

Window to Temptation Ch. 04

It had been two weeks since Morgan's birthday party, and Cory was starting to feel like she was seeing her friend less and less every day. She opened the front door, the cool air blasting her in the face as sweat dripped down her spine. The run had been good. She'd set a new PR, and her legs throbbed with the good kind of burn that only came with muscle growth.

It wasn't enough though. She'd gotten a text from Morgan last night saying she wouldn't be able to make the run because Zach was insistent that he needed her this morning to prep for a presentation. Then, to make it worse, Dafni no showed this morning as well. Cory didn't mind running alone, but it was the second time this week it had happened and she was starting to feel like an outcast.

Hunter was already in the kitchen when she came in for a bottle of water. She smiled at him from the entryway, admiring how the pale blue shirt hugged his arms and chest.

"My eyes are up here." He smiled past the Northwestern Football mug in his hands, the steam rising over his nose.

"What, a girl can't enjoy the view?" The self-pity that was weighing her down already felt lighter as she reached into the refrigerator to grab a bottle of water. "You're already up and dressed. Busy morning?" She leaned against the sink and smiled as Hunter fumbled his way through tying his tie.

"Client call at eight." He glanced up, taking in her flushed face and damp shirt. "How was the run?"

"Fine." She downed half the bottle, not trusting herself to say any more about it.

Hunter's hands stilled on his tie. "You trying to convince me of that or yourself?"

Cory closed her eyes and released a breath, setting her water on the counter. "Morgan didn't show. Again." She took a step forward, her hands touching Hunter's chest as he made his clumsy attempt at a Windsor knot and did it herself.

"Maybe she's just busy?"

"Yeah. She said Zach needed help with something." She watched her hands as she brought the tie through the loop, tugging slightly. "Dafni didn't show either."

"Well, at least you didn't have to put up with her weird psychic stuff alone." He grabbed her hips pulling her against him.

Cory put her arms around his neck. "Or they ran together without me."

"You know that isn't true," he kissed her forehead. "Morgan adores you. And besides, you introduced them for this exact reason."

"I know." She pressed her face into his chest. "I know that. I'm being ridiculous."

"You're not being ridiculous." He squeezed her tighter, uncaring if it meant he needed to change his shirt. "You miss your friend. That's normal."

She pulled back to look at him. "Thank you, for saying that." She wiped her face, telling herself it was just sweat. "When are you going to be home tonight?"

"Late, probably. We're putting together the pitch for a distribution company out of Savannah."

"Does that mean you're traveling again soon?"

"Maybe. It's still early to tell." He watched her reaction ready for another fight about how he always leaves. He was thankful when it didn't come. "I also need to follow up with Lawrence, see how the restructuring is going."

Cory giggled, taking a step back to grab her water. "Funny you should mention him. I have a call with Lawrence later today too."

Their eyes met and held. The air between them shifted, charged with a playfulness they both recognized but neither named.

"Guess we'll both be dealing with that asshole today."

"Lucky us." She bit her lip, watching his pupils dilate slightly. "Maybe I should show him my dance moves."

"Please don't." But he was grinning now, that crooked smile she'd fallen for in college. "I really do have to go. You going to be okay?"

"Yeah." She leaned forward, and stood on her toes to kiss him. "Maybe I'll text Morgan since you're going to be late. See if she wants to come over and catch up on 90 Day Fiancé. We're like four episodes behind."

Hunter made a gagging sound that turned into a cough.

"Oh, stop it."

"I didn't say anything." He kissed her again. "Have fun with your trash TV."

"It's not trash. It's cultural anthropology."

"Sure it is." He was already halfway out the door. "Love you."

"Love you too."

When the door pushed shut, she realized she was smiling. Hunter was right, she was spiraling herself out for no reason. Today was going to be a good day. She grabbed her phone from the counter and fired off a message to Morgan.

Cory: Hey! Hunter's going to be late tonight. Want to come over and catch up on 90 Day? I'll open that rosé you like.

She stared at the screen for a moment, then headed upstairs to shower. The hot water loosened her shoulders and she stood under the spray longer than she needed to, letting the steam fill her lungs. The stress of the last week was living in her shoulders. She rolled them, stretching her back, all the things she would normally do after a run.

When she was satisfied she wasn't going to be sore later, she shut off the water and grabbed a towel. Instinctually, she grabbed her phone, smiling as she saw the unread message from Morgan.

Morgan: Ugh I'm so sorry!! Dafni already invited me over for wine and girl talk. Rain check? Tomorrow maybe?

Cory stared at the message. Read it again. Then a third time.

No. She wasn't going to let herself get jealous. That was insane. Morgan was allowed to have other friends. She closed her eyes and tried to control her breathing. Tomorrow could still work. She'd have to check with Hunter, but she did still owe Dafni and Luther a dinner. She didn't love the idea of sharing her best friend with the couple next door, but if it would help bridge the gap, make her stop feeling like she was being replaced, maybe it was for the best.

Cory: No worries! Have fun. Try not to join their creepy sex cult. :)

The smiley face was a lie. She set the phone down and stared at her reflection in the foggy mirror. Water dripped from her jaw onto the counter that she would have to clean up later. She was proud of herself for not saying what she was really feeling.

Her phone buzzed against the counter breaking her from her self-loathing.

Morgan: You're the best! Love you! ❤️

Followed quickly by:

Morgan: With the way Zach has been acting a sex cult doesn't sound like the worst thing in the world!

She dropped the phone on the counter and braced her hands on either side of the sink. Her reflection stared back, water still dripping from her hair. It seemed the only thing Morgan cared to talk to Cory about these days were her problems with Zach.

"You're being ridiculous," she said out loud.

She had a full day. Her call with Lawrence was at ten, following by Katrina at noon and a new client consultation at three. She needed her energy to be positive, to put out good vibes. She rolled her eyes at herself in the mirror. She needed to get ready for work.

It wasn't that Morgan had disappeared, at least not completely. But it felt like their friendship had entered a new stage. One that made Cory want to cry and ask what she did wrong. The one-word responses, the cancelled plans, the memes that got heated instead of riffed on for twenty minutes. And now she was next door. With them.

Cory shook her head and turned to her closet. She had a call in an hour and couldn't afford to spiral. She'd separated her wardrobe into two lives. The clothes, accessories, all of it. She pulled pieces without thinking. A beige, loose-fitting ribbed sweater vest with a matching tiered cotton skirt. Large wooden hoop earrings. Chunky crystal bracelets. Handmade jewelry she'd purchased downtown.

"All natural," she muttered, rolling her eyes at her reflection. She skipped the makeup, part of the brand, all part of the carefreeness that sold the whole act.

Her hands were shaking. She noticed them as she sat down in front of her computer, adjusting the camera angle until the frame caught what it needed to. Behind her sat an array of incense sticks and indoor air-cleansing plants, all arranged inside an earthen pot layered with smooth stones. She'd never felt this nervous before a call. She blamed the poor sleep, the exhaustion from her run. Whatever it was, her confidence wasn't even close to standard.

She closed her eyes. Deep breath. She summoned the curated vocabulary, the mask she wore for these people, and let it settle over her.

The call connected. Lawrence sat alone in his office. No HR. No board of directors. No sycophantic team leads or sales reps. A complete one-on-one, the opposite of what she'd been told to prepare for. The giant conference table was gone. Behind Lawrence sat an expensive looking bookshelf, filled to the brim with books like "The Art of War", "Winning at All Cost", "Extreme Ownership". It was a wall that seemed to fit his personality to a 'T'. He was taking the call from his private office. Cory wasn't sure why that suddenly felt intimate, but it did.

She dipped her head. "Namaste. It's wonderful to see you again, Lawrence. I trust your week has been bountiful."

He didn't smile. His fingers steepled beneath his chin, his gaze already cutting through her. His voice was the same as she had remembered, cold and with an edge that seemed more vicious without the restraint of a team nearby.

"Cory. Your... suggestions have increased productivity. The overall sentiment of the employees we surveyed was higher than before."

She exhaled, not realizing she'd been holding her breath since he'd started speaking. "Excellent. Focusing on affirmations, and the value of oneself both externally and internally informs every aspect of our lives. Work is no different. I think—"

"Yes. Every aspect of our lives. We'd like you to come here. To hold a motivational seminar. If productivity continues to improve, no matter the margin, we'd like to make it a quarterly event."

The repeat business would be impossible to turn down. She hadn't been expecting this at all. Most of the wellness work she did was strictly remote. This would mean she would need to maintain this persona for an extended period of time. The thought of it made her sick. Or maybe that was still her stomach doing flips due to the setting.

She nodded carefully, maintaining her image of inner peace. "It would be my pleasure. What you've implemented at Nexus is really a scaffolding exercise. After affirmations comes bonding. True synergy arises when energies are aligned, even among—"

"I have to say." He cut her off, not caring for whatever nonsense she was about to spew. "What the efficiency gains we'd already gained, I'm excited to see how a live performance will impact morale."

Her smile held, barely. Behind it, every alarm in her head was firing at once. Lawrence didn't actually think that was her dancing, did he? That would be preposterous. On screen, his eyebrows raised and she realized he was waiting for a response. She took a breath, feigning like it was part of her meditative release. She was making this something more than it was. Hunter had come back and put the idea of the dancer in her head and now it was the first thing jumping out at her. Lawrence probably didn't even remember going to the club.

"Absolutely. There's an energy exchange in person that—"

"Great. I'll have my assistant reach out with some dates. I assume your availability is flexible?"

"Um... yeah. I just need to talk to my husband and—"

"Good. I have another meeting I need to run to. We'll be in touch."

Lawrence nodded once and ended the call. His face vanished, replaced by her own reflection in the dark monitor.

The thoughts came in dozens, each one building off the anxiety of the last. Had Lawrence connected Hunter and her? That didn't seem likely. After all, she'd built the business on her maiden name Ellison. She'd done it from day one. a way to separate her real life from the grift. Lawrence had no reason to connect Cory Ellison, holistic wellness consultant, to Hunter Novak's wife. No reason at all.

So, if it wasn't that then why? For reasons she couldn't explain, it felt like Lawrence knew something. The only image that kept surfacing was the dancer. Hunter's story about how Lawrence couldn't take his eyes off her. She pressed her palms harder against the desk. No. She was spiraling. Lawrence was a Fortune 500 CEO. He didn't have time to fixate on his wellness consultant. And even if he did, even if some part of him had looked at Cory and thought of that dancer, what did she think that meant?

He looked like he wanted to devour her. Hunter's words rattled in her mind and she reached for the hemp necklace that sat against her collarbone. The organic fibers suddenly catching on her skin as her pulse thrummed against it.

"Get it together, girl." She stood and started pulling off the gaudy, weighted jewelry, the pieces clattering onto the desk. Next came the crystal bracelets. All of it a character she'd built to sell something she half believed in to people she didn't respect.

And now one of those people might be picturing her without the costume on. Without anything on.

She shook her head, dismissing the thought. "What the fuck is wrong with me?"

She changed out of the costume and dropped to the bedroom floor, desperate to shake the tension the call had left behind. She bent her right knee, planted the other foot, and extended her arms into warrior pose. "Glutes. Right. What system?"

The burn tore through her thighs and calves. She couldn't remember what system activated with this pose, even though it was something she'd done thousands of times. Her breath came too fast, her feet tingled, her hands quivered. The exhalation collapsed and she fell back onto the bed.

"That was... miserable." She knew the mechanics. The physiology. She'd done warrior pose endlessly. But she was so frazzled she couldn't even place where her breathing went wrong, where her muscles misfired.

She grabbed her phone from the nightstand. No new messages from Morgan. She closed her eyes, trying to recenter herself, when an idea began to form. She owed Dafni and Luther a dinner. She hated that the only way to invite another couple, but it was truly a last resort.

Cory: Hey babes! So Hunter and I still owe Luther and Dafni a dinner. Maybe you and Zach can come to help buffer the weird lol. How about Saturday?

She stared at the screen, the worst case scenario playing in her head. Morgan would respond with another one word answer 'maybe' and then leave Cory to fend for herself on Saturday. She forced the thought aside and pressed send.

Her phone buzzed almost instantly.

Morgan: Omg yes!! That sounds so fun! I'm actually with Dafni right now I'll let her and Luther know! Saturday works perfect. Want me to bring anything?

Cory read the message twice. It was the longest text Morgan had sent her in weeks. More words than all of her responses from the past week combined. And it had come in under a minute.

Relief and nausea arrived at the same time. Morgan wanted to see her. Morgan was excited. But would she have been as excited if she'd excluded Dafni and Luther? She wished she knew the answer.

Cory: Just your beautiful self! I miss you. It's been too long.

Morgan: OMG Yes!! This is going to be so fun. Dafni says she'll bring wine.

Cory set the phone down. This was good. She could reconnect with Morgan. Remind her of all the fun they had when they were together. She closed her eyes and tried to control her breathing.

She headed downstairs and nursed a glass of ice water, scrolling through her phone without purpose. Every social media feed was an algorithm of wellness and corporate posturing. It was the same curated bullshit she contributed to, reduced to a series of numbers and estimates for which ads would land hardest. Her stomach turned. She let out an exaggerated sigh and headed back upstairs, determined this time to run through a full yoga routine correctly.

But the window was always there.

She glanced over her shoulder as if someone had caught her looking. The absurdity of it only made her pause longer. She crossed the room and peered down.

Morgan stood in the front yard wearing a smile wider than Cory had seen in months. She hugged Luther, then Dafni, with a sincerity that made Cory's chest ache. Whatever they were saying was too far below to hear, but the body language was exuberant, warm, easy. Another round of hugs.

Something bitter rose in the back of Cory's throat.

Luther disappeared inside and returned a moment later carrying a heavy tome under one arm. The cover was aged leather, worn and blemished, every cut and tear a testament to how long it had existed. Morgan took the book like a nervous admirer, clutching it to her chest. She waved goodbye and then, Cory's grip tightened on the window frame, leaned in and kissed Dafni on the cheek. The peck lingered a bit too long. Cory watched Morgan walk away, practically giddy in her stride.

That's when she felt it. A set of eyes on her.

Luther stood below, staring directly up at her window. Dafni was already gone. His glare was unwavering as a slow grin spread across his face, exposing yellowed teeth. He didn't wave. Just turned and lumbered back inside.

She lowered herself to the floor, lifted her legs against the wall, and pointed her feet toward the ceiling, becoming a perfect L, as she stayed in Viparita Karani. She closed her eyes and focused on nothing but her breath. In through the nose. Out through the mouth. Trying to banish the

weight pressing down on her shoulders. The irrational anguish of being pushed away from Morgan.

"All problems have solutions," she reminded herself.

The rattle of the air conditioner faded. The room fell silent. Behind her closed lids she found a place of soft light and calm, her breathing finally steady, sleep pulling at the edges of her consciousness—

"Heya!"

She screamed louder than Hunter had ever heard. He doubled over cackling before she'd even gotten to her feet. "Holy shit, Cor! Ease down."

"YOU FUCKING ASSHOLE!"

She shoved him, hard enough to move him but not hard enough to mean it. He wheezed through his laughter as she stormed past him and headed downstairs, heart hammering, still furious. He followed, catching her at the bottom of the steps and sliding his hands around her waist from behind.

"Come on. It was funny."

She pulled free. "If my eyes are closed I don't want to be jump scared. How is that not obvious?"

"You're right. I'm sorry. I won't do it again." He put his hand on his heart. "Scout's honor."

She dropped onto the couch in the living room, still shaking her head. "You're not even a fucking scout." She couldn't stop the laugh that was bubbling up. "I swear, there's not enough namastes in the world to deal with your shit."

He sat at the opposite end, giving her space, reading the room the way he always did when she was deciding whether to stay mad. His arm draped across the cushions.

"So, how'd it go?"

"Fine." Her arms crossed. Still pissed.

"Ok, fine is better than bad." He studied her face. "Something you're not telling me."

She couldn't conceal it, the jealousy, the isolation, the loss she still couldn't fully grasp. "It's stupid."

"It's not stupid." He kicked his feet up on the table.

"Fine. It's Morgan. She's been... hanging out with Luther and Dafni. Like, a lot."

"So?"

"She's ignoring me." She winced at the sound of it. "God that sounds stupid out loud."

"Nah. I get it, Cor. Why don't you just... I dunno. Call her or something?"

"I actually um... did something worse." She looked up at him hoping to see some kind of reaction on his face. "I invited her to dinner Saturday."

"That's not bad at all that's—"

"And I may have mentioned Luther and Dafni were coming before she even said yes."

Hunter raised an eyebrow. "Oh. That's um..."

"Pathetic. It's fine you can say it."

"Not pathetic." He gave her a warm smile. "It's smart."

She rubbed her face. "She responded like instantly. Like, the longest message I've gotten in weeks. And..." Her voice started to rise. "She's already relaying the invite to Dafni because apparently she's over there right now."

"Well, at least she said yes?"

"I just... I miss her, ya know. Like I want to see her, without all that buffer or whatever."

He pulled her into a hug. "Why don't we just walk over there? I'll occupy Zach."

"Really? you'd do that for me?"

"Absolutely. Do you want to head over now?"

"Let's make lunch first. You can help." She wasn't giving him the option to back out.

"I'd love to." He kissed her on the cheek as they moved into the kitchen. Creamy orzo with grilled chicken, zested lemon, and roasted zucchini. Simple and effective. Cory sliced the zucchini into half-moons while Hunter worked on the chicken.

"Lawrence wants me to come to Cleveland."

Hunter's knife stopped. "What?"

"In person. He wants to do a quarterly seminar. Live."

He resumed cutting but Cory noticed the way his brow pinched together. He was running through it in his head. "That's good, right? I mean, the money will be good."

"Yeah. It's great." She swept the zucchini into a bowl. "He just... it just feels weird after um... what you told me."

Hunter looked at her and smiled. She could feel herself blushing. "You mean about how he was drooling over the naked girl who looked just like you?"

"Stop. I'm serious. It got weird."

"Weird how?"

"He called it a live performance." She kept her eyes on the cutting board. "He said he was excited to see how a live performance would impact morale."

The kitchen was quiet for a beat. Just the hiss of the burner warming the skillet.

"That's... fuck, Cor. Now I want to tag along."

"Can you please be serious for once."

"Sorry, sorry." He ran his hand through his hair. Cory could feel him studying her. "It's just corporate speak, Cor. He didn't mean anything by it."

"I know that." She grabbed a towel, wiping her hands. "It's just..." She finally looked at him. "The things you told me he said. I can't unhear it."

Hunter set the knife down. The memory surfaced whether he wanted it to or not. Lawrence's heavy hand on his shoulder, his eyes locked on the stage. *I would have bent that bitch over my desk.* He'd never told Cory that part. Now he wondered if that was a mistake or not.

He walked to the sink washing his hands then moved in behind Cory, placing his hands on her shoulders. She leaned back into him, knife still in hand.

"Go to Cleveland. Crush the seminar. Take his money." He squeezed her shoulders. "And if he tries anything, I'll fly up there and beat the shit out of him."

"That's very toxic masculinity of you."

"I contain multitudes."

"Mhmm." She turned and kissed him. "Is that why you're hard right now?"

Hunter's face went pale. He stepped away from Cory, nearly tripping on his own feet. "I am not. That's just..."

Cory doubled over in laughter. "Now we're even." She turned back toward the counter. "But seriously, thank you for not making me feel crazy."

They walked over after lunch. Cory walked with a nervous energy, her pace quicker than intended. Hunter matched her, his hand brushing hers between steps.

"You're overthinking this," he said.

"I'm not overthinking anything."

"Cor. It's going to be fine. You'll see."

"I just want it to be normal. Like it used to be."

"It will be." He squeezed her hand. "Just talk to her. I'll keep Zach busy."

"What are you going to talk about?"

"I dunno. Football? The new Mustang that's an EV?" He shrugged. "Zach's not exactly hard to entertain."

She managed a small laugh as they turned up the walkway. Cory knocked before she could talk herself out of it. From inside, she heard Zach call out. "Coming!"

The door swung open and he blinked at them, clearly not expecting company. "Heya. Uhh, were you supposed to be dropping by?"

"Surprise visit." Hunter stepped inside and brought Zach into a bro-hug. "Just saw a commercial of that new Mustang. The battery powered one."

Zach's face lit up like a kid on Christmas. "Dude. They are ruining it, right! Come out to the garage, I still have the Shelby my dad and I used to fix up. Now that's a car."

They brushed past Cory to the garage. Hunter looked over his shoulder and shot her a wink. Mission accomplished.

Morgan appeared in the hallway, having heard both their voices. Her expression flickered surprise, feigned or real, Cory couldn't tell and decided it didn't matter. She stepped inside and pulled Morgan into a hug.

"Sorry for the unplanned visit. Hunter wouldn't shut up about that car and I figured we could talk about the dinner."

Morgan laughed, "Those two." Her arms tightened around Cory. "I'm glad you stopped by."

They settled into the den. An awkward silence stretched between them, filled only by the occasional laugh or groan from the garage.

Cory broke the silence first. "So! How have things been with Dafni and Luther?" She cleared her throat. "I saw you say goodbye to them this morning."

Morgan's eyebrow rose, her face turning a light shade of pink. "Oh um... you saw that?" She tucked her hair behind her ear. "It was nothing really. He just... well you know Zach is... well Zach and Luther was just helping me." Her hands fidgeted in her lap. "He gave me a book to borrow."

"A book? Like fiction or—"

"No. Philosophy." Morgan tucked her legs underneath her on the couch. "It's old. Like, really old. But it's about how we... okay, so you know how with Zach, I'm always the one compromising? Like, I bend and bend and bend and then I'm mad because I feel like I'm only ever doing stuff for him?"

Cory nodded. Her chest ached watching Morgan's face as she said it.

"Well the book talks about how that's not a flaw. It's conditioning. Like, we're taught to shrink. To want less for ourselves when we get married. And the only way to undo it is to stop saying no to yourself." She glanced toward the hallway, then back. "Luther highlighted this one line for me. Something about how you can't know who you are until you've stopped refusing experiences." Her cheeks flushed. "I know that sounds weird. But when I read it I cried, like literally cried."

Cory's stomach tightened. "What does that even mean? Stop refusing experiences?"

"I'm not sure. But I think it means like stop refusing to do things that make me happy just because I think I should always be trying to make him happy."

"That's... interesting." Cory tried to examine those words more closely. Was it possible Luther knew about the sex tape? Even if he did, would that matter? She chastised herself. Maybe he was just being nice, and Cory was being jealous. "So it's like a self-help thing?"

"No, it's deeper than that." Morgan's eyes were bright in a way Cory hadn't seen in weeks. "There's this one part about how every experience brings you closer to... I don't know, like becoming whole?" She glanced toward the hallway, then back. "Like, we spend so much time saying no to things that we don't even realize how small we've made ourselves."

Cory looked away, not wanting Morgan to see the look on her face. It all sounded so familiar to her. The aspirational framing, the feeling of wholeness. It was almost like the mask Cory wore

when dealing with her corporate clients. She just wasn't sure what Luther's angle was, or if he had one at all.

"Well, I'm glad you're feeling good. I've missed you, Morg. Like, genuinely." She pulled her into a hug.

"I love you, Cory." Morgan's voice was muffled against her shoulder. "And I'm sorry. I know I've been distant. It's just... Dafni and Luther are fascinating. They're helping me understand that I—"

"MORGAN!" Zach's voice cut through the wall like a bullhorn. "Hey, where'd you put my wrenches? The ones that were next to the Mustang?"

Cory cursed under her breath. Helping her understand what exactly? What could Luther possibly help Morgan with that she would be so secretive about?

Morgan rolled her eyes. She pulled back from the hug. "I didn't touch your wrenches, Zach."

He appeared in the doorway, Hunter trailing behind him looking apologetic. "It was right there this morning. Right where I left it."

"Then it's still there. I never go into the garage."

"It's not. I looked."

"Then look again. Maybe it fell on the floor."

"I looked, Morgan. It's not—"

"Then I don't know what to tell you." Her voice grew angry. "I didn't touch your wrench. What would I even do with one?"

Zach disappeared. Morgan exhaled through her nose, her fingers pressing into her temples. When she looked back at Cory, the warmth from a moment ago was gone.

"Sorry about that. He's... well you know."

"We'll talk more on Saturday." Cory pulled her into another hug. "Sorry for showing up unannounced."

"Don't be ridiculous. You know you're always welcome here."

"Morg—" Zach's voice drifted in from the garage.

"Jesus. I need to deal with him. Love you."

"Love you too."

Morgan and Zach arrived a few minutes before six. Cory practically sprinted from the kitchen when she heard them on the front porch. Zach was holding a twelve-pack of Miller Lite against his hip, his Titans jersey wrinkled in a way that suggested he'd pulled it off the floor. Morgan stood beside him smiling, wearing a fitted black top and jeans, along with small gold hoop earrings Cory hadn't seen before.

"I'm so glad we're doing this," Cory said, pulling Morgan into a hug the moment the door was open.

"Me too." Morgan squeezed back. "It's been way too long."

"Hey, Cor. Where's Hunter?" Zach pushed past them into the house. "I need to talk to somebody about that Vols game because Morgan has literally refused to engage."

"Because you've brought it up nine times today," Morgan called after him.

"Office!" Hunter's voice carried from the back of the house. "And I already know what you're going to say. The fourth quarter was a disaster."

"A DISASTER." Zach was already gone. He dropped the twelve-pack on the kitchen counter, pulling out two bottles as he rounded the corner. His voice boomed through the hallway. "Dude. They had the lead. All they had to do was run the clock. That's it. Run. The. Clock."

Morgan rolled her eyes and followed Cory toward the kitchen. The island was covered in vegetables. A cutting board sat in the middle, a tomato half diced. Next to it was a glass bowl of shredded cheese, limes, and cilantro still bundled. The smell of cumin and chili powder hung thick in the air. Two cast iron skillets sat on the stove, one with seasoned ground beef, the other warming tortillas.

"Tacos?" Morgan's face lit up. "Oh my God, yes."

"I figured we'd keep it simple."

Morgan picked up a knife, making herself at home as she began dicing what was left of the tomato so Cory could focus on the meat. "So, do you remember that blue teddy I bought last month and never got a chance to wear?"

Cory laughed, already sensing where this was going. "Let me guess, you finally put it on last night and Zach lost his mind?"

"If only." Morgan released a frustrated sigh, scraping the tomato into a bowl and then grabbing the pepper. "I told him to wait in bed for me, I had a surprise. Then, when I came in fifteen minutes later looking like a playboy bunny, he was passed out. Literally snoring."

"Oh no." Cory had to wipe away a tear she was laughing so hard.

"It's not funny." Morgan poured the frustration into her chopping, the sound of the knife hitting the board drowning out Zach and Hunter's voices from the back. "It's been over a week since—"

Three heavy knocks banged on the front door. Cory's hand tightened on the spoon she'd been using to stir. "That must be Luther and Dafni." She was about to suggest Hunter get the door so she could finish her conversation with Morgan, but Morgan had already dropped the knife and headed toward the living room.

Luther's voice filled the entryway, as Morgan opened the door. "Well now, somethin' smells down right delicious in here."

Cory watched from the kitchen as Morgan gave Luther a quick hug, then turned toward Dafni giving her a much longer one.

"We bring wine!" Dafni held up two bottles as she leaned down to return the hug. She wore a white linen dress that stopped just above the knee, her dark hair loose around her shoulders. "They look perfect on you. I knew they would."

Cory chewed on her lip, her knuckles turning white against the spoon as Dafni admired Morgan's earrings.

"Thanks again for letting me borrow them." Morgan grabbed her arm. "Come on, you can help us in the kitchen."

Luther took another step inside the house, looking around the small space as if trying to compare it to his house. His linen shirt pulled tight on his stomach, the sleeves rolled up to his elbow.

"Hey man. Glad you guys could make it." Hunter appeared from the back of the house with Zach right behind him. He held his hand up for Luther who gave it a courteous shake.

"I appreciate the invite. Truly."

The energy shifted the second Dafni entered the kitchen. She squeezed Cory's arm as she passed. "Thank you for having us. Everything looks amazing". She took up post next to Morgan by the island.

"So like, did you two see the news about Tracy from 90 Day?" Cory directed the question at Morgan, but Dafni answered first.

"Yes! It such a shame, no? She just living her life trying to be free and they say no, you can't do that. And throw her in jail."

Cory snickered, then stopped herself when Morgan didn't join in. "I mean, sure, but like, she did steal a car. That's pretty serious."

"Steal. Why must everything be about possession? In community, we share, no?"

"It wasn't her car though. Like, legally that's just theft."

Dafni waved her hand as if swatting the word away. "Legal. This is just rules from people who want keep things for themselves, no? If my neighbor needs car, she take car. I need olives, I take her olives. Nobody calls police."

"That's... a very interesting way to think of it." Cory glanced at Morgan, waiting for the backup. The shared look. The silent agreement that this was insane.

Morgan was picking at the cilantro, pulling leaves from stems. "I mean, she kind of has a point though. Like, Tracy and Derek were together for two years. They shared everything. It was basically her car too."

"It literally wasn't."

"No, I know. But, like, the principle of it." Morgan shrugged. "It does sound nice though, doesn't it? We always get hung up with what belongs to who. It's like, mine mine mine, you know? And then we wonder why everyone's so isolated."

Dafni nodded, pointing at Morgan with a lime wedge. "Yes. This. Exactly this."

Cory stirred the beef. She didn't want to fight. Plus, maybe Morgan had a point. People were getting shot for minor things like knocking on their neighbor's door. She wasn't sure what to think, but as she placed the spoon on the counter she couldn't help but wonder if that was Dafni's logic when Cory saw her steal a lighter.

"Let me open that wine."

Twenty minutes later dinner was served and everyone sat around the table eating tacos and sharing stories of their past. Cory had arranged the seating so Morgan sat next to her, but that didn't stop Dafni from sitting on her other side, putting Zach between Dafni and Luther.

The tacos were good. Cory knew, because everyone had gotten seconds before slowing down. She allowed herself a moment of satisfaction as everyone began to slow down. She poured herself more wine and focused on being a good host.

"Your tacos are the best, Cory. Seriously, I don't know how you do it." Morgan took another bite and Cory smiled as a chunk of salsa and cilantro fell out of the back of it.

"Dude, these are legit." Zach was already building his fourth. He nudged Hunter, attempting to whisper but failing miserably. "You're lucky. Whenever I ask for tacos Morgan always just orders in."

"Because when you finally decide what you want for dinner it's already late and I'm exhausted." Morgan's grip tightened on the edge of the table.

"Food really is the key to bringing folks together," Luther said, dabbing the corner of his mouth with a napkin and drawing Morgan's attention.

He leaned back, the chair groaning under his weight. "Many cultures before us saw the dinner table as sacred." He took a generous sip of wine. "Not in a religious sense, necessarily. But in the sense that breakin' bread with someone was an act of trust. You're sharin' sustenance. You're sayin', I want you here."

"I don't know about sacred, but it makes sense." Cory locked eyes with Luther. "There's a ton of research on communal meals and oxytocin release, mirror neurons activating when we eat together. It's, like, hardwired into us."

"Okay, nerds." Zach reached across Dafni for the hot sauce. "I thought this was a dinner not a TED talk."

Dafni laughed. Morgan noticed he'd finished his third glass of wine.

Luther's eyebrow rose. "Now see, that's fascinatin'. You take somethin' ancient and beautiful and you break it down into chemicals and neurons." He shook his head like a disappointed father. "Don't you worry something gets lost in the translation?"

"I mean, that's just how I process things. The science behind why something works doesn't make it less meaningful."

"No, no. I agree with you." He set his wine down. "But here's what I find interesting. You just said it's hardwired into us. Sharing. Trust." He gestured around the table, arms wide. "Breaking bread. If that's true, and as you say we are literally built for it, then why do we spend so much of our

lives puttin' up fences around everything? What we eat, who we eat with, what we share, what we keep." He nodded at her. "This feels natural. Don't it? Six people, good food, good wine. Nobody's holdin' back. But then as soon as we leave you'll lock your doors and close your windows." He gave Cory a knowing smirk when he said the last line.

"That's just... how society works." Cory could feel the heat rising between her shoulder blades.

"Sure, sure, society." He waved his arm dismissively. "I think the best version of ourselves is the one that ain't afraid. That's all. To experience all that life has to offer."

The table was quiet for a moment. Cory took a sip of wine. She'd wanted to push back but couldn't find the angle. Everything he'd said sounded reasonable. That was the problem.

Dafni broke the silence by reaching across the table and squeezing Cory's hand. "This was beautiful meal. You are wonderful host."

"Thank you." Cory squeezed back, grateful for the shift. She stood, gathering the plates. "Morg, do you want to help me clear the table?"

"Of course." She stood, collecting Luther and Dafni's plates with a smile. Zach stuffed one last taco into his mouth, crumbs and toppings tumbling back onto the ceramic. Morgan waited, her foot bouncing impatiently as she held out a hand for his plate.

"This was perfect," Morgan said as the two friends walked into the kitchen. "Dafni and Luther are pretty great, right? Like, I know they are a lot but you have to admit, it makes sense."

Cory rinsed the plates buying herself a few seconds to think as she loaded the dish washer. "I mean, I guess. But I'm not sure how it helps you." She grabbed a dish towel that hung on the stove, drying her hands before turning to face Morgan. "What did you mean by that? When you said they were helping you understand."

Morgan turned her head, her face turning red. "I just meant... like, they help me see things differently." She avoided Cory's gaze. "Helping me figure out how to handle all the Zach stuff."

"You two are going to be fine." She grabbed Morgan's hand. "You're just going through a rough patch is all. Zach is an idiot but he loves you."

"Do you really think that?" Morgan closed her eyes. "Or are you just saying what you think I want to hear?"

Cory's mouth fell open. She didn't know how to respond. She wanted to be offended, or at least defend herself and tell Morgan that she was just trying to make her feel better. But before she could say anything Zach's voice cut through the kitchen wall. "I'm serious, Dafni, you're always doing such adventurous stuff. Maybe some of that'll rub off on her."

Morgan's face went still. She pulled her hands away from Cory and spun around, pushing through the kitchen door.

"You know, maybe if you paid half as much attention to me as you do to every other woman in the room, you would know exactly how adventurous I could be."

Cory cursed under her breath. She could hear Zach stammering, the scrape of a chair, Morgan's voice getting quieter which meant it was getting worse. She took a breath, grabbed the second bottle of wine and walked into the living room.

"Okay." Cory set the bottle down on the table. "I think we need a palate cleanser." She stepped between Morgan and Zach. "How about a game? Never Have I Ever?"

The fire in Morgan's eyes slowly faded as she looked at her friend. She just smiled and nodded, then grabbed her wine glass from the table and moved toward the couch.

"I love this game," Dafni said, moving to sit next to Morgan.

Luther rose from the table. "Well now. That does sound like a fine idea."

Hunter appeared from wherever he'd been hiding during the explosion, offering Cory a look that said you sure about this? She answered by pouring herself another glass.

Zach came over last, sinking into the far end of the couch with a fresh Miller Lite, having apparently decided wine was no longer his friend.

Cory settled into the armchair and pulled her legs beneath her. She thought about Luther's words at dinner. "Alright." She raised her glass. "Who wants to go first?"

"I'll go," Morgan said, already leaning forward in her seat. "Never have I ever flirted with someone right in front of my partner." Her eyes shot daggers through Zach as he attempted to make himself smaller.

Dafni shrugged and drank without hesitation. "Luther thinks it's funny when I flirt with other men. He says it charming."

"I think it's adorable," Luther confirmed from his spot next to her as he took a drink.

Zach on the other hand, didn't move. His eyes darted between Morgan and his beer. "Babe, I wasn't—"

"Just drink, Zach."

"I'm serious, I was just talking to her about—"

"Oh my God." Morgan pressed her fingers to her temples. "It's a game. Either you've done it or you haven't. Just—"

"Alright." Hunter leaned forward, beer in hand. He'd made the switch with Zach so he wouldn't be the only one. "My turn. Never have I ever been kicked out of a bar."

Zach laughed then drank immediately, grateful for the redirect. "Okay so, this was in Nashville, junior year. Me and my buddy Trent—"

"Oh God not this story." Morgan rolled her eyes but the corner of her mouth twitched.

"—we're at this dive bar off the strip, right? And Trent, he's three pitchers deep, decides he's going to arm wrestle the bouncer." Zach was leaning forward now, gesturing with his beer. "This dude was huge. Like, arms as big as my legs. He had a neck tattoo and everything. I'm pretty sure he did some time in jail."

"What happened?" Dafni asked, her chin resting on her hand.

"Trent lost. Obviously. But then he starts accusing the guy of cheating, says his elbow came off the table." He shook his head and even Morgan was laughing. "So now he's screaming over the

music telling everyone in the bar the bouncer was a cheater demanding they go best two out of three."

"They threw you out for being too loud?" Cory asked, captivated by the story.

"No, they kicked us out because after the bouncer refused Trent sucker punched him and we started a bar fight."

"Oh my. God!" Cory covered her mouth.

"It wasn't as bad as it sounds."

"Um... yes it was. You had to go to the ER for stitches and I couldn't touch your stomach for a week because it was too painful," Morgan corrected, laughing.

"Semantics." Zach sat up a little taller as his friends looked at him in astonishment.

Hunter turned to Luther. "Alright, Luther. You want to give it a go?"

Luther swirled his glass, considering it. "I think I'll pass this round." He took a slow sip. "I'm afraid there ain't much I haven't done. I'd just slow the game down."

Cory and Hunter exchanged a look of bewilderment. Cory shrugged it off and smiled. "Okay, then. I'll go." Her fingers curled around the stem of her glass as her gaze found Dafni. "Never have I ever shoplifted."

As expected, Dafni drank without hesitation. Cory expected a story to come from it, or maybe for someone else to ask what she'd stolen. Instead, everyone else drank. Her jaw went slack.

"Oh my God. Seriously? I'm the only one?"

"You've never taken anything?" Morgan chided, nudging Cory with her hip. "Not even like a candy bar as a kid?"

"No! Why would I?" She turned her attention to Hunter. "Seriously, you too?"

The room erupted. Dafni doubled over, her hand on Morgan's arm. Even Zach was grinning, shaking his head.

Hunter smiled "I mean, yeah, I was no boy scout either. Junior year, after we beat Ohio State, we stole all the traffic cones around the stadium and put them statues all around campus." He shrugged. "Campus police showed up and everything. Coach made us run stadiums at five AM for a week."

"You're terrible."

"Totally worth it."

"Ain't no harm in a coloring a little outside the lines," Luther said, with a half-smile on his face as he listened to everyone's stories. "It don't make a whole lot of sense limiting yourself just because someone you've never seen before tells you it's wrong." He turned his attention toward Cory. "That's what life is, experiences. The good, the bad, everything that falls somewhere in between. Any life worth livin is about experiencing all of it."

Cory wanted to argue. She wanted to point out that rules existed for a reason. They were what made us more than just wild animals. But the entire table was nodding along, as if what he'd

said made all the sense in the world. Morgan had stars in her eyes like he'd just said the most beautiful thing in the world. Even Hunter seemed to be captivated by this new-found wisdom.

"Well... I guess I need to go steal something."

"Yes, I can help," Dafni said, almost too quickly and it drew another round of laughter from the table.

They played a few more rounds. Dafni admitted she'd never learned to drive. "Luther takes me everywhere. Is romantic, no?" Zach confessed he'd never read an entire book cover to cover, which surprised exactly no one. The wine dwindled and the laughter came easier. The earlier tension between Morgan and Zach seemed to fade, and Cory caught Morgan giving him bedroom eyes on more than one occasion.

Cory poured the last of the wine into her glass, closing her eyes as the room swayed happily around her. "Okay, last one. Never have I ever... cheated on someone."

For a moment no one moved. Then Luther and Dafni brought their glasses to their lips, killing the tension.

"Okay, wait," Morgan looked at Cory nervously. "define cheating."

Hunter grinned. "If you have to ask, you've cheated."

Cory's eyes went wide. She'd known all of Morgan's dirty little secrets. Sure, maybe not that she'd stolen a candy bar as a child, but cheating, she would definitely know about cheating. So why was Morgan drinking. Worse, why had she refused to look at Cory while she did.

The second the wine was gone from Morgan's glass, she stood not allowing any type of follow-up questions. "It's getting late and if we don't get home soon this one is going to be sleeping here." She pointed at Zach who was barely holding onto his beer.

Luther and Dafni stood next, and the moment was completely gone. Instead everyone gathered by the door where goodbyes happened quickly. Dafni gave everyone a hug, even Zach who seemed to watch Morgan's reaction the entire time. Luther shook hands with Hunter and Zach before offering Cory a hug of her own, that she accepted despite her uncertainty.

The hug seemed to last longer than needed and before she could pull away Luther whispered: "When you're ready to start colorin' outside the lines, you know where to look."

She pulled back only to see Morgan smiling at her. "Thanks again for doing this." She pulled Cory into a hug, the warmth of her body melting all the anxiety that had just passed over her. "And I promise, I'll be on the next run."

"Good," Cory replied, inhaling the scent of her shampoo. "We have so much to talk about. Just us."

"I know." Morgan pulled back, smiling. "I'll see you tomorrow. Promise."

Cory stood in the doorway and watched them go. Morgan and Zach walked ahead, Morgan's arm around him mainly for balance. Luther and Dafni followed at their own pace, Luther's arm around Dafni's waist, holding her close like a lover. At the edge of the driveway, Luther glanced back. Their eyes met. He gave her the smallest nod that made the hair on the back of Cory's neck prickle, before turning toward his house.

Cory closed the door and leaned against it.

"Well." Hunter appeared with a trash bag, already collecting bottles. "That was... a lot."

"Yeah." She thought about Luther's words, the way he looked at her. "It was."

Hunter tied off the trash bag and leaned it against the wall by the back door. The kitchen was mostly clean. Plates in the dishwasher, leftovers wrapped, counters wiped. Cory stood at the sink rinsing the last of the wine glasses, her movements slower than usual due to the wine.

"So." He grabbed a dish towel and started drying what she handed him. "You feel better about you and Morgan?"

Cory turned the glass under the water, watching the red stain swirl down the drain. "Yeah. It was nice having her here."

"Good. I mean, you two were laughing a lot during the game. Seemed like things were back to normal."

She handed him the glass. "I don't know about normal. But it was better."

"See, it's like I said. There was nothing to worry about. You two just needed some time together." He dried the glass and set it in the cabinet. "Speaking of... is everything okay with her and Zach? Did she mention anything?"

"What do you mean?"

"They just seemed to argue a lot." He folded the towel and draped it over the oven handle. "Don't get me wrong, I know he was drunk and Morgan had every right. But, I don't know. They just seemed not on the same page. Like, more than usual."

Cory dried her hands. She could tell him about the blue teddy. About the dead bedroom. About Morgan's frustration that had been building for months. But those weren't her secrets to share.

"They're going through a rough patch. Morgan's been dealing with some stuff."

"Well, maybe their friendship with Dafni and Luther will help. They seemed to really get along great. When Zach wasn't making an ass of himself, I mean."

Cory's stomach flipped. Hunter wasn't wrong. They did seem to get along great. Morgan especially seemed more confident and alive with the new neighbors.

"Yeah." She shut off the kitchen light. "I hope so."

Hunter followed her upstairs, playfully grabbing her butt as he swayed with each step. She swatted his hand, playfully, but after everything Morgan had told her the last thing Cory wanted was to deny Hunter sex if he wanted it, even if she wasn't particularly in the mood. She brushed her teeth while he stripped down to his boxers and climbed into bed. The window was cracked open, the night air drifting through, carrying the sound of crickets and nothing else. No moans. No cries from next door.

Cory spit into the sink, wiped her mouth, and stared at her reflection. Luther's voice was still circling. When you're ready to start coloring outside the lines, you know where to look.

She turned off the bathroom light and climbed into bed beside her husband.

As expected, Hunter was all over her the second she climbed into bed. His mouth was on her neck before she'd even settled against the pillow, his hands already pulling at the hem of her shirt. She let him take it off and kissed him back, trying to match his energy while the evening still churned behind her eyes.

Morgan's earrings, a gift from Dafni. The shoplifting round where even Hunter drank. Everyone around her was playing a version of themselves and Cory had no idea. She shouldn't have been surprised, not really. After all, isn't that exactly what she did with clients like Lawrence? Why should she be shocked to find out the people she loved were doing the same?

Hunter's mouth moved to her chest, his tongue tracing the top of the tree of life tattoo. She ran her fingers through his hair and focused on the sensation. On the warmth of him. Hoping that the weight of his body against her leg would be enough to bring her back to the present.

"Hey." He looked up at her, his chin resting on her sternum. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah. Sorry, I'm fine."

"You're not." He kissed her chin. "Talk to me."

She sighed, her hand still in his hair. "I'm sorry, babe. My brain just won't shut off. It was a lot tonight."

"The Morgan stuff?"

"Yes. No. I don't know." She pulled him up to kiss her again. "And just like, the way Luther and Dafni seemed to be only focused on them. Like it was their mission to phase us out."

Hunter laughed, the vibration of it tickling her mouth. "What's so funny?"

"I just remember things differently than that." He broke the kiss working his way back down to her neck, her collarbone.

"What do you mean?"

"Luther was paying a lot more attention to you than he was Morgan." His head dipped, finding her nipple and sucking it past his lips. Cory's back arched, a moan escaping her lips as his tongue circled her hard nub.

"What are you talking about?" She shifted her hips as his fingers slid across the band of her underwear.

"You didn't notice the way he was looking at you?" His fingers slipped beneath the band and she felt him pause. "Wow" His voice changed. "I thought you said your mind was somewhere else?"

"I... I don't know." Her entire body was warming up, the arousal mixing with embarrassment. "It's probably just the wine."

"Mhmm." He didn't sound convinced. His fingers moved slowly, spreading the wetness across her, and she bit her lip trying not to react. "So, back to what I was saying."

"Do we have to?" Her back arched off the mattress, chasing his touch.

"You didn't notice?" He pulled back just enough to look at her. "Every time you pushed back on something he said, your shoulders go back and your jaw gets tight." He slid a finger inside her and she sucked in a breath. "His eyes dropped, Cor. Every... Single... Time."

"Ohhh fuck." Her clit was starting to pulse. It needed more attention. "Drop... dropped where?"

"Where do you think?" He kissed her breast, his lips brushing her nipple. "Right here."

"You're making that up." Her fingers threaded through his hair.

"I'm really not. I was sitting right next to him. He'd wind you up and then just... enjoy the show." He added a second finger and she released his hair, grabbing his forearm. "It was like he was doing it on purpose."

"That's... that's ridiculous." Her voice didn't match her body. The words came out breathless and thin while her walls clenched around his fingers. She couldn't explain it. Two minutes ago she'd been somewhere else entirely, going through the motions, and now she was dripping because her husband was telling her their pervy old neighbor was staring at her chest during dinner.

What the fuck was wrong with her?

"Not that I blame him." Hunter's mouth closed around her nipple and she gasped, her nails digging into his skin. "Fuck, you know how much I love these." He moved to the other one, his fingers curling inside her at the same time. "I spent half the dinner trying not to stare at you myself."

"You sure you weren't just jealous another man was looking at them?" She reached out grasping the front of his boxers and finding him hard. "Is this like the strip club all over again for you?"

Hunter groaned as her hand squeezed him. "Maybe a little." He thrust against her palm. "But this isn't about me."

"Sure it is. You love this." She stroked him harder, feeling him twitch. "Telling me other men want me. It's like the strip club all over ag... mmm." His thumb pressed against her clit and she lost the ability to speak.

"This is different and you know it." He circled her clit, watching her face contort and her eyes flutter shut. "You're not wet because Luther was watching you."

"Then why am I... fuck, don't stop." She grabbed his wrist, pressing his fingers harder against her.

"You're wet because you thought he wasn't." He obliged, his thumb working her clit while two fingers stayed buried inside her. "You thought he was more interested in Morgan than you."

"That's... oh God." Her hips bucked against his hand. "That's not..." She released his manhood, grabbing at the sheets. "I don't care who he looks at."

"You're not used to getting all that attention." He curled his fingers and she moaned into the pillow. "But he's been staring at you since the day he moved in. You thought he lost interest after he met Morgan but—"

His words were cut off when she reached back out, grasping his testicles and squeezing.

"Hunter, shut up and fuck me already." She tugged his boxers down his legs and pulled him on top of her. His cock pressed against her thigh, hard and hot, and she rolled her hips against it.

"And I don't want to be quiet tonight. They keep us up every night. Let them hear us for a change."

He pushed her panties to the side and the head of him nudged her entrance. She was so wet it was almost embarrassing, the slickness coating both of them as he teased her opening without pushing in. Her hips lifted, trying to take him, but he pulled back just enough to keep her waiting.

"Hunter."

"What?"

"Stop teasing."

"Now, where's the fun in that?" He pressed forward slightly before pulling back again.

She grabbed his ass with both hands and pulled. He sank into her in one stroke and her head snapped back against the pillow. "Oh fuuuck." Her voice filled the room. Her hips lifted, as she felt his balls press against her ass. She didn't care who heard her. Let the whole street hear just how good it felt.

"God damn, Cor." His voice was strangled as her walls gripped him tight. "You feel... fuck."

"Harder." She wrapped her legs around his back, locking her ankles. "Fuck me, harder."

He braced his hands on either side of her head and drove into her, the bed frame cracking against the wall. He increased his speed, from a slow tease to a steady, rhythmic fucking. Fast enough to fill the room with rhythmic wet slaps as Hunter's hips and thighs made contact with hers.

"Yesss. Just like that." She dug her nails into his shoulders, her pussy clenching and milking his shaft as he impaled her again and again. She reached up and braced one hand against the headboard, the other gripping his bicep, the serpent tattoo flexing beneath her fingers. His body was slick with sweat already.

"Fuck, Hunter." She arched her back and his mouth found her nipple, sucking hard enough to make her yelp. "Mmm. There's no way they didn't hear that."

She didn't know why she said it. The words came out before she could stop them and once they were in the air she couldn't take them back. Hunter's hips stuttered for half a second, then slammed forward harder than before.

"Probably." He crashed his mouth onto hers before pulling back. "I've never heard you this excited before." He grabbed her thigh and pushed it higher, changing the angle. Deeper. She cried out, her hand flying back to the headboard.

"Oh my God. Right there. Fuck... Yes... Right there." Her cries got louder, as if she were auditioning for a porno. The thought sent a fresh wave of heat through her body.

He held the angle, his hips snapping against her. The wet sound of them together mixed with the creak of the bed and her moans and the breeze from the window cooling the sweat on her stomach. She was aware of all of it. Every sensation stacked on top of the last.

Her fingers found her clit and she rolled it between her fingers, her body jolting at the contact. She was already close. It had built faster than she expected, the combination of his cock stretching her and his words and the images that kept flooding behind her eyes. Luther at the

dinner table, his pale blue gaze dropping to her chest. The way his lips curled when she got fired up. The whisper at the door.

"Cor." Hunter's voice brought her back. He was watching her, his face tight with the effort of holding back. "You're thinking about him aren't you? About the way he was looking at you?"

She opened her mouth to respond, but her walls clenched around him, telling him the answer he already knew. "Fuuuuck." She worked her clit faster, no longer trusting her words.

"It turns you on doesn't it?" Sweat dropped from his forehead onto her cheek and she moaned her response. "To think about him seeing you... fuck. Like this." He thrust deep and held, grinding against her. "Staring at your tits."

He sheathed himself fully inside her, pausing. His forehead dropped against her collarbone, his breath ragged. "Fuck. I should not be this turned on right now." He pulled back, crashing into her again.

"Nnnngh, fuck." Her legs were shaking, her hips bucking chasing the orgasm that was just within reach. "You make it sound so dirty."

"Not dirty. Sexy." He grabbed her wrist, causing her to sigh in frustration as he pinned both her wrists over her head. "It's so sexy watching you get worked up when people see how sexy you are." His hips slammed into her, his grunts growing louder. "All those people seeing you the way I see you."

"Baby, I'm close." Her hips were moving on their own now, grinding against him every time he bottomed out. "I'm so close."

"You're going to cum thinking about his eyes on your chest aren't you?" His cock pulsed inside her letting her know he wasn't going to last much longer either. "Thinking about our disgusting neighbor watching you cum."

"Ohhhh. Oh fuck, baby. Please."

He released her wrist and her hand flew to her clit, the lewd sounds of her arousal filling the silence. He pressed his forehead to hers. "Let him hear you, Cor." Her fingers were frantic on her clit, her eyes squeezed so tight she saw dots. "Cum for me."

"Oh God." Her walls clenched. "Oh fuck, oh fuck."

The orgasm hit like a bomb, ripping through her so hard her vision went white. She screamed, her whole body seizing as wave after wave crashed through her. Her back arched completely off the mattress and she grabbed Hunter's arms, her nails breaking skin, holding on like she'd fall apart if she let go.

"Fuck. Fuck, Cor." Hunter couldn't hold back anymore. He buried himself as deep as he could and she felt him swell inside her, his cock pulsing as he came. He groaned against her neck, his whole body shaking, his fingers digging into the mattress on either side of her.

She felt every throb. Every twitch. Her walls milked him through it, both of them riding the aftershocks as the room slowly came back into focus. The bed had shifted at least a foot from the wall. The sheets were tangled around their ankles. The pillow had fallen to the floor at some point and neither of them had noticed.

Hunter collapsed beside her, his chest heaving. "Jesus Christ."

She couldn't respond. She was still trembling, her hand resting on her stomach, feeling the rise and fall of her own breathing. The breeze from the window touched the sweat on her chest and she shivered. Goosebumps spread across her skin, tightening her nipples all over again.

"That was..." Hunter was staring at the ceiling, one arm thrown over his forehead. "I don't even have words for that."

She turned her head and looked at him. His face was flushed, his hair matted to his forehead. He looked wrecked in the best possible way. She loved him. She loved this. Whatever had just happened, was because of their connection.

"Hotter than the strip club thing?" She managed, her voice hoarse.

"Are you kidding?" He laughed, still catching his breath. "That wasn't even close. This was... fuck, Cor. Where did that come from?"

"I don't know." She stared at the ceiling. "Fuck, I wish I knew."

She did know. She just wasn't ready to admit it. Not out loud. Not to herself. So instead she rolled onto her side and pressed her face against his chest, breathing him in.

"Hey Babe?"

"Mmm." His arm wrapped around her but it was heavy. He was already fading.

"I love you."

"Love you too, Cor. So much."

His breathing evened out in under a minute. It used to annoy her how fast he could fall asleep. Tonight she was grateful for it. She lay against his chest and stared at the far wall. Her body was satisfied in a way it hadn't been in weeks. Maybe months.

She couldn't decide if she wanted to throw up or touch herself again.

She lay there for a long time, her body cooling, the sweat drying on her skin, listening to the silence from next door and wondering if it was really silence at all.

She couldn't sleep.

Hunter's light snoring told her that he was completely wiped out. An odd sense of satisfaction washed over her. She should have been exhausted. Her body was spent, her muscles loose, the pleasant post-orgasm bliss tingled her skin. But her mind wouldn't shut off.

The breeze from the window had turned cool. It touched the sweat still drying on her chest and she shivered. She needed to close it before the room got too cold. Hunter was asleep on top of the comforter and she didn't want to wake him fighting for the blanket.

She slid out from under his arm carefully, her bare feet finding the hardwood. She hurried across the room to the open window and reached for the frame. That's when she noticed the blinds were up. She didn't remember opening them. Hunter must have done it earlier and she was too caught up in everything to check.

She was about to pull the window down when movement caught her eye.

The lamp was on next door. Cory held her breath as Dafni moved through the frame first, pulling her dress over her head. Her body was exactly as Cory remembered it. Her skin was flawless, her chest large and dipping into a V shape that men go crazy for.

She almost got lost in watching Dafni again, until Luther's large frame came into view. Her eyes snapped to him and she realized he was facing her.

It didn't make sense. Dafni was right there, her naked body absolutely magnificent but Luther's gaze held onto Cory.

His eyes traveled down from her face to her bare chest. The moment was slow and deliberate like he wanted her to know exactly where he was looking. He didn't try to hide it, didn't bother looking over at his wife, just stared at Cory's naked chest.

Her nipples hardened. She didn't move.

Luther's hand rose slowly waving at her like they were just two neighbors being friendly, his grin spreading across his face. She couldn't explain why she did it, but she waved back, completely unconcerned about her lack of modesty. Then, in the most casual fashion she could muster, she reached out and slowly pulled the window closed before dropping the blinds.

She walked back to bed and climbed in next to Hunter, pressing her bare chest against his back. He stirred briefly, his arm wrapping around her and pulling her close. Instinctively telling her that everything was going to be fine.

Cory pressed her head between his shoulder blades and closed her eyes, but sleep wouldn't come. Not for a very long time.