



LAP DANCE LOVE

A GOSWAMI

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When Two Worlds Collide!

A. Goswami

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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved top and a dark skirt, is walking away from the camera on a sandy beach. She is carrying a black high-heeled shoe in her right hand. The background is a sunset over the ocean, with a warm orange and yellow glow. The text "A FEELING LIKE NO OTHER" is overlaid in large, bold, pink letters.

A FEELING LIKE NO OTHER

By A. Goswami

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Chapter One

Emma Brown hesitated at the entrance of the dimly lit strip club, her heart pounding in her chest. The thumping bass of the music from inside mixed with her racing pulse, creating an overwhelming cacophony in her head. She inhaled deeply, trying to steady herself before taking a step inside. As she crossed the threshold, her senses were assaulted by the smell of alcohol and the warm, heavy air. She glanced around nervously, her cheeks flushing as her eyes darted between the scantily clad women and the boisterous patrons.

The strip club was a cacophony of sound and movement. Strobe lights flickered overhead, casting shadows that danced and twisted with the gyrating bodies on stage. The air was thick with anticipation and desire, palpable even to someone as inexperienced as Emma. Though the club was filled with laughter and raucous conversation, Emma felt a deep sense of unease. She was entirely out of her element, a wallflower in a garden of hedonism.

The stormy weather outside seemed to match Emma's uneasy feelings. Dark clouds hung low, and rain pelted against the club's windows. Lightning flashed, and thunder rumbled in the distance, adding to the tension she already felt.

Once inside, Emma spotted her sister Scarlett, who was about to be married, along with a group of her rowdy friends. They were already tipsy, laughing, and enjoying themselves. Emma, on the other hand, was sober and feeling out of place. She carefully navigated through the crowd and found a seat at the back of the club, hoping to blend in and avoid drawing attention to herself. As she settled down, she couldn't help but feel like she didn't belong there, her usual modest demeanor contrasting sharply with the wild atmosphere surrounding her.

Scarlett noticed Emma sitting at the back and approached her with a teasing smile. "Hey, sis, are you trying to be a wallflower back here? Come join the party up front," she said, motioning towards their group of friends.

Emma hesitated, glancing at the lively group before looking back at her sister. "I don't know, Scarlett. I feel out of place here," she replied, uncertainty evident in her voice, "I feel like a penguin at a damn peacock convention."

Scarlett laughed gently and patted her sister's shoulder. "Well, maybe it's time for the penguin to learn some peacock moves! It's my bachelorette party! Just give it a chance, and try to have some fun, okay?" she urged.

With a reluctant sigh, Emma agreed and followed Scarlett to join their friends. As they settled in, the group began encouraging Emma to let loose and enjoy herself.

"Emma, you seriously need to chill," said Chloe, one of Scarlett's friends, playfully nudging her. "We're here to have a good time, remember? Plus, you never know when you might need some sultry dance moves!"

Another friend chimed in, "Yeah, let your hair down and enjoy the hot women dancing all around! We might have to start calling you 'Princess Penguin' if you don't loosen up."

Feeling the pressure to fit in and amused by their banter, Emma took a deep breath and attempted to push her discomfort aside, trying her best to embrace the experience.

As the strippers took the stage, their bodies moved fluidly and seductively to the pulsing music. They were attractive and toned, their outfits leaving little to the imagination. Each one wore a practiced smile, but Emma couldn't help noticing the subtle flicker of sadness in their eyes, a hidden layer beneath their confident performances.

Scarlett and her friends cheered and applauded, clearly entertained by the dancers' provocative routines. They hooted and playfully tossed dollar bills onto the stage, thoroughly enjoying themselves.

Emma, however, couldn't shake her empathy for the performers. She found herself wondering about the stories behind their smiles, feeling a sense of melancholy amidst the raucous environment. Her thoughts drifted to her own life, reflecting on how long it had been since she genuinely enjoyed herself. But she knew that this setting wasn't her idea of fun, and she couldn't help but feel a sense of disconnect from her sister and friends.

As the night wore on, Emma tried to participate in the festivities, but the sadness behind the dancers' eyes and her own feelings of being out of place continued to weigh on her.

The announcer's voice resonated throughout the club, anticipation surging through the room as he introduced the final act of the night. "Ladies and gentlemen, brace yourselves for an unforgettable performance by the incomparable Nicole!"

As Nicole emerged onto the stage, a palpable shift in the atmosphere occurred. Her entrance was nothing short of spellbinding, exuding an irresistible allure that commanded the undivided attention of everyone present. She was the embodiment of beauty and sensuality, bearing an uncanny resemblance to Kylie Jenner with her voluptuous curves, smoldering eyes, and an air of confidence that distinguished her from the other dancers.

Nicole's dancing transcended anything that had come before, a breathtaking fusion of ballet and pole dancing that showcased her astounding flexibility, elegance, and grace. Each pirouette and graceful extension was executed with an almost ethereal fluidity as if she were defying gravity itself. Her movements were poetry in motion, a captivating display of strength and poise that left the audience in awe.

For Emma, who had been somewhat detached from the evening's entertainment, the sight of Nicole's performance was like a bolt of lightning, electrifying her senses and demanding her full attention. The way Nicole seamlessly intertwined a few moves from ballet and pole dancing was both innovative and mesmerizing, and for the first time that night, Emma found herself genuinely engrossed in the spectacle, as she had been a professional Ballerina herself.

Emma watched Nicole dance, a magnetic energy seemed to radiate from the stage, connecting the two women across the dimly lit room.

Nicole's routine was a masterful blend of seduction and artistry. She wore a stunning outfit that accentuated her every curve – a shimmering, deep red bodysuit that hugged her body like a second skin, with strategically placed cutouts that teased and enticed the audience. Her long, dark hair cascaded over her shoulders, framing her face in a sultry, mysterious way that only heightened her allure.

As the pulsating music filled the room, Nicole began her performance with a series of graceful, ballet-inspired movements. She swept across the stage with the poise of a seasoned ballerina, her lithe body effortlessly executing flawless pirouettes and arabesques. Her expressive eyes, accentuated by smoky makeup, held a captivating intensity that seemed to pierce the soul of every onlooker.

As Nicole approached the pole, her routine transitioned into a mesmerizing display of strength and agility. She gripped the pole with the confidence of an expert, launching herself into a series of gravity-defying spins and inversions. Her body moved fluidly through each gravity-defying maneuver, showcasing her incredible flexibility and control. With every breathtaking move, it became clear that Nicole was not just a talented dancer, but a true artist.

Throughout her performance, Nicole's facial expressions conveyed a story that transcended the physicality of her dance. She exuded a mix of vulnerability and power, a captivating blend of sensuality and raw emotion that left the audience captivated. Her eyes seemed to speak volumes, inviting the onlookers to join her on a journey of passion and self-discovery.

Emma was captivated by Nicole's every move. The loud cheers and cries of Scarlett's friends and the thumping of the music all faded into the background, leaving nothing but Nicole and her sensual movements. There was no denying that she wasn't like any other stripper – her voluptuous body shimmied in ways that made hearts skip beats. Her movements were not what one would expect from a stripper; they were graceful, controlled, and contained an intense power.

Nicole seemed to be in her own world, each move building on the next until she reached her climax – a series of twirls and turns that left the audience mesmerized. When the lights ultimately faded, she halted in a final dramatic pose, sweaty and triumphant. She placed her hands over her heart for an instant before giving one last bow.

Emma's eyes trailed after Nicole as she walked away behind the smooth fabric of a vibrant red curtain. As Nicole finally disappeared from sight, she lingered long enough to turn her gaze back at Emma, and her smokey eyes burned right through her face like two embers - making Emma cower in embarrassment and blush deeply in response.

A hush followed Nicole's exit, as Scarlett and her friends ordered more drinks. Scarlett, now high as a kite, sat down next to Emma, and whispered in her ear, "Don't tell me you weren't turned on after that?"

Emma felt her face redden even deeper in response to Scarlett's teasing. She tried to deflect the attention by sarcastically remarking, "Yes, I'm sure that a stripper that looks like one of the Jenners is the solution to all my problems!"

Scarlett laughed and rolled her eyes before replying with confidence, "Well if you think that was something, you should come back here some night and see Nicole's real show. It's enough to make your jaw drop."

"I think I will pass," Emma replied, hiding her real emotions.

"Okay, Mother Teresa! Look, some of the girls have decided to gift me a private lap dance, and some are in the mood for one themselves. Things are...about to get raunchy. If you want to leave, then I'd understand."

Emma hesitated for a minute, considering her options. Part of her wanted to stay and witness the spectacle, but an even stronger part of her wished she could leave and never look back. Eventually, she said reluctantly, "I think I'm going to head out. Have fun!"

Scarlett smiled in understanding before giving Emma a quick hug and saying goodbye.

Emma grabbed her handbag, taking one last look around the strip club for signs of Nicole. She made a move towards the exit, but before she could make it out the door a voice behind her spoke up. "Where do you think you're going?" She stopped in her tracks and slowly turned around to face Nicole's mischievous smirk.

"Leaving so soon?" Nicole continued, her voice sultry and teasing. She leaned against the wall, one leg crossed over the other, the shimmering red bodysuit still clinging to her body. Her dark hair cascaded over her shoulders, and her smoky eyes locked onto Emma's, sparking undeniable chemistry between them.

Emma, feeling a mix of excitement and nervousness, stammered, "I, uh, I was just... I have to go."

Nicole stepped closer, her gaze never leaving Emma's. She tilted her head slightly and said, "You know, I couldn't help but notice you during my performance. You seemed... different from the rest of the crowd." She smiled, a hint of playfulness in her eyes. "I like that."

Emma blushed, a deep shade of red flushing her cheeks. She struggled to find words, feeling her heart pound in her chest. "I... um, thank you. Your dance was... amazing."

Nicole grinned, closing the distance between them. She reached out, gently brushing a strand of hair from Emma's face. "Why don't you stay a little longer?" she whispered, her breath warm against Emma's ear. "I could give you a private lap dance... just you and me."

Emma hesitated, torn between her desire to be closer to this enigmatic woman and the knowledge that it went against everything she believed in. But there was something about Nicole, an irresistible magnetism that made it impossible to walk away.

"All of your friends want a lap dance from me. Even the Bride, but... I'd much rather dance for you," Nicole said with a mischievous smile, her eyes twinkling.

As Emma stood with a pounding heart, her sister and friends saw what was going on, and gathered around Nicole and Emma.

Nicole glanced over at the group of women and smirked. "How about a deal?" she proposed, addressing Scarlett and her friends. "If your lovely sister here agrees to a dance from me, I'll arrange for all of you to get a free private lap dance from any stripper in the club. I know the owner, so it won't be a problem."

Scarlett's eyes lit up at the offer. She grabbed Emma's arm, excitement dancing in her eyes. "Emma, come on! It's my bachelorette party! This would be the perfect gift!"

"But, Scarlett—" Emma started to protest, her cheeks burning.

"No buts! You deserve some fun too," one of her friends chimed in, grinning.

"Yeah, we promise we won't judge!" another friend added with a playful wink.

Scarlett gazed at Emma with a mixture of eagerness and worry. "Emma, I know it's been a struggle for you since Alice passed away two years ago, and I totally get that healing takes time. But this is our moment to let go of the past and be in the present. Let's make tonight about having some fun and taking a break from everything else going on in our lives - just for one night! What do you say?" She gave her friend an encouraging smile, wanting her to say yes.

Emma hesitated, feeling the pressure from her sister and friends, and unable to resist the magnetic pull she felt towards Nicole. She knew that Scarlett's intentions were good, and that she only wanted the best for her.

"Please, Emma? For me?" Scarlett pleaded, giving her sister the most convincing puppy-dog eyes.

Emma sighed, finally relenting. "Alright," she agreed, her voice barely more than a whisper. "I'll do it."



Nicole led Emma by the hand, guiding her away from the noisy main floor towards a more secluded area of the club. With each step, the sounds of music and laughter grew fainter, replaced by the rapid drumming of Emma's heart. The guilt of possibly betraying her late wife, Alice, weighed heavily on her mind.

The private space was tucked behind a thick velvet curtain, giving it an air of intimacy. Comfy chairs and soft lighting created a cozy atmosphere, a world apart from the chaos outside.

As they entered the room, Emma couldn't help but admire how the gentle light played on Nicole's skin, making her look even more beautiful. Nicole caught Emma's gaze and smiled, causing Emma's heart to race.

"I, uh, I've never done anything like this before," Emma confessed, her cheeks turning pink with embarrassment.

Nicole's eyes softened. "It's okay," she said, giving Emma's hand a reassuring squeeze. "Why don't you tell me what you'd like? You can set the pace."

Emma hesitated, her mind racing with conflicting emotions. "I'm not sure," she admitted, her voice barely audible. "It's been two years since... since I lost Alice, and I just don't know if I'm ready for something like this."

Nicole leaned in, her gaze holding Emma's. "I understand," she said gently. "How about we just start with a conversation? No pressure, just two people getting to know each other. And if you want to stop at any point, you just say the word, okay?"

"No, I think I would like to experience what everyone in the club so desperately want to experience," Emma said. Emma felt nervous but determined to experience Nicole's lapdance. She took a seat and steeled herself for the intimate performance. Meanwhile, Nicole was brimming

with excitement, happy that Emma had agreed to experience the full magic of her skills.

Nicole moved to the center of the room and began her performance. She sauntered around in circles, her eyes locking onto Emma's as she spun and swayed. Her body shimmered with a hypnotic grace as she approached closer and closer, each movement becoming more sensual than the last. She unbuttoned her corset top ever so slightly, revealing just a hint of cleavage that made Emma's heart race faster with anticipation.

The atmosphere in the private room grew heavier as Nicole prepared to perform her lap dance for Emma. With each beat of the sultry music, the air seemed to thicken, charged with anticipation. Nicole's eyes locked onto Emma's, a look of smoldering intensity that left Emma breathless, unable to look away.

As the first notes of a slow, seductive melody filled the room, Nicole began to move. Her body swayed to the rhythm, her hips undulating with a hypnotic grace. The curve of her waist, the arch of her back, every movement was a fluid and deliberate expression of sensuality.

Nicole approached Emma, her eyes never leaving Emma's face. She reached out, allowing her fingers to trail along Emma's arm, sending a shiver down her spine. As she danced around Emma, the warmth of her body seemed to radiate outward, enveloping Emma in a cocoon of desire.

With each swaying motion, Nicole's dress shimmered and clung to her curves, accentuating the enticing lines of her body. The fabric seemed to come alive, caressing and revealing her skin in a tantalizing dance of its own. The room seemed to shrink around them, the world outside fading away until all that remained was the space between them, charged with an electric current of longing.

Nicole's dance became more intimate, her body pressing closer to Emma's. Her breath, warm and fragrant, brushed against Emma's ear as she whispered seductively, "Let yourself go, enjoy the moment."

Emma felt her pulse quicken, her breath catching in her throat as Nicole's body moved against hers. The sensation of Nicole's skin, smooth and warm, sent a shudder through Emma, awakening a hunger she had long thought dormant.

Emma, now wide-eyed with awe, and bearing a heart thumping with excitement, found herself wanting to touch Nicole.

She hadn't touched another woman in years.

She hadn't felt the need to.

But Nicole was something special.

"Don't be afraid," Nicole's voice was slow and soft, with just a hint of breathiness, and it sent shivers down Emma's spine.

"Touch me," Nicole commanded, her voice full of desire.

Emma hesitated for a moment, unsure if she could make the leap. But before she knew it, her hands had already begun to explore Nicole's body as they danced together in the dimly lit room.

Emma's hand softly glided over every bump and curve of Nicole's body, their movement gradually intensifying until her fingertips were firmly tracing the outline of Nicole's hips. She felt the warmth radiating from her skin.

"Yes...Emma, right?"

"Yeah," Emma whispered.

"You look like Kate Middleton," Nicole teased, pushing Emma's hair behind her ear.

"I have heard that before," Emma squeezed in a feeble smile.

"Oh, I am sure you have. There is something so elegant about you. Your dress, your hair, your eyes...all of it screams sophistication."

Emma took that as a compliment. She had the same glossy sable hair as Kate Middleton, jewel-bright blue eyes, and an aristocratic nose. She knew her movements were graceful and unhurried; She often wore more formal looks that echoed Kate's style—simple shift dresses in sophisticated muted colors or timelessly tailored suits for special occasions. Even when wearing jeans or loungewear she managed to look refined and polished without being overly dressed up.

Emma could not help it. This was who she was, a lover of timeless feminine fashion, but she was surprised a stripper like Nicole had the eye to distinguish Emma from the others.

Emma was lost in her own little world, until the sensation of Nicole's body straddling hers brought her back to reality. She felt a warmth overcome her as Nicole settled down onto her lap, and all she could do was look into those deep, soulful eyes that seemed to be asking all the right questions.

“I don’t usually feel like kissing my customers,” Nicole said with a hint of amusement.

“Don’t worry, I understand. This isn't a pleasure for you, it's work,” Emma said softly as she lightly grazed Nicole's cheek with her trembling finger tips.

Nicole smiled and then slowly leaned in to kiss Emma deeply and passionately. Emma was hesitant at first, but something in her broke, and she found herself melting into the kiss.

If someone would have told her that by the end of the night, she would be locking lips with a stripper, she never would have believed them. But there she was in that moment, feeling alive and free. Emma felt her heart racing and liquid heat oozing from within. It seemed like an eternity that their lips were entwined, and she wanted so much more but suddenly a wave of panic overflowed as reality sunk in. She quickly pulled away, gasping for air before turning towards Nicole with wide eyes begging her to stop the lapdance instantly. Her voice trembled as she begged softly, “Please... can you please stop?”

Nicole was taken aback for a second, and then, an understanding smile crept on her full lips, and she slowly stood up, and stepped away from Emma. "Of course," she said with a nod. "Anything you need." She moved towards the side of the room, gathering her clothes while keeping her gaze fixed on Emma's eyes which were still wide with panic and fear but also something else that Nicole couldn't quite put her finger on.

Emma was breathing hard and had a hand on her chest. She was sweating, and for a minute, she thought she was going to faint.

It was all too much, too fast, and too real for her. She wasn't equipped to handle this type of situation and she didn't know what to do. After a few moments, she slowly began breathing again, regaining her composure. She looked at Nicole and said, "I'm so sorry... I just... I wasn't expecting this."

Nicole nodded understandingly, "Look, I get it. You don't look like the type who would enjoy all this...or me. You just seemed different from the rest of the people that visit a place like this, you know. You looked too good to be true."

Emma wanted to believe Nicole, but she knew it was Nicole's job to praise customers. She smiled and said, "Thank you, I appreciate that. But you don't have to be polite for the sake of it. I know I am old, and skinny for a woman like you to find attractive," Emma said softly.

"What do you mean by a woman like me?" Nicole asked.

"A woman who is genuinely so gorgeous. You don't look like you belong here, I don't mean that in a bad way, it's just...you stand out. You have such remarkable beauty, and it's so pure," Emma said sincerely.

Nicole laughed confidently, her eyes sparkling with amusement. "Emma, you're definitely undervaluing yourself. Beauty comes in all shapes and sizes, and believe me when I say you're beautiful."

Emma blushed, appreciating the compliment but still feeling self-conscious. "Thanks, but it's hard for me to accept that as easily as you say it."

Nicole tilted her head, a sly grin playing on her lips. "So, let me ask you something. Why did you stop the lap dance midway? I could tell you were enjoying it, at least for a moment, there when your hands were on my ass, and your tongue was down my throat"

Emma swallowed hard, suddenly feeling awkward and exposed. "I..uh...I just couldn't do it anymore. I felt like I was betraying myself, or something," she stumbled over her words.

Nicole's gaze sharpened, sensing there was more to the story. "You sure that's all? Don't hold back with me, I can handle the truth."

Emma nervously bit her lip, wrestling with the decision of whether or not to reveal her true feelings to Nicole. After a few moments of contemplation, she decided it was best to keep them hidden. She sighed and forced a smile. "Yeah, that's all," she muttered. "I just didn't think it was for me."

Emma stood up, while Nicole still kept staring at her with curious, suspicious eyes. "I think I'm gonna head home now," Emma said, her voice wavering slightly. She grabbed her purse and started to walk away, not wanting things to get any more awkward than they already were.

"Wait!" Nicole called out, and Emma stopped in her tracks. There was a long moment of silence as the two just stared at each other, and then Nicole finally broke the tension. "I get it if you don't want to say anything right now, but I think you should know: You were my favorite part of tonight. I couldn't keep my eyes off you, even while I was performing on stage. That doesn't usually happen with me; I hardly ever crush on patrons here, let alone beg them to receive a lap dance from me. That was a first! So, I hope you get over whatever it was that made you stop me, and you come back one day, and allow me to finish what I started, and don't leave me midway, after making me all wet between my legs," Nicole said.

Emma blushed hard, her cheeks aflame, and nervously looked away. She fidgeted with the edge of her shirt before clearing her throat and meeting Nicole's gaze. "I hope we meet again," she said softly, then quickly

added with an awkward smile, "It was really nice to talk to you." Before she left, she couldn't help but ask, "Why do you do this?"

Nicole gave a sad smile, "It's the same story you hear all the time with girls like us. I had come from a difficult upbringing, early pregnancy, and raising my daughter as a single mother. I didn't want her to follow my path and go through the same struggles that I did, so I pushed for her to be a scientist instead. But that was easier said than done; there were bills to be paid. So here I am, stripping and escorting to make ends meet. What about you?"

"I am a teacher," Emma said simply, her heart heavy after what Nicole had just told her, "I hope your daughter can fulfill her dreams."

"Yep, me too. I am doing all I can to make that happen," said Nicole with a determined glint in her eyes. With a nod, she stepped back and smiled at Emma, "It was nice talking to you. I hope we meet again soon."

Emma couldn't help but smile too; Nicole's determination was inspiring. She took one last look back at her as she walked away before turning and heading out the door herself.

Chapter Two

Emma sat in her room, the muted sunlight filtering through the heavy, velvet drapes that covered the tall windows. The room was filled with the scent of old books and lavender, a comforting aroma that enveloped her as she sank into the plush armchair. The room itself was a testament to Victorian elegance, with an intricately designed wallpaper depicting whimsical scenes, deep mahogany woodwork, and beautifully carved furniture. A large, ornate mirror hung above a marble fireplace, reflecting the warm light of the candles flickering on the mantelpiece.

Her eyes scanned the bookshelves that lined the walls, filled with leather-bound volumes of murder mysteries and literary classics. They were her solace, her escape from reality when life became too much to bear. The room also housed a collection of antique items, such as an elegant brass telescope, a delicate porcelain tea set, and a vintage gramophone that played the melodies of a bygone era, creating an atmosphere that felt both timeless and nostalgic.

Emma wore a simple, yet elegant, silk nightgown that draped over her body, its soft fabric providing comfort as she curled up in the armchair. In her hands, she held a delicate bone china teacup, filled with a fragrant blend of Earl Grey tea, the steam gently rising and dissipating into the air.

In her other hand, Emma held a small photo album, its pages filled with memories of a time that seemed both so close and yet so distant. Her gaze lingered on a picture of her late wife, Alice. She was stunning, with her golden blonde hair cascading down her back, her bright blue eyes sparkling with life, and a smile that could light up the darkest of rooms. Alice had an undeniable European charm, her Swedish heritage evident in her delicate features and natural elegance.

Emma felt a twinge of guilt mixed with sorrow as she reminisced about their time together. The pain of losing Alice still lingered, even after two years, and the thought of moving on seemed like a betrayal. Yet, she couldn't deny the stirrings of desire she felt as she recalled her encounter with Nicole at the strip club.

The night at the club had been surreal, a step outside her comfort zone that had left her both exhilarated and conflicted. She remembered the way Nicole's body had moved, the seductive grace with which she danced. There was an undeniable magnetism that drew Emma to her, making her heart race in a way she hadn't experienced since she was with Alice.

Nicole's confident and alluring presence had awakened something within her, something she had thought long buried. The guilt she felt over her growing attraction to Nicole weighed heavily on her heart, yet she couldn't shake the memory of Nicole's mesmerizing dance and her piercing, smoky eyes.

Emma closed the photo album with a sigh, and sat staring at the pastel-colored walls of her bedroom. The sound of the gramophone was drowned out by her own thoughts, which seemed to be coming at her at breakneck speed.

Emma wanted to see Nicole again. There was no doubt in her head that no matter how she justified it, her heart yearned to look at Nicole's face, and to touch her body one more time. In her head, she put it down to her charitable nature, and her wish to help Nicole with money and her daughter's education, but no matter how far she swam from the sharks, they followed her to the shore.

Nicole followed her, incessantly demanding attention.

Emma tried to focus on her daily tasks and routines, but Nicole's presence seemed to have seeped into every corner of her thoughts. The mundane activities that once filled her days now felt dull and empty in comparison to the vivid memories of their brief encounters. Emma found herself daydreaming about Nicole's smile, her laugh, and the way her eyes seemed to see straight through her.

As the night wore on, she could not take it anymore.

I am only trying to help her. I would have done it for anyone.

Emma reassured herself, as she typed a message to Scarlett, asking for Nicole's number. In a few minutes, Scarlett replied, giving Emma the information she needed, and asking why she needed the number, followed by a wink.

Emma did not reply. She would deal with Scarlett later. For now, her heart was racing, and her brain was screaming, pulling her in two directions.

Emma closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, she had decided to go ahead with it. She called Nicole and heard the familiar voice at the other end.

"Hello?" Nicole said.

Emma could barely contain her excitement as she responded, "Hi, it's Emma here. I was wondering if you wanted to go out for coffee sometime?" She held her breath as she waited for an answer...

There was a pause, and then Nicole began to speak. "I'd love to! But..umm...I have also started escorting on the side, and my evenings are packed for the next seven days."

Emma felt her heart sink, but forced a smile and said "That's ok. We can do it some other time!". She was surprised by her own resilience as she quickly tried to come up with an alternate plan, a plan she would have never dared to mention before meeting Nicole, "I can pay you as well. How about I book you for an evening? Just to talk...strictly platonic?"

Nicole seemed taken aback, but not in a bad way. "That would be lovely. When did you want to meet?" she asked, excitedly.

"How about tomorrow? I can book you for an evening and we can spend some time together," Emma replied, her cheeks burning with

anticipation as the plan slowly began to take shape.

"Sounds great!" Nicole said happily, and the two set up a time and place to meet.



The following day, Nicole arrived early at the quirky bohemian café called "The Whimsical Cup." The café was adorned with colorful tapestries, mismatched furniture, and an eclectic collection of art, giving it a unique and inviting atmosphere. The patrons varied from students typing away on their laptops to artists deep in conversation, all contributing to the vibrant and creative energy of the place.

Nicole felt a mixture of excitement and nervousness as she sat at a table, waiting for Emma to arrive. She was used to feeling in control of her emotions, but something about the prospect of spending an evening with Emma made her heart race in a way she hadn't felt in a long time.

As she sat at the table, surrounded by the lively chatter of the café's guests, Nicole couldn't help but feel self-conscious about her outfit. She had chosen a bold, red dress with a plunging neckline and a daring slit that ran up the side, revealing her toned legs. The dress clung to her curves and sparkled under the café's lights, a stark contrast to Emma's conservative and elegant style. She fidgeted with her dress, wondering if she had made a mistake in her choice of attire.

As the minutes ticked by, Nicole couldn't help but ponder the reasons behind Emma's decision to meet her. What had prompted this sudden invitation? Was it purely a friendly gesture, or was there something more to it? The questions swirled in her mind, making her even more anxious for Emma's arrival.

Finally, Emma walked into the café, her eyes scanning the room until they settled on Nicole. A warm smile spread across her face as she approached the table, and Nicole felt her heart skip a beat. Emma looked

effortlessly chic in a tailored navy-blue dress that fell just below her knees, paired with a delicate pearl necklace and matching earrings. The contrast between their styles only heightened Nicole's concern about her own revealing outfit.

"Hi, Nicole," Emma greeted her warmly, taking a seat across from her. "You look stunning, as always."

"Thank you," Nicole replied, trying to hide her nerves behind a confident smile. "You look lovely too."

Emma sat down opposite Nicole, and crossed her legs, with her dark red heels pointed at Nicole. "I am sorry to make you change your plans at the last minute," Emma began, "but...I had to see you as soon as possible."

"That's okay. You are paying me. As long as I get paid, I don't mind!"

That did not come out how I intended it to!

Emma smiled awkwardly, "you look so hot! I can't get over how beautiful you are."

Nicole smiled with relief, her uneasiness forgotten. "Thank you—is that why you asked to see me so urgently?"

"That was part of the reason. Nicole, to be honest with you, I don't know why I asked you to meet me, and what I am doing here. Am I losing my mind? Is it a cry for help? All I know is that you made me feel more alive that night in the strip club than the past two years combined."

Nicole's eyes gazed into Emma's, her curiosity piqued as she inquired softly, "What was it about that night that was so different from all the others you have spent?"

Emma lowered her gaze, and shifted in her chair, before replying, "I felt wanted, by a woman who was prettier, more confident than me, and I liked that. I liked being...liked. But, I don't really know how much of that was real, you know? Don't you act the same with everyone?"

Nicole nodded slowly, “Yes, that is true. But I can tell you one thing for sure—I wasn’t acting with you. It was... special.”

“How? I am not that special!!”

“Have you looked at yourself in the mirror?”

“Yes, and I don’t see it.”

Nicole frowned, “why are you so hard on yourself? You are fucking hot, in a very different way. Trust me, if you were a client who had booked me for the night, I would have been giddy right now to see how wild this prim and proper lady can be in bed!”

“You would be disappointed,” Emma said, her cheeks flaring up.

Nicole smiled and shook her head. “No way! I can tell that you are a passionate person hidden beneath the surface, and all you need is someone to give you a spark of courage so that it comes alive again. And I think...I want to be the one who does it for you. You are already paying me, why not *really* make use of that money?”

Emma thought for a moment about the offer, feeling a little thrill of excitement. But then her better judgment kicked in and she shook her head. “No,” she said firmly, with conviction. “I appreciate the offer, but I think I’m going to have to decline.”

“Why? What are you so afraid of?”

Emma bit her lower lip, not wanting to say it out loud. She wasn’t exactly sure why she was so scared, but the idea of engaging in such an intimate act seemed daunting.

Nicole finally sighed and shook her head as if realizing Emma’s hesitation. “Alright then...I will respect your decision and leave it at that,” Nicole said. “But I want you to know that you don’t have to be scared of this. I can help you build your confidence and find courage if that’s what it

takes. I can ease you into me...I mean...into having fun again" Nicole flirted.

"How about we just talk tonight? And see where it goes?" Emma suggested, still feeling a little apprehensive.

Nicole nodded and smiled. "That sounds perfect." She said, "I'm happy to do whatever you are comfortable with".

As the evening progressed, Nicole took charge of the conversation, sharing some hilarious incidents that occurred at the strip club. She recounted stories of bachelorette parties gone awry and patrons who had one too many drinks. Emma found herself laughing along, feeling more at ease with every passing minute.

Nicole also mentioned that she had taken up reading in the past two years. She spoke passionately about the books she had recently discovered, her eyes lighting up as she discussed plot twists and her favorite characters. Emma found herself enthralled by Nicole's enthusiasm for literature, realizing they had more in common than she initially thought.

The waiter arrived to take their coffee orders, and as he looked at Nicole, his eyes lingered a bit too long on her exposed skin, taking in her revealing outfit. Emma noticed the lecherous gaze and felt a surge of protectiveness, her eyes narrowing in disapproval. She placed their coffee orders and the waiter reluctantly pulled his attention away from Nicole.

"Does it bother you when people keep staring?" Emma asked.

"No, I enjoy the attention. That's why I give my best when I perform on stage. I like to shock people. I enjoy being the center of attention and making them want me," Nicole replied with a mischievous smile.

"So, would it be okay if I stare as well?" Emma asked and surprised herself with her own boldness.

"Oh, sure, Duchess. Is it okay if I call you Duchess?"

“Why, because I look like Kate Middleton?”

“Yes!”

“Then what do I call you? King Kylie?” Emma asked, with a grin.

“I am shocked you know the name of her Snapchat ID! I took you for a woman who stays away from celebrity gossip and social media,” Nicole replied, enjoying their banter.

“Oh, don't be fooled by my innocent facade. I may not follow the trends of today but I do keep up with what's going on in the world. We all have our guilty pleasures” Emma responded with a smirk and a wink, “plus, the gayness in me can't help but stalk Kylie from time to time. She is so pretty!” Emma said as she admired Nicole's perfectly sculpted face.

Nicole could feel herself blushing as she saw the admiration in Emma's eyes. She smiled back at Emma and said “Well then, you can call me King Kylie if you like! Just don't tell anyone else in town about my nickname though - I like my secrets to stay secrets.”

As the evening wore on, the flirtatious banter between Nicole and Emma continued, both of them enjoying the playful exchanges that seemed to flow so naturally between them.

"Have you ever thought about trying pole dancing?" Nicole asked with a sly grin, sipping her coffee.

Emma raised an eyebrow, intrigued by the suggestion. "I must admit, I've never considered it. But, you know, I used to do ballet, and I can see how some of the moves on the pole are similar. They both require grace and balance, but I imagine pole dancing needs even more core and shoulder strength."

"Oh, don't sell yourself short, Duchess," Nicole teased. "I bet with your ballet background and a little practice, you could become quite the performer. The stage would love you, and so would the audience."

Emma blushed at the thought, suddenly picturing herself in a sultry outfit, gracefully spinning around a pole. "Well, maybe one day I'll give it a try. Who knows? I might surprise myself. Although, if I were to start dancing again, it would have to be Ballet."

"How good are you?"

Emma squinted her eyes, and looked away, thinking how she could answer this without being too full of herself.

"I have won a few national championships in my time. But, it's been a few years since I performed, so...I must be rusty. Although...I would love to try pole dancing once in my life!"

Nicole laughed, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "I'd love to see that. You'd have those guys drooling and the ladies swooning. Seriously, though, I've never had any formal training myself. I just started copying moves I saw on TV and kind of taught myself along the way."

Emma looked at her with admiration, impressed by Nicole's raw talent. "Well, you're incredibly skilled for someone who's self-taught. It's no wonder you command so much attention when you perform."

Nicole flashed a flirtatious smile, leaning in a little closer. "You know, I could give you a few pointers if you're ever interested. Private lessons with King Kylie—what do you think?"

Emma grinned, feeling at ease with Nicole's playful nature. "I might just take you up on that offer one of these days. I can't promise I'll be any good, but at least it would be entertaining to watch."

"Oh, trust me," Nicole said with a wink, "I have no doubt you'd be a natural. And I'd definitely enjoy teaching you all my tricks."

Emma blushed, suddenly feeling a bit hot under the collar. "We'll see about that," she replied with a chuckle, "I think I could be persuaded," Emma said, her voice soft and inviting as their eyes locked once again. She

couldn't believe she was flirting with Nicole. The feeling was both empowering and exhilarating.

"So, what were you like before you became allergic to sex?" Nicole said, becoming bolder with her words.

"I am not allergic to sex. I am just...cautious," Emma replied, her cheeks blushing even more. She was suddenly very aware of Nicole's proximity and the way her gaze made Emma feel.

"Are you cautious about kissing too?" Nicole was taking her chance.

Easy does it, Nicole. You don't want to scare the Duchess away!

"No, I have made out with women in the past few months, " Emma said, not breaking eye contact.

"And what was that like?" Nicole asked, leaning forward, and placing her chin on her knuckles.

"I haven't had sex in years, so, not very good," Emma joked, but she couldn't hide her slight embarrassment.

Nicole smiled and moved closer to Emma, so their noses were almost touching. She could feel the heat from Nicole's body and it sent shivers down her spine.

"Well then," Nicole began, "I think it is time I show you just how good kissing can be." And with that, Nicole gently touched her lips to Emma's.

The kiss was gentle at first, but it quickly began to intensify with passion. The more they kissed, the deeper and softer their mouths moved against each other as if they were one being unified in a single embrace. Emma felt all of her worries melt away as she completely gave herself over to this moment, feeling a sudden electrifying buzz between her legs, and an avalanche of lust-filled emotions grip her body. She wanted to protest, to back away, to put an end to Nicole's black magic, but instead, she found

herself moaning into the kiss, into Nicole's mouth, and trying to bite down on the juiciest pair of lips she had ever tasted.

Nicole, meanwhile, was in her own state of rapture. She had dreamt of this moment ever since she and Emma had first met; a chance to show the woman just how good it could be. And for a brief second, the woman's surrendered response filled Nicole with joy and made her feel complete.

But it was over just as quickly as it began. Before either of them could say another word, Emma pulled back and stared into Nicole's eyes with a look of regret. Nicole could tell that Emma was conflicted. The woman had obviously felt something from the kiss, but she was too afraid to admit it - to herself or anyone else.

"I was not expecting that," Emma finally whispered, her voice low and her face flushed. "I think it's best if we don't do that again."

"I am sorry. I thought you should know what a good kiss can feel like."

"I know what a good kiss can feel like. I was married to a woman who was the best kisser in the world," Emma said with a sad smile.

Nicole felt jolted by Emma's answer. She finally had her answers to why Emma was so scared to let her guard down.

"Where is she now?" Nicole asked, fearing the answer.

"She..." Emma felt the emotions start to choke her throat and she stopped mid-sentence.

Nicole could see the pain in her eyes and felt her heart break. She reached out to touch Emma's hand, as if to offer comfort. "It's okay, you don't have to tell me anything else right now," Nicole said quietly.

"She died two years ago," Emma finally completed her sentence. She looked away, not wanting Nicole to see the tears that had formed in her

eyes, “and I think I should leave now. How much do I have to pay you?” asked Emma, rising up from her chair.

Nicole's heart felt like it was being crushed under the weight of Emma's sudden decision to leave. The pain in her eyes was almost unbearable to witness, and Nicole couldn't believe that their evening together was ending like this.

"It's the usual rate," Nicole replied quietly, trying to keep her voice steady. She couldn't bring herself to say the actual amount, as if doing so would make the moment even more real and unbearable.

Emma quickly reached into her purse and pulled out the necessary cash, placing it on the table before making her way towards the exit. She left the café in a hurry, her steps heavy with the weight of her emotions.

As the door closed behind Emma, Nicole felt a wave of numbness wash over her. She stared at the money on the table, her eyes stinging with unshed tears. She couldn't help but wonder how she could have ever thought that an elegant, well-educated woman like Emma could have actually liked her. To Emma, she was probably just a momentary distraction, an exciting diversion from her otherwise mundane life. That was all she would ever be to people, she thought bitterly.

Nicole's chest tightened as the realization hit her like a punch to the gut. She had allowed herself to believe, just for a brief moment, that she could be more than a beautiful, exotic dancer; that someone like Emma could see beyond her profession and truly appreciate her for who she was.

But now, as she sat alone in the café, surrounded by the laughter and conversation of others, the loneliness felt heavier than ever. She was a performer, a beautiful facade designed to entertain and captivate, but beneath the sparkling exterior, she was just another lost soul searching for something real.

As the tears threatened to fall, Nicole knew that tonight would be one she would never forget. A fleeting moment of hope, a glimpse of something

more, only to be left alone once again, nursing a broken heart and shattered dreams.

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Chapter Three

Emma couldn't shake the feeling of guilt that weighed heavily on her conscience after her abrupt departure from the café the previous night. She had been rude and indecent with Nicole, a woman who had only ever shown her kindness and understanding. The guilt gnawed at her, disrupting her daily life, and making it difficult for her to focus on her work as an English teacher.

As Emma stood in front of her class, she found herself struggling to keep her mind on her lesson plans. The students could sense her distraction, which only made them more restless and harder to manage. One morning, while discussing a Shakespearean play, Emma's thoughts wandered back to Nicole. Her hand, holding the chalk, moved absentmindedly across the blackboard, and when she snapped back to reality, she realized she had written "King Kylie" instead of the name of a king in the play. The classroom erupted in laughter, and Emma felt her cheeks flush with embarrassment.

"Miss Brown, who's King Kylie?" one of her students asked, grinning mischievously.

Emma quickly erased the name and tried to regain control of the situation, but it was evident that she was not being the effective teacher she prided herself on being. This only added to the growing sense of guilt and frustration she was feeling.

That night, Emma found herself tossing and turning in bed, unable to sleep. She was angry with herself for letting her emotions affect her behavior at work, especially with her students. She had always prided herself on her politeness and good manners, and she couldn't bear the thought of having treated Nicole so poorly.

In the dead silence of her night, when no one moved in the house, not even Scarlett, Emma tried to analyze her feelings, and her sudden need to dive head first into scandalous adventure.

2 years had passed since the love of her life had tragically left this world, completely breaking her heart and leaving her an emotional wreck. Emma had lost whatever faith she once held in herself, and in the world, covering up all of those feelings with busy work just to get through the days. But now, as much as she wanted to stay hidden away from any potential hurt or disappointment again, Emma longed for that spark of excitement and joy that was usually present in her life before this tragedy occurred.

She was stuck between longing for the past, and being afraid of the future. Emma almost wished she had someone to talk to and help her move on, but there was nobody... not like Alice, who could always put things into perspective in a heartbeat. As she battled thoughts of finally resurfacing from her melancholy, and how that would perhaps tarnish the love she has for Alice, she decided on one thing, she needed to apologize to Nicole.

She picked up her phone, hesitated for a moment, and then dialed Nicole's number. The call connected, and Nicole's voice came through the line, sounding surprised but pleased to hear from Emma.

"Hey, Emma. What's up?" Nicole asked, trying to keep her voice casual, despite the mix of emotions she was feeling.

"Hi, Nicole," Emma began, her voice trembling slightly. "I wanted to apologize for the way I acted the other night. It was rude and uncalled for, and I feel terrible about it. I was wondering if we could meet somewhere, maybe talk things over?"

There was a pause on the other end of the line, and then Nicole responded, "Of course, Emma. I'd be happy to meet you. How about Central Park? We can grab a coffee and find a quiet spot to talk."

"That sounds perfect," Emma said, feeling a wave of relief wash over her. "Let's meet by the Bethesda Terrace at noon?"

"See you there," Nicole agreed, and they hung up.

As noon approached, Nicole arrived at Central Park earlier than she and Emma had agreed upon. Central Park in the summer was a sight to behold – a lush, green oasis amid the bustling city. The sun was shining brightly, casting dappled shadows through the leaves of the towering trees. Families picnicked on the open lawns, while children's laughter rang out from the playgrounds, and couples strolled hand-in-hand along the winding paths. Joggers weaved in and out of the crowds, and artists set up their easels, attempting to capture the vibrant energy and beauty of the park.

Nicole, clutching a book in her hand, found herself aimlessly wandering around the park. She had taken the day off from work for this meeting with Emma, a decision that made her feel both excited and guilty. Dressed in a flowing, floral summer dress that hugged her curves just right, and a pair of comfortable yet stylish sandals, she couldn't help but wonder why she was putting in so much effort for a woman who seemed so out of her league. Her hair was styled in loose waves that framed her face, and she wore minimal makeup, wanting to look naturally beautiful for the encounter.

As she continued to walk, her phone rang, displaying her daughter Susie's name on the screen. With a smile, she answered the call, eager to hear her daughter's voice.

"Hey, sweetie! How are you?" Nicole asked, her voice filled with warmth.

"I'm having fun with Grandpa, Mom! We're watching cartoons together," Susie chirped happily.

"Oh, which one are you watching?" Nicole inquired, genuinely interested.

"We're watching 'The Adventures of Luna and Sol,' you know, the one with the magical sisters!" Susie excitedly replied.

Nicole chuckled, remembering how much Susie loved that show. "That's one of your favorites, isn't it? I'm glad you're having a good time."

"I miss you, Mom," Susie said, her voice softening.

"I miss you too, honey. But I promise we'll do something fun together when I get home, okay?" Nicole reassured her.

"Okay, Mom. I love you!" Susie said with enthusiasm.

"I love you too, sweetie," Nicole replied, feeling a pang of sadness strike her heart.

As she ended the call, Nicole took a deep breath, imagining a world where she didn't have to hide her work from her daughter and could spend more time with her. It seemed like a distant dream, but the thought of it gave her hope.

As the time for her meeting with Emma drew closer, Nicole found a bench near Bethesda Terrace and sat down. The sounds of the nearby Bethesda Fountain, with its Angel of the Waters statue, added a soothing ambiance to the atmosphere. Her eyes scanned the crowds for any sign of the elegant woman she was waiting for, feeling a mix of anticipation and excitement.

As Nicole sat on the bench, her eyes were drawn to a figure approaching from a distance. It was Emma, looking like royalty, dressed in an ankle-length dress that seemed to flow around her as she moved. The dress was a rich shade of emerald, accentuating her vibrant, green eyes and the graceful curve of her neck. Her hair was pulled back into a chic, low chignon, allowing her delicate features to shine. Emma's eyes held a look of demure sincerity, reflecting the vulnerability she felt.

Nicole couldn't help but notice Emma's choice of footwear - five-inch heels that she somehow managed to navigate the park's uneven terrain in. The sight of it brought a smile to Nicole's face, as it seemed almost comical in the casual setting of Central Park.

Finally, Emma reached Nicole, and Nicole stood up to greet her. Emma went for a hug and Nicole went for a handshake, resulting in an endearingly awkward moment between the two. They both laughed nervously, trying to ease the tension that hung in the air.

"Hi, Nicole," Emma said softly, her cheeks turning a light shade of pink.

"Hey, Emma. It's good to see you," Nicole replied, her eyes sparkling with warmth.

They decided to grab a coffee from a nearby vendor and found a quiet spot beneath the shade of a majestic oak tree. The sun filtered through the leaves, casting dappled shadows on the ground as they sat down on a bench.

Emma took a deep breath, steeling herself to begin the conversation. "First of all, I want to apologize again for the other night. I acted out of character, and I shouldn't have treated you that way."

"And I want to apologize to your feet on behalf of you. How have you been walking around Central Park in those?" Nicole joked.

"I have been wearing these shoes for a while now, so I'm used to it," Emma said.

"Yeah, and I am used to women running away from me after realizing what I do for a living, so it's not a biggie," Nicole uttered.

"I was afraid you would say that. Trust me, it wasn't you. It was me. I am the problem here."

"It's me, hi! I am the problem it's me!" Nicole hummed Taylor Swift's song and grinned at Emma.

"I got that reference!" Emma exclaimed, laughing.

"I hope you did. I wouldn't wanna be friends with someone who doesn't listen to Queen Taylor!"

“Queen Taylor, King Kylie, Kate Middleton...what’s with us and royalty?” Emma said.

Nicole chuckled, "Well, I guess we just have a thing for the finer things in life."

Emma smiled, playing along, "Yes, including our taste in people, apparently."

"Of course," Nicole winked, "Only the best for us."

Emma took a sip of her coffee, feeling the warmth seeping through her body. She looked out onto the park, feeling a sense of peace enveloping her. “ So, do you forgive me?” Emma asked.

“For what? Listen, I get it. You have baggage, a traumatic past, and I am hardly the woman who you imagine would rescue you from the past.”

“But, why would you want to rescue me? You yourself...”

“Need rescuing?” Nicole smiled wistfully.

“I did not mean that. But yeah, you have a hard life yourself, and you hardly know me...”

"I have never wanted to know anyone more," Nicole declared.

"We can do that as friends," Emma suggested.

Nicole spoke with a husky, sultry voice that made Emma’s heart skip a beat as she said, “You know I like you, right?” Emma felt her cheeks flush as the question lingered in the air. She wanted to answer, but found herself unable to process what was being asked of her. It seemed like an eternity had passed since Nicole opened her mouth and still no response from Emma. Thoughts raced through her head as she tried to comprehend what was being asked of her.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, Emma was able to collect her thoughts. “I... I like you too.” she said hesitantly, “I would be lying if I said

otherwise. You got me to crawl out of my shell, if only for a little bit, and no one has been able to do that in years. But...I still need time to figure out what I want from life...from myself, and I don't want to lead anyone on.

"No, you won't be leading me on. I have been friends with women I have liked before. I know how to keep my feelings in check, if it means that we can stay friends." Nicole said with a reassuring smile as she reached out to grab Emma's hand in hers.

Emma looked down at their intertwined hands, feeling the warmth of Nicole's skin against her own. She then looked back up into Nicole's eyes, noticing the glimmer of sincerity and hope that shone behind them. It gave her the courage to take a leap of faith. "Alright," she said softly, a hint of a smile forming on her lips, "let's give this friendship a try. But I gotta warn you, I might not be easy to deal with, and there's a chance you might get your heart broken."

Nicole grinned, her eyes dancing with amusement, and replied, "Well, I've always been a fan of rollercoasters, so I guess I'm up for the ride."

The two of them shared a laugh, their voices carrying in the warm summer air. The peaceful atmosphere of Central Park enveloped them, the sound of leaves rustling and birds chirping allowing the weight of their previous conversation to dissipate.

After a few moments of companionable silence, where they sipped their drinks and took in the beauty of the park, Emma hesitantly spoke up. "Nicole, I know this might be a bit sudden, but my sister Scarlett and I are going to see a wedding venue later today, for her wedding. You wanna come with us?"

Nicole looked thoughtful for a moment, her brow furrowing as she considered Emma's invitation. "I don't know, Emma. I don't wanna intrude on your family time. Plus, won't Scarlett mind having the woman who performed at her bachelorette, at her wedding venue?"

Emma waved away Nicole's concern with a casual flick of her wrist. "Oh, Scarlett loves you! Besides, she just wants someone to be excited

about all this with her. You know how it is," Emma smiled reassuringly, her eyes filled with warmth. "You won't be intruding. I genuinely want you to be there, and I think Scarlett would enjoy having your input too. You have a great eye for aesthetics, as is evident from the gorgeous dress you are wearing, and we could really use your help."

Nicole chuckled, a playful smile spreading across her face, "Well, I haven't been to many weddings, but I've definitely been to my fair share of bachelorette parties. Does that count?"

Emma laughed, the sound mingling with Nicole's amusement, "It's a start!"

Nicole thought for a moment longer, her gaze drifting across the sunlit park before finally settling back on Emma. "Alright, I'll come. But only because you asked so nicely," she said with a teasing smile.

Emma couldn't help but smile back, her heart feeling lighter than it had in a long time. "Thanks, Nicole. I think it's gonna be a lot of fun."



Emma and Nicole arrived outside a building in downtown Manhattan, where Scarlett was waiting for them. Nicole's eyes scanned the area, finally landing on a hip, urban girl leaning against the building's exterior. She appeared to be a few years younger than Emma, closer to Nicole's age, and bore a striking resemblance to Jennifer Lawrence. Her blonde hair was tousled, and she wore a cropped leather jacket paired with high-waisted jeans and ankle boots.

Nicole recognized Scarlett from the night at the stripclub, and found her prettier with less makeup and a more comfortable outfit.

"Hey, Scarlett," Emma called out, waving her hand to get her sister's attention.

Scarlett looked up from her phone, her expression shifting from surprise to curiosity as she saw Nicole standing beside Emma. "Hey, sis! And... Nicole, right?" she asked, extending her hand for a friendly shake.

"Yeah, that's me," Nicole replied with a smile, shaking Scarlett's hand firmly.

Emma interjected, "Nicole's gonna be joining us to check out the wedding venue. I thought her input might be helpful."

Scarlett raised an eyebrow but didn't question her sister's decision. Instead, she flashed a knowing grin at Nicole. "I see. Well, I'm glad to have you here, Nicole. It's not every day that a stripper develops feelings for my sister, but I'm not one to judge. If you make her happy, then I'm all for it."

Nicole's cheeks flushed a deep shade of red, but she managed to laugh off Scarlett's blunt observation. "Well, we're just friends for now, but I'll do my best to keep her smiling."

Scarlett nodded approvingly, and gave Emma an amused smile, before leading the way to the wedding venue. When they arrived, all three women shared a collective frown. The venue was an indoor space, with walls painted in a dull, lifeless beige color. The dim, yellowish lighting cast an unflattering hue on the chipped wallpaper, while the musty scent of old carpet wafted through the air.

Walking into the space, they could hear the distant hum of an overworked air conditioner, struggling to keep the room cool. The banquet tables were covered in plain white tablecloths, and the chairs had seen better days, with their upholstery coming apart at the seams. The dance floor was small and tucked into a corner, far from inviting for a lively celebration.

Emma sighed, looking around at the lackluster space. "This isn't what I had in mind at all. It's too... confined."

Nicole chimed in, her eyes taking in the uninspiring surroundings. "Yeah, it's not giving off the right vibe. You guys deserve something more

open, more dynamic."

Scarlett nodded in agreement, disappointment evident in her voice. "You're right. I don't want to settle for something less than perfect. I just wish we could find the ideal place."

As they stood in the drab venue, Nicole's mind raced with ideas, and she suddenly remembered a place that might just be perfect for Scarlett's wedding.

Nicole hesitated for a moment, contemplating her next words, and then spoke up. "Hey, I have an idea. My dad's cabin is located in a beautiful spot in the woods near Hope Lake in Shelton, Connecticut. It's secluded and has a clearing that would be perfect for an outdoor wedding."

Emma and Scarlett exchanged glances, their interest piqued. "Really?" Emma asked. "What's the place like?"

Nicole painted a vivid picture of the cabin and its surroundings. "It's nestled in the forest, surrounded by tall, ancient trees that provide a natural canopy overhead. The air is always so fresh and clean there. The clearing is large enough to accommodate all your guests, and the backdrop of the woods would make for some stunning photos."

Scarlett, unable to contain her excitement, chimed in, "That sounds amazing! But are you sure your dad would be okay with it? We don't want to impose."

Nicole shrugged nonchalantly. "My dad lives there alone, and he runs a mechanic shop nearby where he fixes cars and bikes. He's always been super laid-back, and I'm sure he'd be more than happy to help. I can give him a call and check if you want."

Emma's face lit up with gratitude as she squeezed Nicole's hand. "That would be incredible, Nicole. Thank you so much for offering. We'd love to check it out."

Emma then furrowed her brow, clearly concerned about logistics. "But, wait, how's the connectivity to the cabin? Are there hotels nearby for the guests?"

Nicole nodded reassuringly. "Yeah, there are a few hotels within a short drive from the cabin, and the roads leading up to the place are well-maintained. I'm sure we can work out the logistics."

Scarlett nodded enthusiastically. "Awesome! Let's plan a visit over the weekend and see it for ourselves."

Nicole smiled, pleased that she could help. "Great! I'll talk to my dad and make sure everything's set up for our visit. I have a feeling you're going to love it."

"So, we are not going with this place?" Emma asked one last time, looking around at the place as if it was a crime scene.

"No, babe, we will not be going with the moldy, starved-for-light, crumbling piece of shit that this place is. I think I want to check out the place your stripper girlfriend has suggested," Scarlett said with a smirk, linking her arm with Nicole's and pulling her into a friendly side-hug.

Nicole laughed at Scarlett's blunt assessment of the venue and the playful use of the word "girlfriend." "Hey, I'm just trying to help you guys out," she said, grinning at the sisters. "And for the record, I prefer the term 'exotic dancer.' It has a more mysterious ring to it, don't you think?"

Scarlett chuckled, giving Nicole a playful nudge. "Fine, 'exotic dancer' it is. But seriously, we appreciate your suggestion, and I'm sure the cabin will be a million times better than this place."

Emma joined in the laughter, relieved that they were all getting along so well. "I don't think it would be too hard to find something better than this. I'm just glad we have other options to consider."

"Me too," Nicole agreed. "And who knows? Maybe we'll end up turning your wedding into a woodland fairytale."

Scarlett winked at Nicole. "A fairytale with royal guests like Kate Middleton and King Kylie in attendance, eh?" Scarlett gave Emma a side glance, who was livid.

"Scarlett!" Emma cried.

"Oh, it's okay. I am sure Nicole doesn't mind me knowing her nickname, do you?"

"Umm...I had asked Emma to keep it a secret, but I guess I'll give the bride-to-be a pass!" said Nicole with a smile.

Emma attempted to stifle a smile and instead, rolled her eyes. "I'm glad the two of you are getting along. However, let's not get ahead of ourselves; we still need to see the venue."

"Okay, let's leave early tomorrow?" Scarlett suggested. "The sooner we get there and check it out, the better!"

"Yes, I will come to get you at 7 o'clock in the morning," Emma told Nicole.

"Okay, I'll be ready," said Nicole, and her eyes twinkled.

On the way home, Scarlett asked Emma about Nicole, her voice giddy with excitement, but Emma did not give her much to be excited about.

"Yes, there is something special about her, but I don't think you will be seeing us walking hand in hand anytime soon, Scar. We come from different worlds. She is the heat of the scorching sun, and I am the calm of a placid lake. I don't have the energy, or the will power to step into the dating game with someone like her."

"Are you stupid? Have you seen her ass? Those gorgeous eyes...damn, if I wasn't getting married..."

Emma grinned, and rolled down the window and leaned out into the night air, taking in a deep breath of the city. The streets were alive with car

horns and city lights, a dizzying array of neon signs that illuminated every corner.

Emma thought about all the times she had checked out Nicole's ass and an embarrassed smile spread across her face. "Yeah, okay, She's really hot... But I don't think I am interested in exploring that relationship any further. I like the way things are now, and I just want to keep it friendly. That's all," she said firmly as she settled back into her seat, "Plus, she is at least 10 years younger than me."

"As you say, Duchess, but don't underestimate the power of some junk in the trunk. It can cure crippling depression." Scarlett said dreamily.

Emma closed her eyes, and Nicole's curvaceous figure popped into her head. Emma felt a tingle run up her spine as she thought of Nicole's curvaceous figure. Her eyes burning from the smouldering intensity that radiated from those full, bee-stung lips. Her mind raced with thoughts of how hot and sensual Nicole appeared in the tight summer dress she had worn today, accentuating every curve of her body. She tried to quell the fire within and wrestled against thinking any more about it but was unable to resist dwelling on how badly she wanted to touch those curves or feel them pressing against hers.

Chapter Four

It was a crisp, early Brooklyn morning as Emma and Scarlett prepared to leave their house. The sky was a mix of deep blues and purples, with the sun barely peeking over the horizon. A cool breeze rustled through the trees lining the streets, carrying with it the fresh scent of freshly baked goods. The dew-covered grass glistened in the morning light, and the aroma of bread and pastries filled the air. The air was invigorating, filled with the promise of a new day.

Emma felt a whirlwind of emotions inside her – a mix of nerves and excitement. She had never been this close to anyone since Alice, and the thought of spending an entire day with Nicole made her heart race. Scarlett, on the other hand, was buzzing with anticipation at the possibility of having her dream outdoor wedding. Their excitement was palpable as they climbed into Emma's well-maintained, middle-income car – a silver Toyota Camry that had served them well over the years.

“I don't know what I'm more excited about; a freaking outdoor wedding in the woods or the prospect of having a stripper as a sister-in-law.”

Emma grunted, “You have to stop with the jokes, Scar. I don't like them, and I'm sure neither does Nicole. Stop calling her 'stripper' all the time.” Scarlett sighed and took a look at herself in the rearview mirror of the car, “Nicole is not a pussy, Em. She can take a joke, plus, I genuinely like her, and I know she is not just a stripper. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been fine with this pairing!”

As they drove through the still-waking city, Emma couldn't help but admire the charm of Brooklyn's streets, the way the sunlight filtered through the trees, casting patchwork shadows on the sidewalk. The city

was slowly coming to life – the aroma of fresh coffee and baked goods wafting from the corner cafés, and early morning joggers and dog walkers making their way along the pathways.

The journey from their home to Nicole's took them through various neighborhoods, each with its own distinct character. As they approached the low-income area of Brooklyn, known as Redhook Flats, the scenery began to change. The neat rows of brownstones and manicured gardens gave way to aged, graffiti-covered buildings and cluttered streets. Despite its rough exterior, the area had a certain charm, a sense of community that seemed to defy the odds.

As they pulled up to Nicole's building, a sense of nervous excitement settled over Emma once more. She couldn't help but think about the last time she had seen Nicole – their shared kiss and the feelings it had stirred within her. She knew that today would be a turning point in their friendship, a day that would define the course of their relationship. And yet, she couldn't shake the fear that held her back, the fear of moving on from Alice.

As Emma and Scarlett approached Nicole's apartment, they spotted her waiting for them on the sidewalk. She was dressed in a pair of tight, hot shorts and a sports bra that showed off her incredible curves. Her Kylie Jenner-like appearance was undeniable – from her plump, luscious lips to her smoky, almond-shaped eyes. Her long, raven hair cascaded down her back, framing her flawless, sun-kissed skin.

Emma's heart skipped a beat as she took in Nicole's stunning appearance, feeling a sudden warmth rise to her cheeks. She couldn't help but be affected by Nicole's bold and confident demeanor, and it stirred something inside her that she hadn't felt in a long time. Emma stared at Nicole like an owl, and for a brief, minuscule of a tempting second, her eyes lingered on her cleavage, and she salivated just a little bit.

"Wow, King Kylie in the flesh!" Scarlett exclaimed playfully as Nicole climbed into the back seat of the car. "You sure know how to make an entrance."

Nicole flashed a grin, her eyes twinkling with mischief. "Well, when you've got it, you've got to flaunt it, right?" she replied, striking a playful pose.

Scarlett laughed and playfully nudged Emma. "See, Em? That's the kind of confidence we need to rub off on you!"

"Hi, Duchess, I see you are still wearing those heels and your trademark knee-length dress," said Nicole, eyeing Emma with a mischievous gaze.

Emma, not knowing what to say, simply smiled back and waved awkwardly at Nicole. "Um...hi," she stammered nervously.

Nicole just shrugged with a smirk on her face and leaned back in her seat as the car pulled out of the parking spot, and into the city streets.

As the car made its way out of the city, Scarlett continued to flirt with Nicole, asking her about her favorite workout routines and complimenting her toned figure. Nicole, ever the entertainer, played along and shared her fitness secrets, while also subtly directing her gaze towards Emma every now and then.

Emma, who was driving, couldn't help but steal glances at Nicole in the rearview mirror. She felt a mixture of curiosity and admiration for this woman who seemed so comfortable in her own skin. Though she tried to focus on the road, Emma's thoughts kept drifting to the undeniable attraction she was feeling for Nicole.

As they continued driving towards Lake Hope in Connecticut, the conversation between Nicole, Scarlett, and Emma flowed freely. Nicole, always eager to learn more about the people she met, asked Scarlett about her soon-to-be-wife.

"So, Scarlett, tell me about your fiancée," Nicole inquired, genuinely interested in her story.

Scarlett's eyes lit up as she began to talk about her fiancée, Danielle. "Dani is a wildlife biologist, and she travels all over the country to study and protect endangered species. We met during a hiking trip in the Adirondacks. She was there tracking a rare bird species, and I was there to escape the city for a bit. We hit it off right away, and our love for nature and adventure just brought us closer."

Scarlett's face softened as she reminisced about her romance with Danielle. "When we first met, there was just something electric between us. She was so passionate about her work and had this incredible, adventurous spirit. We spent hours talking about everything from our love for the outdoors to our favorite books and movies. It felt like we had known each other forever."

Scarlett continued, "We started dating after that hiking trip, and our adventures just kept getting better. I remember this one time, we went on a spontaneous road trip to the Grand Canyon. We camped under the stars, and Danielle taught me all about the constellations. And I taught her all about cunnilingus... It was such a magical night."

"Are you good at that? Eating out women?" Nicole asked, smirking.

Scarlett laughed, her cheeks turning a deeper shade of pink. "No comment," she said with a smile. "You tell me, Nicole, are you only good at humping a pole, or are you any good with humping women senseless?" Scarlett asked, raising an eyebrow and turning around to eye Nicole teasingly.

"Scar! You're embarrassing her!" Emma interjected, coming to her friend's defense.

Nicole laughed out loud and blushed. "Well, I'd like to think I'm pretty good at both!" she quipped back. "But where I truly excel, ladies, is in the art of foreplay. I love to spend time exploring a woman's body, from head to toe, until she is shivering, trembling with excitement, and groaning in anticipation. And then, when the moment is just right, I release the kraken

and go wild," Nicole said, leaning forward, her mouth hovering tantalizingly close to the back of Emma's neck.

Emma shivered involuntarily, feeling a thrill at Nicole's words and the warmth of her breath on her skin. She glanced at her sister, trying to hide her excitement and embarrassment at the same time.

Scarlett chuckled, enjoying the playful banter and the effect it was having on her usually reserved sister. "Well, it sounds like you certainly know how to have a good time, Nicole," she said, giving her a playful wink, "A lot of my friends would sell their blood to have some of that fun with you. They are dying to receive that lap dance from you!"

"Oh, I am happy to hear that, however, I only had eyes for one woman that night," Nicole murmured, still gazing at Emma in the rearview mirror.

As the journey continued, Nicole and Scarlett took turns playing their favorite hip-hop tracks, singing along, and trying to get Emma to join in the fun. Emma, however, was growing slightly irritated by the loud music and found herself daydreaming about making Nicole listen to classical music if they ever started dating.

The scenic route from New York to Shelton, Connecticut, was a beautiful contrast to the bustling city they had left behind. The lush green landscape seemed to stretch for miles, while quaint little towns dotted the way. It was a perfect day for a road trip – the sun shone brightly, casting a warm glow on everything it touched.

As they drove, Nicole couldn't help but keep her eyes on Emma. Sitting in the backseat, she had her arms draped casually around the backrest of Emma's seat, her fingertips brushing against Emma's shoulder every now and then. Emma noticed the subtle touches and felt her heart race each time their skin made contact.

The landscape outside the car window transformed as they drove, with the urban sprawl of Brooklyn giving way to lush greenery, picturesque towns, and rolling hills. The beauty of their surroundings seemed to mirror

the blossoming relationship between Emma and Nicole, adding a sense of serenity and enchantment to the journey.

Their laughter echoed through the car, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere that invited vulnerability and openness. As the conversations between the trio grew deeper, Emma and Nicole found themselves sharing more of their lives with each other – their dreams, their fears, and their hopes for the future.

Emma opened up to Nicole about her love for literature and her desire to inspire a love of learning in her students, Nicole's eyes shone with admiration. She shared her dreams of opening her own pole dancing studio, creating a space where women could feel empowered, strong, and confident in their bodies.

Throughout the journey, Scarlett noticed the growing connection between her sister and Nicole. She watched as Emma's initial hesitations and insecurities seemed to dissolve, replaced by a sense of ease and camaraderie that was both refreshing and heartwarming.

At one point, Nicole turned to Emma and said, "You know, Duchess, I've got the perfect song for you," before putting on 'WAP' by Cardi B, which also featured Kylie Jenner in the music video.

Nicole locked eyes with Emma in the rearview mirror as she lip-synced, rapped, and provocatively sang along to the track. Emma, though irritated by the loud music, couldn't help but be amused and slightly turned on by Nicole's performance.

Nicole felt her body with her hands, her sexy, siren eyes locked onto Emma. She moved her torso provocatively to the beat, making sensuous, drool-worthy expressions with her face.

By the end of her little performance, she had made Emma wet.

Emma, on the other hand, was shocked, and in disbelief.

No one had managed to stimulate her passions, like Nicole had. With just an arch of the eyebrow and the slow, sensuous movement of her hips, not to mention the sex radiating from her eyes, Nicole had reached deep down into Emma's body and shaken her to her very core.



As the trio arrived at the cabin near Lake Hope, Connecticut, they were greeted by a captivating sight. The wooden cabin, painted in an array of bright, cheerful colors, appeared to be an extension of the surrounding forest. Built in a traditional log cabin style, its architecture was both rustic and charming. A covered porch wrapped around the front, with a cozy bench swing swaying gently in the breeze. Large windows adorned the facade, allowing sunlight to stream in and offering a glimpse of the inviting interior. The cabin was surrounded by towering pines and leafy oaks, their branches forming a natural canopy above.

A shed nearby, where Nicole's father, Logan, repaired cars and bikes, had an old-fashioned, weathered appeal. The wooden structure was adorned with faded signs, and the door hung slightly ajar, revealing the assortment of rusty bikes and spare parts within. A workbench, covered in tools and mechanical paraphernalia, stood against one wall, bearing testament to the hours spent tinkering and fixing.

The cabin was nestled in a clearing, where birds sang and the scent of pine and fresh earth filled the air. Scarlett couldn't contain her excitement as they stepped out of the car after the one-and-a-half-hour journey. "Oh my God, it's even more beautiful than I imagined!" she exclaimed, her eyes shining with joy.

Emma couldn't help but smile as well. "Thank you, Nicole, for bringing us here," she said sincerely.

Nicole grinned, happy to share this special place with her new friends. "I told you it was worth the drive!"

The weather was perfect – a sunny morning with just the right amount of breeze rustling through the trees. As they stood there, taking in the scene, a well-built man emerged from the shed. He looked like J.K. Simmons, a real man's man, with tattoos adorning his muscular arms. He wore a vest that showcased his impressive physique, and his deep, gravelly voice carried across the clearing as he greeted the girls.

"Hey there! You must be Scarlett and Emma!" he boomed, striding over with a wide grin on his face. "I'm Logan, Nicole's dad. Welcome to our little slice of heaven."

Scarlett, not one to hold back, rushed forward and enveloped Logan in a hug. "Thank you so much for having us! This place is amazing!"

Logan laughed, returning the hug before extending a hand to Emma. "Pleasure to meet you, Emma," he said warmly, his handshake firm and friendly. "I hope you ladies enjoy your stay here. And don't hesitate to ask if you need anything."

Emma nodded, her eyes taking in the surroundings once more. "Thank you, Mr. Sanders. It's truly beautiful here."

"Please call me Logan," the man with light blue eyes said with a smile, "shall we begin the tour?"

As they stepped inside the cabin, they found a cozy, inviting space that exuded warmth and character. The walls were adorned with photos that captured the essence of Nicole, Logan, and Susie's lives. There were pictures of Nicole as a toddler, beaming with pride on her father's lap, and Susie as a little girl, playing with her favorite toys. Emma noticed a striking photo of a young, handsome Logan with Nicole, both grinning widely, seated on a Harley Davidson.

The rustic furniture in the cabin added to its charm. There was a large, wooden dining table that could easily seat eight people, with matching chairs that had seen many years of shared meals and laughter. A plush, comfortable sofa sat in front of a stone fireplace, where countless evenings

had been spent warming up after long days spent working in the shed or exploring the surrounding woods.

In one corner of the living room, there was a bookshelf filled with books on various subjects, but it was clear that bikes and cars held a special place in this family's heart. Manuals, biographies of famous motorcyclists, and volumes on the history of automobiles lined the shelves, showing the depth of their passion for all things mechanical.

The cabin had a distinct lived-in quality that made it feel like a true home. It was obvious that Nicole, Logan, and Susie had spent countless hours together within these walls, creating memories that would last a lifetime.

As Logan led Scarlett and Emma through the four comfortable bedrooms, it was clear that each room had its own unique personality. One room was adorned with posters of classic cars and motorcycles, reflecting Logan's love for all things automotive. Another room was decorated with an assortment of colorful art supplies, a testament to Susie's creative talents. The other two rooms were more neutral in their décor, making them the perfect blank canvas for the wedding party to make their own.

Logan showed them the kitchen, living room, and four comfortable bedrooms that could accommodate the wedding party. "We've got enough space here for you and your closest friends to get ready for the big day," he explained.

Scarlett, her excitement palpable, clapped her hands together. "Oh, this is just perfect!" she exclaimed.

Logan led them back outside and pointed to a massive oak tree near the cabin. "Now, as for the ceremony, I think this spot right here would be ideal," he said, his voice full of pride. "The oak tree provides a natural canopy, and the clearing can easily fit up to a hundred guests. It's going to be a gorgeous backdrop for your wedding, Scarlett."

Scarlett's eyes sparkled as she imagined exchanging vows beneath the majestic oak. "It's like something out of a fairy tale," she said, her voice

filled with emotion.

Emma, sharing in her sister's joy, nodded in agreement. "It's simply stunning, Logan. Thank you for offering your cabin for Scarlett's wedding."

During the tour, Nicole excused herself for a few minutes to head into the shed. Emma felt a pang of disappointment at her sudden departure, but she quickly shook it off and continued to enjoy Logan's company. She found that he possessed the same confidence and charisma as his daughter, and it was clear that he was genuinely pleased to offer his cabin to the sisters.

As they continued exploring the grounds, Scarlett and Emma asked Logan about logistics, the nearby town of Shelton, and accommodations for their guests. "Logan, are there any hotels nearby where our guests can stay?" Emma inquired.

Logan nodded. "Absolutely. There's a charming inn just a few miles from here in Shelton, as well as a couple of chain hotels. I'm sure your guests will find something suitable."

Scarlett chimed in with another question. "And how about catering and other wedding services? Can we find them locally?"

Logan assured them that they would have no trouble finding everything they needed for the wedding in Shelton. "The town has a variety of businesses that cater to weddings – from florists to caterers. I can even recommend a few if you'd like."

Scarlett and Emma exchanged grateful glances. "Thank you so much, Logan. This is all so wonderful," Scarlett said, her voice full of appreciation.

As the tour came to an end, Nicole returned from the shed, a warm smile on her face. Emma felt her heart lift at the sight of her.

"You were cuter as a child," Emma teased Nicole.

“Really? I know a few hundred women who would beg to differ,” Nicole winked, but Emma did not like the joke. She did not like imagining Nicole giving hundreds of women lapdances, or maybe more.

“And the photo of the baby in your arms, is that your daughter?” Scarlett asked, folding her hands below her breasts.

“Yep, that is the love of my life, Susie.”

“She is as cute as her mother,” Emma said.

Nicole brushed her hair to the side, “So I am cute now?”

“Yeah, I change my mind. You are still very cute,” said Emma, swooning over the way Nicole was still playing with her dark, raven colored hair, “Is she at school?”

“Yes, aren't you a teacher as well? Shouldn't you be teaching right now?” Nicole asked

“I took a day off for Scarlett—which will be the only day I will be taking off from work before the wedding, I hope you get that, Scar?” Emma eyed her sister sternly. “I can't afford any more leaves from the school!”

Before Scarlett could snap back with one of her one-liners, Logan emerged from the cabin behind Emma and Scarlett, clapped his hands together, and said, “Alright, ladies, I could use a little help setting up lunch beneath that beautiful oak tree out there. We'll get some furniture out and enjoy a nice meal, courtesy of yours truly.”

Scarlett and Emma exchanged glances, impressed by Logan's enthusiasm and hospitality. “Wow, Logan, you cooked for us? That's so thoughtful,” Emma remarked.

Logan flashed a proud smile. “Well, I do like to show off my culinary skills every now and then. You'll be the judge of whether I succeeded or not!”

Nicole chimed in with a teasing grin, "Just a fair warning, my dad's cooking can be a bit of a hit or miss. If we make it through lunch without any mysterious stomachaches, I'd say it's a win!"

Laughing, they all headed outside to help Logan set up the outdoor lunch beneath the massive oak tree. The sun filtered through the branches overhead, casting dappled shadows on the ground below. It was a picturesque setting for a meal, and Emma couldn't help but imagine how magical a wedding ceremony would be in this very spot.

As they moved chairs and a long wooden table into place, Logan continued talking. "Now, I don't want you two making any final decisions until after lunch. Enjoy the food, take in the atmosphere, and let the place work its magic on you."

As the afternoon sun bathed the cabin and surrounding clearing in a warm, golden light, the gentle breeze rustled the leaves of the trees, adding a serene soundtrack to the picturesque setting. The massive oak tree stood proudly, providing a canopy of shade for the outdoor lunch that Logan had prepared.

Logan had outdone himself with the meal, presenting an array of mouth-watering dishes that showcased his culinary talents. A vibrant mixed greens salad with cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and feta cheese was accompanied by a tangy vinaigrette. There were also grilled chicken breasts seasoned to perfection, accompanied by an assortment of grilled vegetables, like zucchini, bell peppers, and asparagus, their flavors enhanced by the smoky char. To round off the meal, a refreshing fruit salad added a burst of natural sweetness to the spread.

As everyone took their seats around the long wooden table, adorned with a simple yet charming tablecloth, Nicole playfully nudged Scarlett to ensure that she sat next to Emma. Scarlett chuckled at her friend's antics but graciously obliged, leaving Emma with no choice but to sit beside Nicole. With the seating arrangement settled, the group began to dig into the delicious meal, their laughter and lighthearted conversation filling the air.

“The food is phenomenal. I am never trusting Nicole about anything ever again,” said Scarlett, licking her lips.

“Yes, I agree. Everything is delicious,” Emma nodded, slicing a piece of chicken and lifting it to her mouth with a fork.

“I had to learn to cook. This one here.. wouldn’t settle for just mac and cheese,” Logan pointed at Nicole, who grinned, “I was a foodie as a child.”

“Yeah, and now, all she wants to eat are avocados, or drink strawberry smoothies.” Logan continued, and gave his daughter a look of mock concern.

“If I start doubling down on your homemade burgers, dad, then no one would want to see me perform on stage,” Nicole said, giving him an innocent smile.

Emma stared down at her plate, an undeniable feeling of awkwardness creeping up on her. She observed Logan and Nicole interact and it was clear to see that they had a tight bond. Emma found herself wondering what it would be like to have a relationship like that with her own father, if he could ever accept the decisions she made in life. Was Logan always supportive of Nicole's decision to become a stripper, or did she have to put up the same kind of fight at home as Emma had to?

Emma nervously shifted in her seat and pushed the piece of chicken around on her plate. She wanted so badly to reach out and ask Logan, but something kept holding her back. She was afraid that she would just make things worse if she asked, so instead she just sat there in silence as they continued their meal.

“What was she like as a child?” Emma asked after a silence of a few minutes.

“Nicole? She was a handful. Well, more than a handful because she weighed a ton as a child. But then she lost all that weight, but gained a strong liking for women; she was a dog off the leash, weren’t you?”

Nicole almost spat out her food before she caught herself and frantically tried to swallow. Emma couldn't help but giggle at the awkwardness of the situation, and Logan broke into a hearty laugh that made Nicole relax a bit.

"I am sorry if I said too much," Logan apologized. "I tend to get carried away sometimes."

Nicole rolled her eyes, but Emma could see the relief in her expression. It was clear that Logan's acceptance and humor made her feel comfortable being herself around him.

"It's okay, Logan. And please continue telling us how Nicole was a 'dog off the leash' as we are very interested to know," Scarlett said, stuffing her mouth with grilled vegetables.

Logan glanced at his daughter, who shrugged. "Go ahead, Dad," she said, her gaze resting upon Emma and Scarlett. "I trust these two."

"Let's just say, there were a few girls from the catholic school who weren't too catholic after Nicole had set her eyes on them. She was great at the art of making girls lose their faith and their 'straightness'," Logan winked at Emma, who blushed.

Emma wondered if Nicole had told her father about their night at the stripclub. She couldn't help but feel a bit self-conscious under his gaze now, unsure of how much he knew about her and Nicole's intimate relationship.

As if sensing Emma's discomfort, Nicole spoke up. "Dad, can we talk about something else? Like maybe how you used to take me fishing here when I was a kid?"

Logan's eyes softened as he looked at his daughter. "Of course, baby girl. Those were some of the best memories of my life."

He went on to tell them stories of their fishing trips, and how Nicole would always out-fish the boys despite her young age. He talked about the time she caught the biggest fish they had seen in the lake, and how proud he

was of her for not giving up after a few hours without any luck. Emma sat mesmerized as Logan spoke, forgetting all about her self-consciousness from earlier as she was captivated by his stories. She found herself asking more questions about Nicole's childhood, eager to get to know more about what made her into the person she was today.

The lunch crawls to an end in an hour, after which, Emma and Nicole help Logan clear the plates, while Scarlett decides to take a walk around the cabin once more and inspect the surroundings for the wedding.

Nicole watched Emma with a wandering eye, and noticed how she almost glided over the wooden floor of the cabin, clearing plates, humming a classical tune to herself, her hair falling in gentle waves around her face.

Emma, unaware of Nicole's eyes on her, turned around, and spoke in her usual, soft, honey-glazed voice, addressing Nicole, "How many girls have you brought to this cabin, while your father was away?"

Nicole smiled, and leaned against the kitchen counter. "Not many, actually. I usually come here by myself to unwind and escape the chaos of the club, and spend some family time with Susie and Dad, as she usually stays here."

"Why doesn't she stay with you?"

Nicole sighed and looked away for a moment, before turning back to Emma with a sad expression on her face. "I'm a stripper and an escort, Emma. That's a tough profession to hide from your daughter if she stays with you." She paused for a moment and then continued. "So I keep Susie here with Dad most of the time so she can have some normalcy. I don't want her to grow up thinking that what I do is okay."

"But what you do...is okay, isn't it? Why do you think it isn't?" Emma said, her gentle green eyes watching Nicole with concern.

Nicole shrugged. "It's just... society and all the stigma that comes with it. The judgment, the shame. I don't want my daughter to face any of that because of me."

Emma took a step closer to Nicole, her hand reaching out to rest on Nicole's arm in a comforting gesture. "Nicole, you shouldn't be ashamed of who you are or what you do. You're a beautiful and strong woman who is making a living in a way that works for you. You're not hurting anyone."

Nicole looked at Emma, a soft smile forming on her lips. "Thank you, Emma. That means a lot coming from you, and I try to live my life with this philosophy, but, the world, and the people in it can be pretty cruel sometimes. And I can somehow make my peace with it, but I don't want my 9-year-old daughter to start having to be so brave, and courageous so early on in her life."

Emma nodded in understanding, "but will you ever tell her?"

"Hell yeah. She should know how brave and badass her mother was, but, now is not the time."

Emma's head dropped to the side, and she stared at Nicole with admiration, "stop trying so hard to make me fall for you!"

Nicole pushed away from the kitchen counter, and took a step towards Emma.

She watched how the sun filtering through the windows hit her face and how the light bathed her skin in a golden glow and reflected off the shimmer in her eyes to bring out the warm amber flecks in them.

"Why can't I try?" Nicole said, closing the distance between Emma and her, and watching with relish how Emma's breath intensified because of their proximity.

Emma licked her lips, and stared into Nicole's hazel-colored eyes, thinking of a witty reply, but all of a sudden, years of reading, and enjoying great authors, deserted her, and left her speechless.

"Because..."

"Because?" Nicole's lips curved into a mischievous smile.

"Because...I am not one of the catholic girls you used to prey on. I am difficult to charm."

Birds chirped outside, and the sound of Logan snoring could be heard from the porch, but inside the cabin, bathed in the glittering stream of sunlight, Nicole and Emma stood centimeters away from each other, their chests and hearts beating with unhinged fury, egging them to make a move, but both stood rooted to their spot.

"You are nothing like those catholic girls," Nicole whispered, her eyes dropping down to stare at Emma's parted lips, and the faint sight of her tongue inside her mouth.

She longed to feel it inside her mouth.

Emma's tongue drew a line of saliva along her lips, wetting them further and making her lips glisten.

Nicole imagined Emma's tongue in her mouth, tasting and exploring, conquering and subduing. She imagined Emma's tongue everywhere on her body, dancing and drowning with hers.

"Nicole, there is a man outside with a bike, asking for Logan. Should I wake him up?" Scarlett rushed into the cabin.

Nicole and Emma quickly stepped away from each other, and Emma stepped back self-consciously, her face burning with embarrassment. Her eyes darted to the doorway, meeting Scarlett, who was now grinning like a naught schoolboy.

Scarlett hesitated for a second before adding, "Oh...sorry...I didn't mean to interrupt something here. I'll just tell the man my sister and her stripper girlfriend are about to make out so he'll have to wait!"

Emma and Nicole could not help but burst out laughing at Scarlett's words while Emma replied, "Uh...that won't be necessary."

Nicole bit her lip as Emma's blush deepened and she casually brushed a stray lock of hair from her eyes. "Um, I'll just...step outside and take care of the..." she said, slowly backing toward the doorway, but keeping her eyes on Emma, who was still flushing.

"Yeah," Emma nodded.

"What was that about?" Scarlett asked Emma, joining her in the kitchen as Nicole exited the cabin.

"That was me being a stupid, reckless, fool of a woman! Someone needs to control me, lock me up in chains or something, before I do something silly!"

Scarlett laughed, "Well, I don't think Nicole would mind the chains part."

Emma's face turned bright red again as she tried to compose herself. "I don't know what came over me. I shouldn't have said that."

"Why not?" Scarlett pressed, leaning against the counter next to Emma. "You two clearly have chemistry, and it's not every day you meet someone who makes your heart race like that."

Emma bit her lip, her mind swirling with conflicting thoughts and emotions. On one hand, she was drawn to Nicole in a way she couldn't explain, but on the other hand, she was hesitant to act on those feelings. She wasn't sure if it was because of her own insecurities or if it was something else entirely.

"We need to have a long talk when we get home, Em. I need to know what's going on in that complicated mind of yours," Scarlett said.

Emma, lost in her own thoughts and confusions, wandered aimlessly to the window, and gazed outside.

She found Nicole crouched beside the bike, and inspecting something intently. She was now wearing an old pair of jeans that fit her curves

perfectly.

Emma couldn't take her eyes off of her; mesmerized by how sexy Nicole looked as she worked on the bike.

Time seemed to stand still as Emma watched Nicole work, admiring every move she made. From the way she adjusted the handlebar to the way she twisted a bolt here and there; it all felt like a dance in slow motion set against a beautiful sunset background.

It wasn't until Scarlett cleared her throat behind her that Emma snapped out of it, startled by the sudden interruption before quickly stepping away from the window and turning around to face Scarlett with a shy smile, "Yes, I think we need to have that talk."

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Chapter Five

Scarlett and Emma sat in the cozy living room of their Brooklyn apartment, each holding their preferred beverage - a cold beer for Scarlett and a steaming cup of hot chocolate for Emma. The warm, yellow glow from the table lamp filled the room with a sense of comfort and familiarity, providing the perfect ambiance for the heart-to-heart conversation they were about to have. The sisters had always shared a special bond, and their late-night talks had been a cornerstone of their relationship over the years.

The living room was a reflection of the sisters' personalities, with Emma's love for art and literature evident in the carefully arranged books on the shelves and the framed prints adorning the walls. Scarlett's more adventurous and free-spirited nature was showcased through the colorful throw pillows and the collection of small trinkets from her various travels. Together, their styles created a space that was both eclectic and inviting.

Scarlett took a long sip from her beer before setting it down on the coffee table, looking at her sister with a mixture of curiosity and concern. "Alright, Em," she began, leaning back on the couch and crossing her legs. "It's time we had that talk."

Emma sighed, dreading the next few minutes, or hours she would have to spend being interrogated by Scarlett. It wasn't like she did not want to get to the bottom of her emotions; it was the trouble she would have to go through to get there.

"I know you like Nicole, Em," Scarlett said softly. "It's written all over your face when you look at her."

Emma's cheeks turned a deep shade of crimson as she hung her head, trying to find the courage to answer.

"I do," she admitted after a few moments of silence. "But I'm so scared... I've never felt this way about anyone in a long time, and I don't know what to do with it."

"Can we start with the basics?" Scarlett asked, leaning forward, and eyeing her sister with compassion, "you have been in love before. You have dated, and you know the complexities that come with it. I am assuming you aren't in love with Nicole...yet."

Emma shot Scarlett a small smile, grateful for her sister's understanding. "No, I'm not in love with her...yet," she repeated, emphasizing the last word. "But I'm definitely attracted to her, and I can't seem to stop thinking about her."

Scarlett nodded, taking another sip of her beer. "So what's holding you back?" she asked gently.

Emma hesitated, struggling to find the words to express her feelings. "I don't know," she finally admitted, her voice barely a whisper. "I guess I'm just terrified of getting hurt again. I've experienced heartbreak before, and I don't want to go through that pain ever again. When I was with Alice, I was a novice in love, brimming with energy and life. All I wanted was to love her wholeheartedly because I didn't understand the consequences that come with loving someone so deeply. I was naïve."

Pausing, Emma took a deep breath, fighting back the tears that threatened to spill. "And when...when Alice passed away," she choked out the words, her voice cracking with emotion, "I was a wreck. You saw me, Scar. I had given up on life. I was utterly devastated, and the pain was unbearable. Those days following her death still haunt me, and I find myself waking up in tears or screaming from nightmares that take me back to those terrible times."

Her gaze dropped to the floor as she continued, "And now, somehow, without actually looking for it or expecting it, I find myself falling for a woman who couldn't be more different from me. She's a stripper and an escort, for heaven's sake, and she has a daughter. I don't know if I have the energy to dive into something that seems so...complicated."

Emma's words hung in the air, raw and vulnerable, as she laid bare her fears and uncertainties.

"People move on, Em. It's already been two years. You can't keep living in the past," Scarlett said gently, reaching out to take her sister's hand. "And as for Nicole, she may be a stripper and an escort, but that doesn't define who she is as a person. You've spent time with her, you know how kind and caring she is. And as for her daughter, that's just another part of her life. If anything, it shows how strong and resilient she is to have been able to raise her daughter on her own."

Emma's eyes filled with tears as Scarlett's words sank in. "You're right," she said softly. "I've been so focused on my past that I haven't given myself a chance to move on and start fresh. And Nicole...she's not what I thought she was. She's so much more than that."

Scarlett smiled, squeezing her sister's hand. "I'm glad you see that. And as for the complications...well, isn't that what makes life interesting?" she continued with a grin. "You can't predict what's going to happen, but you can choose to take a chance and see where it leads."

"But...what if taking a chance only leads to more heartbreak?" Emma asked, her voice tinged with apprehension. "I don't think I have the strength to nurse a broken heart again. I'm already depleted, Scar. I struggle to find the energy to wake up in the morning and face the day, let alone go to work. And Nicole...she's so far out of my league. I'd have to go to great lengths just to keep up with her, to prevent her from slipping away."

Emma's voice wavered as she spoke, revealing the depth of her fears and the heavy burden she carried. Her words painted a picture of a woman unsure of her own worth, hesitant to take a leap of faith for fear of the unknown.

Scarlett took a deep breath and looked intently at her sister, understanding the weight of Emma's emotions. "Emma, I know you're scared, and that's completely normal. But sometimes, we need to take risks in life, especially when it comes to love. Think about it, if you never allow

yourself to open up to someone new, how will you ever know if there's something beautiful waiting for you on the other side of that fear?"

Emma listened, her eyes glistening with unshed tears as she took in her sister's words.

"You don't have to feel guilty about your feelings for Nicole, Em. Alice was and always will be, a huge part of your life, but she wouldn't want you to spend the rest of your days mourning her. She would want you to live, to love, and to be happy."

Scarlett paused for a moment before continuing. "Remember our friend, Jess? After she lost her husband in that accident, she was a wreck, just like you. But then, she met someone new, someone, who made her heart race again. She was terrified of moving on, but she took a chance, and now she's happier than she's been in years. Love doesn't always have to end in pain, Em."

Emma looked up at her sister, her heart aching with a mixture of hope and uncertainty. Scarlett's words resonated with her, but the fear of the unknown still lingered.

"Nicole is an incredible woman, and she's clearly into you. It's not every day you meet someone who can make your heart race like that. You deserve happiness, Emma. You deserve to take a chance on love again. And who knows? Maybe this complicated, beautiful, stripper-escort woman is exactly what you need to help you heal."

Emma stood up from the couch and began pacing around the living room, her thoughts racing as she tried to process everything Scarlett had said. Her heart pounded in her chest, a mix of fear and anticipation swirling within her. As she walked back and forth, her eyes darted between the framed photos on the walls, the memories of her life with Alice, and the possibility of a future with Nicole. Her mind played a tug-of-war between the comfort of the past and the excitement of the unknown, each step echoing the internal struggle she was trying to overcome.

"Are you with me...if I decide to pursue this?" Emma stopped pacing around and asked, glancing at her sister over her shoulder.

"I'm your sister, babe. I'll follow you through the gates of hell...if hell was filled with sexy sorceresses in leather pants and plunging necklines." Scarlett joked.

Emma rolled her eyes.

"I'm kidding. I'm with you. Even if the stripper decides to stomp on your heart with her six-inch heels."

Emma floated back to the couch, her thoughts filled with images of Nicole in six-inch heels, standing over her, gazing down at her with seductive, smoldering eyes, while her thighs quivered with every movement of her body.

"I'll think over what you've said," Emma conceded, shaking the tantalizing thoughts of being happily trampled by Nicole from her mind. "But I still want to proceed with caution. I don't really know much about her. She seems nice, she's incredibly gorgeous, and her father seems like a delight, but what about her history? Her past lovers? I want to take things slow," Emma asserted.

"But...you will take things further, right?" Scarlett inquired, looking for reassurance.

"Yeah...I think I will," Emma replied, her voice filled with determination and a touch of newfound hope.

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Over the course of the next few days, Emma and Nicole found solace in their budding relationship through texts, as both were swamped with work. Their conversations ranged from the mundane to the exciting, each message bringing them closer together. Nicole made it a point to text Emma good morning and good night each day, regaling her with stories about her

day, but always ensuring that she steered clear of any mention of her profession.

Emma, on the other hand, filled Nicole in on the preparations for Scarlett's wedding. She shared how Scarlett's fiancée, Danielle, had arrived and was now living with them, and how their apartment had become a frenzy of wedding-related activities. With her newfound confidante, Emma chatted about the countless hours spent scrolling through Pinterest, searching for the perfect décor ideas to make the upcoming celebration truly magical.

The text messages between the two women were filled with playful banter and light-hearted flirting. Nicole would often cheekily ask Emma what she was wearing, only to be met with Emma's dry, matter-of-fact responses. However, one day, when Nicole posed the same question, Emma decided to surprise her by responding with a simple "nothing" as she was texting from the shower.

Caught off-guard, Nicole's heart raced at the thought of Emma showering, her fingers hovering over the phone's screen as she tried to come up with an equally teasing response. As their connection deepened, it became increasingly difficult for them to deny the attraction they felt for each other, even if it was only through a screen.

After a week of their virtual tête-à-tête, Nicole could no longer stand the distance between them. Taking the plunge, she asked Emma to meet up in person to catch up and reconnect face-to-face. Her heart pounded as she awaited Emma's response, hoping that she felt the same way.

Emma's face lit up as she read Nicole's message. A wave of excitement washed over her, and she couldn't help but smile as she typed an enthusiastic "yes" in response. The prospect of seeing Nicole again filled her with a sense of anticipation, her stomach fluttering with nervous energy.

Finally, it was the day of their long-awaited reunion. Emma had taken the day off work, eager to spend as much time as possible with Nicole. She nervously fidgeted with her hair and clothes, wondering if she was dressed appropriately for the occasion.

Emma wore a white summer dress that fell to just below her knees, with a blue floral pattern and thin straps. The dress was conservative, but it accentuated the little feminine curves she had, hugging her hips and chest but leaving some room for imagination.

Standing outside the cozy café where their meeting was supposed to take place, Emma glanced around nervously, her eyes searching for Nicole's familiar figure strutting down the street like the star of a rom-com. Just then, her phone buzzed in her hand, and Nicole's name flashed across the screen.

"Hi, you're late!" Emma teased with mock anger.

"Umm...Emma, I don't think I'll be able to make it today," Nicole began hesitantly. "Susie's come down with a nasty fever, so she'll be spending the day with me. I'm really sorry, but I think I have to cancel."

Emma's heart sank at the sound of Nicole's voice, disappointment washing over her. She had been looking forward to this day so much, and now it was falling apart. "Oh, that's too bad," she replied, trying to keep the disappointment out of her voice.

"I know, I'm sorry. I'll make it up to you, I promise," Nicole said, her voice full of sincerity. But it did little to ease Emma's disappointment.

"Sure, no problem," Emma replied, trying to sound upbeat. "Let's plan for another day when Susie's feeling better...or, if you're cool with it, I could swing by your place and we could hang out there? I'd finally get to meet Susie too, you know?"

A brief silence fell over the conversation, and with each passing second, Emma started regretting her suggestion. She doesn't want me to meet her daughter yet. Or maybe ever?

"No, I...don't think you should do that," Nicole said, her voice hesitant. "I'm a bit stressed right now, and I don't think I'd be great company. We'll meet some other day, and I'd like you to meet Susie when she's not sick."

"Of course, I understand," Emma replied, trying to keep her own disappointment at bay. "Take care of Susie, and we'll plan something for when she's feeling better."

"Thanks for understanding. I'll text you later, okay?" Nicole said before hanging up.

As Emma stood there, alone on the sidewalk, she couldn't shake the nagging feeling that something was off. Nicole's voice had sounded strained, and she couldn't help but think that there was more to her last-minute cancellation than just her daughter being sick. But Emma pushed those thoughts aside, telling herself she was just being paranoid.

As Emma wandered aimlessly through the city streets, she couldn't shake the sinking feeling that gripped her heart. Gradually, the sounds of the city, the buzz of conversations, and the rhythm of footsteps faded into the background, replaced by the echo of Nicole's hesitant voice in her head.

Something about Nicole's reasoning for not wanting Emma to come over just didn't sit right with her. Throughout all their conversations, and with everything Emma had come to know about Nicole, she knew that Nicole wasn't the type to cancel plans just because she wouldn't be good company. Nicole was stronger than that. If she really wanted to see Emma, she should've been fine with simply sitting together, not feeling the pressure to make conversation or put on a show.

Emma tried to brush off her growing unease, but deep down, she couldn't help but feel that there was more to Nicole's cancellation than met the eye. And as she continued to roam the bustling streets, lost in her thoughts, she couldn't help but wonder what was really going on behind the scenes.

After aimlessly wandering the streets of Brooklyn for nearly forty-five minutes, Emma realized she desperately needed a distraction. On any other day, her go-to coping mechanism would have been to hurry home, cocoon herself in a blanket, and lose herself in the pages of a gripping mystery novel. But today, the idea of returning to her empty room, accompanied only by a head full of negative thoughts, held no appeal for Emma. Instead,

she made a decision – she would un-cancel her attendance at the book club meeting she had previously ditched in order to make plans with Nicole. This would, at least, provide her with a much-needed escape from the whirlwind of emotions that threatened to consume her.



Nicole was determined to look her absolute best tonight. Cara, her most lucrative client, expected nothing short of perfection, so Nicole decided to turn up the heat on her usual sexy attire.

She slipped into a form-fitting dress that hugged her curves just right. The deep navy blue fabric was adorned with delicate silver embroidery along the neckline and hem. She paired this with matching strappy stilettos and a dainty silver bracelet that added an elegant touch. Her makeup was meticulously applied to accentuate her best features - smoky eyes, well-defined brows, and a subtle nude lip. Her raven-colored hair was styled into loose waves that effortlessly cascaded down her back.

Nicole looked absolutely stunning - the perfect blend of sexy and sophisticated. But as she finished primping for her night with Cara, an overwhelming sense of guilt and sadness washed over her, stemming from the lie she had told Emma earlier. This emotional turmoil left a searing pain in her chest that was impossible to ignore.

As Nicole examined her reflection in the mirror, her thoughts raced, dominated by the image of Emma, the woman she was rapidly falling for. The bitter sting of dishonesty gnawed at her, making her feel like a fraud. She wished she could be honest with Emma about her profession, but the fear of rejection and the potential loss of something that felt so precious kept her silent.

Nicole closed her eyes, taking a deep breath as she tried to calm the turmoil within her. She reminded herself why she was doing this - for Susie, her beloved daughter. The upcoming school trip was important to Susie, and

Nicole would do anything to ensure her happiness, even if it meant lying to Emma and continuing her life as an escort for clients like Cara.

The weight of the lie felt crushing, a heavy burden that she was forced to carry alone. Nicole longed for a life where she didn't need to hide parts of herself, a life where she could be open with Emma and share the truth about her occupation without fear, or better, change what she was currently doing to make money. But for now, she had to be strong and prioritize her daughter's needs above her own.

As she opened her eyes and looked at her reflection once more, Nicole took a deep, steady breath. She could only hope that, someday, she would find the courage to reveal parts of her life to Emma and that their connection would be strong enough to withstand the truth. For tonight, however, she needed to put on a brave face and fulfill her obligations to Cara, all the while silently praying for the strength to find a way to be honest with the woman who had captured her heart.



Emma sat on a plush, cream-colored couch in the luxurious living room of Cara, a wealthy woman who lived in a stunning penthouse apartment on the Upper East Side. The apartment boasted a modern, minimalist design, with floor-to-ceiling windows that offered breathtaking views of the city skyline. The open-concept living space was adorned with sleek, contemporary furniture in neutral tones, and tastefully chosen artwork adorned the pristine white walls. The overall atmosphere of the apartment exuded sophistication and elegance.

As Emma looked around, she took in the diverse group of book club members who had gathered in Cara's home. Cara, the host, and a successful businesswoman, had a natural air of authority and grace. She was known for her impeccable taste in literature and her ability to lead engaging discussions.

Seated next to Emma was Lily, a quirky freelance writer who specialized in travel articles. Her brightly colored hair and eclectic wardrobe were as vibrant as the stories she told about her adventures around the world. Across from her was Priya, a soft-spoken librarian who had an encyclopedic knowledge of books and authors. Priya's calm demeanor and insightful observations made her a valuable contributor to the club.

On the other side of the room, two friends chatted animatedly while sipping wine. Eloise, a high-powered attorney, was always impeccably dressed and carried herself with confidence. Her wit and sharp intellect made her a force to be reckoned with during the club's heated debates. Beside her was Julia, a successful gallery owner with an eye for artistic talent. Her keen understanding of aesthetics and symbolism often added depth to the group's discussions about the novels they read.

As Emma scanned the room, she couldn't help but feel a sense of belonging and camaraderie with this group of literary enthusiasts. The book club was a welcome escape from the chaos and uncertainty of her personal life, and she found solace in their shared passion for the written word. And yet, despite the comfort she found in the club, her thoughts couldn't help but drift back to Nicole and the nagging feeling that something was amiss.

From the corner of her eye, Emma saw Cara approaching her, her confident strides capturing the attention of the room. Her Shakira-like blonde curls framed her face, highlighting her piercing green eyes and high cheekbones. She exuded a sultry, authoritative air that could be intimidating to some.

"Emma, I was wondering what you thought about Raskolnikov's internal struggle in 'Crime and Punishment'? Do you think his guilt was solely a result of his crime, or did his moral compass play a role in his eventual confession?" Cara asked, her voice smooth and captivating.

Emma blinked and tried to focus on Cara's question. She had read 'Crime and Punishment' and had formed her opinions about the protagonist's mental turmoil, but her thoughts were clouded by her concerns about Nicole.

"Uh, I think Raskolnikov's guilt was definitely a major factor, but his moral compass certainly played a role in his confession as well," Emma answered hesitantly, trying to recall the details of the novel.

Cara nodded, encouraging Emma to elaborate. "That's an interesting perspective. Do you believe Raskolnikov's isolation and detachment from society contributed to his decision to commit murder, or was it more of an inherent flaw within him?"

Emma paused for a moment, considering Cara's question. "I'd say it's a mix of both. His isolation and detachment from society definitely played a part, but I think there was also something inherently flawed within him that led to his actions. His belief in the extraordinary man theory, for instance, was a justification for his crime, but it also indicated a deeper issue within his character."

Cara seemed pleased with Emma's response. "I agree. Raskolnikov's character is complex, and the novel does a fantastic job of exploring the many layers of his psyche. It's fascinating how Dostoevsky manages to make the reader empathize with Raskolnikov, despite his heinous actions."

Emma nodded, finding herself more engaged in the conversation. "Absolutely. Dostoevsky's ability to delve into the human mind and explore the darkest corners of our psyche is truly remarkable."

Cara studied Emma's face for a moment, sensing her lingering distraction. "You seem a bit off tonight, Emma. Is everything alright?" she asked, her tone shifting from inquisitive to concerned.

Emma hesitated before answering, not entirely sure if she should confide in Cara. There was something about Cara that made her feel like she couldn't quite trust her. "Oh, it's just been a long day," Emma said, trying to brush off her concerns with a weak smile.

Cara raised an eyebrow, clearly not buying Emma's excuse. "Well, you should know that there are many people who would love to be a part of this book club. We expect all our members to be engaged and contribute to the

discussions. If you're not up for it, there are others who would gladly take your place."

"Cara, I just had a bad day, and haven't I been contributing for all these months?"

"Of course, Emma. I didn't mean to imply that you haven't been contributing. I just want to make sure that everyone is getting the most out of this experience," Cara said, her voice softening.

Emma nodded, feeling a mix of relief and annoyance at Cara's words. She knew that Cara was just trying to maintain the high standards of the book club, but her tone had felt unnecessarily harsh.

As the discussion progressed, Emma made a conscious effort to concentrate on the novel and the perspectives shared by her fellow book club members. An hour of engaging, laid-back conversation later, the meeting came to an end, and the serious talk gave way to more casual chatter.

Eloise, ever the gossip enthusiast, seized Emma by the elbow and guided her into a secluded corner, while the others engaged in small groups of animated discussions.

"Have you heard the latest news about Cara?" she whispered, keeping her voice hushed.

"What news?" Emma inquired, although she genuinely had no interest in learning anything about Cara.

"I thought as much. You're not just living under a rock, you're practically beneath an entire mountain range. Anyway, Cara's getting a divorce from her husband. Word is, she wants to explore her sexuality, and there are rumors that she's been hiring escorts to, well, navigate the vast ocean of lesbian experiences."

Really? That's surprising," Emma remarked, her mind now reeling with questions. "Do you know anything about the escort she hires?"

Eloise shook her head. "Not much, to be honest. But I heard the doorman talking about how absolutely gorgeous she is. He said she's been spending entire nights at Cara's apartment."

Emma found herself intrigued by the mysterious escort, but she knew it wasn't any of her business. She decided to change the subject. "Well, people make their own choices, I guess. So, what's the next book on our reading list?"

Eloise, never one to dwell on a single piece of gossip for too long, quickly shifted gears. "Oh, it's 'The Great Gatsby' by F. Scott Fitzgerald. It's a classic, and I'm sure we'll have a lot to discuss next time."

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Nicole stood in the posh elevator of an Upper East Side building, her heart pounding like a ticking time bomb, waiting to explode. She felt low and mentally exhausted, grappling with the repercussions of her lie to Emma. She tried to listen to "Earned It" by The Weeknd on her phone, hoping it would get her in the mood, but her thoughts were in turmoil.

The elevator ascended to the penthouse, the soft hum of the gears adding to the tense atmosphere. She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror, looking stunning in her navy blue dress and strappy stilettos. But her eyes betrayed the storm brewing within her.

The opulent elevator, with its brass and marble accents, only served as a stark reminder of the double life she was leading. Nicole couldn't shake the feeling that she was betraying Emma, even though they weren't dating. She knew that Emma was aware of her profession, but Nicole longed for a life where she could stop escorting and pursue her growing interest in Emma.

As the elevator climbed higher, a sense of foreboding crept over Nicole. The anticipation and tension built within her like a tightly wound spring, ready to snap at any moment.

The elevator dinged, signaling its arrival at the penthouse, and Nicole's pulse quickened. She tried to push her conflicting emotions aside and muster up the confidence she needed for her night with Cara.

She felt frightened, as if she was about to walk onto a wooden platform for her beheading. Her steps echoed around the hallway, and her long, confident strides had little effect on her nervously beating heart.

A feeling of impending doom, of an executioner taking off his hood and striding forward with a noose already in one hand and another swinging from side to side gripped her heart, as she rang the doorbell.

Cara opened the two-inch-thick wooden door, inlaid with polished metal, and framed by heavy chains. The warm air from the apartment wafted out through the doorway. Cara's perfume—a mixture of vanilla, musk, and cinnamon—wafted out into the hallway and enveloped Nicole's nostrils.

Cara's lips teased Nicole as they kissed in greeting. The taste of her lipstick, a mixture of red wine and chocolate, lingered on Nicole's lips after they parted.

"You are early. I am still entertaining guests. I will introduce you as my personal stylist, helping me with my look for the Gala," Cara whispered in Nicole's ear and as she withdrew, planted a light, but hungry kiss on the nape of Nicole's neck, and gestured for her to enter the apartment.

Nicole stepped into the foyer, crossed the marble floor and entered the parlor. A great chandelier hung from the ceiling, crystals glistening from the light cast by its candles. The walls were painted dark red, ablaze with the glory of the chandelier's light.

She went through another doorway, and entered into the airy, luxurious living room, affording magnificent views of New York city.

Bathed in the light of the chandelier, everything from the furniture, to the walls, to the marble floors, to the paintings on the walls, reflected the glow. A grand piano stood in one corner, the mahogany reflecting amber in

the candlelight. The living room was decorated with white and red furniture, Cara's favorite color. A fireplace, with a large red slate, inlaid into the marble, formed the center of the room. A large mirror hung on the wall to the left of the fireplace. Two red velvet couches rested on either side of the fireplace, flanked by a coffee table. A French-style bar rested in the corner of the room, opposite the living room's entrance.

Nicole's eyes scanned the opulence, and rested on the group of well-dressed women who were milling around in the center of the living room, and looked like they were about to leave. Nicole swallowed hard, as every eye in the room turned to her. The women looked intimidating in their fine jewelry, and designer bags hanging off their elbows, and they had started chatting amongst themselves in low voices at the sight of Nicole.

"Nicole?" a voice Nicole was familiar with, came from behind her, and she wheeled around to see Emma standing before her.

"Emma..." a fearful whisper escaped Nicole's full lips, and she felt her heart drop to her stomach. She hadn't expected to see Emma there, and the shock of it was too much for her to handle.

"What are you doing here?" Emma asked in a voice that was laced with cold, razor-sharp shards of ice.

Nicole fumbled for words.

She couldn't form any coherent words. Her mind was racing a mile a minute, trying to come up with a plausible explanation for why she was there. She couldn't bear the thought of Emma finding out that she had lied because of an escorting gig, and she knew that if she didn't play her cards right, everything could come crashing down around her.

"I-I'm Cara's personal stylist," Nicole stammered, trying to come up with a plausible lie. "She hired me to help her get ready for the Gala tonight."

Emma raised an eyebrow, her gaze lingering on Nicole's dress and stilettos. "Really? I didn't know Cara needed a personal stylist."

"Well, she knew I have a good eye for fashion, so...," Nicole said with a nervous laugh, hoping to diffuse the tension.

Emma's eyes narrowed, and Nicole could see that she was still skeptical. "Well, I'm sure you have work to do. I'll see you later," Emma said, her tone dismissive as she turned and walked out of the apartment.

Nicole's eyes followed Emma, who strutted away with a flip of the hair, and the strides of someone who wanted to get out of there as soon as possible.

Nicole felt crushed, and dizzy. Her heart was palpating, and sweat trickled down her forehead. She knew that she had to maintain her composure in front of Cara and the other women in the room, but her mind was a jumbled mess.

Cara approached her, her eyes sweeping over her body with an appreciative gaze. "You look stunning, as always," she said, her voice low and sensual. "Come, let me introduce you to my friends."

Nicole followed Cara to the center of the room, where the women were still gathered. Cara introduced Nicole as her personal stylist, and the women made polite small talk. Nicole tried her best to act normal, but her mind was still reeling from her encounter with Emma.

As the women started to leave, Cara took Nicole by the hand and led her to the bar. "Let me make you a drink," she said, smiling at Nicole.

Nicole nodded, grateful for the distraction. She watched as Cara expertly mixed a cocktail, her hands moving with precision as she added the ingredients to a crystal glass. The smell of alcohol and fruit filled the air, and Nicole felt her nerves calm slightly as Cara handed her the drink. Nicole took a sip of the drink, the sweet and sour taste exploding on her tongue. She felt a warmth spread through her body and the alcohol burn down her throat. She knew that she needed to keep her wits about her, but the drink was helping to calm her nerves.

"You should've called me once you reached the building. I didn't want you showing up in front of my friends. They've already started gossiping about me," Cara said, raising the glass to her lips and taking a sip, her eyes locked on Nicole from over the rim of the glass.

"I'm sorry... I didn't know," Nicole responded, feeling a twinge of unease.

"What's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost," Cara remarked, tracing a finger along the edge of the glass and moving closer to Nicole. "Are you nervous about me using that 9-inch strap-on on you tonight?"

Nicole forced a smile, trying to play her part for the evening. "Since when have massive, monstrous strap-ons ever scared me?" she quipped, taking a step closer to Cara, their breasts brushing against each other ever so slightly.

Cara chuckled and, with a theatrical tug, pulled Nicole into her. Their bodies collided, the force pushing Cara against the sleek bar counter.

A trembling hand caught Nicole by her throat, and lightly choked her. Nicole noticed the hunger in Cara's eyes, and she knew the woman was getting aroused.

But Nicole was hardly in the mood to get dominated. Her thoughts were still with Emma, and the coldness of her voice. She could not shake the image of Emma storming away from her, almost in disgust.

Suddenly, Cara was kissing her, as hard as she could, while her dress was being pulled off her. The dress hit the marble floor with a gentle swish, and her bra came off next.

Cara broke the kiss, and their eyes met. "I'm not in the mood to play games," Cara said, the timbre of her voice low and sensual. "I'm going to go on the offensive, and you're going to take it."

Cara pushed Nicole against the marble floor, and lowered herself on Nicole. Her tongue licked at Nicole's flesh, starting at the shoulder, and

working its way down. She lingered at Nicole's nipples, licking and sucking them until they stood erect. She continued down Nicole's abdomen, her tongue making small circles on her skin before she reached her dripping-wet pussy. Nicole could feel the onset of desire spreading through her body. She had always fancied Cara, and her hands that would tremble with desire, and her desperate mouth and tongue that would sneak into spaces inside her pussy that no other woman had ever reached.

Cara's mouth engulfed Nicole's pussy, and she felt the woman's tongue slurp on her juices. Her tongue worked its way into every nook and cranny, like a ship that had been at sea for too long and was trying to replenish its water supply. Nicole moaned and writhed, her mind going blank.

She remembered Cara's promise, and felt the woman's teeth graze her clit. Nicole knew that soon, her hands would be handcuffed, her ass would be spanked raw, and she would be fucked senseless. She knew, that Cara had the ability, and the talent, to fuck all thoughts of Emma, and her shocked, disgusted face, out of Nicole's mind.

But did she want it?

Cara pinned Nicole's hands above her head, and leaned over her.

She was rasping, and saliva gleamed all around her lips. A finger and a thumb pressed against the side of Nicole's lips, and Cara breathed out in a sultry, desperate tone, "suck on it, baby."

Nicole obliged, and opened her mouth. The scent of her pussy juices was on Cara's fingers, and she sucked as hard as she could. Her tongue swirled around the fingers, and her lips clamped down on them.

Cara looked down at Nicole, and pulled her fingers out of Nicole's mouth. She brought her fingers to her lips, took a lick and a suck, and moaned. "I love the taste of your pussy on my tongue," she said, in a husky voice.

"And now, I am going to sit on your pretty face, and these juicy, red lips, until they are all swollen and...hurting from kissing my pussy," Cara

said, her tone low and deliberate.

Nicole felt Cara's ass rest on her face, and felt the woman's hands pull her ass cheeks apart. She felt Cara's pussy against her lips, and opened her mouth as wide as she could.

Nicole's tongue spread over Cara's pussy lips, and she inhaled the scent of the woman's juices. Cara moaned and bucked, grinding her pussy against Nicole's tongue. Her hands dug into Nicole's ass, and pulled her into her pussy.

Nicole closed her eyes, steeling herself to service her client. Usually, she would be willing, even eager, to satisfy both herself and her clients at this point, as she was a highly sexual person and sometimes enjoyed having sex for money.

But today, arousal was a distant memory. Her body functioned on autopilot, reacting to Cara's touches, kisses, and licks in the most mechanical way. She played her part, twisting her face into lustful expressions and ensuring Cara remained oblivious to her disinterest.

As Cara's passionate attentions continued, Nicole felt herself sinking into a dark, desolate abyss. Her heart seemed to fracture, shattering into a million pieces. Her mind screamed in agony, begging for release from these shackles, longing for the freedom to think only of Emma.

Nicole's tongue worked on Cara's pussy, but the intensity of her strokes weakened, and tears threatened to spill from her eyes.

Then, suddenly, the weight of Cara's body lifted, and the scent of her arousal dissipated. Nicole opened her eyes to see Cara lying beside her, propped up on her elbows, gazing at her with a mix of concern and sadness in her eyes.

"I'm sorry," Nicole whispered, sitting up straight and burying her face in her hands. "I'm really sorry. I have some things going on in my personal life, and I know that's no excuse, but..."

"It's okay," Cara said gently, placing a reassuring hand on Nicole's shoulder. "I understand. You can't always be in the mood for sex. You can go home, and don't worry, I'll still pay you."

Usually composed, Nicole couldn't hold back any longer. She began sobbing like a child, her emotions finally breaking through the façade she had tried so hard to maintain.

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Chapter Six

Nicole hurried out of Cara's apartment, feeling a desperate need to find solace in Emma's presence. She quickly hailed an Uber, and as the car sped towards Emma's house, she couldn't help but contemplate the words she would say when they finally met.

Would she be completely honest with Emma? Or would she keep some secrets to protect her own heart? How could she even imagine pursuing a romantic relationship with Emma when she couldn't leave her profession and couldn't promise loyalty?

The city's night lights blurred past her, casting shadows on her tear-streaked face as the weight of her reality pressed down upon her. The once-vibrant metropolis now seemed like a cold, unfeeling void, reflecting the turmoil in her heart. The city that had once felt like her playground now mocked her, its laughter echoing like hollow taunts in her ears.

Nicole reached for her phone, her hand trembling slightly as she dialed Emma's number. It rang and rang, but there was no answer. Her heart sank further as if the rejection of the unanswered call was the final nail in the coffin of her dreams.

In that moment, the car felt like a cage, trapping her in the bleak reality of her life. She had thought that maybe, just maybe, she could find solace and understanding with Emma. But now, it seemed that the universe was conspiring against her, tearing apart the fragile threads of hope she had clung to so desperately.

The sorrowful melody of Sufjan Stevens' "Casimir Pulaski Day" filled the car as the driver navigated the city streets. The haunting tune wrapped around Nicole like a shroud, intensifying the ache in her heart. Unable to

bear the melancholy notes any longer, she finally spoke up, her voice cracking with emotion.

"Could you please stop playing this song?" she asked the driver, her voice barely above a whisper.

"Of course," the driver responded, his eyes meeting hers in the rearview mirror with a flicker of understanding. He turned off the music, and the sudden silence enveloped them.

However, the absence of sound only served to amplify the turmoil in Nicole's mind. The quiet seemed to scream at her, the oppressive stillness a haunting reminder of the emptiness she felt inside.

Desperate for a distraction, she addressed the driver again. "Could you play something else? Maybe some rap music?"

The driver nodded and searched for a suitable playlist. Soon, the car was filled with the rhythmic beats and aggressive lyrics of Kendrick Lamar's "Humble." The raw energy of the music chased away some of the shadows that had been clinging to her, providing a temporary reprieve from the relentless sadness threatening to consume her.

As the car pulled up in front of Emma's apartment building in Brooklyn, Nicole realized she still hadn't figured out what she would tell her. The uncertainty gnawed at her as she stepped out onto the sidewalk, her heart pounding in her chest. The building was a charming old brownstone, its worn bricks and ornate details speaking of a rich history that contrasted with the modern world swirling around it.

A strong gust of wind picked up, ruffling Nicole's hair and sending a shiver down her spine. She felt nervous, shaky, and excited all at once, a storm of emotions brewing within her as she approached the entrance. With a deep breath, she pressed the buzzer to Emma's apartment, her finger trembling slightly as she did so.

The Uber that had brought her there pulled away from the curb, taking the sound of the rap music with it, as if the universe was orchestrating the

perfect dramatic backdrop for this pivotal moment in her life. And there she stood, on the threshold of a decision that could change everything, with nothing but her racing thoughts and the wild wind for company.

"Who is it?" Emma's voice crackled over the speaker.

"It's me, Nicole," Nicole said, running a hand through her hair.

"What are you doing here?"

"Can we talk?"

"No, Nicole. I don't want to talk to you. Never show up at my house again."

"Emma..please...give me a chance to explain."

Nicole heard the sound of another woman, before the intercom went silent.

She stood waiting for a few minutes, before the main door opened, and Emma walked out, wearing a very elegant night dress, which looked like a silken soft gown from a Victorian-era painting. White, flowing, tied at the front with a pink sash. The sleeves were long and gathered at the wrists. The bodice was gathered and pleated, falling in layers.

Nicole felt like a lowly hooker in front of Emma, dressed in a revealing dress, the smell of another woman's juices on her body, dried tears leaving a streak on her face, and smeared mascara running down her cheeks. Emma's icy stare made Nicole feel even more naked than if Emma had stripped her naked at that moment.

"I'm sorry I lied," Nicole began, her voice heavy with remorse. "I didn't want to tell you why I was canceling on us."

"And why is that?" Emma asked, folding her arms in front of her.

"Do you want me to say it?"

"Yes, I want you to say it."

Nicole sighed. She deserved this.

"Because I had to go to a client."

"You're missing out on a vital piece of information. You had to go to a client, to have sex with her, on the day we had decided to meet... on the day... I was ready to give us a chance."

"What?" Emma's words stabbed Nicole, and she felt the wound sting, a pain beyond anything she had ever experienced before. "You were ready to give us a chance?"

"Yeah... I was. And it took a lot of strength and effort for me to finally decide to... give a shot at happiness. But I chose the wrong person for it. It's not even your fault, Nicole. You were just doing your job. But it's unfair to me, isn't it? How can I start fresh, after years of pain, with a woman who has sex with other people as part of her profession?"

"I understand, and it breaks my heart, Emma. Don't you think I want someone to love me as well? Do you know what it's like to spend nights pretending to enjoy another woman's company, while secretly yearning for the company of the woman you want to be with? I wish... I swear... I wish I could just quit tomorrow and show you how much I want to give us a shot. You deserve it. But... what will I do without this job? How will I support and educate my daughter?"

"You could help your father with the repair shop," Emma suggested.

"He barely makes enough to support himself."

"You could take up an administrative job, become a secretary or a personal assistant."

"Who would hire a former stripper and escort to be their personal assistant?"

Emma pursed her lips and looked away from Nicole. She knew Nicole was right; she had no option but to continue with her current line of work, even though Emma wished with all her heart that she didn't.

After a silence of about a minute, Emma looked at Nicole, and her eyes softened, and her body relaxed.

"You shouldn't have lied to me."

"I know," Nicole dropped her gaze, and felt another gust of wind slap her from the side.

"I get it. I understand why you did...what you did. I would have done the same, if my child's education and well-being were on the line, but..."

"Please...no buts," Nicole looked up, her eyes pleading silently with Emma not to continue her sentence.

"But..." Emma continued, her voice trembling, "we can't make this work. This is too complicated for me. It's too much. I only see us going up in flames in the future. I... wish you were just a cab driver, or a waitress... but you're not. And I wish I was progressive... or brave enough to accept your profession, but I'm not. Maybe if I was younger, maybe if you were my first love, but not at this age, Nicole."

Nicole felt a sharp pang of sadness in her chest, her heart aching with the weight of her own choices and the love she had for Emma. She looked into Emma's eyes, searching for any glimmer of hope, any chance that they could still make this work.

"I understand," Nicole whispered, her voice barely audible as she fought back her own tears. "I wish things were different, but I can't change my past, and I can't change my present situation. But... please, Emma, isn't there anything I can do to make you see how much I care about you?"

"Did you have sex with Cara?" Emma mustered the courage to utter the words, her voice barely audible.

"I... I left her apartment, Emma. I came straight to you. I didn't stay there for the entirety of the time she had booked me." Nicole's voice trembled, desperate to make Emma understand.

"Did you have sex with her? Did you kiss her, even for a moment?" Emma persisted, her gaze fixed on Nicole, searching for the truth.

Nicole knew she couldn't evade the question any longer. She had to be honest with Emma, no matter how much it hurt.

"Yes," she admitted, her eyes welling with tears as she looked away, unable to meet Emma's gaze. "But I had to... This doesn't change how deeply I've come to care about you," Nicole said, her eyes drifting to the ominous dark clouds gathering in the sky.

Emma looked at Nicole, her eyes glistening with unshed tears, the pain of the decision she was about to make etched on her face. "I care about you too, Nicole, more than I ever thought I could. But I have to protect my own heart, and I just don't think I can do that with you."

For a moment, the two women stood in silence, the air between them heavy with regret and unspoken wishes. It was as if time had stopped, allowing them a final, lingering moment together before the harsh reality of their circumstances forced them apart.

A storm brewed in the distance, the dark clouds mirroring the heaviness in their hearts. The once lively streets were now empty and desolate as if the world itself was mourning the love they were about to lose.

Nicole took a shaky breath, feeling the last of her hope slipping away. "Take care of yourself, Emma," she murmured, then turned and walked away, leaving behind the woman she had fallen for, and the dream of a life they could never share.

As Nicole's footsteps echoed down the empty street, Emma leaned against the wall of her apartment building, struggling to hold back her tears.

In the cold, unforgiving wind, the storm approached, and with it, the lingering sadness of a love lost to circumstance.



Emma found herself sinking deeper into the throes of her heartache. She had taken a leave of absence from her teaching job, claiming an illness, but the truth was her emotional turmoil left her unable to function. For days, she sat by the Victorian window of her room, her gaze lingering on the world outside yet not truly seeing it, as if her mind was trapped in a cage of despair. She spoke to no one, her silence a reflection of her broken spirit.

Scarlett tried to reach out to her sister, her concern growing with each passing day. "Emma, please talk to me. I can't bear to see you like this. What's wrong?" she implored, the worry evident in her voice.

But Emma could only muster a faint, "Please, Scarlett, I just need some time alone," her voice barely a whisper, brushing off her friend's persistent inquiries.

"What happened on the date? You haven't told me a single thing since you came back," Scarlett pressed, her concern palpable.

Emma met her sister's gaze hesitantly, as if mustering the energy to do so drained her of her last reserves. "It didn't work out, Scarlett. Nicole and I... we can never be together, and that's all I'm willing to say. I just need some time alone."

Scarlett found herself at a loss for words. She had never been particularly adept at motivational speeches or knowing precisely what to say in situations like these. Nonetheless, she enveloped her sister in a warm embrace, providing comfort the best way she knew how. Despite being swamped with wedding preparations, Scarlett made sure to check up on Emma regularly.

Even Daniella tried to cheer Emma up, going as far as showing her some embarrassingly hilarious pictures of Scarlett from one of their

trekking trips. Emma took one look at the photo of a sunburned Scarlett, her skin as red as a lobster at a beach barbeque, and managed a melancholic grin. But the brief moment of amusement faded quickly, and Emma once again turned her face to gaze out the window, her eyes aimlessly following the pedestrians walking to and fro on the pavement below.

After a week of Emma's self-imposed isolation, Scarlett's patience began to wear thin. Her own wedding was fast approaching, and she couldn't fathom the thought of her sister wallowing in misery during this crucial time. Frustration bubbled over, and they had a mini fight.

"Emma, you can't keep doing this to yourself. Whatever it is that's hurting you, you need to face it and move on. I need you by my side!" Scarlett exclaimed, her voice a mix of concern and frustration.

"I'm sorry, Scarlett," Emma said, tears welling in her eyes. "I just... I can't right now."

Desperate to escape her pain, Emma took long, solitary walks in Central Park. She immersed herself in World War II podcasts, hoping the tales of blood, heroics, and struggle would keep her mind off romance. But no matter how hard she tried to distance herself from love, the ache in her heart persisted.

One evening, she returned home to find Scarlett and Daniella sharing a romantic candlelight dinner. The sight of their love and happiness sent a wave of despair crashing over Emma, and she retreated to her room, unable to hold back the torrent of tears.

As she cried herself to sleep, memories of Alice and the hurt Nicole had caused her swirled through her mind like a storm. The pain was overwhelming, consuming her from the inside out, and Emma felt more alone and lost than ever before.

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The strip club was a dimly lit den of smoky seduction, with sultry red lights casting a warm glow over the room. Plush velvet booths lined the walls, and the intoxicating scent of perfume and liquor hung in the air. Patrons clad in dark suits and loosened ties whispered among themselves, anticipation etched on their faces as they waited for the night's main event.

With fierce determination, Nicole stepped onto the stage. She was dressed to kill – a figure-hugging, black sequined dress that clung to her curves, accentuating every movement. The plunging neckline revealed just enough to keep the patrons wanting more, while the thigh-high slit showcased her toned legs, which seemed to go on forever.

The sultry beats of "Wicked Games" by The Weeknd began to pulse through the air, Nicole's body seemed to meld with the music, her movements a raw expression of the frustration and anger that consumed her. Each sway of her hips, each arch of her back, was a powerful statement of defiance and pain, a way to channel the sadness that threatened to overwhelm her.

Feeling the heat of the stage lights on her skin, Nicole slowly began to undress. She started with her red stilettos, kicking them off one by one, her movements deliberate and controlled. Then, with tantalizing slowness, she unzipped her dress, allowing it to slide down her body and pool around her ankles. Every piece of clothing removed was like shedding a layer of her sadness, a cathartic release that she desperately craved.

Her eyes blazed with an untamed intensity as she approached the gleaming pole at the center of the stage, now dressed in nothing but a barely-there lingerie set. With a grace that defied gravity, Nicole wrapped her limbs around the cold steel, her body gliding through the air, her sadness turned into an almost furious elegance. The patrons, entranced by the raw emotion on display, could not tear their eyes away from her performance, their voices blending into a cacophony of cheers and whistles.

As Nicole continued to dance, every twist and turn a testament to her heartache, she felt the weight of her despair begin to lift, if only for a moment. Her arms reached towards the ceiling as if trying to touch the sky, her legs twirling and winding around the pole with an almost supernatural

ease. The energy of her performance crackled in the air like electricity, each movement infused with the passion of a thousand suns.

Her body undulated and writhed, as though the music and the emotions within her were fighting to break free. With every spin and flip, she felt a semblance of control returning, a reclaiming of the power she thought she had lost. The sweat glistening on her skin was a testament to the intensity of her performance, the way she threw herself into the dance, fearless and unyielding.

As the music reached its crescendo, Nicole's body coiled around the pole, her hands gripping it tightly as she hung upside down. She gazed out at the crowd through hazy eyes, her breath coming in short gasps. She had given everything she had to this moment, leaving nothing left to give.

The patrons erupted into applause, their adulation washing over her like a warm wave. But Nicole barely heard them, lost in the ecstasy of her performance. She hung there for a few moments longer, savoring the heady rush of adrenaline and emotion that coursed through her veins.

Finally, with fluid grace, she untangled herself from the pole and landed on the stage, her body alight with energy. The patrons were still applauding, their faces flushed with excitement. Nicole couldn't help but smile, feeling lighter than she had in months.

Backstage, Nicole found herself sitting in solitude, her gaze fixed on the mirror as she contemplated Susie's school trip experience. She was still dressed in her provocative three-piece lingerie, the fabric hugging her body like a sultry second skin.

The dimly lit backstage was a cacophony of scents - the pungent aroma of sweat mingling with the sweet and heady perfume, a blend of cheap hairsprays and luxurious fragrances. The atmosphere was heavy with humidity, charged by the exertions of the dancers who had occupied the space before her. In one corner, a haphazard pile of photography equipment lay abandoned, a testament to its disuse and disregard.

Nicole's eyes wandered to the decanter, its contents a shimmering amber liquid that seemed to beckon her. Hesitating for a moment, she finally reached out and poured herself a generous measure of whiskey into a vibrant red plastic cup. The liquid burned a trail down her throat, a fleeting solace against the storm raging within her.

Seconds turned into minutes, and the whiskey in the decanter slowly diminished as Nicole took one gulp after another, the alcohol coursing through her veins.

Nicole lifted the cup to her lips again, the whiskey calling her name. One sip followed another, her mind screaming, pleading for her to halt. She knew the danger, the past that haunted her – alcoholism, the demon she had once wrestled.

But she couldn't stop. The cup tilted, liquid fire pouring down her throat. Glassy eyes stared back from the mirror, watching the self-destruction in progress. Each swallow brought temporary solace, yet pushed her closer to the precipice.

Nicole, drowning in sorrow, ignored the warnings. The red cup emptied, and her heart sank deeper into despair.

The door creaked open, the manager, Candy, stepped inside, her high heels clicking against the floor. Her gaze locked on Nicole, taking in the disheveled state of the woman. "A patron wants a private lap dance," she announced, her voice firm yet tinged with concern.

Nicole tried to respond, but her words slurred, barely comprehensible. Determined, she attempted to stand up, her body wobbling, threatening to betray her. Candy's eyes widened, concern deepening, as Nicole nearly collapsed to the floor.

"Go home," Candy urged gently, her hand reaching out to steady Nicole.

"No," Nicole protested, her voice wavering but resolute. She steadied herself, gripping the edge of the vanity. "Who's the patron?"

Candy hesitated, her gaze searching Nicole's face before she replied, "A blonde woman. Calls herself 'The Bombshell'."

Nicole's heart skipped a beat, her breath catching in her throat. Memories swirled, the name echoing in her whiskey-soaked mind, a whirlwind of emotions threatening to overpower her.

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Nicole's steps faltered as she entered the dimly lit private lap dance area, her heart pounding in her chest. There, reclining on the plush sofa, was none other than 'The Bombshell' Eva Santino. Her eyes widened in disbelief, her body tense.

Eva exuded an air of confidence and sensuality, her long golden hair cascading over her shoulders, framing her stunning face reminiscent of Gigi Hadid. Her piercing blue eyes, seductive and inviting, seemed to dance with mischief as they locked onto Nicole's. Her full, pouty lips curved into a knowing smirk, as if fully aware of the effect she had on others.

Clad in a tight, red silk dress that hugged her every curve, Eva's figure was nothing short of breathtaking. The plunging neckline accentuated her ample cleavage, while the slit up the side of the dress revealed a glimpse of her toned, tanned legs. She crossed them with deliberate slowness, drawing attention to her slender ankles and the designer heels that adorned her feet.

Memories of their three-year relationship flooded Nicole's mind, the passion and the pain intertwined. Eva, the ex who had abandoned her for a rich, old Hollywood producer in pursuit of movie roles, was back in the city.

"Is this some kind of twisted joke, or am I hallucinating?" Nicole's voice emerged low and unsteady, betraying her inner turmoil.

"Are you drunk? Does Candy still let her girls drink on the job?" Eva asked, reclining on her arms and offering Nicole the most self-satisfied smirk she had ever seen.

"Only her best girls," Nicole retorted, her eyes narrowing on her ex, who, she couldn't deny, looked incredibly tempting in her silk dress. Her alcohol-fueled mind spun, struggling to comprehend why this was happening to her. Why had Eva chosen to reappear at the moment she was most vulnerable?

"Obviously, I had to leave for you to become the best," Eva taunted.

"I was the best even when you were hanging around, desperately seeking a sugar daddy behind my back!" Nicole snapped, taking a step closer to Eva, who maintained her infuriating smirk.

"Show me, then. Bring yourself over here, and let's see what you've got."

"I'll charge triple the usual rate."

"Why? That's against the club rules."

"I make the rules here," Nicole sauntered over to Eva, raised a leg, and placed it seductively on the couch beside her. Leaning forward, she whispered, "Triple, and the price will rise the more you make me wait."

Eva's eyes fell on Nicole's leg, admiring the sheer black lingerie that accentuated her Kylie Jenner-like body. She parted her lips and let out a low moan, her eyes widening with desire as they moved up to Nicole's face.

"That's a deal," she breathed finally, reaching forward to touch Nicole's leg.

The heat of Eva's fingers sent waves of hatred through Nicole's body, and for a moment she felt as if time had stopped, and all that remained was a ball of fury, twisting and turning in the air between her and Eva.

"Why are you here, Eva?" Nicole inquired, gracefully lowering herself onto Eva's lap, her legs straddling Eva's waist and her hands draped around her neck. "Is that old man not satisfying you properly?"

"The old man is dead," Eva whispered, her breath catching in her throat as Nicole's lips grazed the side of her neck, and she slowly began to undulate her heart-shaped hips against the supple skin of Eva's thighs.

"Oh...so that must mean...you're wealthy now, right?" Nicole teased, her sultry voice adding an alluring edge to her words.

Eva swallowed hard, releasing a deep, lingering sigh as Nicole's parted lips descended on the side of her neck.

"Damn...you still make me so incredibly wet," Eva purred, her hands gripping Nicole's waist.

"No! No touching! Those are the club rules," Nicole admonished, pinning Eva's hands above her head as she intensified the rhythm of her hips, moving with even more flair and seduction.

The sensual movements of Nicole's body ignited a fire inside Eva, sending waves of pleasure through her entire body. With each grinding circle that Nicole slowly traced around her lap, Eva felt as though time was standing still, and all she wanted was for the moment to never end.

Nicole shifted her weight slightly and began to sway her hips from side to side, squeezing and releasing the muscles in Eva's inner thighs with every thrust. She then let out a soft moan and released one hand from Eva's neck before dipping it between their bodies and lightly tracing circles on the fabric of the pleasure mound beneath them. The sensation quickly drove Eva wild as she clung tightly onto Nicole's hips, biting down lightly on her shoulder with each new wave of pleasure that surged above them.

Nicole then slowly rose up onto her hands until only their torsos connected, allowing her free-range movement in full view of Eva. Rolling her hips sensuously forward and back, she used fingers entangled in their hair to keep their eyes locked throughout the dance. As Nicole continued to tantalize Eva with her slow sultry moves, Eva could feel herself trembling with anticipation as every part of her ached for release.

Nicole grabbed onto her ex's throat and pushed her back forcefully. Eva's eyes rolled in terror as she tried to catch her breath. Nicole let out a deep, rumbling voice, and tucked some of her raven black hair away from her face. "I told you..." she sneered. "No touching!"

"Do you miss me? Do you regret leaving me?" Nicole asked with a hint of smugness in her tone. "We were meant for each other, Eva," she added mockingly, "a stripper should only be with another stripper. That's our destiny...and nothing else". With that, Nicole released her grip on Eva's pale throat, revealing red finger marks etched into the porcelain skin. She dove between Eva's legs, thrusting her hands inside the tight dress and snatching at the panties beneath.

"I miss the sex," Eva breathed heavily, "I miss your fucking body!" Nicole rewarded this statement with a smirk before tugging the panties aside and scraping her long bright red fingernails along the folds of Eva's pussy lips.

"I know I am drunk...and this is probably the alcohol speaking, but right now, I want nothing more to fuck you senseless," said Nicole, positioning herself in a way that both her, and Eva's pussy were almost touching, "spread your legs!"

The mix of hatred, heartbreak, and alcohol was making Nicole breathless with sudden, forbidden pleasure. She could hear screams in her own voice, in the back of her head, begging her to let go of her ex, but she ignored the voice.

She had lost Emma.

But she could still enjoy hate sex with her ex, who was still desperate for her.

Eva complied, opening her legs wide as Nicole pushed her body down onto Eva's and leaned in for a deep kiss. Their tongues entwined in unison and Nicole moaned with pleasure, her hands roaming down the curves of Eva's body as the two women explored each other with a newfound intensity.

Nicole ground her hips into Eva's as Eva returned the gesture, pulling at the straps of Nicole's lingerie with both hands.

"What's gotten...into...you?" Eva asked through the kiss, as Nicole devoured her ex's mouth, "I wasn't expecting this...when I walked in."

Nicole grunted, and grabbed Eva's hair in a fist, "you caught me at my worst time, and your best. I would have kicked you out of this room, if only..." Nicole pressed her crotch so tight against Emma that their pussies began to make out.

"If only what?" Eva asked, as sweat dripped down the side of her face, and she held onto Nicole for dear life, as the stripper had her way with her.

"If only I could find a way to be with her!" said Nicole, and started humping Eva harder than ever.

Nicola reached forward with her spare hand and pushed a finger inside of Eva's pussy, then another.

"Oh, fuck!" Eva moaned, her mouth gaping open as the hot and wet sensations of the stripper's fingers pleased her inside.

"But if I can't, then why not be the best at what I do," Nicole moaned in Eva's ear, as she pounded her now wet pussy with her fingers, "I am number one, you get that?"

"Oh fuck..." Eva whispered, out of breath, as Nicole fucked her harder and harder.

"I'm still the number one," Nicole moaned, as she stuck another finger inside Eva's pussy.

"Oh my God, oh my God," Eva breathed, and then, "I'm cumming!"

"Yeah, you better!" moaned Nicole.

The two women closed their eyes and rocked back and forth, grinding against each other, letting the pleasures of the flesh overwhelm them.

And then it was all over.

Nicole flung herself off of Eva, who was quivering like a rag doll.

"Don't forget...triple the price. Pay at the bar, and make sure they hear my name loud and clear, and...don't you dare ever step foot in this place again," Nicole spat out, disgust dripping from her words. She had known this would happen; reckless and irresponsible were two words she knew all too well.

"How about coffee? Later?" Eva murmured meekly, finally making eye contact with Nicole as she tugged at her dress to cover her body.

"No. This was a sympathy fuck. I know that old man left you high and dry. He gave it all to his daughter instead of you, so now here you are back to square one. Been looking for some work in every strip joint around huh? Now get out before I puke."

"Fuck you," Eva snarled, standing up from the couch, "you don't get to treat me like this," she growled through gritted teeth as Nicole sashayed over to the full-length mirror.

"Oh but I just did," Nicole purred, "so scurry on outta here. Got to put on my face and costume again before I go back on stage. Three minutes 'til showtime!"

Eva glared before storming off, slamming the door behind her.

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Chapter Seven

Nicole sat at the oak dining table with her daughter, Susie, helping her with her history homework. Susie, a bright-eyed twelve-year-old with chestnut curls cascading down her back, was working on a project about the American Revolution. The cozy living room was filled with the warmth of their laughter as they discussed historical figures and events. Soft sunlight filtered through the sheer curtains, casting a golden hue on the framed family photographs adorning the walls.

The phone rang, disrupting their focused concentration. Nicole answered it, her face shifting from a smile to a look of concern as she listened to her father, Logan, on the other end of the line.

"Dad, what's going on?" Nicole asked, anxiety lacing her voice.

"Nicole, I'm sorry, but I have to leave town urgently for some important work. I need you to go to the cabin and look after the guests and arrangements for Scarlett's wedding. I won't be able to do it myself," Logan explained.

"But Dad, Susie has school, and I can't just leave her here," Nicole protested, glancing at her daughter, who was now watching her with curiosity.

"Don't worry about that. My girlfriend will babysit Susie while you're gone," Logan reassured her.

Nicole hesitated, her mind racing with thoughts of facing Emma again. The prospect of hosting Scarlett's guests filled her with dread, because she wouldn't just be hosting Scarlett and her friends, but also Emma, who she

hadn't spoken to ever since they parted ways on Emma's porch almost a week 10 days ago.

"Dad, are you sure there's no other option?" Nicole asked, desperate for an alternative.

"We promised Scarlett and Emma, Nicole. We can't bail on them now. Besides, is everything alright with Emma? You've been avoiding talking about her, or Scarlett," Logan inquired gently.

"Everything's fine, Dad. I'll head over to the cabin and take care of everything," Nicole lied, trying to keep her voice steady.

With a sigh, Nicole hung up the phone and turned her attention back to Susie, her mind already preoccupied with the impending reunion with Emma and the emotional turmoil it would undoubtedly bring.

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Over a candlelit dinner, Scarlett shared the news with Emma and Daniella. The flickering flames cast a warm glow on their faces as they enjoyed their meal. Scarlett, unable to hide her concern, broached the subject carefully.

"Emma, there's been a slight change of plans for the wedding. Logan has to leave town for work, so Nicole will be staying with us at the cabin and helping with the preparations," she said, her voice hesitant.

Emma's heart skipped a beat, her fork hovering mid-air as she processed the information. She took a deep breath, trying to hide the worry that threatened to consume her. Daniella glanced between the sisters, sensing the tension in the room.

"Are you going to be okay with that, Emma?" Scarlett asked, her eyes searching Emma's for any sign of distress.

Emma mustered a smile and set her fork down, meeting her sister's gaze with determination. "Of course, Scarlett. This is your wedding, and I'll make sure I handle all my responsibilities well. I'll set everything aside and focus on making your special day perfect."

Scarlett looked relieved, her shoulders relaxing a bit as she reached across the table to grasp Emma's hand. "Thank you, Emma. I really appreciate it."

Daniella chimed in, offering her support. "We'll all work together and make sure everything goes smoothly."

As the three of them continued their dinner, Emma couldn't help but feel a mixture of anxiety and anticipation at the prospect of seeing Nicole again. She resolved to be strong and put her sister's happiness first, no matter the emotional challenges that lay ahead.



Nicole sought refuge in her father's shed, immersing herself in the task of restoring a vintage motorcycle as a means of distraction. The scent of oil and gasoline intermingled with the earthy aroma of the surrounding woods, creating an environment that was both nostalgic and oddly comforting. Sunlight filtered through the dusty windows, casting warm beams of light on the worn wooden floor and the tools that lay scattered about.

Her hands, stained with grease and calloused from years of hard work, moved with the steady precision of a skilled artisan. The rhythmic clicking of the wrench as it tightened bolts and adjusted gears served as a metronome, allowing her thoughts to focus solely on the task at hand. With each turn and twist, she found herself temporarily escaping the reality of Emma's impending arrival, her anxiety momentarily pacified by the intricate dance of metal and machinery.

Despite the solace she found within the shed, Nicole could not completely quell the nervous energy that stirred within her. It pulsed like a

heartbeat, a constant reminder of the emotional storm that was brewing on the horizon. The motorcycle she worked on stood as a metaphor for her own emotions—something that was once beautiful and powerful, now in need of repair and understanding.

Nicole wiped her brow, her hands smudged with grease, as the distant hum of an engine reached her ears. Her pulse quickened, anticipation knotting her stomach. She stepped outside the shed, shielding her eyes from the sun, the wind teasing her hair.

Emma's car rolled into the clearing, stirring up a cloud of dust behind it. Scarlett, Cassie, and Chloe tumbled out, their laughter and chatter weaving through the air, a lively soundtrack to the unfolding scene. The atmosphere crackled with excitement and anticipation, the energy palpable and infectious.

Nicole's eyes locked onto Emma, an invisible magnetic force drawing them together despite their unease. Awkwardness and nerves tangled in the space between them, an unspoken language of the heart.

"Working hard...or hardly working?" Scarlett teased, rushing to Nicole and enveloping her in a bear hug.

"Hardly getting anything done, more like," Nicole replied, her eyes drifting over the rest of the group.

Scarlett proceeded to introduce Cassie and Chloe to Nicole, who remembered them from the bachelorette party. Cassie, a slim, athletic, tall model with a striking resemblance to Kendall Jenner, grinned as she approached Nicole. Chloe, petite and innocent-looking, with a long ponytail, smiled warmly.

Cassie wrapped her arms around Nicole, pressing her body tightly against her as they embraced. "I've heard so much about you and your incredible moves," she purred, her voice sultry and teasing. "I mean, that night at the club, you were absolutely mesmerizing, like a goddess on the stage." Nicole couldn't help but blush at the compliment, feeling a mix of flattery and awkwardness.

Cassie leaned in closer, her breath warm against Nicole's ear as she continued, "I was so desperate for a private lap dance, you know? But, alas, it eventually went to Emma. Such a shame, really." She pulled back, her eyes twinkling mischievously. "But who knows, maybe I'll be lucky enough to receive one by the end of this wedding weekend." Cassie finished with a playful wink, leaving Nicole slightly taken aback, unsure of how to respond.

As the conversation unfolded, Emma stood at a distance, her expression a complex mix of amusement, curiosity, and a hint of jealousy, while she watched the exchange between Nicole and Cassie.

Finally, Nicole greeted Emma with an awkward hug, the tension between them palpable. Emma's embrace was stiff, and Nicole could feel the distance between them, even as their bodies touched.

"It's good to see you," Nicole said, trying to keep her tone light despite the turmoil in her chest.

Emma pulled back, her eyes flickering with emotion as she replied, "It's good to see you too, Nicole." Her voice was neutral, her words carefully chosen, and Nicole felt a pang of regret at the thought of what could have been.

Scarlett interrupted the moment, clapping her hands together. "Alright, ladies, enough of the mushy stuff. We have work to do!" she exclaimed, ushering them towards the cabin.

The group made their way into the cabin, their excited chatter echoing through the warm, rustic space. Nicole took the lead, showing them each to their rooms. The bedrooms were cozy and welcoming, adorned with soft linens, charming wooden furniture, and tasteful artwork on the walls. As they moved from room to room, Nicole tried to catch Emma's gaze, but Emma seemed determined not to meet her eyes, focusing instead on the surroundings and listening attentively to Nicole's explanations.

Scarlett's room was a spacious suite, perfect for the bride-to-be. The comfortable queen-sized bed was dressed in crisp white sheets, with a plush

comforter and an array of decorative pillows. Nicole had paid special attention to the details, hanging fairy lights around the room and arranging a beautiful bouquet of Scarlett's favorite flowers on the nightstand. A large window offered a stunning view of the woods outside, while a cozy reading nook by the window provided a quiet spot for reflection. Logan and Nicole had outdone themselves, even with the meager resources they had. Scarlett beamed at the sight, exclaiming, "Nicole, you've outdone yourself! This is absolutely perfect."

After settling Scarlett in, Nicole led the rest of the group to the other two rooms which were available for the wedding party. The atmosphere grew tense as the arrangements for the remaining rooms were discussed. The fourth bedroom belonged to Logan, which was to remain shut during the wedding festivities.

Each of the remaining rooms was similarly decorated, exuding a sense of warmth and comfort that made the guests feel at home. Emma hesitated, unsure if she wanted to share a room with Nicole, while Chloe, not knowing Nicole well enough, felt equally uncertain.

Cassie, sensing the awkwardness, offered to share a room with Nicole. "I wouldn't mind bunking with you," she said with a flirtatious grin, "I'm sure it would be quite the experience." The naughty undertone in her voice left no doubt about her intentions, making the situation all the more delicate.

Emma felt a knot of unease and anxiety twist in her stomach as Cassie's words rang in her ears. During the drive to the cabin, Cassie had been quite vocal about her intentions with Nicole, boldly announcing to the group her plans to make "sweet, sweet love" to the stunning stripper. Scarlett had done her best to silence Cassie, but Emma knew all too well that Cassie was the kind of woman who followed through on her desires, especially when those desires involved a breathtakingly gorgeous, curvaceous woman who appeared as if she had been sculpted by the gods themselves.

"Sure," Nicole replied, her radiant smile lighting up her face as she met Cassie's gaze. It was then that Nicole finally caught Emma's eye, and just as

quickly, the smile vanished from her face. Feeling exposed, the tall brunette hastily averted her gaze, unwilling to reveal her vulnerability.

"Alright, guys, you've got exactly one hour to rest before we head to the hotel where Danielle and her family are staying," Scarlett announced. "Emma, when do the decorators arrive?"

"They'll be here in the evening," Emma responded, her voice steady and reassuring. "Don't worry, I'll take care of them."

"I'll go to the caterers and make those changes to the menu," chimed in Chloe.

"And I," Cassie declared, dramatically throwing her arms up in the air, "will sit among the woods, beer in hand, and watch the sun set behind the trees!"

"Nicole, make sure she does not drink too much! If she starts drinking now, I will have a zombie as one of my bridesmaids," Scarlett said.

"Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on her," Nicole said, her eyes settling on Cassie, who looked visibly giddy.

"Not if I get you drunk as well!"

"We'll see about that," Nicole teased, her lips curling into a playful smirk. Emma watched the exchange with interest, sensing an undeniable chemistry between the two women. As the others dispersed to their rooms, Emma and Nicole found themselves alone in the cabin for a few fleeting moments. A tense silence hung in the air between them, punctuated only by the sound of Cassie cracking open a beer as she stepped inside the room she would be sharing with Nicole.

"Hey," Emma finally spoke up, breaking the silence. "I don't know if Scarlett mentioned this to you, but we're really grateful for your help with the wedding. It means a lot to us."

Nicole turned her gaze to Emma, and a smile of appreciation crept onto her lips. "Of course, Emma. I'm happy to help in any way I can. This wedding means a lot to Scarlett, and I want to make sure everything goes smoothly for her."

Emma nodded in agreement, but her mind was elsewhere. She couldn't help but notice the way Nicole's eyes lingered on her, and the sudden heat that rose to her cheeks made her feel all the more exposed.

"I also want to talk about the situation between us," Emma rushed her sentence, as if afraid if she took her time with it, she would never be able to get the words out.

"Okay..." Nicole said, curiously, her eyes scanning Emma's face, before dropping to her slim, graceful form for a few seconds, and painfully appreciating how ethereal and cute Emma looked, fiddling with her thumbs nervously.

There is no way this woman is 40.

Nicole, helpless and tortured, gazed at Emma for a few more seconds, admiring the effortless grace and beauty that seemed to surround her. Emma's sleek silk dress, the hue of a soft morning sky, hugged her curves just right and highlighted her slim waist. Her long, auburn hair flowed over her shoulders in gentle waves, perfectly framing her stunning features. Emma had always embodied an easy, modern elegance that reminded Nicole of Kate Middleton, and today was no exception. Her go-to minimal makeup, a subtle touch of blush on her cheeks, and her signature soft-pink lipstick only served to amplify her natural charm. The low-key pearl earrings and a delicate pendant necklace rounded out her look, making her even more captivating and impossible for Nicole to resist.

"Nicole?"

"Yeah?" Nicole snapped out of her reverie, focusing her attention on Emma's face.

"I don't want our history to affect Scarlett's wedding. I want us to be friends for the next two days, and... I want to enjoy this wedding without feeling anxious and nervous all the time."

"You don't have to worry about me, Emma. I'm over everything," Nicole replied, her tone more confident and self-assured than she truly felt.

"That's... good. But I'm not. I'm sorry, but I guess I'm a bit more emotional than you."

Nicole felt the sting of Emma's words.

"I didn't mean it that way. It was very hard for me too," Nicole said, trying to smooth things over.

"You don't have to say that to make me feel better. We're two different people, Nicole. That's the main reason why... things didn't work out. You're stronger, more resilient. I'm more of a softy, I guess. Anyway, thanks for everything you're doing for Scarlett and me, and please don't burden yourself with too much. Now that I'm here, I'll take care of everything."

"Yeah, just knock on my door if you need any help."

"Yeah, I'll make sure I knock, for more than one reason," Emma couldn't help herself, as her jealousy and anxiety regarding the budding chemistry between Cassie and Nicole spilled over.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Nicole was confused.

"I see how Cassie and you are hitting it off. She's more your type, you know. Better looking, younger, wild, and impulsive," Emma looked away, gazing out the window, her bitterness exposed.

"Cassie's not my type. I'm just being polite. Nothing's gonna happen between us, Emma. I'm not so petty as to parade a new girl in front of you so soon."

"You can if you want to; I shouldn't hold you back," Emma tried to make her words sound genuine, but she knew she was failing.

"It won't come to that," Nicole said, "but it's good to know it's affecting you," she couldn't help but tease Emma.

"It's not. In fact, I just told you it wouldn't bother me if the two of you hooked up!"

"Really?" Nicole raised an eyebrow, smirking.

"Yeah," said Emma, tearing her eyes away from Nicole's smoldering gaze. "But we should focus on the wedding and making this a special day for Scarlett. She deserves that much."

Nicole nodded in agreement, relieved that the tension between them had dissipated. "You're right. Scarlett is the most important thing right now. And I want to do whatever I can to make sure her day is perfect."

Emma smiled gratefully, feeling the weight of their conversation finally lift from her shoulders. "Thank you, Nicole. That means a lot."

With that, the two women stood in the silence of the cabin, lost in their own thoughts. It was a moment of peace before the chaos of the wedding preparations would resume, and as they stood there side by side, Emma couldn't help but wonder what the future held for her and Nicole. Could they truly be friends, or would their past continue to haunt them?

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As the night unfolded, Scarlett, Chloe, Cassie, and Emma gathered cozily in the inviting living room, sinking into the plush couches and armchairs. Soft, golden light flickered from the fireplace, casting a warm glow on their animated faces, and shadows dancing on the wooden walls. The scent of burning wood mingled with the aroma of the hot cocoa they'd been sipping on, creating an atmosphere that felt like home, a sanctuary from the cold night outside.

Chloe leaned forward, her eyes sparkling with curiosity as she asked, "So, Daniella is really struggling with her sister, huh?" A playful smile

tugged at the corner of her lips, and her red curls bounced with each excited gesture.

Scarlett chuckled and replied with a knowing nod, "Oh yeah, they just can't seem to agree on anything, from the table settings to the music choices. It's like watching a ping-pong match, back and forth."

Chloe enthusiastically chimed in, "Oh, you should have seen the caterer! He was such a sweetheart, and so attentive to every little detail." She leaned back, her eyes lighting up as she recounted her experience. "He walked me through the entire menu, making sure everything was just right. Even the vegetarian options – he suggested this amazing stuffed mushroom dish with goat cheese and fresh herbs."

Scarlett's eyes widened with interest, "That sounds delicious! I can't wait to try it."

Cassie playfully nudged Chloe, "I bet you spent extra time with the caterer just because he was charming, huh?"

"I am not like you, Cassie, I don't turn every polite conversation with a stranger into a full-blown flirting session," Chloe giggled, defending herself.

Cassie let out a laugh, "Hey, you never know when a totally innocent conversation can lead to something more."

Emma remained quiet, her fingers wrapped around the cool glass of lemonade, taking slow, thoughtful sips. Her gaze wandered towards the window where Nicole stood, her silhouette framed against the night sky. The full, luminous moon bathed the trees outside in an ethereal, silvery glow, casting a gentle light upon Nicole's face. Emma couldn't help but be drawn to her beauty, her heart aching with the memory of the connection they once shared.

Lost in her own world, Nicole gazed at the enchanting scene outside, her eyes following the moonbeams dancing on the leaves. She longed for the bond she and Emma had forged, a bond that now seemed to be slipping

through her fingers like sand. But she remained oblivious to Emma's wandering gaze and the inner turmoil that brewed beneath her calm exterior.

Emma, on the other hand, fought to maintain her composure, struggling to keep her emotions in check. She tried to appear unbothered by Nicole's presence, but the tug of her heart was hard to ignore. As the night wore on, the two women remained locked in their silent dance of longing and restraint.

"Scar, I've been working on a little dance number for your wedding," Cassie said with a playful wink.

"Don't tell me you're planning to do the chicken dance," Scarlett responded, her tone a mix of amusement and disbelief.

"Are you kidding? I would never dream of repeating our childhood dance at your wedding!" Cassie feigned shock, though the mischievous glint in her eyes hinted otherwise.

"No way, I am not allowing this!" Scarlett declared, laughing.

"Listen, girl, I'm dancing at your wedding whether you like it or not. It can either be a cute, nostalgic throwback to our childhood and the bond of our friendship, or it can be a sultry dance choreographed by Nicole, complete with a pole right in front of your wedding altar. You decide," Cassie said, turning her gaze towards Nicole, who also looked up at the mention of her name.

"What?" Nicole asked, caught off guard, while Emma's attention was suddenly drawn to the conversation.

"I'm just saying... wouldn't it be amazing if we performed together on Scarlett's big day? Two bridesmaids, slowly stripping away their long, flowy gowns, revealing a set of matching black lace lingerie. The crowd would go absolutely wild!" Cassie said, her voice dripping with suggestion, as a wicked grin spread across her face.

Scarlett couldn't help but laugh at the outrageous image Cassie painted. "Oh, you're unbelievable, Cass. That's definitely one way to make the wedding memorable!"

Nicole shook her head, amused but not entirely comfortable with the idea. "As fun as that sounds, I think I'll leave the dancing to you two. I'm here to support Scarlett, not to steal the spotlight."

Emma couldn't help but feel a pang of relief at Nicole's response, though she tried to hide it behind a chuckle. "I agree with Nicole. Let's keep the wedding classy, Cassie."

Cassie shrugged, her eyes alight with mischief. "Alright, alright, I get it. I'll tone it down a notch. I guess this is what I get for being the youngest in a group filled with boring, old women," she scoffed, leaving Emma to wonder if the comment was a jab at her. Nicole's eyes darted to Emma, gauging her reaction.

A sudden surge of anger rose within Emma, her fists clenching at her sides. She recognized Cassie's attempt to rile her up and make her uncomfortable in Nicole's presence. Determined not to let Cassie get the better of her, Emma took a deep breath, her voice steady as she retorted, "I don't think any of us are boring, Cassie. We're just not interested in making a spectacle of ourselves at Scarlett's wedding. Plus, pole dancing is an art, one that can't be learned overnight. I think we shouldn't take it too lightly."

Cassie raised her hands in surrender, the mischievous twinkle never leaving her eyes. "Okay, okay, I get it. No pole dancing at the wedding. But can I at least get a few private lessons while I'm staying with Nicole? What do you say, babe? I don't usually sleep before 4 anyway."

Emma's emotions teetered between annoyance and anxiety at Cassie's suggestion, her gaze snapping to Nicole. The thought of Nicole spending time alone with Cassie, let alone teaching her how to pole dance, was unbearable. But Nicole appeared unfazed, her expression neutral as she replied, "I'm sorry, Cassie, but I'm really tired tonight. Maybe after the wedding, when all of us aren't swamped with work?"

Cassie pouted playfully, "I can be quite persuasive, you know."

Nicole offered a weary smile, leaning against the wall, her eyes trained on Cassie, who sat with her long, model legs crossed and her brightly painted toes wriggling seductively.

Scarlett leaned forward, anticipation etched on her face as she awaited Nicole's response. Unfazed, Nicole replied with nonchalance. "Sorry, Cassie, but I'm not the type to be swayed by a few persuasive words. You'll have to do a lot more than just wriggle a few toes at me," Nicole said, briefly wondering if she'd stepped over a line.

Cassie, however, was resilient, and her advances only grew bolder as Nicole continued to ignore them. "Wait till we share a bed tonight, baby," she purred, draping herself in a cloak of seduction, batting her cat-like, almond-shaped eyes, and fixing Nicole with a gaze that smoldered like glowing embers.

For a fleeting moment, Nicole felt the allure of Cassie's charm, her heart racing in response. Cassie was undeniably captivating, and under normal circumstances, Nicole would have been all over her, their passion igniting like wildfire. But, fortunately, or unfortunately, Nicole's heart was ensnared by another – a woman who now regarded her with a pensive gaze.

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In the darkness of her room, Emma lay in bed, her body tangled in the soft, cream-colored sheets. She could feel the steady rhythm of her heartbeat against the pillow, pounding in her ears as her thoughts raced uncontrollably. She didn't want to care about Nicole or what might be happening in the room she shared with Cassie, but try as she might, she couldn't banish the images from her mind. Vivid scenes played out before her, of tender caresses and whispered words that only served to fuel her jealousy. The thought of them sleeping side by side, their bodies pressed together in the night, their breath mingling in the air between them, sent a searing pain through Emma's heart.

As the minutes turned into hours, Emma's restlessness grew more intense. Sleep seemed an impossible dream, leaving her wide awake and consumed by her own insecurities. The silvery moonlight filtering through the curtains cast eerie shadows on the walls, adding to her sense of unease. Eventually, she could no longer bear the weight of her thoughts, and she slipped out of bed, her feet padding softly on the cold wooden floor. The chill of the night air raised goosebumps on her skin, but she barely noticed, her mind too preoccupied with the turmoil of her emotions.

Emma hated herself for what she was about to do. She knew it was childish, immature, and downright embarrassing, but she couldn't help it. Her curiosity and jealousy drove her forward, like a moth drawn to a flame. As she tiptoed down the hallway, she tried to convince herself that it was just a moment of weakness, that she would never have stooped to such levels under normal circumstances.

Approaching Nicole and Cassie's room, Emma pressed her ear against the door, straining to catch even the faintest sound from within. She held her breath, her heart pounding in her chest, terrified of being discovered in such a compromising position.

Emma heard nothing for a few moments, and she was about to turn around when she heard a soft moan from inside the room. Her heart skipped a beat as she realized what was happening. She felt a sharp pain in her chest, and tears filled her eyes as she imagined Nicole and Cassie entangled in each other's arms. Emma's mind raced as she tried to decide what to do next.

Just then, she heard her name being called from behind her. She froze in place, her mind suddenly blanking out as the realization of what was happening hit her like a ton of bricks. She felt numb and hollow inside, utterly heartbroken. She wanted to run away and forget this ever happened, but it was too late. The person calling her name had already seen her standing outside the door.

Emma's heart sank as she felt the heavy weight of embarrassment settle over her, wishing she could simply dissolve into dust and be carried away by the wind. As she slowly turned around, she found Nicole standing

in front of her, wearing soft cotton booty shorts and a crop-top, her eyes dancing with amusement.

"Emma, what are you doing here?" Nicole inquired, her voice a mix of confusion and humor.

Instead of succumbing to the mortification of being caught eavesdropping, Emma's heart swelled with joy. She stood up straight, letting the waves of relief wash over her for just a moment. "I wanted to speak with you...about something related to the wedding," she said, her cheeks flushing as her heart hammered relentlessly against her chest. Nicole's smile broadened as she crossed her arms, her eyes twinkling with mischief.

"Then why were you standing outside my room with your ear pressed against the door?" she teased.

Emma's breath quickened as reality crashed back down on her. Once the relief of realizing Nicole and Cassie weren't intimately involved had dissipated, she was left facing the truth – she had been caught red-handed, eavesdropping like a jealous ex on the verge of a mental breakdown, dangerously close to being committed to an asylum.

"Because... well, I... I heard some moans from inside, and I couldn't help but wonder..." Emma stammered, struggling to find the right words.

"To know whether Cassie and I were hooking up?" Nicole asked, a sly grin on her face.

"A little," Emma finally admitted, her cheeks burning with embarrassment.

"And what did you discover?" Nicole couldn't help but revel in the rare opportunity to tease Emma, who was usually so poised and eloquent. Seeing her at a loss for words brought a playful satisfaction to Nicole.

Emma hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to respond. "Well, I... I didn't really find out anything," she admitted sheepishly, feeling foolish for having snooped in the first place.

Nicole laughed softly, the sound filling the dimly lit hallway like a warm embrace. "That's because nothing happened, Emma. I get hit on by women like Cassie almost daily."

"So, she did try to make a move on you?" Emma inquired.

Nicole hesitated for a moment before deciding to share more details with Emma. "Cassie did try to make a move on me while we were in bed, especially after she had a few drinks," she admitted. "But I told her that I was in love with someone else, and that nothing could ever happen between us."

Emma's heart raced at the revelation, her mind reeling from the implications. Could it be that Nicole was referring to her?

Nicole continued, a hint of embarrassment coloring her cheeks. "And now, well, it's possible that she's...pleasuring herself. I suppose that's what you heard, Emma."

"Wow..." Emma murmured, her voice barely audible, the surprise and disbelief apparent in her tone. "She must really be into you."

"Can you blame her?" Nicole replied, a playful, teasing grin spreading across her face as she raised an eyebrow in mock surprise.

"I suppose not," Emma conceded. "You do have a certain magnetic charm that seems to captivate women."

Nicole shrugged modestly. "Not all women, I guess."

"No," Emma insisted, "I'm sure it's every woman. Regardless of who they are or what their sexual orientation might be, I bet once they lay eyes on you, they can't help but wonder and fantasize about what it would be like to be with you."

"Did you ever fantasize?" Nicole asked, her voice barely a whisper, her eyes locked onto Emma's, searching for the truth.

Emma's cheeks flushed a deep crimson, her gaze shifting to the floor. "Get a few drinks in me, and I might be willing to share a bit more about that."

Nicole's smile widened, her curiosity piqued. "We might find a few bottles of beer in Cassie's suitcase," she suggested, her tone light and playful. "Speaking of her, should we leave her to her own... amusements?"

"I kinda... want to... listen in," Emma admitted, her voice full of curiosity and mischief, as she bit her lower lip, trying to suppress a grin.

Nicole's brown eyes shone with surprise and excitement. She leaned back against the wall, tucking a strand of her curly hair behind her ear. "Are you being serious right now?" she asked with a coy smile, her perfectly arched eyebrows raised in amusement. "What's gotten into you, Emma? Sneaking around late at night, trying to catch me...in the act?" Her voice was laced with humor and a hint of seduction.

Emma shifted her weight nervously from foot to foot, feeling the heat rush to her cheeks. "I know it sounds crazy," she said, her voice barely above a whisper. "But there are still a few things you don't know about me. We have hardly spent enough time together," Emma said with regret.

"Well, if we are to be friends for the next two days, I guess I should make complete use of that time, and get to know you," Nicole said with a smile.

"How much can you learn in two days?"

"Well, I need to know the basics, like...you have a thing for listening to your friends masturbate?"

Emma shushed Nicole, "yeah, yeah, we'll see, now...let's hurry before she..."

"cums thinking of me?" Nicole was loving playing the narcissist.

"Don't be so sure of yourself, she might just be thinking of Megan Fox."

Nicole laughed and shook her head. "Alright, let's get into position," she said, gesturing to the door.

The noises emanating from inside were louder than either of them expected - they could clearly make out Cassie's pleasured moans and gasps as she pleasured herself with an intensity that seemed almost otherworldly. Emma felt a thrill course through her body at the sound of Cassie's pleasure; it was far more intense than anything she'd ever experienced before, and what she had been expecting. After years of living a life devoid of thrill, or adventure, Emma suddenly felt alive. She glanced over at Nicole who was staring intently through the crack in the door, seemingly lost in the moment too.

The sounds grew louder and more intense until finally, with a loud exclamation, they heard the sound of Cassie climaxing.

"Emmmaaa...oh fuck Emma!" Cassie cried out, and then fell silent.

Nicole shot Emma a look that seemed to say, "What on earth did we just witness?" while Emma, dazed and perplexed, returned the gaze with uncertainty.

"Did I hear that right?" Emma whispered, cautiously backing away from the door.

"Yup!" Nicole struggled to hold back laughter, her eyes gleaming with amusement. "It turns out, Cassie wants the teacher, not the stripper."

"But that doesn't make any sense," Emma mused out loud, her brow furrowed in confusion. "She's never shown any interest in me."

"I think that's because she knows how challenging it is to pursue you," Nicole explained. "Think about it, you possess this captivating charm, an allure that's incredibly enticing. You keep your body modestly covered, but people can sense what you're hiding underneath. You walk with grace and

poise, but people can only imagine what you might become behind closed doors. And one of those people just happens to be Cassie, along with a few more, I'm pretty sure."

Emma let out a deep sigh, chuckling shyly. "There must have been another Emma. Why would she think of me when she's been trying to hit on you?"

"A horny woman and a starving belly know no bounds or limitations, dear girl," Nicole grinned mischievously. "It's going to be fascinating to see how Cassie interacts with you for the rest of the wedding festivities. Wow, what a night!"

Emma smiled, a hint of relief in her voice. "It sure was a wild night. Much better than what I'd anticipated when I snuck out of bed to eavesdrop on you. And, regarding that..."

"We don't need to talk about that," Nicole assured Emma, her voice tender yet playful. "Although it would be fun to tease you about it for the rest of our lives."

"You've already teased me enough," Emma whispered, letting the words hang in the darkness between them. "I think I'll go back to bed now. It's a big day tomorrow," she said, and Nicole nodded in agreement.

"Yeah, have a good night, Emma."

As Emma turned and gracefully retreated to her room, Nicole felt her emotions in turmoil, her heart yearning for solace. Watching Emma disappear into the darkness, hope began to rekindle within her.

Maybe all was not lost yet.

Chapter Eight

The morning sun streamed through the windows, casting warm, golden rays on the floor, as Emma slowly awakened. She felt lighter, happier than she had in a long time. Memories of the night before brought a shy smile to her face; she couldn't believe she'd actually attempted to eavesdrop on Nicole and Cassie. The laughter bubbled up within her as she remembered the absurdity of discovering Cassie pleasuring herself, all the while thinking of Emma.

However, mixed with the amusement was a lingering sense of worry. The time spent with Nicole, watching her, talking with her, had ignited feelings in Emma that she thought she had buried deep inside her heart. She found herself drawn to Nicole once again, captivated by her charm, beauty, and compassionate personality. Emma couldn't help but feel a magnetic pull towards her.

Laying in bed, Emma pondered how she would navigate the rest of the day, as well as the upcoming wedding, with thoughts of Nicole swirling through her mind. Her heart raced, a mix of excitement and fear. How could she maintain her composure in the presence of the woman who had unintentionally ensnared her affections?

As Emma lay there, her thoughts drifted back to the day she and Nicole had parted ways. She recalled the hurt and pain etched on Nicole's face, and the heavy weight of regret that had settled in her own heart. As she replayed the scene in her mind, she couldn't help but wonder if she had been too impatient and dramatic in severing ties with Nicole. What if, instead of turning her back on their relationship, she had chosen to weather the storm with her? Could they have built a happy future together, once they'd made it through the initial struggle?

The thought gnawed at Emma's heart, as she considered the possibility that she might have abandoned something precious, without giving it the chance it deserved. She couldn't shake the feeling that she had acted hastily, letting fear and insecurity dictate her decisions. And now, when she found herself drawn to Nicole once more, she couldn't help but wonder if fate was offering them another chance to explore the love they had once shared.

Emma's heart raced as she paced the room, her thoughts tumbling like waves crashing on the shore. The air felt heavy around her, as if the room was closing in. She could hear the faint rustle of the sheets as Chloe slept soundly nearby, unaware of the storm brewing in Emma's mind.

In the dim morning light, she pondered how Nicole had sparked a transformation within her. She was becoming more daring, more intrepid, and more sexually self-assured. It was as if Nicole's touch had awakened a dormant part of her soul, allowing her to cast aside the shadows of her traumatic past and embrace a newfound sense of empowerment.

With Nicole, Emma never felt the weight of judgment or the burden of expectations. Their connection transcended labels and societal constraints. The scent of Nicole's perfume, the warmth of her laughter, and the softness of her skin created a sense of belonging that Emma hadn't felt in a long time.

For the first time in years, a hunger stirred within Emma. She yearned to see Nicole's body uncovered, to explore every curve and trace every line with her fingertips. To surrender herself completely to the embrace of another woman, dissolving the barriers that had held her captive for so long. And that woman was Nicole.

Emma had never found anyone more alluring, but she couldn't help but question the source of her desire. Was it merely Nicole's physical beauty that ensnared her, or was there a deeper, more profound connection that she couldn't yet put into words?

Emma's thoughts swirled like a whirlwind, and she found herself transported back to the early days of her relationship with Alice. She remembered how, even then, she had been hesitant to embrace love,

terrified of the repercussions. At that time, she didn't know she was a lesbian, and, more than anything, she didn't want to be one. She knew that her conservative parents would disown her if they discovered her true identity. Yet, there was something about Alice – her magnetic force – that had drawn Emma in, breaking through her fears and causing her to rebel against her familial constraints.

Emma could still picture the first time she had met Alice. It was a chilly autumn day, and the leaves were dancing through the air like nature's confetti. Alice had been wearing a crimson scarf that matched her lips, and her eyes had sparkled with mischief and curiosity. Her laughter was like music, and Emma found herself drawn to her like a moth to a flame. The connection between them had been undeniable, and despite her fears, Emma had allowed herself to be swept away in the tumultuous waves of their burgeoning love.

In many ways, her relationship with Alice had been a journey of self-discovery. Alice had helped her to tear down the walls she had built around herself, and to accept the truth of her own desires. Together, they had faced the challenges of coming out, and had forged a bond that had seemed unbreakable. But the sudden tragedy of Alice's death had shattered Emma's world, leaving her adrift in a sea of grief and loneliness.

Now, as she found herself caught in the gravitational pull of Nicole's allure, she couldn't help but notice the parallels between her past and present. Much like Alice, Nicole had a magnetic force that drew Emma in, tempting her to break free from the shackles of her past and embrace the possibility of love once more. It was a feeling that both excited and terrified her, as she feared the consequences of opening her heart again.

The memory of Alice's love was both a bittersweet reminder of what she had lost, and a beacon of hope for what could lie ahead. As Emma considered the similarities between her feelings for Alice and her burgeoning attraction to Nicole, she wondered if she was being given a second chance at love – an opportunity to heal the wounds of her past and find happiness in the arms of another woman.

With each passing moment, the pull of Nicole's charm and beauty grew stronger, threatening to sweep Emma away on a tide of desire and longing. The question remained: would she allow herself to be carried away by these emotions, or would she remain anchored to the safety of her memories, too fearful to risk her heart again? It was a decision that weighed heavily on her, as she stood on the cusp of a life-changing choice.

All she wanted at that moment was to see Nicole's face again, to talk to her, to hear her flirtatious banter and those inappropriate yet amusing remarks that sent shivers down her spine. Emma let out a heavy sigh, feeling the anxiety building up within her. She was on the verge of being overwhelmed when Scarlett suddenly burst into the room, her face a mixture of panic and distress.

"Emma! Something terrible has happened!" Scarlett exclaimed, her voice cracking with fear. Emma's heart leaped into her throat, her own troubles momentarily forgotten as she focused her attention on Scarlett's urgent words.

Scarlett gathered everyone in the living room, before explaining the tragedy, "My wedding gown, you know, the one our cousin in Montreal designed and stitched? It was supposed to arrive today. But the guy who was bringing it had an accident. He was driving drunk, and now he's at the police station, along with the car that has the gown."

Gasps and murmurs filled the room as the group processed the information. "That's awful!" Cassie exclaimed. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," Scarlett replied, panic seeping into her voice. "We need someone to go to the police station, explain the situation, and get the gown back before the rehearsal dinner tonight."

As the gravity of the situation sank in, the group began discussing amongst themselves who could go. Suggestions flew around the room, but each idea seemed to have a flaw.

"I would go, but I have to oversee the catering arrangements," Chloe said apologetically.

"And I can't drive," Cassie said, shrugging her shoulders.

"What about your father?" Scarlett asked, addressing Daniella.

"I can send him if you want, but he sucks at talking to authority, or being manipulative. We need to send someone who can talk to the cops. I would have sent one of my friends who are staying at the hotel, but I don't know if I can trust them with this, Scar," Daniella looking worryingly at her fiancé, who was close to tearing up.

Just when it seemed like all hope was lost, Nicole spoke up. "I can go," she declared confidently. "I can take my bike, and I'll have the gown back by tonight. I've had a lot of experience dealing with cops."

Scarlett hesitated, clearly concerned about Nicole going alone. Before she knew what she was doing, Emma found herself volunteering to accompany Nicole, her voice laced with determination. "I'll go with her, Scarlett."

"But who will look after the decor?" Scarlett asked, reluctant to let Emma go.

Chloe chimed in reassuringly, "Don't worry, Scarlett. Last night, Emma explained everything to me, and most of the major work has been done. I'll take care of the rest."

"Are you sure about this, Em? You would have to sit on a bike," Scarlett warned her sister.

Emma nodded her head in agreement, determined to help. "I'm sure," she said firmly. "I have sat on a bike before, Scar. I think you have forgotten."

Scarlett hesitated for a moment before finally giving her blessing. She gave Emma a tight hug, wishing her luck before turning to Nicole with instructions on how to get to the police station.

"Okay, let's go! We don't have much time," Nicole said, already heading for the door.

Emma watched in awe as Nicole put on her biking jacket, zipped it up and placed the keys into the ignition. She grabbed the helmet from the side stand, before aiding Emma to sit down behind her.

The proximity between them and the sexual tension between them was evident as Emma climbed behind Nicole on the bike, resting her hands tentatively against Nicole's waist. Her breath hitched in anticipation as she felt the engine roar beneath them, suddenly aware of every tiny detail of their contact: Nicole's heat radiating through her clothing and into Emma's hands, the slight flexing of muscles beneath the fabric as Nicole kicked the stand, and balanced the bike between her legs.

Nicole smiled back at Emma, a hint of amusement in her eyes. "Hold on tight," she said, her voice low and husky.

Emma gulped, the words making her feel suddenly vulnerable as she wound her arms around Nicole's waist. She could feel the warmth of Nicole's skin through the fabric, and was intensely aware of every subtle movement they shared.

"Don't fall asleep behind me," Nicole advised as she put the bike into gear. "It's a long route, and I don't want you to be jolted awake if I hit a bump." Emma nodded in agreement as Nicole throttled down the dirt road towards the highway, the wind whipping her hair back and making her heart race with excitement. Emma held on tightly, her body pressed against Nicole's back, feeling every curve and dip of her spine.

As they surged forward, the world blurred into a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes. Trees rippled in a blur of greens and browns, while fields stretch out in an infinite horizon ahead of them. The sun casts its golden rays across the sky, creating shadows that move with them.

The warm, salty air is heavy with the scent of wildflowers, the earthy mix of grass and dirt suddenly coming alive with each gust of wind. The

faintest hint of leather and Nicole's perfume linger on the air, teasing Emma's senses as they ride.

The wind was like a thousand fingers, strong and relentless, tugging at Emma's hair and pushing her body back against Nicole. Every dip in the road was felt through the bike, Emma's hands tight around Nicole's waist as she held on for dear life.

"How long will it take for us to get there?" Emma hollered, her voice barely audible over the cacophony of the wind, as the motorcycle's powerful engine roared beneath the two women.

"About four hours one way," Nicole responded, her voice carrying a mix of excitement and concern. "Are you okay back there?" she inquired, her words dripping with genuine concern.

"Yeah, I've ridden on a bike before, but it was a long time ago," Emma confessed, leaning forward to bring her lips closer to Nicole's ear. As she spoke, her lips brushed ever so slightly against Nicole's skin, sending an electric jolt through both their bodies.

The unexpected touch of Emma's lips against her ear caused Nicole's stomach to flutter, her heart to leap, and a sudden surge of energy to course through her body. Struggling to maintain her composure, she asked, "What made you volunteer for this boring, painful, potentially dangerous journey on this old bike of mine?"

"It's my love for my sister," Emma replied, her voice resolute and unwavering. "I knew Scarlett would worry herself sick if someone other than me went to fetch the wedding dress. Knowing that I've gone to bring it will help calm her nerves. She trusts me more than anyone else."

"And it had nothing to do with me?" Nicole said brazenly, the adrenaline coursing through her veins making her speak her mind, even though she knew she shouldn't have.

"I don't know," Emma said, and then added as a last-minute thought, "Maybe it has a little something to do with you." Her words hung in the air

between them, a palpable tension building as they rode on.

Nicole's heart pounded in her chest as she contemplated Emma's words.

"I might brake more often than required," Nicole teased playfully, her voice lilting with mischief.

"Then, I might have to hold onto you tighter than required," Emma countered, as she pressed her breasts against Nicole's leather-clad back and wrapped her arms around her waist, embracing her firmly. "I know we're making a mistake," Emma confessed, her voice tinged with a mix of desire and caution. "I shouldn't be hugging you like this. I shouldn't be so close to you. I shouldn't be sitting behind you on a bike, while the most romantic landscape whips past us."

"Can't we allow ourselves just two days of fun?" Nicole implored, turning her head to gaze into Emma's eyes for a fleeting moment before refocusing on the road.

"Two days can lead to a lifetime of heartbreak," Emma murmured wistfully into Nicole's ear.

"Or... provide us with memories for a lifetime?" Nicole suggested, her voice a blend of hope and defiance.

"Nicole..." Emma tightened her embrace, clinging to Nicole as if she were her lifeline. "Why does life have to be so difficult?"

"The struggle makes it worth living for, Em. That's what I've learned. A little suffering paves the way for abundant happiness. Without suffering, the thrill of happiness fades, leaving life a blend of lukewarm emotions. Suffering ignites passion in life, and in love." Nicole's words were a balm to Emma's conflicted heart.

Emma blinked hard against the gust of wind, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. "You are wise beyond your profession. I would love to just talk about life with you someday."

"I would cherish that as well," Nicole agreed softly.

But then, both women fell silent, acutely aware that such a day might never arrive in their future. They knew they had only today and tomorrow, and then, perhaps, nothing more.

But for the moment, Emma relished the feeling of being so close to Nicole. Her mind went blank as she felt the wind whip past her face and through her hair. The sun warmed her skin, and she couldn't help but enjoy the beauty of the landscape they were passing through. Green hills, dappled with patches of white and yellow wildflowers, soared before them as they entered Vermont.

The sky was painted with a myriad of hues, from deep purple to blazing orange, and for a moment, Nicole forgot about the journey and just took in the natural beauty around her. Everywhere she looked was an abundance of green, sprinkled with wildflowers that danced in the gentle breeze. She could feel Emma's head resting against her back, lulled by the vibration of the engine and the rhythmic sound of tires whirring on asphalt.

Nicole glanced at Emma over her shoulder, finding her eyes closed and lips parted in a serene expression. She couldn't help but feel a surge of desire as she drank in the sight of Emma's peaceful demeanor. Emma was beautiful, with her soft features, full lips, and long lashes that brushed against her cheeks as she slept.

Nicole realized with a start that Emma had fallen asleep behind her, and all the warnings she had given her earlier about not falling asleep suddenly came flooding back to her.

"Emma," Nicole called out softly, hoping to jar her awake. When Emma didn't respond, Nicole gently slowed the bike down and pulled over to the side of the road. She turned her head to look at the beautiful woman behind her. Emma's head had slumped forward, her long hair falling over her face.

Nicole reached around and gently lifted Emma's head up, her fingers brushing through the soft strands of Emma's hair. Emma stirred slightly,

blinking her eyes open.

"Sorry," Emma mumbled, her voice husky with sleep. "I didn't mean to fall asleep."

"It's okay," Nicole reassured her with a warm smile. "I've got you. Just hold on tight to me, okay?"

Emma nodded, her face flushing with embarrassment. She rested her head on Nicole's back and tightened her embrace around Nicole's waist.

Nicole looked around her and was thankful to see that they were right on the edge of a small village, and she spotted a gas station not far away. She eased the bike up to the pump and killed the engine.

"I'll go fill up and grab some snacks." Nicole hopped off the bike and stood close to Emma. "I'll give you time to freshen up and tend to your bags, alright?" She held her hands out for the helmets, and when Emma slipped hers off, Nicole caught the whiff of Emma's perfume. It was a heady mix of jasmine and vanilla, and it made Nicole's heart skip a beat.

"Sure," Emma murmured, handing over her helmet. "Be quick, okay?"

Nicole nodded and headed towards the convenience store, her heart still racing from the scent of Emma's perfume. As she grabbed some snacks and drinks, her mind kept drifting back to Emma and the way she had looked when she had fallen asleep behind her on the bike.

Nicole imagined waking up beside Emma someday, her body close and warm in the early morning light. She imagined pressing her lips against Emma's skin, kissing all over her body, and then diving between her legs. The sensations of pleasure that would come with exploring every inch of Emma's body were overwhelming to Nicole.

She imagined the two of them making love slowly and tenderly, their bodies intertwined in perfect harmony. Nicole would feel Emma's breath on her neck, her fingernails lightly scratching along Nicole's back as they kissed passionately.

Nicole shuddered, felt her breath quicken, and goosebumps rise on the back of her neck, as she watched Emma sitting on the bike, straddling the backseat, while her summer dress fell around her thighs.

She knew making love to this woman would be heavenly, cathartic, probably better than experiencing Nirvana.

Nicole grabbed a few snacks from inside before heading back out towards the bike where Emma waited patiently for her return. When their eyes met, they both smiled shyly at each other before getting onto the bike again and setting off on their journey towards their next destination.

As Nicole and Emma entered the picturesque Vermont town, the sun descended gently toward the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the cobblestone streets and charming storefronts. Each building they passed seemed to have a story, with their intricate woodwork and delicate window panes reflecting the town's history and charm. The scent of freshly baked bread from a nearby bakery wafted through the air, mingling with the faint fragrance of blooming flowers from meticulously tended gardens that adorned the sidewalks.

The atmosphere was serene and inviting, providing a striking contrast to the urgent mission that had brought them there. Emma couldn't help but feel a sense of peace, even amidst the turmoil of emotions she was experiencing.

"Wait here for me, okay?" Nicole instructed Emma, her eyes filled with determination as she parked the bike in front of the modest, red-brick police station.

"But, what if you need help?" Emma asked, concerned.

"Don't worry, I've got this," Nicole reassured her, flashing a confident smile that melted Emma's anxiety away.

Emma watched as Nicole strode confidently into the police station, her heart filled with admiration and gratitude.

The minutes ticked by, and Emma found herself growing increasingly restless. She began to pace the sidewalk, her mind conjuring up all sorts of scenarios that could be unfolding inside the police station. Her heart raced with worry, but she tried to keep her faith in Nicole's ability to handle the situation.

Finally, the door to the police station swung open, and Nicole emerged triumphantly, followed by a disheveled-looking man carrying a large suitcase. Relief washed over Emma as she realized that Nicole had not only retrieved the wedding gown but had also managed to free the man who had been caught drunk driving.

"How did you do it?" Emma asked, her voice a mixture of awe and curiosity.

Nicole winked and replied, "Let's just say I have a way with words. And maybe a little charm doesn't hurt either." She grinned, her eyes sparkling with mischief.

The man, looking sheepish and grateful, handed the suitcase to Nicole, who then passed it to Emma. "Here's the wedding gown, safe and sound," she announced.

Emma thanked Nicole, her eyes narrowing as she glared at the man. He stammered out an apology, mumbling a few incoherent words before hastily leaving the two women, as if fearing that if he lingered, he might be asked to bring the wedding gown back with him once again.

"How will we fit the dress on the bike?" Emma wondered aloud, her gaze falling on the massive suitcase. It stood upright on the front seat of the bike, its wheels stubbornly refusing to roll.

"We'll place it between us," Nicole suggested thoughtfully, leaning over to grab the handle and pull the suitcase closer. "I'll have to perch right on the edge of the front seat."

"No!" Emma objected, her eyes wide with concern. She quickly assessed Nicole's slender frame and did some mental calculations. "I can't

risk it," she insisted. "I'll fall off the bike if I don't hold onto you, and from what I've experienced, you do enjoy braking a--"

"Don't worry," Nicole interrupted, a hint of amusement in her voice. "I won't be braking as much now that you won't be clinging to me." She flashed a mischievous grin and turned away, running her fingers through her hair. Emma found herself captivated by this enigmatic woman who had suddenly reentered her life and was now playing an exhilarating game of hide-and-seek with her emotions.

"All jokes aside," Emma said, her tone serious as she turned back to face Nicole, "I'll be terrified navigating these winding downhill roads while holding onto this monstrous suitcase!" Her expression was a mix of pale anxiety and determination.

Nicole, charmed by Emma's vulnerability, offered a reassuring smile. "Trust me, babe, the only time you'll be falling now...will be in love."

Emma let out a faint chuckle, shaking her head. "That was incredibly cheesy, Nicole."

"Well, that's what came to mind, and unlike you, I'm not afraid to be impulsive!" Nicole retorted playfully.

"I'm still not comfortable sitting on this bike with the bag wedged between us," Emma said firmly, and Nicole sensed that her resolve was too strong to argue any further.

"We could use Gary's car," Nicole suggested.

"Who's Gary?" Emma inquired, her eyebrows furrowing in confusion.

"The guy I just got released from the police station. The accident was minor, and his car is still in working condition. We could ask him to lend it to us. It's the least he can do after nearly sabotaging Scarlett's wedding."

"Do you think he'll agree?"

Nicole shrugged her shoulders, the confidence in her eyes unwavering. "We can only try."

Nodding in agreement, Emma watched as Nicole strode back toward the police station, as Gary had gone back to sign off on some paperwork, her confident gait making Emma's heart flutter involuntarily. As she entered the building, Emma took a deep breath, hoping for the best.

It wasn't long before Nicole reappeared, a triumphant grin plastered across her face. Emma's heart skipped a beat as she saw Gary following Nicole, carrying a set of car keys in his hand.

"He's agreed to let us borrow his car," Nicole announced, her eyes twinkling with satisfaction. "He'll just need a lift back to the bus stand, and then we're good to go."

Emma breathed a sigh of relief, grateful for Nicole's persuasive skills. "Thank you, Nicole. I don't know what I would have done without you."

Nicole gave Emma a playful wink. "You would have figured it out, babe. You're a smart girl."

Emma rolled her eyes, but a smile tugged at the corners of her lips. She couldn't help but feel grateful for Nicole's presence and her ability to navigate tricky situations.

After Nicole parked her bike in the police station's parking lot, the women and Gary made their way to Gary's car, a sleek black sedan that glistened under the bright sun. Nicole slid into the driver's seat, while Emma sat in the passenger seat, and Gary sat at the back.

The women dropped Gary off at the nearby bus stand, and once they were all alone in the car, they looked at each other, and smiled, "I guess we managed to save your sister's wedding after all!" Nicole said, putting the car in gear.

"She would have gotten married to Danielle in pajamas. I am sure the wedding would have still taken place. But I know how excited she is to wear this dress, and yeah, we have definitely saved her a long bout of sadness. And all thanks to you, Nicole. First, you offered your father's cabin for the wedding, and now this, you have turned out to be a hero for our family. What are you planning to do next, save us from a burning building?"

"No, save you from yourself," Nicole said slyly, giving Emma a faint, but piercing gaze, before she expertly took a U-turn, and headed towards the main road. Emma felt her pulse quicken as Nicole drove with confidence and ease that left her feeling dizzy.

The car glided along the winding roads, with Nicole handling the turns and curves like a pro. The wind blew across her face, Emma felt completely alive as she watched Nicole expertly maneuver each corner like it was second nature to her. Emma had been mesmerized by Nicole's biking skills earlier in the day and now seeing the same level of control she had over the car was almost too much to take.

Nicole turned up the music on the radio and she began to hum along as they drove, taking in every little detail that passed them by outside the window, while talking about everything that had happened throughout their journey so far.

Halfway to the destination, Nicole had started craving a beer. At first, Emma refused, worried about the consequences of drinking and driving. But after Nicole admitted to having done it plenty of times before, Emma agreed and they pulled over for beers. The sun was setting, painting the sky with an enchanting shade of pink. They stopped at an old roadside bar, lost in time with its wooden walls covered in photographs of musicians from decades past.

Once inside, Nicole approached the bartender with a wide smile on her face. She ordered two beers while Emma looked around in awe - this place was a relic from another time.

"Come on, we need to get going. There's an anxious, hormonal bride-to-be waiting for her wedding gown," Emma urged, as Nicole took a

leisurely swig of beer, leaning back with her legs crossed and eyes observing Emma intently.

"When was the last time you really let loose, Em? Truly had a blast?" Nicole inquired, a playful glint in her eyes.

"I'm enjoying myself right now," Emma replied, taking a delicate, almost demure sip from her beer. "I don't usually drink beer, but here I am."

Nicole smirked. "Drinking beer is your idea of fun?"

"No, a thrilling five-hour bike ride through breathtaking scenery with one of the most fascinating women I know is," Emma shot back with a smile.

"Okay, still not quite what I had in mind," Nicole teased.

"How about eavesdropping on my friend as she indulged herself, fantasizing about me? That was pretty exhilarating, right?" Emma asked, hoping for validation.

Nicole laughed, finishing nearly half her beer in one go. "That's just a typical Monday night in my life, sweetheart. I'd love to see you genuinely let go, at least once before you inevitably return to your life and leave mine after the wedding. I want to see you dance until your gorgeous red heels break, and your lovely, angular face is glistening with sweat."

Emma raised an eyebrow, her eyes flickering over Nicole's alluring form, trying hard to resist the temptation of her cleavage, which was practically begging for her attention as Nicole's folded hands rested below her breasts. "Why? Is all of that part of your Monday night ritual as well?"

"No, that's more like a Wednesday night," Nicole chipped in, leaning forward, and dropping her smile to a sexy, sizzling pout, and holding Emma's face with an alluring gaze that breathed out fire and flames of passion and seduction, "aren't you a little sad that you won't even get to find out how my body looks without all these clothes? Don't you want to see...just once, before I become a memory for you? Don't you wonder how

it would be, if we were to strip each other naked and thrash around on a bed, hungry, starving, begging for release? Just once, before we say our goodbyes, can't we fuck each other, and live the rest of our lives, with the memory of what that felt like?"

Emma finally dropped her gaze to Nicole's cleavage. She had to, it was right there in front of her.

"It would be suicide."

"At least we'd die...together."

"I don't want to die yet," Emma's pulse quickened, as Nicole's hand snaked across the table, and caught her wrist, "I can just be your escort, Em...you can even pay me. Think of me as nothing but an outlet for your desires and fantasies, that have been lying dormant for years. I know I turn you on, Em, I know you want me."

"Is it that evident?" Emma's pupils dilated, and her body felt light as a feather.

Lips.

It will be her lips and eyes, that would eventually lead me to my downfall. Already, I can feel myself wanting to feel them between my own lips.

Already, I can feel her enveloping me in her arms, and cocooning me inside her raging, rampant, rambunctious sex appeal.

Below the thick, wooden table that separated the two women, Nicole's foot had already started caressing Emma's shin...then it was on her knees, and then, she had caught the hem of her dress between her toes, and with eyes practically devouring Emma in lust, she had started hitching the hem slowly up her legs, until the pale, translucent skin of Emma's thighs revealed themselves to Nicole's foot.

"What are you doing...?" Emma gasped, this time with a hint of panic in her voice, as she tried to snatch back the hem of her dress from Nicole's foot.

"Emma, sweetheart...have you ever wondered what's it like to have your body worshiped by a truly hungry woman? Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have someone who's attentive to your every need, and prepared to deal with your every demand? Have you ever wondered what it would be like, to have your body exploring the depths of the mind of a woman who's truly afraid that she'll never feel...your body again?"

Nicole whispered into Emma's ear, as her toes started to drag along the length of Emma's thighs.

"Let yourself go, and let me in...," she repeated, as her foot slid higher, and her toes started to caress the soft, sensitive skin of Emma's inner thighs.

Emma could feel her stomach flip, and her mouth go dry. Her skin was alive with goosebumps, and her heart thundered inside of her chest. She was no longer in control of the situation — Nicole had taken charge, and Emma's body was on fire with the intense desire that coursed through it.

Emma felt her chest heaving, as if an entire universe of raw, untamed emotions was about to explode out of her. Her body begged for more, and yet, she knew she couldn't do it. She wanted to succumb to Nicole's touch and give in to her desires - but every fiber in her conscious body kept reminding her why she should resist.

Nicole's foot kept inching up the hem of Emma's dress, until finally, it was resting on the crease between Emma's legs, a few centimeters away from the warmth that pooled between them.

"Not like this..." Emma was finally able to string a few words together, and speak in a shaky voice that betrayed every emotion that she was feeling, "once we are back. Tonight...I promise," Emma said, and a light moan escaped her mouth as Nicole's foot started to caress the sensitive spot above her thighs.

A lustful smile spread across Nicole's face, and she nodded. "I'll be waiting," she whispered.

For a while, they just sat there, across from each other, staring into each other's eyes. A few other patrons had trickled in, and the restaurant was starting to fill up with people.

"We need to leave soon," Emma was the first to break their silent moment, and their gaze.

Nicole nodded, and her foot and toes slid slowly away from Emma, who quickly pulled her hem back down over her legs.



When Emma and Nicole finally returned to the cabin at dusk, Scarlett was waiting for them on the porch, her eyes scanning the horizon anxiously. The moment she caught sight of Emma and Nicole, her face lit up like a thousand suns. She rushed towards them, her arms outstretched, and pulled them both into a tight embrace.

"Thank you, thank you so much!" Scarlett exclaimed, her voice choked with emotion. "I can't tell you how much this means to me. You've saved my wedding day!"

Emma and Nicole exchanged a glance, both of them feeling the weight of Scarlett's gratitude. As they pulled away from the hug, Scarlett wiped the tears from her eyes and looked at Nicole with a mixture of admiration and affection.

"Nicole, I know we haven't known each other for very long, but you've done so much for me already," Scarlett said, her voice still quivering. "As a way to thank you, I want you to be one of my bridesmaids. I can't think of anyone else I'd rather have by my side on my special day."

Nicole's eyes widened, and she felt her own tears welling up as she looked back at Scarlett. She had never been a bridesmaid before, and the

unexpected honor filled her heart with warmth and gratitude.

"Oh, Scarlett," Nicole stammered, trying to hold back her tears. "I don't know what to say. Thank you so much for including me. I'd be honored to be your bridesmaid."

Emma smiled at the exchange, feeling a surge of pride and happiness for Nicole. She knew that the woman deserved this special moment, and she couldn't wait to see her standing beside Scarlett on her wedding day.

The rest of the evening was a whirlwind of activity and anticipation. Emma, fully committed to her role as the wedding planner, oversaw the final touches to the wedding decor, making sure everything was perfect, even though she was tired from the day-long journey she had just completed.

The ethereal, fairytale-like decorations transformed the space beneath the massive oak tree where the ceremony would take place into a dreamscape that seemed to belong to another world altogether.

Strings of fairy lights adorned the tree's branches, casting a soft, magical glow that enveloped the entire area. The ground beneath the tree was covered with a plush, white carpet that gave the impression of walking on clouds. Elegant chairs, draped with sheer, flowing fabrics and adorned with delicate flowers, were arranged in perfect rows, awaiting the guests.

Garlands of pastel-hued flowers, intertwined with ivy, wound their way up the trunk of the oak tree, creating a stunning backdrop for the couple as they exchanged their vows. A beautiful, rustic wooden arch, adorned with more of the enchanting floral arrangements, marked the entrance to the enchanted space.

Clusters of candles flickered within antique lanterns, scattered throughout the area, their dancing flames casting playful shadows on the lush green grass. The sound of wind chimes, carefully placed among the branches, filled the air with a gentle, soothing melody.

At the heart of it all, stood the oak tree, its ancient branches stretching out like protective arms, embracing the scene below. Its leaves rustled softly in the breeze, adding their own whispered blessings to the upcoming union.

As Emma put the finishing touches on the scene, Nicole watched in awe, impressed by the talent and vision Emma possessed. It was clear that Emma had poured her heart and soul into creating this magical atmosphere, and the result was nothing short of breathtaking.

With the wedding décor completed, Nicole eagerly lent a hand wherever she could. She worked alongside Chloe, making sure the leaves and the path leading to the venue were clear and pristine.

Later, Nicole found herself helping Cassie with the song playlist for the wedding. As they listened to the music, Nicole couldn't help but probe Cassie about her feelings for Emma.

"Have you ever considered Emma as a potential...hook-up?" she asked, as they sat on the porch, watching the decorators, and Emma work out the final touches to the wedding decorations.

"What? Emma? No! She isn't my type."

"Beautiful, graceful women with high cheekbones and a chiseled jawline are not your type?"

"Yeah, she is pretty, but she is dull. Can't you see? She would be dead in the bedroom."

"Really? Then...why were you moaning her name yesterday, while your fingers were deep inside your..."

"Shut Up!" Carrie cried out, and hushed Nicole, who started laughing, "how dare you listen in on me?"

"How dare you call my friend boring and dull?" Nicole said, raising an eyebrow, "look, I don't blame you. Between you and me, even I have, on an occasion...or two, imagined that lovely, breathtaking woman, and, I have

had more physical interactions with her than you, and let me tell you, that woman is a dynamite. Don't judge a book by it's cover, Cassie, especially not a book that looks like her," Nicole said, her eyes falling on Emma, who looked like a maiden of the night, floating about in the clearing, her arms outstretched, and her fingers pointing to something or the other that needed correction.

As if she were dancing across a ballroom floor, Emma's feet glided on the dew-covered grass and wove through the maze of tables and chairs, and all Nicole could think, and hope, was for Emma to not forget the promise she had made in the bar.



The bridesmaid gowns, chosen by Scarlett with a keen eye for style, were a perfect balance of elegance and femininity. The floor-length dresses were made of a soft, flowing chiffon fabric in a romantic, dusty rose hue. The gowns featured a flattering V-neckline and delicate cap sleeves, adorned with intricate lace detailing that added a touch of vintage sophistication.

When Emma first saw Nicole wearing the bridesmaid gown, she was completely mesmerized by her beauty. The dress accentuated Nicole's already curvaceous frame and hugged her curves in all the right places, making her look nothing short of stunning. The dusty rose hue complemented her tanned skin and dark hair, while the lace detailing highlighted her strong yet feminine shoulders.

This was the first time Emma had seen Nicole in such an elegant ensemble, as she was more accustomed to her friend's laid-back, effortlessly cool style. The transformation was breathtaking, and Emma couldn't help but feel a surge of pride and admiration for the woman who had so seamlessly stepped into her life and captured her heart.

As Nicole moved gracefully through the room, chatting and laughing with the other bridesmaids and guests, Emma's eyes never left her. She

marveled at the way the soft fabric of the gown flowed with Nicole's every movement, and how the twinkling fairy lights seemed to cast a halo around her, only amplifying her radiant beauty.

In the other corner of the clearing, near where Danielle's parents chatted away with Scarlett, Nicole's eyes fell on Emma, while she was engrossed in conversation with one of her liberal aunts who was one of the few relatives of Scarlett and Emma who had decided to show up.

Nicole's gaze was fixed on Emma's hands, their elegant dance a captivating performance as she conversed with the woman before her—a woman who, to Nicole, was as inconsequential as a shadow.

How could Nicole possibly focus on anything else when the most breathtaking woman she had ever known stood just a few feet away, radiating an allure that seemed to defy description?

Emma was attired in the same gown as Nicole, but in the eyes of the smitten observer, it was Emma who truly made the dress come alive, as though it were specifically crafted for her and her alone. The gown seemed to mold itself to Emma's body, accentuating her curves with precision and showcasing her lithe form. The dusty rose hue took on an ethereal quality against Emma's fair skin, the intricate lace detailing appearing as if spun by the hands of a celestial seamstress.

Nicole stood there, her gaze unwavering, as she drank in every facet of Emma's beauty. From the masterfully crafted bun at the nape of her neck to the delicate ballet of her hands as she spoke, Nicole felt entranced. She longed for even a fraction of the grace and poise that Emma displayed as she seemed to glide through the room, as if borne upon the very air itself.

A fervent yearning welled within Nicole, a desire to remove the gown from Emma's body later that night. She wished to hear the soft rustle of the fabric as it fell to the floor, to see her own gown join the pile, creating a sea of delicate lace and chiffon—a testament to the unspoken passions that lay hidden beneath the elegant façade.

And so, Nicole continued to watch from a distance, her eyes lingering on Emma's every movement, her heart swelling with a fervor that threatened to burst forth. With each passing moment, the line between reality and fantasy blurred, leaving Nicole breathless and aching for the evening to arrive, where the hidden depths of their passion would finally be revealed.

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Chapter Nine

The tender, romantic melodies of Taylor Swift filled the air, weaving a spell of enchantment around Emma. It seemed as though the music was crafted specifically for this moment, a moment of anticipated bliss and joy. With everyone else occupied, Emma was finally alone, and she welcomed the brief respite from small talk and superficial conversations.

She found an empty chair, next to the easel which bore the words, 'Welcome to the Rehearsal Dinner for Scarlett and Danielle's wedding' in elegant cursive. Emma breathed a deep sigh, and caressed her thighs, feeling the soft fabric of her dress brush against her skin. The music seemed to fill her entire being, and she swayed to the rhythm, lost in the moment.

Suddenly, she looked down at her dress and was shocked to find that the color had changed. It was now white, more elaborate, and eerily familiar to her. Emma ran a hand through her hair, and her fingers stumbled upon a wedding veil that rested upon her head. Panic surged through her as she realized that she had been transported to her own wedding day.

Her pulse quickened, heart pounding in her chest as fear gripped her. What was happening? This couldn't be real. She stood up, her breath coming in short, shallow gasps, as she searched for a corner to escape to, a place to hide from this nightmare. But as she began to move, a cold hand gripped her shoulder, stopping her in her tracks.

She turned to see Alice, her dead wife, staring back at her with an eerie calm. "Where are you going, Emma?" Alice asked, her voice soft and chilling. "We're about to get married."

Emma's heart threatened to leap from her chest, and she tried to shake free from Alice's icy grip, but the hand held fast, unyielding. "No," she

stammered, her voice barely above a whisper. "You're dead. This isn't real."

But Alice just smiled, her eyes dark and bottomless. "You can't run from me, Emma. I'm always with you."

Desperate to escape, Emma wrenched herself from Alice's grasp and began to run, her legs pumping furiously as she tried to put as much distance between them as possible. But no matter how fast she ran, Alice was always right behind her, a specter of her past that refused to be left behind.

Fear constricted Emma's chest, making it difficult to breathe, but still she ran, her vision blurred by the tears streaming down her face. The once-familiar surroundings of the rehearsal dinner had twisted into a nightmarish labyrinth, the laughter of the guests now the sinister cackles of unseen horrors.

Her heart raced, her body slick with sweat as she careened around corners and down darkened hallways, searching for an exit that seemed to elude her at every turn. Alice's chilling laughter echoed in her ears, a haunting reminder that there would be no escape.

And then, just as Emma thought she could run no further, a door appeared before her. She flung it open, her last desperate hope for salvation, and stumbled into the night. The darkness enveloped her, cold and unfeeling, as she collapsed to the ground, her body wracked with sobs.

The relentless sobbing eventually subsided, leaving Emma hollow and exhausted. She wiped her tear-streaked face with the back of her hand and took a deep, shuddering breath. It was then that she realized her surroundings had changed once more: she was alone in the woods, the cabin nowhere to be seen.

Panic set in anew, and she felt her heart race as her mind reeled. How had she ended up here? Where was everyone? And, most importantly, where was Nicole?

"Nicole!" she cried out, her voice shaking as it echoed through the trees. No response came, and Emma felt her fear grow stronger. She called out again, more urgently this time. "Nicole, where are you?"

Desperation clawed at her chest, and she began to run wildly through the woods, her dress snagging on brambles and twigs, her legs scratched and bleeding. The darkness seemed to close in around her, suffocating her, but she didn't care. All that mattered was finding Nicole.

"Nicole!" she screamed, her voice raw and hoarse, but still she continued, her desperate calls for her friend punctuating the eerie silence of the forest. "Nicole, please!"

Her legs grew heavier, her breath ragged, but still she ran, refusing to give up. She couldn't lose Nicole, not now, not after everything they had been through together.

And then, just as her body threatened to give out, she heard it: a distant voice, calling her name. "Emma!"

Hope flared in her chest, and she stumbled toward the sound, her vision blurred by renewed tears. As she staggered through the underbrush, the voice grew louder, more distinct, until at last, she saw her.

Nicole stood before her, her eyes wide with concern, her arms outstretched. Emma fell into her embrace, sobbing uncontrollably as Nicole held her tight, whispering soothing words into her ear.

"It's okay, Emma," Nicole murmured, her voice a balm to Emma's frayed nerves. "I'm here. I've got you."

Nicole and Emma dropped to the ground, while Emma clung to Nicole like a drowning woman to a raft.

"It's okay...it's okay, Emma. It was only a bad dream. It's over now, baby...look at me, it's over now."

Nicole took Emma's chin in her hand and tilted her face to make the woman look into her eyes. Nicole saw fear, apprehension, and panic swimming in the light brown eyes that were now red and puffy. She leaned in and pressed her cheeks against Emma's damp ones, and nuzzled her like a mother comforting her child.

"It's okay to be scared," Nicole whispered, her breath hot against Emma's ear. "But you're safe now, with me. You don't have to be afraid anymore."

Emma clung tighter to Nicole, her body shaking with sobs, and Nicole held her close, rubbing soothing circles on her back. As Emma slowly calmed down, Nicole leaned back and looked into her eyes, studying the woman's face intently.

"Are you hurt anywhere?" Nicole asked, her voice soft and gentle. "Do you need me to check for any injuries?"

Emma shook her head, her breathing finally returning to normal. "No, I don't think so. Just a few scratches and bruises. Thank you for finding me, Nicole."

Nicole let out a gentle smile, but decided not to respond. Instead, she tenderly brushed Emma's cheeks with her thumb, wiping away the tear that had formed at the corner of her eye. "Do you want to stay here for a while?" Nicole asked sympathetically. "You don't have to go back if you're not ready."

Emma shook her head meekly, feeling as fragile as glass in this moment. "I can't go back," she finally murmured. "I'm afraid it will all come flooding back again."

"That's alright," Nicole whispered comfortingly. "We'll just sit here and take some time to breathe." She gestured toward the sturdy oak tree nearby. "Why don't we get cozy against its bark? It'll be much more comfortable for you."

The two of them meandered towards the tree, its bark rough against their backs as they slumped down onto the ground.

They sat together in companionable silence, their fingers intertwined and shoulders pressed gently against one another. Emma's eyes were closed, her breathing steady and even, while Nicole kept a vigilant gaze on Emma's serene face. Nicole remained alert, poised to provide comfort and support should Emma succumb to another panic attack.

But for now, Emma was calm. In her presence, Nicole had shouldered the weight of her burdens, casting aside the panic and fear that plagued her heart with the grace and strength of a valiant shield maiden.

As Emma rested her head on Nicole's shoulder, she came to a stark realization: she had been a coward. The feeling of being cornered by an enemy that was elusive and formless, one that she couldn't seem to push away, left her feeling vulnerable and weak. Her past had become her greatest adversary, and she knew, deep within her soul, that it was time to break free.

"Nicole..." Emma's gaze lifted, her eyes searching Nicole's as she pulled herself up by gripping her shoulders. "I can't live like this anymore."

Nicole tenderly massaged Emma's lower back, feeling the intricate knots of the gown beneath her fingertips. "You shouldn't. No matter what transpires between us, you owe it to yourself to pursue what you desire, without being held captive by your past."

"It's difficult," Emma whispered, her focus drifting past Nicole's face, illuminated by the soft moonlight, and into the velvety darkness between the trees.

"You really loved Alice, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you loved her until her last breath?"

"Yes."

"And there was nothing more you could have done to save her?"

"No..." Emma's voice began to crack, but she steeled herself, refusing to shed any more tears.

"Then you have nothing to feel guilty for. You were a devoted and loving partner, right up to the end. You cared for her, looked after her, and that's all you could have done. You mourned her and lived in devotion to her memory, even after she was gone, in a world where love like that is so incredibly rare. Wherever she may be, Emma, I'm certain she's seen your sacrifice and your unwavering devotion, and it must have filled her with joy. But I'm also sure she wouldn't want to see you like this. Don't cause her pain in the afterlife, Em. If she loved you as deeply as you loved her, she would want you to try to find happiness. Try, Emma...that's the least you can do. Try."

Emma and Nicole stared into each other's eyes, while the trees swayed around them.

The forest around them was dappled with the soft light of the moon, illuminating the enchanting setting they were in. The chirps of crickets and croaks of frogs filled their ears as a cool breeze rustled through the trees. A pleasant scent lingered in the air, a mix of fresh grass and wildflowers, which added to the peaceful aura of the night.

"I want to try," Emma said, her eyes never leaving Nicole, "right now."

"Right now?" Nicole asked, uncertain what Emma meant.

"Yes. It's now or never."

"Okay...how can I help?" asked Nicole, as Emma draped a leg over Nicole, the hems of their dressing colliding and mixing into a pile of silk.

"By kissing me," Emma's lips quivered like the leaves above them, and she pressed herself against Nicole's busty cleavage.

Her lips lingered merely centimeters away from Nicole, but she lacked the courage to close the gap, and reach for freedom.

But fortunately for her, Nicole didn't lack the courage.

Nicole could feel Emma's trembling body pressed against her own, and she knew that Emma needed this. She could see in her eyes that she was desperately seeking some kind of release, some kind of comfort, and Nicole was more than happy to provide it. Without another word, she leaned in and pressed her lips to Emma's, their mouths locking in a fiery embrace as they melted into each other's arms. Emma's hands roamed over Nicole's curves, tracing every inch of her body as they kissed deeply, their tongues swirling and intertwining. Nicole's hands found their way to Emma's waist, pulling her closer as they lost themselves in the moment.

Nicole gently untied the knots of Emma's gown, and as each one was loosened, she felt a new wave of freedom wash over Emma. With each passing moment, she could sense Emma's inhibitions slowly being released. As Nicole drew back from their kiss, she could feel Emma trying to take as much of her as possible, as if she was a lifeline in a sea of uncertainty.

"Are you okay?" Nicole whispered, her breath hot against Emma's cheek.

Emma nodded, her eyes closed in ecstasy. "Yes, I'm more than okay."

Nicole smiled, and taking Emma's hand, she placed it on her breasts, and made Emma squeeze one of her boobs.

A low, lust-filled moan escaped Emma's thin lips, as Nicole kept guiding her, making her press her tits harder with each squeeze.

Nicole could feel Emma start to feel more and more comfortable with her own body, and she made sure to keep encouraging her along the way.

"You like that, don't you?"

Emma nodded, her face bright red.

"Then take a good feel," Nicole whispered, as she pushed Emma's hand deeper into her cleavage.

Emma was in a trance as she buried her hand between Nicole's breasts. She could feel the softness of Nicole's skin, and the way her firm tits cushioned her hand. She could feel the heat rising within her, and she knew the lust flowing through her body.

And then, in an act that surprised even Nicole, Emma pulled the neck of Nicole's dress down, exposing her tits, and dove into her cleavage with a grunt. She started to explore every inch of Nicole's body as she kissed and licked every inch of her chest.

Nicole moaned, and placed a hand on the back of Emma's head, feeling her hair, and slipping Emma's dress off her body to expose her ass. She ran a finger down the small of Emma's back, tracing circles and lines as she dug her nails in ever so lightly. Her other hand moved to cup one of Emma's breasts, and she squeezed it with a moan.

Emma broke from the kiss and looked Nicole in the eyes, a lustful grin on her face. She felt a hand on her ass, and another on her breast, and she knew the freedom she was feeling would be overwhelming. She returned the favor, removing Nicole's dress, and then reaching behind Nicole to take her bra off as well.

Emma admired the naked beauty in front of her, and then she leaned in with a furrowed forehead, and parted lips and kissed Nicole's right nipple. She teased it with her tongue at first, but as she continued, she sucked it into her mouth and latched on.

Nicole moaned at first, but then she gripped Emma's hair as Emma buried her face in Nicole's tits. Nicole turned her head to the right and watched Emma as she sucked and slurped on her breast.

Nicole watched Emma, a woman breaking free, a woman escaping captivity of her own mind, finally let go, and transform into the woman she really was.

She watched Emma, with eyes closed, and tongue sticking out, lashing her nipple furiously with fervent strokes of her tongue, interchanging between licking the nipple, biting it, and sucking it. And then, it was all sucking.

Emma climbed on top of the curvaceous stripper, who watched in amazement, as Emma pressed the weight of her entire body on her, grab both her tits, and push them together.

"Oh my god, I love them so much. I have been...staring, and salivating, and fucking wanting them ever since I saw you in that stripclub..." Emma said, her eyes fixed on the tits as if they were an otherworldly object of wonder she had stumbled upon.

"And I had been waiting to see you...like this, Em! Straddling me like a predator, and eyeing me hungrily. I love seeing you...ah fuck, Emma...!"

Nicole was cut short as Emma's lips engulfed her left boob and her whole mouth swallowed it up, or tried to. She sighed in relief, and then she took hold of Emma's hair, and pushed her into her flesh.

Emma moved down, putting Nicole's breasts together again, and then she kissed down to her bellybutton, and then she began licking around her bellybutton, and even licking right inside the belly button, before kissing downwards again.

Emma kissed around Nicole's belly button, and licked in it, and then she kissed down to her pelvis and then she kissed along her pelvic bones. She then shifted to the right a little, and began kissing around her right hip bone.

"No!" Nicole cried, and rolled on top of Emma, as the two women spun away from the bark of the tree, and found themselves in the center of a clearing, bordered by massive oaks.

"I want you to cum first!" Nicole hissed through gritted teeth, topping Emma, and kissing all over her collarbone.

Emma purred, and sighed in satisfaction, before once again rolling on top of Nicole.

The wet, dewy grass stuck to the naked bodies of the bridesmaids, like little medals announcing the passion of their act.

"No, you don't understand...I need you! I want to feel you shudder against my lips. That's *my* release!" Emma growled, all the poise and elegance of Kate Middleton leaving her body, and being replaced by the sheer depravity of an adult film star.

Nicole grinned, and once again, the two women rolled, and Nicole found herself back on top of the skinny woman. More medals clung to their bodies now, some even finding a resting place between the strands of their hair.

If a traveler would have stumbled into that clearing in that moment, they would think they have walked into heaven. Gazing upon two naked women, bathed in the silvery shards of the moon, one voluptuous and sexy, one slender and ethereal, with damp, bodies bearing the marks of their passion, the traveler would surely have fainted on the spot.

"Then let's cum together!" Nicole gasped, and pinned Emma's hands behind her head.

Nicole enjoyed Emma's lust-bathed face for a few seconds, and then she spread Emma's legs, and positioned her crotch between them.

She slung one of Emma's legs over her shoulders, with her toes pointing to the sky, and grabbed the leg with both her hands, like holding a flag while marching in a parade.

Emma realized what was going to happen, and arched delicately in anticipation.

"Shit! You are killing me baby," Emma growled, unable to take her eyes off Nicole's stiff nipples.

"haven't even begun," Nicole said, and gently, with unflinching eyes, started rubbing her pussy against Emma's inner thighs.

The sensation of Nicole's exotic, spicy pussy rubbing against her lower torso, made Emma moan and sigh, arching her back in enjoyment.

She had felt the rub of a woman's clit against her lips, and other parts of her body, and she knew what was about to happen, but to have it done so animalistically made it all the more enjoyable.

At first, Nicole's crotch was just rubbing against Emma's inner thigh, both women reveling in the contact, with mouths slightly open, eyes shut, and breathing coming in deep, full breaths.

Emma's leg, that was slung over Nicole's shoulder, was already trembling, and her eyes watered in anticipation.

Nicole's lips adorned a gleeful smile, and then, she grabbed Emma's leg with both her hands, and started rubbing her clit on Emma's thigh, in slow, circular motions, and each circle was being drawn tantalizingly close to her eager pussy.

A strong gust of wind picked up, tousling Nicole's hair about, making her look like a Nordic warrior at the helm of a ship, battling winds and storms with an oar.

But the oar, in this scenario, was Emma's leg, and Nicole was using it as leverage to push down on Emma's soft skin as hard as possible.

Finally, With a little thrust that mimicked a man shoving his dick inside a woman, Nicole slammed her pussy against Emma's, and the woman yelled in uncontrollable pleasure.

Her scream filled the clearing, making a flock of birds take off into the night sky.

The wind was howling around the two passionate women, while they eagerly mushed their pussies together. Emma screamed Nicole's name, and

grabbed her curvy ass, while Nicole grabbed Emma's hips, and held her as hard as she could.

Emma moaned like a wounded dog, and her writhing seemed to get Nicole even more aroused, as she took both her hands, and placed them on Emma's soft breasts, pinching her erect nipples.

Emma bucked her hips against Nicole's, in a frenzy of lust, and she grabbed Nicole's shoulder with her mouth, and bit down, not hard enough to make her bleed, but hard enough to leave a mark.

Emma's panting came in ragged, sharp bursts now, and she was getting close to orgasm. The friction against her pussy, the wind rushing across her body, the sensations of Nicole's large hands kneading her breasts, the taste of her mouth, the smell of her sweat - it was a symphony of lust that was more than enough to bring Emma there.

Emma's eyes rolled into the back of their sockets, and she fell down on Nicole, making the woman fall back on the grass. Emma panted, her pussy grinding against Nicole's, and her clit receiving the most intense rub of her entire life.

Emma felt like a dying star going supernova, and the pleasure was so intense that she didn't even care if Nicole was a little more experienced than her - all she cared about was cumming, and cumming hard.

Emma rolled over, and pinned Nicole to the grass , continuously grinding against her throbbing, over-sensitive pussy.

Nicole was surprised, but she didn't mind - she loved how Emma was taking control.

Suddenly, the stars aligned perfectly, or Emma and Nicole's pussies, and both reached climax at the same time. Emma's pussy spasmed around Nicole's, while Nicole moaned loudly, unable to hold it all in.

They both screamed, a sound so powerful and primal that it could have awakened all the night creatures in the forest. Emma felt hot all over, and

she experienced the most intense orgasm of her life. Emma collapsed on top of Nicole, unable to keep her eyes open, and Nicole wrapped her arms around Emma, and closed her eyes too.

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Chapter Ten

Scarlett and Daniella's wedding was an absolute stunner, each detail expertly designed to create a vibe of love and joy that was impossible to ignore. The sun beamed down, bathing the whole affair in a warm, golden light that seemed to make everything shimmer. Beneath the grand and ancient oak tree, Scarlett and Daniella stood, their eyes locked and brimming with love as they exchanged heartfelt vows.

Scarlett was a vision in her flowing white gown, which featured delicate lace and intricate beading that glinted in the sunlight. Her fiery red hair cascaded down her back, framing her face in soft curls. Daniella, on the other hand, chose a sleek, modern jumpsuit that accentuated her tall, athletic frame. Her dark hair was swept up into an elegant updo, revealing her graceful neck and the dazzling diamond earrings that glittered with every turn of her head.

The setting for the wedding was nothing short of magical. The oak tree's massive branches spread out like protective arms, draped with strings of twinkling fairy lights that added a touch of whimsy to the scene. The ground was covered in a lush, green carpet of grass, sprinkled with flower petals in vibrant shades of pink and orange. Rustic wooden chairs, adorned with floral arrangements and flowing ribbons, lined the makeshift aisle.

Nicole stood proudly as a bridesmaid, her excitement and happiness shining through her radiant smile. For once, she was standing at a wedding not as a paid escort to some guest, but as a cherished friend participating in an important role. The joy of being included in such a significant event made her heart swell with gratitude and warmth.

Emma, having found a sense of ease, watched the ceremony unfold with a mixture of joy and relief. Throughout the festivities, Nicole couldn't

help but check in on Emma, ensuring that she was coping well and didn't succumb to another panic attack. She would bring Emma refreshing drinks, catch her eye from across the gathering, and subtly position herself nearby to ensure Emma was never left alone.

At one point, Nicole walked over to Emma, handing her a glass of champagne. "How are you holding up, Em?" she asked softly, concern etched on her face.

Emma smiled, appreciating the genuine care Nicole was showing. "I'm doing alright, thanks to you," she replied, squeezing Nicole's hand gently, "I am not going to run away."

"Sure, because trust me," Nicole winked at Emma, "I don't think Scarlett would enjoy her bridesmaids making love at her rehearsal dinner *and* her wedding." Emma blushed harder than an Indian bride on her wedding day.

"I am still recovering from that," she mumbled, quickly gulping down a vodka shot. "I can't believe how I acted yesterday."

"You acted so desperate, horny...some would even say, like a slut..."

"Nicole!" Emma said sharply, her cheeks now apple replicas, "I'll throw this drink in your face if you don't stop teasing me!"

The night continued with a sumptuous dinner, followed by speeches, and a lot more dancing.

Laughter rang out across the venue as heartfelt and humorous speeches were made. Daniella's father, Logan, took the stage, his eyes twinkling with mischief as he began to regale the guests with a hilarious tale of how his daughter came out to him. "Now, I have another story about our dear Daniella that I think you'll all find quite amusing. You see, when Daniella finally decided to come out to me, she wanted it to be memorable, something that would stick in my mind forever."

The guests leaned in, eager to hear more.

"Well, she certainly achieved that," he chuckled. "One evening, I came home from work to find a huge, beautifully wrapped gift box in the living room. It was enormous, and I couldn't imagine what could be inside. Daniella stood nearby, grinning from ear to ear, urging me to open it."

The guests laughed, imagining the scene.

"So, I carefully untied the ribbon and removed the wrapping paper. And there, inside the box, was... another box! This one a bit smaller, but still quite large. With Daniella's encouragement, I opened box after box, each one nestled inside the previous one like a set of Russian dolls."

The guests chuckled, picturing the growing pile of boxes.

"Finally, after opening what felt like a hundred boxes, I reached the smallest one. I was almost out of breath by then, but Daniella's excitement was contagious. I carefully opened the tiny box, and inside, there was a note. It read: 'Surprise! I'm gay! I am finally coming out of the box!'"

I looked at my thirteen-year-old daughter, raised an eyebrow, and said, "Do you mean...you're coming out of the closet?" The crowd laughed, and Scarlett held Daniella's hand, squeezing it gently, offering her support. "You see, she had mixed up the phrases 'thinking out of the box' and 'coming out of the closet,' but one thing she hadn't mixed up at all was her sexuality and her preferences. Even though I thought it was a phase back then, she proved me wrong. And now, years later, she's finally marrying the love of her life. So, here's to a life of thinking out of the closet and coming out of the box!"

The crowd erupted with laughter, and Emma linked her hand through Nicole's arm as they cheered.

Cassie, emboldened by a few too many drinks, finally mustered the courage to approach Emma. With a flirtatious grin, she slurred, "Hey Emma, you know you're way too beautiful to be dancing alone, right?" Emma, taken aback, glanced at Nicole who just shrugged, amused by the situation.

As Cassie dragged Emma to the dance floor, her hands caressed Emma's waist and arms as they swayed to the music. Emma tried to maintain her composure, but she couldn't help but giggle at Cassie's over-the-top attempts at flirting.

Cassie leaned in closer to Emma, her breath heavy with the scent of alcohol, and whispered, "You know, Emma, you really deserve someone better than Nicole. I mean, she's a stripper, and you... you're just so amazing."

"Cassie, you need to decide who you want, honey, me or Nicole!"

Cassie groaned, and then in a childlike whiny voice, said, "I want you both!"

"Sorry, I don't like threesomes, but I hear Amanda, Daniella's maid of honor, is recently divorced, and looking to experiment!"

"Well, then point me in the direction of that lady, and I will see to it that her experimentation goes well!"

Emma laughed, and after sending Cassie in the direction of the maid of honor, came back to find Nicole surrounded by a group of excited, and cackling teenage girls, who couldn't get over how similar Nicole looked to Kylie Jenner.

"Oh my god, Nicole! Your lips are amazing! Where did you get them done?" one girl exclaimed, her eyes wide with admiration.

Nicole chuckled, shaking her head. "Thanks, but they're actually natural. No injections or fillers here."

"No way!" another girl chimed in, disbelief in her tone. "You have to tell us your secret! How do you keep them so full and gorgeous?"

"Well," Nicole replied playfully, "I guess I just won the genetic lottery!"

The group of teenage girls continued to shower Nicole with compliments and inquiries, clearly enamored with her beauty and eager to emulate their idol, Kylie Jenner. All the while, Nicole entertained their curiosity with a touch of amusement, enjoying the lighthearted banter with her young admirers.

As the group of teenage girls dispersed, heading off to enjoy their dinner, Emma and Nicole found themselves alone once more. They settled down next to each other, their shoulders brushing as they turned their attention to the wedding festivities. The atmosphere was joyous, but beneath the surface, both women were lost in deep thought.

As the evening progressed, the reality of the situation began to weigh on them both. The wedding would soon come to an end, and with it, the time they had together. Lingering in the air between them was the unspoken question that had been haunting them both: "Now what?"

Emma glanced over at Nicole, her eyes full of uncertainty and hope. Nicole returned her gaze, a mixture of determination and vulnerability in her eyes. For a moment, the noise of the celebration faded away, and all that existed was the connection between the two women, their hearts beating in sync with the rhythm of their unspoken emotions.

But, as the music grew louder and the laughter of the guests filled the air once more, Emma and Nicole were pulled back into the present. They knew that soon, they would have to face the reality of their situation and decide what the future held for them. But for now, they chose to savor the fleeting moments of happiness they had found in each other's company.



The wedding festivities had come to an end, and the once-vibrant scene was now being stripped away by the decorators. Under the cloak of night, Emma and Nicole remained the sole witnesses to the transformation. They had retreated to the cabin porch, slipping into comfortable clothes that signaled the end of their public personas for the night.

A hush had settled over the forest, broken only by the rustling of leaves, as if the very trees were whispering secrets to each other. Emma and Nicole sat side by side, their bodies a testament to the unspoken bond they shared, seeking solace in each other's presence.

The night's shadows played tricks on their eyes, casting eerie shapes and patterns that danced in the darkness. Their shared silence was heavy with the knowledge that time was running out. Soon, the inevitable question would arise – now what?

Nicole leaned her head on Emma's shoulder, the warmth of their connection providing a temporary reprieve from the chill of uncertainty. Emma's arm wrapped around Nicole, holding her close, as if trying to stave off the relentless march of time.

"Can I ask you something?" Nicole's voice broke the silence that hung between them, tentative and uncertain.

"Don't ask something you don't want to know the answer to," Emma whispered, her gaze following the decorators as they dismantled the wooden arch under which Scarlett and Daniella had exchanged their vows.

"How did Alice die?" Nicole pulled away from the embrace, her eyes searching Emma's face for answers.

"She died during childbirth," Emma revealed, her voice catching as the arch came crashing down, a shower of leaves following in its wake. "We had decided to have a baby with the help of a sperm donor, and everything went smoothly until the last moment. Complications arose, and... the doctors couldn't save Alice... or the child."

Nicole's gaze followed a man as he climbed the massive oak tree, removing the fairy lights that had illuminated the clearing. As the lights vanished, the darkness seemed to deepen around them, casting a somber atmosphere over the scene.

"I am so sorry, Emma," Nicole's voice trembled, tears glistening in her eyes. She couldn't imagine what she would go through if she lost her Susie.

"Now it makes sense. Your reluctance to find happiness, to fall in love again. How could you, after all that you've gone through?"

A rogue cloud momentarily obscured the moon, plunging the cabin and the clearing into deeper darkness. "What happened between you and the father of your child?" Emma inquired, her toe gently caressing Nicole's feet.

"Nothing. He was a patron... a young boy of 18 or 19, whom I took pity on and had sex with. A few weeks later, I discovered I was pregnant, and the boy had killed himself by throwing himself into a lake. He was a troubled soul, I found out later. I decided to keep the baby, and that's that."

"His family never contacted you?"

"He had no family."

Emma studied the beautiful face beside her, barely visible in the shadows. And then, as if sensing her gaze, the cloud drifted away, and the moonlight bathed Nicole's face, illuminating her features like a beacon on a watchtower.

"I would love to meet Susie someday. I wish she could have come to the wedding, her and Logan."

"They had to go visit my uncle. He isn't doing well, and he wanted to meet Susie before... anything bad happened," Nicole explained, her toe meeting Emma's as they engaged in a playful game of footsie. The two women shared a comfortable silence, their feet communicating more than words could.

After a moment, Emma found her voice again. "Nicole... what now?"

Nicole's hands curled into fists as she shifted uneasily in her seat, her tongue darting out to moisten her lips. "I want to try again," she finally confessed, just as the decorators dismantled a pole supporting the overhead canopy.

"But what has changed since the last time we had this conversation? You're still escorting, aren't you?"

"Yeah, but I'm willing to stop. I won't escort anymore. I'll just perform at the strip club for a while until I find another job, something more... respectable."

Emma's heart constricted, her emotions a whirlwind of confusion and apprehension. Nicole was prepared to abandon a steady source of income to be with her, and Emma couldn't help but question if she was ready to shoulder that kind of responsibility.

Emma's mind raced, weighing the risks and the possibilities that lay before them. She looked into Nicole's eyes, searching for any hint of doubt or fear, but found only determination and love. It touched her deeply that Nicole was willing to make such a significant change in her life, just for a chance at happiness together.

"Can I ask you a few things about what you would be doing at the strip club?"

Nicole's face softened, and she nodded slowly. "Of course, Emma. I'll answer anything you want to know."

Emma took a deep breath, gathering her courage. "Will you have to perform any... sexual acts?"

"No, not if I want to. The club usually gives us independence regarding that. If I want, I can just perform, and go backstage, and call it a night."

"Will you be naked on stage?"

"Depends on what kind of an act I am performing. If I am performing a proper striptease, at the pole, then yeah. But if I am doing more of a cabaret performance, then no. But...the cabaret performances don't pay that well, and I'd lose my position as the final act of the night, which is usually

the most coveted. You have already seen it. I performed it when we first met."

Emma did remember it, how could she ever forget it. That performance by Nicole was the reason she found herself here, sitting on the porch of a secluded cabin, with a woman who is willing to give up a large part of her income in order to be with her. She felt like she owed it to Nicole to say yes, even if she was scared about the consequences of such a decision.

"I can try and make my peace with the nudity. Even top actresses go nude in front of the camera, right? And millions of people around the world watch them. You would only be naked for a handful of people," Emma reasoned, attempting to rationalize the situation.

"Emma, the nudity comes right at the very end, and then I'm off the stage before you know it," Nicole reassured her gently.

Emma nodded, her thoughts racing. Maybe she could make this work. She knew that if there was anyone who deserved her courage and effort, anyone for whom she could take the leap of faith, it was the woman sitting beside her.

Just as she was about to nod her head and tell Nicole she was ready to give them another shot, another thought popped into her mind. "What about private lap dances? Would you still give them?"

Nicole fell silent, her heart heavy with the weight of the question. She had been dreading this conversation, but she knew she had to be honest with Emma.

"Yes, I would. They pay well, and it's a big part of my income," Nicole said, her voice soft and hesitant.

Emma's heart sank. She had hoped that Nicole would say no, that she would continue sacrificing for their future. But deep down, she had always known this was a possibility. It was a part of Nicole's job, and she couldn't just ask her to give it up.

"Okay," Emma said, trying to sound brave even though she felt like crying. "I understand."

"Emma, even if I were willing to give up providing private lap dances, the manager of the club won't agree. It is a strip club at the end of the day, and private lap dances are kind of the norm, the staple at places like these," Nicole explained, her voice tinged with regret and frustration.

Emma took a deep breath, trying to steady her emotions. "I know, Nicole. I understand that it's a part of your job, and I'm not asking you to give it up overnight. I just... I need some time to process it all and figure out how I feel."

Nicole reached out, placing her hand gently on Emma's knee. "I get it, Emma. This is a lot to take in. And I'm willing to be patient and wait for you to decide what's best for you. I just want you to know that I'm serious about us, and I'm willing to make changes for our future."

A tear escaped Emma's eye, and she quickly wiped it away. She knew Nicole was sincere and trying her best to make a better life for both of them. But Emma also knew she had to be realistic and honest with herself about what she could handle.

Emma imagined Nicole giving lapdances to an array of people. She could imagine each performance, from the seductive music that played in the background to the way Nicole moved her body in time with the beat. She could see her hips swaying and her arms snaking around clients as she moved ever-closer towards them. She envisioned clients practically drooling over Nicole, their hands making contact with different parts of her body as if they had the right to touch her. The image filled Emma with a jealous rage, and she nearly leapt off the porch in anger before realizing that this was simply how it was going to be if they were together.

Emma could feel a deep jealousy beginning to stir within her at the thought of someone else experiencing pleasure through what was supposed to be her exclusive connection with Nicole. It was like a hot poker burning within her chest, making it hard for her to breathe.

Her thoughts spiraled out of control, images of Nicole intimately dancing for others consuming her mind. Finally, Emma couldn't take it any longer and whispered, her voice tinged with anguish, "It won't work! I can't...This isn't how it's supposed to be!"

"Emma...please, work with me here," Nicole implored, her voice cracking as she fought to save their relationship. "I know it's far from perfect, but it's my job. I can't just quit and walk away. Please, don't give up on us just yet. We can find a way to make this work."

Tears brimmed in Emma's eyes as she looked at Nicole. She wanted it to work just as much as Nicole did, but the thought of her giving lap dances to others was too painful to bear. "I don't know if I can," she whispered, her voice faltering.

Nicole leaned in, gently taking Emma's hands. "I promise you, Emma, I'll do everything I can to make this work," she said, her voice low and sincere. "I won't abandon you. I'm in this for the long haul. Just give me some time to figure everything out, and I promise I will."

By now, the clearing had been stripped of all its decorations, the trees bereft of the warm twinkling lights, lanterns, and the giant disco ball that had once graced the dance floor. The only light came from the moon, casting an eerie glow over the empty space.

"Everything's cleared out, Emma. We're leaving now!" Gary, the owner of the decoration company, called out. Choked by her emotions, Emma gave the man and his team a thumbs-up.

"Thanks for everything, guys!" Nicole spoke up in Emma's stead.

As the decorations were loaded into the truck, it finally rolled away into the darkness, leaving Emma, Nicole, and the heavy silence between them alone in the clearing.

"You haven't spoken for a while, Em. What are you thinking?" Nicole asked, shifting her position to sit cross-legged on the grass, facing Emma.

Inside Emma's head, a fierce battle of thoughts and emotions raged. She tried to reason with herself, reminding herself that it was just dancing, merely Nicole's job. She attempted to rationalize everything, even thinking back to the time when she had taken bachata dancing classes, dancing provocatively with other girls while Alice had been nothing but supportive.

But then, a sudden realization struck her like a bolt of lightning - bachata dancing classes and lap dances were entirely different worlds. The thought triggered a torrent of vivid images of Nicole dancing intimately with others, and her heart grew heavier with each passing moment.

Tears streamed down Emma's face as she looked into Nicole's eyes, her voice barely audible as she whispered, "This won't work, Nicole. This is it for us."

The words cut through the air like a knife, shattering the last vestiges of hope that had lingered between them. For Emma, there was no turning back. The line had been drawn, and she knew in her heart that their love would not be able to survive this fundamental divide.

"No! No, Emma...why don't you understand what we have here?" Nicole inched closer to Emma, taking both her hands in hers, her eyes pleading with a vulnerability she rarely showed.

In that moment, Nicole would have done anything to change Emma's mind. She was ready to abandon her ego, her attitude, and all the things that made her feel invincible, just to keep Emma from walking away. But Emma's resolve was unwavering. She shook her head, tears still flowing freely down her cheeks. "I understand perfectly well, Nicole. It's just that...I can't bear the thought of you dancing like that with other people. It hurts too much."

"I'll leave my job! Is that what you want? I'll leave everything!" Nicole's voice was a desperate whisper.

"And I won't let you," Emma replied softly, "Don't make this so difficult for me, Nicole. I will always, always be grateful to you for last night. You gave me something I'll cherish forever. You pulled me back from

the edge of a dull, monotonous existence and showed me how much life has to offer."

Nicole's eyes narrowed, and her forehead creased in irritation, "And I did all of that just so you can leave me and enjoy your newfound freedom with someone else?"

"I'm not the one looking to bump bodies with someone else, Nicole."

"Is that a shot at me? Do you think I want to dance naked for others? That I enjoy it? I drink myself to oblivion each night, just to forget the day's events. I would gladly give it all up if I could provide my daughter with the life she deserves. But I can't because I don't know how to do anything else. I'm just a hot body with a beautiful face who knows how to turn people on. That's how you fell for me, right?"

"Yeah," Emma said curtly, "and I'm afraid someone else might as well, someone who's prettier than me. Then what, Nicole? What will you tell me then?"

"That won't happen!"

"You don't know that!" Emma said, shaking her head, tears flying off her cheeks.

"I know because I've fallen in love with you!" Nicole's voice cracked, and she began to sob like a child.

She broke down in front of Emma, burying her face in her hands, "I love you!" she whispered, more to herself than Emma.

Emma cradled Nicole's face in her hands and wiped the tears from her cheeks. "I'm a 40-year-old woman whose idea of a great evening is staying in with a cup of coffee and a good book. You're a firecracker, a wild gust of wind. You should love someone who's like you!"

Nicole suddenly stood up, backing away from Emma as the full realization of what this meant hit her. This was it. It was over. She had tried

to make it work, to create something that could last, but in the end it was impossible.

The anger she felt towards herself for being so foolish mingled with sadness as she realized how stupid it was of her to show such weakness.

She was a warrior, a woman who had faced and conquered the most brutal challenges life could hurl at her, and yet here she was, tears streaming down her face, pleading with a woman who seemed determined to walk away.

"Okay," Nicole exhaled, her voice trembling, "okay..." she repeated, her heart aching with the weight of her decision, "you should call Gary and have him come back to pick you up."

"As you say," Emma agreed, nodding through her tears, sniffing and wiping away the remnants of their shared heartbreak.

Nicole stood by the window of the cabin, and watched Emma gather her things, her heart heavy with the knowledge that this was the end. The moment seemed to stretch on forever, each second a painful reminder of the emotions they had shared and the love they were now leaving behind. The dim light inside the cabin cast a somber glow over the scene, only heightening the sense of loss that enveloped them both.

Finally, Emma stepped outside, her silhouette framed by the moonlight as she walked towards the waiting truck. The finality of the moment hit Nicole like a tidal wave, leaving her breathless and hollow. As Emma climbed into the truck, she glanced back one last time, and for a brief moment, their eyes locked, sharing a silent goodbye. Then, the truck pulled away, disappearing into the night, taking with it the last remnants of the love they had shared.

Nicole remained at the window, staring long after the truck had vanished, her eyes fixed on the spot where it had once stood. The trees swayed gently in the breeze, their rustling leaves a haunting lullaby for her shattered heart. She tried to muster the strength to put on a brave face, but the crushing weight of her sorrow was too much to bear.

Unable to hold back any longer, Nicole retreated to the kitchen, her footsteps heavy and slow. Her father's whiskey bottle caught her eye, and she grasped it as though it were a lifeline. She unscrewed the cap and brought the bottle to her lips, drinking deeply, as if the burning liquid could somehow dull the pain that gnawed at her soul.

But the whiskey did nothing to quell the tempest of emotions that raged within her, and as the tears began to fall once more, Nicole realized that no amount of alcohol could mend the broken pieces of her heart.

But she was determined to test that theory, determined to try and drown out the pain with every sip of the whiskey. She took another long swig, feeling the warmth of the alcohol spread through her body, numbing her senses. The room spun around her, but she didn't care. She just wanted to forget. To forget that Emma was gone.

The memories of their time together flooded her mind, each one like a knife twisting in her gut. She remembered the way Emma's laughter had filled the cabin, the gentle touch of her fingers on Nicole's skin, the way her moans and screams had filled the night air when they had made love in the middle of the forest, in the darkness of the night.

Nicole took another swig of whiskey, closing her eyes as the memories continued to wash over her. She remembered how Emma had tasted, how she had felt beneath her touch, and the sound of her voice when she begged for more.

With her head still reeling from the torrent of emotions and images of their passionate lovemaking playing in her mind, Nicole began to climb the stairs to her room, gripping the whiskey bottle tightly. The alcohol coursing through her veins made her unsteady, her steps faltering as she ascended the staircase.

Suddenly, her foot slipped on a step, her balance lost in an instant. A wave of panic surged through her as she tried to grasp onto something, anything to keep her from falling. But it was too late – the cruel force of gravity pulled her down, her body tumbling helplessly down the stairs.

The sickening sound of her skull connecting with the hard wooden steps echoed through the cabin, each impact a brutal reminder of the fragility of life. As Nicole's battered body came to a rest at the foot of the stairs, she lay there, broken and alone.

The world around her began to fade, the darkness closing in like a suffocating shroud. As her consciousness slipped away, the last thing she thought of was Emma's smile, and the love she had left behind.

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Chapter Eleven

A Few Days Later

Emma roamed the grounds of St. Mary's Academy, where she spent her days nurturing the minds of the next generation. Overhead, the sky sulked, a canvas of gray that mirrored her own gloomy disposition. She was drawn to a towering oak tree, its sturdy branches reaching out like loving arms, beckoning her closer. She found solace beneath its protective canopy, leaning against its rough, textured bark.

Sitting there, her thoughts inevitably drifted back to that other tree, a towering willow, under which she and Nicole had shared their most intimate moments. The memory of their passion, their love, and their connection seemed to echo in the rustling leaves above her.

A young girl with a smattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks approached Emma, her sneakers scuffing the ground as she took a break from playing on the playground. "Miss Emma," she asked, slightly out of breath, "where have you been for the past few days?"

Emma managed a soft smile and replied, "I was away at a wedding, sweetheart."

The freckled girl frowned, "We missed you, Miss Emma. The substitute teacher was no fun at all. She sucked!"

Emma couldn't help but chuckle at the girl's candid remark, even though she knew she shouldn't. "Now, now, you shouldn't say things like that," she gently chided the young girl. "But I promise I won't leave you and the other kids again any time soon."

The girl beamed a wide smile, her eyes lighting up. "Yay! I'm so glad you're back!" And with that, she turned and sprinted back towards her friends, her laughter filling the air.

Emma watched her go, feeling the warmth of the interaction chase away a bit of the chill that had settled in her heart.

Emma had always found solace in the company of children. They possessed a certain magic that could mend broken hearts and chase away life's miseries. Their innocence and unfiltered honesty were like a healing balm for the soul, reminding her of the beauty that still existed in the world despite its imperfections.

As she watched the kids play, their laughter filling the air like a symphony, Emma couldn't help but feel a yearning deep within her heart. She longed for a child of her own, a little being to share her love and wisdom with, and who would, in turn, teach her about the simple joys of life.

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Emma's footsteps echoed in the empty apartment, the silence heavy around her. Daniella and Scarlett were gone, honeymooning somewhere filled with love and laughter. She missed them, but mostly, she missed Nicole.

Her phone buzzed, a reminder from her book club. Carla would be there, the woman who might have tangled with Nicole between the sheets. She couldn't face that now. Tapping her screen, she dismissed the invitation.

Netflix offered an escape, a refuge from her thoughts. Emma clicked on *Downton Abbey*, the familiar faces of the Crawley family filling her screen. The stories would carry her away, a temporary respite from the ache in her chest. She needed that, just for a little while.

Days blurred together, each one a mirror of the last. Emma clung to routine, seeking solace in the mundane. She downloaded dating apps,

thinking that maybe she was ready to test the waters. But the small talk, the endless parade of faces, it all felt hollow, empty. She couldn't keep up. One by one, the apps disappeared from her phone, replaced by meditation tools and calming soundscapes.

Emma sought balance in her life, the equilibrium she once knew. But even as she tried to meditate, to find peace, her thoughts always circled back to Nicole. The taste of her lips, the warmth of her touch, the love she had left behind.

She tried to move forward, but her heart kept pulling her back, tethered to memories that refused to fade.

The classroom was empty, save for Emma, who sat at her desk grading essays about the American Revolution. She was lost in her students' words, her red pen marking corrections and offering praise, when the door creaked open. Another teacher entered, a girl of about 11 or 12 trailing behind her.

"Wait by the door, sweetie," the teacher instructed the girl before walking over to Emma's desk.

"Emma, this is the girl I mentioned to you," she said, gesturing towards the child. "She's closed herself off—doesn't eat, doesn't speak, doesn't smile. I thought maybe you could help her, given how wonderful you are with kids."

Emma glanced up from her papers, taking in the girl's small form. She stood by the door, hugging herself, her eyes filled with a sadness far too heavy for someone her age. The sight of her tugged at Emma's heartstrings, the urge to offer comfort and understanding washing over her.

Emma nodded at the teacher, determination set in her eyes. "I'll handle it," she assured her, before turning her attention to the girl. "Come on over, sweetie."

The other teacher flashed a grateful smile before slipping out of the classroom, leaving Emma alone with the young girl.

The girl hesitated for a moment, then approached Emma's desk, her steps slow and cautious. As she came to stand beside Emma, her eyes remained downcast, her expression as sad as a lost puppy.

Emma softened, sensing the vulnerability and pain radiating from the child. She knew she needed to tread carefully, to create a safe space for this girl to open up and let her in.

"What's your name?" Emma inquired gently, and the girl hesitantly raised her gaze. "Susie," she murmured, her voice barely audible.

Emma couldn't help but find it strange that she was speaking to a girl named Susie, the same name as Nicole's daughter. She quickly dismissed the thought, though, and focused her attention on the child before her.

Tenderly taking Susie's hand, Emma brushed the girl's hair out of her face, offering her a warm, reassuring smile. "You have such beautiful hair, Susie," Emma observed, her eyes searching the young girl's face for a connection.

"Thanks," Susie replied softly.

Spotting a small mole behind Susie's ear, Emma's curiosity piqued. "What's this?" she asked playfully. "I have one exactly in the same place!" Emma exclaimed, capturing Susie's attention.

"Really?" the brown-eyed girl inquired, her curiosity now mingling with a hint of skepticism.

"Yes, would you like to see it?" Emma prompted, and Susie nodded her head in agreement. Tucking her loose hair behind her left ear, Emma turned her face to reveal the back of her ear. "Do you see it?" she asked.

"No. There's nothing there," Susie observed.

"What? Are you sure?" Emma feigned panic, her voice laced with disbelief.

"Yeah," Susie replied, squinting her eyes for a closer look, her curiosity piqued even further by the apparent disappearance of the mole.

"I can't believe this! It was right there this morning when I was getting ready!" Emma lamented.

Susie, now amused by the unusual behavior of usually composed teachers she was used to seeing, broke into a smile. "You're lying. You never had a mole!"

"I did! It must have gone into hiding after seeing yours because yours is so much better than mine," Emma responded, putting on a mock-pout.

"But beauty is in the eye of the beholder," young Susie countered, stunning Emma with her wisdom.

"Wow, wise words from a wise young woman. Where did you hear that?"

"My mom told me."

"Your mom must be very intelligent!"

"Yes, she is."

"What's her name, Susie?"

"Nicole," Susie answered, and Emma's heart clenched at the mention of the name. Yet she couldn't let Susie detect her emotions, so she maintained her smile and said, "I bet she is. You're lucky to have a smart mom like that."

As Emma processed the new information, her mind raced. Standing before her was Nicole's daughter, a child who was clearly struggling with something. Why wasn't Nicole aware of her own daughter's struggles?

"Well, then why isn't the daughter of such a wise woman happy at school? I hear you have stopped speaking to your friends?"

Emma studied Susie's face, searching for a way to break through her barriers. "Susie, can you tell me what's wrong?" she asked softly, her voice full of empathy. The girl hesitated, her eyes downcast, unwilling to share her burden.

Taking a deep breath, Emma decided to take a risk. "Is it related to your mother? Is she doing okay?" she inquired gently.

At the mention of her mother, Susie's eyes welled up with tears, and she gave a small, trembling nod.

Emma reached out, placing a comforting hand on the young girl's shoulder. "It's alright, Susie. You can talk to me. I'm here to help."

The young girl remained quiet, and Emma could hardly bear the suspense. "Susie?"

"She keeps drinking all the time, and the doctor says she shouldn't drink. It's hurting her liver. But she still drinks. Grandpa and I have asked her not to, but she lies to us."

Emma listened attentively, a knot forming in the pit of her stomach at the thought of Nicole struggling with alcoholism. She knew all too well the pain and destruction addiction could bring to a family.

"Susie, I'm so sorry you're going through this. It must be really tough for you," Emma said, her voice full of understanding and compassion. "But don't worry, we'll figure this out together."

Susie wiped tears from her cherubic, flushed cheeks and said, "I'm sorry for crying. Mommy says I shouldn't cry in front of strangers. It shows weakness."

Emma's own eyes filled with tears as she responded, "But I'm not a stranger, honey." Susie's heart-wrenching expression, coupled with the knowledge that Nicole was hurting herself and her family, tore at Emma's heartstrings.

"When did she start drinking again?"

"After she came back from a friend's wedding."

Emma's heart plummeted. It was because of her, and the decision she had made to walk out of Nicole's life. Part of her suddenly held herself responsible, but another part also felt irritated and annoyed at Nicole's behavior. How could she let anything deviate her from being a good mother? Emma hadn't expected something so weak and desperate from Nicole.

"Okay, listen, Susie, your mother might be going through something right now, honey, and this might just be a temporary thing, alright? You don't need to worry. She'll be fine."

Susie nodded her head, rubbing her eyes. "Please don't call my mother to talk to her. I don't want her to know I snitched on her!"

Emma smiled and shook Susie's hands. "I promise. But you have to make a promise to me as well." She leaned closer to the girl and spoke in a hushed voice. "You'll go back to class with a smile on your face, and you won't lose that smile until the end of the day. Because you know what happens when things disappear. Sometimes, they may never return, like my mole. Do you want to lose your smile forever?"

"No, I won't lose it," said Susie, her soft, adorable lips curling into a smile that warmed Emma's heart. "You're so pretty, and I'm sure your mommy is too. She'll be okay, I promise!"

Emma ruffled Susie's hair, and after a moment's hesitation, pulled her into a tender hug, which surprised both Susie and herself.

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Emma sank deeper into her seat, the shadows of the dimly lit club providing a shroud of anonymity. A low, smoky haze hung in the air, mingling with the pungent aroma of sweat and cheap cologne. The music

throbbed relentlessly, its relentless rhythm invading her chest and unsettling her nerves.

Her eyes darted around the room, taking in the faces of the patrons who seemed at ease in this world of excess and hedonism. Their laughter and jeers only served to heighten Emma's sense of unease, amplifying the gnawing anxiety that clenched her stomach like a vice.

She checked her watch, counting the seconds until Nicole would grace the stage. Emma wrestled with the conflicting desires that had brought her here – the urge to confront Nicole in a more private, controlled setting versus the magnetic pull of witnessing her dance once more.

As the anticipation swelled, Emma's thoughts raced, an endless stream of what-ifs and maybes. How would Nicole react to her presence? Would she even listen? Emma's fingers tapped a nervous rhythm on the table, her gaze fixed on the stage, her mind awash with uncertainty.

And yet, despite the tumult of her emotions, a part of her ached to see Nicole in her element, to bear witness to the raw, unbridled talent that had left her captivated the last time they had met. It was a hunger that couldn't be sated by phone calls or whispered conversations in quiet cafés. Emma needed to see Nicole in her truest form – vulnerable, powerful, and utterly spellbinding.

The stage lights dimmed, casting an eerie darkness over the club. In the shadows, Nicole materialized, her presence a sudden gravitational force, drawing the attention of everyone present. Conversations ceased, laughter muted, the collective anticipation so thick it was almost tangible.

The first haunting notes of a melody emerged, and Nicole began to dance. Her limbs unfolded like the petals of a flower opening to greet the sun. She swayed and undulated, each fluid motion conveying a story not yet told, emotions left unspoken.

Nicole's performance progressed and her dance took on a more complex and hypnotic quality. She spun and pirouetted, her body tracing

intricate patterns in the air, inviting the audience to lose themselves in her otherworldly beauty.

The music swelled to a crescendo, and Nicole's movements became more daring, her body twisting and contorting with the skill and precision of a seasoned gymnast. Emma's unwavering eyes watched the woman who had released her from captivity, run her hands up her body, and with a swift swoosh of her cape, detach it from a corset that was hidden underneath, and twirl around.

Adorned in a provocative latex corset and tantalizing netted stockings that enveloped her lithe lower body, Nicole executed a flawless split. With a flourish, she extended her arms to the heavens above. In a final, fierce cascade of her silken hair, she cast a sultry, seductive, soul-ensnaring gaze upon her awestruck audience. In that moment, Emma, along with the other patrons of the strip club, found themselves utterly captivated, willingly surrendering to Nicole's irresistible combination of skill, sensuality, and undeniable magnetism.

With the grace of a seasoned performer, Nicole bestowed one final bow upon her entranced spectators before vanishing into the shadowy abyss behind the stage, leaving a trail of bewitched hearts in her wake.

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"She will be here momentarily, but I must inform you, Nicole has stopped escorting. She only does private lap dances now," one of the waitresses at the strip club told Emma, who had inquired for Nicole, and asked her what services she offered.

"Sure, I'll keep that in mind," said Emma, and leaned back into the plush, leather couch situated in the back of the room.

The stage was ablaze with red and blue lights, leaving the people in the room cloaked in darkness, their faces hidden from each other. She had been waiting for a few minutes now, anticipating her arrival, when suddenly a

curvaceous figure emerged from the shadows at the edge of the stage. Nicole's tall frame swayed in her ruby red thong and corset, emphasizing every curve on her body and deepening her already voluptuous cleavage. Her silky raven black hair flowed as she strutted towards Emma with the grace of a supermodel.

Emma felt as if all fluids had drained from her mouth, yet her body was drenched in anticipation. The air around them crackled and pulsed with energy as Nicole stopped before her and locked eyes. The recognition in Nicole's gaze made Emma's heart stop for a few brief moments, sending waves of excitement coursing through her veins.

"So, what brings you here, Emma? Are you here for a private lap dance or something more?" Nicole asked coolly, her piercing gaze never leaving Emma's.

"I've come for a conversation," Emma replied, feeling the oppressive weight of Nicole's icy, unforgiving gaze bearing down on her.

"Whatever floats your boat. As long as I'm getting paid," Nicole retorted, rolling her eyes dismissively. "Do you want to talk privately or here?"

"I'm not here to avail your services," Emma declared, her tone firm.

"Then you shouldn't have come here to waste my time. My time costs money here."

"And what would it cost you if you lose your daughter?" Emma's words flew like arrows, piercing Nicole's heart in countless places.

"What are you talking about?"

"You've been drinking...a lot, and your daughter is deeply concerned for your well-being. She's become withdrawn, no longer speaking or smiling at school."

"How do you know all this?"

"Because I teach at the school she attends. She's not in my class, but her history teacher brought her to me, and I had a conversation with her."

Nicole sank onto a nearby couch, her seductive façade evaporating, leaving a vulnerable woman in its wake.

"She goes to the same school...where you teach?"

"Yes."

"And she's...sad?"

"More than sad, Nicole. Your daughter is consumed with worry because of you. She told me about your liver issues."

Nicole didn't reply, but her silence spoke volumes.

"Have you been drinking a lot?" Emma inquired again, as one of the other strippers began to perform on the main stage and tendrils of smoke snaked through the dimly lit club.

"A little," Nicole admitted, her voice tinged with remorse.

"Why, Nicole? I thought you were a strong woman who prioritized her daughter above all else."

"I'm also human, okay?" Nicole snapped, her emotions raw and exposed. "The pain I felt after you left...it was unbearable. I searched everywhere for peace but found none. So, I turned to drinking, and it eased the pain."

"But it also pushed your daughter away from you."

"I always make sure I don't drink in front of her."

"She's old enough to recognize when you're drunk."

Nicole tore her gaze away from Emma. This would have been a lot easier if you would have just agreed to try to make it work with me, she

thought to herself.

Suddenly, a switch went off in her head, and when she turned her gaze back to Emma, it was fierce, and breathing fire, "thank you for the concern, Emma, but I think I can raise my own child. I have been doing it without you, and I will continue to do it long after you are gone. Just because I showed you my vulnerabilities, and broke down in front of you, does not mean I will allow you to lecture me about motherhood. Just because you teach kids does not make you a mother! You need to be one to know what it feels like!"

Emma felt like Nicole had punched her in her gut.

"I was only looking after my student. I would have done the same for any other kid in my school."

"No, you wouldn't have. You wanted to see me again. You are confused about whether you want me or not. Maybe, it's you who needs to get her head straight, and not me."

Emma was heartbroken and stood up to leave. But she had a responsibility to Susie, her student, and she had to fulfill it. She looked at Nicole with a newfound resolve.

"I will be looking after your daughter, no matter what," Emma said firmly. "That is my job and my duty as her teacher."

Nicole scoffed. "You don't have to remind me of that."

"Good. Because I take my responsibilities seriously."

Nicole rolled her eyes. "Fine. But don't think that just because you're her teacher, you have any right to tell me how to raise my child."

Emma sighed. "I don't want to tell you how to raise your child, Nicole. I just want to help a child who is concerned for her mother."

Nicole did not reply. She was out of ammo, and common sense was slowly returning to her brain.

"Good work on the stage. I'll see you around," said Emma, and Nicole watched her leave, her long, flowy skirt dancing around her ankles.

Nicole closed her eyes, and leaned back against the couch. She closed her eyes, and felt the floor reverberate with the thumps of the bass. She let out a deep sigh, and then remembered the words her landlady had said to her that morning, 'pay up by the end of the week, or pack your bags'.

"Nicole! That man in the suit wants a lap dance. Hurry up, and get to work," one of the managers tapped Nicole on her shoulder, and with an unexpressive face and demeanor, Nicole stood up, and on the way to the man, smiled like a robot, but she felt her heart bleed from inside.

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A Few More Days Later

Nicole stood in the center of the pulsating nightclub, the cacophony of sound and stench of desperation all around her. She was draped in a dress that clung to her curves like a second skin, the deep crimson fabric plunging low in both the front and the back, leaving little to the imagination. The shimmer of the sequins adorning the dress caught the dim light, casting a seductive glow on her exposed skin.

Beside her stood her client, a fat, middle-aged man with a receding hairline that only highlighted his oily, pockmarked face. His beady eyes darted about, greedily taking in the sights, while he clung to Nicole's arm like a leech. The gold on his fingers and the tailored suit did little to hide the sleaziness that emanated from him. He was a senior politician, a man of power and influence, and Nicole felt repulsion curdling in her stomach as she played her part, feigning interest in his inane conversation.

She kept reminding herself that this would be her last escorting job, that this man's money could be her ticket to a new life, one in which she could finally escape the darkness that had enveloped her for so long. The

thought of her daughter, waiting at home for her, fueled her determination to endure this final, degrading task.

As the politician leaned in, his hot, whiskey-laden breath caressing her ear, Nicole gritted her teeth and plastered a smile on her face. She would suffer through this night, for herself and for her child. This would be the end, and she would finally be free.

The politician, emboldened by the alcohol coursing through his veins, pulled Nicole towards the dance floor, his meaty fingers digging into her slender arm. She winced in pain but masked her discomfort with a practiced smile, her eyes scanning the throng of gyrating bodies around them.

As they began to dance, the man's intentions became increasingly clear. His hands wandered across her body, groping and caressing in a predatory manner. He whispered lewd remarks into her ear, each word dripping with lustful intent, and his heavy breathing betraying his growing excitement.

Nicole fought back the urge to vomit, her skin crawling under his unwanted touch. She tried to maintain a facade of compliance, but the man's aggression was escalating, and she could feel her control slipping away.

He yanked her closer, their bodies pressed together in a grotesque parody of intimacy. His eyes roamed her face, settling on her lips with a hungry gleam. Nicole knew what was coming next, and she braced herself for the inevitable, her heart hammering in her chest.

The politician's moist, repulsive lips descended upon hers, and in that instant, something within Nicole snapped. She couldn't bear this degradation any longer, not for any amount of money, not even for her daughter. She shoved him away, disgust and rage boiling over, her eyes blazing with defiance.

"No," she hissed, her voice barely audible above the din of the club, "I told you, you are only paying me for my company."

The politician's face contorted in anger, his beady eyes narrowing into a sinister glare. "You think you can refuse me?" he spat, his words slurred with alcohol.

Nicole stood her ground, her heart pounding in her chest, but her voice remained steady. "I am not a prostitute anymore," she said firmly, "and if that is what you want, then you are wasting your time and my patience."

The politician raised his hand to strike her, but before he could make contact, he was tackled from behind by a burly bouncer. The man hit the ground with a thud, and the bouncer stood over him, his massive arms crossed over his chest. Nicole watched with a mixture of relief and dread as the scene unfolded before her. She knew that this could mean trouble, but she couldn't bring herself to care. She was done with this life, and she was ready to face the consequences of her actions.

As the bouncer dragged the struggling politician out of the club, Nicole slipped away into the shadows, her heart heavy with the weight of what she had just done. She knew that she had burned a bridge, and that her future was uncertain, but she also knew that she had taken a step towards reclaiming her dignity and independence.

In the shadows, unnoticed amidst the chaotic scene unfolding on the dance floor, a woman observed Nicole from her perch near the bar. She was a petite platinum blonde, her beauty unmatched by any other in the nightclub. Blue eyes, filled with an intensity that Nicole had never encountered before, seemed to sparkle as they caught her gaze.

Gracefully, the woman made her way over to Nicole, her steps sure and confident. As she reached her, she placed a gentle yet firm grip on Nicole's waist, guiding her away from the cacophony of the club and into the seclusion of a private VIP section.

Nicole's confusion and shock were palpable as she cried out, demanding to know the identity of her mysterious savior. But the woman was relentless, leading her through heavy velvet curtains and into a dimly lit room adorned with sumptuous couches.

Once inside, the woman took a seat on one end of a plush sofa, gesturing for Nicole to join her. As Nicole hesitantly settled down beside her, she was struck by a sense of familiarity that seemed to emanate from this enigmatic stranger. Something about her presence felt like home, and despite her lack of understanding, Nicole couldn't help but feel a sense of safety in her company.

As the woman turned towards her, the pieces suddenly clicked into place. Sitting before Nicole was Bella Foster—world-renowned DJ, music producer, one-half of the power couple Bella and Ava, and, most significantly, a long-lost friend whose paths with Nicole had diverged due to the whims of fate and circumstance.

"You've gone platinum," Nicole observed, taking note of Bella's silvery white tresses that cascaded down her back, meticulously parted down the center.

"Is that why you didn't recognize me earlier?" Bella inquired, just as a waitress entered their private sanctuary, her tray laden with an array of cocktails and enticing snacks.

"Whiskey for my friend," Bella instructed the waitress, who nodded in acknowledgment and disappeared from the room to fetch the desired beverage.

"How are you, Nicole?" Bella asked, crossing her legs elegantly and pointing the toe of her Louboutin at Nicole with a teasing glint in her eye.

"Didn't you just see? I'm doing fabulously, clinging to the arms of pervy old men for money," Nicole replied, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Why? I thought you were a stripper?"

"Things have changed since we last saw each other, Bella."

Bella scrutinized Nicole, who shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "You, on the other hand, are living your best life, aren't you? You found the love

of your life, released a chart-topping album, won a Grammy, and now, I hear, you're in talks to produce the beats for Beyoncé's next album?"

"Nothing's been finalized, but yeah, we're in discussions. I'm sorry I just... abandoned you like that. The last time you came to my apartment, three years ago, it led to a lot of complications with Ava. I didn't have the courage to get back in touch, and I've been feeling guilty ever since."

"It's okay, B. We were hardly friends. I was a woman you sought for sexual satisfaction, and I thought I was lucky to be wanted by a girl as beautiful and talented as you. We were friends with benefits, or benefactors, with a smattering of friendship involved."

Bella smiled, "You were always a friend to me, Nicole. But I'm glad you don't hold grudges."

"I don't," Nicole affirmed.

An awkward silence descended between the two old friends before the waitress reappeared, bearing a bottle of Glenlivet and two upturned, empty crystal glasses. Bella gestured for the waitress to leave them, then poured a drink for Nicole and herself.

"I shouldn't be drinking this," Nicole muttered, her eyes locked on the glass of whiskey, torn between reluctance and temptation.

"Why? Are you recovering?" Bella inquired, pausing with the whiskey bottle tilted in her hand as she looked up at Nicole.

"Yes, from both alcohol and heartbreak. Which is a terrible combination because alcohol helps you through heartbreak," Nicole explained.

"Okay, you're not having any then. And also, I want to know all about this woman who managed to make the stunning, ultra-cool Nicole Sanders fall for her."

"I'll tell you, but only if you pour me a drink. I promise I won't have more than one," Nicole bargained.

Bella leaned back into the plush couch, a playful half-smirk gracing her glossy pink lips. After a moment's contemplation, she leaned forward, poured Nicole a drink, and capped the bottle. "Only one," she warned, sliding the glass towards Nicole, who eagerly seized it and took a sip.

Nicole opened up to Bella, recounting everything that had transpired in her life since they'd lost touch and Bella had married Ava, the brilliant astrophysicist who had discovered a habitable planet for humans outside of the solar system – a fascinating story in its own right.

When Nicole reached the part where she met and fell in love with Emma, her voice cracked. She downed the remainder of her whiskey, much to her own dismay, having intended to savor it for longer than the mere ten minutes that had elapsed.

"In short," Nicole continued, "she doesn't want to try mending her broken heart with a stripper who dances for others, and I don't blame her. She's the polar opposite of me. She dresses like a posh Englishwoman from the royal family, which is why I call her 'The Duchess'. She's part of a book club that discusses philosophy, teaches at the same school my daughter attends, and she deserves someone with whom she wouldn't have to sacrifice so much."

"But, weren't you ready to sacrifice everything for her as well?" Bella asked.

"Yes, but it wasn't enough."

Bella sighed, and looked at Nicole with empathy.

"I remember feeling helpless, when Ava and I were at a dead end regarding our relationship. I remember thinking there is no way we can end up together, when Ava's daughter is my best friend. But destiny intervened and showed us a path that led straight to each other. You need that stroke of luck...of destiny as well, Nicole."

Nicole laughed, her voice crackling with sarcasm, "I am not a very lucky woman, B. My entire life has been one big catastrophe after another. A mother that ran away with her pimp, years of sex work, an unplanned daughter, and now, losing the woman who I think is the love of my life...plus, I am sure my liver is giving up on me. I stopped hoping for good luck long back."

Bella waited for Nicole to finish, before opening her mouth to speak in a low, but excited voice, "are you still as good a pole dancer as I remember?"

"Yeah, I think so."

"How would you like to star in my music video?"

"What?"

"Destiny has finally intervened, Nicole, in the form of Bella Foster, your friend from a different life," said Bella, and clapped her hands together in joy, "this is perfect."

"I don't get it," Nicole frowned.

"There is a single I am about to release, for which, I have to shoot a music video. This music video will be something I have never done before. It will be sexy, and sensual, and it will celebrate women owning up to their sexual power. For that, I need a woman, sexy, strong, and skilled in pole dancing, as the main star of the music video. I have been holding auditions in Los Angeles, but no one has caught my eye, and I can't believe my mind did not think of you earlier. You are the most sexist pole dancer I have ever seen, and you are an amazing dancer as well. This can also be the big break you need...deserve!"

Nicole was speechless. She stared at Bella in silent disbelief for a few moments before stammering, "Are you serious?"

Bella smiled and nodded her head, then she sat down next to Nicole on the couch and hugged her. Nicole was frozen to her seat as she processed

this sudden turn of events. Could it be true? Was this really happening? She felt overwhelmed by the prospect of having a chance to make something great with Bella and show the world how amazing pole dancing can be. With Bella's help, Nicole could finally prove that there is more to pole dancing than just taking off clothes – it's an art form, an expression of beauty and grace that anyone can appreciate. Tears welled up in Nicole's eyes as she realized that after years of feeling like she was stuck in a never-ending cycle of mediocrity, here was her chance to finally break free and shine.

"Yes, I'm serious," Bella said, looking into Nicole's eyes. "I have faith in you, Nicole. You have something special, something that sets you apart from all the other dancers out there. I want you to be the star of my music video, and I want you to show the world what you're capable of."

When Nicole did not reply, Bella grinned, and hugged her once more, "I can't wait to go home, and tell Ava about you and Emma! She would love to know how I helped two lovers find each other!"

"Whoa! Whoa! That's a long...long shot. And Bella, I hope you are not offering me this out of pity. I want to work with you because I deserve it!"

Bella pulled back from the hug and looked at Nicole with a serious expression. "For real, Nicole, this ain't about pity. You've more than earned this shot with your mad skills and non-stop hustle. I remember watching you perform all those times, and I kept thinking you deserved so much better than a stage in some strip club. You're meant for the spotlight, with millions of eyes witnessing your magic. You truly deserve this."

Nicole felt a wave of relief wash over her as she locked eyes with Bella, seeing the realness there. She finally allowed herself to believe that this amazing chance was actually happening.

"I'd say let's do a toast to celebrate, but since I'm about to be your boss, I gotta put a stop to the drinking," Bella said, grinning playfully.

"Thank you, Bella, you have no idea— you might've just saved my life," Nicole replied, her voice heavy with emotion. This time, it was she

who wrapped her arms around the smaller, more petite frame of Bella Foster in a tight, meaningful hug.

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Chapter Twelve

A few days later, Emma found herself walking down the bustling hallway of the school, the cacophony of laughter and chatter filling the air. Students bustled past one another, exchanging greetings and discussing their plans for the weekend. The scent of textbooks and cleaning supplies hung in the air, a familiar mixture that always brought a sense of routine to Emma's day.

As she rounded the corner near the school's main staircase, Emma spotted Susie standing with a group of friends near the lockers. The sun filtered through the large windows nearby, casting a warm glow on the group as they exchanged animated stories and shared laughter. Susie's eyes sparkled with genuine joy, a sight that Emma hadn't witnessed in quite some time.

Emma approached Susie, who seemed to be in the middle of a particularly entertaining anecdote. Her friends were leaning in, hanging onto her every word with rapt attention. Emma hesitated for a moment, not wanting to interrupt, but Susie caught sight of her and broke off her story, her face lighting up with a warm smile.

"Hey, Ms. Brown!" Susie greeted, her friends following her gaze and offering polite smiles of their own. "What's up?"

"Hey Susie, do you have a moment?" Emma asked, trying to keep her tone casual. She didn't want to alarm Susie or make her feel singled out in front of her friends.

"Sure, Ms. Brown," Susie replied, excusing herself from her group with a friendly wave. As they walked a short distance down the hallway, Emma couldn't help but notice the marked difference in Susie's demeanor, the weight of worry seemingly lifted from her shoulders.

As they ambled down the hallway, Emma and Susie engaged in light banter, discussing everything from the latest school gossip to Susie's ongoing projects. Susie was lively, her youthful energy infectious.

Eventually, Emma delicately steered the conversation towards the topic she was most anxious about. "How are things at home, Susie? And your mom... how is she doing?"

A bright smile spread across Susie's face as she answered, "She's doing great, Ms. Brown! She doesn't drink anymore, and she's been so much more present and engaged with me. It's like having the old mom back."

That was good news, of course, but it also sowed the seeds of confusion within Emma. "That's... that's great news, Susie."

"And there's more!" Susie continued, oblivious to Emma's internal turmoil. "She's got a new job, or at least she will soon. It's a big deal, like, the kind that pays way more and means she won't have to work late nights anymore. She's pretty stoked."

A wave of conflicting emotions washed over Emma. She was, undoubtedly, happy for Susie. The girl deserved a stable home and a sober mother. But she was also taken aback, and yes, a little hurt. Nicole had made a significant life change, one that could potentially open the door to their relationship, and yet, she'd chosen not to share it with Emma. Could it be that Nicole had moved on? That she was over her?

"Wow, that's... fantastic, Susie. Your mom has worked hard and she deserves this," Emma managed to say, keeping her emotions under control, "and nice use of the word 'stoked'. Now I know you are reading all those Sherlock Holmes books I gave you."

Susie beamed back, evidently proud, "Thank you, Miss Emma."

Their conversation gradually faded as Emma's thoughts took the helm. She wore a practiced smile, nodding and responding where appropriate, but her mind was miles away. She could hear Susie's laughter, feel the joy radiating off the young girl, but it only seemed to amplify her own turmoil.

She felt a strange cocktail of elation, confusion, and a rising sense of loss that tugged heavily at her heartstrings.

Emma bid Susie goodbye with a gentle ruffle of her hair, her smile a touch too strained, her eyes a tad too glossy. As Susie scampered away, her laughter echoing down the corridor, Emma found herself rooted to the spot. The bustling hallway seemed to fade away as her thoughts took a deep dive into the whirlpool of her emotions.

Her heart throbbed painfully in her chest at the thought that Nicole might have moved on. The idea, a mere whisper before, now roared in her mind, the echo reverberating painfully. She'd always known there was a possibility, of course, but the reality of it seemed to strike her with a newfound force.

She had been hard on Nicole, she knew that. Their circumstances had been difficult, their lives on entirely different tracks. But had she been too hard? Was her demand for sobriety and a new job too much of an ask from a woman struggling to make ends meet, to take care of her daughter?

Emma began walking down the hallway, her steps slow and heavy. The usual chatter and laughter of the school faded into the background as her mind spun. She felt a pang of regret for cutting off Nicole so completely. If she had maintained contact, would things have been different?

Emma missed Nicole. There was no denying it, no escaping the hollow ache that swelled within her at the thought of the other woman. She had grown fond of Susie too, the girl's resilience and optimism a bright spot in her otherwise routine days. And now, when circumstances seemed to be aligning, Nicole was nowhere to be found.

As she walked the length of the empty corridor, Emma couldn't shake the gnawing feeling of dread that had taken residence in her gut. The realization hit her like a ton of bricks: she might have just lost Nicole, forever.

Emma slid behind the wheel of her car, her hands gripping the leather steering wheel a touch tighter than necessary. The school faded away in her

rearview mirror as she navigated her way through the familiar streets. The city buzzed around her, its rhythm a stark contrast to the turmoil swirling within her.

She found herself drawn to a particular route, one that meandered past a certain café that held memories both sweet and bitter. Her foot eased off the accelerator as she approached it, her car slowing to a crawl. The café was still the same, whimsical, as its name suggested, its warm lights spilling onto the pavement, the aroma of fresh coffee wafting through the slightly ajar door.

As she glanced inside, her heart pounded in her chest. She half-expected, half-hoped to see a familiar figure perched on one of the barstools, engrossed in one of her fashion magazines as she waited for her coffee. But Nicole was not there. A wave of disappointment washed over her, and she quickly steered her attention back to the road, her heart throbbing painfully in her chest. Was she falling for Nicole again?

After what felt like an eternity, she pulled up in front of her apartment building. The familiar sight of it brought little comfort, her mind still occupied by thoughts of Nicole. She trudged up the stairs, her footsteps echoing in the empty hallway.

Inside, Scarlett and Daniella were lounged on the couch, having returned from their honeymoon, and were engrossed in some sitcom. Their laughter filled the room, a stark contrast to the silence in Emma's heart. She gently nudged them apart and slid between them, her gaze fixed on the TV screen.

"Guys, I need your help," she began, her voice barely above a whisper. The room fell silent, their attention shifting to her. "Something happened at school today. Susie... she said that Nicole might have quit her job. She's sober, and she's starting a new job soon."

Scarlett blinked at her, her eyebrows shooting up in surprise. "Whoa, hold on. You mean to tell us that our sexy stripper has stopped stripping?"

"Seems like it," said Emma, her gaze fixed on Gloria from Modern Family.

Daniella turned to her, her brows furrowed in concern. "But she hasn't contacted you?"

"No," Emma confirmed, the word feeling heavy on her tongue. "And I don't know what to do."

"But remember, it was you who decided to call it quits, right?" Scarlett pointed out, arching an eyebrow at Emma.

"It wasn't exactly a breakup. We hadn't even officially started dating," Emma protested.

"Yeah, but you put the kibosh on it. You made that call," Scarlett persisted, her fingers absentmindedly gathering her vibrant, blood-red hair into a casual ponytail. "Why should she be the one to reach out?"

"Because it was apparent that Emma wanted to explore the relationship too. Nicole's profession was the only hurdle. Now that the issue is moot, Nicole should initiate contact if she's interested in giving things another shot," Daniella chimed in, her voice as measured as ever.

Scarlett rolled her eyes. "How many times is Nicole expected to offer a second chance, only for my overthinking sis to reject her?"

"Emma's not overthinking, Scar. Her reasons were valid," Daniella countered.

"Well, they didn't make a lick of sense to me!" Scarlett fired back, her eyes flashing. "Nicole was prepared to ditch the escort life. Do you have any idea how much these VIP escorts rake in? More than both of us combined, that's for sure!"

"True, but Emma was also ready to confront her past, to move beyond it. For her, starting a complicated relationship while still recovering from a

previous one would have been equally challenging," Daniella responded, her voice still as serene as a placid lake.

Scarlett and Daniella were as different as night and day. Scarlett was the bold, outspoken, and hilariously witty one while Daniella was the tranquil, reserved, and somewhat taciturn. Yet, that's precisely why Emma sought their counsel—to hear both sides of the coin, mirroring the conflicting arguments within her own mind.

"Emma," Daniella softened her tone, resting her hand on Emma's shoulder, "if you've got any residual feelings for Nicole, I'm saying you should give it another go. At the very least, drop her a text, and congratulate her on ditching the lifestyle she detested. You can do that much as a friend, right?"

Daniella's words clicked into place for Emma, like a lightbulb moment in the midst of her internal turmoil.

"I am legit thrilled for her. I knew she wanted something more than the pole life. I should at least let her know that I'm happy for her. That's the least I can do," Emma's thought process started to clear, her words reflecting her emerging clarity.

"But before you do that, make sure she's actually got a new gig and isn't doing the dance floor thing anymore. Although, if that's the case, it's a sad day for the club-goers. She was hands down one of the best dancers to ever hit the stage. No one could work the crowd like our Nicole when it came to shedding layers, and turning people on with just a look."

"You do realize you're talking about your potential sister-in-law, right? And your wife, aka me, is right here," Daniella snapped back, a hint of irritation creeping into her tone.

"But babe, remember the show you put on for me in Miami..."

"Okay, that's it. I don't want to hear any of that!" Emma quickly interrupted, standing up from the couch, stretching her arms above her head, and stifling a yawn.

"Yeah, like I enjoyed hearing about how you and Nicole got steamy, rolling around in the grass during my rehearsal dinner," Scarlett shot back.

"Umm...you were literally begging Emma to spill the tea," Daniella retorted with a chuckle.

"Can't you ever be on my side? Like...ever?"

Emma left the newlyweds bickering, disappearing into the sanctuary of her room.

Throughout the following day, Emma wrestled with her nerves, her mind a whirlwind of thoughts and the right words to say to Nicole. She even found herself hunched over a piece of paper, penning down a makeshift script to guide her through the conversation. She wanted to sound casual, yet sincere, her tone a careful balance between friendly concern and detached curiosity.

As the day melted into night, she found herself alone in her room, rehearsing the conversation over and over in her head. "Don't sound too eager, Em," she reminded herself, even as her heart hammered against her ribs in anticipation.

Finally, with a deep breath, she picked up her phone and dialed Nicole's number. The line connected, and Nicole's familiar voice floated through the speaker, sending an unexpected jolt through Emma's body.

"Hey, Nicole. I just wanted to ask for Logan's number. I never got a chance to thank him properly for letting us use his cabin for the wedding," Emma started, trying to keep her tone light and casual.

"Oh, sure. I can give you his number," Nicole replied, her voice neutral.

"And also," Emma continued, "Susie's doing really well at school. She seems... happier."

"That's good to hear," Nicole responded, her voice still guarded.

"Nicole," Emma finally broached the topic she'd been circling around, "Susie mentioned something about you changing jobs?"

Nicole paused before answering, "Yes, I have."

Emma congratulated her, and just as she was about to end the call, a question tumbled out of her mouth, "Why didn't you tell me, Nicole?"

Silence stretched on the other end, before Nicole's voice broke through, "I wanted to make sure I really had the job first."

"Oh, okay, I am really happy for you. I know how much this means to you," Emma's voice shook, and she found herself sinking into a quicksand of emotions.

"Anything else?" Nicole asked.

Emma's heart was now screaming in pain, pummeled into dust by Nicole's apparent ignorance towards Emma.

"No, I wish you all the best in life," Emma said curtly, and hung up.

She sat on the edge of the bed for a while, watching her lava lamp glow and bubble in a hypnotic rhythm. The anger and pain inside her churned like the wax inside the lamp.

Finally, she stood up and began pacing around restlessly in her room. The air around her seemed to be filled with a thousand tiny needles, pricking her skin with their intense pressure. Her breathing grew rapid and shallow, as if all the air was slowly being sucked out of the room. She tried to fight against it, drinking water and counting backwards from one hundred in an attempt to calm down. But nothing worked — her entire body was teetering on the edge of a panic attack, ready to crash and burn at any moment.

Suddenly, the walls of her room seemed to warp and twist, distorting until Emma was no longer in her bedroom but a cold, sterile hospital room. She was shaking uncontrollably and she could feel the cool air in the

hallway skirting around her face. Her vision blurred as tears welled up in her eyes — she knew where she was and why she was there. She remembered that day like it happened just yesterday; the doctor had told them nothing could be done to save either Alice or their unborn child. It felt like Emma's entire world had collapsed under the weight of that one sentence.

Desperately seeking refuge, she tried to remember the safety of her bedroom. She opened her eyes, and started noticing every single thing in her room. She looked at her bed with its warm quilt and ruffled pillows; the mismatched lamp on her nightstand and the worn-out carpet beneath her feet. Inhaling deeply, she focused on this image until it became stronger in her mind.

Gradually, Emma felt herself being pulled back into reality. Finally, she was completely back in the real world, and her panic subsided. Her heart pounding gently against the rhythm of her thoughts, Emma slowly climbed into bed, tucking herself under the quilt. With one final deep breath, she allowed herself to close her eyes, surrendering to the tender embrace of sleep.

She was roused from her slumber by the insistent knocking at the door. Her eyes fluttered open, and she squinted at the clock on her nightstand. It was past midnight. She stumbled out of bed, still half-asleep, her mind foggy with the remnants of her dreams.

She trudged towards the door and pulled it open to see Nicole standing on the other side. She blinked at Nicole, her mind struggling to process the sight in front of her. Was she still dreaming? With a shake of her head, she closed the door, convinced her sleep-addled brain was playing tricks on her.

"Emma? It's really me," Nicole's voice floated through the closed door, her tone laced with confusion and amusement. The sound of her voice jolted Emma's senses awake, and she swung the door back open.

Nicole stood there, grinning at her, looking very real and very much awake. Emma blinked at her again, her heart pounding in her chest, a mixture of surprise, confusion, and a hint of joy swirling within her.

"Hi Duchess!" Nicole said, and stepped authoritatively inside Emma's bedroom.

Emma only had a few seconds to observe Nicole, but during those seconds, she realized Nicole had not come to waste time. She had come to play.

Clad in a body-hugging ebony dress with a tantalizingly low V-neckline accommodating Nicole's navel, her breasts were pushed and propped against each other, exposing their entire complexion and elasticity. She was never more stunningly sexy.

Her eyes glinted with mischief as she stood there with ruby-red lipstick adorning her inviting lips. Her stilettos clicked delightfully as Nicole paraded around the bedroom and swung her hips in Emma's direction.

"What are you doing here?" Emma asked, her voice feeble.

"What I should have done long ago...made love to you in your cute, little Victorian room," said Nicole, turning gracefully to look at Emma, who was breathing hard.

She could not understand this sudden assault of raw sexuality at midnight from the woman she had thought she had lost.

Nicole stepped closer to Emma, and with an emphatic push, pinned Emma to the wall, holding her slender waist in her hands, "I have missed you so fucking much!" Nicole groaned, and brought her face closer to Emma.

"Then why didn't you come earlier? Why did you make me wait?"

"Because, this time, I wanted to make sure you would not wriggle out of my grasp," Nicole tugged at Emma's waist, and pressed her body tight against her curvaceous form.

Emma gasped, as Nicole's taut and firm breasts crashed into her own, and the seductress smiled wickedly.

"How are you so sure I still want you?" Emma locked eyes with Nicole, and stared into them like she was searching for a needle in a haystack.

"Let's check, shall we?" Nicole said, and with the speed of a chess player tapping on the clock beside them, reached between Emma's legs, up her little tennis skirt she wore to bed, and placed her palm flat against Emma's damp, covertly inviting panties. Emma's breath caught in her throat, and her eyes widened with surprise.

"See? You are still so wet for me," Nicole whispered into Emma's ear, before letting her hand linger there, exploring the contours of her sex with a delicate touch.

Emma moaned softly, her body betraying her as she melted into Nicole's embrace. For days, she had tried to forget her, to move on with her life, but now it felt like all her defenses had crumbled in one fell swoop.

"I hate you," Emma muttered weakly, as Nicole continued to tease her with her fingers.

"No, you don't hate me, baby. You love me, don't you?" Nicole said.

"I don't know," Emma said.

"Then, let us find out if you still love me," she said, and, after stepping away from Emma, started unbuttoning her blouse.

Emma stood like she was rooted to the ground, watching Nicole undress in front of her. When the woman reached for her dress and slowly lowered it, revealing a black thong, Emma's mouth felt dry.

Emma tried to speak, to say something, but her vocal cords were paralyzed. All she could do was watch as Nicole pulled her thong down, and stood naked before her.

Nicole had a body like a swimsuit model, Emma thought, as she stared at her with silent awe, taking in every curve, every line. She was

voluptuous, and her hourglass figure made Emma long for her touch, and to be filled by her once more.

The seductress smiled at her, and remained silent. Emma wanted to say something but didn't know what, and so stood completely still.

"Tell me now, do you still want me?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"I can't tell you...I can only show you," Emma said, feeling every centimeter of her panties sticking to her pussy, as Nicole's naked, delicious body turned her on like no one else.

"Show me, then," Nicole said, approaching her.

She stood up close to Emma, and placed her hands on the woman's shoulders, kissing her deeply. As soon as her lips touched Emma's, her body started to tremble, and she closed her eyes.

Emma kissed Nicole back, and wrapped her arms around her neck, trying to pull herself closer. She was about to throw herself into Nicole's arms, when the woman suddenly grabbed her wrists, and held them tight behind her back. Once again, Emma was with her, but she was helpless.

"You don't get to touch me," Nicole said, as she held Emma in place.

"Why?" Emma was almost begging now.

"Because this is my reward. You broke my heart, and left me to figure out a way to be with you. I get it...you did the right thing, but now, don't I get to reap the rewards of my hard work?"

"You do. I am sorry, Nicole. I shouldn't have...mmpphhhff..." Nicole shut Emma's mouth by thrusting her tongue down her throat, and kissing her aggressively.

Emma tried to break away, but it was too late. Nicole had her in a tight embrace, and was exploring her body with deep, passionate kisses. Emma felt herself losing control as Nicole's hands traveled down her back, exploring every inch of her skin. She could feel the heat between them as their bodies pressed against each other, and she tried to press her crotch between Nicole's thighs for friction.

Nicole moaned softly as Emma writhed against her, the warmth of their skin heating the space between them. Emma wanted more, and wanted to feel every inch of her, but Nicole was in complete control. She kept kissing Emma exploring her mouth with her tongue, making her weak in the knees. Nicole reached around and grabbed Emma's ass, giving a soft squeeze, and pulled Emma in closer.

"I thought a woman like you...with years of sexual experience...wouldn't be so vanilla," Emma muttered, her hips gyrating against Nicole's naked thighs for as much friction as possible.

Nicole arched an eyebrow, and licked Emma's chiseled jawline, before pushing her down to her knees by pressing on her shoulders, "You shouldn't have said that, baby."

Emma was eager, willing, and ready to get down on her knees. She was back to the forest, back to feeling horny as hell for Nicole, the woman who had infused her with life and longing once again.

She looked up at the towering, plump figure of the sexist woman she had laid eyes on, and for the first time in years, felt her pussy throb for a woman.

Nicole was her woman now.

Emma was done playing games with herself.

This was it, and she meant to show it to Nicole.

Nicole raised one of her leg, and with a hand, she lightly pushed Emma's forehead, so that the back of her head was pressed against the wall

of Nicole's bedroom.

"Is the Duchess ready to get dirty?" Nicole asked, panting with anticipation and lust.

"Fuck, yes," Emma said, licking her lips, "I've been dirty for you ever since I laid eyes on you."

Nicole let out a moan, and Emma could feel the heat burning between her thighs as the older woman pressed her pussy against her lips.

Emma didn't hesitate. She took a deep breath, and pulled her tongue out, licking tentatively at Nicole's clit. Nicole hissed in response, and Emma responded by wrapping her lips around the tiny bead.

When Emma slid her tongue inside of Nicole, the woman yelped in pleasure, and Emma could hear how wet Nicole was by the obscene slurping sound it made as she continued to eat her out as hungrily as she possibly could.

Emma couldn't help herself. This was what she had wanted to do for the longest time, and she was delighted at the knowledge that she was finally able to make Nicole feel this.

Emma thrust her hips forward, and Emma's back pressed against the wall.

Like a belly dancer moving her hips, Nicole started rolling her hips back and forth, meeting Emma's tongue. Nicole grabbed her massive tits, massaged them manically, and screamed, "Emmmaaaa..."

Emma moaned Nicole's name in reply, but it was muffled, as Emma did not want to break away from Nicole's crotch. Instead, she ran both her hands up the back of her thighs, grabbed Nicole's heart-shaped ass, and clawed, and dug into them, pushing Nicole's entire lower body tight against her feminine form and face.

"I'm going to make you cum so hard," Emma whispered huskily as she licked at Nicole's clit.

"Oooohhhh...." Nicole moaned as her body started to tremble.

Emma continued to lick and bite on Nicole's clit, thrusting her tongue in and out. Emma's entire face was buried in Nicole's pussy, and all that could be seen was her bobbing head. Emma opened her eyes, and couldn't believe how sexy this sight was.

With Nicole leaning over Emma, one leg bent at the knee, resting on Emma's shoulder, and the other shaking and trembling because of the pleasure radiating through her body, Nicole shrieked, grabbed Emma's soft brown hair into a fist, and came all over her face.

Emma opened her mouth, and Nicole wiped her pussy dry all over her lips and cheeks, and chin.

But Nicole was not done yet, and neither was Emma.

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Nicole threw Emma onto her own bed, and the lava bed shook, fell, and crashed on the floor. Emma did not care.

Nicole fell on top of Emma, and the two women kissed passionately, this time, taking their time to explore, and conquer each other's mouths.

Legs intertwined, and hands met each other as bodies embraced, and became one. Emma and Nicole were lost in the pleasure of rediscovered love, and the satisfaction of laying naked in the arms of the woman they had come to love.

Their kiss lasted long, until both of them were gasping for breath.

"I love you," Nicole whispered.

"I love you too," Emma said, without any hesitation.

"I can see you are almost out of your shell," Emma said, her eyes twinkling with anticipation. "But I wonder...if you can push yourself a little further, and do something to me that will blow my mind?"

With that, Emma threw her legs around Nicole's waist, clinging onto her like a baby monkey clinging onto its mommy. She then pivoted, throwing Nicole onto the bed beneath them. The mattress sprung up for an instant before settling back down again; however, Emma was not in the mood to relax anymore. She was like a torrential downpour at the moment, and she wanted to rain over Nicole with all her fury, might, and ferocity.

"I had always wondered," Emma began as she slid below Nicole's waist and grabbed hold of her hips firmly, turning her around so that she lay on her stomach. Nicole yelped loudly before laughing softly and looking over her shoulder at the woman behind her – wild hair and twinkling eyes peeking through the mess. "What type of woman would it take to finally bring me back to my old sexual ways?"

Nicole stared at Emma expectantly, hoping that she was about to do what Nicole had been daydreaming since they met. Her answer sent shivers down Nicole's spine as Emma continued. "It had to be a woman like you, Nicole." With that, Emma settled on her stomach too; hovering above the gentle curves of Nicole's glamorous and extravagant hips, studying the hip line closely.

"It had to be a woman with an ass like this," she said as she ran her fingers delicately over the goosebumps-ridden skin of Nicole's hips, tracing a nail beside the hip cleavage.

"Emma," Nicole murmured breathlessly. "You have no idea how sexy you look toying with my ass, baby. I can't believe it!"

A flirt of a breeze drifted in through the half-open windows in Emma's bedroom. The windchimes hanging on the windows chimed delicately, and the soft, gentle jazz music that Scarlett and Daniella mostly played in their room drifted through the walls and into Emma's room, reminding Emma

how thin the walls were, and how her sister and her wife must have heard the intense screams and moans that ripped through the room moments ago.

Emma kissed Nicole's hips, the right butt cheek, where the ass formed a crease with the thighs.

Then she kissed the other butt cheek at the same spot, but this time, opening her mouth, and bringing her lips down with eagerness and hunger.

The 'Duchess', now disrobed of her poise and elegance, put on the cloak of sexual thirst, and dove for her prize: Nicole's beautiful ass.

Nicole threw her face in the pillow, and grabbed the ends of the duvet, trying her best not to yell, as Emma kissed and licked all over her butt, leaving no flesh untasted by her tongue and lips. The sensation of every kiss, of every flick of the tongue sent waves of pleasure through every limb and extremity of Nicole's body.

Emma circled her tongue around the entrance to her pussy, and then lapped it up, like a hungry dog with a bowl.

"Get on you knees, love," Emma husky voice commanded the former stripper, and Nicole complied.

Nicole, now on all fours, her back arched and ass in the air, looked back at Emma, and saw the woman grab the jiggly skin, and dive between her hips, to lick more of Nicole's pussy.

Emma was gentle, her lips shy at first, but then she grew in confidence, and started licking Nicole's lips with wild determination, gently nibbling with her teeth on the way, stretching the pussy lips, then slithering her tongue in, before doing the same with her lips again.

Emma's nose dug into the curly pubic hair, and with two hands she spread the legs even wider, and dipped back into Nicole's pussy, her tongue entering in and out, in and out, getting more and more wet with the juices.

Emma's fingers ran circles around the erect clitoris, and she sucked at the hole, sucking Nicole's pussy, and squeezing Nicole's thigh.

"Oh, God, yes," moaned Nicole, as Emma's tongue expertly licked her clit, and explored her pussy with her tongue.

Emma raised her face with a smirk on her face, she looked at Nicole and said:

"Can you get used to this? Because I think I am obsessed."

Nicole nodded, and with wild abandon began grinding her hips in mid-air.

Emma's hands grabbed her ass cheeks, and spread them apart, and Emma dove back in, this time with less restraint, and more wild abandon.

Nicole started pushing her ass back, to meet Emma's tongue. Her hands grabbed the headboard, and her face shot up, eyes rolling back into the sockets as Emma's tongue lips sucked on her clit expertly.

"Emma...Emma... fuck yes, you beautiful...beautiful woman! Take it all! Oh, fuck I love you!"

Emma growled, and kept going.

Nicole's whole body shook with the orgasm. She could feel the orgasm vibrate through her body, sweat dripping down her face.

Emma licked the crack from the front to the back, and in one swift movement rolled her body over the top of Nicole, and pushed Nicole's upper body to the mattress with her mouth, and licked the entire belly from the side, causing Nicole to shiver with delight.

Emma lifted her head, and with a mischievous grin, said, "It's good to be back."

Chapter Thirteen

As they lay tangled together in bed, their bodies still humming from the aftermath of their passionate connection. A gentle breeze wafted in through the open window, the subtle scent of night-blooming jasmine carried on its wings. The moonlight streaming in painted an ethereal glow on their skin, adding to the intimate serenity of the room.

Nicole, her head resting on Emma's shoulder, began to tell her about Bella and Ava. Her voice was soft, a little husky, punctuated occasionally by her chuckles. She described how Bella had offered her a role in her upcoming music video, a prospect that both terrified and excited her. Emma listened, her fingers absentmindedly tracing patterns on Nicole's back, her heart swelling with pride for the woman she loved.

"Bella Foster? The same Bella who used to visit you years ago? Is she the one who got married to that astrophysicist Ava and then released that killer album?" Emma asked, curiosity bubbling in her tone. A ripple of laughter passed through Nicole at Emma's wide-eyed astonishment.

"Yes, that's the one," Nicole confirmed, her laughter fading into a warm smile. "And yes, she and Ava are now happily married. So, you don't have to worry about anything."

Emma let out a sigh of relief, her heart settling into a steady rhythm once more. A moment of silence hung in the air before Nicole began to share the concept of the music video. She spoke of a grand gothic hall, adorned with intricate renaissance art. She described the massive steel pole that would stand like a beacon in the center of the hall, upon which she would dance.

"I'll be performing the best pole dance of my life," Nicole said, her voice laced with a cocktail of excitement and trepidation. "It symbolizes that everything is art if you can read between the lines."

Emma's heart swelled with pride as she listened to Nicole's words. This woman she loved was about to redefine the perception of pole dancing, an art form often misunderstood and stigmatized. It was a courageous move, and Emma knew Nicole was just the person to pull it off. Her Nicole, her brave and beautiful Nicole.

As the conversation gradually meandered, Emma's thoughts coiled around a new concern. "What about Susie?" she asked, her voice a soft whisper in the silence of the room. "How do you think she'll react to her mother and her teacher dating?"

Nicole was silent for a moment, her fingers tracing absent patterns on Emma's arm, her eyes lost in the dim light. Then, her lips curved into a soft smile. "Susie loves you, Emma," she said, her voice carrying an undeniable certainty. "She talks about you all the time."

Emma blinked in surprise, her heart fluttering. "She does?"

"Oh, absolutely," Nicole affirmed. She began to share snippets of their home life, where Emma seemed to have become a constant, albeit unknowing, presence. She told Emma about how Susie would gush about the books that Emma had gifted her, about the little nuggets of wisdom Emma shared, and how she'd replicated Emma's fashion sense at home by having started wearing long skirts, elegant jewelry and even the colorful headbands that Emma would often wear. Nicole even shared about Susie's excitement over Emma's suggestion of a visit to the local art museum - a suggestion Emma herself had forgotten.

"You're like her role model," Nicole concluded, the fondness in her voice palpable. "She's in love with you, just like her mother."

Emma's heart was a whirlpool of emotions. She felt elated, surprised, touched, and a wave of affection for the young girl who'd seemingly nestled herself in their hearts.

"But," Nicole added, her tone turning playful, "before we tell her, I think we should enjoy a bit of sneaking around. Go on a few dates, and have our little secret. What do you say?" Her eyes twinkled with mischief in the moonlight, and Emma couldn't help but laugh. It sounded like a perfect plan.

Emma's voice wavered slightly as she voiced her fears, "Nicole, I... Are we sure about this? Can we handle a new beginning? I don't want either of us to get hurt again."

She felt Nicole's hand gently cupping her face, turning it towards her. Nicole's eyes, shimmering in the soft glow of the moonlight, held a depth of sincerity that made Emma's heart flutter.

"Emma, I won't lie to you," Nicole began, her voice a soothing balm to Emma's anxious heart. "There might be some rough patches ahead. We both have our baggage, and getting into a relationship... it's not going to be a magic fix."

Emma's heart pounded as she listened, her fears threatening to choke her. But before she could spiral further, Nicole's words pulled her back.

"But, Em," Nicole continued, her thumb gently stroking Emma's cheek, "it's clear that we want each other. We want to be together. And I believe that, that desire... it's going to be enough. We're going to figure it out, one step at a time, together."

Emma looked into Nicole's eyes, and she saw her own fears mirrored there, but also a determination, a promise. It gave her courage. Maybe they could do this. Maybe they could navigate this new chapter of their lives, together. The thought, frightening as it was, also held a sweetness that made her heart ache.

"Okay," Emma finally whispered, her hand reaching up to cover Nicole's on her cheek. "Okay. Let's do this. Together."

Nicole's fingers had stilled their patterns on Emma's back, and she shifted slightly to look into Emma's face. "Why weren't your parents at

Scarlett's wedding?" she asked gently, her eyes soft with concern.

Emma sighed, her eyes staring blankly at the ceiling, the memories threatening to come flooding back. "They're very religious... devout Catholics," she began, her voice low, "They didn't take it well when both their daughters turned out to be lesbians."

Nicole squeezed Emma's hand in understanding, urging her to continue.

"The last time I saw them was at Alice's funeral. Things... got a bit better after that, but they still couldn't bring themselves to come to Scarlett's wedding." Emma's voice was thick with emotion. "It hit Scar pretty hard. They sent a letter, and a gift... through the mail. Congratulated her, said they wished her all the happiness in the world. But they couldn't... they didn't come."

Emma's voice faded away, the words hanging in the air between them. Nicole held her a little tighter, offering her silent support. The night wind rustled the curtains, and they lay there in silence, lost in their own thoughts.

Nicole's curiosity was piqued, her thoughts drifting to the older couple she had yet to meet. "What are they like?" she asked, her voice a soft whisper in the quiet room.

Emma let out a small chuckle. "My dad's a big history buff, always has his nose buried in some book about the World Wars or the Civil Rights Movement. He's a high school history teacher, you know. Mom... mom's more artsy. She loves painting, does these beautiful landscapes."

Nicole could hear the fondness in Emma's voice. "Did they know about... you and Alice?"

Emma shifted uncomfortably. "They knew we were close, but they didn't know the extent of it. Not until Alice's funeral when I... lost it."

"And they couldn't accept it?"

Emma sighed. "They tried, in their own way. But their faith... it was a stumbling block. They couldn't reconcile their beliefs with having two lesbian daughters. It was a struggle. There were arguments, tears... it was rough."

Nicole sensed the deep hurt that lingered in Emma's voice. She gently squeezed Emma's hand, wordlessly offering her support. Emma smiled faintly, appreciating the silent understanding. They lay there, cocooned in their shared warmth, the secrets of the past unfurling in the cool, night air.

Nicole looked at Emma, her eyes reflecting a cocktail of surprise and curiosity. "Wait, they didn't know you were married to Alice?"

Emma shook her head, her eyes fixed on the ceiling. "No, they didn't. Alice and I...we were young and in love, and we didn't want to deal with the backlash. So, we just...did it."

Nicole could hardly believe what she was hearing. "Just like that?"

"Just like that," Emma confirmed, her voice barely more than a whisper. "We found a courthouse, got a license, and were married by a kindly old judge who didn't bat an eyelid at two girls wanting to get hitched. We didn't have rings, or vows prepared, we just...winged it."

Nicole chuckled softly at that. "That sounds...kind of perfect, in a way."

Emma gave her a sideways glance, a small smile playing on her lips. "It was. It was the most imperfectly perfect moment of my life."

As Emma talked, Nicole could picture the scene: Two young women standing in a courthouse, holding hands, their hearts full of love and rebellion. It was raw, it was real, and it was perfectly them. Nicole squeezed Emma's hand a bit tighter, a silent promise to stand by her no matter what.

Wrapped in the softness of each other's arms, Emma and Nicole allowed the steady rhythm of their heartbeats to lull them to sleep. The night outside was quiet, the moonlight streaming through the open window

bathing them in a serene glow. Their bodies fit together like puzzle pieces, a testament to their shared history and the love that had endured despite the odds. As they drifted off into the world of dreams, the soft whisper of their breaths became a comforting lullaby.

In the adjoining room, the scene was quite different. Despite the late hour, Scarlett and Daniella were wide awake, the unmistakable sounds of passion from the adjacent room still reverberating in their ears.

"Oh c'mon, babe," Scarlett chuckled, giving Daniella a playful nudge, "admit it, you're just a little bit scarred."

Daniella shot her wife a glare, but there was a playful glint in her eyes. "Scarred? I've been traumatized, Scar. I never thought I'd hear my best friend...you know."

"Making the beast with two backs?" Scarlett supplied helpfully, and Daniella blushed.

"Stop it," she admonished, swatting Scarlett's arm lightly. "I'm just...I'm going to need a minute."

"Or several," Scarlett added, unable to resist. "But you know, as much as I hate to be up at this hour in the morning, only to listen to my sister scream in pleasure, I am very happy for them. Emma's been mooning over Nicole for ages, and it's about time they figured their shit out."

Daniella sighed, rolling onto her back and staring up at the ceiling. "I know, you're right. I just...did not need the auditory proof."

Scarlett laughed again, pulling Daniella close and pressing a kiss to her cheek. "Welcome to my world, babe," she said, her voice soft. "Welcome to my world."

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In the warm afterglow of their newfound romance, Emma and Nicole found themselves caught in a cascade of unforgettable moments. Each day was an adventure, a personal journey that was as much about learning about each other as it was about celebrating their love.

Emma, with her vast intellect and insatiable curiosity, often coaxed Nicole into spending languid afternoons at the city's most renowned art museum. They'd meander through the echoing halls, flanked by towering statues and masterpieces that spanned centuries. Emma, her eyes alight with passion, would launch into in-depth explanations about the art around them, the air around her buzzing with the electricity of her enthusiasm. She'd explain the hidden symbolism in a Picasso or the history behind a Monet with such fervor that even the museum guides often paused to listen.

Nicole, on the other hand, drank in Emma's words like a parched wanderer, her eyes bright with interest and amusement. Even though she didn't understand half the things Emma spoke about, she found herself drawn to the animated expressions on Emma's face, the way her hands would gesticulate, and her voice would rise and fall in excitement. The art museum, with its high ceilings and hushed silence, suddenly seemed a lot more interesting.

Nicole frequently experienced deep-seated passion towards Emma following museum visits. This was partly due to the delight she felt when exposed to Emma's intellect and partly because, of being overwhelmed by tedium, she would use sex as an escape route back to her own sanity.

On the flip side, there were days when Nicole, with her unabashed adoration for rom-coms, would enthusiastically haul Emma into a plush movie theater to catch the latest release. Emma, who hadn't been inside a movie theater since the last Star Wars movie, found herself in the throes of a cultural revelation.

The flickering lights, the smell of popcorn wafting through the air, and the collective gasps and laughs of the audience were a far cry from her usual quiet, book-filled evenings. But there she was, squeezed into a seat next to Nicole, her hand tightly clasped in Nicole's, lost in the whirlwind of emotions that the movie evoked.

On one such occasion, they were watching a particularly heart-tugging movie about star-crossed lovers. Emma, always a sucker for a good love story, was so overwhelmed by the onscreen drama that she turned to Nicole, her eyes moist with unshed tears, and started kissing her passionately. The darkness of the theater cloaked them in anonymity, and Emma got carried away, momentarily forgetting where they were.

That is, until an usher, armed with a flashlight and a sense of duty, tapped them on the shoulder, his face a mix of embarrassment and annoyance. They were promptly asked to leave for "disturbing the peace and public decency," a phrase that had Nicole doubling over with laughter in the theater's lobby while a sheepish Emma tried to hide her flushed face behind her hands. They were banished from the kingdom of cinematic romance, but not before becoming the protagonists of their own real-life rom-com, complete with a scandalous public display of affection and an abrupt, hilarious expulsion.

Over one sun-soaked weekend, Emma and Nicole found themselves winding down the familiar path to Nicole's rustic cabin. Nicole's father, Logan, a man with a booming laugh and a sparkle in his eyes, was already there, having arrived earlier to prepare a small feast.

The instant he laid eyes on them, his face broke into a wide grin. "Well, if it isn't my favorite girls!" he exclaimed, reaching out to pull both of them into a bear hug. Spotting Emma's faint blush and the interlaced hands, his eyebrows shot up in surprise, quickly replaced by a knowing smirk. "Well, it's about damn time," he chuckled, a glint of mischief in his eyes.

Throughout the evening, Logan reveled in his newfound knowledge, showering the pair with teasing remarks and well-timed jabs. Emma, already flushed from the wine, found herself growing even redder with each passing comment, while Nicole simply shook her head at her father's antics, a soft, amused smile playing on her lips. Despite the incessant teasing, there was a warmth that flowed through the cabin, a sense of rightness that confirmed they were exactly where they were meant to be.

Once dinner had been devoured and praises lavished upon Logan for his culinary skills, Emma found herself helping with the cleanup. Standing side by side at the sink, washing and drying the dishes, a comfortable silence settled between them.

As they worked, Logan turned to her, his expression softening. "Emma," he began, his voice low and serious, "I want to thank you. You've given Nicole a chance she's long deserved. My girl, she's got a heart full of love to give, and I think you're just the person to appreciate it."

He patted her hand gently, his eyes warm. "You won't regret this, I promise you that."

His words, sincere and heartfelt, hit Emma like a tidal wave. She felt a lump in her throat, and her eyes welled up. Overwhelmed by the emotion coursing through her, she did the only thing that felt right. She stepped forward, wrapping her arms around Logan in a tight hug, whispering a quiet 'thank you' into his shoulder. Logan, taken aback for a moment, eventually returned the hug, patting her back reassuringly. It was a simple gesture, but one that spoke volumes about the future they were all stepping into.

The crowning jewel of those days, however, was the double date that Scarlett and Daniella organized. They all found themselves at a lively bar in the heart of the city, where the bass of the music made your chest vibrate, and the neon lights were a dazzling array of colors in the darkness.

Scarlett, always the protective older sister, had a few choice words for Nicole. She took her aside, away from the crowd, under the pretense of getting more drinks. Standing tall, Scarlett pointed a well-manicured finger at Nicole, trying her best to keep a stern expression on her face.

"Alright, listen up, Nicole. My sister's happiness, it's in your hands now. You're holding her heart, and I swear to all things holy, if you so much as think of breaking it, I'll... I'll... I don't know... I'll break your bones or something!"

Nicole blinked at Scarlett, her eyes wide. After a moment of stunned silence, she broke into peals of laughter, clutching her sides. "Break my

bones?" she managed to gasp out, "That's the best you got?"

"Might not sound like much, but trust me, I can make it hurt," Scarlett retorted, wagging her finger at Nicole for good measure.

Nicole, still chuckling, raised her hands in surrender. "Alright, alright. Message received, loud and clear. I promise, Scarlett. I'll take good care of Emma."



It was a lazy Saturday morning, the sun was streaming through the cracks of the curtains, casting a warm glow on Nicole's bedroom. Nicole and Emma lay entwined in the sheets, the remnants of their early morning lovemaking still evident in the room. They were in the middle of a tickle fight, their laughter echoing through the quiet house, when the sound of the front door slamming shut echoed through the hallways.

"Mom, I'm home!" Susie's voice floated up the staircase, shattering the bubble of their private world. Panic shot through both women as they scrambled to make themselves decent. Nicole threw on a robe and rushed to the door while Emma, blushing furiously, pulled the sheets up to her chin.

Nicole was in the middle of whisper-yelling at Emma about how she was supposed to have more time when the bedroom door flew open. There stood Susie, her hair a tangled mess from playing, her eyes wide as she took in the sight of her mother and her favorite teacher in a rather compromising situation.

"Mom? Miss Emma?" Susie managed to squeak out, her gaze shifting between the two women.

"Hey, pumpkin," Nicole greeted, her voice sounding unnaturally high. "We were just...umm...having a...morning tickle fight. Yeah."

Emma, still buried under the sheets, added, "Yeah, your mom was just showing me her new...pillows. They're super soft."

Susie looked at them with a mixture of confusion and amusement. "You guys are really weird," she declared. Then, as if remembering something, she added, "Oh, and Grandpa Logan says you two are dating. Is that true?"

The silence that followed was broken only by the distant hum of a lawnmower. Emma and Nicole exchanged a wide-eyed look, but before they could fumble their way through an explanation, Susie's face broke into a beaming smile. "I think it's awesome! You both always seem happier together. And now Miss Emma can help me with my English homework here too!"

With that, she launched herself onto the bed, choosing to hug Emma instead of Nicole who was prepared to receive the burst of affection. Emma let out a surprised 'oomph', wrapping her arms around Susie, her heart swelling with relief and happiness.

"And," Susie said, pulling back from Emma, her eyes twinkling with mischief, "I'm so relieved I don't have to keep your secret anymore. Grandpa Logan made me swear not to tell!"

Nicole let out a strangled laugh, shaking her head in disbelief. "Trust Dad to spill the beans. But hey, she's okay with us. That's all that matters. You are okay with us, right honey?" Nicole asked, joining her daughter, and her love in bed.

Susie's smirk was wickedly cunning, her eyes alight with mischief. "Yeah, as long as I get to know questions on my English test earlier than the rest of the students, I will be okay," she said nonchalantly.

"What?" Nicole interjected sharply. "Is that why you're fine with this, and not because Ms. Brown makes your mother happy?"

Susie shrugged, bouncing on the balls of her feet. "Yeah, yeah, that's there as well, but a girl also needs to look after her own interests, right?"

With sudden energy, Susie leaped out of bed and turned to face them one last time. "And before I get grounded for saying this, I have to warn

you, it was not very good parenting to tell your daughter like this. I could have been...like scarred. But I'm okay to let that go." Her smile was sunny and bright as she looked from her mother to Emma. "But I am happy you could be my mommy in the future. I can't wait to discuss a thousand more books with you."

With that final statement hanging between them like a promise, Susie whirled around and shot out of the room like a cannonball.

Nicole watched her go, then turned back to Emma with a wry grin. "What do you think is more probable? You becoming Susie's second mommy or my daughter actually reading a thousand books in her lifetime?"

Emma couldn't help but chuckle at that question - both options seemed equally likely at present.

"That escalated far quicker than I'd imagined, didn't it?" Nicole mused, a lopsided grin gracing her face. "Emma Brown, welcome to the family." Her tone was light, but the weight of her words hung between them, filling the room with unspoken promises and shared dreams.

Emma was silent, her gaze fixed on the hardwood floor beneath her. Her mind was lost in the intricate swirls and whorls of the floorboards, as if they could offer her a roadmap for navigating the labyrinth of emotions she found herself in.

"Em? You okay, babe?" Nicole's voice gently coaxed her back to reality.

Emma turned her gaze up to Nicole, her large, chocolate brown eyes full of a myriad of emotions. "I...I don't just have you to lose now. I have Susie, too."

Nicole's hand found its way to Emma's face, her thumb caressing her cheekbone. She touched her forehead to Emma's, their shared warmth a tangible testament to their bond. "Look at it this way, Em. Now, you've got two families instead of one."

Emma gave a small, humorless chuckle. "That's a terrifying thought."

"Only if you let it be," Nicole countered.

"I feel like I'm just setting myself up for an even bigger heartbreak," Emma confessed, her gaze drifting away.

Nicole gently took hold of Emma's chin, guiding her face back towards her. Her smoky eyes met Emma's, holding them captive. "Emma Brown, I promise you, as long as I live, your heart, your happiness, your health... they're mine to protect. And I intend to do so with the same dedication I have for my own daughter. You mean more to me than you can possibly comprehend. I understand it's early days yet, and you might not fully grasp the depth of my love for you. But I promise you, one day, this anxiety you're feeling, this fear of future heartbreak, it'll dissolve. Because I'll love you so fiercely, so completely, that you'll have no choice but to believe in my words, in us."

A sense of ease washed over Emma as Nicole's words echoed in her ears. She saw nothing but sincerity in Nicole's eyes, and it soothed her tumultuous emotions. For the first time since they confessed their feelings, Emma felt a sense of certainty. She leaned in, letting her forehead rest against Nicole's, their breaths mingling in the small space between them.

But as comforting as Nicole's words were, a part of Emma couldn't shake off a niggling sense of unease. Because life, she knew, was a seasoned player, notorious for its unpredictable moves. She had learnt that harsh lesson time and time again. No matter how carefully one planned, how stringently one tried to control the variables, life always had a way of throwing curveballs.

As Emma closed her eyes, letting Nicole's presence seep into her senses, a chilling thought crossed her mind. Their love story had just begun, they were in the honeymoon phase, where everything felt perfect, too perfect. And in her experience, this euphoria was often a prelude to an imminent storm.

Unknown to both of them, their budding relationship would soon be put to a test, a test that would either solidify their bond or shatter it completely. Little did they know, the specter of impending danger was slowly creeping towards them, ready to strike when they least expected it. The question was - would their love stand the test of time, or would it crumble under the weight of the unforeseen challenges that lay ahead? The answer, only time would tell.



The set of the music video shoot was a colossal cavern of action, a symphony of color and sound that took Nicole's breath away. A massive green screen stretched skyward, dwarfing the human activity below into an intricate ant farm. Cameras, lights, and countless gadgets she couldn't name hummed and blinked, ready to immortalize her performance for the world to see.

People swarmed the space, everyone with a purpose, a direction, a mission. Directors shouted instructions to the camera crew while makeup artists and lighting technicians adjusted their instruments. Production assistants scurried back and forth with paperwork and props while stylists buzzed around her, concocting her look for the day.

But in spite of all this organized chaos, Nicole found herself not a bundle of nerves but a beacon of tranquility. A quiet thrill danced along her veins, an electric anticipation that colored her world in vibrant hues of excitement. She had worked tirelessly for years to make it to this moment - her dreams were finally coming true!

The transformation began the moment Nicole stepped into the makeup and dressing area, a cocoon of creativity where the ordinary morphed into the extraordinary. The air was thick with the scent of foundation, powders, and the sweet undertone of various makeup products. A makeup artist, a maestro of his craft, approached her with a focused expression, his tools of artistry in hand.

As he worked on Nicole, his brushes danced over her skin, highlighting her features, and sculpting her face. "You've got the perfect bone structure, you know?" he said, his voice filled with professional admiration. "It's like working on a marble statue."

Nicole chuckled, her nerves eased by his casual banter. "Just don't turn me into a clown, please."

His laugh echoed around the room as he assured her, "Trust me, Nicole. You're going to look breathtaking."

Once the makeup was done, her clothing came next. A fiery-haired stylist with a hawk-eye for detail, presented Nicole with her costume. The dress was a sight to behold - a body-hugging corset dress in a deep burgundy that would beautifully contrast with her pale skin. The bodice was adorned with intricate lace patterns that gave way to a flared, flowing skirt that ended at her knees.

The stylist, an eccentric woman named Trina, fluttered around Nicole like a determined hummingbird. "This is a statement piece, darling," she said, her hands deftly adjusting the fit of the dress, "and you're going to wear it like a queen."

Nicole nodded, her eyes drawn to her reflection in the mirror. The transformation was astounding. With the addition of the stockings and knee-high boots, Nicole felt powerful, fierce, almost invincible. She was an enchantress, a siren ready to ensnare the world.

As she made her way back to the set, a young woman, her assigned personal assistant for the shoot, handed Nicole a set of earphones. "Here," she said, "Keep in tune with the track. You're going to kill it out there!"

Nicole gave her a grateful smile, the beat of the music pulsating in her veins, syncing with her heartbeat.

Nicole gave her a grateful smile, the beat of the music pulsating in her veins, syncing with her heartbeat. Her assistant had been right - this song was perfect. As she approached the set, Nicole felt a surge of adrenaline

course through her body. She was ready to take on whatever challenge awaited her.

The set bustled with activity as everyone prepared for filming. Nicole spotted Bella, speaking with the music director and Nicole's heart leapt with joy.

Bella spotted Nicole and waved her over, a huge grin on her face. "Look at you! You look stunning!" Bella exclaimed as she wrapped Nicole in a tight hug. "You're going to do great! Just remember - stay focused, believe in yourself and have fun!"

Nicole nodded firmly, feeling empowered by Bella's words of encouragement and support. She knew that no matter what happened today, she would make it through this challenge unscathed. With one last deep breath to steel her nerves, Nicole stepped onto the stage and faced the cameras head-on.

The bright lights illuminated every inch of the stage and for a moment, time seemed to stand still as all eyes focused on Nicole alone. Then suddenly, like a switch had been flipped within her soul, something shifted into place inside Nicole's mind; Her worry disappeared; any remaining nerves evaporated away; determination rose up inside her chest like an unstoppable force – and with one final deep breath – she began to dance...

The song that Bella had created was electric - a mix of modern beats, funk and soul that combined to create an infectious rhythm. As Nicole moved her body to the music, she felt an undeniable connection with the beat - it surrounded her like a cocoon, igniting her movements and setting her body on fire.

Nicole Sanders, the fiery vixen, was a tempest on stage. Like a ballet dancer in stilettos, she twirled and shimmied, her body undulating to the rhythm of the pulsating beat. Each step was a symphony of perfect timing and skillful precision, her body echoing the music's rhythm like a resonating chord.

As she reached the gleaming pole at the center of the stage, she extended her arms, her fingers wrapping around the cool metal. The chill of the pole seeped through her skin, a tingling sensation that sparked a surge of adrenaline within her. With a swift movement, she leaped from the ground, her thighs twisting around the pole, her skin pinching against the icy metal.

Ascending the pole with the grace of a seasoned acrobat, Nicole reached a dizzying height she had never achieved before. There, suspended in the air, she unfurled her arms, letting her body rely on the strength of her coiled legs. Her back arched in a gravity-defying pose, her hands flung out behind her, like a bird spreading its wings for flight.

Her toned body began its descent, sliding down the pole inch by tantalizing inch. A wild, fierce look of feminine power and allure etched into her features, Nicole was the embodiment of raw, untamed sensuality. As she twirled and spun, she defied not just gravity, but also the confines of the human body. She was a whirlwind of movement, an enigma of strength and grace, under the spell of Bella's intoxicating beats.

As the lights flashed across the stage, they caught on the glitter adorning Nicole's body, creating an ethereal glow around her. Her corset caught the light, reflecting it like a beacon, giving the illusion of an angelic entity descending onto the earthly plane. An aura of power and sensuality enveloped her, a radiant display that even managed to intimidate Bella.

Suddenly, the music director's voice cut through the reverberating music, "Cut!" His command echoed through the set, causing the lights to come back on in full force.

An eruption of applause and cheering broke out among the crew. Nicole, still radiating with the residual energy from her performance, could only beam, a triumphant smile stretching across her face. She had done it. She had captured the essence of the song, transforming it into an unforgettable performance.

As Nicole stood, basking in the afterglow of her performance, her eyes spotted a familiar face in the crowd.

Standing next to Bella, clapping along with others, was none other than Nicole's ex-girlfriend Eva "The Bombshell" Santino.

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Chapter Fourteen

Bella gently guided Nicole through the bustling set, weaving their way past the scattered crew and equipment, towards a small nondescript door nestled in the corner. It was an unassuming entrance to the music director's makeshift office, a sanctuary from the orchestrated chaos outside.

Upon entering, Bella secured the door behind them, the audible click of the lock echoing in the quiet room. "What's going on, Nicole?" Bella questioned, her voice laced with concern. The usually vibrant and self-assured Nicole seemed visibly shaken, her face paled and her breathing uneven.

"Did you know that she is my ex-girlfriend, Bella?" Nicole blurted out, her voice barely concealing her incredulity. "We didn't part ways amicably, and now you're expecting me to share the spotlight with her in this music video? I thought I was the sole performer!"

Despite Nicole's best efforts to maintain composure, the simmering tension was palpable. The fiery spirit of Nicole Sanders was threatening to burst forth, her emotions teetering on the edge.

Bella held up her hands in a placating manner, "Nicole, I honestly had no idea. Initially, the plan was indeed to have you as the sole performer. But as we delved deeper into the creative process, the team felt that the narrative would gain an additional layer of intensity with two performers. The sexual tension, the sensuality... it would make the video even more compelling. And who wouldn't want to witness two exceptional pole dancers intertwining on a single pole?"

Exasperated, Nicole ran a hand through her hair, "But how am I supposed to fake chemistry with her? And I can't even begin to imagine

Emma's reaction..."

"Don't stress about Emma," Bella quickly interjected, her voice steady and comforting. "I'll handle that conversation. We just need to focus on delivering an exceptional performance."

Nicole, however, was far from convinced. Her eyes reflected her inner turmoil as she paced the small room, her hands restlessly clenching and unclenching at her waist. The prospect of performing with her ex was a complication she hadn't anticipated, and it had thrown her completely off-balance.

"How is this supposed to work?" Nicole's voice had an edge of desperation as she stopped pacing and faced Bella. She resumed her urgings, flinging her arms around wildly, "I have prepared the choreography for a single person. What am I going to do with all that effort I put in? Am I going to have put it all to waste?!"

Bella hastily tried to comfort her. "No! We keep everything you have done. After you descend from the pole, Eva will join you, and then the two of you will start again after a sultry dance together. You will take turns on the pole and my choreographer will design an appropriate routine for the two of you."

Nicole seemed pacified for a moment until fury struck her again and she pointed an accusing finger at Bella. "It would've been alright if only the girl joining me wasn't so vile! This evil manipulative knifing bitch!"

At that precise moment, a knock on the door paused Nicole mid-sentence. Bella opened it and allowed Eva in. Nicole sighed heavily but stayed facing away from Bella and Eva.

Eva spoke up this time, her voice resolute yet pained. "This is very important to me Nicole," she said, as Nicole kept fixedly looking at a random spot on the wall, as far away from them as possible. "That jerk left me with nothing and after his death, here I am back on the streets. I auditioned for this role and got it after competing with thousands of other girls. I deserve this chance."

Nicole spun around, her expression filled with suspicion, scrutinizing Eva.

Eva was enticingly dressed in slender denim shorts and a white crop top, which was tight enough to outline her generous curves, including her nipples that seemed to be invitingly protruding through the cloth. She had an extra inch of height on most women and her lips could easily inspire any man or woman's wildest desires. She was a Gigi Hadid-like figure, irresistible for most who laid eyes upon her. People often forgot that she was also almost as good of a pole dancer as Nicole herself.

"I swear I'll be on my best behavior," Eva said in a calm voice.

"But Emma still needs convincing," Nicole finally surrendered after much contemplation. If it were true that Eva had lost everything and desperately needed this job like she did, then Nicole knew that it wouldn't be right for her to even protest.

Reluctantly, she gave in and accepted the idea of working with her sexy manipulative ex for just a few days.

"What do you say we shoot a little test footage with the new choreography? We can tell Emma afterwards, there's no need to worry her unnecessarily," Bella suggested, and Nicole agreed. She had wanted to bolt to Emma right away and tell her everything, yet, at the same time, she was aware of how much she could disagree with Bella when it came to important matters such as this one. Bella was a good person but also someone who placed a lot of ambition into her career, thus, Nicole had to be very careful when it came to contradicting her decisions if she wished to work with the woman in the future.

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The stage was awash with harsh fluorescent light, the green screen a looming backdrop to the unfolding drama. Nicole and Eva stood side by side, their reflections bouncing off the polished surface of the pole that

stood between them like a silent referee. The air was thick with anticipation as they prepared to perform in front of the music director, a newly recruited choreographer, and Bella, who was observing from her seat with an unreadable expression.

An awkward silence hung in the air as Nicole and Eva glanced at each other. The old familiarity was there, but so was a decade's worth of silence, resentment, and unfinished business. They were like two dancers preparing to perform a duet, but the music had yet to start.

Eva, ever the icebreaker, finally spoke up, "Remember that routine we used to do back at the strip club?" She asked, her voice betraying a hint of nostalgia.

Nicole blinked, the suggestion catching her off guard. That routine was seared into her memory, its intense sensuality a testament to their shared past. She murmured, almost to herself, "That was... very sexual."

Eva shrugged nonchalantly, "We can take out the intimate parts."

With a hesitant nod, Nicole agreed. They began to move around the pole, their bodies a mirror image of each other, their movements synchronized in a dance that was as much about power and control as it was about grace and sensuality.

Their bodies swayed around the pole, their hips undulating in perfect harmony as they wrapped their limbs around it. They spun and twirled, their fingers lightly caressing the metal surface as they moved in time with each other.

They moved closer together until their faces were mere inches apart, poising for a kiss before pulling away from each other in an exquisite show of tension. And then the two women wrapped a leg around each other's waist, with the pole between them. They looked into each other's eyes, and Nicole could not help but be reminded of the heated, almost barbaric passion that had once existed between her and Emma.

As if on cue, the two women started to gyrate their hips, thirsting into each other, and the pole at the same time, while doing a very slow, seductive wave with their bodies.

Nicole's eyes did not leave Eva, as her body furled, and unfurled like a flag in the wind, her eyes half-closed, oozing the sensuality of a woman possessed with the powers of seduction.

Eva's hands trailed up Nicole's sides, causing her to shiver with pleasure as they moved in rhythm with the music. Nicole's body responded, her hips swaying in time with Eva's as the two women continued their sultry dance around the pole.

Nicole was being outshined, and Eva was stealing the show, Nicole knew she was being held back by her inhibitors and doubts about the morality of what she was doing.

Nicole stole a glance at the audience, and watched all their eyes fixed on the tall blonde, whose face was contorted into a painting of pleasure. Eva was moaning, and her moans were only audible to Nicole.

Nicole swallowed hard, and felt the competitiveness in her take centerstage. She could not let her ex outdo her, especially not in front of Bella, who she wanted to impress. She had to bring people's attention back to her.

Grabbing onto the part of the pole above their heads, Nicole hoisted herself in the air, swung around the pole, and positioned herself behind Eva.

"What are you doing?" Eva whispered over her shoulders.

"Breaking free," Nicole whispered, and suddenly, she wrapped her legs around both, the pole, and Eva, taking the blonde by surprise, locking her in, and making her unable to move her limbs.

Nicole was using Eva as the pole now, and although she was breaking her own rule of not making the act sexual, she was clearly demonstrating her skills in the best way, rendering Eva motionless at the same time.

Clinging onto Eva's back, Nicole shimmied up the pole, and Eva's body, and when her crotch was directly behind Eva's head, she asked the blonde to turn around.

Eva knew what Nicole was doing, and even though she knew she was being outsmarted, she could not help herself, but turn around, and have her lips, merely inches away from Nicole's crotch.

Nicole had used Eva's lingering feelings for her to captivate her, and make her forget about outdancing her ex.

With Nicole hanging off the pole mid-air, legs wrapped around Eva's torso, she started grinding her hips again.

She moved back and forth, eyes looking down at Eva, thrusting in, and then out, in and then out, right onto Eva's face. Her eyes never left Eva's as she mercilessly continued grinding inches away from the blonde's face.

She could feel Eva's eyes so close to her crotch, yet she knew she would never touch it, and she could feel a knot forming in her stomach that was both filled with the high of subjugating her ex, and enthralling the audience with moves she hadn't pulled off in years.

Eva's hands trembled as they traveled up Nicole's smooth, toned thighs. She felt her breath hitched in anticipation and she could feel the electricity of the moment pulsing through her veins.

Nicole commanded Eva's surrender. "Arch back and close your eyes. Throw your hands in the air." Eva complied without hesitation, feeling an urge to submit to this powerful desire that had invaded her body like wildfire.

Nicole slowly slid downwards, her hands still gripping the pole for balance as she sensuously crooned over Eva's face before nuzzling the softness of her earlobes with delicate kisses.

Traveling further downward, she caressed the length of her throat with feather strokes of her lips until finally, she reached the warm valley of Eva's

cleavage.

The music director's voice echoed in their hazy world of sensual pleasure: "This is amazing! Finish off by kissing her cleavage, and then untangling yourself off her with a fury!"

Nicole froze, a million thoughts racing through her mind. Would she do it? This was going to be the most impactful way to finish the performance, but it would also be taking things too far. She thought of Emma and how this could impact their relationship. Could she do this and still tell Emma everything later?

Eventually, Nicole decided that she could not let this opportunity pass by; with a deep breath, she leaned in and pressed her lips against Eva's soft cleavage before slowly unwrapping herself off Eva with utmost grace.

The audience was left astonished by what they just saw. Nicole had delivered an experience that was out of this world, a performance the likes of which they had never seen before.

Eva looked at Nicole with a hint of admiration in her eyes, and with a sly smile, told her: "It's a good thing you are dating someone else, and I am so done with love, otherwise after that performance...I would have been after you like a foxhound after the scent of a criminal!"

Nicole's response was a soft murmur in Eva's ear, a gentle but firm rebuttal, "Thanks, but don't get any ideas, Eva. This was about the performance, the artistry, not any lingering feelings between us. I wouldn't want you to mistake it for anything more."

With that, she turned away from Eva, her gaze seeking out the shadows where the crew and Bella were clustered. Their faces were lit with wide, triumphant grins, their cheers ringing out in the darkness, a testament to the unforgettable performance she'd just delivered.

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The sound of tiles clicking and clacking against the wooden table ricocheted across the room. Emma and Susie exchanged a quick glance, secretly communicating their next move. Meanwhile, Daniella and Scarlett were bent over the Scrabble board with intense concentration.

Susie's fingers darted across the tiles, assembling the letters for 'QUARTZ'. An expression of pure satisfaction and victory spread across her face as she placed them on a triple-word score.

"Wow! That was amazing!" Emma exclaimed, her admiration for her partner evident.

Scarlett couldn't help but groan in defeat and marvel at the same time. "I swear to God, Susie must have been born playing this game," she quipped.

"It's because I think like Miss Emma," Susie said with a shrug, unable to contain her joy and delight.

Daniella sighed, reaching into the bag for more tiles. "I guess we should have known better," she said ruefully. "The two of them are like peanut butter and jelly."

"Seriously," Scarlett agreed with a wry smile. "And just look at how happy Susie is right now."

As if on cue, Susie let out a loud peal of laughter as Emma affectionately ruffled her hair. Daniella and Scarlett exchanged another knowing look; they may have lost the game, but seeing the bond between Emma and Susie was totally worth it.

As Emma and Susie began setting up the board for another round of wordplay, it was clear that their camaraderie had only grown stronger since Nicole started working long hours at the set of the music video.

"You know what this means?" Emma asked playfully as she arranged the tiles on the board.

"What?" Susie replied eagerly.

"A lifetime of Scrabble nights together!" Emma declared with a laugh.

Susie's eyes lit up with happiness as they settled down to play again - united as always.

As the stars claimed the sky, the apartment morphed into a realm of soft laughter and the gentle murmur of voices. The scrabble board had been abandoned long ago, replaced by more rounds of different games, each one more thrilling than the last. The night unfurled, a quilt of memories being stitched in real-time, all while Susie fought a losing battle against her drowsy eyelids.

Finally, Susie's little head dropped onto her chest, a soft sigh escaping her lips. Her eyes fluttered open once, twice, and then closed, her small body yielding to exhaustion. Emma rose from her seat, her arms instinctively reaching out for the child. The others watched as she gathered Susie in her arms, her touch as tender as a mother's.

The bedroom was a world away from the one Emma had known. Gone were the austere furnishings and the classic Victorian charm of Jane Austen's England. In its place were bright colors and playful designs, the remnants of a room that had once been a sanctuary of solitude, now brimming with warmth and the essence of childhood. Teddy bears perched on shelves, crayon drawings taped on the walls, a testament to the transformation brought about by a nine-year-old girl.

Emma moved quietly, gently laying Susie on the bed. The covers were pulled up, Susie tucked in with a soft kiss to her forehead. Emma's heart fluttered as Susie's fingers curled around her own, the child's sleepy voice murmuring a barely audible "goodnight, mommy."

Emma froze, her breath hitching at the endearment. A wave of emotion washed over her, the enormity of the moment sinking in. She was a mommy, not in the biological sense perhaps, but in every other way that mattered.

"Goodnight, sweetheart," she whispered back, gently disentangling her fingers from Susie's and tip-toeing out of the room. The door clicked shut behind her, leaving Emma standing in the dimly lit hallway, her heart pounding in her chest.

The walls of the apartment seemed to echo with the words, 'goodnight mommy', a symphony of happiness and unspoken promises. Emma leaned against the door, her vision blurring as tears welled up. They slipped down her cheeks, not tears of sadness, but of joy, a testament to the bond she'd cultivated with Susie, a bond that was now a part of her very being.

Emma darted into the washroom, her heart pounding wildly. The door clicked shut behind her, the muted hush of the apartment replaced by her own ragged breaths. The cold tiles under her feet were a stark contrast to the warmth spreading in her chest. She leaned against the sink, her fingers gripping the edge until her knuckles whitened.

The reflection in the mirror was a woman transformed, her eyes shining with tears and her heart pulsing with an emotion she'd long given up hope of feeling. Emma's past was a collection of lost dreams and abandoned hopes, a marriage that had disintegrated, a child she'd never gotten to hold. Her path was strewn with heartache, the image of a perfect family shattered beyond repair.

But tonight, something shifted. An unexpected ray of hope cut through the shadows of her past. She was in love again, not just with Nicole, but with a bright, vibrant little girl who had entered their lives like a whirlwind. Susie, with her infectious laughter and endless curiosity, had wormed her way into Emma's heart.

Tears spilled down Emma's cheeks, but they were tears of gratitude, not grief. She let herself sink to the floor, her body wracked with silent sobs. But in her heart, there was warmth. For the first time in a long time, the echoes of loss were drowned out by the symphony of newfound love. Emma knew then that she had found her family in the most unexpected way. And while the path ahead may be uncertain, one thing was clear: she was ready to face whatever came their way, as long as she had Nicole and Susie by her side.



Under the harsh, artificial lights of the set, Nicole held her phone tight, the screen casting a soft glow on her face. "Just another hour, love," she promised, her voice a soothing hum against the bustling backdrop. "Don't wait up."

The rustling on the other end of the line painted a vivid picture of Emma, her golden hair cascading over her shoulders as she moved about their shared home, tucking Susie into bed, tidying up the remains of the day. "And Susie?" Nicole asked, her heart tugging at the thought of the little girl she had grown to love.

"Out like a light," Emma replied, her voice carrying the undertone of a smile. The sound was a balm to Nicole's weary soul, a reminder of the warmth waiting for her at home.

As Emma detailed their dinner – a playful assembly of mini pizzas, Susie's favorite, with a medley of toppings arranged into smiley faces – a chuckle bubbled out of Nicole.

"Really, Emma? Mini pizzas with smiley faces?" Nicole's voice echoed with a soft chuckle. The image of her girlfriend meticulously arranging toppings on small pizza bases brought a smile to her face.

"Yes," Emma replied, her voice light with mirth. "Susie wanted to help, so we made them together. She insisted on adding the pepperoni herself. You should have seen her, Nicole, she was so careful, placing each piece of pepperoni like it was a precious jewel."

Nicole could imagine it perfectly - the kitchen bathed in warm light, Emma and Susie working side by side at the counter, the little girl's bright eyes focused intently on her task, a tiny tongue peeking out in concentration.

She could hear the joy in Emma's voice, the affectionate exasperation as Susie decided to eat a piece of pepperoni rather than put it on the pizza,

the soft laughter as Emma tried to stop her but eventually gave in. She could picture the small kitchen table, now a canvas of flour dustings and scattered toppings, the heart of their home filled with shared giggles and a delicious, comforting aroma.

"And guess what?" Emma continued, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper, "Susie made a special pizza for you. She put an 'N' with olives on it."

Nicole's heart swelled at the thought. "For me?" she asked, her voice choked with emotion.

"Yes, for when you come home. She's already asked me three times if it's time to put it in the oven."

A lump formed in Nicole's throat. She was missing these precious moments, these simple pleasures of domestic life, all because of her work. But at the same time, she felt a profound happiness knowing that Emma and Susie were creating these memories together, and that she was still a part of them, even from afar.

Nicole's reverie was abruptly punctured by the sharp click of heels on concrete. A scent of jasmine wafted past her, signaling Eva's arrival before the woman's voice sliced through the conversation, "Nicole, we need to practice the descent again."

Over the phone, a pause, a change in the rhythm of Emma's breath. "Who was that?"

Nicole's heart hammered in her chest. "The choreographer," she blurted out, the lie tasting bitter on her tongue. The ensuing silence was deafening. "I have to go, love," Nicole added hastily, before ending the call, her heart heavy with the burden of unspoken truths.

Nicole was wrapped in a tight coil of worry, a gnawing unease that had grown with each passing day. She hadn't told Emma about Eva being on set with her. It was a secret that weighed heavily on her, but she had carried it, fearful of disturbing the delicate bliss of their relationship. Things had been

going so well between them, between Emma and Susie, that she hadn't wanted to introduce any potential strain.

Now, she was paying for it. Her performance that night was marred by her preoccupations, her usually seamless movements clumsy and hesitant. When the director finally called it a wrap, Nicole felt a rush of relief. She needed to talk to Bella, to figure things out, but Bella was nowhere to be found.

Instead, she found herself facing Eva. "What's wrong, Nicole?" Eva asked, her eyes narrowed in concern. "You were tense on stage today." Nicole could only stare back at her, the weight of her secret pressing down on her harder than ever.

"Listen," Nicole confessed, her voice a strained whisper in the stillness of the night, "I haven't told Emma about you and me... about us working together. And today, I lied to her for the first time. It felt awful." Her movements were curt and rigid as she hastily gathered her belongings from the table near the viewing monitor, the agitation clear in her actions.

Eva, unperturbed, simply shrugged, "So, tell her now."

Nicole's fingers paused midway through zipping her bag, her eyes darting to meet Eva's. "I'm scared," she admitted, her voice barely audible. She looked at Eva, really looked at her. Her ex stood before her, clad in a soft pastel blouse and bell-bottom pants - an elegant ensemble that gave her a more sophisticated aura than usual.

"Scared of what? We're just working together," Eva argued, an eyebrow lifted in a silent challenge, "People in the movie business work with their exes all the time."

Nicole sighed, her bag now slung over her shoulder. "I know, but... our relationship didn't exactly have an easy start. I was a stripper, Eva. That's a lot for any girlfriend to digest. I promised Emma I wouldn't do anything that could cause her discomfort. And I know her, this will."

Eva clicked her tongue, her gaze dropping to the floor as she contemplated Nicole's words. "That's why I always thought it'd be easier for two strippers to date. They understand our world, they're better equipped to handle the jealousy and the... mess."

Nicole couldn't help but snort at that, "Really? If that's what you thought, why'd you leave me?"

Eva shrugged again, a soft sigh escaping her lips. "I got greedy. But now, every single day, I regret that decision. Especially after seeing how you've grown into this... this strong, fierce, and mature woman."

Nicole eyed her warily, "Are you trying to stir something up, Eva? Because..."

Eva held up her hands defensively, "No! God, no! I'm happy for you. I know there's no chance... you made that pretty clear. I just... I miss having a genuine friendship, you know? In our line of work, we don't exactly make many friends. And when I left all that behind and moved to LA, well, it wasn't exactly the place to make new ones."

Nicole's gaze softened, a spark of empathy kindling in her eyes. "I can be your friend, Eva. We just need to convince Emma that's all we'll ever be."

A shadow of despair passed across Eva's face. The words were a little hurtful, and reminded her she had lost Nicole forever, but she nodded, stiffened up, and said, "and I will help you in that. Just tell me what you need me to do."

"Nothing. I need to handle this on my own."

"Okay," Eva paused, while the last of the crew shuffled out of the exit.

"Girls, we gotta go," said a man who was standing near the lever that controlled the lights in the studio.

"Thank you, Eva. You have matured as well," Nicole offered her ex a warm smile, rubbed her arm in a very friendly manner, and walked out of the studio, and into the hallway that led to the elevators, with Eva trailing behind her.

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In the dimly lit bowels of the TMZ office, a solitary employee sat hunched over his desk. His name was Jared and his job was to trawl the internet for the latest celebrity scoop, scandal, or meltdown. The flickering light from the computer screen cast a spectral glow over his face, his eyes weary from hours of squinting at the relentless barrage of text and images. The deafening hum of the server room next door was his only company.

Jared's fingers danced over the keys, his hand occasionally reaching out to his lukewarm coffee. His once-thrilling job had become a monotonous routine; every day, the same old celebrity faces, the same old controversies, the same old gossip. Tonight, with the clock ticking ominously towards midnight, he yearned for something - anything - out of the ordinary.

Just as Jared was about to power down his computer, his phone buzzed to life on the cluttered desk. An anonymous number flashed on the screen. Curiosity piqued, he picked up the call, his voice echoing in the empty office, "Hello?"

A woman's voice, low and husky, filled his ear, "I have exclusive footage of Bella Foster's next music video. It's explosive. It'll make the internet implode."

Jared's heart pounded in his chest. His weariness evaporated, replaced with a jolt of adrenaline. "Who is this? What do you want for it?"

"I want nothing," she replied, a cryptic smile in her tone. "Just leak it in the next five minutes."

And then she hung up.

Jared sat stunned for a moment, the dead silence of the office seeming to press in on him. A shiver ran down his spine. His boring day had just turned into a thrilling night. The mouse felt heavy under his fingers as he clicked on the email with the attached footage, his pulse thundering in his ears. This was going to be big.

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Chapter Fifteen

The apartment door creaked open to reveal a groggy Emma, bathed in the soft luminescence of the night lamp from behind. Her eyes, heavy with sleep, blinked against the hallway light as Nicole stepped in, the scent of her perfume wafting through the air.

"Hey, you," Emma mumbled, her voice husky with sleep. She yawned widely, covering her mouth with a delicate hand, "It's late, Nicole. You should've just let yourself in."

Nicole grinned sheepishly, toeing off her heels in the hallway. The thought of Emma waiting up for her warmed her heart and stirred a longing deep within her. The stress and confusion of the day seemed to dissolve in Emma's presence, replaced by a rising tide of desire.

Nicole leaned in to capture Emma's lips, her hands instinctively sliding to her waist, but Emma gently pushed her away. "Nicole," she murmured, stifling another yawn, "I need to sleep. Early morning tomorrow..."

But Nicole was relentless. She smiled at Emma's drowsy protest, a mischievous glint in her eyes. "Just a few minutes," she coaxed, nuzzling Emma's neck, her fingers tracing a path down Emma's arm, causing her to shiver despite the warmth of the apartment.

Emma extricated herself from Nicole's hold with a playful wiggle and a half-hearted chiding, "This is what you get for working all day, Miss Sanders," she declared, feigning severity. Her sleepy eyes twinkled with affectionate jest, belying her words.

But Nicole was undeterred. A sultry smile curved her lips as she watched Emma saunter towards the living room. Moving with predatory

grace, she trailed behind, her gaze drawn to the enticing sway of Emma's hips.

Suddenly, Nicole quickened her pace, her fingers curling around Emma's waist as she spun her around and pinned her against the wall. Emma gasped, her eyes wide and sparkling with surprise. Nicole leaned in, her breath fanning over Emma's lips. Her eyes held a promise of unspoken desires, her touch lighting a flame that flickered brightly in the dim room.

Nicole's eyes, dark and unrelenting, bore into Emma's. A warm chuckle escaped her lips as she noticed the languid drowsiness melting away from Emma's gaze. "Awake now, aren't we?" she teased, her voice a seductive rasp that rumbled low in her chest.

Emma, taken aback yet entirely entranced, nodded subtly, her breath hitching as Nicole's explorative fingers continued their dance across her skin. "You... you're impossible, Nicole," she managed to stammer, her voice laced with feigned annoyance and undeniable arousal.

"Oh, you have no idea," Nicole purred, her lips inching tantalizingly close to Emma's earlobe, her hot breath sending a shiver down Emma's spine. "Tell me, Emma, how am I supposed to resist you when you're looking so deliciously tempting?"

"Nicole..." Emma warned, her voice nothing more than a breathless sigh. Her hands reached up to Nicole's shoulders, intending to push her away, but they found themselves winding tighter around her neck instead.

Nicole responded with a triumphant grin, her grip on Emma's waist tightening slightly. "That's what I thought," she murmured, before finally claiming Emma's lips with her own, sparking a blaze of passion that quickly consumed them both.

The kiss was deep and intense, the heat between them building with each passing moment. Emma's body molded to Nicole's as they explored one another's mouths with a hunger born of years of pent-up desire. They pulled back, gasping for air, then intertwined their fingers and pressed together from head to toe. Their lips locked once more, and this time it was

not a dance but an explosion of life. Emma let her fingers roam over every square inch of Nicole's back that she could reach, then kissed her again.

The kiss lasted for a few more seconds, before Emma pulled back, hair disheveled, and eyes now wide awake, and teeming with lust, "make it a quick one," she rasped, and then squealed, as Nicole lifted her up in her arms.

Emma wound her legs around Nicole's waist, a delicate bow, gracefully tied around the gift of her sensuous curves. Emma grabbed Nicole's face between her slender fingers, and planted a storm of kisses on her face, as the voluptuous woman led her to the couch, and gently placed her in the center.

Nicole dropped to her knees, and before Emma could get her bearings, her legs had been parted open, her skirt hitched up to her waist, and Nicole's lips were grazing the underside of her thighs.

Emma gasped as Nicole's lips trailed up her inner thigh, her fingers tangling in Nicole's hair. Nicole's tongue flicked against the sensitive skin, causing Emma's body to arch off the couch. The sensation was electric, and Emma couldn't hold back the moan that escaped her lips.

Nicole's lips curled in satisfaction at the sound, and her tongue kept exploring, prodding, teasing Emma until she was nothing more than a quivering mess. Then, finally giving in to the pleasure that surged through her body, Nicole pressed her lips against Emma's most sensitive area and began to lavish it with all the love and attention it deserved.

Emma gasped again as Nicole's tongue glided over her clitoris with gentle strokes before diving deep inside of her. The sensation was unlike anything she had ever experienced before, and soon she found herself moaning louder than ever before as the waves of pleasure coursed through her body.

Nicole continued to lavish Emma with attention until Emma could take no more, and finally released a long sigh of blissful satisfaction. She opened

her eyes to find Nicole gazing up at her with an expression of pure adoration on her face.

"I wasn't planning for it to be that quick," Emma admitted, gasping for breath.

Nicole let out a devilish chuckle, her hands trailing a teasing path up Emma's legs. "Well, there's always round two," she offered, her voice a husky whisper.

"But Susie and I have school tomorrow," Emma protested, but her arms tightened around Nicole, pressing her chest further into Nicole's.

"What about me?" Nicole's voice turned into a seductive purr, her words a sultry whisper in Emma's ear. "How can I sleep when I'm all wet and dripping for my Duchess?" She traced her tongue along Emma's collarbone, eliciting a shiver.

Emma exhaled, her body humming with a mix of exhaustion and desire. She pressed a kiss to Nicole's forehead. "Only because I love you so much."

"That's all the reason I need," Nicole replied, her grin widening.

"Get on top of me," Emma managed between heavy breaths.

"I'm already on top of you, baby," Nicole responded, her tone laced with amusement.

"No," Emma clarified, her voice dropping to a whisper. "On top of my... face."

Nicole blinked in surprise before breaking out into a playful grin. "Whoa, Duchess! Someone's been watching a lot of porn while I've been away!" She chuckled, the sound rumbling deep within her chest.

Emma felt Nicole's hips through the mesh fabric of her dress, and lifted it up to reveal a black, lace underwear, "hurry up!"

Nicole shuffled up Emma's body, and Emma waited, her heart hammering in anticipation and impatience. Nicole looked down at Emma with siren eyes, while Emma looked up at her goddess, with doe eyes. the contrast was hypnotic, but the intensity of their gaze was the same.

"Go for it this time," Emma managed to say, before Nicole's pussy was on her lips.

"Oh, I am definitely going for it, sweetheart! By the time I will be done with you, you'd be the Duchess of Desperation..."

Nicole started moving her hips, and her honeypot was on Emma's lips.

Emma's mouth opened automatically, and her tongue dove right in, her eyes rolling back as she tasted Nicole.

It was sweet, it was tangy, it was hot, like nothing Emma had ever tasted before.

Nicole's smell, her taste, her skin, her voice, her lips, her fingers, her everything - she was everything that Emma wanted, everything she needed.

The succubus started rocking her hips forward and backward, rubbing her smooth, wet skin against Emma's face.

"More..." Emma moaned, having enough of the teasing.

"Ask me nicely," Nicole whispered, licking one last time, and then stopping.

"Please..." Emma whispered, she felt like a little girl begging for a sweet.

"Ask me nicely."

"Please fuck me," Emma moaned, barely holding back the strain of desperation in her voice.

"What a good girl," Nicole said, and started grinding on Emma's mouth, letting Emma indulge in her taste.

Emma was falling deeper into the abyss of lust with every passing second, and she decided to let go of all her inhibitions, and just go with it.

She grabbed Nicole's ass, pushing her crotch into her mouth.

Her lips wrapped around Nicole's clit, sucking it softly.

She started flicking it with her tongue, increasing the pressure as she went.

"Oh, that's it..." Nicole cooed. "Can't stop thinking about it now, huh? My little bitch has been left all alone..."

Emma moaned in agreement, sucking Nicole's clit even harder.

"You're fingerfucking yourself as you suck on my clit..."

Emma continued to suck and lick, her fingers straying from Nicole's ass, and slowly teasing down over her crotch.

"I can feel it... I can tell you want it..."

Emma's tongue dug into the soft flesh of Nicole's pussy, making her moan even louder.

"Fuck... I can feel you... coming..."

Emma's eyes widened, and she sucked harder, and harder.

"That's a good girl... you're my good girl..."

Nicole's fingers tangled in Emma's hair, and she leaned back, swatting Emma's fingers away from her pussy and began fingerfucking Emma with the same intensity with which she was riding her face. Their moans filled the room, mixing in their lust and desire, as they brought each other to the edge.

"I'm gonna... cum, Emma..." Nicole moaned, and pushed on Emma's head even further.

Emma's lips wrapped around Nicole's clit, and she sucked with all of her strength, moving her tongue in and out, side to side.

"Oh, god... god... god... god... god... god... god... god..."

Nicole's legs tensed, and she pushed Emma's head down even further.

"I'm cumming... Emma..."

Emma's fingers dug into Nicole's ass as her tongue worked faster and faster, pressing harder and harder against the wet flesh of her clit.

And then Emma came as well, shuddering and moaning, her eyes rolling back as her body shuddered and shivered in ecstasy.

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The room was cast in the soft glow of the moonlight filtering through the window, rendering everything a surreal silver. Emma stirred on the couch, awoken by a dryness in her throat. Her gaze fell on Nicole, sprawled beside her, deep in sleep. Moonlight streamed across her face, painting her skin in ethereal luminescence. Her chest rose and fell gently, her lips parted in peaceful slumber, a strand of hair strewn casually across her face. A sense of joy and gratitude washed over Emma like a tidal wave, rendering her momentarily breathless. She leaned in, pressing a feather-light kiss onto Nicole's forehead before disentangling herself gently and padding to the kitchen.

The kitchen tiles were cold against her bare feet, grounding her in the reality of her extraordinary life. Her hand found its way to the refrigerator handle, pulling it open. The sudden glow of the refrigerator light illuminated the room, casting elongated shadows on the kitchen floor. She pulled out a water bottle, taking a long swig to quench her parched throat.

As she headed back, her phone caught her eye where it lay on the coffee table. Picking it up, she decided to check her notifications and scrolled through her Instagram feed, not expecting anything unusual at this hour.

But then, she froze. Her heart pounded, each beat echoing in her ears. The world seemed to tilt, the room spinning. Bella Foster's new music video scenes had been leaked. The news flash sent her mind reeling. Her fingers tightened around her phone, her knuckles turning white.

Emma squinted at the thumbnail of the video – a blurred, pixelated mess of colors and movement – and pressed play. The world beyond the small screen ceased to exist as the video came to life.

It was Nicole – unmistakably so – her body, usually so familiar and comforting, now a spectacle for the world to gawk at. Her dance was a siren's song, hypnotic and luring, but the notes were sour to Emma's ears.

Beside her was a woman, tall, sculpted like a Greek goddess with waves of lustrous hair cascading down her back. There was a familiar beauty in her stance, a lethal grace in her moves, and Emma's heart sank as she recognized her. Eva.

Nicole and Eva twirled around the pole, their bodies undulating in sync with the pounding music, their dance charged with an electric sensuality that was hard to ignore. They were close, too close for comfort.

The video ended abruptly with Nicole sliding down the pole and the camera zooming in on her face nuzzled against Eva's chest. The sight was a brutal punch in the gut. Was Nicole...kissing her? Nuzzling? Emma's fingers tightened around her phone, her mind teetering on the edge of panic.

A knot of dread twisted in her stomach, her heart pounded in her chest, as if she were running a race she couldn't possibly win. Nicole, her Nicole, and Eva. Dancing together. That close. It felt like a personal betrayal broadcasted for the world to see.

Tears stung the corners of Emma's eyes, but she blinked them away. Now was not the time to crumble. She needed to confront Nicole, needed answers. Her gaze swiveled to Nicole, still peacefully asleep on the couch, oblivious to the storm that was about to hit their lives. Emma steeled herself, took a deep breath, and walked towards the couch.

Emma's fingers dug into Nicole's shoulder, shaking her awake. Nicole's eyes fluttered open, bleary and confused, before widening as Emma thrust her phone into Nicole's face. The familiar touch of Emma's hand on her shoulder was now foreign, a biting reminder of the precariousness of their situation. Emma's face was a mask of rage, her eyes glowing with a fury Nicole had never seen before.

"What's this, Nicole?" Emma hissed, her voice ice-cold. "Care to explain?"

Nicole's mind was a whirlwind of confusion. She squinted at the screen, her heart dropping into her stomach as the scene unfolded. The music, the dance, Eva... it was like watching her worst nightmare come to life. Her throat went dry, her pulse quickened. The walls of the room seemed to close in on her, and a wave of dizziness washed over her. This couldn't be happening.

"But... I..." she stammered, grappling for words that refused to come. The ground beneath her feet felt like it was crumbling. Emma's piercing stare bore into her, demanding answers she couldn't give. Her heart pounded against her rib cage, each beat echoing her guilt. Emma knew. The secret she'd hoped to bury was now out in the open, a ticking time bomb that had finally detonated.

Nicole felt the color drain from her face. The edges of her vision blurred as panic surged through her veins. Her world was spiraling out of control, the ground yanked out from under her. The grim reality of the situation hit her like a freight train. She had messed up, big time.

"Eva," Emma's voice was strained, laced with the hurt Nicole had caused. "Are you...you sleeping with her?"

"No!" Nicole's voice cracked. "It...it's not what it looks like, Emma."

Emma's world tilted on its axis, the room spinning around her in a hazy blur. Her gaze landed on Nicole, her mouth moving frantically, desperation etched into her face. But Emma's ears were filled with a deafening silence, as if she was underwater, drowning in a sea of betrayal.

Her legs gave way, crumbling beneath her like sandcastles against a brutal wave. She sunk to the floor, her body folding in on itself. Nicole lunged forward, her hands reaching out in a futile attempt to catch Emma.

"No!" Emma spat out, shoving Nicole away. Her touch was poison now, a scalding reminder of the betrayal.

Nicole tried to approach her again, but Emma lashed out. Her foot connected with Nicole's shin, her guttural cry echoed off the walls. The world around Emma receded, her vision tunneled to Nicole's shocked expression.

Then, the dam broke. The rage, the hurt, the betrayal flooded out of Emma, spilling over in harsh screams and sobs. It was like a manic wave crashing over her, leaving her shivering in its wake. She felt as if the life was being sucked out of her, replaced with a cold, bitter emptiness.

"Mommy, why's Miss Emma crying? Is she hurt?" Nicole whirled around, her eyes landing on a scared and teary-eyed Susie standing at the entrance of the room.

Nicole's heart pounded in her chest, caught in a fierce tug-of-war between the crying woman on the floor and the frightened child by the door. She drew in a shaky breath, her eyes bouncing between Emma, whose body was wracked with sobs, and Susie, whose small frame was trembling from fear.

"Emma!" Nicole's voice cracked as she tried to get through to her. "You're scaring Susie. Please, stop!"

But Emma was too far gone, her words seeping with venom and hurt. "I don't care! You should've thought of that before you lied to me...before you...you..."

Nicole knew she had lost Emma to her fury and heartbreak, at least for now. In an instant, she rushed towards Susie, sweeping the little girl up into her arms. "It's nothing, sweetheart," she soothed, pressing her cheek against Susie's soft curls. "Miss Emma and I are just having a little...misunderstanding. I promise you, everything's okay."

Nicole's eyes bore into Susie's, willing the child to believe her, even when her own world was spiraling out of control. "Stay in your room, okay? I need to talk to Miss Emma. Don't be scared, love, everything will be fine." But even as Nicole spoke those words, she wasn't sure if they were for Susie or to convince herself.

The somber symphony of Emma's heart-wrenching cries echoed hauntingly through the apartment as Nicole tucked a trembling Susie into bed, pressing a gentle kiss to the little girl's forehead.

"Mommy, please tell Miss Emma that I... I love her. And... please don't argue with her," Susie's whisper came as a timid plea, her small fingers clutching tightly to her treasured teddy bear as watery eyes, so much like her mother's, stared up at Nicole.

"I promise, baby girl. Now, you need to sleep, okay?" With a last reassuring smile, Nicole turned off the bedside lamp, plunging the room into comforting darkness, and closed the door to the sanctuary now occupied by Susie.

Stepping back into the eerie stillness of the living room, Nicole found Emma waiting for her. The screams and sobs had given way to a chilling, venomous calm. Emma stood in the middle of the room, her green eyes radiating betrayal and anger.

"I don't know whether to even ask you why you did this, or to just ask you to get the fuck out of my house."

"I deserve a chance to explain myself, Em."

"You don't decide what you deserve! You don't deserve anything! You got more than what you ever hoped for, and that went to your head, didn't it?"

"Don't say that, Em," Nicole found her own voice crumbling under the mountain of hurt crashing down on her heart.

Emma took a few deep breaths, hands balled into fists on either side.

"Tell me, then. Why did you go behind my back, decide to shoot a sexy music video, with kissing and all, with your ex? Your damn ex? Out of all the people in the world you could have worked with? Why?"

"Because... I needed this gig, Em! Not just 'kinda needed' it, I was desperate for it! It was the only way I could see to be with you." Nicole's voice was raw, layered with a mixture of frustration and desperation. "I wasn't the one pulling the strings here, Em. This is Bella's show, she calls the shots. I could see it in her eyes, she wanted Eva. So, what was I supposed to do?"

"Just bail on the shoot?" Emma's suggestion came out more as an accusation.

"Really, Emma?" Nicole's eyes widened in disbelief. "And then what? Go back to grinding on laps in smoky clubs for the rest of my life? Is that what you wanted? Would you have stuck by my side then, Em?" Her words were sharp, ringing with a harsh reality. "It was either going back to a life of being a stripper, selling myself every damn night, or shooting a sultry music video for a few days and never having to take off my clothes for money again. I chose the latter, Em, because it made damn sense."

"Did you ever consider, for a single moment, what it'd mean to your girlfriend? Your girlfriend who you know is sensitive, who struggles with your past? How long has it been, Nicole? Weeks?" Emma's words surged like a tidal wave. "Did it ever cross your mind that you've been lying to me, that I deserved the truth?"

"I messed up there, I get it. I should've told you." Nicole's admission fell into the room like a broken promise. "But I was scared, Em. I was going to tell you tonight, but then we started kissing and, well, one thing led to the other..."

"So it's the sex's fault, huh? The sex you coerced me into tonight!" Emma's words were hot, and they hit Nicole like molten lava.

"Coerced?" Nicole recoiled, her brows furrowed in disbelief, anger slowly inching its way into her heart. "What are you talking about, Em?"

"I can't believe you've been grinding up against your ex all day, behind my back, and then you have the audacity to come home and touch me with that same body," Emma spat the words out.

"That's got nothing to do with this!" Nicole's voice spiked in volume, her frustration teetering on the brink. "What I do with Eva is work, and what I do with you, in our home, is pure love. Not once have I ever contemplated cheating on you, Emma. I've never loved anyone as fiercely as I love you. You are as important to me as Susie is."

"Don't you dare bring her into this!" Emma cut her off, her voice laced with a warning.

"Emma," Nicole tentatively edged closer, her hands outstretched in plea. But Emma retreated a step back, erecting an invisible barrier between them. "I screwed up, Em. Big time. Between the chaos of work, the overwhelming pressure of perfecting this once-in-a-lifetime choreography, and the looming dread of confessing about Eva... It was just too much. I copped out and chose the easy way by not telling you. I messed up. Humans fuck up. But don't you dare question my loyalty, Em..." Her voice rippled with desperation, her helplessness in making Emma understand the depth of her love was palpable.

"Nicole," Emma's voice was hushed, gentle, yet carrying the sting of a whip, "I can't trust you anymore. This... it's all just too overwhelming. I need some air."

"Don't go, Emma," Nicole's words were a plea. "Let's work this out."

"I'm sick of always having to work things out, Nicole," Emma's voice was weary, her eyes far-off. "All I ever wanted was a simple, straightforward relationship. Yet, here I am, neck-deep in a convoluted mess."

"Love isn't complicated, Emma. Not if it's genuine," Nicole countered, her heart aching with each passing moment. "You've never truly believed me when I told you how much I love you, have you?"

"I did, Nicole. I did trust you. But trust can be shattered."

"And it can be mended, too, Em, especially when the intent was never malicious to begin with." Nicole clung to every syllable, every word, desperate for them to pierce through Emma's hardened resolve.

The past few months had been a whirlwind for Emma, a wild, thrilling ride of ups and downs. And though the peaks had always been breathtakingly beautiful, drowning the lows in their brilliance, she wasn't certain this was just another trough to ride through. Emma could sense the growing fatigue in her heart, her resilience wavering.

A lie, no matter how it was spun, was still just that - a lie. If she was to navigate the treacherous waters of a relationship with a former stripper, someone whose sexual desires were far more intense than her own, Emma needed the beacon of absolute honesty. She understood she might be seen as outdated, or rigid in her thinking. But she was just that - a creature of tradition attempting to keep her footing in the shifting sands of modernity.

"I need to step out for a bit," Emma choked out, her fingers scratching at her neck as if trying to alleviate the crushing weight pressing on her. "The walls... They're closing in. I feel suffocated."

"Can I come with you?" Nicole's words were timid, hopeful.

"I'd rather you didn't. I don't want to talk to you, not now."

"No need for chat, Em," Nicole spilled out, her voice softer than a whisper. "I can hang by your side, or follow you if you like that better. I can't stand to let you be alone with your headspace right now. I know how gnarly it can get."

"Nah, I'm good," Emma shot back, her voice cracked like a faulty radio speaker. "I just need a bit of air to breathe." The pause that came next was a hard punch, hanging heavy between them. Emma's bloodshot eyes, chock-full of fresh, stinging betrayal, hooked onto Nicole's, which were screaming silent pleas for Emma to stick around.

But all Nicole could do was stay rooted to the spot as Emma slammed the door behind her, the sound echoing in the empty apartment like a bitter goodbye. Emma's footsteps ghosted away, each one a soft blow to Nicole's heart.

Nicole bolted to the window as if possessed, her heart pounding like a drum solo. Her eyes sought out the lone figure in the night, Emma, still in her PJs, walking the deserted street as if she was the last woman on Earth.

Nicole tracked Emma, until she vanished around a bend, then she allowed herself to break. Her body shook as sobs tore through her, hot and fast. Standing in the pale wash of moonlight that poured in from the window, Nicole watched the spot where Emma had disappeared, a part of her wishing she could just disappear herself, to escape the gutting pain that gnawed at her.

Knowing she had shattered Emma's trust, a woman who had rolled the dice on a wild card like her, was a pain deeper than anything Nicole had ever known. Between shuddering breaths and a flood of tears, Nicole stumbled to the couch, collapsing onto it like a ragdoll. She wished her friends, Scarlett and Daniella, were home to give her some sage advice or just lend a shoulder, but they were off trekking someplace. Logan was MIA too, and there was no one Nicole could turn to who might have a roadmap for how to fix this mess she'd made.

Nicole's gaze roamed around the living room, the place pulsating with memories. Her eyes snagged on faded snaps of Emma and Scarlett back in

their wild child days, their faces lit with the easy, untamed joy of youth. They came to rest on the wedding portrait of Scarlett and Daniella that took prime real estate above the mantel. The beaming smiles of the couple in the picture seemed to mock her present state.

She remembered Scarlett's cheeky comment, "Soon, our lonely wedding portrait might have some company," she'd teased, a sly grin on her face. Emma had shot back, "Do you think I'd still be living with you if I married Nicole?"

Nicole couldn't recall the rest of the conversation, her mind had short-circuited with pure joy at Emma's words, at the casual 'if I married Nicole'. From the second she and Emma had jumped into the dating scene, Nicole's heart had been scribbling wedding plans and family dreams with Emma and Susie.

The memory came crashing back, kicking off another sob-fest that had Nicole sinking sideways onto the couch. She gave in, shutting her eyes and letting the red-hot waves of sadness and pain wash over her, drowning her in a sea of despair.

Chapter Sixteen

Emma found herself wandering through the maze-like streets of Brooklyn, the towering buildings dwarfing her, making her feel like an ant lost in a concrete jungle. The sky was a steel grey, heavy with the promise of rain. The neon lights flickered sporadically, casting strange shadows that danced and leered.

Suddenly, a burst of raucous laughter echoed through the deserted streets. Emma turned a corner and found a group of dudes, clad in black leather jackets, parked on the sidewalk. Clouds of smoke unfurled from their mouths as they chain-smoked and chatted. Their hungry eyes swept over her, causing goosebumps to prickle on her skin, a knot of fear coiling in her stomach.

She quickened her pace, her heartbeat pounding in her ears, but their echoing laughter and the soft crunch of their footsteps let her know they were trailing her. Panic welled up inside her as the distance between them steadily shrunk.

Just when she felt the cold fingers of fear wrap tightly around her heart, a sleek BMW slid up next to her, the hum of its engine cutting through the quiet. The window rolled down smoothly, revealing a woman in the driver's seat. Her face was illuminated by the soft glow of the dashboard, her sharp features softened by the low light.

"Emma?" she asked, her voice cool as she looked Emma up and down. "I'm Ava, Bella's wife."

Emma hesitated, her mind scrambling to decide whether to trust this stranger. "Get in. It's not safe," Ava insisted, her tone firm. Emma glanced

back at the still-approaching group, their taunts growing louder. The brewing storm in the sky seemed to echo the turmoil in her heart.

Reluctantly, she climbed into the passenger seat, the smell of leather and an unfamiliar perfume filling her nostrils. Ava wasted no time, pressing on the gas as soon as Emma closed the door.

"Rule one, when you've had a major blowout with your significant other, avoid taking it to the streets of Brooklyn post-midnight," Ava advised, smoothly navigating the car through the intricate web of city streets.

Emma stole a glance at Ava. She was familiar from countless newspaper articles and social media posts – the woman who'd bagged the Nobel Prize for discovering a habitable, Earth-like planet in the cosmos. It felt surreal to be in the same car with her.

"How did you find me?" Emma finally asked.

"I figured you'd be more curious about how I knew about your tiff with Nicole."

Emma shrugged. "Guess Nicole dialed up Bella. By the way, it's cool to meet you, Ava. Heard tons about you. Just wish it was under better circumstances..."

Ava's lips curved into a small smile, and she eased off the gas, allowing the car to cruise leisurely. Under the unforgiving glare of the streetlights, Ava's sharp Persian features stood out – those defined cheekbones, the bewitching eyes. She was tall, commanding, with an aura so potent that Emma felt like a timid mouse in the presence of a majestic lioness. No wonder Bella Foster, a sizzling nineteen-year-old, fell hard for this astrophysicist.

"Why do you think the circumstances are bad?" Ava asked, a hint of amusement seeping into her tone.

Emma sighed. "Didn't Bella fill you in? About Nicole, me, and the music video she's doing with your wife?"

"I'm in the loop, Emma. We rushed over as soon as we got wind of the leak. Bella worried you'd stumble on it before Nicole could explain. So, she insisted we drive down to your place to prevent any missteps."

Emma digested Ava's words and then asked, "Where's Bella?"

"She's with Nicole. Things aren't great."

Emma felt a pang of concern. "What's wrong?"

"She's having a breakdown, similar to what you were going through. How're you holding up?" Ava's gaze turned towards Emma, making her feel slightly unnerved.

"I'm... not great," Emma admitted, a little taken aback by her own honesty.

Ava nodded. "I figured as much. You should know, though, Nicole wasn't lying. She loves you. She's never been unfaithful. And her moral compass is far superior to most people."

It felt like Ava had hit her with a sucker punch while soothing her wounds at the same time. "I never questioned her morals, Ava. I just... I worry about how to handle a relationship where I'm constantly up against more... enticing women who work closely with my girlfriend. And when I found out that one of them was her ex, well, you can see why that's a problem for me."

"I get why you're bothered, sure..." Ava conceded, deftly swinging the car onto Atlantic Ave, and barreling towards Cobble Hill. The Manhattan skyline, dazzling like a decked-out bride, sprawled out in front of them. The dense constellation of skyscrapers pricked the darkness, the city's lights shimmering off the river's surface like a thousand fireflies. It was a sight that could suck the breath out of anyone.

"But I can't wrap my head around why you can't see beyond this hiccup and consider the bigger picture. Sure, the initial instinct to mistrust Nicole, I get it. But you've been in the trenches with her for over a month now, right? Known her for a couple more? You're tight with her family, you're close with her kid, if I'm not wrong. So, if you sideline the nature of Nicole's gig and the fact that she's filming a music video with her ex, do you honestly believe she's the type to double-cross you? Why would she ditch stripping, and escorting, without any sure-shot alternative to match the financial gain, only to screw over the woman she took this enormous risk for? Does it add up? And even if it does, don't you think she deserves a shot to give her side of the story?"

"But Ava, it's easier to preach from the sidelines. I'm just a simple, homely, stay at home on weekends kinda woman teaching middle school. The glitz and the glam of the entertainment industry is as alien to me as Martian soil. The only thing glitzy about me is that I used to love doing Ballet once upon a time. It's like I tripped and fell headfirst into this whirlwind romance with a woman who's my polar opposite. And that's how love operates, right? It sucker punches you when you least expect it. Maybe that's why I'm jittery? Her world's a riddle to me. Plus, I lean towards the traditional side, and she's out of my league, not to mention younger... You can see how this might freak someone like me out, right? I want us to work, you've no idea how much. But...it's a hot mess."

Ava quirked a brow, "Messier than a forty-something scientist falling head over heels for a nineteen-year-old DJ, who's besties and roomies with the estranged daughter she's trying to reconnect with?"

"Uh... that does sound like a soap opera. And that's your love story, right?"

"Bingo, and I'm a scientist, Emma. I despised parties, hated blaring music, and had zero patience for attractive, party-crazy college girls who usually ended their nights praying to the porcelain gods. But life had other plans, and I fell for the wildest, party-loving whirlwind in the city. She bangs out club bangers for a living, for crying out loud, but we found a way. I had my fears, Emma. Hell, I still do. She's at the top of her game, and I'm not exactly in my prime. She shares her workspace with literal goddesses,

these Aphrodites...see what I did there?" Ava flashed a grin, dropping Bella's stage name as a slick pun.

"But I trusted Bella, and I still do, and that's why I went all in. You're going to have to dive in headfirst, Emma. You're going to have to take the plunge...just once, and I swear, it'll be worth it."

"What if she shatters me?" Emma's words hung heavy in the air, her gaze tracing the twinkling cityscape, her mind a whirlpool of doom-laden 'what ifs.'

"But what if she doesn't? The real question is, are you prepared to gamble on a far-fetched tragic outcome, just to secure that happy ending you've damn well earned after all the heartaches you've weathered?"

"But..."

"Emma..." Ava's gaze flicked to Emma as she eased the car to a halt by the Brooklyn Bridge pier, the city's twinkling veins reflected in the car's glossy surface. "Do you ever tell your middle school kids to ditch their passions, to never chase their dreams?"

"Never. I always tell them to pursue their dreams. I mean, what's life without chasing a dream or two?"

"Precisely. If you can coax a bunch of middle-schoolers to risk it all, to take that leap of faith and give their all to fulfill their dreams, why can't you hold yourself to the same standard? Sure, we both had our slip-ups. We fell for girls that are hotter, younger, and exude sexual energy that's like... a moth to a flame. But that's not all there is to them, right? Bella's got a head on her shoulders that belies her age, and Nicole...well, from what I've seen, that woman's lived more lives in a single lifetime than anyone else I know. She's brought up a well-rounded kid, and that alone speaks volumes about her character."

Emma's head sagged, eyes shuttering closed, and the only sound was the soft patter of raindrops splattering against the windshield.

"Go all in, Emma. It's worth it. Take it from a scientist, or better yet, from a forty-something-year-old who was scared to let herself love again but took a shot on a girl who turned out to be way more of a woman than she'd ever imagined."

"And the ex?" Emma's question was barely audible, her eyelids fluttering open to the city lights morphing into abstract colors on the rain-splattered windscreen.

"Given she's the one who leaked the footage, you can bet your bottom dollar she's no longer part of the music video. Bella won't rest until she's made to answer for her actions. And...if you're worried about another attractive woman stepping in to work with Nicole, don't."

"Why?" Emma's gaze finally locked onto Ava's, a glimmer of hope flickering in her eyes.

"You will find out soon enough...that is if you decide to give Nicole another shot. Otherwise... there is no use discussing this with you."



On the sprawling canvas of the music video set, a flurry of action blurred the line between chaos and precision. The clatter of equipment, the sharp snaps of commands, and the whirr of anticipation rippled through the busy crew members, their movements becoming an intricate ballet of light, sound, and film.

Nicole stood in the eye of this swirling tempest, her nerves drawn tight like piano wire, echoing with a high, unsteady note of anxiety. She paced the sleek stage, her eyes darting around the tech-laden space, her heart hammering out a frantic rhythm that echoed in her ears. Each beat was a pulse of fear, a silent question - 'How will the new co-dancer adapt to the choreography? Can she match the rhythm, the energy, the synergy of the dance?'

Her gaze kept sliding back to the door, a gateway from the makeup and costume labyrinth, where any moment, her new dancing partner would emerge. Every creak of the door hinges, every footstep that echoed closer, sent a thrill of tension coursing through her veins.

In an attempt to distract herself from the gnawing dread, Nicole threw herself into the choreography. She dove headlong into the rhythm of the dance, her body tracing the familiar contours of the routine. Her mind, a seasoned choreographer itself, tweaked the movements, recalibrating each step, each pirouette to accommodate the new partner. The changes were subtle but significant - more demanding, calling for a degree of grace and elegance that was a slight deviation from her usual style.

Pole dancing, at its core, was about control. The pole, a slender metal rod, served as an axis around which the dancer's body moved in graceful arcs, delicate spirals. The use of hands, though integral, was limited - a careful balance of support and style. Nicole tried to emulate this, her legs stretching into a balletic line, toes pointed with an artist's precision. She leaned back, her body curving like a bowstring, arms unfurling in dramatic waves as she swirled around the pole.

But the devil was in the details, and Nicole faltered. Her grip slipped, her movements floundering in that instant of imbalance. She nearly crashed to the floor, but years of instinct kicked in. She recovered, landing on her feet with a thump that resonated louder in her ears than the bustling set around her.

Now, anxiety was no longer just an uninvited guest, it was an unwanted tenant, threatening to overstay its welcome. Nicole did not want to appear green, unpolished in front of the new dancer. Nicole, the seasoned artist, the woman who'd danced her way out of a life she'd left far behind, wanted to impress. The need to stand tall, not falter, not fail was a drumbeat that now set the rhythm of her heart.

The stage awaited, the crew buzzed, the music hummed - the world was set to the rhythm of a dance yet to be danced. With every ticking second, Nicole braced herself for the music to cue, the door to open, and the dance to begin.

Ever-vigilant Bella, with her inborn sixth sense for her best friend's discomfort, intercepted Nicole's anxious gaze. Swiftly navigating the set with the confidence of a woman who owned every inch of the place, she closed the distance to Nicole. Worry etched soft lines on her youthful face, and her voice carried a note of concern. "Everything kosher?" Bella inquired, her hand lightly landing on Nicole's tense shoulder, grounding her like a lifeline.

Nicole's response was tinged with a blend of frustration and apprehension, "No, everything's not okay. This new routine's like speaking Swahili. And walking on air? I don't think I've got the core strength for that Cirque du Soleil shit!"

Bella shrugged, her delicate shoulders rising and falling in an elegant motion, "We can ditch the 'walk on air' bit," she suggested, breezily.

But Nicole was quick to counter, a hint of sarcasm lacing her words, "No can do. Our newbie diva specifically requested it. Don't want to get on her majesty's bad side, do we?" Nicole rolled her eyes, venting her growing frustration, "I'm about up to here with her whims and fancies on this set, Bella."

At this, Bella couldn't help but chuckle, a touch of surprise rippling through her laughter, "Look at you, grumbling about the fringe benefits of your job on set. You can't complain of her 'demands' when they comprise of a little quickie in the vanity van. yeah, I know. Don't act so surprised. Brace yourself, darling, you've got a whole lifetime of catering to her wishes. And something tells me you'll be more than pleased to comply." Bella's smile hinted at a playful tease, her gaze lingering on Nicole for a beat before she looked past her, "And speak of the devil... here she is, your brand-new dance partner! Break a leg!"

As Bella's words hung in the air, the set doors swung open, ushering in an ethereal figure. Draped in an elaborate dress, the new dancer floated into the studio like a ballerina straight out of a Tchaikovsky ballet. The dress, a swirling, stormy blend of muted grays and luminous whites, was crafted to mimic the sky during a soft rainstorm. It cinched at her waist, emphasizing her slim form, before billowing out in layers of frothy tulle, reminiscent of

clouds. Silver sequins, sewn into the bodice and scattered across the skirt, glinted like droplets of rain, capturing the stage lights and casting ephemeral rainbows across the room.

This new dancer had a face that would remind anyone of the refined beauty of Kate Middleton – a rich blend of elegance, charm, and nobility. Her eyes, warm and inviting, twinkled with a mix of nervous excitement and unshakable confidence. A cascade of curls tumbled down her shoulders, framing her face in an explosion of chestnut waves. She was an elegant masterpiece that demanded everyone's attention, including Nicole's.

Nicole felt a wave of envy watching her, yet her heart swelled with pride, a strange combination indeed. The woman moved with a fluidity that was captivating, taking her place next to Nicole, settling into the poised, graceful stance of a seasoned ballerina. It was as if she had always been there, in that moment, on that stage, ready to dazzle the world.

"Relax, Nicky," the new dancer whispered, leaning in so only Nicole could hear her over the buzz of the crew. The familiar, soothing voice sent a shiver of excitement down Nicole's spine.

"I love you," the ballerina assured her, a warmth seeping into her words, "and I won't embarrass you." Her eyes sparkled with certainty, yet her voice held a hint of playful challenge.

Nicole's heart pounded in her chest, her fears momentarily abated by the dancer's earnest declaration. A nervous chuckle escaped her lips as she shook her head, finding her voice, "Emma, my love, I'm not worried about you embarrassing me. I'm terrified of embarrassing you."

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The room fell into a hushed silence as Nicole took her place beside Emma, their bodies radiating nervous anticipation. The pulsing beat of the intro music filled the studio, the vibrations twining with their heartbeats,

fusing them into the rhythm of the impending dance. Bella's camera rolled, ready to capture the unfolding saga of the stripper and the ballerina.

Nicole kicked off the dance, her body a siren's song on the gleaming pole. Her movements were primal, powerful, a bold assertion of her innate sensuality, unapologetic and fierce. Yet, seamlessly woven into her routine, were elements of elegance and grace, borrowed from the world of ballet. Each twist and twirl, every arch and bend, spoke of a silent narrative of strength and beauty, mirroring the dance unfolding beside her.

Beside her, Emma moved with the fluidity of a dream. Her ballet was a breathtaking spectacle of lithe grace and transcendent elegance. The seeming fragility of her movements belied the iron will and strength that powered each pirouette, each leap, and every graceful glide. Yet, in the curve of her arm, the tilt of her head, and the arch of her back, there was a subtle echo of the sensual power and raw emotion that Nicole's dance emanated.

The director's camera swung between the two, capturing the enchanting symmetry of their performance, the stark contrast between the pole and the ballet, melting into a single, unified expression of strength, grace, passion, and love. Their bodies moved in sync, the sensuous undulations of Nicole's dance intertwining with the ethereal grace of Emma's ballet, creating a symphony of movement that held everyone in the room spellbound.

As the director masterfully maneuvered the camera, it swung like a pendulum in a captivating dance of its own, capturing the bewitching rhythm of two women lost in their artistry. The lens hungrily drank in the seductive motion of Nicole's curves tracing a language of desire on the cold steel of the pole, while in the same breath, it tenderly cradled the ephemeral beauty of Emma's ballet - a ballerina lost in the soft embrace of her melody.

The performance peaked as Emma began her signature ballet walk, her body floating across the stage with an unearthly elegance. Nicole, mirroring her movements, launched herself into a vertical walk around the pole. Defying gravity, she seemed to walk on air, the strength of her core and the

grip of her hands her only support. It was a spectacle that captured the essence of their journey, a symbol of their unity and strength.

As the music faded, both women ended their dance in a dramatic pose, their bodies arched, arms outstretched in mimicry of flight, smiles bright on their faces. Then, as if pulled by a magnetic force, they rushed into each other's arms, their lips meeting in a kiss that echoed around the room, a perfect end to their dance. The studio erupted in applause, the crew's cheers a cacophonous salute to the ballet and the pole, and most importantly, to the love story that had unfolded before their eyes.

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Epilogue

One Year Later

"Emma, have you checked the lights in the ballet hall?" Nicole shouted across the bustling studio, darting through the flurry of assistants, decorators, and last-minute fixers, her hands full with wires and a half-eaten sandwich.

"I'm on it, babe!" Emma called back, a paintbrush in one hand, a steaming cup of coffee in the other. She was perched on a stepladder, adding a final touch of glistening gold to a wall mural in the ballet hall.

Their dream, a ballet and pole dancing studio, was about to become a reality, and the air crackled with excited anticipation. The two large halls, side by side, reflected the contrasting yet intertwined spirits of the two women. One was a passionate celebration of modern fierceness, the other a serene tribute to classic elegance - much like Nicole and Emma themselves.

The pole dancing hall bore Nicole's signature in every nook and corner. Sleek, black walls echoed her fearless spirit, while metallic accents and dynamic LED lights added to the room's modern edge. Steel poles stretched from the shiny floor to the high ceiling, glinting under the bright neon lights. The room had an undeniable charge, an electric current that invited you to release your inhibitions and embrace the fierce.

In contrast, the ballet hall was a beautiful page out of a Victorian diary. Creamy white walls shimmered under the soft, warm lights. Classic chandeliers hung from the ceiling, their crystals winking at the polished wooden floor below. Full-length mirrors lined one wall, reflecting the vintage charm of the room. And at the room's heart was the ballet barre, a

stage set against a hand-painted mural of a delicate ballerina mid-pirouette, its elegance a perfect mirror to Emma's grace.

"Can you believe we're finally here, Nikki?" Emma stepped down from the ladder, her eyes shimmering with unshed tears of joy. She walked over to Nicole, paintbrush and coffee forgotten on a nearby table.

"I can, and I do," Nicole said, looking around their studio with pride. "And I know it's going to be as amazing as we dreamed."

"And speaking of amazing, you've got paint on your face," Emma laughed, reaching out to wipe a smudge off Nicole's cheek.

With a final check of the lights and a swipe of a wet wipe, they stood in the center of their dream, ready to throw open the doors to their new world, as the anticipation of the grand opening bubbled up around them like champagne.

The studio doors swung open with a bang, and a miniature ballerina pranced in, her pink tutu bobbing with each step she took. Following close behind was Logan, looking slightly winded but all smiles.

"Well, well, well," Nicole said, a grin spreading across her face. "Look who's gone to the dark side."

"Hey!" Emma playfully swatted at Nicole, her eyes twinkling. "Ballet is not the dark side."

"I disagree," Nicole shot back, ruffling Susie's hair. "Our little firecracker here was supposed to be my star pole dancer."

"Oh, come on, Nicole, don't be a sore loser," Emma said with a smug smile. "Ballet's just more her style. Isn't that right, Susie?"

"Yep!" Susie nodded enthusiastically. "I love my tutu!"

Logan laughed, catching his breath as he slung an arm around Nicole's shoulder. "Don't worry, Nikki," he said, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "I'm still team Pole Dancing."

"Well, that's a relief," Nicole said, her laughter echoing in the bustling studio. "And let's not forget Scarlett and Daniella have signed up for my classes too, so looks like I'm winning here, Emma."

Emma shook her head, grinning. "Not so fast, Nikki. Bella and Ava just asked for private ballet lessons."

"WHAT?!" Nicole exclaimed in mock outrage, throwing her hands up in the air.

"So we're even, huh?" Emma teased, her gaze following Susie as she practiced a pirouette in front of the mirror. "Although I might argue that counting Logan in your pole-dancing roster is a bit of a charity move on my part."

Logan grinned unabashedly. "Hey, I never enrolled as a student. I just stated my preference for pole-dancing ladies as compared to those spinning around... all bundled up in yards of tulle."

"Dad!" Nicole interjected, her hands instinctively moving to cover Susie's ears.

Undeterred, Emma suddenly switched the conversation, excitement flashing in her eyes. "Guys, our music video is mere thousands away from hitting the big 500 million on YouTube!" She held out her phone, the YouTube metrics shining brightly on the screen.

Nicole, looking over, gave a half-smile. "To be honest, those numbers don't carry much weight for me anymore. I'm just elated we could deliver the music video Bella envisioned, especially after everything she's done for us."

"But Ava..." Emma's voice softened, a dreamy glow lighting up her face, "Ava's the real superhero here. If it weren't for our heart-to-heart in her car that night, I might never have given us a second chance. Bella cleared the path for us, and Ava, well, she made sure we stayed on it."

Nicole nodded, looking around at the walls of their studio, the product of their love and hard work. "And just look where we've ended up, owning our very own dance studio, right in the pulsating heart of Brooklyn!"

There they were, the trio of women, the wide-eyed child and the spry old man, all of their faces lit up with bright smiles as they surveyed the new studio. In just a few days, these walls would reverberate with music, laughter, and the determined rustle of bodies in motion. They would bear witness as scores of aspiring dancers, both young and old, took their first steps into the worlds of pole-dancing and ballet, learning from the absolute best in town.

It wouldn't just be any ordinary opening. On that day, the studio would be christened under the auspices of the world's most celebrated couple, a veritable force of nature, their names sparkling like twin stars in the cultural firmament. Ava and Bella, two names that had become synonymous with love, courage, and resilience in the LGBTQ+ community.

Their journey to becoming such pillars of strength is indeed a tale for the ages, though that's a different narrative, one to be penned perhaps in another book, at another juncture.

But for now, we draw the curtain on the lives of Nicole and Emma, letting them bask in the warmth of their mutual love, and in the joyous radiance of their newly minted, diverse family. The echoes of their laughter and chatter, their shared stories and dreams, will fill these halls, embedding into the walls and becoming a part of the studio's history, its soul.

And with that, we take our leave, drawing this chapter to a close...

The End.

Continue Reading Bella and Ava's story in the 'top ten' bestselling book, 'Fated To Love You', the standalone book one in the series 'The Brooklyn Girls'.

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Fated To Love You (When Blunders Turn
Beautiful)

A NOVEL
BY A GOSWAMI

FATED TO LOVE YOU



"Read the hugely popular, top ten bestseller that tells the story of Bella, a young DJ in Brooklyn, as she falls for Ava, her best friend and roommate's mother. Ava, an astrophysicist, and Bella meet, make love, and later realize the blunder they have just committed!"

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Chapter 1 (Bella)

A bevy of beautiful girls gyrate on the dance floor in front of me, and the usual, often depressing, but mostly routine question pops into my head.

Who should I fuck?

I scan the dance floor.

I spot the blondes that look like me, with cute, innocent faces, but there was nothing innocent about the way their hips were moving.

I had had my fill of blondes. Tonight, I wanted something exotic.

And as the word materialized in my head, so did she, in the corner of my eye.

Yes, she was exotic, but she was also so much more.

A purple beam of light moves through the dance floor and briefly illuminates her gorgeous face.

I only get a brief look at her face, but it is enough.

I know who I am fucking tonight.

She is standing alone, looking bored, looking like she would rather be anywhere else in the world.

Me too, babe. Me too.

My fingers graze the many knobs and sliders on my Pioneer DJ mixer, finding the one I need.

I twist the knob, and the volume of the trance music that had been blasting through the speakers decreases, and a groan of disapproval flows towards me from the crowd.

I hold the mic close to my lips and lick them once.

I am not usually nervous, but suddenly, I realize I am sweating.

She is unbothered by the sudden decrease in volume.

In fact, the look on her face says she welcomes the unexpected quiet.

“Hello folks, this is your DJ, DJ Aphrodite in the house, can I get a ‘hell yeah’ if you are enjoying the party, and can you make sure you are loud enough to shake the fucking foundations of Burj Khalifa?”

I point the mic at the crowd.

They scream their approval, and I smile.

I like it when the crowd is responsive and alive, and when it comprises a beautiful, older lady, who I desperately want to see naked.

I flick my blonde hair out of my face.

My ocean-blue eyes are drawn to her once again, and I find her finally looking at me.

She has a glass of whiskey in her hand.

A woman who likes whiskey is a woman who likes danger.

“Those of you who know me, know I like to do this thing during my sets, where I shine the spotlight on someone I either find extremely beautiful, or someone...who looks like they would rather swim with sharks than be at my concert.”

I signal with my hand, and suddenly, beams of white light from above, pierce the darkness of the club and start moving around amidst the crowd, like searchlights searching for escaped criminals.

The crowd howls and starts chasing after the spotlight, like children running after fireflies.

Ms. Exotic is rooted in her spot. She wants no part of this.

Little does she know, I am going to make her a part, whether she likes it or not.

I slowly start twisting the volume knob, gently increasing the volume.

The crowd starts jumping, as the music climbs, and nears crescendo.

“Are you guys ready to be ‘spotlighted’?”

Yeah, I know, it’s a cringe term, but it’s stuck now, and my fans kinda know me for it.

A cocktail waitress climbs onto the little circular stage from where I had been DJing the party.

“Which one?” she whispers into my ear.

“Woman in black, wearing the strapless dress...curly hair, with the glass of whiskey in her hand.”

The waitress nods and leaves.

I am now blasting the music at full volume.

People in the crowd have begun dancing.

In a sea of people twisting, grinding, and throwing their bodies around to the beats of music, beats that I produced, Ms. Exotic is standing still, sipping her whiskey as if she is staring at art in an art gallery.

Am I the art?

I signal with my hand once again, and the music stops.

All the spotlights disappear, except one.

One shines down upon Ms. Exotic, illuminating her like a unicorn in a mystical forest.

And now, I can see her clearly.

I can make out her features, and after a few seconds of staring at her blankly, I realize I might have stumbled upon God's greatest creation.

"Hi, I guess the spotlight has chosen you," I say into the mic.

The corners of her mouth curl into a mischievous smile. She looks around, and then back at me.

"The spotlight...or you?"

Even without the mic, her voice carries to me.

"Guilty as charged!" I raise my hands in defense, "Would you like to know why the spotlight chose you?"

"No."

"Because you are both the most beautiful, and the most bored of all the people here tonight, and I have no idea why. Your looks should be enough to cause chaos around you."

"The eye of the storm is always calm."

The crowd cheers for her response and quick wit.

Her smile lengthens to a grin.

"Look at the mouth on this one, and by that I mean, gosh, your lips are pretty!"

The crowd now cheers for me.

"What's your name, honey?" I ask.

"Ava."

"Ava, the rules state that if the spotlight chooses you, then you gotta give a solo dance performance on a track of my choosing."

"What if I don't want to follow the rules?"

A few boos crop up from the crowd.

"Then you would leave this crowd, and me, very disappointed in you. You have a body that's made to dance. And all of us here, would like to see it move, am I right, people?"

The crowd cheers. They are so drunk, they would cheer for Nazis at that moment.

Ava presses her lips together.

I notice the fullness of her mouth, and how thick and juicy both her lower and upper lips are.

I lick my own lips in anticipation.

She is driving me crazy.

“So...Ava...will you dance?”

“I will,” Ava takes a step closer to the dance floor, “but not on a song of your choosing, but mine.”

“Accepted,” I say, making an exception to my rule for the first time since the inception of my ‘Spotlight Trick’.

“What kind of music would you like me to play?”

“Something that is out of this world, quite literally.”

“What do you mean?”

“I am an astrophysicist, darling. I would like you to play something that brings me closer to the universe.”

I laugh, “Can I play the Star Wars theme?”

“I would prefer that over the nonsense I have been hearing ever since I stepped into this club.”

“Yo, the scientist coming in with that nuclear heat!” someone shouts from the crowd, eliciting a few chuckles, but I am not laughing.

She might be hot as fuck, but she can’t get away with calling my music ‘nonsense’.

“Maybe you are too old to understand it, Ava?”

Yes, I went there, although she hardly looks a day older than 35.

“Is it so easy to rile you up? Come on, Aphrodite, show me what you can do.”

I suck in my cheeks and stare Ava down.

She glares back.

“Come forward, Ava. I want you on the dance floor.”

Ava climbs the three steps, and steps onto the floating dance floor, hanging a few feet above the swimming pool.

No one is allowed here, except the person I want.

Ava affords me the best view of her body ever since I spotted her, and I stifle a gasp.

She is tall, statuesque, and curvaceous.

Elegance drips through her posture.

Her hair is the color of chestnut, and they fall in electrifying curls down to the small of her waist.

Her strapless dress hugs her frame, making me dizzy with desire, and her hands, resting on her waist, make her look like she is modeling for the biggest fashion brands in the world.

Scientists look like this? Well done, Neil Degrasse Tyson, on getting hot women to take up science, man!

“Where are you from, Ava?”

“I am from America. I am an Iranian-American.”

A middle eastern beauty. That explains the flawless skin.

“Ava, from America, especially for you...this is my own produced track, ‘No Time For Caution’ from Interstellar.”

I see Ava’s mouth part in surprise.

“I want no lights, except the one on Ava. And I want us all to look at the stars outside, from the highest floor, in the tallest building in the world, as the music of ‘Interstellar’ takes us to a place beyond our imagination. And Ava, maybe after this, you’ll think better of my music.”

I open the folder titled ‘private’, on my Mac, and click on ‘No Time For Caution’.

My eyes find Ava, who is still confused as to how a Trance DJ had remixed a song from ‘Interstellar’.

“Ava...” I call out to the Middle Eastern, “No time for caution, baby.”

The synth beats start flowing from the speakers, overlayed with the iconic piano piece from ‘No Time For Caution’.

Ava closes her eyes the moment she identifies the track and starts to slowly move her body.

Like a ballerina, she starts to spin, waiting for the beat to drop.

Ava spins, and she spins with full control.

I look in awe, as she keeps spinning, and then she raises one leg in the air, and starts spinning on just one leg.

She *is* a ballerina!

She stretches her arms out, her body now a little blur of black.

And then the beat drops, and picks up again, with electric guitars ripping through the track, going crazy along with the pianos from Hans Zimmer, and it seems like something has caught hold of Ava.

A ripple runs through her body, and she does the wave with the flexibility of a gymnast.

The crowd stands still, and then erupts when the song comes to a close.

Ava stands panting, clutching her sides.

All the spotlights are turned on, but I wish they weren't.
I was not done gawking at this beauty.
Ava bows, and the crowd goes berserk.
She turns around and walks to my DJ console.
She grabs my hand and raises it in the air, while taking the mic in her hand. "Never have I heard Hans Zimmer's work remixed such flawlessly. Your music *did* take me to a different world, DJ Aphrodite!"
"Bella," I whisper to her.
"What?"
"My name is Bella, and I would like to buy you a drink."

∞∞∞∞

I am alone with Ava at the back of the club, as the party slowly draws to a close.

Another DJ is helming the music, while I lean against the bar counter, as the city of Dubai twinkles below and behind me.

"I think you are really hot." I do not waste time.

"I think you are very pretty yourself," Ava says with a subtle smile.

"Are you single?"

"Yes."

My heart leaps with joy, and my panties become a little wetter.

"I can't help but think of how flexible you are," I say, frantically trying to come up with one-liners that would get me in bed with the goddess in front of me.

"Why would you think of that?"

"Flexibility has its uses, especially in bed."

Take the hint, woman!

"Oh...umm...yeah." Ava takes a sip of her whiskey, and turns her gaze away from me.

She doesn't want me. Good thing I am on the 154th floor from where I can jump to my death!

"Do you like women?"

I guess it's time to be direct to save time.

Better rip the band-aid off as quickly as possible.

"Yes, but Bella, I am not interested in hooking up at the moment."

I nod.

“Am I not your type?”

“Yeah, hot, young blondes with the body of a gymnast are not my type,” Ava says sarcastically.

“Then what’s the problem?”

“I am here to support my friend, Samantha, and I wouldn't be a good friend if I abandoned her right after the party celebrating her becoming the head at Louis Vuitton.”

“Samantha Brooks is your friend?”

“Yeah.”

“How does an astrophysicist strike up a friendship with a fashion designer?”

“Long story. It will take time.”

“But I won't, in making you...cum.”

The missile is away.

Ava blushes and hides her face behind her glass.

The missile has locked onto the target.

“You really want this, don’t you?”

“As much as I wanted you to dance.”

“Well, blow my mind again, and I might just do...what you want.”

Jackpot. Missile has demolished its target.

“Ava, you look like someone who likes being in control.”

Ava frowns and looks at me with confusion.

“Why would you say that?”

“I have a hunch,” I say, “and I know exactly...what would blow your mind.”

I wait for a group of tipsy, staggering girls to pass, and then unzip my clutch.

“Give me your hand,” I ask Ava, who extends her right arm, palm facing upwards.

I drop a cylindrical bullet shaped not much bigger than an actual bullet, in Ava’s hand.

I look around to see if someone has seen me hand Ava a sex toy.

“What is this?”

“Power.”

Ava looks at the pink bullet-shaped vibrator, her eyes studying the fascinating object like it was material from outer space.

“Ava, you gotta be subtle, babe. I don’t want people to find out how desperate I am for you.”

Ava smiles. “Who’s gonna be using this, you...or me?”

“I am giving you the power,” I say and take the vibrator back from Ava, “and I am keeping this.”

I glance around, and when I am satisfied no one is watching me, I slip the vibrator inside my skirt, and with a gasp, I insert it inside my vagina.

Ava’s eyes widen.

They look prettier than ever.

If only it was my mouth between her legs making her eyes go wide.

“This...is your power.”

I search inside my clutch once more, take out a small, rectangular remote, shaped like a Wrigley’s Doublemint chewing gum, and thrust it into Ava’s hand.

“The controls are easy enough to understand, especially for an intelligent scientist like you. Just make sure you don’t start off with max speed. Be...gentle with me.” I graze Ava’s arm with my fingers.

“I’ll be in the washroom.” I lean closer to Ava and touch my lips to her cheeks.

She withdraws, but out of the suddenness of my movements, and not because she did not like it.

Or I hoped so.

I make my way toward the washrooms and feel the vibrator start vibrating the moment I step into a stall.

She did not waste time.

She is eager.

I grab the sides of the stall with both my hands, as the vibrator starts humming intensely inside me.

I close my eyes and imagine Ava, leaning against the bar counter in her black, sparkling dress, her fingers playing with the buttons on the remote, controlling me like a puppet, wondering how soon she wants to burst into the washroom to see the consequences of her actions.

The vibrator speeds up, and I gasp, and then moan.

A knock on the door scares me.

Have I been caught?

“Yes? Just a minute!” I say in my most natural, not close-to-cumming voice.

“I don’t think I can wait a minute,” comes the voice from the other side of the door.

I unbolt the door and pull Ava in.

She crashes into me, like monstrous waves crashing ashore, like women crashing into a store with end-of-season sale.

She is hungry, and I am ready to serve.

I am pushed against the wall, in the cramped little space, with Ava’s body pressed tightly against me.

She searches for my lips with her own, and I offer her my mouth.

She pulls my lower lip with her teeth and moans when our tongues meet.

Her hands are already on the small of my back, her legs sliding between my thighs.

“What’s your age?” she asks, nibbling along the sides of my neck.

“Old enough to show you the time of your life.”

She holds me by my throat. “Tell me your age, Bella.”

“20.” I smirk, while Ava chokes me lightly.

“Fuck, you are too young.”

“I am above 18.”

“I am 19 years older than you.”

“That’s hot.”

“That’s inappropriate.” She is slowly backing away from me.

I stop her by grabbing her waist, turning, and pushing her against the wall.

“It’s 2023. We are consenting adults, and I don’t think I can let you go now before feeling your fingers in me.”

I nuzzle the sides of her neck and take a big whiff.

She smells of lust and seduction, mixed with notes of pear, tangerine, and bergamot.

Prada.

I see her battle with her thoughts.

She is deciding whether it would be morally justified to fuck a girl who is 19 years younger than her.

I pull the top of my jumpsuit down, to reveal my left tit, and to help her make a decision.

She lowers her eyes, and I see her lick her lips.

I grab the back of her head and direct her towards my swollen nipples.

She thrusts her tongue out, to taste it, while also coming to a decision.

“We need to go somewhere else.” She is hardly able to speak with her mouth stuffed with my breast.

“I know just the place,” I say.

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I have VIP access to the observation deck of the Burj Khalifa, which is empty as Ava and I enter it through gold, metallic doors.

The city glitters around us.

We are on top of the world, up in the clouds, and I am with an angel who can't keep her hands off me.

We stumble our way to the very edge of the observation deck, where only a chrome-finished railing separates us from massive glass panes affording 360-degree views of the city.

Ava has me pushed against the railing, which is biting me on the small of my back.

But I couldn't care less.

I am in a daze, numb to everything except pleasure.

Ava is gasping, her breasts rising and falling like musical notes in one of Beethoven's symphonies.

“I had no plans of doing this tonight,” Ava mumbles against the skin of my neck, as she kisses upwards, and bites my ear lobe, “but you are so... fucking...hot.”

I arch my back and lean backward over the railing. “I had no plans of making out with an astrophysicist, like ever,” I say, running my hands through Ava's chestnut-colored hair, “but you are fucking hot as well...”

“I don't have much time. We'll have to be quick,” Ava says, taking deep breaths and undoing the knots of my top.

In the few seconds that we stop making out, we look at each other.

Her fingers work frantically on the knots, while her eyes peer deep into my soul.

My knees suddenly falter, and I feel my heart filling up with emotion.

“Your eyes are kind,” I say.

“No one has ever said that to me. People mostly think I am a cold-hearted bitch.”

“People don't know shit. I know my shit. I can read people.”

“What else can you read?”

“That you wish I hadn’t tied these knots so tightly.” I smile as Ava unties the last knot.

Straps of my dress fall off my shoulders, now revealing both of my breasts.

“My...god,” Ava mutters.

She stands and gives my breasts an eyeful, while I smile at her childlike excitement.

“You like them?”

Ava replies by stuffing her face between them.

Her tongue explores my under-boob, and I feel my nipples hardening to their max potential.

I want them inside her mouth.

Behind us, the sound of helicopter blades rotating disturb the silence surrounding us.

Ava stops feasting on my tits for a second and looks past my shoulder.

“We have company,” she says, and before I know it, I am pulled down to the floor by my shoulders, behind the opaque part of the balcony running parallel to the glass panes.

“Shit.” A searing pain on the back of my neck makes me wince.

“Fuck!” Ava pulls her hand back from my shoulders and reaches for the railing.

“I broke your necklace,” she says somberly, holding up my broken ‘Aphrodite’ chain with the Greek symbol of Aphrodite as the pendant.

“It got stuck in the railing, and broke as I pulled you down. I am so sorry!” Ava hands me the necklace.

“It’s okay. Forget it. It’s not very expensive.”

“Are you hurt?”

“Yes, I am in extreme pain, Ava...pain of not having your mouth and hands all over me! Stop torturing me and continue what you were doing.”

“The helicopter is right on top of us,” Ava warns.

“Good, let them enjoy a few minutes of excitement in their mostly boring job.”

Ava smiles and pushes me flat against the cold, granite floor of the observation desk.

My head rests against the hardness of the floor, but I don’t care.

I watch as Ava lowers her face on my tits and starts sucking one again, while palming and kneading the other.

My tits aren't very big, and I feel a little insecure as Ava tries to grab a handful with some difficulty.

But soon, Ava's mouth alternating between my tits makes me forget all about my tiny tits and makes me arch my body in sheer, unadulterated pleasure.

I part my legs and groan, "Fuck me, Ava. Please fuck me!"

Ava sighs and, without leaving the assault on my nipples, pushes the hem of my skirt up my legs, and finds my soaking-wet panties.

She pulls them to the side.

I love it when a woman does that.

It tells me they are impatient.

That they don't have the time to undress me. They would rather make space for themselves, in the shortest time possible.

"Yes!" I moan, as Ava toys with my pussy lips, rubbing the edges of my opening, while swirling her tongue around my nipples.

"Don't..." I gasp.

"Don't what?"

"Don't make me beg for it."

"That's exactly what I want you to do."

"Power...you like power, don't you?"

"I like beautiful girls begging me to thrust my fingers in them."

"Then do it, baby. Stick them in. As far as they go. Please! Please!"

Ava succumbs to her own impatience and enters me.

I let out a muffled scream as I clasp my arm over my mouth.

I didn't want to be caught indulging in lesbian sex in an Islamic country like Dubai.

Although, I hear prison isn't that bad for lesbians.

It took Ava one finger and a few thrusts to get me cumming all over her hand.

I was embarrassed.

I hadn't cum so soon in months, or maybe years.

"That was quick," Ava laughed, licking my juices off her fingers.

"Thanks for confirming what I was only assuming," I say, feeling my cheeks going red.

"It's okay, I have this effect on girls."

“An assertive woman scientist who is full of herself, do you *want* to make me fall for you hopelessly?”

“No, I want you to help me cum.”

“How can I be of help?” I ask.

“By staring at me with your beautiful blue eyes and playing with your tits.”

“What? That’s it?”

“Yes, I don’t need much.”

Ava straddles me in a way that my thighs are pressed firm against her crotch.

She lifts her dress, and I feel her pussy on my thigh.

It is wet, leaking, and warm with desire.

Ava starts rubbing herself on my thigh.

“I am ready for round two.” I hand Ava the vibrator, who inserts it inside my pussy and presses a button on the remote.

The vibrator comes to life.

So does Ava’s need to ravish my thigh.

She starts riding my leg, like a cowgirl on a mechanical bull.

Her expressions change from sophisticated ecstasy to ugly lust.

She is sucking her teeth, groaning wildly, and putting her all into feeling my skin rub against her clit.

“Play with your tits,” she commands me.

I grab them hesitantly. I am still insecure about their size.

“They are perfect. They are heavenly. And they are the ones that convinced me to fuck you.”

It’s like Ava has read my mind, but I don’t let my surprise boil to the surface.

Hearing her call my breasts heavenly gives me the boost of confidence I need, and I grab them and press them hard for Ava.

“Is this turning you on? Watching a 20-year-old manhandle her tits for you? Huh? Do you like fucking my leg? You like feeling my young skin?”

“Oh fuck yes!!!” Ava screams and cums.

It’s all over.

She collapses on top of me, as the sound of the helicopter fades into the distance.

Did we really put on a show for them?

Am I really focusing on that right now? What’s wrong with you, Bella?

I hug Ava, and suddenly, she backs away.

I am confused.

“That was...amazing. You are really hot, Bella.”

Ava stands up, and I am forced to stand as well.

“Are you leaving?”

“I have to meet Samantha at 11 in one of the restaurants in this building. We have planned our own little afterparty.”

I look at my watch. It's 10:50 pm.

“But I didn't even get to see you naked?”

“Was it really required?”

I make a face that says ‘duh’.

“Maybe next time?”

“Ava, you can't just leave like this.”

I try to soften my tone, but I let slip in the frustration anyway.

“I am sorry. I wish I had more time. But I really don't. I...am thankful that your ‘spotlight’ chose me tonight. Otherwise, this party would have been torture for me. And thank you for the amazing time.” Ava extends her hand for a handshake, and I look at it in disbelief.

“You are more Gen Z than me, an actual Gen Z! Are we really going to say bye with a handshake?”

“Why not? Do you want a goodbye kiss? I can give you one if you want.”

“What? Not like this! I can't believe this is happening. Anyway, thanks for your time, Ms. Ava, I am glad my legs could be of service to you tonight.”

Ava looks at me with pity.

I hate that.

“I'll see you around, Bella.”

“How? We don't have each other's numbers.”

“I'll reach out to you.”

I scoff.

“No need.”

I pick up my broken chain from the floor and stuff it inside my clutch, along with the vibrator and the remote, while Ava watches me curiously.

“What are you looking at?” I ask her.

“How beautiful you are.”

“Then why are you leaving me?”

“Because I am 39, and you are 20, and I can read people too. You look like someone looking for love.”

Is it that obvious?

“You are wrong,” I say resolutely.

“Maybe. But I can’t take the chance. Goodbye, Bella, or should I say, Aphrodite?”

Ava turns around and leaves me with the sight of her perfectly shaped hips and the sound of her heels.

“What a night,” I murmur and follow behind her.

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My phone wakes me up, and I grudgingly look at the screen to see who has dared to disturb me from my slumber.

“Yes,” I say in a drowsy, raspy voice.

“I need you!” Sophia whispers urgently from the other end.

“I need sleep, bitch,” I say lazily.

“I am at a cafe with my mom, and things are getting awkward at the rate of 36 ‘umms’ per minute.”

“Umm...so? How can I help?”

“You can bring your ass down here and help save me from this vortex of awkwardness.”

“It’s your mom, Sophia. How awkward can it be?”

“Don’t you know what’s it like between my mom and me?”

“No, because you never speak of it.” I lift myself off the bed and sit cross-legged, staring out the window.

“There was a reason. Now, are you coming or not?”

“Do you know I landed at 2 am this morning from a 14-hour flight from Dubai?” I stand up and stretch, admiring the shards of sunlight filtering through the netted window in my room.

“I know, and I also know you had sex with a lovely old lady while you were over there, so I am very sorry if I am not able to empathize with your labors. The Little Sweet Cafe. 77 Hoyt Street, Brooklyn. Be there in the next 15 minutes.”

Sophia hangs up on me, leaving me with no option but to visit her and her mother.

I decide to throw on a hoodie and gym leggings, anticipating the cold October weather of New York.

I look at myself in the mirror before stepping out and wonder if the ‘old lady’ that Sophia had mentioned would still appreciate my beauty if she saw me looking like a homeless teenager, with frizzy bed hair and sunken, sleep-deprived eyes.

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Chapter 2 (Ava)

The Little Sweet Cafe looks exactly like it is named. It is sweet, small and cozy, with the aroma of coffee floating all over the place.

I look through the large windows and lazily observe the citizens of New York City go about their business.

I try to spot my daughter in their midst, but she is nowhere to be found.

A young guitarist enters the cafe, her guitar slung over her shoulder.

I watch her take the booth next to mine and start working on her laptop.

I am curious to know what a guitarist does on a laptop, so I try to steal a glance.

She appears to be mixing two tracks on a DJ software, similar to the one Bella had been using at the party in Dubai.

A sudden uptick in my heartbeat reminds me I am still not over what happened a few days back, on the observation deck of the tallest building in the world.

As I remember the heated, passionate encounter I had found myself in, I hope my blush fades away before Sophia returns to the booth.

Bella.

Aphrodite?

Aptly named.

She possessed the beauty and the passion of the Greek goddess for sure, and had somehow managed to infect me with it as well.

I, a 39-year-old scientist, who had increasingly found herself having fewer one-night stands than ever before, had behaved like a cougar on the prowl.

I blush harder than ever before.

I had left Bella in Dubai, but she still prowled the hallways of my brain.

The bell over the entrance to the cafe rings, and Sophia enters with her friend in tow.

Her friend, who she was eager for me to meet.

Her friend, who has light blonde hair, a tiny waist, a small stature, and ocean blue eyes.

“Sorry to keep you waiting Mom, this one wouldn’t leave her bed!” Sophia apologizes and slides into the booth, occupying the seat in front of me. “Bella, this is my mom, Mom, this is Bella, my best friend, my roommate, and probably my soulmate.”

I meet Bella’s eyes, and feel my heart climb up my throat, and lodge itself in the back of my mouth.

I do not blink, and neither does she, I think.

I sit, and I stare.

I hear Sophia calling out my name, but I couldn’t give a fuck, because the improbable, the unthinkable was happening right before my eyes.

Bella smiles at me and extends her arm for a handshake.

The damn handshake!

“Hi Ms. Miller, it’s nice to finally meet you!” Bella expertly hides any bout of surprise or shock that may have assaulted her.

She acts innocent, which makes her look prettier than ever.

“Hello.” I shake Bella’s hand and feel sparks of electricity sizzle where our hands make contact.

“Bella has just returned from a week-long trip to Dubai, where she played two parties.”

“Played?” I try to act innocent as well, but I have no idea how convincing I look.

Bella smirks, her eyes twinkle, and her thin, rosy red lips glisten as she licks her lips. “I am a DJ, who would like to be known as a producer someday.”

“A producer?”

“Of beats...music...tracks, that sort of stuff.”

“Oh...”

I try to think of other things to say, sentences, words, anything that would not give away my lust mixed confusion at seeing Bella sitting in front of me.

“That must be an exciting field of work?” I manage to say.

“Yes, I get to travel around the world, meet new people, and make interesting music. I am not complaining.”

“That’s great.”

Cliche and dry replies exit my mouth.

“It is genuinely very nice to meet you, Ms. Miller, because this one keeps mum on anything to do with her family. We had started to think she was an undercover spy running around as a fake model. And I also see where she gets her killer good looks from.” Bella turns her head to wink at Sophia, and then rests her youthful blue eyes on me as if challenging me to a duel.

“Thank you. Sophia has been very quiet about you as well. Whenever I would ask her about her friends, she would say, ‘Mom, it’s better if you just meet them. It’s very hard to explain my friends. They can only be experienced and not explained.’”

“Really? I just think she was just too lazy to say anything about me. Well, now that we have met, Ms. Miller, we don’t need her to play the middleman, do we? We can now gang up on her, something I had always wanted to do.”

Sophia dismisses Bella with a wave. “She is just frustrated Kaylee and I keep pulling her leg, and she can never come up with a good comeback.”

“It’s hard to go against two bullies,” Bella says, rolling her eyes.

My heart vibrates, much like the vibrator inside Bella I had been controlling a few nights ago.

As Bella and Sophia banter, I steal glances at Bella.

She is dressed in a grey oversized hoodie, and navy blue gym leggings, with her hair parted down the middle and her face devoid of any make-up.

I still find her breathtaking.

Especially her cute little butt that I hadn’t had the pleasure of exploring in Dubai.

I shake my head.

She is your daughter’s friend...best friend! Roommate!

Not an object of desire!

“Mom, are you okay? Why are you shaking your head?”

“Umm...nothing, just trying to get rid of this pain in my neck. I think I slept weird yesterday.”

“It’s the pillows of the modern world, Miss Miller. Try sleeping on the floor without a pillow. It’s great for your spine. I find myself on the floor

most nights.”

Bella stares right into my eyes, and they scream silently at me.

“On the floor? Isn’t that uncomfortable?”

“Not if you are in Dubai, and on the highest floor in Burj Khalifa.”

I almost faint.

My heart thuds and bangs against my rib cage.

“Wha...What?”

“I mean, even the floors there are more expensive than any bed I have ever slept on, so, I was just exaggerating, Ms. Miller...I don’t sleep on floors in five-star hotels.”

“What the hell are we talking about, guys?” Sophia butts in, “Can we switch the subject to literally anything but floors?”

I smile, and Bella laughs, radiating extra-terrestrial beauty.

I look at her for a few seconds, then tear my eyes from her striking face with difficulty.

“Sophia told me you’re an astrophysicist? You must be like, really smart?”

“Yeah, that’s one thing I can say about myself confidently.”

“Bella is pretty dumb, Mom. Like really stupid. It’s really amazing how few brain cells she has!” Sophia laughs.

“Your daughter, Miss Miller, is the biggest whore in the world. I mean, talk about orgies, glory holes, swinger clubs, she has tried everything!” Bella retorts, and Sophia’s mouth opens into an ‘O’.

“That’s you, bitch!”

“But who got me started?” Bella quips, and I can’t help but grin at Sophia and Bella’s banter.

Fucking my daughter’s best friend aside, I feel happy that during the time I was away from Sophia’s life, she had the support and care of good friends like Bella and Kaylee, who I was yet to meet.

And then suddenly, I wonder if Bella had told Sophia about her encounter with me in Dubai.

The thought leaves me feeling uncomfortable, and I quickly drag myself away from the thought.

“How is Sophia as a roommate?” I ask.

For the next few minutes, Bella tells me all about living with Sophia, and by the end of it, I am both happy and sad.

Sophia has changed.

She has become clean, organized, and responsible, which was a huge departure from the teenager who used to live with me.

I was happy my daughter had changed, but I was sad I could not see her change in front of my eyes.

A tear forms in the corner of my eye, and Bella goes quiet.

“What’s wrong?” she asks, her voice full of concern.

“Nothing, just...regretting a few things. Like being away from her... for so long.”

I reach for Sophia’s hand and squeeze it.

The ever emotionally awkward Sophia smiles nervously and pulls her hand back.

“It’s okay, Mom, you did not miss much.”

“Yeah, except for seeing her throw up all over the place after a night out and hearing her bitch and cry over boys, you haven’t missed out on much. Her life is pretty boring,” Bella tries to lighten the mood, and it works.

I start to feel at ease.

Maybe Bella also realizes the importance of keeping our little sexual soiree under wraps, for the benefit of her friendship with Sophia.

And I didn’t have any idea that the hot, little blonde, with perky tits and a bubbly personality was my daughter’s roommate.

So, was it really my fault?

I reached a conclusion that acquitted me of any wrongdoing, and I eased into my chair and sliced into my sausage, something we lesbians don’t usually do much.

“So, I was thinking,” Sophia starts, “how about the two of you come together to my fashion show tonight?”

No, baby girl, what are you doing?

“Yeah, about that, how are you feeling?” Bella asks Sophia.

“I am good. I mean, I am not scared of tripping on the runway or anything, but I *do* feel a little nervous thinking my mom and my bestie are going to be in the crowd. That can fuck with you a little.”

“Language, Sophia.” My motherly instinct jumps out of me, eliciting a chuckle from Bella, to who I give a side-eye.

“Mom, fuck is like...not even a curse word now. It’s so much more than just a word, it’s an emotion,” Sophia tries to wriggle her way out of her mistake.

“Still...it wouldn't behoove you to speak like a lady sometimes.”

“Would I sound like a lady if I used words like ‘behoove’?” Sophia says dryly, “Anyway, as I was saying, I have already added both of your names to the guest list. You should have good seats, so come together, okay?”

“Umm...I have work later tonight, so I might show up a bit late,” Bella says, and I give her a look of appreciation.

“Okay, but you *will* make it, right?”

“I wouldn't miss it for the world, baby.” Bella hugs Sophia, and once again, I feel happy that Sophia has people around her who care for her.

“And you, Mom? Will you come?”

“Of course, why wouldn't I?”

“Because the whole reason I left the house was you not being supportive of my career choices.”

Sophia finally addresses the elephant in the room, but I wish she didn't do it in front of Bella.

“I am trying to change my ways, Sophia. I hope you can already see some of the changes.”

I almost choke up as I say the words.

Sophia smiles, and this time, it is her who reaches out and grabs my hand. “Yes, I can, but I just don't want anything bad to happen. I am a little cynical like that.”

“Nothing will go bad. I won't let it,” I say, but I speak too soon as I feel Bella's feet slide up against my ankle below the table.

Shit.

Bella does not care. She wants to continue playing.

I shoot Bella a look of warning, but she is busy talking to Sophia about the fashion show.

And all the while, her toes continue on their path upwards.

Inching towards my knees, and in the process, pushing the hem of my maxi dress along with them.

I plead with Bella with my eyes, but she does not offer me a look.

Her feet are now gently caressing my calf-muscle, and I feel her touch on every square millimeter of my skin.

She looks innocent while talking with Sophia, like a Barbie still in its box, waiting to be played with, but I know she is no Barbie.

She is Annabelle.

A sexy, seductive Annabelle that wants to possess me.

I take a deep breath.

I know I can just shift my position, and I will be rid of Bella and her foot.

But I stay put.

I am hooked.

I am like a fish swimming toward the bait, even though I know it will mean the end of my life.

Bella finally looks at me, and I see a cocktail of mischief and seduction brimming in her eyes.

“Miss Miller, have you gotten something done to your lips?”

What a weird question to ask while playing footsie with your roommate’s mother!

“No, why?”

“They are so full, and so...aagghh...just beautifully shaped. Especially your lower lip. Girls I know would kill for thickness like that.”

“Yeah, and I never understood why I wasn’t passed on these ‘lip’ genes?” Sophia mutters, as she sips her latte.

“Can I call you Ava, Miss Miller?” Bella slides her feet beyond my knees and tries to slip it between my legs.

My cross-legged posture does not give her access, and her toes keep trying to wriggle their way in.

“No, Bella!” I blurt out.

“Mom, all of your juniors call you Ava, why can’t Bella?”

“No, I mean, I said, no, of course, you can call me Ava. Miss Miller makes me sound old.”

“But your bangin’ body says otherwise, Ava. It says I am the hottest piece of science ass around!”

“Bella, stop flirting with my mom and tell me if I should call Kaylee’s new boyfriend to the show?”

Bella and Sophia meander into another discussion, while Bella’s toes keep trying to part my legs and slide up my thighs.

“Wait, I gotta take this,” Sophia says, as her phone starts ringing.

She leaves the booth, and exits the cafe, leaving my torturer and me alone with each other.

“Open your legs,” Bella mouths.

“I need to talk to you,” I quickly respond. I know I don’t have much time, and I need to make sure Bella understands the gravity of what I am about to say.

“What happened between us in Dubai was a mistake. It was a mistake back when I didn’t even know you were my daughter’s friend, but now it is more than a mistake. It is a sin.”

“It didn’t feel like a sin when you were pushing me down to the floor and breaking my necklace to get to my tits. See, I have proof.”

Bella pushes her hair to one side and shows me a bruise on the side of her neck, which was almost completely healed.

“You hurt me, Ava. See?”

“I am sorry for that.”

“Oh, I am not talking about this. You hurt me when you just abandoned me. I was hoping for so much more.”

“As I said, I did not have time.”

“We have all the time in the world now.”

“We are not doing anything, Bella,” I hiss, “I am trying to mend a very strained relationship with my daughter. The last thing I need is her finding out I was boning her best friend.”

“Who said anything about boning? I just want my goodbye kiss.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Ava...you know you want to.”

Bella parts my legs with her foot, and somehow, I don’t offer any resistance.

Her feet slide up against my inner thigh and reach my panties.

I am almost half-naked now, my indecency only hidden by a slab of wood.

Bella is disrobing me with her feet, and I am allowing her to.

I am glaring at her, and she is smirking at me. She is enjoying this.

She is a wicked 20-year-old, and I am a desperate 39-year-old, and I can’t help but love being lusted after a bombshell like the blonde sitting in front of me.

And then I snap out of it.

“I have to go to the washroom,” I mutter and stand up quickly, forgetting my dress has ridden up to my waist.

I sit back down, adjust my dress, and stand up again, while Bella keeps a hand on her lips and watches me with delight.

I almost run to the washroom, which is just a little closet with a single commode.

I close the door behind me, drowning out the chatter outside, and grasp both sides of the sink.

I look at my reflection and wonder how a confident, project-leading scientist on the James Webb telescope, NASA, is being toyed with by a 20-year-old.

Even the interview with the head of NASA for my current position was less nerve-wracking than the last 10 minutes of my life.

I realize I need to get a grip on myself...or maybe on Bella's waist as I push her against a wall and attack her mouth...

No! No! Hell no!

I straighten up, and nod to myself.

I got this.

A knock sounds at the door.

"Occupied," I say.

"I need to talk to you," says Bella from behind the door.

"Okay, give me a minute."

"No, in there. I need to talk to you alone."

"Sophia will be back any minute."

"She won't. She is talking to Kaylee, and they are arguing about her boyfriend. She won't be back anytime soon. Just open up. I swear I won't bite."

I unlock the door, and that's all Bella needs.

She slides in and closes the door, then locks it.

We are cramped inside the little washroom, our breasts almost touching.

"I need that kiss, Mommy," Bella groans seductively.

This time, I am prepared for Bella's nonsense.

I push her back, pinning her against the wall.

"No, Bella. We are done."

Bella takes a few deep breaths, never breaking eye contact with me.

She is the sexist thing in the world.

I can't believe I am rejecting the sexist thing in the world.

"Okay," Bella whispers and starts taking off her hoodie.

“What the hell are you doing? Bella?”

I watch in utter confusion and horror, as Bella pulls her hoodie over her head and clutches it in one hand.

“Kiss me.”

She starts massaging her tits, and my mind flashes back to the night in Dubai, when she was doing the same, while I rode her thighs to an earth-shattering orgasm.

“Just a kiss, and we will be done. I promise.”

“Why? Why is this kiss so important to you?”

“You broke my necklace, bruised me, and then abandoned me. Don’t I deserve this fucking kiss?”

She had a point. Or was I being biased here?

Bella closes the gap between us, and all of her 5 feet 2 inches of sexiness presses against me.

She hugs me.

I glance past her shoulder and notice the curve of her butt in her tightly fitted leggings, and I lose my mind.

I grab her hips with both my hands and start kissing her.

I kiss her hard.

I kiss her with passion.

I kiss her like she was my lover.

She slides her hand inside the neck of my dress and grabs my boob.

I moan into the kiss and caress her hips through her leggings and then start grabbing at them with fervor.

She starts kissing down my neck.

She parts the front of my dress to reveal more of my cleavage and licks up and down the line, and I feel like the most desirable woman in the world.

She drags her lips over my tits, towards my nipple.

She is almost there.

My breath quickens in anticipation.

My grip on her ass hardens.

My mouth opens, and then shuts, and then opens again.

Wordless screams, along with expressions of pure ecstasy, override my face.

I forget every moralistic principle in the world, the age gap between us, the relationship Bella has with my daughter.

All I want is for her to cover the remaining distance of a few centimeters with her mouth and latch onto my nipple.

A knock on the door ensures that never happens.

Like the crumbling blocks of a game of Jenga, everything collapses around me.

Anticipation turns into fear. Lust into anxiety.

“Yes?” I say in a perfectly normal voice, while Bella’s face goes white with fear.

“We’re waiting to use the loo out here. Can you hurry up?”

It's not Sophia, but it very well could have been.

“We need to get out,” I say, and Bella nods.

This is the first time I see her scared.

“And now, we are really done,” I say, and Bella nods again.

The expression on her face tells me she isn’t faking or lying this time.

I take a deep breath, adjust my clothes, and exit the washroom, followed by Bella.

Sophia is still outside.

Bella and I sit at our booth in silence, waiting for our nerves to settle.

“That was close,” Bella finally says.

“I am glad you finally have that notion.”

“But, after that kiss, I know it will be fucking hard for me to stop thinking about you.”

Me too, I think to myself.

“It will pass,” I say.

Bella shakes her head. “Don’t think so,” she says, while running a gentle finger on the bruise on her neck.

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