

Lilas.

My heart is slipping very fast. It is beating in an unnatural way that is a mixture of fear and pleasure. Why do I seek pleasure from the man that I'm afraid of? Do I need to seek a therapist? Is it because I haven't had a boyfriend before? Is that why my judgment is wrong and forbidden?

Did his huge hands have to encompass my hips and waist? Why did Salvatore have to be such a handsome, nerve crawling, dangerous man? His features, his voice...the way he smells and how he leans unto me.

All of the abominable things he says! Why would he ask me to touch myself and think of him? I have never done that before. I don't have a visual or vision in my mind to commit an act like that. And for the rst time, he makes me want to know how it feels.

He said things that a step father should never say to a step daughter. The man is old enough to be my father and his dangerous allure is enough to rip my panties. I've been so busy in my teenage years focused on chasing my future to build a career as a jewelry designer. I didn't pay attention to boys—I was particularly disgusted at the way they way the opposite gender stared at me as an object of desire.

But Salvatore, the man says the foulest things and yet, it enraptures me. He is a maa, pretending to be a solid business man. He kidnapped me. He is an arrogant bastard who threatened me. I say, repeating his crimes to myself as I head to the oce that I have been assigned to.

It is the jewelry design department and I have been running errands. I can't count how many times I've been sent to the copier machine, getting them iced coffee, compiling design papers and listening to their conversations. According to what I've seen, almost all the women in the oce are in love with Salvatore and they are uncomfortable to talk about it in my presence.

Only if they knew that Salvatore is denying Lumen. Wait...what if they know? I wonder how many girls he is sleeping with in the oce and using the same tricks as he did on me.

“Oh, there you are! Are you slacking off already because Salvatore is your step dad?” Patrica asks, she is head assistant of the designing team.

The designers who are huddling in collaborative spaces, sketching intricate patterns take a look at me as I enter.

“No, that's not it—” I say but Patricia interjects.

I don't know what to say about my disappearance. I should have made up a lie before entering the oce.

“I got lost actually.” I say and she fakes a smile on her face at my excuse.

“Well, Lead stones is a skyscraper. And you are a little bit slow. So, I understand why.” Patrica says, a glare on her face as she walks away to her work station. I scoff, watching her retreat before closing my eyes and taking a look at everything.

The jewelry designing oce is a vibrant and creative atmosphere. There are eight people who work in this station and they all have different workstations. The head of the jewelry team, the head assistant, Patricia, ve designers, then, me.

There are shelves lined with gemstone samples and metal prototypes which add a touch of elegance to the surroundings. The soft hum of creativity lls the room as team members discuss the latest trends and techniques in jewelry design.

“Lilas, right?” A girl says to me, she has auburn hair and a friendly personality.

“Yes,” I say, gathering all the unused sheets from the general workspace.

“I'm Bloom.” She says.

“It's nice to meet you. Listen, do not pay attention to Patricia. The girl is a b***h and she has slept with almost every guy in the oce, including the cleansers.” Bloom says and my eyes widen with surprise.

“Really?” I ask, tying my hair into a bun.

“Yea, she's just jealous because you have it easy and Salvatore is your stepdad.” Bloom says and I sigh.

How would I explain to anyone that I don't have it easy? This would have been a dream to work in a company as great as Lead Stones but that's before I found out it was owned by an enigma maa. Also, I didn't get here by my own talents...I got a straight ticket and now, I'm being mistreated.

“What is on your mind?” Bloom says and I forget that I'm talking to her.

“Huh?”

“I'm sorry—it's just, I can't blame Patricia for hating me. I did get here through nepotism.”

“Oh my goodness! Don't you know? When your sketch was submitted, every designing team in the company wanted you to be in their team because your sketches were so unique and brilliant. That is the real reason why Patricia is triggered.” Bloom says and my pale reaction brightens in a second.

“No way!” I say in joy.

“Yes way! I heard the head of our team, Miss Fiona, talk about how amazing your sketches were and that they could easily sell in the market. You won't be running errands for long, Lilas.” Bloom says and I place a hand on my chest in complete joy.

I'm about to laugh when Miss Fiona walks out of her oce, heading into the general meeting area.

“Meeting!” Patricia who lls in suite days and all the designers rush into the room.

“Come on, let's go!” Bloom says and I follow her into the meeting room. The walls are adorned with framed renderings of past masterpieces, showcasing the team's expertise. In the center, a circular conference table made of polished wood is surrounded by ergonomic chairs, each meticulously chosen for both comfort and style.

I gaze at Miss Fiona. She is a strikingly beautiful woman with a cascade of blonde hair that frames her face. There is no smile on her face, thus, I'm guessing that she doesn't bring a playful personality to the workplace. There's an air of approachability about her.

After everyone is seated, she stands from her chair and uses the remote to start a display on the projector which is showing on the wall.

“As we all know, every year, Lead Stones holds a competition between designing teams. It is that time of the year once again and according to Mr Salvatore, he has made a decision with the board meeting that whoever is chosen for the most unique design for this year will get ten percent of the sales of their design.”

As Miss Fiona mentions that, the designers around the table cannot control their excitement and trepidation as they stare at one another, subduing their emotions so that Miss Fiona can speak.

“If chosen, your design will sell for only a limited hour but the designer will receive ten percent of its income. Last year, the gold team won but this year, we have to make sure the winner is one of us.”

“We are a Diamond team and it must show in our design. You have to use your creativity wisely. The rules are clear; anyone who is caught cheating, stealing another person's design will be kicked out of the competition and the future ones that might hold.” Fiona says.

I inhale after listening to Fiona. If I win this competition, I will be able to pay Salvatore, he won't have anything on me anymore. I have to. I have to emerge as the winner.