

12- Claiming Justice

Ashley pov:

I had fallen asleep on the bed in his arms. I did not know why he did not insist me to go back to my mattress, but I liked his closeness.

The next morning, I woke up when a maid knocked the door for bringing my breakfast. The moment she placed the tray and left, I quickly went to the bathroom and took shower. Justin was no more there beside me.

It did not feel good to eat something without his company. I sat on the bed and removed the lid. When I was placing the lid on the nightstand, my eyes caught a piece of paper. I picked it up and unfolded it.

"Hello, Kitten. I am leaving some more Dorito bags. Enjoy them. And yes! You are ALLOWED to watch TV. Ok? Don't get bored. Once I will be back you can help me with some more calculations."

I was horrified when I realized I was tracing his firm handwriting under my thumb. Oh, Justin. I miss you. I just can't wait for you to return and give me company.

He was a true gentleman who was funny, and mischievous and never tried to touch me without my consent.

Helped me in the bathroom when I got my period.

How can a man like him was still single? Oh, was he single or committed? I don't think he would find anything special in me when I was just a maid in this house.

Almost a nobody.

Sarah pov:

I was away for hardly two weeks, and everything seemed to have changed around here. The place, the Deluca house that used to open its arms for me like I was a queen here, was now giving me strange vibes.

I used to bring my friends here just to let them see how I was treated by Electra Deluca. Justin's granny. How my man used to treat me like no other man would treat any girl.

This was NOT the same place. Helga had been like a mom to Justin. She had been serving him since he was a baby. She was appointed by Justin's mother initially as a governess but later she started doing Justin's small

chores happily.

She continued her job even after Justin's mom passed away.

I needed to do something about this girl. What did Justin call her?

Ashley? Yes, it was Ashley indeed. I needed to show her who was the boss of the house. Justin could not stay home twenty-four-seven. He used to leave for business tours every other month.

As a business partner, I also accompanied him.

Not this time. Not before I kick the girl out of his life and out of this house.

"Granny!" I ran to her with open arms when I saw her coming down the stairs carrying her stick.

"My My. Sarah! How come you are early, sweet!" Granny hugged me and kept me in her embrace for a few moments.

Shella and Nadia both used to get scared by her. I knew she was a difficult person. However, she was loving towards me and Justin both.

She had promised me that she would see me married to Justin before her death.

"I was missing you, granny. And Justin too. Where is he?" I looked around and saw her face going pale.

"Are you alright, granny?" I placed the back of my hand on her forehead, "You don't look well."

"Oh, nothing is happening to me. I am not dying before getting you married to Justin." Her gaze dropped to my friends, "How are you two, girls? Enjoyed the trip? Please have a seat!" Shella and Nadia sat on the sofa placing their handbags on the Centre table, "We will be going back to our place, granny."

Both of them were sharing a luxurious house in the suburbs of Agnith. Several times they spent their nights with me in this house. I also did the same and stayed with them for movie nights and our fun nights.

"Oh, don't be fools!" Granny scolded Shella and Nadia, "You two are not going anywhere. You are Sarah's best friends, and I am not letting you go just like that!"

That's what my friends liked about the Deluca house. They were given VIP protocol just because they were my friends.

I gave them a proud grin and leaned towards granny, "Where is she?"

Electra Deluca huffed with resentment, "Must be in that bedroom. I told her not to leave the room. But the maids told me that she not only left her room once or twice but also accompanied Justin to his study."

I did not remark because I did hear the girl's voice on phone. This was not the time to confirm granny's suspicions.

The girl was c*nnning enough to enter Justin's study. I did not want her to make her way to the dining room. Granny leaned a little towards me, "I think she is also watching TV and using Justin's bed!" She remarked bitterly. I needed to go to Justin's floor and meet the girl myself.

"Where is Justin, granny?" I looked around trying to act nonchalantly like I gave a f*ck where he was. While I just could not wait to meet him and claim him as mine.

I needed him to look at me. To look at my face so that he would remember, that I was the one for him. The one who loves him. The one who can claim him.

13- Her Panties

"Where is Justin, granny?" I sked Electra Deluca,

"He is out for his usual meetings." She pursed her lips in a thin line. I wanted to ask her about Helga but that was not wise in the presence of my friends.

"How is Sean? Is he also accompanying Justin?" I asked taking off my shoes tiredly. By now all I wanted was a comfortable bed and Justin's arms around me.

"Lately, he has been acting weirdly, not responding to my calls. I just don't know what is going on around here!" I wish I could kick the old woman. She was the one who convinced me to get him married to a b*tch!

"Ma'am!" A uniformed maid arrived and stood there lowering her gaze.

"Are their rooms ready? I don't want any complaints!" Granny told her in a strict tone.

"Everything is done, ma'am. Just the way you asked!" the poor girl was talking to the floor and could not wait to run away. Most of the house help called granny, a Hitler.

I wanted to know about that girl but had to wait until we were alone. We were sent to our assigned rooms.

My room was the usual guest room closer to Justin's. While Shella and Nadia were occupying the other rooms in the same corridor.

Everyone here knew about our close-knitted friendship.

"Yes!" I called when I heard the knock. Nadia and Shella peeked inside the door. Like me, they were also freshly showered.

"You are still loading off your bags?" I kept settling my stuff in the built-in cupboards of the room. My father always lived in Europe taking care of the business there while Justin used to take care of the business in the USA.

"When will you meet Justin's wife?" Shella asked me and that made me furious. How dare she?

"She is..." I went near her and held her by her shoulders," NOT Justin's wife." I was seething with anger.

"Sarah!" She tried to push me away, "You are hurting me." She winced when I increased the pressure of my fingers on her bare shoulders.

"Sarah! Are you crazy? Leave her!" Nadia shook me a little trying to put some sense into me. I blinked and realized

what I was doing. With a shock, I got back leaving her shoulders, "I... I am sorry, Shella. I am so sorry."

I did not know what got into me.

"It's ok, mate." She was rubbing her shoulders, "We know you are possessive about him. You need to do something about that girl. Today I am calling her, Justin's wife. Tomorrow whole world might be doing the same. You can't hold everyone's tongue."

She was right. I needed to do something about it,

"Stay here." With my chin up and shoulders squared, I walked to the door, "I am going to Justin's room."

Justin was not home so I did not need that girl's permission to enter the room. Without bothering to knock on the door, I twisted the handle and stepped inside.

The room was dimly lit because of the lights emitting from the LED TV. I could hear the strange sounds mixed with those dramatic echoes. Maybe the sound of a wrapper? Blended with the TV sound? Granny was right. She was watching TV along with some munching.

Fumbling with the switches, I switched on the lights and closed my eyes when the room was highly lit.

Gradually when I opened my eyes, I saw a girl sitting on the bed. Her one arm was covering her eyes due to sudden light and the other hand was holding a big bag of Doritos.

She kept sitting like this for a few moments. Slowly she removed her hand and narrowed her eyes blinking a little. "Who is this?" She spoke not sure what to expect.

Open your eyes, bitch, and look at me. I commanded her silently. She took some more time and then her curious eyes, ran over me from head to toe.

She was examining me... weighing me.

Placing the bag beside her she stood up slowly wiping her hands with her cotton skirt. Gosh! I wanted to laugh so badly.

Granny was insecure for nothing. The girl was wearing strange clothes, like an oversized blouse and a long skirt. Her hair was messy but silky.

Her lower face was stuck with what looked like crumbles. She must have known what I was thinking because she immediately wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Do I know you, ma'am?" She was the first to speak. Except for her black hair and green eyes, there was nothing exceptional on her face.

"I don't think you are allowed to sit on that bed and watch TV." I knew I was being rude. But it was supposed to be that way.

I could not let her go out of my hands. She seemed to be nervous under my scrutinizing gaze. The spot where she was seated was filled with wrappers and crumbs.

I frowned when my eyes landed on the dirt and traveled back to her. She followed my gaze and I saw traces of shame in it.

"I am sorry, ma'am. I was just about to clean it!" She said with a fake sweet smile, but her fidgeting fingers were a telltale sign of how nervous she was.

"Sorry? You are sorry for not following the rules? You are getting ten million dollars by the end of this bargain. And here you are breaking all the rules!" I stepped forward to slap her face.

She might have sensed it and stepped back looking a little scared.

This was enough for today. That was the required reaction I wanted. I needed to leave the room now.

"Ma'am. I am sorry. It won't happen again. I will clean up this mess and switch off the TV." She murmured still looking down.

"Please do that!" I flipped my hair and before turning on my heels I warned her, "And yes. You better stay away from my fiancé! Ok?"

"Your fiancé?" She frowned and her head shot up, "Who is your fiancé?"

I chuckled, "Your husband! He is my fiancé! Better stay away from him. You bet an eye on him and I swear..."

Her eyes went wide and then I did not know what got into her, "Are you out of your fuc*kin mind?"

"Excuuuse meee?" I could not believe, she was the same girl who was being so polite just a few moments back.

"You think I will like looking at your fiancé? Your, Fiancé. Is. Yuck!" She even got out her tongue as if she wanted to puke.

"Girl! Just be within your limits. Ok?" I wanted to strangle her neck.

"I am within my limits. You ask your fiancé to stay within his limits. I would like to jump off a cliff before even attempting to make a pass on him. He sucks. He is an a*sshole."

This girl! I needed to teach her a lesson.

"The room you are living, the roof under which you are breathing, the food you are eating. It all belongs to my fiancé."

"I give a shit to whomever it belongs to. If you don't like your fiancé staying here, then better keep him inside your panties so that he won't put his hand in my panties!"

What? Justin tried to... He tried to be intimate with her?

And what kind of girl was she? She was not happy with the attention she was getting from Justin? Was she asexual or something?

What was going on here? Justin never tried to put his hand in my panties.

What was so special about her panties?

14- My Heart

Ashley pov:

By now I was seething with anger. How dare she!

She thought I would be after her fiancé just because he was rich and was married to me. I was trying to control my fury by balling my fists tightly.

Justin told me to become a lioness. He was damn right.

I should not allow anyone to take advantage of me. The girl before me was undoubtedly beautiful. She had red curls around her perfectly featured face.

Her body from head to toe spoke of wealth. Her clothes seemed hell expensive. She was wearing a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes.

She kept looking at my face then her nostrils flared up and she turned on her heels to leave the room. Her tone was so insulting when she tried to remind me of my contract marriage conditions.

I switched off the TV and started cleaning the bed.

"It's ok, Ashley. Your life is precious. Everything that happens in our lives is necessarily not there to make us feel happy. Sometimes we need to pay the price for our happiness." Mother Superior lectured me in my head.

I tried to push back the moistness in my eyes. I was missing my first home and I could not make a call to my friends or Mother Superior who was admitted to the hospital. The bag that got lost had my phone too in it.

Leaving the Doritos bags on the nightstand I scurried to my mattress. The same old corner that was supposed to belong to me for one year.

I no longer knew what else to do so I opened the window blinds partially and peeked out. It was a beautiful sunny day, and I just could not wait to go outside.

Oh, I was a pro when it came to sneaking out of the windows. Though Eden orphanage had strict policies, but our friends' group usually made it out of the window.

The sneaking out activity was carried out with such precision that we never got caught.

We never did it in broad daylight though.

I tiredly let my body drop on the wide window slab and lean my cheek to the blinds. What else could I do except lie on my mattress and go to sleep? But how could I sleep when I just woke up hardly two hours back?

I hoped they would not mind me sitting here. I could not risk opening the blinds completely.

I did not know how much time I spent sitting there looking at the lush green lawn, when I heard the door knock, I bolted up straight. I hoped my husband's fiancé did not complain to him. I did not want to face that asshole!

"Hey!" Justin came inside and furrowed his brows when saw me sitting near the window, " What are you doing

there, kitten?"

He must have observed Doritos packs that were untouched, "Strange! You did not eat them?"

I shook my head in the answer without looking back.

I could see his reflection in the glass taking off his jacket and tossing it on a sofa before closing the distance between us.

Even his reflection was se*xxy as f*ck! Now why this absurd thought crossed my mind?

"Ashley!" I could feel him standing behind me, but I did not turn around. Why he was even here? Who was he?

Why was I asked to marry that bullshit man when he already had a fiancée?

"Kitten!" I felt his hands placed on my shoulders. He wanted me to turn around and face him.

"Justin! Leave me alone!" I knew I was upset, and it was not Justin's fault. Poor him had been there for me this whole time.

"No. I am NOT going anywhere. This is not happening, kitten. Get up. Did you have your food? How many movies did you watch?" He was trying to make conversation.

"None."

"None? Why?" This time he forced me to face him by turning my

chin.

"Because I am not allowed to!" I shoved away his hand lightly.

I turned back my face and kept looking outside, "Did you have your breakfast, Ashley?" I heard it again and it warmed my heart that there was someone for me who was hell worried.

A lone tear escaped my eye.

"I am asking you something, kitt..." He brought his face near mine and caught the tear on his index fingertip.

"Ashley?" This time he was worried for me. Without warning, without giving me a chance to argue he scooped me up from there in his strong arms.

This time something different happened. Instead of placing me on the mattress he sat on the sofa and made me sit on his lap.

"You want to cry? Here I am." The man was offering his shoulder to lean on and his chest to get wet by my tears.

His t-shirt was tightly clenched in my fists as I leaned my head on his chest. His hands were rubbing my back trying to console me.

His grip tightened when my shoulders started shaking while crying.

"Ashley!" I felt him placing his cheek on my head. We stayed like this for quite some time. When I was all done with my weeping session, then I realized that I needed something to sniff my nose.

I quickly tried to scan the room for a napkin nearby.

"Done with your crying?" He asked me, all amused for some reason. But that amusement was short lived when I wiped my nose with his t-shirt.

"KITTEN!" His horrified voice boomed in the room making me laugh, "THIS IS MY FAVORITE
T-SHIRT!"

His eyes were wide with the reaction. And that I found more hilarious than ever. He kept looking into my eyes and then started shaking his head,

"Was that the reason Eden Garden let you go? Because you used to cry all the time and then sniff your nose with their clothes?" He narrowed his eyes by the end of the statement.

"No," I laughed, "It's just that... your t-shirt smelled so nice!"

"Oh?" His eyes were now dancing with mischief. He gave a light playful punch on my cheek, " So all the things that smell nice get to wipe your..."

"Ouch! Justin! Stop it. I am sorry, ok? It was ... just... just... a sudden reaction..." He was nodding his head with stars still shining in his eyes.

"Justin. Stop it! I am serious!" I leaned my forehead on his shoulder which was now shaking with laughter.

"You must be hungry!" He whispered gently and I nodded my head without lifting it up.

"Yes, I am. Can you intercom someone to bring us anything that is available?" I knew it was not lunch time so by now kitchen must be closed or something.

"Why ask them to bring it here when we can go out and have it in the dining area?" I frowned and looked up. I must have imagined it.

He was interested in having snacks with me at that dining table? But what about my creepy husband? If he would be there, he might make things harder for me.

And what about my creepy husband's super creepy fiancée?

And to top it all!

That old goat might create havoc if she would see me there. She might get a heart attack and die.

Just this morning this fancy pants fiancée warned me not to break the rules so that I won't lose my ten million. I looked into Justin's amber eyes and sighed.

I was ready to sacrifice my ten million dollars for him. But what about Mother Superior? Eden garden already had taken loans for her treatment.

She did not have any health insurance policy.

“Why is it taking so long for you to decide, kitten? Is something bothering you?”

I shook my head and snaked my arms around his neck. Strange that I was not feeling weird sitting on his lap. It was giving me an old couple vibe.

“Going out in the open with you might cost me losing ten million dollars, Justin.” He tried to open his mouth to argue but also closed it when I continued, “And I would never regret losing it if it was not about Mother Superior. She was the one who practically did my brought up since I was a baby.”

I could see the surprise in those magical eyes. It seemed like he was having difficulty believing that I was willing to sacrifice my money just to have his company.

“She needs money?” He asked me touching his nose tip with my cheek. Yup! We were that close.

I moved my head in affirmation while playing with his t-shirt garment, “She is getting cancer treatment.”

His mouth formed an O when he heard that.

“Don’t worry. You will not lose your money. No matter what happens!”

"Are you sure?" The messy bun was half opened by now, letting my hair tendrils fall on my face.

Smiling at me he started shifting back my hair, "Yeah. I give you, my word."

Uh, oh. Justin! Stop looking at me like this!

How I wanted to kiss those luscious lips! And then something alien happened. I started getting a strange tingling in all my sensitive spots.

My core, my boobs, and my heart!

15- Next Thirty Minutes

Sarah pov

After I was done with that girl, I felt light. I stormed out of her room and went straight to bed. I needed my nap to clear the fog off my mind.

Initially, I was upset when I heard her accusation against Justin then something dawned on

1. me.

She was saying these things because she knew Justin did not belong to her. She could never have Justin. And that was the reason for her whining.

Like other girls, she knew she could never have Justin.

That brought a smile to my face. Due to her stupid blaming game, I missed my lunch too. I did not know if my friends had it or not.

“Wake up, bit*ch. You are killing us by keeping us hungry for so long!” I got up still in my half sleeping mind.

“Nadia?”

I stretched and tried to open my eyes. I saw two shaking images of my friends, "I am sorry. again closed my eyes and hit my head on the pillow, "I thought you two already had lunch.'

"We thought you went to Justin's room. Where were you?"

"Umm. I did go there. She is a true bi*tch!" I spat in anger and the good thing was it helped my sleeping mind to wake up.

"She is a bi*tch? Why? What did she do?" I felt the edge of my bed dip when Shella sat close to me. Concern was dripping from her tone.

"I will tell on the dining table!" I tried stifling a yawn, "Just give me five minutes, and then we can do some snacking there."

"Make it fast. And please don't forget. We are watching a romantic movie tonight!" I stopped

in my

tracks when I heard Nadia.

"No, Nadia! I can't." I said without turning towards them, "My fiancé needs my time. I will spend the night with him." With that, I entered the bathroom.

“How dare she?” Granny was trying to keep her calm, but I could see anger radiating from her eyes. I had told my friends and granny about the conversation with that maid.

Granny chose well. She was right when she said she was not beautiful.

But that maid might get out of control if we won't do something about it.

“Leave her, granny.” I said while pushing a bite-sized chicken sandwich in my mouth, Ignore her. Let's not discuss her. She is not worth our time. She might be doing it to get our attention. She is not groomed like us. And you do know Justin. How picky he is about everything! His food. His clothes and even me. His fiancée!”

I tried to console her while putting a proud grin on my face. Everyone knew Justin chose me! I

was his one and only choice.

“She is right granny!” Nadia said while taking a sip of green tea, “Justin always liked refined women. This one doesn't have any comparison with Sarah—We need to ignore her gibes. She must be a nobody and should be treated like one.”

Granny gave her a subtle smile and kept drinking her coffee. At this age, she was still so active. She never touched alcohol in her life.

“Initially I was planning to offer her one million amount.” Granny said, “Justin convinced me to make it ten. If she

won't honor the contract then I am afraid, she might leave empty handed.

The moment she would leave, I will make sure that she doesn't get what was decided. She was here as a maid. Not as an owner of the house. It's just been a few days and it seems she has forgotten who she really is. And doesn't remember which class she belongs to."

Granny seemed pissed by her.

"My grandson is someone people can't take their eyes off him so easily. And here you are telling me that she called him bullshit. Blamed him for something so low. Justin would never even bat an eye on someone like her. What does she think of herself?"

I quickly stood up and went to her, "Granny! You will make yourself sick. Please don't get worried by her words. They do not hold any importance to us. We all know that she was just beating about the bush. Please relax." I bent down to hug her slim and tiny figure.

That bitch clearly wanted attention and was succeeding in it. I will make sure that she leaves the place empty-handed.

"Relax. Ok? She can't do a thing. If you want to kick her out you need to stay strong, granny." I kissed her white-haired head.

I felt her going relaxed in my embrace. She was doing deep breathing exercises to control her

emotions.

I walked back to my chair and sat beside my friends.

"By the way, granny. Any idea, when Justin would be back? I was wondering if he could join us for coffee."

Now granny's forehead wrinkled into several lines, "You mean to say he hasn't met you yet?"

"No. He hasn't." I smiled, "He is not home since I arrived. Remember?" I felt her body going tensed again.

"What is it, granny?" I asked her in concern.

"Justin came home around half an hour ago. And you haven't met him yet?"

What? Justin was home? Maybe he did not know that I had arrived?

"I did tell him that you are back!" Granny said. Now it was my turn to get shocked.

He knew that I had returned. Still, he...

Granny's voice did not let me speak, "I hope she hasn't stopped him from coming here."

"Don't worry." I sighed, "She doesn't deserve our time!" I tried to spread my lips for a fake smile when the door to the dining room opened and I heard a familiar heavy voice from the doorway.

“Who doesn't deserve your time, Sarah?”

I looked up and my mouth hung open when I saw Justin entering the dining room with that pathetic girl. She was still dressed in that ludicrous skirt blouse.

There was still that strange loose bun on her head.

Ha-ha. She was scared and was walking behind Justin as if she was expecting him to shield her.

Who was she? A damsel in distress? Or was she acting like one?

Just a few hours back she told me that she did not want to do anything with her husband and now she could not seem to wait to cling to him like a magnet.

Huh!

So now, the bitch was able to accomplish the chance to make her way to the dining room! Come on, bi*tch!

Be my guest!

I will try my best to make Justin realize that you are not an innocent fairy. But I did not know, that in the next thirty minutes she would do the honors herself.

16- Disbelief

Ashley Walters pov

I did not know why Justin decided to take me to the dining area when Electra Deluca forbade me to leave my room.

Maybe because I was upset? Or because he might be feeling guilty for getting me stripped of my basic right of leaving the room?

The conditions ma'am Electra offered me while signing the contract seemed lucrative by that time but now, I realized what a fool I had been.

They denied me my basic right, and I said yes. Without even thinking!

"Who deserves your time, Sarah?" Justin announced as soon as he opened the door. We both knew that she was talking about me.

She was such a good actor that the frown lines that appeared on her forehead disappeared in a jiff when she saw me.

The woman knew how to control her emotions when needed. Right now, she could not unleash the crazy bi*tch hiding behind her beautiful face.

I felt jealousy surging through my heart when I saw her standing up and approaching Justin with that sexy smile. Her red curls were bouncing with each step.

When she came to my room this afternoon, I could not see her face properly. But in one glance I guessed, she was beautiful.

Now her eyes reminded me of someone. Maybe some actress. I tried to think hard but could not remember the name. They were quite familiar.

She reached close to Justin and wrapped her arms around his neck, "Justin!" She looked up into his
and I forgot to breathe.

eyes

This hug was not the one, you would give to your husband's cousin or assistant. This was more like an intimate hug.

On the other hand, Justin placed his hands on her shoulders as if he did not want that closeness. She was trying to stick to him and even attempted to kiss him right on his lips. Justin was quick to turn away his face to avoid that kiss.

Her lips landed on his cheek.

This impulse to push her away from him crossed my mind and I tried to control my hands by balling them into

fists.

This morning she warned me to stay away from my husband who was supposed to be her fiancé. And now look at her.

What was she doing right now? Trying to kiss the only one who was like a friend to me in this house.

"How are you, Justin? Missed me?"

"I am good!" Justin just replied to the first part of her query but did not respond to her '

Missed me' part, "Did you meet Ashley?" He pulled me forward to meet her.

"Ashley. Meet Sarah." Turning to her, he smiled, "This is Ashley, and today she would be joining us at this table. Though she did not want to come out..." He eyed granny, "But no one can resist me if I put my mind to it."

I could feel the strong presence of Electra Deluca. Her eyes were causing goosebumps on my body.

"How are you, pretty girl!" He left my hand and went to ma'am Electra, "You are getting beautiful day by day!"

Now that was cute. He was trying to cheer her up just like he was doing it with me a few minutes back in the room.

"Thanks, Justin." She replied in a clipped tone.

Right now, the girl whose name was Sarah was ignoring me like I did not exist there. She was also giving strange signs to ma'am Electra when she thought no one was watching.

There were two girls who were still seated, examining me from head to toe and whispering to each other in hushed tones. I did not have any difficulty, guessing that they were discussing

1. me.

Hooked down at my baggy clothes and tried to straighten my blouse. I knew I did not look much presentable.

There was laughter in their eyes.

"Justin. Have you met Nadia and Shella!" Sarah spoke again and tilted her head meaningfully looking at her friends.

Justin just nodded at them to acknowledge their presence.

He quickly pulled out a chair. Sarah was about to step towards it when Justin looked me in the eye and motioned me to sit on it, "Sit down, Ashley!"

Sarah's smile weakened. I tried to control the laughter and succeeded to kill it in my throat. He quickly took the seat beside me.

"So, what have we got here?" He ran a quick glance at the ceramic trays carrying bite-sized sandwiches, and hummus with pita bread, "We both are so hungry!" He said to no one in particular.

"We have a fruit bowl too!" He pointed towards a white ceramic bowl that had fruit chunks neatly cut.

He started filling my plate with different things.

"I ... I... this is too much, Justin!" I tried to stop him with throaty laughter. I was getting hell nervous because the other ladies in the room were looking at me like they would eat me alive. It was Justin's presence that was stopping them to do anything.

I did not know if they made a wish to Santa Clause. Because just then Justin's cell decided to ring non-stop.

"Oh. It's from work." He frowned at his phone and pushed back his chair with the back of his knee to stand up.

"I am just outside the door." He whispered and I was sure they all heard him.

Once he was out of the door, we could still hear him talking on the phone.

There was just quietness. The calmness one expects before the storm.

"So!" A girl whose name might be Nadia or Shella, spoke for the first time, "Which brand are you wearing, girl?" She was trying to make fun of my clothes.

"Oh. Shut up, Shella!" Sarah tried to bat her eyes quite dramatically, "These are not her clothes. She borrowed it

from someone. Right, Pashley? Maybe your elder sister?"

The way she tried to make fun of my name her friends started giggling like fools.

"So, tell me, Pashley!" She placed her chin on her fist and bat her lashes again, "Have you ever seen so much food being placed on the dining table?"

I never knew Sarah could be this rude. I was not the one who offered myself for marriage to her fiancé. Why can't she take it out on that old goat who was just glaring at me with those small, narrowed eyes?

"Don't you have the answer, Pashley? Baby Pashley wants to cry?" Sarah curved down her lips and started wiping fake tears from her face.

How did she know that I wanted to cry? Oh, maybe she noticed my quivering lips?

Whatever it was! I was not going down without trying... without giving a fight. Justin asked me to be a lioness. Not a damsel in distress!

I lifted my eyelids to look into her eyes. She was still batting those lashes.

"You..." I cleared my throat, "You should stop doing that. You know?"

"Stop doing what?" She asked me with an attitude, "Stop asking you questions, petty Pashley?"

"No. The way you are blinking those fake lashes. They might fall down!" I wasn't sure if they heard me or not.

Because not only Sarah's but her two minions' jaws were touching the floor.

And then Sarah's friend whose name might be Nadia choked on the water she was drinking.

Shella quickly looked down at the tabletop, but I did not miss the praise in her eyes.

"How dare you!" Sarah's face was slowly turning into a witch's, "Have you ever visited a salon? I don't think so. Have you ever even taken a bath? You smell of Justin's body wash!"

God! She was a spoiled brat!

"I smell of him not because of that body wash but because we cuddle a lot." I rolled my eyes with a smile, "Like a lot if you know what I mean!"

I winked and focused my attention on the plate Justin made for me. I was hell hungry, but I wanted to wait for Justin.

Please Justin, come soon. Otherwise, they will rip away my already shattered confidence.

My remark of cuddling must have blown away Sarah's mind because clenching her hands, she stood up from her chair.

I was sure she wanted to slap me. Just then the door opened, and Justin came inside.

Seeing Sarah standing in her seat made him stop momentarily, "What happened? You, alright?" His eyes traveled from her to my face.

"Yes!" Sarah's facial expressions changed in an instant, "I was just telling her how she smells like you. I would love to gift her some of my things."

There was a strain-free smile on her lips. How could she change her mood in a matter of seconds?

Justin came back beside me, "You haven't even started, kitten." He brought the one-bite sandwich to my mouth, "Open your mouth. Eat it."

Quite obediently I did what he asked and started chewing it. He even poured me coffee while talking to granny.

"Justin! Agora Internationals are dying to meet you. Better set an appointment to meet them." Granny told him trying to act normal as if she gave a f*ck if I was there or not.

"Yes, Justin. Granny is right. Last time they made so many calls to Kyle." Sarah also joined the business-related convo.

I sat there quietly chewing my food and a little fascinated by the topic. While talking casually Justin's arm came around the chair, I was sitting.

If Sarah noticed it, she did not let it show. They all were hypocrites who knew how to keep their emotions in control.

Her friends were whispering to each other so that they won't disturb the ongoing discussion. I was the only one without company.

Without making anyone realize Justin placed a donut on my plate. I was eyeing it for so long.

He was acknowledging my presence.

The door suddenly opened, and someone entered the dining hall, "You people having coffee without me?"

The voice was familiar. The hair on my nape stood up.

"Sean!" Sarah beamed and stood up with her arms outstretched.

This was the same man who...

Oh my God! How dare he!

I did not know what came into me.

"Kitten! You alright?" I heard Justin's whisper but ignored it. This man whom Sarah called Sean was taking her in his embrace. He did not notice me yet.

I could not contain the anger and without thinking I stood up and climbed the dining table. The ceramics made clanking sounds when I shifted it to one side making room for myself. Before anyone could utter a word or Justin could stop me, I crawled to the other side pushing the plates off my way.

The plates were down on the floor, shattering, making a mess on the floor.

I had become immune to the sounds. The moment the man's

eyes

fell on my

face his eyes

went wide.

Before he could say anything I not only reached him but also held his collar, "You piece of shit! How dare you? You mot*her fu*cker."

"What is she trying to do?" I heard one of Sarah's minions but chose to ignore her. I was a

lioness.

"Girl! Leave him!" I heard the old goat's voice behind me.

“No matter who you are!” I spat in anger, “I won’t spare you!” I lifted my hand and slapped tight on his cheek.

Placing his hand on his cheek he looked at me in disbelief.

17- The undefeatable

Sarah's pov

The girl had gone crazy. She not only slapped Sean but was also clawing his face using her nails. Justin who had initially gone still, frowned, and then there was a murderous look on his

face.

He quickly rounded the table and went to her. Sean who was shocked, now was getting beaten silently. What happened to him? Why was he not responding to the pain she was inflicting on him?

"Kitten!" Justin called her.

This was the second time I heard him calling that. He never used any nickname for me except for a usual and rare sweetheart.

That's it.

"Leave me, Justin!" She screamed, "I won't spare him. How dare he? How dare you, mister!"

"Kitten! Honey!" Justin wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her gently. He was so gentle with her as if she was made of glass and that was making me hell jealous.

There was something odd about this. I just could not seem to put my finger on it.

One moment he was hell angry at Sean and the next moment he was trying to console her. This soft side of him was only reserved for me.

Why was he showing it to her? She was just a maid.

No. I could not bear to lose him. He was mine. He would remain mine.

"STOP!" All of us heard the booming voice of granny ringing in the room. In all this fiasco, we had almost forgotten about her, "Move this girl away from Sean, Justin!" Justin who was still looking at Sean like he wanted to kill him did not move an inch from his place.

"Justin! I said, move her away! NOW!" Ashley who had gone quiet was still clutching Sean's collar in her hand.

Justin tried to pull her towards him, but she stubbornly did not budge from her place.

"I am not leaving him, Justin." She muttered under her breath, but all of us heard her anyway.

Justin held her fist that was clutching Sean's shirt and very gently pulled it away from her grip. When she left the shirt, he did not let go of her hand.

He even turned her to him and hugged her, "It's ok. I am here with you. I won't spare him. Whatever, he did. He would pay for it!"

What was he saying? Why was he saying that? What did Sean do? Oh, Sean. You did something stupid and

unintentionally you pushed Justin towards her.

Right now, I was not liking how he was so close to her, and I needed to do something about it.

"Whatever I did..." Sean spoke for the first time, "It ... just happened. I ... I am ... so sorry, please!"

"Enough, Sarah!" He raised his hand, "I know you better than Justin. And I know very well what you are capable of doing. Justin might be an intelligent dog. But he doesn't know one bit about you."

What did he think of himself? Why was he spitting hatred when he was the one who took advantage of that maid?

I went to him and held his collar, "There are so many girls in this world, Sean. So many beautiful and pretty girls. You have money. Looks. There is nothing you haven't got. You could get any girl of your choice. And see what you did to me. To us! She was supposed to spend one year in a corner of Justin's room. And today she had snacks with us on this dining table reserved only for family and friends who belong to our class. She joined Justin in his office..."

"What!" That got granny and Sean's attention. Their eyes were wide in shock. I nodded my head leaving his collar and giving him a little shove.

"Yes. Justin took her to his office. He even allowed her to munch there." I folded my arms under my bo*obs.

"Don't be silly." Granny waved her hand nonchalantly, "Justin would never take anyone to his office. I don't believe you!"

"For your information, Justin shared this tidbit when I called him last time from my trip. He told me that she was there helping him. Or you both are so crude that you just can't understand what that girl is up to. She got the chance because of you, Sean. You don't have anything to lose. You will still be getting money from granny no matter if you choose to live here or somewhere else. But I am losing my fiancé. Because he was there to console her when you took advantage. Before that, he did not even bother if she existed or not."

I was panting by now.

"Sean. Let me make one thing clear. If Justin ever decided to ditch me. I swear I will wring your neck with my bare hands." With that, I stormed out of the room. By now I was getting a

headache.

I was sauntering to my room when I saw the door to Justin's room closed. They both were together behind this closed door.

I needed to disturb them.

No, maid. You are not getting privacy with my fiancé.

I knocked and heard the bi*tch answering yes. Like the room belonged to her.

"Justin! Ashley!" I went inside and my eyes were on Justin's hand touching her cheek, "I am here to ask about you, Ashley!"

When she did not respond I went to them and held her hand in both of mine, "Ashley. I think I misunderstood you. I am so sorry for what Sean did..."

I managed some moistness in my eyes. I hoped she would take the hint of not telling Justin what I said to her in this room and at that dining table. Those words were mean, it was foolish of me to say them.

"Not only Justin but I am also responsible for it..." I wanted to tell Justin and her that this house belonged to me as much as Justin. Because I was the one who would be looking after this mansion officially in the future.

But then the girl said the most outrageous thing.

"You cannot blame yourself, Sarah, when you are not the culprit. You can't blame yourself for something you never intended to do. The blame lies with your fiancé. Not you."

I frowned and looked up at Justin, not understanding what that dumb girl was trying to say. "Excuse me?" I smirked. Was I missing something? Why was she blaming Justin when Sean was the culprit?

"Sarah. Can you please go outside? I need to talk to her." Justin kind of pleaded to me.

I nodded at Justin and turned to her, "My fiancé? I don't think Justin did anything except to give you respect. I am talking about Sean, Ashley."

Now it was her turn to get confused. It did not seem like she was faking it. But seriously I still thought she was dumb.

"Sarah. I said please go out..." Justin asked me again. And this time he seemed desperate.

"Wait a minute, Justin." The maid made him quiet and pulled away her hand that was in my grip, "Sarah. I am not talking about Justin. I am talking about that dork whom you people were calling Sean. He was the one who ... I mean..." She licked her lower lip, "He tried to molest me. He is your fiancé. Right?"

This time I could not contain the laughter bubbling up in my throat, "Honey! You seem delusional. No. Sean is not my fiancé."

Now she was no more attentive to Justin. Justin tried to hold her shoulder, "Ashley!"

But this Pashley held my shoulders this time and asked me, "Then who is your fiancé, Sarah?"

I smiled and chewed my lower lip pointing towards Justin, "This man. Justin. He is my fiancé. I said fondly.

When she did not speak and kept looking with that dumb expression. I spoke again, "Oh please don't tell me you don't know your husband. You did not marry Sean. You married Justin."

My Gosh! How dumb one can be!

She was a certified dumbass!

18- Sean is not my fiancé

Ashley's pov

For the first time, I saw the sincerity in this girl's eyes. I was happy that forgetting our differences she took a stand for me.

She slapped her husband for me! For a maid!

"Thank you, Sarah," Justin told her softly and she nodded trying to shift back the hair that was falling from my bun.

"Come on. Let's get you to your room." Justin told me and held my hand. Before leaving the room, I did not miss the threatening look he gave to my husband.

By now I was genuinely interested. In no way Justin was his elder brother.

Nah!

My husband was the only son. Then who was Justin to the family?

"Justin?" I called him while walking to the room, "Who are you?"

"What?" He chuckled, "I am Justin I guess."

We stopped walking and he started tucking my hair behind my ear.

"No. Not that. I mean what is your relation to this family? Cousin? Assistant? Some relative?" I felt his body going tense.

"I... I am..." I was waiting for him to speak and for the first time, I found him hesitant about something.

Holding my hands, he looked up at the ceiling and closed his eyes to sigh deeply, "This is proving to be more frustrating and more difficult than I could imagine." He murmured more to himself, "Come on. Let's go to your room first."

I could not understand what he meant.

Once inside the room, I did not sit on the bed or mattress. I just kept looking at him questioningly.

"Y... You want coffee?" He asked me and then sauntered to the intercom device, "You could not finish your coffee there.

He was asking someone to bring me coffee and it warmed my heart. He was se*xy, funny intelligent. Yet he cared for me.

"Kitten. I need to talk to you. I need to tell you something. Can you promise to listen to me patiently?" He held my elbow and all I wanted to do was trace his strong jawline having one day's old whiskers.

I giggled nervously and hugged him, "Why do you sound so ..." I could not find the right word for it, "Scared or should I say..."

"I am scared, kitten. Hell scared!" He pulled me to his chest and engulfed me in that big hug. I smiled leaning my cheek on his chest.

Like always he smelled good. I did not know why he chose to befriend me. The girl who used to dress shabbily did not know how to carry out a decent conversation.

"What is it, Justin?" I raised my face to him and secretly wished to kiss him, "You are scaring me, Justin!" I said eyeing his lips briefly.

He was quietly looking into my eyes. Shaking his head, he cupped my cheek, "Kitten! I ..."

There was a knock on the door.

Instead of Justin, I answered it, "Yes?" I hoped it was not my husband. I don't think he would have enough courage to step into this bedroom.

"Justin! Ashley!" Sarah came inside and her gaze was on Justin's hand touching my cheek, "I was here to ask about you, Ashley!"

I did not like this intrusion. Justin wanted to talk to me about something private and here she was sabotaging our privacy.

When I did not respond to her, she came near us and held my hand in both of hers, "Ashley. I think I misunderstood you. I am so sorry for what Sean did..."

She had moistness in her eyes.

"Not only Justin but I am also responsible for it..." What?

Did she really mean it?

Sarah's pov

When Justin left with Ashley, I saw granny standing up slowly from her place.

"We will meet you later, Sarah," Nadia whispered in my ear before exiting the room with Shella. They had witnessed more than enough family drama.

"Sean. Was the girl telling the truth?" Granny asked him in a stern tone. The poor man got slaps from Ashley and me.

Now, this was granny's turn. I just could not imagine what Justin would do to him.

"Granny! Can you all please cut me some slack? It was a mistake. I apologized! What do you expect me to do?"

Hang myself? Suicide?" His voice raised in anger.

"Keep it down, boy! Keep it down!" Granny said silkily, "Justin won't like it if he would come to know you tried to disrespect me.'

"Ahan! And who will tell him? You? Some servant?" And then his eyes turned to me, "Or Sarah!"

For a minute a tremor ran through my spine.

"Sean!" I tried to speak, "You ..."

"Shut up!" He spat, "You got what you wanted! Congratulations! You scored the points in front of Justin's eyes. Happy now?"

"No, Sean! It's not like that. You ..." I could not afford his hatred. He could help me in getting back my fiancé.

"Enough, Sarah!" He raised his hand, "I know you better than Justin. And I know very well what you are capable of doing. Justin might be an intelligent dog. But he doesn't know one bit about you."

What did he think of himself? Why was he spatting hatred when he was the one who took advantage of that maid?

I went to him and held his collar, "There are so many girls in this world, Sean. So many beautiful and pretty girls. You have money. Looks. There is nothing you haven't got. You could get any girl of your choice. And see what you

did to me. To us! She was supposed to spend one year in a corner of Justin's room. And today she had snacks with us on this dining table reserved only for family and friends who belong to our class. She joined Justin in his office..."

"What!" That got granny and Sean's attention. Their eyes were wide in shock. I nodded head leaving his collar and giving him a little shove.

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my

"Don't be silly." Granny waved her hand nonchalantly, "Justin would never take anyone to his office. I don't believe you!"

"For your information, Justin shared this tidbit when I called him last time from my trip. He told me that she was there helping him. Or you both are so crude that you just can't understand what that girl is up to. She got the chance because of you, Sean. You don't have anything to lose. You will still be getting money from granny no matter if you choose to live here or somewhere else. But I am losing my fiancé. Because he was there to console her when you took advantage. Before that, he did not even bother if she existed or not."

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"Sean. Let me make one thing clear. If Justin ever decided to ditch me. I swear I will wring your neck with my bare hands." With that, I stormed out of the room. By now I was getting a headache.

I was sauntering to my room when I saw the door to Justin's room closed. They both were together behind this closed door.

I needed to disturb them.

No, maid. You are not getting privacy with my fiancé.

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"Sarah. I said please go out..." Justin asked me again. And this time he seemed desperate.

"Wait a minute, Justin." The maid made him quiet and pulled away her hand that was in my grip, "Sarah. I am not talking about Justin. I am talking about that dork whom you people were calling Sean. He was the one who... I mean..." She licked her lower lip, "He tried to molest me. He is your fiancé. Right?"

This time I could not contain the laughter bubbling up in my throat, "Honey! You seem delusional. No. Sean is not my fiancé."

Now she was no more attentive to Justin. Justin tried to hold her shoulder, "Ashley!"

But this Pashley held my shoulders this time and asked me, "Then who is your fiancé, Sarah?"

I smiled and chewed my lower lip pointing towards Justin, "This man. Justin. He is my fiancé. I said fondly.

When she did not speak and kept looking with that dumb expression. I spoke again, "Oh please don't tell me you don't know your husband. You did not marry Sean. You married Justin."

My Gosh! How dumb one can be!

She was a certified dumbass!

19- Bitter lesson

Ashley's pov

"Oh, please. Don't tell me that you don't know your husband. You did not marry Sean. You married Justin."

I blinked my eyes and then smirked sarcastically, "Oh. Really? You must be out of your fuckin mind." I shot in frustration. She did not like it but chose to ignore it.

"You can think as you like. By the way, do let me know if you need anything." She placed her hand on the same cheek where Justin just touched it, "Take care!" She said politely and then lifting on her toes she kissed Justin on his cheek, "I love you, sweetheart!"

Justin did not respond to her and kept standing avoiding eye contact. Sarah had left the room.

"Jus.. Justin. I ... I know she was lying. You ... You don't need to worry about anything. I ... I believe you. I ... I t... trust you." I gulped my spit and wiped the sweat off my palms by rubbing them to my skirt.

"Ash..."

"Shh." I wrapped my arms around him and placed my forehead on his chest. I knew Sarah was lying. She wanted to create a rift between us.

I won't let her succeed. Justin can't be ...

No.

“Just tell me that you are not my husband. I will believe you, Justin. You are the only one I want to believe Justin. You are the only friend here. You are better than the rest of them.”

I kept blabbering looking down at his shoes just waiting for him to refuse everything that Sarah said. I felt his arms around me, and a smile crept on my lips.

“Kitten!”

“She was lying, Justin. Right? I am an outsider who doesn't know shit about these Richie riches. You are the only one who is my friend... I ... You are different Justin. You don't act like a spoiled brat.” Gosh! I don't know why tears were coming out of my eyes.

Just then I remembered something.

Lifting my face up I saw into Justin's eyes. There was something in those eyes.

Fear!

Fear of what? Losing me? Stop it, Ashley!

“Justin. Can... can you take off your t-shirt?”

“What?” He looked at me as if I have lost it.

"Yes, please. I would like you to take your t-shirt off." Not understanding he kept looking at

1. me.

"Please!" I requested it again.

Still not understanding his hands fumbled with the hem of his t-shirt and then reaching back,

in one quick motion, he managed to take it off with one hand.

Those muscles! I wanted to trace every part of his skin. But no. I needed to see this.

"Turn around!" This time he just looked at my face and then turned around silently. I gasped when I saw the tattoos on his back. The same small dragon on his shoulder blade went down just above his ass.

That muscular back I saw the first day right after signing the contract.

Stepping back, I let out a low chuckle causing him to turn back to me, "She is right. Damn!" I laughed, "Sarah is right. Isn't she?"

"Ashley. Listen. I can explain." He tried holding my shoulders, but I stepped back.

"Justin. I haven't seen the world enough. I know I am naïve. I trusted you!" I said softly and let the tears fall down my cheeks.

"Ashley! Kitten..."

"Justin. Please leave!" All the pent-up anger left my body magically.

"No. Kitten! No!" He was shaking his head while walking towards me.

"Don't!" I lifted my index finger at him. And he stopped getting closer to me, respecting my wish, "Please leave."

"No. I can't, Ashley. Please." He pleaded, "Don't make me leave the room. Just listen to me once."

This unbearable pain in my chest was getting too much. It was not letting me breathe. Then I remembered something. Wiping my cheek, I tried to smile,

"I am sorry,

apologies."

sir. It skipped my mind that this room belongs to you. It's not mine. My

past

With that, I sauntered towards the door trying to walk him.

He quickly held my wrist, "Ok. Fine. I will leave. Ok, Kitten?"

The way he used to call me kitten caused fluttering sensations in the pit of my stomach.

But not anymore.

Before leaving the room, he did something unexpected. He kissed my hand and I felt wetness in his eyes.

Nah! I must be imagining it.

"I know you are mad at me. But if you need anything, feel free to come to me." I closed my eyes not wanting to look at his face. Not wanting to hear him.

I again opened them when I heard the door closing behind him.

He had left the room.

I lost the only ally I had got. The only friend in this house.

And I had started missing him.

Why Justin? You took me as a fool? What did you think of me? A naïve eighteen years old?

Ignoring the bed where I spent last night in his arms, I went to my mattress and laid on it. I felt so insulted.

So, Sarah was his fiancée? Now I understood why she was so cold towards me. Justin belonged to her, and I was the third wheel in this relationship.

Not on paper though. Technically, I was the one who would be leaving the house after one year. Putting the pillow on my face, I tried to suppress the screams coming out of my throat.

Mother Superior. I wish you did not have cancer. I wish I could find my parents. I wish I had someone, to lean on.

I wish I could use any excuse to leave the place. I used to look at those big houses in movies with envy. The wealthy and powerful CEOs used to attract me so much. Not anymore.

What a fool I was! Ha-ha.

A

Rich people did not have hearts. That was the most bitter lesson I learned in my life.

20- Movable staircase

Sarah's pov

I think I am about to achieve something in near future. It was a hunch. I was this close to my success. To my one and only fiancé.

Justin!

I did not know what went between that maid and Justin. However, for the first time in my life, I saw Justin getting scared of something.

It was written on his face.

When she was calling that stupid Sean my fiancé, Justin did not want me to tell her that Sean was not her husband.

Did Justin lie to her? Justin never lied in his entire life. Why now?

The way he tried to hold her when she went to Sean for attacking him. He was cupping her cheek so gently when I entered his room, I won't lie. I was hell jealous.

The way he was looking at her. Why?

I was his fiancée and he never looked at me like that.

Wasn't it part of the contract that they were not allowed to communicate? She was not allowed to use the bathroom in his presence.

She was supposed to spend this one year on a mattress.

So, why she was getting all the unnecessary attention from Justin? Something was fishy. She thought Sean was my fiancé. That means she thought she was married to Sean.

I needed to talk to Sean.

"May we come in?" I looked up to find Nadia and Shella standing in the doorway, "Sorry. We knocked but you were too engrossed in your la la land."

They came inside and sat close to me on the bed, "You seem tense." Shella asked with concern.

I told them whatever happened in the room.

"I think you are right. She must have thought that Sean was her husband. What I don't understand is ..." Shella lifted her legs and sat cross-legs before me, "All this time she had been living in that room. Justin was the only one going there. He was the only one visiting her. Is she that much dumb? Just imagine." By the end, they both were laughing which made me smile.

Justin never liked dense-skulled, giggling girls. He always liked someone who could carry out an intelligent conversation.

I was sure the attraction Justin might be feeling towards her was temporary. Thank God, I was blessed with friends like Nadia and Shella otherwise I might be scratching my head by now.

Ashley's pov

It was Justin's room and being a gentleman, he had left it for me. The maid who brought my meals used to place the tray and I used to finish my whole plate.

Unintentionally, I was following all his advice. But now I was no more ready to confine here. I needed to go out and find a job. Once I would be settled, I would ask them not to bring me any more food.

They wanted to constrain me because they did not want the news to go out that Deluca's heir had not only gotten married but also had a bride hidden inside his bedroom.

If that was the deal, I was ready for it. I won't flaunt the fact that I was the wife of Justin Deluca.

My heart missed a beat when I thought of him. Two days had passed since we last met.

He did not attempt to set foot in the room. The room that belonged to him.

When I got done with dinner, I waited. I could no longer sleep as I took too many naps during the day. Once I was sure that they all must have retired to their rooms, I got up and examined the window umptieth time. I had already checked the height which was a bit more than the window in the Eden Garden Orphanage.

Closing my eyes, I asked for help from God and started climbing the window. Once stepping outside on the ledge, I stood straight and took deep breaths. I did not know after how many days, I was breathing in the fresh air.

Making sure the window does not slide back, I put the blind frame back. As the room was dark so anyone looking at the window from outside would never get the idea that the window was opened.

Not at least in one glance. I needed to take this risk if I wanted to be independent.

There was a drainage pipe going down all the way. I held it with all my might and started slipping down. The moment my feet touched the ground I wanted to jump with joy.

Yes! I did it! This seemed to be the backyard of the house. I guess I could not use the gates. I looked for some electric wires covering the walls. But there were none.

I prayed that there was no electric current running in the walls. I went to a bushy area and hid in it when I felt a searchlight on my head. The guard must be observing the area. Once the search spot was gone, I tried to climb the wall and got slipped landing on my back!

Urgh!

Why can't they make a window that landed directly outside the house? Just like they show in movies. I stepped back and went running to the wall trying to use my feet as quickly as possible. I did not want the guards to find me under that bright searchlight.

Yes! After climbing it, it was no more difficult to jump to the other side.

It was the weekend and two blocks away the area was bustling with tourists and locals. There was a fair number of teenage couples on dates.

I kept walking not sure where to go when someone tapped my shoulder from the back.

"Ma'am. You are blocking our way!" I literally jumped and spun around only to find a young couple looking at me. I quickly got aside.

"I am sorry," I muttered. By now I was feeling hell thirsty.

"You seem new here." The boy who might be twenty or twenty-one years old of about my height asked me, putting his arm around the girl. They both were young and cute. The girl was slim, dark-skinned, and sexy while the boy was lanky and had blond curly hair.

His blue eyes seemed glassy behind those thick-rimmed glasses.

I licked my lower lip and nodded my head, "I just got shifted two blocks from here." He frowned and they both looked at each other.

"Two blocks away is the elite colony just beside Deluca empire. You are from there?" He ran his eyes on me, examining me from head to toe. The girl beside him poked her elbow in his chest.

"Ouch, Ev!" I smiled because she just gave him a slight nudge. He was being over dramatic.

"Shut up, Elijah. That place is not only for rich people. She might be a servant or some house help's kid. And she seems thirsty too." She opened her tote bag and offered me a mineral water bottle. I took it from her and finished in one go.

When I removed the bottle from my lips Elijah was looking at me with a raised eyebrow, "Thirsty! Aren't we?"

"I am sorry, Elijah." Still holding the bottle, I waved at them, "I need to go. I am here to look for something."

I wanted to move away from there. They knew about the Deluca empire. They might know about Justin too. Silly me! Who wouldn't?

"Can you tell me what you are looking for?" The girl spoke to me. There was sincerity in her

and voice. But same was the case with Justin.

eyes

"I... I am looking ... for a job." I tried to flash a smile.

"What?" They both were standing there open-mouthed and then the boy whose name was Elijah started laughing

holding his tummy, "Girl! You are funny. Who looks for a job at night? Ha -ha."

I did not have time for this stupidity.

"Thank you for giving me this!" I waved the plastic mineral water bottle in the air and was about to turn when I heard the girl.

"Stop. Please stop." She again shot that look in the guy's direction, "I am Evelyn, and he is my boyfriend, Elijah."

"Hi, Evelyn. Hi Elijah!" I said with a bit of sarcasm in my tone. I did not want to stay here for long otherwise they would certainly notice my crumpled clothes and then they might...

But I could not run away from everyone, anymore if I wanted to find a job.

"And you are?" Evelyn asked me, "And please ignore his rudeness."

"I am Ashley. Ashley Walters." Evelyn extended her hand for a handshake when I got done with my introduction.

After the handshake, she gestured for me to walk with them, "Do you want a fancy job,

Ashley? Because right now we do have a job."

Elijah turned his head to his girlfriend as if questioning her and then rolled his eyes when she wiggled her brows.

"I just need to earn some cash. I need it badly." I did not want to sound desperate, but I did

not think I had a choice.

“Ok, Ashley. We own a small ice cream parlor.” This time Elijah spoke and thankfully he was serious this time, “We sell fresh juices, shakes, coffee, and donuts but ice cream is the main attraction of our shop. We have got two helpers who take care of it when we are away for our little me time.” He kissed Evelyn’s cheek affectionately making her blush, “It’s twenty hours shop so we take turns. We keep it close on afternoons. On weekends we run it for twenty–four hours too. Depending on the crowd.

Don’t worry you will be working in shifts. Sometimes, my cousin helps us with that. Right now, one of our helpers is leaving the town and has resigned. So, unless you don’t find your ideal job, we can hire you.”

I could not believe it. I had gotten a job? Just like that?

They both took me to that small ice cream parlor where they explained how I needed to be vigilant about its cleanliness. I needed to deal single–handedly with the cash counter and ice cream tubs mostly. Coffee and shakes were handled by the other employee.

Making shakes was not my department for the time being. But I would be needing to get trained for that as well.

I stayed there and they explained to me how to handle the cash counter. Filling the cups and the cones with scoops of ice cream seemed fun.

I even started managing a few of the customers. Elijah whom I found a little rude initially proved to be a sweetheart. He not only taught me patiently but also gave me tips about how to carry myself if I wanted to face the crowd.

I even dropped some chocolate fudge ice cream on the counter but none of them complained

or made an issue.

Elijah immediately wiped it, "It's ok. You will learn quickly. You are a beautiful girl, Ashley. Try to be presentable. I don't want anyone to make fun of your clothes. I can give you a little bit of advance payment..."

"No, silly. Wait." Evelyn stopped him and went inside the pantry of the shop.

When she came back, she had two skirt dresses, "These belong to a former employee. When she left urgently, she did not have time to take her stuff. She was of your height and built. I think these should serve the purpose."

I did not know why a tear slipped down my cheek, "Thanks, guys."

"Hey!" Elijah frowned at me, "Stop being emotional. Join from tomorrow night. We will

manage in the daytime."

Before leaving that small Ice cream Heaven I hugged both of them excitedly.

I jumped on my way back to the Deluca Mansion. The way I was laughing hysterically all alone could make anyone believe that I had gone crazy.

I was even singing a romantic song. However, when I reached the boundary walls of the Deluca mansion, I stopped short.

There was a small, movable staircase, painted in white resting next to the wall. It had small wheels under it. A uniformed guard was standing there beside it.

“I am asked not to let you jump over this wall, ma’am. You can use this to enter the mansion.”

21- Secret Got Out

Ashley's pov

I did not argue. I not only used the staircase to cross the wall but also found one more resting outside the room's window. Using those wooden stairs, I climbed up to the room's window and got inside the room. Once inside, I peeked through the blinds where a guard was taking the staircase away.

Did Justin know that I went out? Did he know that I was on a job hunt? Tonight, I felt happy. The sense of achievement that I tried to do something for myself was making me euphoric.

The night shift was ideal for me as during the day I could catch up on my sleep.

I paid a visit to the bathroom so that later I could lie on my mattress and catch some sleep. When I entered there, I saw women's body wash and shampoo set near the basin. Justin's products were missing from the shelf.

I felt bad. Despite me, being mad at him he was still trying to facilitate me. He knew when I sneaked out and how I did it.

He did not try to put any restrictions. If only he would have told me the truth...

Damn!

Then I decided to tell him about my job. He deserved it. He might find out later, so it was best if I trust him on this

this.

I might be mad at him but that did not mean I wanted to take advantage of the situation.

I could not talk to him. No maid was there otherwise I would have sent him a message. So, I came up with something.

There was a study table in the corner of the room. The table was occupied by paper pads, ballpoints, and permanent markers. I tore a paper from the writing pad and picked up a pen. After thinking for a few minutes, I wrote in bold letters.

I HAVE GOT A JOB IN ICE CREAM HEAVEN!

I checked the text and then went out. I wanted to go to his study. I did not know in which room he was residing. So, the study room was the safest option. When he would enter here in the morning, he will find it at once.

I went to the door and slid the chit under it. After getting done with my business, I went to my mattress and fell limply on it. There was a slight chance that Justin would not approve my night job. But I needed to be honest to him.

After so long, I felt tired. Tired and happy.

The next morning, I sat up when the maid knocked the door for bringing my breakfast tray. When she left after placing it, I removed the lid.

Besides the usual breakfast, there was a big bag of Doritos with a chit. Scrunching my nose, I opened the chit.

There in bold letters was written:

CONGRATULATIONS, KITTEN!

I could not help the smile spreading on my lips. We both were acting like small kids. I was horrified when I realized that I was slowly tracing his handwriting with the pad of my thumb.

I ate my breakfast happily and then laid back again on the mattress. Mentally I started making a wish list of the stuff I was going to buy after getting my first salary.

A cheap phone. Few dresses. What else? Maybe a gift for Justin?

Now why that thought crossed my mind?

I wanted to catch up on my sleep but when I did not feel like sleeping, I got up and started cleaning the room. The Doritos packs from that night were still there. I placed the new one with them.

I was thinking to take shower when I heard some rustling outside the door.

It was a chit. I picked it up.

The chit said, **I AM SORRY, KITTEN!**

I kept standing there like a fool not knowing what to do. I just placed the chit with the previous one and scurried to the bathroom.

The words 'I Am Sorry Kitten' were dancing before my eyes. I wanted to go to Justin's study and tell him that it was ok. We all do make mistakes.

But this ego was not letting me do it.

After the shower, I came out and was brushing my hair when the door opened, and a maid entered carrying a big shopping bag.

"This is for you, ma'am." She said before leaving.

I opened it and found different glossy tabloids placed inside. Quite excitedly, I took them out. All the gossips that I liked about movie actors were there.

I knew it was Justin. He was aware of how my life revolved around movies. The day could not get any better.

It had been one week since I found the job in the ice cream parlor. Evelyn and Elijah became my friends. Elijah's cousin Sam was a darling who kept the ice cream parlor alive with his banter. I was still not talking to Justin. Whenever I used to communicate something to him, I used to write it on a chit.

He always used to reply and there used to be an additional chit as well that always said I AM SORRY KITTEN.

For me, each day was getting better.

"Ash! Can you take the cash counter? Andrew is not well tonight." Elijah asked me when I was busily scooping ice creams from the containers."

"Sure, Elijah." It was a weekday, so it was not that crowded today.

"By the way. We need your number for the record, Ash." He said, "If you don't have a phone then that's not a problem. You can provide me with any of the acquaintance's contact number.

We just want to have someone's details in case of any emergency."

"Or if in case we want to reach you!" Evelyn shouted from behind.

"Geez. Eve!" Elijah placed his hands on his hips, "Why do you keep screaming?"

"Because I am taking care of these shake orders for quite some time and here you are gossiping and wasting Ashley's time. Let her work and do your job! Get your fu*kin ass here and help me."

Elijah's face was serious, but his eyes had mischief in them, "Woah! There are not too many customers. Are you sure, darling, you don't need banging back there?"

"You are a dirty-minded prick, Elijah!" Aiming for his head, she threw a paper cup that he caught effortlessly.

"Yeah! And I like getting dirty with you, baby." He sent her a flying kiss.

Listening to these types of conversations always made me blush. Thankfully both he and Evelyn never tried to probe me about why I was living in the Deluca mansion.

For them either I was their maid or some servant's relative.

Evelyn threw the towel on his face, "Shut up, you brat!" They kept fighting and teasing like this. I had never seen any couple so deeply in love."

When my shift ended, I left the parlor and started walking home. Elijah, as always tried to convince me to walk me home and this time too I declined.

It was not comfortable for me to make them witness that I used to climb the wall instead of using the gates.

Every night there used to be a wooden staircase placed beside the wall that I used to enter and exit the house.

A second staircase used to be there for me right outside the room's window. The guard quietly used to bring it and remove it after reaching my room safely.

I removed the blind frame and jumped inside the room when someone standing in the middle of the room, started clapping.

“Welcome, Ms. Walters. So, this is how you will honor your agreement?” Sarah’s voice echoed in the room.

Crap! What the hell! Why couldn’t she let me live my life?

22- No More Virgin Maid

Sarah's pov

"Welcome, Ms. Walters. So, this is how you will honor your agreement?" She was not expecting me to discover her secret.

So, she was going out, enjoying her life while also trying to lure her trophy husband. She was cunning beyond my expectations.

I was enjoying her shocked face. She swallowed her spit and took off her old, shabby black jacket that was oversized like the rest of her usual clothes.

Wait a minute. The skirt she was wearing had better fitting tonight.

"What were you doing outside? You do know that your contract requires you to stay here in this very room. And here! Look at you! You are busy sleeping around."

She shook her head and started taking an old watch off her wrist. A low chuckle escaped my lips when I realized that it was a man's watch.

"Whose watch are you wearing? You have started picking pockets too, maid?" She closed her eyes and blew a long-held breath.

"You won't spare me. Will you?" She started taking off her dirty shoes that she was not allowed to place here.

"What would you do if Justin would come to know that you are using his room's window for quenching your desire!" Still ignoring me she started loosening her braid.

"Why do you want to inform him about me going out, Sarah?" She asked me tiredly.

"First of all, don't you dare call me Sarah. Just like Justin is called young master by the servants. You should call me young mistress!" I did not know what she found so funny that she started laughing.

"What? Why are you laughing?" She seemed a little confident tonight after recovering from her initial shock.

"You calling yourself mistress is quite hilarious. I do know that you are nothing but a mistress." She batted her eyes just like I did when we last talked at that dining table.

The way she twisted my words was enough for me to kill her. In an instant, I closed the distance between us and held her by her neck.

"You little piece of shit!" I scathed with anger, "Do you know the consequences of calling me, mistress?"

"And do YOU know the consequences for holding me by my neck IFFFF by any chance Justin would come to know?"

hand away, When the grip of my hands loosened around her neck, she shoved

my hand difference does it make if you are THE YOUNG MISTRESS or just A MISTRESS!"

"What

She was trying my patience and I needed to do something about that. She would only listen to Justin. I needed to talk to him.

"Ok. So, you are his wife. Then be ready to face him, lass!" I was trying to scare her, and she was not one bit afraid of Justin.

Everyone in the household feared Justin except me. However, at one point even I could not dare to argue with him.

I guess this was the time to show her true colors to Justin.

Controlling my wrath, I marched out of the room. In the morning, the first thing would be to talk to him. Shella and Nadia had already moved to their home this noon and I was missing them.

They were my constant support against her.

I was still in the hallway when the phone I was holding started ringing.

Sean!

"Yes, Sean!"

"You must be celebrating by now. Right?" I frowned and looked at my phone if it was really him. He never talked to me in that tone.

"Where are you, man? Come to the dining area. We can talk." I was about to disconnect the call when his voice stopped me from doing it.

"I am not home. I am residing at a friend's place for the time being. Granny promised me that she would take care of my living arrangements very soon."

"You are not living here? But why?"

"Because your fiancé gave me an ultimatum not to show my face or my existence in the house. He even slapped me... Right on my face."

"Oh!" I was dumbfounded for a minute.

"Oh? That's what you have got to say?"

"Come on, Sean. You tried to take advantage of that petty maid. And now you are trying to put the blame on me? This is not happening, Sean."

I kept examining my chipped nail color.

I stopped abruptly, when I saw the lights inside Justin's study, "I will talk to you later, Sean." He was trying to say something, but I had already disconnected the call.

Justin was awake? I slowly went to the study door and pushed it open without knocking. Justin was talking to someone on phone.

"Yes, please. You need to be vigilant and keep an eye on her." He spoke, nodded, and

disconnected the call.

I knew he was talking about that maid. He was asking someone to keep an eye on her which meant he did not trust her.

I needed to tell him about it.

"You are not sleeping, Sarah." He started collecting his paperwork in the form of a stack.

"You are also awake. What are you doing here?"

"I was expecting a few calls from Asian countries. And you know quite well we need to accommodate them due to the time zone difference."

He said busily, "By the way. Why are you here?"

"Justin! I ..." I needed to be careful about it. Helga and Sean were out of the house because of that girl, "I... was

here to... tell... you that..."

"Yes?" he frowned and nodded his head, "Speak up."

"Do you know that your maid... I mean Ashley..." Gosh. That slip of the tongue, "She is going out at night? I mean your marriage was supposed to stay secret. Granny would be upset if this secret will..."

"Don't worry, Sarah." He smiled, "Nobody would come to know about this setting."

"But Justin. The way she is going out..."

"Ok. I will handle her, Sarah. I'll talk to her. Anything else you are worried about?" He stood up and stretched. It was a long time ago when we made love. I was missing him.

"No. I am not worried, Justin. It's just that... as long as she is married to you, she should be careful..." I had to stop when I saw Justin's eyes slowly turning bloodshot red.

"I meant to say... I mean... I am of course not her foe." I laughed trying to make light of the situation, "I am concerned about your family's reputation."

"Sarah!" He walked towards the door and opened it, gesturing me to leave the room, "As long as I am alive you don't need to worry about me or my family's reputation."

I gulped down the disappointment when I could not get the desired reaction from him.

He followed me while exiting the room and ushered me to mine.

"Sleep tight, Sarah." He was about to turn around when I stopped him, "Justin!"

He just stopped and cocked up his brow questioningly, "Why are you occupying the guest room? You could shift her there."

I did not know why I was asking such an absurd question. If he found it odd, he did not remark.

"Someone tried to rape her under my roof, Sarah. This was the least I could do. To provide her security." Damn you, Sean.

I knew he was responsible for it. I wish I could kill him for that.

"You did right, Justin." I told her softly, "Nobody deserves such disrespect."

"I know. Right?" He clicked his tongue and was about to turn away when I placed my hand on his arm. My core started throbbing just by touching him.

"Why don't you stay in my room." I tried to give him my signature se*xxy smile, "It's been a while." He kept looking at my face and then chuckled.

"No, Sarah. Good night." He started walking away.

Did he... did he just flatly refuse my offer?

"But why?" I asked him loudly, "Why not?" I demanded.

He stopped but this time did not turn around, "Because I am married, Sarah. In case you have forgotten, you are the one who got me married. Remember?"

With that, he walked away. Not to his bedroom at least. But he flatly refused me?

No Justin. You need to realize that I am the only one for you. No Justin. You can't reject me and walk away. I will prove to you that I am the one worth keeping.

Not her. Not that no-more-virgin maid.

23- Happy Birthday Ashley

Ashley pov

"What? Take it, silly!" Elijah handed over the envelope to me that contained my salary.

I was standing like a statue looking at it as if I might burn if I would touch it.

My first salary. The first step towards my independence.

first ever

"So, are we getting any treat from your first salary?" Evelyn placed her hand on my shoulder from behind. Chewing my lip, I controlled the unexplainable smile twitching at the corner of my lips.

"Yup. You are. But not today!" I clutched the envelope to my chest. Part of this salary belonged to the one person who helped me with all this.

I wanted to buy something for Justin

Excusing myself I went out to have a look at the convenience store around the corner. Nobody knew that today was my birthday too. The day I was placed outside the orphanage when I was just a few days-old baby.

I kept looking at the showcases displaying different items. None of them was branded. But I wanted to buy something that would have some meaning. No matter how cheap it was.

"What are you looking for, sweet girl!" I spun around when I heard a kind voice behind me.

"I ..." I licked my lower lip to keep it wet, "I am looking for something according to my limited budget," I laughed nervously. Thank God Sarah did not own the store otherwise she would have laughed in my face.

"For a man or a woman?" She opened the showcase running her gaze through all the displayed items.

For

my husband. Sigh!

"F...for a man." I nodded at her.

"What is the age of this man?"

I never asked Justin his age, "Umm. Might be twenty or twenty-one."

"Ok!" Understanding flicked in those eyes behind thick-rimmed glasses. We went through some antique stuff. The idea was that a small decoration item that could be placed on his study table. I was about to choose something when my gaze fell on a watch.

It had that antique look with a lion engraved on the side of the face of the watch. It was not that heavy, and the color must be silver plated ages ago. Now it had blackened.

I examined the price tag and was disappointed.

It was beyond my budget. After buying it I won't be able to spend my money on anything else.

But I did not want to lose the chance of buying it. Next month I might get it silver-plated and then present it to Justin.

Perfect idea! I happily bought it and came out of the store.

"You took longer. We were getting worried for you." Elijah came close to me with concern evident in his eyes.

I waved my hand holding the watch in front of his face, "I bought this!"

"This? What's so special about this? And it's a man's watch. What would you do with it?" And then understanding dawned on him, "Oh." Coming closer he hugged me, "You were out to shop for a gift for me? That too from your first salary? I might cry, Ashley!"

He started fake crying and sniffed his nose.

"Shut up!" I laughed pushing him back, "It's not for you."

"Woah Woah!" Evelyn who was taking off her apron came to join us, "Who is it for?" She took the watch fondly from my hands, "You bought a present from your first salary. Who is the lucky guy, Ash?"

"I am the lucky guy!" Sam entered the kitchen carrying a small ice cream cup.

"You are again eating our ice cream. You brut!" Elijah shook his head irritatingly.

"So, you are dating someone, and you are not telling us, Ash!" Evelyn was still examining the watch, "I don't think you have enough money to give us a pizza treat." She pouted and I felt embarrassed. I did plan to celebrate with them, but the watch made it impossible.

"No worries." Elijah snaked his arm around my shoulders, "Pizza treat from my side. We will celebrate Ashley's first salary day." He gave me a sincere smile and that made my eyes wet.

I was lucky to have such sincere friends in my life. Elijah took me in a bear hug.

"Hey!" Sam came forward to hug me and Elijah, "Why you are crying, Ash? Listen!"

He got back and pulled Elijah off me making Evelyn giggle, "You are the most intelligent among all of us."

Elijah tried to protest but Sam made him quiet.

"She is intelligent, guys." Turning to me he held me by my shoulders, "The Ice cream Heaven must not be the end of your life, Ashley Walters. Go and study. Become something. You are not born to earn these peanuts." The way Sam was giving me this ted talk, I wondered how it would feel like if I had a brother.

Evelyn yawned loudly giving a silent message that she was getting bored of it, earning a glare from Sam.

"Come on you all. We are going out for pizza. We might know something about the guy for whom Ashley bought this watch."

They all hooted and left the ice cream shop. They all were supposed to return within one hour because Andrew could not stand all by himself more than that.

I enjoyed that one hour like anything. We ate pizza and kept pulling each other's legs. Evelyn wanted to get drunk too but here Elijah called it quits.

"We need to go back to work, and Ashley needs to offer this watch to her guy. She needs to stay decent."

While on our way back to the shop Elijah whispered near my ear, "Are you sure, you don't need me to walk you home? I think your guy should not leave you all by yourself to walk back at this hour."

"Really, Elijah. What am I? Five?" I bumped my fist into his chest playfully.

"Go home. Stay safe." He said before turning away.

Saying our goodbyes, I walked home, clutching the watch to my chest. I did not know if Justin would like it or not. Next month I was planning to get it polished with my next salary.

As usual, there were wooden staircases resting on the wall and near the window. Funny, how he never asked me to use the main gates but tried to make it easier for me.

When I jumped into my room, I saw a familiar figure sitting on my bed. His back was facing

Justin!

My heart missed a beat. What was he doing here?

He must have felt my presence because his body went rigid and then he slowly rose up and turned to me.

He was smiling and oh, how I missed that cleft.

My eyes went wide when he said, "Happy birthday, Kitten!"

24- My Wife's Birthday

Ashley Walters pov

How did he know that it was my birthday? Nobody knew except me or my orphanage staff and friends.

"I did not know how your friend dug me out and called me." He raised his hand which held his phone, "She wanted to wish you, on your birthday."

Aniya?

I felt tears quickly welling up in my eyes. I missed her so much. I blinked back the tears and was about to open my mouth to thank him when I realized that I was no more talking to him.

Ignoring him, I started getting rid of my shoes and sat on the carpet to take off my socks. He crouched down before me and started helping me with it.

I wanted to stop him but how. I did not want to talk. He was the one I got married to. He showed me his friendlier side and hid the fact from me that he was my husband.

His granny told me that I was not allowed to talk to him. I had this image in my mind of a bratty boy who still wore diapers.

He proved to be the opposite. He was kind, empathetic, funny, and caring. But now I could not let

my guard down.

Taking off my socks, he started massaging my feet sending strange but delicious tingles traveling up to all the sensitive spots of my body.

Slowly I freed my feet from his hands and sat cross-legged. My eyes were on the carpet.

"Kitten..." His voice dropped when his phone started ringing.

"I think this is for you." He handed me his phone and stood up.

I received the call and spoke, "Hello."

I saw him walking to the study table and started going through the small notes slid by him.

"Bitch! Happy birthday!" Aniya screamed into the phone making me keep it

away from my ear, "You, dork. Why is your phone not responding? You did not even try to contact us. We thought something bad happened to you. You might have died or something. Where is your phone? Last night an in-charge told us that you are doing ok at the Deluca household. How are they as employers? Have you met their son? I saw his picture in a newspaper. He is a treat to the eyes...."

Gosh! Aniya hadn't changed one bit. She was jumping from one subject to another like a tornado.

"By the way. You are already working in the Deluca family. So why this second job? That too at this odd hour? I

told him that I will call at noon, but he said you usually catch up on your sleep so it's better if I call you at this hour. Is it really him? Did I talk to Justin Deluca?"

"Stop, Aniya. Stop." I could not help the laughter erupting from my mouth, "Breathe! And let me breathe too!"

"Ok. I am breathing, Ash. And by the way, you need to make it quick. There is a long queue waiting for their turn to talk to you."

I knew the drill. Whenever an eighteen year old girl used to leave the orphanage we used to wait in that line to talk to her.

The good thing was they all stayed awake just to talk to me at this odd hour.

The orphanage could accommodate fifty girls, but we all were like a close knitted family.

"Buy a phone as soon as possible. They might be paying you well. Right?" I went quiet and saw Justin's back. I hope Aniya's voice could not reach his ears.

"Sure. I would." I chuckled. Now I felt embarrassed. They talked to me one by one, and I kept telling them how happy I was.

Justin was sitting there patiently not moving an inch from his place. He kept himself busy reading some business-related book on the desk.

At last, when I was done with all my Eden Garden friends, Aniya again held the phone.

"Ani! I need to go now. I am using someone else's phone." I tried to whisper into the phone.

"His name must be Justin. Right?" She asked me excitedly, "I got his number from Mother Superior's friend. Initially, I was hesitant to call but it seems he is a good guy. Try your best to sleep with him. He is hot!"

"Aniya!" I laughed loudly causing Justin to turn back and smirk, "Shut up. Ok?"

I wish I could tell her that Justin was no more my employer. I was married to this hot guy. After disconnecting the call, I stood up and went to Justin.

Instead of uttering any word, I just placed the phone near his book on the table.

His eyes shot up and he hurriedly closed the book, "Your friend told me that it was your birthday. So... I told her you are out for your job." Standing up, his brows furrowed, and he came closer to me, "You still haven't taken off your jacket, kitten..."

He gently helped me out of it.

I did not protest but still did not respond to him. He took my jacket and placed it near an iron

stand.

"So how is your job going?" His hands again went inside his pockets. I stared at his face and then diverted my eyes to the furniture pieces in the room.

Nopes! I would still not talk to him.

"Kitten! I said I am sorry. I accept my mistake." I did not budge and pretended as if I could not hear him.

"Ok. Wait a sec." He went to the study table and picked up the marker. Now he was looking for the writing pad.

I don't think it was there.

Placing his hands on his hips he looked around when suddenly his eyes lit up. He went to the desk and picked up another marker. Heading to the door, he uncapped a marker and wrote on

1.

"HOW IS YOUR JOB GOING?"

I kept looking at him. When he nodded with a smile and extended his hand to give me the other marker then I knew he wanted me to write the reply on the door.

Silly! Right?

Reaching out for the marker, I closed the gap and wrote under his question, "IT'S GOING GOOD."

He nodded again and scribbled, "YOU ARE NOT EATING YOUR DORITOS, KITTEN."

Lifting the marker, I jotted, "I WAS TOO TIRED TO EAT ANYTHING LATELY."

"KITTEN!" He wrote.

Trying to maintain those sad expressions, I wrote, "YES!"

"YOU LOOK CUTE WHEN YOU ARE MAD!" My eyes shot up at that. He was trying to control his mirth. I cocked up a brow and then wrote, "I NEED TO SLEEP, JUSTIN."

I did not know how to respond to that.

"I AM SORRY, KITTEN." After writing it he kept looking at me.

"I NEED TO PUNISH YOU FOR A FEW MORE DAYS, I GUESS.

"IF THAT'S THE CASE I AM READY. I HOPE WE MIGHT BE FRIENDS AGAIN." This time I stopped myself with all my might from kissing him.

He tossed the marker to a side and came closer to me. He opened his arms as a gesture to let me know that he wanted to hug me.

When I stood there rooted to the spot, he said, "Stay mad at me. Take your time. Don't talk to me. But hugging doesn't require any words. It's your birthday. You need it. Damn. I need it too. Let's hug each other and then we

will go back to our Not-Talking mode. What do you say?"

Ok. The offer was tempting. Maybe he was right. I did need that hug.

I looked down to examine myself. I was still wearing that borrowed dress that was meant to make me presentable at my job place.

Even Sarah and her minions tried to make fun of my dress. But this man made it look as if only I mattered to him.

Nothing else.

Not even those loose fitted clothes I wore, no matter if I was using an old pair of shoes. Those socks he just took off my feet were smelly as hell.

But that did not seem to bother him.

Feeling a little emotional, I tossed my marker just as he did a few seconds back and slowly walked to him to place my forehead on his chest. My hands still hanging limply beside me.

I felt his hands holding my droopy ones. He placed them around his waist and then wrapped his arms around me engulfing me in his muscular physique.

"Now!" He sighed, "This is how you are supposed to hug, Ashley."

I inhaled the familiar male cologne and tightened my grip around him. I closed my eyes and

even smiled. Just then I felt his hold stiffening around me.

Umm. I wanted to go to sleep. It was better than any mattress or bed.

I did not know for how long we kept standing there in the middle of the room. He did not seem to be in a hurry. Nor was I.

I was enjoying his non-s*xual touch. His closeness.

We could have stood there for eternity when out of nowhere, his phone started ringing.

"Damn!" He cursed under his breath before stepping back and taking his call, "Yes?"

The sudden loss of warmth made me cold. While hearing the other person on the phone, he picked up the marker he just tossed to a side and wrote at the back of the door.

"YOU MUST BE SLEEPY BY NOW. SLEEP TIGHT, KITTEN. I WILL BE BACK ONCE YOU WAKE UP"

After writing it, he came to me with the phone still clutched against his cheek and kissed my forehead.

"Hold on. Say it again please." He asked the person talking to him on phone. With that, he left the room. The door was slowly closing after he left when I heard him talking to the same person,

"Yeah. I was busy." He said, "It was my wife's birthday."

25- Best Birthday Celebration

Ashley Walters pov

What did I just hear? Justin telling someone that he had a wife? That he was married? Wasn't it supposed to be a secret wedding?

We were supposed to be friends. Despite being spouses, we were not allowed to get close. Nobody should know that I was his secret wife.

With mixed emotions, I closed the door.

Electra Deluca would kill me if she came to know that the secret was out.

I will be the one bearing its consequences. Not him.

I laid back on my mattress and was about to close my eyes when my gaze fell on our chat written on the back of the door.

A smile spread on my lips. What were we? Teenagers?

His handwriting was stable, fluid, and legible. It seemed strange compared to my handwriting which was small and appeared like a kid trying to write his first letters.

Even our writing styles were different.

Even our writing styles were different.

Thinking about him, my eyes fluttered closed. In my dreams he was there, still smiling, writing something on the door.

This time his writing was so small that I needed to get closer to read it. He availed the chance and grabbed me from behind. It was when he turned me to him then I realized he was shirtless.

"This is a dream. Right?" I asked him and he chuckled nodding his head at me.

I reached up and started touching his muscles.

"You are so handsome, Justin."

He brought his face down and looked into my eyes, "I think we are still not on talking terms." His eyes fell to my lips meaningfully.

"So maybe..." I lifted myself on my toes, "We should quit talking and take advantage. It doesn't happen daily that my crush shows up in my dream." I whispered. Our lips were about to touch when my eyes opened.

Not understanding, I looked around and groaned. I was just about to kiss his lips. Just a little bit away.

Why? Oh, why?

I stretched and sat up straight. My breakfast was about to arrive so it was better if I would get up and freshen up.

Tying my hair with an elastic band, I went to the bathroom and came out after taking a shower. I chose to wear shorts with a loose white t-shirt that I tied in a knot around my

midriff. Bringing my laundry out, I fished out the watch from my skirt's pocket that I bought for Justin.

I did not know if he would like it or not. I hope he did. Fingers crossed.

When the door handle turned, I quickly tried to put it inside my shorts pocket when I dropped it to the floor in my haste.

"Happy birthday to you."

Yo! The man of my dreams entered the room carrying a cake with a single candle lighting up. Yup, the same man who I was about to kiss. I quickly picked it up and shoved it inside my pocket.

He placed the cake on the bed and quickly went to the door, "As you don't want to talk to me so I better write it here."

He wrote there, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, ASHLEY!

With that, he held my hand and brought me to the bed, "Cut the cake." Pushing a knife in my hand he gestured towards the cake, "Go ahead. You can't do it by writing. You need to cut it, Ashley."

Any time he used to call me by my name or by the word kitten. It used to cause these delicious tickles ...

"Come on, Ashley! Do it. I am hungry!"

What? He was hungry? I sat in front of him and blew out the candle. He clapped and started singing, "Happy birthday to you..."

I cut the cake and then separated a slice to take it near his mouth. With a smirk, he opened his mouth and was about to take the bite when I rushed to put the piece into

my mouth.

His eyes went wide when I tried to smile with my mouth full of that cake. It was a caramel cake.

Yummy.

When he kept frowning all confused and shocked, I could not take it anymore and started laughing with my mouth still full.

"Kitten. I want that cake now!" He was no more smiling.

Without saying anything as I was still not talking to him, I cut another slice and took the cake near his mouth.

The moment he leaned to eat it, I quickly rubbed that cake on his nose tip. He squinted his eyes to look at it. Before he could understand what I was doing, I rubbed some more on his cheeks.

I hastily stood up and started searching for a place to hide.

"Ashley Walters!" I heard his booming voice calling my name. Left with no choice, I ran towards the door at warp speed and came out of the room.

I could not decide if I should run or laugh. His surprised face kept popping before my eyes. When I heard the door opening behind me, I ran into the corridor to hide somewhere. All rooms were locked. I turned back and found him coming after me with a serious face.

He was not running but was taking long strides to reach me.

My last resort was the study room. I went inside but could not close the door because he had reached me in a jiffy.

I ran my gaze into the room and then decided to go under the desk.

Silly me! Ha-ha.

Once I successfully sat under it, I hid my face and laughed hard. Whatever I did back there was in the spur of the moment. So childish and so immature.

I felt rustling near me. I removed my hands and found him sitting near me. Joining me under that desk. I placed my hands on his shoulders and kept laughing.

"Oh, Justin. You look so cute! Ha-ha. Just look at yourself in a mirror. Oh, God!"

"Really?" There was amusement in his voice, "I look cute to you?" When I managed to nod, he brought his face closer to mine, "Then Let's make you cuter!"

Without warning, he started rubbing his cheek against mine. Very slowly. Taking his sweet time. My heartbeat accelerated.

He bumped his nose tip to mine putting some cake cream there.

Gradually, my laughter subsided. By now my face was covered in caramel cream but, I knew unlike him I did not look as gorgeous.

This was the best birthday celebration I ever got in my life.

"Now what?" He asked me. He was still serious, but his eyes were dancing with mischief.

I chuckled and looked into his eyes, "Now?" his amber eyes were looking at me questioningly, "Now this, Justin!"

With that, I leaned down and started wiping my face with his t-shirt.

Ashley Walters pov

This time he groaned but did not stop me, "Urgh. You are a brat, Ashley. My innocent t-shirt!" Once I wiped my cheeks, I raised my head where amusement was dancing on his face.

"That's all you have got, Ashley Walters?" He clicked his tongue looking down at me. I was so close to him that I could easily kiss his chin.

"Why?" I fluttered my eyes dramatically, "You have got a different move here? Show me what you have got!" I shrugged.

We both were oblivious to the fact that our faces were drenched in caramel cream, we smelled of caramel and we both were sitting under the table like kids.

"I..." he whispered causing my heart to race, "have got... more cream to rub on your face." With that, very gently he again started touching his cheeks to mine. This time I did not get

back.

I not only stayed there but closed my eyes. I could sense the warmth of his breath on my face. When I no more felt the skin-to-skin contact, I opened my eyes and found him staring at my lips.

I held my breath. Was he going to kiss me?

"Kitten?" He breathed with those alien emotions evident in his

"Yes?"

"Close your eyes."

Swallowing down, I furrowed my brows, "Why?"

"Stop asking questions and close them, silly."

eyes.

I giggled and shut my eyes. I felt him moving away my hair from my nape and doing something around my neck.

The feel of his fingers around my skin was making me giggle even more.

He kept fumbling with something unless I felt cold metal against my skin.

Necklace?

"Open your eyes, kitten." He whispered. I looked down and there was a silver necklace falling right above my neckline.

I held it between my thumb and index finger to examine the pendant. It had some familiar illustrations.

Frowning at it, I brought it closer to my eyes, and then my head shot up at him.

"Liked it?" He asked me.

I did not know why there was stinging at the back of my lids. The silver necklace had a lioness engraved on it with two little hearts just above its head. Both hearts were intertwined by a silver thread and had small stones embedded in them that resembled diamonds.

I knew they were not original diamonds as I saw this necklace in the convenience store when I was buying the watch for him.

So, he got it polished and gave it to me. The feeling was euphoric. Despite being insanely rich, he chose something meaningful for me.

He chose a lioness.

"You did not like your gift?" There was concern in his voice, "A few days back I asked you to be a lioness and you did become one."

"I..." I chuckled, "You won't believe me, Justin." Fishing inside the pocket of my shorts, I took out the watch I chose for him.

"It was meant to reach you next month. I bought it last night for you as a token of thanks, with my first salary."

He seemed shocked when he saw it.

"Coincidence! Right? A lion." I waved it in front of his face.

He took it from my hands and assess it carefully, "Can I wear it?" He asked me fondly while checking it. The heir of the Deluca family was acting as if he had not seen such a precious thing in his life, ever.

I quickly snatched it from his hands, "No. Not now!"

"No?" he shook his head, "Why not?"

"You will get it next month once I will get it polished," I said placing it back inside my pocket.

"Ok. I have got one more thing for you." He crawled out to go to his study table's drawer, Here. I think you need it."

He came to me holding a box and crouched down again before me.

"What is it?" I looked at him not understanding and took the box. He smiled when he heard my gasp. It was a phone set.

A brand new one!

"Justin..."

"I am sorry for giving this late."

"But you did not need to buy this. Justin..."

"Shh. You lost yours here. In my house. My servants did this to you. You deserve it."

"But Justin. It's an expensive one."

He did not answer back. His wife might deserve hell expensive gifts but not me. We were not a normal couple.

And I was certainly not a gold digger.

"Ashley. I know you. That's the reason I never offered you to have lavish clothes, expensive shoes, and a stable amount each month in your bank account. I know you will never accept these things from me. I would be really very happy if you will accept this."

I went quiet for a few seconds.

I wish I could tell him that my dream would come true if he would lick the cream off my face.

He was waiting for my response. And all I did was reach out and wipe some cream off his face with my finger.

"Ok. I accept this phone." I licked the cream off my finger and looked up. For some reason, eyes had gone intense.

The innocent action might be the reason.

his

We both were sitting there under that desk with caramel cream on our faces. Justin Deluca did not mind it when instead of celebrating a normal birthday with him, I messed his face up and ran from there.

I could detect the desire in those amber eyes, but I knew that he was aware of his limits. The desire vanished from his eyes as soon as I looked into his eyes.

All this time he had been a perfect gentleman not at all attempting to force himself on me.

"Have lunch with me." He casually started wiping cream off my hair strands.

"I can't." I curved down my lips, "I need to sleep a lot during the day if I want to do night duty responsibly."

There was admiration evident in his eyes. For some odd reason, he liked my No. Should he take it on his ego if I was declining his offer?

"Kitten... I..." Just then his phone started ringing with that annoying tone, "I am sorry. Wait a sec." He switched his phone on the speaker.

"Yes?" With that, he started unboxing my phone telling me with hand gestures that he has already inserted the sim card.

"Where are you, Justin? The executives are waiting for you man!" Justin frowned and handed. over the new phone to me.

"Hey, Keith. I am home. Why? Which executives are you talking about?"

Justin was now showing me the screen where he had saved a few contacts on my phone.

"Justin Deluca. Are you out of your fu*cking mind?" The man, Justin called by the name Keith asked him loudly, "How can you forget it? The executives of that Arab company are here to discuss the oil reservoirs."

Justin who was closing the box froze for a minute.

"Shit!" He muttered, "How can something this important slip from my mind?"

"Are you sure you are not too busy at home with someone? Someone who made you forget about this meeting..."

Whoever this Keith was. He was now teasing Justin.

"Shut up!" Ruffling my hair Justin stood up and offered me his hand, "Just start the presentation and keep them busy. I will be there in no time."

After helping me to get up, he kissed my head, "Sorry, Ashley. This cream has made your freshly showered hair a little messy."

"It's ok, Justin. You go for your meeting." I smiled and held the phone along with its box,

Don't forget to change your shirt!"

I did not forget to pull his leg. He rolled his eyes and pointed towards the bathroom door.

"There is an attached bathroom in this study, you clean yourself there. I'll go and get ready." He gazed casually at his wristwatch, "Don't eat that cake without me."

"Ah. I will gulp it down in one go like a Godzilla. Tsk, Justin. You need to get another one for you." He chuckled and bumped his fist playfully with my cheek.

"Bye. I enjoyed this not-so-special birthday party!" He had left the room. And all I wanted to do was go after him and tell him that this was the most special birthday I ever had in my life.

Damn you, Keith, whomever you are. I was enjoying my time with him.

Well, guess what? The enjoyment was short-lived. Sigh!

27-Pack up

Sarah pov

I followed that Walter girl.

Yeah. Last night I followed her and got to a small ice cream parlor. Ice cream Heaven, I guess. She was offering ice cream to the customers with a smile.

Well! That smile was supposed to be professional. But Nah. She seemed happy. Like genuinely happy. She was just eighteen. Without a decent degree. Obviously, she could not get an executive job with it.

A guy came out of the shop with a big steel container.

"Hi." I greeted him with a big smile. He ran a slow gaze all over me and looked back, thinking I was talking to someone behind him.

"I... am talking to you." I giggled tucking my hair behind one ear, "I am Sarah."

He tried to smirk quite unsure of himself, "Yes, Sarah. How can I help you?"

I pointed towards the ad, displayed in the upper right corner of the glass door, "I wanted to ask you about this job. Is it still open?"

He must have thought he misheard me, "Excuse me?" His brows knitted into several creases.

"That ad. Why?" I laughed again letting him see my dimpled smile, "I can't do this job, mister?"

"No. It's not that." He again tried to focus on my assets, "It's just that.... You are too refined and groomed for this job, miss. By the way, we have already appointed someone. You are late. Apologies but we forgot to remove it."

After giving a final once over, he started walking towards a mini-van to place the container.

"You have hired someone? Is that the girl?" I asked him stepping backwards trying to keep up with him. He turned his head towards the shop and nodded at me.

"Yes. Ashley. The girl we hired just a month back." I nodded. I hoped they knew her secret.

"You are not here for the job. Right?" He asked me. I was wrong to take him as a fool. People who belonged to his class and status were usually cunning. Ashley also had the same traits.

I needed to blow her cover in front of Justin.

"Sam. Come back! We need help!" A female voice screamed at the top of her lungs. So the guy's name was Sam."

Without answering the guy, I started walking back home. So, she was doing a night job, screwing around and tarnishing Deluca's name.

Justin should know about it. I was not going to spare her just so easily.

No, Pashley. You are not off the hook. I will make sure of it. From now on this is

my

mission.

I started walking back to the house which was not a problem for me. I had been an avid member of the gym. Justin introduced me to it because I wanted to keep myself fit.

"Are you awake?" I typed a message to Sean. Within a minute I received his call.

"Hey, Sean."

"Of course, I am awake. Why would I sleep when I do nothing except watch TV and eat junk." Oh, God. He was still angry at me.

"Sean. I promise you. I will bring you back to that house. You think you are there because of me? Ok. I swear you will be back." He went quiet. He might not be expecting me to accept my mistake. Right now, I needed everyone around me.

This Pashley would not leave the mansion so easily.

"What do you want from me, Sarah?" He asked me tiredly, "I no longer live there. So, I don't think I can do anything from here."

"I understand, Sean. I just need a backup plan. Let me come over and discuss it. You want your house back and I want my fiancé back. Please help me,

Sean."

How to tell him that my fiancé was no more interested in sleeping with me? He was ignoring me. He had been cordial but reserved.

We were normal around each other, but he was keeping me at arm's length. Not letting me get closer to him.

I heard Sean taking a long sigh, "Ok. Come tomorrow evening. I will see how I can help you."

"Oh, Thank you, Sean."

"But, Sarah. Don't get your hopes too high."

"I know. I know, Sean." I said excitedly, "Don't worry. I won't."

"Bye, Sarah."

"Bye, Sean."

He disconnected the call, and I could not help the silly smile spreading across my face. Now I needed to control that fu*cking Pashley!

I yawned loudly and rubbed my eyes. Yes. I stayed awake last night. As I not only followed her but also collected

information about her and about the ice cream parlor, she was working in.

After getting done with breakfast, I decided to pay her a visit to Justin's room, but before that, I needed to go and meet Justin.

It made sense if I keep showing him my face. He should be able to see me twenty-four seven if I wanted that girl to stay out of his mind.

I took a leisurely bath and got dressed in a black sleeveless, high-neck sheath dress that reached my knees. The polyester fabric just clung to my body. I paired it with black pumps.

After applying natural makeup that I bought from Paris along with Justin. Where he kept asking me to buy whatever I wanted.

Those were fond memories that I never wanted to forget. After spraying perfume, I examined myself in the mirror.

Wow! I looked great, just like Justin always wanted me.

I went out of the room and dashed towards Justin's room where that Pashley was residing.

Before I could reach there, the door to the study room that was in the far corner of the

corridor opened and that girl came out of it all smiling.

"What the hell! What are you doing there?" She stopped short in her tracks when she heard me. The smile on her face faltered.

Instead of answering me, she resumed walking and tried to walk past me.

"Did you just try to ignore me?" I asked her and then noticed the moisture on her face and wetness on her front hair.

"Did you just use Justin's study bathroom? Didn't we tell you that you can only use the one attached to the bedroom?"

The guest room where Justin was staying had the lights on. A telltale sign that Justin was in there. So that meant she was alone in the study.

How dare she?

Instead of arguing, she kept looking down at the carpet. Running a quick gaze in the corridor, I held her elbow lightly and gave her a little shove inside her bedroom.

Once I entered behind her, I closed the door and faced her, "That is Justin's study. Everything placed there is confidential. Going there in his presence was another thing, girl. Why would you think of setting your foot in his absence?"

She seemed upset and worry lines around her eyes were evident. She was hiding something.

Then my eyes fell behind her and my jaw must be hung open. There was a cake placed on the bed.

"Is this your birthday?" I chuckled and started taking slow steps towards it, "Wow! Now I get it. You brought this cake so that Justin can celebrate your birthday with you. And when he was not available you went to his study to take something. Or maybe to steal something. Why else would you go there except you might be interested in..." I frowned and shook my head, "Wait a minute. Let me search you."

"What?" She said in shock. That was the first word I could manage out of her mouth, "No. You can't be serious."

"I am dead serious, my dear Pashley." I was beaming with happiness. She was carrying something precious and expensive. This raid was unexpected for her.

Gosh! I did not know for how long she had been stealing behind our backs.

Without warning, I turned her and started searching her shorts pockets and the baggy t-shirt that was tied around her waist.

Her face had gone beat red with embarrassment. The only thing I could extract from her pocket was an old male watch.

Interesting.

It was not only old but the cheapest thing I had ever seen in my life. I threw it on the bed and took a frustrated sigh. There was nothing she had.

Then why was she in the study? Just then my eyes caught something gleaming near her neckline. I furrowed my brows and tried to hold it when she stepped back.

"Don't! It's mine!" There was moistness in her eyes but her tone was firm.

"You are nothing but a lowly maid of this house, girl. Show it to me right now." I spoke through clenched teeth.

Just look at the gall of this girl.

Her hands dropped limply to her sides. I grabbed the necklace and gave it a little shove. It was a branded silver gold that did not come out easily. I twisted it a little and unhooked it.

I gasped when I realized this piece had a Cartier logo embossed on the chain. Justin's favorite brand. All the jewelry, he ever gifted me was from Cartier. This one was a masterpiece.

I tried to control my fury. She was not only trying to rob me of my fiancé but was also stealing all the precious gifts, he bought for me.

I snorted and held the necklace before her eyes, "This doesn't belong to you. It's not made for a maid! Ha-ha." I again batted my lashes, "Got it, Pashley?"

I was about to turn around when something strange happened. She quickly went ahead to open the door. It seemed like she did not want me to see the backside of the door.

Was she hiding more things there?

This was serious. I needed to tell Justin. He should be aware of her monopoly.

Without bothering to throw a second glance in her direction, I came out of the room.

Now I knew why Justin was pushing me away. She must be telling him stories against me and stealing things that he meant to give me.

Just then Justin came out of the guest room he was residing in and stood still when he saw me.

"Sarah. Hi!" He was freshly showered wearing a crisp white shirt. His black jacket was hanging loosely on his arm and his hair was gelled back in style.

He must be going to some meeting.

"Aren't you late for the office today, Justin?"

"Yeah. I am." He seemed to be in a rush, "I will talk to you later, Sarah."

"Justin?" He stopped abruptly when I called him, "I know you must be getting late for your meeting, but I need to do something about this."

Raising my hand that held the necklace I dropped its pendant before his eyes to let him see. Justin initially frowned and then his eyes went wide.

"Wh... Where did you find it? I mean..."

"Yes, Justin." I said with a smile, "Just a few minutes back I caught Ashley coming out of your study." That piece of information must be enough to make him angry, but he kept his calm.

"And?" He asked me. There was no emotion in his eyes, and everyone was aware that Justin knew how to hide his feelings.

"And?" I smirked, "She knew I could search her so instead of hiding it in his pocket she was wearing it. Can you believe it?"

He kept looking at me. I knew he must be speechless.

He reached out to take the necklace from my hand and examined it carefully, "Sarah!"

"Yes?"

"Did you ask her to take it off? I mean..."

"No." I said with a proud grin, "I took it off." I placed my hand on my chest.

Closing his fist around it he raised his one hand to cup my cheek, "Sarah."

"Yes, Justin."

"Pack up!"

"Sorry?"

"I said pack your things. You are no longer welcome here. Leave my house."

"J...Justin!" What was he talking about?

"You have two hours." He then walked past me, "And don't you dare set your foot in my house or my room again."

This order had left me tongue-tied. I wanted to remind him that I was not the other girl. Ashley was the other one.

I was his fiancée, damn it!

Before leaving the corridor, he turned and spoke again in a no nonsense tone, "And Sarah. Don't you dare go near Ashley!"

28- Ashley's side

Ashley Walters pov:

Shame

Insult

Humiliation

Pain

Everything started attacking me at once. How dare she? What did she think of herself? Why was she doing it?

Thank God, I opened the door on time when she was about to leave, otherwise, she would have killed me if she had read the chat written at the back of the door.

I was not the one who proposed Justin. Her fight was with the Deluca family. I was just a pawn. I was supposed to get my money and leave.

No questions asked.

But would I be able to leave Justin that easily?

That was the question that kept popping up in my mind lately. The cake on that bed was still there.

"Kitten? Ashley?" I jumped a little when I heard Justin calling my name and knocking the door.

I did not reply to Justin. I wanted him to believe that I had gone to sleep.

"I know you are still awake, kitten. I have got your necklace." My heart missed a beat. Did Sarah give that necklace to Justin?

I thought she was more interested in wearing it. Why would she do that?

Ignoring the knocks at the door I headed to my mattress to take my due sleep. I wanted a clear mind. And right now I did not want to face Justin. Being a gentleman, he would not open the door unless I would allow it.

This was not his mistake. I could not let my frustration out on him.

He did not deserve it when all he did since my arrival was to be nice to me. The knocking had stopped. He must have left by now.

"I would talk to you later, Justin." I laid on the mattress when I remembered that I had forgotten my phone, which he gifted me, in the study.

Thank God I was not carrying it otherwise Sarah might have taken that too.

Sarah pov:

"Sarah. You need to keep it together. If you would panic that girl will take undue advantage of it." Shella told me

frustratingly.

"Here. Take this." Nadiya gave me the coffee cup, "It might help you to come to your senses. My both friends did not like the way I was losing my cool.

"You don't understand it. She is very cunning. Sean and Helga were too close to Justin. And see what she did to them. I don't know what magic potion she made Justin drink."

I wish I could kill the girl with my bare hands.

"Stop it, girl. Don't be silly." Shella sat on the mattress causing it to dip, "There is no comparison between you two. You are a smart, intelligent, and beautiful girl who has a Harvard degree. For God's sake, Sarah. Use that intelligence. Use your brain. Bring that Harvard degree to some use."

I was not aware of what got into me. I hid my face with my hands and started sobbing uncontrollably.

"Sarah!" I felt my friends coming closer to me. One of them held my hands and the other one held me by my shoulders.

"Shh. We are with you." I cried harder. They were consoling me while it was Justin who was supposed to be there and calm me.

It was his job.

"She... She will take away my man. Shella. I love him like anything. I love..." I hiccupped. "I love him. Oh. God. What

"She... She will take away my man, Shella. I love him like anything. I love..." I hiccupped, "I love him. Oh, God. What to do now? Electra Deluca took away everything from me. She tricked me..."

They both were silently trying to offer me comfort.

"I always thought that she liked me. She made me believe that she had this control over the Deluca household. I was wrong, man. I made a mistake."

My friends did not interrupt. They just let me bawl my eyes out.

God knows for how long, I kept crying. Once I got tired and started wiping my face that was when Nadiya left my hand.

"Should I bring you another cup of hot coffee? This one has gotten cold." I declined her offer. Right now, all that mattered was their company.

At least, they were with me.

I needed them to help me kick her out.

Just then we all heard a knock at the door.

Justin?

"I knew it!" I quickly wiped my face with excitement, "I knew it. He can't live without me." Laughing to myself I ran towards the door and opened it.

Disappointment engulfed me like anything. With drooping shoulders, I came to the couch and sat down.

"Not happy much?" Sean did not seem to mind that I was not happy to find him at my friends' doorstep.

He sat beside me and held my hand.

"We need to do some work. You people can help yourselves with these cookies." Both the girls wanted to leave the room for giving us some privacy.

"Now don't be silly," Sean winked flirtatiously, "join us and let us know about the solution to this problem."

Shella and Nadiya looked in my direction, asking for approval. When I blinked my eyes, they nodded and sat there taking the other couch.

"So," Sean turned to me, "she succeeded!"

He was not mocking but still, it hurt. I did not like the way he asked me. I was not a failure.

People used to call me intelligent and witty. Every guy's eye used to focus on me and my body. For them, I used to be a perfect combo of beauty with brains.

be a perfect combo of beauty with brains.

"I can't imagine my life without him, Sean," I said quietly. Nadia and Shella were sitting there tight-lipped.

After packing my bags, I dropped straight at their door. I did not have anywhere to go. It had been three days since I landed here. I was not able to eat or drink anything.

I felt like shit without him.

Without Justin.

"What happened? Tell me." Sean asked me softly and when I thought I had shed enough tears, I again started sobbing.

"She was coming out of the study, which Justin is so possessive about. The strange thing was... he was not there. She was coming out of it all smiling. I thought maybe Justin was also there until I realized he was in his room. She was wearing this Cartier necklace, so I thought that maybe she stole it."

"Then? What did you do?"

"Naturally I took it from her... by force. What else could I do? When I met Justin outside the room, I told him everything that happened. I don't know what got into him. He did not take a minute to throw me out of that house.

He forgot that I had been living in that house for so long. Since my teenage years!" I again started bawling my

eyes.

"Sarah! My dear, Sarah!" Throwing back his head he started laughing, "I never knew you are so silly!"

Right now, it was difficult to decide if I wanted to rip off Sean's head or murder that Pashley.

"What do you mean by that," Nadiya tried to confront him. She never liked Sean and always tried to stay away from him.

"Seriously, Nadia? You really want me to spell it out for you? She hates that girl but there was no need to make it obvious for Justin."

"I don't understand..." Nadia raised her arms in exasperation.

"What do you want to say, Sean?" I asked him leaning back on the couch, "Or like Justin, you also think that it was my mistake..." I asked him looking up at the ceiling."

"You might not be mistaken, Sarah. The only mistake you made was letting Justin see your hatred towards that maid. He was your fiancé..."

"He... IS... MY fiancé!" I quit crying and tried to remind him.

"Yeah yeah." He rolled his eyes, "He IS your fiancé. But who asked you to threaten her so openly? You can win over anything by using love as your weapon." He winked at Shella, "What do you think?"

He asked no one in particular.

"I think..." Shella spoke for the first time, "I do get what he is trying to say. Sarah!" She shook her head, "You don't need to remind everyone that you hated her. Helga and Sean did this mistake and they had to bear the consequences."

Nadia started nodding her head, "Agree. He does have a point."

"No, I don't understand this." I tried to argue, "She can openly flirt with my fiancé, and you expect me to stay quiet? No, that's not happening." I said stubbornly.

"I am afraid you might lose your fiancé, Sarah," Sean said in a serious tone. I looked at my friends for confirmation when he spoke again, "Don't look at them, sweetheart. They are your minions and would never tell you that you are wrong. Sorry, ladies!"

He shrugged while apologizing, "But this is how it is. Whatever you will do Sarah... No matter how silly it might be. Your friends will never dare to tell you that you were wrong..." "Stop it, Sean!" I stood up and wanted to march to the guest bedroom assigned to me when he immediately jumped from the couch and came close to me holding me by my arms.

"You did amazing when you hit me in front of everyone." I had to quit struggling when he said that. He nodded, "I thought that was a genius move by you. Then what happened after that, Sarah? Why did you bring everything in the open? You want Justin? You need to love everything he is affectionate for. Even if it's someone's poop!"

I silently looked into his eyes, "Sean!" I breathed, "You mean to say..."

"Yes, Sarah." He cupped my cheeks in his both hands, "I think, now you understand what I am trying to say. You want to go back to the house? Right?"

When he asked me, I nodded slowly.

"Good. Then mark my words. There is only one person who can help you to get back into the Deluca house. And that is Ashley Walters."

He squeezed my arms before letting them go, "You want to step in there? Lure her. Beg her if need to. She is your permit... your pass... your ticket inside that house."

you

A smile cracked up on my lips. I never knew Sean was so sensible. He was right. All I needed to do was get back in Justin's good books, to let him know that I was on his side.

I was on Ashley Walters's side.

Ashley pov

"I need your help, Ash." I heard Evelyn trying to lift that cold steel container full of Pecan flavored ice cream.

"Hey." I quickly left the cash register and went to her. We lifted it up and placed it in the hole inside the big showcase."

"Ok. So where is the container?" Elijah asked us while stretching his arms, showing his non-existent biceps

"Sorry, chief. You are late." I could not help the smile flashing on my face. Now he was in trouble.

"I had been calling you for the past ten minutes!" Evelyn roared and even hit him on the chest.

"Hey! I was just coming. Ok?"

"No, you were not. You were busy scrolling your phone."

"Ev!" He rolled his eyes and pulled her to him.

"Oh, God. I guess I should go out. It's too much hot in here." I waved my hand while teasing them.

"Great idea. I need this privacy so that I can kiss her." He showed me a thumbs-up sign.

"No, Ash. You are not going anywhere." Evelyn snapped and tried to push him away.

"People. Get to work. What's the fuss about?" A panicked Sam came inside the back room, am serving there all alone."

"They are fighting for a kiss." I tried to bite back my smile.

When he turned to the couple questioningly, Evelyn gave a shove to Elijah.

"I need to kiss her. She is my girlfriend." Elijah informed him.

"He was busy on his phone despite my asking him to help me. So, no. He is not getting the kiss." Evelyn was hell angry.

"I

"Oh, God!" Sam looked up at the ceiling, "Grow up, guys." He turned to Evelyn tiredly, "Who helped you in placing the container, Eve?"

"Ash! Our shining star!" She gave him the cutest smile.

"Then it's decided. Ashley will get that kiss from you!"

"What!" I looked up horrified at this absurd notion. This made Evelyn and Sam crack up Elijah just huffed at the poor joke choice of his cousin that was not so poor.

while

It had been four days to that insulting nightmare. The first day when I did not open the door, Justin left the phone box at my doorstep. The maid who brought me dinner informed me about it. She was not allowed to touch it. Once she left, I opened the box. As expected, there

was a chit.

SHE WON'T DO IT AGAIN, ASHLEY. I PROMISED YOU, I WILL KEEP YOU SAFE. PLEASE

FORGIVE ME.

Those cute notes were becoming my addiction.

The necklace was still with him, but I had started using my phone. To my surprise, my orphanage contact details and Aniya's details were already saved there.

I had even started exchanging calls and messages with my old friends.

By now, I had again gotten busy with the cash register when after some time I heard hushed voices behind me.

"You tell her."

"No silly. You go to her and talk."

“She is your friend. Go, Evelyn!”

“She is YOUR employee! You go Elijah!”

I frowned and spoke up without turning around, “Elijah! Evelyn. What is it?” They had gone quiet.

“Guys!” I again called them.

They came forward and sat on either side of me. Opening the cash register, I skidded the calculator towards me, “Are you two going to talk or keep staring at me for admiring my beauty.” I quipped without moving away my gaze from the register.

I heard Evelyn chuckle.

"It's not as important, Ash." She started, "But you never know it might be."

I stopped the calculations and turned to her, "What are you talking about." She looked at Elijah as if asking for his help. They both were acting weird tonight.

Elijah fixed his spectacles on his nose, "I don't want to scare you, Ashley. But I have seen a man following you at night."

"What?" Flashing a smile at him, I closed my register, "Seriously? I am a movie person. But Elijah. I think you have been watching suspense movies a lot lately."

"No, Ash." Eve covered my hand with hers, "He is a very good observer. I can vouch for that. He told me a few days back but initially, I ignored it thinking he must be imagining it."

When I was sure that they were not playing any prank on me, I shrugged, "I don't know what to say. I... I never noticed any guy following me. Wh... What is his age? Must be a high schooler having a crush on me. Who knows?"

I laughed but had to hold it back when I realized they both were dead serious now.

"This is not a joke, Ash." Eve said with concern, "I saw that man and he is in no way a high schooler. He was a well-built giant man."

Justin's image flashed across my mind. No, he was not a giant.

"What's his height?"

"He might be around seven feet!" Elijah told me.

No way. It was not Justin. He was around six two or six three. But not seven.

"So, you people have been observing this man following me, and you informing me tonight?"

"Yes. I caught him just one or two times so thought I might be wrong." Inhaling a deep breath he turned to me, "I actually... just saw him nearby."

"What? Wait a minute. The man who was following me is here?"

"Yes. Close by." He whispered near my ear.

I got up and went to the window. Thank God for the old brown curtain.

"There with the black car," Elijah pointed to a side, and I saw a man partially bald. He was wearing dark shades even at this time of the night.

He had this rigidity on his face. There was an air of brutality around him. Slowly I raised my phone and focused its camera on him.

"What are you doing?" Evelyn hissed behind me, "He might catch us..."

Ignoring her when I clicked his picture just then he decided to look towards me. The moment he saw me, the harshness left his face.

He took off his glasses and salute me with a smile. Our mouths were hung open!

"Who are you, Ashley Walters? President of some country?" Elijah whispered behind me.

"What do you mean by that" I kept looking at the man who had now moved put back his glasses.

"You are a fool not to realize this. He is your bodyguard, silly."

away his gaze and

I was still trying to process what Elijah had said. We could not discuss it further due to the sudden influx of customers. After completing my shift, I started walking home. At one point I stopped and turned around only to find the same man walking behind me keeping a safe distance.

"Oh, Justin!" I said silently with a sigh, "Why?"

This was too much. I was not a hot shot like him. For God's sake, I did not need a bodyguard. The huge, muscular man was still wearing his shades.

Once I would reach home, I will check Justin's study. If he would be awake, then I will talk to him about it.

I was about to reach the wall of Deluca's house when I heard someone calling my name in a low voice.

Was I imagining it?

No. It can not be that stalker's voice. It was too girlish.

I turned around and found myself face to face with my husband's fiancée.

Sarahi.

30- Sleeping Together

Ashley Walters pov

I stood there rooted to the spot. Justin told me to be bold.

To become a lioness.

But around this girl, I was not aware of what used to come over me. No matter what façade I put up there in front of her. Her presence always used to affect my mental health effortlessly.

I did not want her to see the little Ashley inside me who used to get scared easily.

"What do you want Sarah?" I folded my arms on my chest and ran my gaze over her. Her face was wet with tears. Her palms were joined, and she was wearing the same dress that she wore when she took away my necklace.

"I am..." The tears in her throat were making her choke on her words, not letting her speak.

Whatever was making her upset, I did not like her standing there crying like this. She might be a stone-hearted person.

However, my brought up was done in a decent environment where I was taught to be down to earth and empathetic to everyone.

"You did not answer me, Sarah. What are you doing here? We can talk inside." I did not want her to witness the

wooden staircase.

That staircase was a formality, I was sure nobody would stop me from entering through the main gate. Justin won't let that happen.

Thinking of Justin was about to bring a smile to my face, which I bit back immediately.

"I can't

go inside, Ashley." She said while wiping her face, "I am not allowed to."

Not allowed to? Why? And why she was calling me Ashley and not Pashley?

"What are you talking about, Sarah? Why are you not allowed to go inside?" I looked at her face trying to look for any signs if she was lying or mocking me.

Was it a new plan?

"The day I misbehaved with you and took your locket..." She wiped her tears, "Justin did not like it, Ashley." She started crying again, "He kicked me out of that house."

What? No! I can't believe it!

How can Justin ask his fiancé to leave the house? That too because of me?

Something inside my chest fluttered and warmth started spreading all over my body.

I placed my finger on my chest, "He asked you to leave because of me? Are you sure?"

She nodded her head, "He is a man of principles." She smirked, "If he promised to keep you safe under his roof then no matter who the person is. He won't accept any shit from anyone. No matter if it's me or Electra Deluca."

When my eyes went wide, she nodded her head with a sarcastic laugh.

"Why are you here, Sarah?" I demanded, "Whatever happened was between you and Justin. I did not know that you are no more in that house until just now."

Justin wrote on that chit that Sarah would not do anything against me. He never mentioned that he has kicked her out.

"It might be between Justin and me. But the reason was you." She walked closer to me and held my elbow lightly, "He will listen to you, Ashley. Please ask him to take me back. And I assure you, Ashley, from now onwards anything that you don't like won't happen. I swear, Ashley. Please ask him to take me back. I have been with him since childhood. I always stayed in this house. It's almost mine as much as his. Please, Ashley. I promise I will try to be a better person."

Her speech had made me quiet. Justin was not someone who might like suggestions. What if he would not like it if I will poke my nose into his personal matters?

"Sarah... Justin never takes his decisions after consulting me." How to make her believe me?

"Sarah. Justin never takes his decisions after consulting me." How to make her believe me?

"I know. I know, Ashley. I know him like anything. We were very close before..." She paused for a moment, "before you came into our lives..."

"Listen, Sarah. I did NOT come into your lives. Stop telling me that again and again. I was brought by the Deluca family. Please stop blaming me..."

"I am sorry. I am so sorry, Ashley. I assure you. You will never get hurt by me in future. All I want is one chance."

How to convince her that it was not in my hands?

"Ashley. Justin usually doesn't listen to anyone when he makes decisions. But at least can you try? Please?"

When I stayed quiet, she again joined her palms, "I ... I beg you, Ashley Walters. Please convince him to take me back and I promise you. You will never get hurt in the future. Like Justin, I will make sure nobody dares to harm you. You will find me on the same side where Justin is standing."

Urgh! Why was she making such kinds of demands that I was not able to fulfill?

"Ok." I stepped back, "I will try to talk..."

"When?"

"As soon as possible."

"No. Tonight. Please, Ashley. Talk to him tonight."

"Sarah..."

"Please, Ash. I might die. Please. He won't go to sleep until and unless he is sure that you will return safely."

What? Justin would stay awake until I ...

Right now, she did not look like Sarah who used to mock me. A different person was standing there right before me who did not have any resemblance to Sarah.

To be honest, I liked this version of hers. Quite down to earth.

"Ok. I will try. Tonight." I gave her a tight-lipped smile.

"Really?" She jumped with joy and took me in a warm hug, "Oh, thank you thank you thank you, Pash...I mean..." She got back fixing her hair in embarrassment, "I mean... Ashley."

I chuckled and turned around to walk, "Bye, Sarah."

"Bye, Ash."

Once reaching my room, I stepped out to check the lights in Justin's study.

Good! He was inside. Sarah might be right. He must be waiting for my safe return.

How about a shower first? Though we were still not on talking terms, I needed to let my ego down because of Sarah. She deserved a fair chance.

Justin was someone who could not be ignored easily by any sane girl. He was Sarah's fiancé and no girl in her right state of mind would let her fiancé go.

Especially if it's a man like Justin.

After taking a quick shower I changed into the only pair of cotton shorts I had and a usual oversized t-shirt.

Stepping out of my room, I ran a cautious gaze in the corridor and was thoroughly disappointed. Justin was no more in his study.

By now the room was dark. I should have gone to him before taking shower.

I was about to get back inside my room when a thought crossed my mind. What if he was in his room but hadn't gone to sleep?

It won't cost anything if I try to find out. Right?

Standing in front of his door, I raised my hand to knock and then decided to just call his name softly. The knock might disturb his sleep.

Placing my hands on the door I leaned into it and whispered his name, "Justin!"

I could not see any light coming under the doorframe, "Justin!"

It was again a whisper but a bit louder.

What if ... if he was mad at me? For not talking to him for these past few days?

"Justin!" I whispered again but this time there was desperation in my voice. It had gotten a little bit teary too.

"Jus..." Before I could again call him the door to his room opened making me fall forward on my face. Two strong arms suddenly wrapped around me to keep me safe from the fall.

"Easy, kitten." As soon as those arms were around me, they left me once I got steady on my feet. And I came to know the reason why?

Justin was standing there wearing his boxers.

Only his boxers.

I gulped down and reminded myself I needed to breathe.

"I thought you were awake..." I tried to speak and for some reason, my voice had turned husky, "A few minutes back the lights of your study were..." I cleared my throat which had suddenly gotten parched.

"Yeah. I don't go to sleep until and unless you return from your job." He added and waited for

Damn. Sarah was right.

Urgh. How to speak when he was standing with all that glory of his beautiful body and those curves and the muscles...

"Ashley!"

"Ye... Yes... yes, Justin."

"Stop it!" He chuckled.

"Stop?" Throat clear, "Stop what?"

He came closer and leaned down to bring his eyes to my eye level, "Stop staring at me."

His eyes were no more amused now. They had turned serious, and the amber color had turned darker.

I had forgotten completely why I was there. I could not remember any more about Sarah.

"I

I... Justin..." I licked my lower lip and chuckled, "I don't remember anymore why I am here." I did not know how to hide my embarrassed face that must be turning crimson by now.

"Kitten. You do know you need your sleep so that you can perform better at your work?" These were the exact words I told him that night when I did not want to talk to him.

I tried to smile and was about to turn around to leave his room when without warning he snaked his arms around my waist and lifted me.

"JUSTIN!" I squealed, "What are you doing?"

"Making you sleep." Hitting the door with one foot he shut it with a bang and took me to his bed, "Sleep here. Unless you want to change into something comfier or ..." His eyes started dancing, "You are welcome to take off your clothes if you want."

He placed me on the mattress and bent down kissing my temple.

"What?" I pushed him by placing my hands on his chest, but he did not budge and started laughing. I shifted back towards the headrest. He quickly turned to the closet and took out a pair of comfy cotton pajamas.

Standing there he hooked his fingers in his boxers to take them off.

I quickly covered my eyes with my hand, "What the hell ..."

Why was he changing here when he should have gone inside the bathroom?

"Now I am decent enough to sleep beside you." I heard him close to my ear.

I opened my eyes and took a sigh of relief when saw him dressed in those pajamas. However, he was still not wearing anything to cover his upper body.

Getting inside the covers he took me in his arms and that reminded me those arms belonged

to Sarah, not me, "Justin. I need to talk."

"After our sleep, Ashley."

He nuzzled his nose in my neck and pulled me closer to him.

"Oh, God Justin. What if the maid who brings me breakfast won't find me in the room?"

"Nothing will happen." He said in between the loud yawn.

"Justin, what if..."

"Shhh. Go to sleep, Ashley."

"Justin what if ..."

"Ashley..." He pinned me under him this time and raised his head, "Do you want me to make you silent or ..."

Oh, brother. He was talking about a kiss.

"I am sorry. I am sleeping." I squeezed my eyes shut, "See. I am already asleep by now. I have gone to sleep." I tried to make him believe.

Gosh! I never blabbered this much.

I heard him chuckling softly and kissed my neck. I laid there waiting for him to make another move. I guess a few minutes must have passed when I opened just one eye to look down under my chin.

He was sleeping peacefully holding me, his face inside the crook of my neck.

"Go to sleep, love." I smiled when he said sleepily and felt his soft lips touching my neck gently.