

## Window to Temptation Ch. 05

The Nexus presentation was almost finished. Cory had been staring at the same slide for twenty minutes, but she was already starting to check out. Something about "cultivating intentional synergy within cross-functional teams." She didn't even know what that meant. Nobody did. That was the point. She changed windows, bringing up her roster of clients for physical therapy. It was slim, not growing at all in the way she'd hoped. She had a terrible thought that the corporate wellness stuff was going to be something she would end up doing her entire life. Just one big lie.

At least things with Morgan had gotten better since the dinner party. Not perfect, but closer. Morgan had started showing up to the runs again, and most mornings it felt like old times. The two of them would get lost in the trail, their breathing would fall in sync and for an hour it was just the two of them competing against nature. The main difference came when they started a conversation. Morgan talked less, and when she did, it skimmed the surface. The weather is perfect today, I can't believe Brandi said that on 90 day, whatever Zach had done to annoy her that morning. The deeper stuff, the confessions that used to tumble out between mile markers, those had dried up. When Dafni tagged along, which was every few days, the two of them would trade glances and references. They had inside jokes that Cory didn't understand. She'd laugh along anyway, hating herself for it.

But at least they were hanging out again. At least she could see her friend.

She leaned back on the yoga ball, letting her hips roll in a slow figure eight, stretching each individual vertebra, while she reread the slide. Sunlight poured in from the midday sun, hitting the counter in a way that made Cory take note of the dust along the grout. She'd need to clean it before she left for Cleveland on Friday. The mere thought of it sent a tickle of anticipation up her spine and made her push her coffee away completely untouched.

The trip was in three days and Lawrence had insisted that the seminar include at least three new modules beyond what she'd presented remotely. On top of that, she still needed to build the guided breathing section and flesh out the "energy mapping" framework she'd invented during their last call. It was a concept she'd pulled out of thin air and now had to present as established practice to a room full of people. One of which included Lawrence and his energy as of late had felt... different, to put it mildly.

She closed the laptop and rolled her neck, each crack producing a satisfying noise in the otherwise quiet house. Hunter was at the office. His workload had thinned out since his trip to Cleveland, but he'd assured her that was nothing to worry about.

She stood from the ball and walked to the sink to dump the cold coffee. As she turned on the tap, movement caught the edge of her vision through the kitchen window. Her eyes went wide. It was Morgan.

Cory's hand froze on the faucet. Morgan was walking up the path toward Luther and Dafni's front door alone, looking over her shoulder like a thief in the night. She was wearing a pair of jeans and a fitted white top. The appearance casual like she was going over to spend time with her new best friends. A sinking feeling rose in her gut at the thought. At the same time, Morgan looked over her shoulder directly at Cory's house. Her gaze swept the front windows, the driveway where Cory's car sat baking in the heat.

Cory actually ducked and immediately felt ridiculous about it. She glanced up from her spot behind the counter. Why did she feel like she needed to hide in her own kitchen, and from her best friend? The question was obvious though, because whatever Morgan was up to she clearly didn't want people seeing her, especially Cory.

Heat tinted her cheeks as she thought about exactly what that statement meant. Sadness, anger, all of it bubbling just beneath the surface and making Cory want to scream. Before she could actually produce a sound, the door opened and Luther's large frame filled it almost entirely. She stood back up, slowly, still afraid any sudden movement may draw attention, like they were feral animals in the wilderness.

Luther's voice boomed across the short distance. Cory couldn't make out what he said, but Morgan's shoulders dropped and a smile broke across her face.

*She's probably just returning that book Luther gave her.*

But that thought was quickly disproven as Morgan walked past Luther. Her hands were free. Cory turned back toward the sink, realizing the water was still running, and shut it off, pouring her coffee down with it.

*Probably just visiting Dafni.*

Her throat grew tight. It had been ages since Morgan showed up at her house unannounced just to gossip. Were those days past them now? Except, Dafni wasn't at the door when Luther opened it. She couldn't shut her brain off as she glanced back out at the now closed door. In the few times she'd gone over, Dafni was always at the door with Luther. Where was she?

She forced herself to walk back to the table and focus on the presentation. The Cleveland trip was right around the corner and she couldn't afford to put this off, even if something was going on next door that she couldn't put her finger on.

She worked. The guided breathing module came together quickly, grounded in actual diaphragmatic mechanics she'd studied at Cornell, dressed up in enough mystical language to make Lawrence feel enlightened. The energy mapping section was harder. She was building an entire framework from nothing, and the further she went, the more it reminded her of her dinner conversation with Luther. All she was doing was repackaging real science and manipulating it to make people feel like they were discovering something for the first time.

She glanced at the clock. It had been over an hour since she watched Morgan disappear into Luther's house.

She stood and convinced herself she needed to stretch her hamstrings. She pressed her foot against the kitchen counter directly in front of the window. Everything looked exactly how it did earlier. The door wasn't suddenly sitting wide open. The curtains were still drawn. Cory was convinced she was having a nervous breakdown. She shook her head and went upstairs. Maybe she'd bring her speaker down. Fall Out Boy had a way of keeping her mind of spinning.

As she entered the bedroom, she squinted, the sun was cutting in through the blinds nearly blinding her. She walked toward the window, telling herself she was just going to adjust the shades. That's when she heard it.

A faint sound coming from directly across the gap between their houses. The hair on the back of her arms stood up as Cory raised the blinds fully to get a better look.

It took a minute for her eyes to adjust. She raised her hand to the side of her face to block out the sun. Slowly, Luther's bedroom came into focus, the bed next to the window. And at the foot of the bed with her knuckles gripping the footboard was Morgan.

*Oh my God. Oh my God.*

Her hand flew to her mouth. Her legs threatened to buckle and she locked her knees, bracing herself against the sill.

Cory had seen her best friend naked dozens of times before, but nothing prepared her for it this time. The muscles in her back were tense, her shoulder blades peeking out as she held herself up. Her hair covered most of her face, and Cory was grateful for it. She didn't want to know what Morgan's expression looked like right now. Her chest swayed, her nipples erect and rubbing against the mattress as her body lurched forward. The cause of it stood behind her.

Luther stood behind her, naked, his body dwarfing hers. His large hand on the small of Morgan's back, the other possessively on her ass. Even from this distance, even through glass, Cory could see the way his fingers dimpled Morgan's flesh. His hips thrust forward, and Morgan's ass rippled in response.

"Ohhhhhh." The angelic voice of Morgan floated through the window. Morgan's back dipped, her spine curving as she pushed back against him, meeting his thrust, taking him deeper. Cory couldn't comprehend what she was seeing. Morgan was pushing back she was... Morgan was fucking Luther.

Morgan's arms gave out and she caught herself on the mattress, dropping to her elbows and raising her ass higher. Luther smiled, pulling Morgan farther back, burying himself to the root.

*How long. How long has this been—*

"Nnnggghh!"

The thought fractured as Morgan's grunt crashed over her. She'd seen Morgan have sex exactly once. A grainy video on a phone screen, sophomore year. It was nothing like this. She thought back to the sex tape as Morgan's fingers tangled in the sheets.

Cory couldn't remember the two guys in the video, just a couple of drunk frat boys Morgan had met at party sophomore year. Morgan had been drinking, the three of them had done a line of coke and then, from the way Morgan explained it, they ended up in the backroom with one guy fucking her, the other using her mouth. Cory remembered laughing as she watched the video. The performance, if you could call it that was clunky. Morgan would moan, and the guy in front of her would slip from between her lips. She'd giggle, stroke him a few times then take him back in her mouth. It was dumb and awkward and... nothing like this.

"... so thick," Morgan's broken words floated to Cory's ears and her gaze moved on its own between Morgan's thighs. Luther's cock was slick, glistening as he pulled back slowly before driving forward. Morgan's body jolted, her fingers white around the edge of the mattress. He was thick. Obscenely so. Not as long as Hunter but wider, stretching Morgan in a way that explained every sound she was making. Cory watched her take him, watched the way Morgan's thighs trembled each time he bottomed out, and something hot and terrible stirred low in her stomach.

Her own breathing had changed. She was taking quick, shallow breaths. Heat bloomed across her chest and crept up her neck, and she pressed her palm flat against her sternum as if she could slow her pulse through sheer pressure. She could feel it. Every heartbeat hammering against the tree of life.

Luther leaned forward without breaking his rhythm, his hand sliding from Morgan's hip up the length of her spine. His fingers closed around the back of her neck. Morgan's head turned as Luther pressed it deeper into the bed.

It was brutal. It was degrading. It was... hot.

"Ahhhhh." Morgan's body was bucking against Luther, the act of dominance seeming to shift something in her.

"Harder," Morgan pleaded, and Cory's mouth dropped. Her fingers had slid under her shirt. She realized she was holding her breath, her fingertips pressed firmly against the hard nub of her nipple.

*When he wanted to fuck me... he didn't ask.*

Morgan's words from the grocery store, weeks ago. Cory didn't realize exactly what she meant when she said it, but now, watching her with Luther, it began to make sense. Luther was like a beast, moving and adjusting Morgan's body in a way that didn't need permission. All of the wholesome worldly facade he'd shown was stripped away and he just... took.

Luther pulled her upright by her hair. Morgan gasped, her back slamming against his chest, her head falling to his shoulder. His arm wrapped around her, one hand spreading across her stomach, the other still tangled in her dark hair. From this angle Cory could see Morgan's face clearly. Her eyes were squeezed shut. Her lips were swollen and parted, whispering something Cory couldn't make out. Whatever she was saying, Luther answered by rolling his hips, grinding into her from behind, and Morgan's mouth fell open in a moan that rattled the glass.

Zach didn't fuck like this. Morgan wouldn't have been able to keep that to herself. He was a good guy, but Cory couldn't imagine him using this level of aggression on Morgan even if she begged for it, and suddenly Cory didn't think begging was off the table.

Cory let out a gasp, her fingers closing around her nipple. She pulled her hand away like it burned her. The thought of touching herself while watching Morgan and Luther sending a wave of nausea through her. That's when the thought hit her. Zach.

She scanned the rest of Luther's bedroom. No Zach. No Dafni.

Her mind drifted to the dinner party, to the question about drinking. Was it possible this was going on the entire time? As she thought about the likelihood, she watched Morgan's arm hook around Luther's neck and she crashed her mouth into his, moaning into it.

That didn't make sense. Morgan had asked for the definition of cheating. If she was already doing... this no definition would have been needed. Which meant it was more recent and that Morgan had plenty of time to tell her about it during their runs but chose not to.

Luther's hand slid from Morgan's breast to her throat. Morgan's body was covered in sweat, her hand went to his wrist, holding it there as another moan tore through her throat that made Cory's thighs press together, her fingers sliding into her waistband.

*Damnit. No.*

She forced her legs apart. Planted her feet. Gripped the windowsill with both hands. She needed to go. She didn't need to see this. Why was she even still watching?

Luther's pace quickened. "Yesss, yes. Don't stop. Ohhhh." Cory watched Morgan's stomach flex and knew what was about to happen.

*What does she have that I don't?*

The thought burned her face like she'd been slapped. She wasn't jealous, at least not about Luther. She didn't want him. She was certain of that. But the question wasn't about Luther. It was about being chosen. Luther couldn't take his eyes off her when they'd first met. So much so that she despised it. Then she introduced him to Morgan, and suddenly Morgan was the one getting all of his attention. She was—

"Unnnnnnggggh."

Morgan's entire body seized. Her back arched hard against Luther's chest, her mouth open in a scream that Cory felt in her own belly. Morgan's hips bucked against him as the orgasm ripped through her, her grip on his wrist tightening. Luther held her steady, absorbing the tremors, his pace never faltering.

Then he looked up.

Across the gap between houses, through the glass and the afternoon light and the dust motes suspended in the air, his pale blue eyes found Cory's.

She stood frozen, her mouth hanging open. Not from being discovered, but from the force of Morgan's orgasm. Heat rolled up her chest. Her thighs clenched on their own, hard enough that she had to widen her stance to keep her balance, and the slick warmth that bloomed between them made her bite down on her lip to keep from making a sound. Luther hadn't moved. He was still inside Morgan, still looking at Cory, and every second his eyes stayed on her made it worse.

Finally, Luther's jaw tightened. His arm locked around Morgan's shaking body and he drove into her one final time, his hips flush against her, his eyes never leaving Cory's. She watched his body go rigid, his knees buckle slightly as a breath of satisfaction left him.

*He came. He just came staring at me, while being buried inside my best friend.*

The air left her lungs. A slow deflation, like the last breath before going under. Her fingers ached from gripping the sill. Her pulse pounded between her legs getting harder to ignore.

She held his gaze for one second longer than she should have. Then she turned away and made her way downstairs, completely forgetting why she came up there in the first place.

*What the fuck. What the fuck. What the fuck.*

She stayed like that until the entire neighborhood went quiet. Then she stayed a little longer. Counting breaths the way she taught her clients, the way she'd taught herself, the way she'd been teaching everyone else to hold themselves together while she sat on the floor of her own hallway falling apart.

When she finally stood, her legs were stiff and her throat was dry. She went to the kitchen and opened her laptop.

"Cultivating intentional synergy within cross-functional teams."

She stared at the words on the screen trying to make sense of them. She never heard Morgan leave.

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SoPo wasn't known for much. It was quiet and far too quaint to draw significant attention from outside developers. An array of caves accessible near a quarry did attract amateur and professional spelunkers alike. However, the real star of the unblemished nature of SoPo was a series of trails that varied in escalation with such severity that it became a hotspot for influencers to film and specialists to train.

"Route Three" as it had become affectionately known, was one of three devised routes by those who tried to tackle it. For the entirety of last summer, Cory and Morgan had begun training to conquer it. They pushed a little further each week, timing themselves across the first quarter of the route until they were both gasping and dizzy at the end of each session.

After that summer however, Morgan's interest waned, and with it so did Cory's drive to conquer Route Three. Despite Cory's disappointment that their efforts ceased, she was grateful for her continued companionship on their morning runs. Which ended up being as therapeutic as they were confessional for both of them, when the mood was appropriate. Otherwise, their bodies said more in silence than they ever could with words.

As the morning fog parted, leaving mist that clung to all around it, Cory had already completed her stretches and warmed up. There was very little she would do to align her mind with her body for running. To her this was anatomical, mechanical, a linear effort that didn't need to be muddied by the complexities of "spirits" and "chakras". No, this was "pure". Which is why despite her perspective, she was still dreading seeing Morgan, knowing that there would be nothing direct about their conversation.

They met at the same spot before the trail they always had. When Morgan appeared, from an outcropping of scattered pines, she looked more confident, her posture was different. Cory barely recognized her. Her blonde hair hung perfectly down to her shoulders, without a single lock out of place, her skin was silky and polished. Her eyes nearly glowed with energy and directness. She was renewed. While Dafni caused them both discomfort in her endless beauty and sensual appearance, in truth Morgan rivaled her, even if it wasn't readily apparent.

Even her attire was different, it was functional still, but her emerald leggings were skin tight, sitting below her navel, accentuating her already sculpted core. Her top was a matching sports bra with a box shaped cut out between her cleavage, and a black faux mesh lining that ran down the shoulder straps. Cory would never have been able to pull it off. Not with her build.

She instinctively covered her chest with her arms when she noticed how much more voluminous and heavy Morgan's cleavage appeared. She didn't know if she had never truly noticed it, from them being so comfortable with one another, or if she had just denied it.

"Wow. Morgan, you look incredible."

She threw her hair over her shoulder, not out of purpose, out of some display of dominance, a silent confirmation of her standing. "Thanks. Just focusing on me. Wanting to really feel good about myself. I feel like I... hide too much."

"Well it's paying off. Whatever you're doing. Like, damn girl!"

While they had usually started at a brisk jog, making sure no acid built up in their muscles, gauging their strain before pushing themselves further. Morgan didn't wait, she broke into a fiery sprint, that left Cory standing there for a full second before her legs even fired. Her pace easily putting her previous efforts to shame.

Cory dug in. The trail was slick from morning dew, the ground treacherous on the inclines, but she knew this route better than Morgan did. She closed the gap, her lungs already starting to burn, her form tightening with each stride as she watched Morgan's ponytail bouncing twenty yards ahead. She was fast. Faster than she'd ever been out here, and that bothered Cory more than it should have.

With every step, Cory lurched closer, attuned with every micro movement of her body, she knew she was approaching a state of fatigue, having barely been able to catch up with Morgan. Instead of risking injury, she slowed down to a calming walk. Now without movement, she felt the humidity burden her attempts at steadying her breathing.

Morgan slowed, turned around, appearing exhausted, her body covered in sweat, glistening as rays of the sun cut through branches nearby. Cory's eyes closed and she saw Morgan with Luther again. The same exertion, the same sweat, the look on her face of pure ecstasy. Cory shook her head as Morgan approached.

"Cory you alright?"

"I'm... fine. Just a rough... start."

"Oh. Ok. Well, like we can just take it easy."

"Sure."

They walked side by side for a while in silence, letting the sounds of nature fill the silence. They came upon an even stretch without any deviations. Finally relaxed, Cory held Morgan's hand.

"Sooo it has been way too long. How have you been?"

"Good! Very good even."

"Awesome, I figured because like you are just. I dunno. Radiant?"

Morgan giggled, lightly squeezing Cory's hand as she did. "Radiant? Wow. You're not coming onto me are you?"

"Stop!" Cory playfully slapped Morgan's arm.

Morgan ran her hand through her hair, which somehow still looked lustrous. "For real though, I feel amazing."

Everything about Morgan was different. The posture, the ease, the way she carried herself like she was suddenly free of whatever was holding her back. It should have made Cory happy. It didn't.

"How's Zach? Did you guys like, settle things?"

Cory had expected her to be caught off guard, to even be alarmed at the inquiry. Instead, she didn't react at all, smiling as she twirled a lock of hair coquettishly. "Oh we're way, way better. God I couldn't even walk right the other day."

Cory winced, and for a second she wasn't sure she was able to breathe. Morgan was grinning at her, open and easy, the same face she'd made a thousand times when sharing something scandalous over wine and 90 day. Except this time it was a bold-faced lie.

They told each other everything. That had always been the deal. Cory was the first person Morgan called about the threesome video. Morgan was the only person in the world who knew that Cory had an abortion right out of college. They cried together in her used Subaru for over an hour just holding one another. No matter how bad the secret was, they always told each other.

Except now she was standing on their trail, on the route they'd claimed together, lying to her face about who made her unable to walk.

Cory's sinuses burned. She blinked hard and turned her head toward the trees, pretending to check the trail marker. Her nails bit into her palms. She wanted to grab Morgan by the shoulders and shake her. *I saw you. I saw his hands on your back. I heard you beg him for more.* The words stacked behind her teeth, and she swallowed every one of them.

"Well, I am totally glad you got past that. For real. So, you seen Luther or Dafni recently? Attend any more book clubs?"

Without hesitation, Morgan replied. "Of course! Oh my god I have learned so much from them."

"Yeah? Like what?"

"Like..." Morgan chewed her lip, searching for the right words. "Ok, so you know how I was telling you about the thing with Zach? The whole dead bedroom situation?"

"Yeah."

"Luther says that's not even about Zach. It's about me. Like, I've been waiting around for permission to feel good about myself. From Zach, from everyone. And the whole time the only person who needed to give me that permission was me."

Her hand went to her chest, fingers pressing against her sternum. "Like, it's not Zach's fault I feel smaller." She paused, reconsidering her words. "I mean, not completely, anyway. We are conditioned to want less, then feel miserable when it happens."

Cory's jaw tightened. It sounded rehearsed, like something out of religious scripture. That wasn't Morgan's words, it was Luther's.

"That's all like... super heavy. It's not like a religious thing? You sure?"

"God no. It's the opposite. It's like..." She squeezed Cory's hand. "Ok, remember what I said at the store? About James? About the way he would... fuck me." She turned her head, like she'd suddenly become shy.

Cory nodded, her throat tightening.

"Luther made me realize I wasn't crazy for wanting that. That wanting to be fucked properly doesn't make me a bad wife." She let go of Cory's hand, tucked her hair behind her ear, and

laughed. "He actually said that every time you say no to something your body is screaming yes to, you're just... killing off parts of yourself. And I've been doing that for years, Cor. Years."

Cory's stomach clenched. She could see Luther's hand on the small of Morgan's back, hear Morgan's cries of pleasure as he slammed into her. Was that what he said to her before bending her over the bed? The blood drained from her face so fast she stumbled on a root.

"Whoa, Cor. You ok?"

"Yeah." She forced a laugh, steadying herself. "Sorry, I just feel like we should be in our dorm rooms after having taken like a super fucking bong rip."

"Stop! I'm serious." But Morgan was laughing, and for a second she looked exactly like the girl Cory had met freshman year. "Ok, I'm not doing a good job explaining it. But it's real, Cor. I feel like myself for the first time in years."

Seeing Morgan closer to her old self, hearing her have more life in her voice, being more animated, should have made Cory happy. She wasn't. She was jealous. Wanting to ask what made Morgan better than her, why Luther and Dafni chose her, why she was always last, why she was always stuck, while everyone else was free.

They walked back the rest of the way in near silence.

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Hunter knew something was wrong. He'd known for days. It wasn't any single thing, more a slow accumulation. The way Cory would drift mid-sentence, her eyes unfocusing like she was watching something play out behind them. Small absences that someone who didn't know her would miss entirely.

He cooked dinner. A simple bolognese, garlic bread. No distractions, just the two of them without phones to idly scroll or background noise to hide behind. It was awkward at first, but eventually small talk came easier, laughter followed, and their rhythm aligned again. Hunter poured them both a glass of red. "Cor. You know what I'm gonna ask, right?"

She sighed. "Yeah. A threesome for your birthday right?"

He grinned. She wasn't wrong, of course, wasn't that what every man wanted for his birthday? But it was further proof that something was bothering her. "Wow. So you're finally able to read minds with your chakra alignments? We need to play the lotto, babe."

She laughed for what seemed like the first time in days. "Ok, ok you got me."

"Seriously though. I wanted to give you... space. Sort out what you're going through. But I can feel it. Something's off."

"It's nothing. It's work and life." She swirled the wine, watching the little vortex of blush liquid curve around the glass.

"Morgan?"

"No. No. We're fine now."

He moved his hand over hers, gently massaging it. "Cor, listen it's fine. Whatever it is you can tell me, and hey if you don't want to, it's fine. But I hate seeing you like this."

He meant it. He also knew he wasn't exactly in a position to demand full transparency. Not when his own head was a mess he hadn't sorted through. The images from Cleveland still surfaced without warning, the way Lawrence's voice threaded through them. He pushed that aside. This wasn't about him.

Cory slowly pulled her hand back, grasping below her breast at her ribs. Her chest rose and fell in a way that told him she was fighting something. "It's... nothing. Fuck. Alright fine. Like I saw something totally just... I don't even know what I saw."

He held her gaze and waited for her to give him more information. He considered making another joke, something about Bigfoot or Mothman, but he didn't want to give her a reason to shut down.

She took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "So something is going on with Morgan—"

"I thought you said she was fine?"

"Morgan and Luther."

"Morgan and Luther?" He tilted his head trying to understand what she was saying. "Like they really are swingers?" He laughed at how it sounded. The thought of it making no sense. But Cory didn't laugh. Her fingers tightened around the stem of her wine glass, her eyes cast toward the floor.

"I think so. Or, like they're... something. The other night, I was upstairs. I heard sounds from next door."

He crossed his arms and leaned back, studying her face. She was giving him just enough, parceling it out, like she was trying to manage the conversation. His eyebrows pinched together and he shook his head laughing. "Alright, you had me, not gonna lie. Good poker face Cor."

"I'm not fucking kidding. Ok? This is serious." Her voice rose, her hand slapping the table and he realized she was being serious.

"Holy shit. You really are serious." He reached for her hand. "Did you see them?"

"The... the blinds were open. I went upstairs to grab my speaker and I heard something. I looked." She pulled her hand back, suddenly more interested in the wine. "... I wish I hadn't."

Hunter studied her as she made the confession. Her face was flushed and her breathing was shallow. Something wasn't lining up, she still wasn't acting like herself. He let it pass, convincing himself that she was still just processing it.

"And it was definitely Morgan?"

"It was Morgan." She said it with such conviction he knew she was sure. "I mean... I saw her go over there and then the voice. It sounded... it was Morgan."

"No way. Absolutely no way." He knew just by how she was acting that she was telling the truth, but his mind refused to believe it. "Her and Zach aren't... I mean, they would have told us, right? If they..."

"Would they?"

"I guess... I don't know."

The only sound was that of forks awkwardly being placed against their plates. She leaned back in her chair. Hunter's mind was turning over faster than he wanted it to. Luther and Morgan. The image appeared before he could stop it. Luther's bulk, Morgan's small frame. The memory of Dafni bent over the mattress surfaced next, and he tried to bury it before his body responded. It didn't work. His mind swapped Dafni for Morgan and the image sharpened instead of fading. Morgan's dark hair splayed across Luther's sheets. Her voice rising with each powerful thrust. He shifted in his chair and pressed his thigh against the table leg.

"There's something else." Cory's voice pulled him back. She was watching him, searching his face like he could somehow explain this whole thing away. Make her realize something she'd missed.

"What?"

"I um... I mean I can't be sure, but I never saw Dafni... or Zach."

Hunter pinched the ridge of his brow. "Ok, I mean what if this isn't a big deal? There was all that friction between Morgan and Zach at that party. Maybe this is their fix or something? Sure, it's awkward, but... I dunno."

"Maybe." Neither of them believed that. "This morning I tried to see if I could like... get anything out of Morgan but aside from making me feel like dogshit just by standing next to her, she was tight lipped."

"Cor. Stop. Seriously. You know how gorgeous you are." The words came out automatically, because they were true and because she needed to hear them. The night at the strip club crept to the front of his mind. The things everyone at the table were saying... what Lawrence said. He ran his palms against his thighs.

She wiped at her eye with the back of her hand. She wasn't fully crying, but it still pained him to see. Cory didn't let people see her like this. "Thank you. Seriously."

"Listen. I know you're going to be heading out soon. To Nexus. But, I know Zach's going to be around. Maybe I can talk to him."

"No you can't—"

"Hey, not like that. I mean just get a read, ask if everything's ok. Maybe that way we'll get a better idea on whatever is going on."

She checked her phone, a nervous habit he'd cataloged years ago. "So if he doesn't know... do you tell him? Do I?"

"I mean I'd have to tell Zach somehow. He doesn't deserve that. No one does. Unless there's something else we just don't know." He let out a breath. "Let me get a beat on it first and then you and I can figure it out when you get back."

She nodded. "Yeah. I dunno. It's like... like this whole thing feels wrong. Something changed when they moved in. I mean all around us."

She wasn't wrong. Hunter could feel it too, the slow gravitational pull of that house, the way it seemed to warp everything in its orbit. He thought about Luther's hand on his shoulder during the move, the trunk full of books, the casual offer of lending his wife.

"Well, we can't solve it right now. But do you feel better?"

"Yeah. For sure."

"Awesome. Let me help you pack."

He ran the water, watching it swirl over the remains of dinner. The bolognese had left a red stain in the white ceramic that wouldn't come out without scrubbing. He turned the tap hotter and went to work on it, his mind already building a version of the conversation with Zach that would give him answers without revealing what Cory had seen. What she'd heard. What her voice sounded like when she described it.