going to catch a cold."

It's surreal. A cold is the least of my concerns right now.

"Addison," I say. "Please understand. You probably think I'm ungrateful, but that's not what it is. I am very grateful for everything I was able to see and experience, because of the contract I signed. I mean, who gets to do that? I know that the women inside that house feel the same. But they want to be here. I can't, not anymore."

"Sure you can. You remember what's waiting for you at the end."

I shake my head. "You might think I'm crazy, and maybe I am, but it's not about the money for me. It hasn't been for a while. I thought that I had to see it through for so many reasons, but none of that matters anymore."

"Because you found love?" she asks with a hint of bitterness.

"Exactly."

“Are you even aware of the investments that have been made on your behalf? Food, housing, Elizabeth’s salary?”

Today, as everything makes sense again, I’m brave. “Then why don’t you just send me a bill?” I say before Elizabeth and I get into the car.

* * * *

Just like that, the illusion ends. I came here with the idea of becoming a sexual expert, living a life of decadence and serving one woman for six months, then go home a millionaire.

I am leaving with nothing but a flimsy nightgown and a pair of slippers.

Elizabeth is in a hurry to leave the premises, but when we are about ten minutes away, she pulls over and parks the car. She removes her seatbelt and mine, and pulls me close.

“This wasn’t a bad decision.”

She kisses me softly, and the pieces continue to fall into place. All the time when I thought it was the setting, the training that made me want her this much—I was mistaken. That first week, I was already falling for her, her gentle but commanding voice guiding me through imagery of perfect bliss, and then later, her hands and mouth doing the same. A perfect match.

“I know. It’s the best I have ever made.”

She takes a deep breath before she fastens her seatbelt once more. “We should keep going. You must be cold.”

“A little,” I admit. “Wow, I really made a dramatic exit, didn’t I?”

All of a sudden, we are both laughing, and it’s the best feeling I’ve had in a while.

“Yes, you did. I’m so glad...and I’m sorry it took me so long to figure this out. I wasn’t sure if I had the right to ask this of you.”

I lean back in my seat, now unable to keep the smile off my face. “You asked me for many other things before. No, I’m serious. This amount of money, it was always unreal. I know Addison isn’t happy right now, but she can’t actually sue me for expenses, can she? If I remember correctly, the contract says that everyone who leaves early will get a small sum of money for their efforts, and a letter of recommendation to make up for the gap in the CV. It had better not say ‘performed excellently in every position.’”

Elizabeth is quiet, and I realize it’s a little too early for that joke. It’s too early for me.

“Please understand that I’m making silly jokes because I’m still trying to adjust. This, us, it’s real.”

“Yes it is. Don’t worry, she’s not going to send you a bill.” She keeps her eyes on the road, but there’s a smile playing over her lips.

“I’ve been, sort of...I don’t know, lost? That sounds weird. I thought this was the answer, do something that’s completely out of the norm, something highly taboo...I thought I’d find my way somehow. Well, in a way I did, just not in the harem.”

“You could say the same about me.”

I look at her, surprised. She seems to take every step with such confidence.

“I had no idea what the hell I was doing until you came along. And then I had to let you go.”

“Not anymore,” I tell her. “I’m not going anywhere.”

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Elizabeth

Finally home, I run a bath for Robin, the way I did on the first day of her training. The goal of week one is to test an applicant, to see if they can take themselves back, have a handle on their own impulses—and tease them mercilessly.

That's not going to happen tonight. There are new rules for us now. Technically, I'm not in control anymore, though it's doubtful if I ever was.

Robin admires the bathroom with the huge window and the soaker tub, but I can tell she's tired.

"Take your time," I say, kiss her and straighten. "I'll be downstairs if you need me."

"You're not coming in with me?" The hopeful expression on her face almost changes my mind, but there's something I need to do first.

"Depending on how long you want to spend in here. I'll be right back."

Addison picks up right away—so she's not consoling herself yet.

"You have something to say for yourself?" she asks coolly.

"I'm sorry. I handled this the wrong way. If I had been honest with myself sooner..."

"Yeah, water under the bridge. What do you want?"

"I'll come get Robin's things tomorrow morning, if that's okay."

There's a pause, long enough for both of us to be confronted with uncomfortable realizations. All of a sudden it makes sense why Addison, who is always about freedom and consent, would try to persuade Robin to stay. Not for the money.

"I'm really sorry," I say again.

"I'm aware of that. I'll have everything ready."

"Her check and letter of recommendation?"

"I said everything. Now leave me alone for a few hours, will you?"

"Good night," I say, but she has hung up already.

I go back to the bathroom, deep in thought. It's ironic. Addison and I designed a beautiful illusion, because we were tired and jaded, of the dating game, the restrictions society puts on women, lastly—the pain. Maybe we were fooling ourselves, or Addison will go back to falling in love with one woman after the other.

I have stopped running. I am home.

* * * *

By the time I join Robin in the tub, she's almost asleep. We don't stay long, eager to end this day that has been complicated and exhausting, and curl up in bed.

It's wonderful. It's terrifying as well, because I'm still afraid it could be too good to be true. Robin, dressed in a pair of my PJs, snuggles into my arms.

"Is there something I can do for you, for rescuing me?" She yawns. "Actually, whatever you had in mind, will have to wait until tomorrow."

"It can wait a little longer," I say. "And I didn't do much. It's not like Addison could have forced you to stay."

"Is she mad?" Robin asks, well aware of the phone call I made earlier. "I didn't mean to hurt anyone, her or you. I just couldn't pretend any longer."

"She'll get over it. We will all be okay."

It's actually a possibility, I think, later that night when Robin has fallen asleep. Once the last steps are taken, we can focus on our own lives...and maybe we'll go on that trip after all.

* * * *

Last night I dreamed I left the harem, and Elizabeth was there to take me away.

That part was real. There were some vague images about sun-filled places, and other, more intimate ones that came with incredible, real sensations, but we're not quite there yet.

It's Addison's secretary who has my personal things ready for us, including the promised paperwork and the check—not a million, but enough to tide me over until I can figure out what to do next.

Elizabeth and I stop at a coffee shop, both of us fairly relieved to have avoided a confrontation today.

"Don't worry about anything now. You have all the time you need."

I still feel somewhat restless, and I imagine I will until one last question is answered—but maybe she needs time, too. The parameters of our relationship have changed completely.

"Whenever we're in public like this, it reminds me of when you first took me to see Addison," I admit.

Elizabeth gives me a wry smile. "We're going to talk about her for a while to come."

"Probably...but I was more thinking about your...personal fetish."

Her eyes darken ever so slightly at the reminder. I can't be sure about any other reaction, but if it's the same as mine, there's an unmistakable promise.

"It was for you, not for her. I would do it again."

"I'll hold you to that."

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Robin

“Robin.” Her tone is breathless, longing, when one night, I slip under the covers naked. The past few days have been odd, and also the happiest of my life so far. Something has been a constant source of frustration. We hug and kiss, often, but we haven’t gone beyond that. I realize that Elizabeth is worried about the dynamics of what our relationship used to be, when she was writing reports on my sexual conduct and evolving skills. It’s not like that anymore, and I need her to understand that.

I don’t need advice from a mentor.

I need her.

“It is okay,” I say. “We both were a bit slow to understand what happened, but it’s all right now.” I can see the conflicting emotions in her expression, until they all give way to one—undisguised lust. “I want you so much,” I whisper against her chest while my fingers, eager to touch and to please, wander between her thighs. It’s not that long since I left the main house, but it feels like it’s been a long time that I’ve been with someone like this.

Addison never forces anyone to do anything. She’s in love with everyone under her roof, and that lifestyle works for her and many others. Sophia and Quinn were quite happy with it, but I wasn’t, because there was one woman I could never get off my mind. I gasp in sheer pleasure when I find myself on my back, Elizabeth on top of me. She holds my wrists over my head, her other hand warm and confident on my hip, the caress soon becoming more intimate. My body has been aching for her touch, soft and welcoming to her fingertips.

“I missed you.” The words come out in a moan, and I raise my hips slightly, desperate to feel her inside of me. I’m filled with gratitude at this second chance, that all our hopes and plans did not deter us from this moment.

“I missed you too. I love you,” she says, kissing me deeply.

Some things are not so complicated after all, only if we make them. We met in an attempt to teach and learn perfect bliss.

That part worked out. It is the most amazing experience I’ve ever had, fantasy replaced with reality once more, and all I can do is give in. I love every second of it.

I push the sheets aside, uncaring that they fall on the floor, smiling down at the woman who has taught me so much about how much pleasure I am able to receive, and give. She knows it too, that I will apply every single lesson.

* * * *

They don't call it a honeymoon phase for nothing. We drink wine on the balcony of Elizabeth's condo, make love until we fall asleep and sneak in another time before breakfast. We plan our future. Elizabeth has a few options, favors she can call in. Thanks to the years of employment with Addison, she isn't in a rush either, but looking at part time opportunities. I browse the job sections as well—just because we're doing okay right now, it doesn't mean we can't look ahead.

We book the trip, not a month, but twenty days in Greece and Italy.

A week before we leave, Addison calls.

I pick up the phone, and there's a bit of an awkward silence, before she says, "Hi, Robin."

Elizabeth has promised she won't ask, unless there's something I want to talk about. I don't see the need. I assume she knows anyway, Addison's romantic evenings for two or three, toys, props. I didn't hate it. I didn't feel like the earth shook, not like those incredible sensations Elizabeth can create for me...Even now, I blush as if Addison is aware of my thoughts. Maybe she is.

"Um, hello... You want to talk to Elizabeth?"

"Actually, I want to talk to the two of you. I'd like to see you."

At least, if there's any sort of trouble, we'll be on the other side of the ocean next week.

"There's no small print in the contract that I overlooked, right? I don't have to give you money?"

"No, of course not." She laughs ruefully. "I'm not sure what happened, and I'm sorry. I feel like we left things on a strange note, and I want to make it up to you."

"It's all good." I have reason to feel forgiving.

"Let me do something for you anyway. Are you and Elizabeth free tomorrow night?"

"Tomorrow night?" I send a questioning look to Elizabeth who has followed the exchange. She shrugs.

"I guess that's okay..."

“I swear you’ll be safe. I’ll text you the address.”

She’s not going to summon us to the main house—I suppose that’s a show of trust that can go both ways.

“We’ll be there,” I say.

“Wonderful. Thank you for hearing me out, Robin. Give my best to Elizabeth.”

On the other hand, there’s a pun in there I’m sure was fully intended.

* * * *

I give everything I have to Elizabeth, and she takes it all. I guess we’re both a bit nervous about Addison’s proposal. There’s one quick and easy way to ease the tension. I ease two fingers into her velvet heat, her body welcoming me, and I lean forward to pleasure her with my tongue, overwhelm her with sensation. It’s not the most comfortable position, but her immediate reactions are a delightful reward.

She whimpers with each brush of my tongue, her body tightening around my fingers with the rhythm of her heartbeat. All those training sessions, even the fantasies I had while fulfilling Addison’s, paid off, for Elizabeth and me.

I have never felt this much in sync with any partner, so close along with her, as I do now. As I feel her inch closer to her climax, so do I, and I know it won’t take much, just a quick touch, a casual caress...She shivers, says my name in that urgent, unmistakable way.

“Yes,” I whisper before resuming my task. Her hips rise, and then, for a glorious moment, I can’t tell where she ends and I begin, her wordless sounds a trigger I can’t resist, pulling me with her.

When I sit back, Elizabeth smiles at my baffled expression.

“I taught you that,” she says with unveiled pride.

“Yes,” I gasp. “You sure did.”

* * * *

The address Addison has given us is an upscale restaurant in town. She expects us at 7:00 p.m. It feels both odd and exciting to dress up for a night out. I haven’t done that in some time—first moving in with Elizabeth for the training, then into the main house, there weren’t many occasions. Since I’ve been back with Elizabeth, frankly, we haven’t gone out much.

“She likes that kind of suspense,” Elizabeth says, shaking her head as she parks in front of the building. I can hear the affection in her tone. It’s true,

we both have history with her now, and that's okay—if it wasn't for Addison and her fantasies, we never would have met.

We have a lot to be grateful for.

When we enter the restaurant, the owner, Maria, introduces herself to us and leads us to a private room. Inside, the table is set for two.

Elizabeth and I share a surprised look.

“There must be a mistake. We were supposed to meet—”

“Ms. Belmont, yes, I'm aware. She told me to give her apologies, as she can't make it tonight, but please, enjoy. She left something for you as well.”

She hands me a gift box. Elizabeth smiles and shrugs. In all the years working for her, she hasn't managed to figure out her boss completely. I have to admit, it's not easy.

“Would you like something to drink?” Maria asks. She recommends a wine for the appetizer course, and we quickly agree.

“What do you think this is?” I ask when Elizabeth and I are alone.

“I have no clue. Let's find out.”

Inside the box, there's a miniature version of the Acropolis, and a letter. Something falls out when I unfold it, and when I bend to retrieve it, I nearly faint.

It's a check. The number says \$1,000.000.

A few seconds tick by before I can breathe normally again, and Elizabeth's hand on my back and her concerned expression is an indication of how close I came to fainting for real. Sure, at some point this was a realistic expectation, but it always stayed fairly vague on my mind. In the end, when it came to love or money, I chose the former. I can't go back now.

We read the letter together.

Robin, Elizabeth, I know that your first impulse is to give it back, because you don't want to owe me, and because I haven't been a particularly good friend to either of you recently. For that, I am sorry. I let my ego get in the way. However, I recognize beauty when I see it. The two of you together epitomize it. Go do whatever job you'd like, start a foundation if you want, but don't bring me back that check. I would consider it a personal insult.

Maria and her team will be at your service tonight. Please enjoy this little preview of Greece. And let me host your wedding.

Best, A.

I sink back into my chair, still speechless.

“She really likes you,” Elizabeth says, her tone somewhat melancholic.

“I liked her too.” I put the card down. “I’m so happy I signed that contract, so I got to love you.”

Maria returns with the wine, before the moment can get any more emotional.

* * * *

I thought I was done with dreams and romantic delusions. I wanted the distance, sex just for pleasure with no further attachment...and I got it all wrong. Elizabeth made all my dreams come true, every sexual fantasy I ever had, and there was a swing in there somewhere—the only scenario from Addison’s house we ever talked about.

Whenever we open a new door, I know we’ll do it together, and it’s safe.

We see the Acropolis together, discover Athens, then travel to Capri, just as I imagined.

In a restaurant by the water, late at night, we talk about marriage, and Elizabeth tells me about her first, and why it didn’t work out.

“I didn’t even know I could be something other than straight. And when I found out, I thought it might be too late. Not just too late to be with a woman, but the way I wanted to.”

“Addison gave you an opportunity.”

Elizabeth smiles wistfully. “I don’t know if it was exactly what I wanted, but it served me at the time. I had limited myself so much, she had big plans. And then you came along.”

“That’s fast forward. I came along after eleven women.” I’m teasing her, and she knows it. At this point in our relationship, our respective past with the woman who keeps a harem, isn’t a reason for jealousy. We take from it what serves us. What made us.

We gave half of the million to a woman’s organization, in Addison’s name—so other women can live free, and make their own choices.

“I never wanted to marry any of them,” Elizabeth says, and in an instant, my vision blurs, leaving me barely able to see the ring she’s slips on my finger.

“To your question, yes!”

I repeat it with even more enthusiasm later tonight, but that may be unrelated to the ring.

* * * *

We had the honeymoon before the actual wedding—which suits us, because when have we ever done anything like everyone else?

Both Elizabeth and I have had long talks with Addison, and our friendship became stronger, a threesome more unlikely.

Quinn and Sophia are still with her, and have already indicated that they wish to stay beyond their six months contracts.

Addison truly is serious about her relationship concept, and she has found women who are happy to fit themselves into it.

I, on the other hand, get to say I do to Elizabeth in the incredibly spacious backyard, the scent of the many rosebushes intoxicating. We are surrounded by women who wish us well—for the occasion, everyone is wearing a bit more fabric than usual. We've enjoyed an elaborate gourmet meal, and now there's cake and champagne—no rules or exercise today.

After the first dance, Kimberly joins Elizabeth on the dance floor, and Addison pulls me to her.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” she asks.

“Oh my God, yes,” I blurt out. “This is the best day of my life, and it means a lot to us that we are celebrating it here. Thank you so much.”

“You're welcome. I'm glad the experience worked out to your satisfaction.”

“It did.”

With a smile, she steps back. “Good. Go enjoy your wife. You both have waited for this day long enough.”

I follow her advice, and a moment later, I'm back in the arms of the woman I married today.

I never dreamed that I'd find love in a harem, but this is the most important lesson I learned—when it's right, nothing is impossible.

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