

His Kickass 31

Chapter 31

Abby

I feel him tense the moment the words leave my mouth. I want to take them back as silence stretches between us. He doesn't seem to know what to say, and I avoid looking up at him. His hand falls off my shoulder.

"No, but I'm guessing you do if you're bringing it up."

"I mean, maybe a little."

He removes his arm from around my shoulder and moves to the side. I sit up and turn to look at him. Maybe this wasn't the best idea. There's a blank look on his face, and I can tell he's trying to hide his emotions from me. It doesn't take a genius to guess that I hurt his feelings.

I force myself not to play it off. This is something that's been bothering me for a while now. If we're going to get married, we need to be able to talk about it.

"Go on," he says.

I swallow. "I just... I feel like we don't try new things," I blurt out. "Everything is always the same. It feels like we're just going through the motions, working toward the end goal, when we should be passionate and loving."

"So you're saying I'm not good at sex?" Adam asks, his voice beginning to sound a bit defensive.

I shake my head. "No, not at all!" I reassure him. I reach for him, but he pulls away, and I swallow again. "I'm just saying that I'd like to try new things with you. I... I don't know. God, I wanna feel like I'm in a movie sometimes! Like you just can't keep your hands off of me! I want to feel wanted, like I'm really yours, you know?"

Adam frowns and folds his arms across his chest. "No, I don't know," he says. "I thought that our sex life was perfectly fine, and now you're saying that it's not good enough."

"It's not that it's not good enough," I say. "I just worry that we're gonna get married, and we'll turn into one of those old married couples who never touch each other."

There's a long, palpable silence between us. Both of us can only stare at each other incredulously before Adam finally speaks up. When he does, I can feel my heart sink.

"I don't know what you want me to say," he bites out, his jaw tense.

I wring my hands. "I just think maybe our sex life isn't as exciting as it could be. And sex is really important to me, so..."

"Wow, okay." He stands up before I can finish, crossing his arms over his chest. I look up at him. This couldn't be going any worse. "I didn't realize I was such a bore."

"I didn't say that."

He shakes his head. "You didn't have to."

"Come on, don't take

"How am I supposed to take it?" he yells, making me jump. I don't think I've ever heard him yell before, but I clearly struck a

"You don't need to get so upset," I say. "I'm just trying to tell you how I feel. We should be able to communicate about these sorts of things,

Without an answer, he shakes his head and stalks out of the room, grabbing his jacket on the way. I jump up and follow him. He puts on

“Don’t leave,” I say, reaching for him. “It’s not a big deal,

He shakes me off. “I’ll see you later,” he says. He can’t seem to look at

...

I hand Leah her drink and sink into the booth across from her. We’re having another girl’s night. I’ve been in desperate need of them lately, and luckily Leah is almost always down to go out for a few drinks. Chloe was too tired after work, but she made me promise to fill her

“They make a good Sex on The Beach here,” she says, sipping from

I gulp down some of my sangria. “I can’t stand them,” I

“You have questionable

I give a dry laugh. “Don’t I

Not only do I still need to deal with the whole Karl and John situation, but I haven’t heard from Adam since last night. I feel bad if I hurt his feelings, but that doesn’t mean he should just disappear. It makes me nervous, and a little frustrated. Is he going to leave me over one conversation? Should I just not have said anything and let the feeling grow and grow until I started to resent

“What are you thinking so intensely about over there?” Leah asks, her eyebrows raised. I stir my drink and shrug my shoulders. “Work stuff. Men

“You’ve been going through

“I know.” I shake my head and drink more. “Why does everything have to go to shit all at once? I don’t have the energy to juggle Karl and Adam and

“Franky, Karl needs to figure his shit out. Your restaurant will be fine, I promise. And something tells me I’m missing something with Adam? I thought things were peachy. Aside from the whole boring sex

“Well, I brought that up to him.”

“Oh?” She leans forward. “Something tells me that didn’t exactly go well.”

“Not exactly. I told him I think our relationship could use more passion. He took it pretty personally. I think I really hurt his feelings.”

She shakes her head. “Oh, you for sure did.”

“He stomped off, and I haven’t heard from him since.”

“What a prima donna.”

“Am I the asshole here? Should I have just kept it to myself?”

“I mean, you’re not the good guy, but you’re not the bad guy either. Sometimes you have to be honest with your partner, even if it sucks.” Leah is the queen of those who can’t do, teach. She’s never had a long-term relationship, but she gives the best advice.

“That’s what I thought, too.”

“So, should I apologize?”

“You can apologize for hurting his feelings, but you shouldn’t apologize for being honest about how you feel. Guys always take stuff about their performance in bed personally.”

“I didn’t say anything about his performance.”

“You implied it.”

I put my head in my hands and groan. “God, I did, didn’t I? I practically called him boring in bed.”

“He is boring in bed,” Leah says. “And he’s a little boring in general, too.”

I shake my head. “That’s not true,” I respond. “Adam is great. He’s sweet and caring, and he loves food as much as I do.”

“But what else about him do you really like?” Leah asks. “What do you guys share aside from the food industry?”

I’m silent for a few moments, thinking. In fact, now that I think about it... I guess Adam and I don’t share a lot of common interests. He doesn’t like to read. He doesn’t enjoy going out all that much. He doesn’t like joining me for brunch and nature walks on Sunday mornings.

“So the answer is nothing,” Leah says with a

“I never

She laughs, and I look up at her, my vision slightly blurred from rubbing my eyes so hard. “You totally

“Yeah.” I give a half laugh. “I guess I sort

“Just wait a bit. He’ll come around. He probably just needs some time to feel sorry for himself. I’m sure he’ll get over

“And if

“Then he’s not the one for

I nod. “You’re

She sweeps her dark hair over her shoulder, giving me a wink. “I

I do a double take when my eyes land on a table at the back. What is Tiffany doing at a place like this? Out of every bar in the Capital, this is the one I’d never expect to run into her. It’s like I can’t escape this

“Excuse me,” I say to Leah. “I’m just going to say hello

“Alrighty.”

I stand up and cross the dark room. Maybe I shouldn’t bother her, but I need to know what she meant by calling me disloyal. I want to know exactly what Karl said to her about me. If he makes it seem like I’m the disloyal one, I’m going to kill him. He doesn’t get to leave me with no explanation, then put all the blame

Tiffany looks up as I approach, and she almost seems relieved. “Excuse me,” she says to her date. “I’m just going to say hi to

She stands up and links her arm through mine, leading me into the corner of the room. The moment we’re out of sight, she drops her

“Good date?”

She rolls her eyes. “Fantastic. I can’t wait to escape down those stairs when you’re done saying whatever it is you plan

Chapter 32

Abby

One of his guards is standing at the front door, and his eyebrows go up when he sees me. I recognize him from back in the day. Jimmy, if I'm remembering right. We never interacted much. He was still new when we got our divorce. Does he know why Karl left me? Do all his staff think I cheated and wronged him? God, I can't believe this is happening.

"I'm here to see Karl," I bite out.

"I'll take you," he says, his eyebrows shooting up at my tone. Hopefully, he knows my anger isn't directed at him. I can't even rein it in enough to be mildly pleasant.

He leads me to Karl's office, knocking softly on the door.

"Yes?" Karl calls.

"Ms. Abby, here to see you."

I refrain at the last moment from rolling my eyes. Jimmy's just doing his job. He's not the one who deserves to have his head bitten off. I force myself to wait until Karl says to let me in, before I stomp into the room, practically closing the door in Jimmy's face. I'll have to remember to apologize to him later when I'm not so angry.

Karl is lounging in his office chair, a crystal glass balanced on his lap. There's some sort of brown liquid inside. Probably Scotch, but it could be Bourbon. Based on what I can see of the bar cart, he's got both.

"You such a fucking asshole," I start. I figure it's a pretty good opening for what I have to say.

His eyebrows shoot up, mimicking Jimmy. They look sort of alike, come to think of it. Same wavy hair. Same chocolate brown eyes. Same bewildered look on their faces.

"Pardon?"

"I just found out that I apparently screwed the gardener when we were together," I hiss. "Now this is news to me, but maybe there's something you know that I don't. So

He puts down his glass and stands

"Shut up," I snap. "I can't believe you told Tiffany I cheated on you." He winces slightly. "Who else have you been telling this to, exactly? All our friends? Our family? What about your

He shakes his head, but I don't let him cut

"Is that the reason you left me? Because you thought I cheated on you?" My voice rises with every word. "Are you fucking kidding

"Abby—"

"I'm so mad, Karl, I could kill you. I really could. I think I might

His face falls a little, but he quickly masks his expression. "Don't say

"Why not?" I spit. "I'm just telling you how I

He shakes his head and walks around the desk. I take a step back. If he thinks he can fix this with a puppy-dog expression and a hug, then he's got another

"Abby, I'm sorry," he says. "For a long time, I did think you cheated on me."

"And that's why you wanted a divorce? That's why you were so cold at the end?"

He nods. At least he has the decency to look a little regretful. It's all coming together now. I guess now that he's decided I didn't cheat, that means it's time to get back together. I'm honestly so angry I think my head might explode.

"I can't believe this."

He takes another step forward, and I glare at him. "Abby, please. You were always so friendly with Justin, and I found a pair of your panties in the garden. They had his semen on them."

I feel sick. "You found a pair of my panties outside and thought to test them? Hell, you found a pair of my panties with a strange man's cum on them and you never thought to talk to me about it? You just thought to jump straight to divorce? God, that's disgusting!"

I'm so shocked right now. I'm sure that I need to sit down judging from how my head is reeling and my stomach is sick from picturing the gardener's semen on my underwear. But instead, I stand up straighter. I'm not going to back down from this fight. No amount of groveling is going to fix the fact that he ruined our relationship over petty jealousy. And what's even worse is that, from the sound of it, the gardener stole my panties to fulfill some sort of sick sex-fantasy. It makes me want to vomit.

Karl, however, appears mostly unperturbed. "I was already suspicious," he says simply. "You two were always so... friendly together. And you always seemed to be putting on your cutest outfits to see him, pushing your tits together, sticking your ass out..."

"Ew!" I blurt out, grimacing. "What is with you and thinking that women are always acting slutty, trying to be fucked? I can guarantee I never did any of those things, and you were just being an insecure prick who was just hunting for reasons to make yourself even more insecure."

He sighs, his shoulders sagging slightly. "I know that now."

"Well, that's great for you Karl, but that doesn't change the last few years. You don't get to just butt back into my life, acting like you're the victim in this whole situation. None of this was my fault, and yet your cousin thinks I'm the bad guy. She told Adam I'm disloyal," I snarl.

Karl lets out a huff and passes his hand over his face. "I'm sorry. I forgot to tell her that new evidence came up. She still thinks you cheated. I told her that back when I was convinced it was

"That doesn't make it okay," I murmur, blinking back the tears that are threatening to

“I’ll set things straight with

“Yeah because that will fix everything.” I can’t help but think of Jimmy, and all the others. “So, did you tell all your staff,

He shakes his head. “Abby, no. I told Tiffany because she noticed me spiraling and demanded to know why I left you. No one else knows the reason

“Not even me, apparently.”

“I’m really sorry.”

“Fuck you.”

He clenches his jaw, and a moment of tense silence stretches between us. I can tell he’s trying to rein in his anger, and it’s such bullshit. What right does he have to be mad in this situation? I loved him. I did everything for him, and he didn’t even have the decency to talk to me about it before deciding to leave me. I never would have cheated on him, and yet he was so quick to

“I can’t believe that’s the reason you left

“The evidence was overwhelming,” he says slowly. He seems a bit distracted, and I can’t help but wonder if his wolf is saying something to him. Maybe mine would be too if she wasn’t still asleep because of what he put

Chapter 33

Abby

Karl walks into the kitchen, and I force myself not to look at him as he strides over. I’m almost done prepping food for the line cooks, and I don’t have time to get into it with him. There’s only so much stress one person can handle before they go crazy, and I’m reaching my limit.

We're booked out again, and one of my waiters called in sick, making us even more understaffed than usual. If not, I probably would have told Karl to just go home. I need to repost my ad sometime soon. There must be people out there who want to work in the kitchen, even as a dishwasher. I don't know if I can keep working with him after everything.

He stops at my station and hovers for a moment. I wait for him to say something, but he doesn't. I slide the pile of carrots off the edge of the blade and give him an arch look. "What do you want, Karl?" "Can we talk for a moment?"

"No. I'm busy." I don't have time to deal with Karl and his bullshit.

"We can talk here if it's easier," he says.

He knows that's not going to happen. John is standing two feet away, not to mention Daisy and Freddy chatting in the corner with Jack. The last thing I need is for everyone to find out we used to be married, or that Karl is an Alpha.

"Fine," I snap, putting down the knife. "But I don't have a lot of time."

He follows me into my office, closing the door behind him. I turn to face him and cross my arms over my chest. I can't imagine what he plans to accomplish in the next few minutes. Continuing our argument from last night isn't going to get him anywhere.

He must read those thoughts on my face because he puts his hands up. "I don't want to argue, Abby. I just want to talk." "I have nothing to say to you."

He takes a step forward but stops when I narrow my eyes. "Please, Abby. You have to know I didn't mean to hurt you."

"Well, if you didn't mean to, then it must be alright."

He runs his fingers through his hair, looking slightly flustered. It's probably the first time I've seen him like this, but I'm too angry to care.

"I can't believe you didn't even trust me enough to talk to me about it," I say.

"Abby—"

I cut him off before he can continue. If he's going to force me to talk, then I might as well get this off my chest. "I trusted you. I never would have done something like that to you, but you were so quick to believe it, anyway. How could you?" My voice breaks a little at the end, and I close my mouth before I get myself into any more trouble. I don't want him to know how much he's hurt

A sorrowful expression crosses his face, and he takes a step closer. "I never wanted to hurt you." "But you did," I say

He visibly winces. "I'm

"You're sorry?" It's maybe the first time he's ever really apologized to me for anything, but it doesn't change what happened between us. "I'm sorry I ever trusted you in the

He crosses the distance between us, forcing himself into my space. I take a step back, but there's nowhere to go. "Don't say that!" he

He's so close to me, I can feel his warm breath on my cheek. I clench my jaw and refuse to look at him. "Just leave me alone, Karl. You're only making

"Abby—"

"I hate you." I mostly say it because of how he reacted last night. I know it's the one thing that'll hurt him the most. But honestly, I'm not sure if it's really what I want to say. What do I want to say? I don't know. All I know is that I'm angry, and hurt, and I feel betrayed and disgusted. Maybe I do hate him, at least

He wraps his broad hands around my arms before I have the chance to slip away. "Look at me," he growls. The pure command in his voice makes my spine straighten. I don't want it to, but his command is impossible to ignore. I might hate it, but he's still

I lift my chin and meet his piercing gaze. He squeezes my arms, not enough to hurt, but enough to get my

"I get that you're angry," he says. "You can be as mad at me as you want. I know I deserve it." His voice lowers, and he leans in. If I move even slightly, my lips will brush his. I hold myself still, forcing down the thought that maybe I wouldn't mind if they

"Yes, you do,"

"Say whatever you want. Be angry for as long as you want. But don't ever say that you hate me." He presses his forehead to mine, and I tense even further. "Please, don't."

I could force him to move, but something stops me. The sort of something I'll have to question later when I can think straight again. I squeeze my eyes shut, and a tear slips free.

"Karl, I..."

Suddenly, there's a loud knock on the door behind us. Karl pulls away, turning from me. I wipe the back of my hand across my cheek and look up at the door.

"Yes?" I call.

"Abby, your fiancé is asking for you," Freddy answers.

I give Karl one last look, but he can't seem to meet my gaze.

...

Adam pulls into a parking space and shuts off his car.

“So,” he eventually says, breaking the tense silence. “We should talk about what happened the other night.”

I fiddle with the strap of my purse, not wanting to meet his gaze. Especially not after what happened with Karl earlier. “Yeah, we should.”

Somehow, this is even more awkward than the first time we had this conversation. I didn’t realize when I decided to be honest that it would snowball into this major thing. Maybe I never should have brought it up. After everything that’s gone down with Karl, I’m even more certain that Adam is a good choice for me. I just hope I haven’t ruined everything.

“For starters, I’m sorry for taking off like that. It was an immature thing to do,” he says. I nod slowly.

“Now that I’ve calmed down, I realize maybe I overreacted. I think you just hit on a sensitive area for

I turn to face him for the first time. He gives me a sideways glance but looks away when he catches me staring at him. His cheeks are slightly red, and he’s tapping his fingers along his leg in a

“Sensitive in

“When my ex-girlfriend broke up with me, she told me it was because I was boring in bed. It really made me feel like shit, you know? So, when you asked if we lack passion, it kind of reminded me of that. I thought you were about to do the

“I wasn’t going to break up with you,” I say, placing a hand on his arm. I can’t help but feel a little guilty. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt his feelings. “I wasn’t putting the blame on you or anything. I just wanted to talk

“About the fact that we have no passion in our relationship?” he asks, shrugging off

I wrap my arms around my stomach and lean slightly away from him. So far, this isn't going well, but how was I supposed to know he'd be extra sensitive? He never told me why he and his last girlfriend broke

"I never said 'no passion.' We definitely

"Right."

"No, we do. Definitely. Dancing the other night was really

He gives me

"It's not that we don't have any passion. It's just that things aren't very spontaneous, and we don't have sex as much as we did when we first got together. It just feels a little early for things to be slowing down between

"Yeah, maybe. I noticed that we've both been busy recently, but it didn't seem like too big of a deal to me," he

Chapter 34

Abby

I climb back into my seat and give Adam an apologetic look. "Sorry," I say.

He shakes his head. "Don't worry about it. I have to get up early, anyway." He adjusts his seat and gives me a small smile. "I'll stop by tomorrow night."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

There's a brief silence. Adam gestures to the paper bag sitting on the center console. "Wanna bring those?" he asks.

I shake my head. "Nah. You can have them. Thanks, though." I give him a quick kiss, then climb back out onto the sidewalk. He starts his car and backs out of the spot in a fluid movement.

Karl watches him drive off, then turns to look at me. I sigh and walk away from him. At what point is going to get the hint, and just leave me alone?

I head for my apartment door, and he follows.

"Abby," he says, reaching for my elbow. I pull my arm out of his grasp and spin around to face him. We're standing close again. Too close. His touch makes me recoil, especially after he just interrupted an intimate moment between me and my fiancée.

"Why are you here, Karl?" I growl.

"Freddy interrupted us."

"There's nothing else to say. I've moved on."

His gaze narrows, almost as though he doesn't believe me, but I continue. "I'm getting married, and I have a life of my own. I don't know why you've insisted on inserting yourself back into my life, but I'm not interested in playing along anymore."

He reaches out and wraps his hand around my arm. "You and I both know that's not true," he says, dipping his head toward me. My breath catches in my throat.

"It is," I insist.

"No, it's not. You can make out with Adam all you want, but you and I both know it's not enough

I pull my arm free and take a step back. "You don't know what you're

He rolls his eyes. "I know you better than

I turn from him and pull out my keys. He's silent as I unlock the door, but I can feel him standing

I yank the door open and walk into the building. He reaches for the door before it can close, and I force myself to face him. "I need space, Karl. Forcing me to talk every two seconds isn't going to fix

"I'm not sure how silence will fix things,

"Please. Just give me time." I need him to leave me alone. I'm not going to be able to sort through my emotions if he's always showing up

"How much time?"

"I don't know. Maybe forever." I plant my hand on my chest and shove him back through the doorway. He lets

"I hate this," he says. I know he's talking about the argument, but also Adam. Karl was always the jealous type, and I can see it in his eyes. He really doesn't like what he saw, but I don't care. Adam is my fiance, and Karl has no right to get involved when he's the one who made baseless assumptions and left me all those years

"That's your own fault," I say. "Goodbye,

The door swings shut, the lock clicking into place. He hovers in the doorway, but I turn and walk up the stairs. When I reach the landing and look back, he's

Karl

I sip on my drink and rub my heads with my fingers. A dull pain pulses in my left temple, and I know it won't be long until it's impossible to ignore. The headache has been coming on all day, and I have a feeling it's going to be a

I can't help but think I deserve the pain. Maybe it's some sort of karma. I hurt the person I loved over something that never even happened, and now she might never forgive me.

There's a knock on my office door, and I sit up straighter.

"It's open," I call.

The door opens, and Tiffany strides into the room. She gives me a narrow look as she perches on the edge of one of my chairs. I take another sip of my drink. Judging by the look on her face, I'm going to need it.

"What's up?" I say. I finish my drink and get up to get another. Drinking probably won't help the headache, but it's the only form of stress relief I've got.

Her eyes track me as I pour another glass. "Want something?" I ask.

"No."

I replace the lid on the crystal decanter and walk back over to my chair. She watches me sit down, her expression stern. She's clearly here to chew me out about something, but it's hard to guess what.

Tough love seems to be her favorite way to deal with me lately. She thinks I'm spiraling, and I can't really argue with her.

Things haven't been easy since the divorce. But I've managed to survive without Tiffany mothering me, and I'm getting pretty tired of her lectures. She's just going to have to let me handle my shit on my own.

“What’s up Tiffany?” I ask with a sigh.

She crosses her arms. “Maybe I just wanted to say hello to my cousin.”

“Okay?”

“Your cousin, who you made a fool of last night.”

My eyebrows go up. “Is this about Abby?”

“You’ve spoken to her, I

“Yeah, she came by last night.” I twirl the liquid around, watching it slosh up against the sides of the glass. “She was

“No, she definitely didn’t seem happy when she left the

I don’t understand how they even got on the topic. Why would they talk about our divorce? “How did it even come up?” I ask. “I didn’t think you guys

“Oh, I saw her out dancing the other night,” she says with a wave of her hand. “I was surprised to run into her, actually. She was out with some

“Adam. Her fiancé.”

“Sure, whatever. They were dancing. They seemed pretty hot and

Great, that’s exactly the kind of thing I’d rather not know. The last thing I want to picture is Abby grinding up against another man. I really need to do something

“And?” I prompt. She must notice my discomfort because a small smile emerges on her face. She’s obviously delighting in

“I took it upon myself to warn him. You know, after what she did to

“Did to me?”

“Cheated on you with your gardener. She did cheat on you,

It’s clear by the way she says it, she suspects Abby didn’t cheat. I don’t know what Abby did to convince her of her innocence, but Tiffany doesn’t seem as indignant on my behalf as she

“No,” I admit. “She didn’t cheat

“So, you lied

Chapter 35

Abby

I weave through the tables, greeting my customers. A lot of my regulars are here tonight, and I stop at Emily’s table. She’s here with her friends, Lunas like her. I know most of them from when Karl and I were married.

Emily looks up at me, and I plaster on a smile. “Hi, dear,” she says, her tone as patronizing as ever. “Wonderful food tonight.”

She gestures to her empty plate, and I wave over Freddy. He walks to us. “Clear these,” I say. He nods and takes their plates away.

“He’s yummy,” one of her friends says, watching him stride away.

“He sure is,” Emily agrees.

She looks up at me and I force a smile. “Is there anything I can get for you guys?”

“No, dear. We’re just finishing up our drinks.” She lifts her martini to her lips and takes a sip.

“We were just talking about the Alpha party,” her friend Lauren adds. We used to make polite chit-chat with each other at Alpha events. Now she looks at me like I’m miles beneath her. It makes my anger flare. Luckily, I’ve gotten good at hiding my feelings, and I don’t think my smile changes when my gaze lands on

“Oh, that should be fun,”

“It’s really too bad you won’t be there,” Emily replies. “We miss having you at all

I seriously doubt she misses it at all. I don’t bother to tell her she might actually see me there. I’m assuming Karl still plans to take me, but I haven’t inquired recently. We’re not exactly on good terms right now, and the thought of attending a stuffy party with him doesn’t sound all that fun. But a bet is a bet, and he stuck to his word; he

I wonder what they’ll think if they see us there together. Will they think we’ve reconciled? I don’t want to give the wrong impression because that’s never going to happen, especially not after what

“Yeah, it is,” I say. “I’ll leave you guys with your drinks if there’s nothing I can get

“Thanks,” Emily says, giving me a false

I turn to walk away, but I’m still close enough to hear Lauren’s cutting remark. “Oh, how the mighty have fallen.” One of them giggles. “Karl really did a number on her.” If only they knew he was working a few feet away, cleaning dishes.

I square my shoulders and move on to the next table. That last remark stays with me as I finish my rounds and walk back to the kitchen. It was a well-aimed blow. Karl really did do a number on me, and now here he is, finishing what he started.

He glances up when I walk in, and I narrow my eyes at him. His eyebrows go up, but he turns back to his work. I really can't stand how attracted I am to him, it's almost like my anger heightens it.

Karl

I turn away from Abby's cutting glare and stack the plates in the sink. Jack pulls the nozzle down and starts rinsing one of the plates. Until they bring a new stack, there's really nothing for me to do. I'm still not allowed to use the big-boy equipment.

In all honesty, I'm getting tired of shoveling food into the garbage, but I know better at this point than to complain. Ever since my last conversation with Abby, I'm sort of worried that she's going to kick me out one of these days. I always knew that she would replace me, eventually, but I hoped that it wouldn't be so soon. I need time to make sure that I set things right with her before she decides to put me on the chopping block.

"I'm going to take a quick break," I say to Jack. He nods. Things have slowed down a little, so it doesn't matter if I disappear for a few minutes.

I wander into the breakroom, going straight for my locker where I keep my phone. There's a satisfying click when I unlock my locker, and I pull my phone

One of the good things about doing a menial task is that it's given me a lot of time to think. It suddenly came to me while I was pushing bits of steak into the garbage earlier. That the one thing Adam loves as much, if not more, than Abby is his job. He's obsessed with it. He has to be. You don't get that kind of success without being a bit of a

Adam's obsession is the perfect thing for me to exploit. And if Adam goes for it, he doesn't love Abby nearly as much as he should. It shouldn't even be a choice. If he agrees to leave her, then I'd really be doing her a huge

I call Jimmy. The phone only rings for a few moments before he picks up.

"Hey, Jimmy. I need you to do something for

"Anything."

"I need you to track down some ingredients." I list them off and wait as Jimmy writes them down. "You think you can do

Chapter 36

Abby

My fingers tap anxiously against the table as I dial Adam's number. After a few rings, his voice, smooth and deep, answers. "Hello?"

"Adam," I start, trying to steady my voice, "It's me."

There's a slight pause on the other end. "Hey, Abbs. What's up?"

I take a deep breath. "I've been thinking ever since what happened the other night... we've been so caught up lately with everything, and I thought maybe we could have a candlelit dinner tomorrow night. Just the two of us. No distractions."

Another pause. Then, a soft chuckle comes through. "Sounds... unexpected. But I'm in. Why not?"

The relief is immediate, but I need more assurance. Adam has been late or flaked on me way too many times for me to take his initial word for it. "You promise you'll be there? Eight o'clock?"

There's a sigh from the other end. "Abby, you know I'm always busy, but if you want this, then yes, I promise. I'll be there."

"But Adam," I say, my voice quivering slightly, "I need you to really promise. Swear on it."

"Okay, okay," he laughs, the tone light, "I swear on it. I'll be there."

I can't shake off a nagging feeling. "I just... I need this, Adam. I need to feel that connection again, that it's just you and me. No distractions. And I need you to be on time. It's going to hurt me a lot if you're late or if you flake out on me."

There's a few moments of silence. Then, in a tender tone, he says, "Abby, I know we've had our ups and downs, and I know I've been...preoccupied lately. But I promise I'll be there tomorrow. I wouldn't miss it for the

His words soothe the unease in my heart, at least for the moment. "Thank you, Adam," I reply. "I just want us to have a night where it's all

He chuckles again. "It's been a while since we had one of those, hasn't it? I'm looking forward to it. Just you, me, and a candlelit dinner. Sounds

My heart flutters, a surge of hope blossoming within. "It'll be special. Just like

He hums in agreement. "I've missed those times, Abby. Tomorrow night, it'll be just like that.

We talk a bit more, laughing about some shared memories, planning a little for the dinner. And as I hang up, a weight has been lifted from my

This could be the turning point, the moment where Adam and I rekindle the love that's been buried beneath layers of misunderstandings and busy schedules. A chance to forget all about Karl and the complications he's brought back into

As I lay down for the night, one last thought drifts through my mind: Adam just has to show up as he promised. Just show up, and everything might

...

I stand in front of the boutique's window, my eyes darting over the various dresses displayed. I need something special, a dress that would leave Adam speechless. Pushing the door open, the bell chimes overhead, and I'm greeted by a rush of perfume and the gentle hum of

"Abby! Over here!" Chloe waves from one of the dressing rooms. She's already trying on a svelte black number, its shimmering fabric hugging her curves.

"What do you think?" she twirls, looking at herself in the full-length mirror. Her auburn hair cascades around her, a stark contrast to the black dress.

"It's stunning," I say genuinely. "But I need something to... reignite a spark."

She grins, her green eyes twinkling with mischief. "Say no more." And with that, she pulls me deeper into the store, past rows of soft silks and delicate laces, until she halts before a rack of cocktail dresses.

She pulls out a deep blue dress, its fabric gleaming like the night sky.

"This. Try this," she insists.

I hesitate, but she shoves it into my hands and pushes me into a dressing room. The dress feels luxurious against my skin, and when I step out to show Chloe, she gasps.

"Adam won't know what hit him," she declares.

I give her a grateful smile. "Thanks, Chloe. I really want tonight to be special."

She nods knowingly. “Sometimes, we need to remind our partners why they fell for us in the first place.”

By the afternoon, my hair has been transformed by the talented hands at the local salon. Waves fall over my shoulders, framing my face perfectly. My nails are painted a subtle shade of blue to match the dress. And after a run to the grocery store, I’m ready to prepare for my dinner date with Adam.

...

Entering the kitchen, the scent of fresh ingredients fills the air. I’ve splurged on Adam’s favorites—truffle oil, a fine cut of beef, organic vegetables, and a bottle of the best wine I

As I slice the vegetables, Chloe pops her head in. “Need

I chuckle. “You? In the kitchen? Last time you tried to cook, we almost had to call the

She shrugs playfully, her freckles dancing with her smile. “Worth a shot! Just wanted to say that everything

I pull her into a quick hug. “Thanks for being here today,

The setting sun casts a warm orange glow over the dining room as I light the candles. The table is covered in a white lace tablecloth, the silverware gleaming in the soft light. The ambiance feels perfect—romantic and

The centerpiece, a vase of fresh roses, adds a splash of color and a fragrant aroma. As I set the plates down, I imagine Adam’s reaction. He’s never seen me go to this extent for a date night, but recent events, especially my lingering feelings for Karl, have made me desperate to reconnect with my

I check my reflection one last time, smoothing down the dress and applying a fresh coat of lipstick. The anticipation is electric, almost tangible. The wine glasses reflect the flickering candlelight, and I pour a rich red wine into each, the scent a tantalizing promise of the evening

Just as everything is set, Chloe peeks in. “Everything looks divine, Abby. He’s going to be

Chapter 37

Abby

The once golden glow of the candles seems dull now. The shadows in the room stretch longer, a stark contrast to the beautifully set table, pristine and untouched. The wine, once poured with anticipation, sits still, a silent witness to my growing anxiety. The aroma of the truffle oil, once intoxicating, now only serves as a bitter reminder of the love I had poured into preparing for this evening.

The clock on the wall seems to mock me with its relentless ticking, each second stretching into an eternity. My phone lays idle beside me, and the absence of a call or message from Adam weighs heavily on my heart.

Trying to ward off the budding dread, I take a deep breath and dial his number. “Maybe he’s stuck in traffic or something,” I think to myself. “Or, god forbid, he got into an accident.”

After dialing his number, I hold my phone up to my ear with a shaky hand. The soft hum of the ringtone echoes in the silence.

After what feels like a lifetime, he answers. The din of background noises hits me instantly—shouts, laughter, the unmistakable hustle and bustle of his restaurant.

My stomach sinks. He’s working. I should have known better.

“Adam?” My voice quivers slightly.

“Abby? What's up?”

His casual tone catches me off guard, and I try to steady myself. “What’s up? Seriously? You were supposed to be here over an hour ago!”

“Oh...right. About that,” he starts, his voice hurried and distracted. “Look, Abby, I got swamped here. Thought maybe you wouldn’t mind if I sat this one out. You know, have dinner by yourself? You can save me some leftovers for

Tears prick at my eyes, and I feel a twinge of anger. “This wasn’t just about the food, Adam! It was about us, about spending time together, reconnecting. This was about you showing up when you said you would. Just this once, I actually wanted you to follow through with

“Come on, Abby,” he interrupts. “Don’t make a mountain out of a

“But you promised,” I whimper, biting my lip to keep it from quivering. “You

Adam sighs. “I’m sorry, Abbs. I didn’t think it would be that big of a deal. We see each other all the time,

“Really? Like last week, when you took me out?” I counter, sarcasm dripping from my

“Yes,” Adam says, sounding annoyed now. “Just like last week, when I took you out for drinks and dancing—at your request, might

I huff angrily. “Be honest with me, Adam,” I say, pinching the bridge of my nose in annoyance, “you wouldn’t have gone with me if you had been able to work that night. It was only because of the electricity going out at your restaurant and you had nothing better

Silence. I can almost hear him gritting his teeth on the other end, and it's a few moments before he responds. “If I could have gone to work that night, I would have, Abby. You know how important my restaurant is to me. But we still had fun,

I almost feel sick. I knew all along that he would have rather gone to work that night, but hearing it out loud is like reopening a wound.

“C’mon, Abbs,” he prods. “Admit it: we had fun. It was a good night.”

“But it wasn’t about just having fun, Adam,” I hiss. “Yeah, the dancing and the drinks were fun. But you had so much to drink, just like you always do when we’re together. It’s like... It’s like you can’t even be around me unless you’re drunk.”

Adam pauses for a moment. The sounds of the bustling kitchen coming through his end of the phone feel like a cacophony in my ears. I think I can hear him put his hand over the receiver and say something to someone else, and it only makes my blood boil even more. It’s like I’m not even here.

“That’s not true,” he finally says. “Of course I can be sober around you.”

I grit my teeth, not wanting to get into that aspect anymore. I’ve noticed how much Adam likes to drink when we’re together, but that’s his own problem to solve, not mine.

“And after all that, you...” I hesitate, the hurt from that evening flooding back. “You couldn’t even be intimate with me.”

I glance around the room, taking in the details—the vibrant colors of the fresh roses, the gleaming silverware, the gentle sway of the lace curtains from the soft evening breeze. It all seemed so perfect a few hours ago.

Adam is silent again, this time for longer.

“Adam?” I

He clears his throat. “I don’t wanna talk about it,” he says quietly. “Shit happens.”

“But what about us, Adam? What about our relationship?” I ask, my voice catching in my

“I’m trying, Abby. But my restaurant needs me right now, and I can’t be in two places at once. Can’t we just

His nonchalant attitude is the final straw. Tears stream down my face, and I struggle to form words. “Reschedule? How can you even suggest that? I put my heart and soul into tonight. This isn’t some meeting you can just push to

“Listen, I didn’t

I interrupt him, my voice filled with bitterness and hurt. “No, you listen. Every time, Adam. Every. Single. Time. I’ve waited for you at parties, at our own dinners, and now this. You always have an excuse. And now, this is what it;s come to? You blowing me off completely? What’s next, if we get married? Will you be late for the wedding, too? Leave me at

I can hear him sigh deeply, the weight of our past mistakes hanging between us. “Abby,

“Save it,” I cut him off, tears streaming down my face. “I can’t talk about this anymore. I’m worried that if I do, I’ll say something that we’ll

Chapter 38

Abby

The weight of loneliness presses down on me as the pristine table setting lies untouched. The absence of Adam’s presence burns more than any verbal rebuke ever could. Frustration bubbles within me as I glare at the untouched plates of food, each dish meticulously crafted to symbolize the deep affection I hold for him.

“This damned evening...” I mutter under my breath.

My fingers tremble slightly as I quickly text Chloe: “Adam didn’t show. AGAIN.”

Before I can even put my phone down, it’s vibrating, and Chloe’s name flashes across the screen. I take a deep breath and answer. “Hey.”

Chloe wastes no time, her voice thick with worry and frustration. “Abby, what the hell happened? Did he at least call?”

I sigh, trying to hold back my tears. "I waited, Chloe. Set the table, lit candles, even put on that playlist he loves. An hour goes by, and nothing. So I called him. And guess where he is?"

Chloe huffs. "Let me guess. The restaurant?"

"Bingo," I mutter bitterly. "And the best part? He acted like it was just another day. Like he hadn't promised he'd be here just yesterday."

There's a pause on Chloe's end before she says, "Abby, how many times are you going to let him do this? This isn't what love looks like."

My voice cracks a bit as I feel the irresistible urge to defend him, even though I know it's wrong. "But we share so much. The passion for food, our dreams... There are moments, Chloe, where everything feels right. I love him."

Chloe takes a deep breath, "You remember that one time we tried to bake Leah's birthday cake, and we accidentally mistook salt for sugar? On the surface, they looked so similar but tasted worlds apart. Maybe that's Adam. Looks right but isn't good for

I'm taken aback by her words, the truth in them stinging. "... I don't know, Chloe. Maybe I'm afraid of

"And there it is," Chloe murmurs. "You moved on so quickly after Karl. Are you sure it was moving on and not just..."

I bite my lip, fighting the truth in her words. "Adam's not a

"Okay, okay," she concedes. "But look, Abby, he's a workaholic. He's not treating you right. And if you want to end things, know that everyone would

My mind whirls with conflicting emotions. "I need to cool off, think

“Just remember...” Chloe’s voice is soft and comforting. “You deserve happiness. You deserve to be someone’s

A hint of mischief enters my voice as I change the subject. “Hey, speaking of priorities, weren’t you supposed to be on a date

Chloe giggles, and I can imagine her blushing on the other end. “Oh, it was... well, let’s just say it was very

“Wow, Chloe! Leaving so soon? That must’ve

She laughs, and I join in. The comfort of our shared humor momentarily eases my pain. “Let’s just say the date was thrilling, but,

“Thanks for always being there, Chlo,” I say, feeling the weight of the night’s disappointment ease a bit.

“Always,” Chloe replies, warmth evident in her voice. “And remember, you’re not alone. Not really.”

I end the call, my emotions swirling.

I take a sip of the deep crimson wine, its flavor, though rich, now tainted by the bitterness of my disappointment. The dining room is drenched in warm hues from the strategically placed candles, and the glow they cast illuminates the high ceilings and ornate woodwork of my apartment. Every decor detail, chosen with care, seems to mock my solitude.

In a fit of fury, I swipe at a plate of caprese salad, sending cherry tomatoes rolling and scattering basil leaves.

“A waste...” I whisper angrily.

With more force than necessary, I begin scraping the food into the trash. The soft gnocchi, the steaming risotto, the delicate veal. Everything is discarded, just like the promises Adam made. Each dish, symbolic of moments in our relationship, is heartbreakingly thrown away.

I'm mid-way through this cathartic—albeit wasteful—process when an idea, perhaps influenced by the wine, hits me.

“Karl,” I say aloud, the name acting like a beacon in the fog of my anger.

Karl had always been different—reliable, true to his word. He's an asshole, but in those ways, he's the complete antithesis of Adam. And I miss him, and I'm drunk.

Feeling bolder by the second, and perhaps the wine lending a hand, I dial Karl's number. My heart races as I hear the familiar ring on the other end. What am I even doing? What would I say?

“Abby?” Karl's voice breaks through my

Taking a deep breath, I plunge into my impromptu plan. “Hey, Karl. Fancy some

He chuckles softly. “You mean the restaurant

“No,” I laugh, somewhat embarrassed. “I mean at my place. I cooked up a storm, and now I have enough food to feed an army. Care to

Silence stretches between us, but it's more contemplative than awkward. I can almost picture Karl, his brow furrowing, trying to decipher the unexpected

“You know,” he starts, “It's late. Is

I bite my lip, debating how much to reveal. “Adam bailed on me. Again. And I just... I don't want all this effort, all this food, to go

There's a sympathetic pause before Karl responds. "Give me twenty minutes. Can I

I smile, relief flooding through me. "Just yourself. I've got

After ending the call, I take a moment to process what I've just done. The dining room, still beautifully lit by candles, reflects the romantic evening that should have been. Despite the unexpected turn of events, I find myself slightly more hopeful about

I rush into the bedroom to freshen up. My hair is quickly fixed, a few strands rebelliously falling onto my forehead. A splash of perfume and a dab of lipstick later, I

Chapter 39

Abby

The clinking of wine glasses fills the room as I lead Karl into my living room, gesturing toward the elegantly set dining table.

"See?" I say, pointing out the various dishes, which I've rewarmed in the oven since I called Karl. "It's almost restaurant-worthy."

"Almost?" He whistles appreciatively, his eyes scanning the assortment of dishes. "You really went all out. What's the special occasion?"

Glancing down at the black dress that clings to my frame, paired with heels that I'd picked out just for tonight, I feel a flush of embarrassment rise into my cheeks. I knew I was overdressed for just Karl, but it's too late now.

"It was supposed to be a special evening... with Adam," I admit.

Karl's gaze turns inquisitive as he sips his wine. "And he's...?"

"He canceled. Last minute," I reply, feeling the sting of the memory. "Like he always does."

He places his glass down with a sigh. "Abby, I'm sorry."

I wave my hand dismissively, pushing the negativity aside. "Doesn't matter now. Let's eat."

The next hour is filled with lighthearted conversation, punctuated by appreciative comments about the food. We share anecdotes, stories of our own culinary adventures, and jokes about old

As we slowly make our way through bottle after bottle of wine, the room fills with the kind of warmth that only alcohol and good company can

"Never thought I'd see the day when you'd cook for someone else, and it wouldn't be me," Karl muses, a slight slur in

I roll my eyes, but there's a smile on my lips. "Well, maybe if someone hadn't flaked on me so

Karl smirks. "One thing I never did, Abby, was stand you

I snort, feeling the wine making me bolder than usual. "True. But you did something worse. You divorced me,

Karl's smirk fades, replaced by a look of genuine remorse. "I know. Over something that wasn't even your

I lower my gaze, the pain of that memory still raw. "You broke my

We sit in silence for a moment, lost in memories of what once was. The atmosphere grows thick with unsaid words, the weight of our shared past pressing in from

Finally, Karl breaks the silence. "I know, Abby. And I want to make it up

I blink in surprise, staring at him. "You... what?"

“I want to make it up to you,” he repeats, leaning in closer.

The air between us crackles with tension. My mind races, torn between the pain of our past and the pull of the man sitting across from me. I wonder if he’s really changed or if this is just another momentary lapse in his commitment issues.

Our faces are inches apart now. His eyes, once so familiar, now hold a hint of mystery. His breath warms my lips, and for a moment, I’m transported back to a time when we were inseparable.

As we stand close to one another, I’m suddenly reminded of my dream from last week. My face turns an even brighter shade of red than it already was before.

Karl, seeing this, smirks. I feel his broad hands wrap around my upper arms, giving me a gentle squeeze as he begins to backpedal me toward the wall. “What’s wrong?” he murmurs, his voice husky. “Your face got all red.”

I swallow and look away to dispel the images of myself riding on top of him, throwing my head back in ecstasy. “Nothing,” I mutter.

Karl’s smirk widens. I feel the wall come up behind me, leaving me with nowhere to go. Maybe it’s the wine, or my anger for Adam, but I’m not so sure if I would want to leave if I could. I find myself tilting my head slightly, exposing my neck. Karl leans down and brushes his lips across my skin. His touch sends a chill down my spine.

“I knew that you wanted this, Abby,” he murmurs. “I know you’ve missed me. Adam can’t hold a candle to what you and I had.”

My heart wrenches; Karl is right. The wetness between my legs only further proves that point. I want Karl, want to relive what we felt for each other before, want to make my dream a reality. I’ve missed him, and for the first time in three years, I need to have sex with someone who has just as much passion for me as I have for him.

But I can't. I'm supposed to hate Karl for what he did to me all those years ago. The fact that my wolf is still dormant after our divorce is a testament

Karl begins to run his hands along my waist, though, making me shiver and momentarily forget my hatred for what he did, for the lies that he

"I miss you, Abby," he murmurs. "And you miss me, too.

I swallow. Half of me wants to give in and let this happen, but I know I can't, for multiple reasons. I'm still engaged to Adam, first of all. And second of all, I can't forgive Karl. Not after what

Just as I feel the pull of his lips drawing me closer, clarity strikes. I push him away gently but firmly. "Karl, you need to go," I murmur, looking

He looks stunned, his eyes searching mine for answers.

I stand, my head spinning slightly from the wine. "Thank you for coming, but it's late. We'll... we'll see each other at the restaurant another day. If you're still planning on working for me, that

Karl hesitates for a moment, his eyes lingering on mine with a mix of desire and regret. I can see a flash of something familiar behind his brown depths: the stern, hard glare of an Alpha. He's angry. But he quells it, which is unlike

Finally, he nods, standing up. "Thank you for the meal, Abby. It was...

I watch him leave, my heart pounding in my chest. The door clicks shut behind him, leaving me alone with my

Chapter 40

Karl

The sting of rejection pulses through me, acute and raw, as I distance myself from Abby's place.

My footsteps echo through the quiet city streets, the usual hustle and bustle of the nightlife seemingly dimmed tonight. Each step aligns with the rapid beat of my heart.

I can't shake the feel of her, the nearness of our last moment.

Abby looked beautiful. She clearly put a lot of effort into her appearance today; her hair and nails looked freshly done, she was wearing makeup, and a gorgeous dress.

A few years ago, I might have been bothered by the way that she dressed tonight. But lately, for some reason I've been finding myself attracted to it. She's sexy, always has been, but is somehow even sexier now.

But what pisses me off more than anything is that she was dressing like that for another man who doesn't even show any interest in her despite the ring he put on her finger. What gives? Why won't she just leave him already?

Shoving my hands deep into my pockets, I aimlessly kick a small rock ahead of me. Its journey, haphazard and unpredictable, mirrors the state of my own emotions.

"She wanted me," I find myself mumbling aloud, holding onto the raw intensity of our almost-kiss.

My wolf stirs within, a familiar presence anchoring my thoughts. "She did," he rumbles in agreement. "But she held back. If you'd just be patient and let her come to you, she'd see the depth of our love"

"I did let her come to me," I reply. "She's the one who called me tonight. But at the end of it, she still can't stop thinking about that"

My wolf growls in annoyance. "Give

The anger is right there, bubbling at the surface. "Time? And for what? For Adam?" I snap, frustration bleeding into every word. "Who leaves their fiancée high and dry like that? Especially when she clearly put in so much

A car horn in the distance snaps me back momentarily, but my wolf's voice, deeper and more introspective, grounds me again. "She's changed. She's not the young girl we once knew. She's a woman now, more intricate, more nuanced. You have to

Bitterness takes hold. "Did you see her tonight?" I spit. "The lengths she went to for him? The hair, makeup, that dress..." The words come out more as a growl. I don't keep them in my head like I probably should, but say them out loud, unable to contain

And yet, my wolf muses, a soft chuckle punctuating my thoughts. "She resisted you. That tells you

I can't help the growl that rises in my throat, frustration evident. "She wants me. It's palpable. I felt it, every damn

My wolf is calm in his rebuttal, his wisdom clear. "Wanting and acting on it are worlds apart. You broke her heart. She's cautious now. You can't simply push and expect her

I halt, drawing in a deep breath, letting the cold air fill my lungs. It's hard to admit, but there's truth in what my

"You might be right," I murmur, the weight of realization pressing

"Show her the change. Be genuine. Earn her trust," my wolf advises, his tone firm. "A true leader knows when to assert and when to listen."

I take a moment, lost in thought. The journey back to my apartment is nearing its end, and I'm not sure I'm ready to face the solitude of my own space. But I can't wander the streets forever.

"Tomorrow," I whisper to myself, thinking of Abby, of what I need to do. Tomorrow, I'll find a way to show her. My wolf rumbles in agreement, its presence a constant reminder that this fight, this pursuit, is far from over.

...

The evening shadows stretch long against the hardwood floors of my apartment, dancing in harmony with the gentle flicker of a solitary candle on the coffee table.

I'm caught in contemplation, my fingers mindlessly caressing the leather armrest of my chair. It's an old piece, weathered from time and countless brooding sessions—much like the thoughts whirling within my mind.

Adam. The very mention of his name leaves a sour taste in my mouth. Every time I think of him letting Abby down, I'm tempted to intervene. But tonight, it's not just Abby or Adam that burdens my thoughts.

My phone buzzes to life on the table beside me, momentarily breaking my reverie. The screen illuminates Gianna's name, my ever-efficient secretary. Swiping to answer, I keep my voice steady. "What's up, Gianna?"

"Alpha," she starts, a hint of hesitation evident in the tone of her voice, "there's something you should know."

"Go on," I urge,

"Someone's been seen around your foster brother's residence. There's talk that he might be waking up from his coma,"

The news hits me harder than I'd like to admit. My foster brother's reawakening would surely reshape the dynamics of our pack. My grip tightens unconsciously around the phone. "Do we

"No names yet, but I'm

"Keep me posted," I murmur, disconnecting the

The silence of the apartment suddenly feels stifling. Images of a once-bustling house, filled with the laughter and camaraderie of two brothers, come rushing back. But time, with its cruel twists, has changed the narrative. If he does wake, there's no telling how the power balance will

But that's not my main focus right now. I need to focus on Abby. On getting her

A glint from the corner of the room catches my eye. The rare ingredients that I've ordered are finally ready, and I know that once I present them to Adam, he won't be able

Resolute, I decide to act. The city's hues of dawning twilight guide me the next day, the sun casting golden streams through the modern glass buildings, leading me to Adam's

It's an impressive place, a stark contrast to the rustic charm of Abby's restaurant. Opulence drips from every corner—crystal chandeliers, plush velvet seats, and gold-trimmed counters. As I seat myself at the bar, I catch glimpses of the city's elite, lost in their world of gastronomic