

Cornered

Presley found herself wiping tears of frustration away in the bathroom. Odin's hatred of her started before she was born. All the therapy she took over the course of her life still didn't x the ache in her heart each time he came at her. It made her act bitter, angry and shrew-like and she was so tired of it and him.

Her father and Odin over the years got into more ghts, some of them quite heated due to Odin's treatment of Scarlett and Presley but it didn't seem to faze Odin in the least. The worst part was, her grandfather felt it was something time would heal and so when he passed away ve years ago, he put their inheritances in trusts for both her and Odin under the care of her father and it could only be released in monthly allotments following one shared meal a month for ten years. They'd gotten through ve years of it but there were still ve to go. She didn't need the money from her inheritance but Odin did and so she was forced to endure his bullshit because they both needed to be present.

She'd done this less than two weeks ago. She hadn't been mentally prepared for a second one so soon. She took a shaky breath and mentally prepared herself to return to the war zone known as the dining table.

Coming out of the ensuite bathroom in her childhood bedroom, she froze at the sight of Cruz Hawley standing with his arms folded over his chest blocking the exit from her bedroom.

He narrowed his gaze at her, "were you crying?"

"No. Why would I be crying? Can you move?"

"You're in no position to make demands of me. You cost me a fty-million-dollar deal."

"I saved you a lifetime of being saddled with a woman's whose voice is the sound of a metal on a cheese grater."

"She was key to my deal."

"Are you kidding me? You're not man enough to seal a business deal without f****g the daughter of your associate. Here I thought you were a solid businessman and yet you have to rely on your dick."

"She told her father I beat my girlfriend, broke her arm and left her in an abortion clinic."

"You know I came up with the story in about thirty seconds," she was smug as she held his gaze. Her smile faltered as the clear clicking of her bedroom door being locked caught her ear. "What are you doing?"

"You owe me."

"Payback was such a b***h you feel the need to intimidate a girl in her own bedroom?" She mocked him despite how much her heart was racing. He was far larger than her.

"Are you feeling intimidated?"

"Not really. Dad is right downstairs. All I need to do is scream and he'll come running. I am after all a daddy's girl."

"He should have beat you more, Ladybird. You're a menace."

"Says the guy who at the age of twenty-three sabotaged my driver's exam."

"Gavin told Odin to stay away so Odin called in a favor."

"Seriously, though, does Odin have like gay porn of you or something he extorts you with? Why are you his lapdog s***h dancing monkey?"

"Nah. He's my best friend. We made vows as kids." He paused, "is Marsha really gay?"

"Not my place to tell."

"Between you and me. I won't say anything to him."

"As if I'd trust you."

"You can trust me, Presley." He held his two ngers up, "scout's honor."

"You were no more a scout than I was."

"True. Come on, spill it."

"It's not my story to share."

"Presley," he slowly stalked towards her. "Come on."

"Fine. She's gay. She knew she was gay years before Dad and Mom met but she was too ashamed to admit it to anyone. Mom called her out one day after a parent teacher conference when Marsha was ogling the ass of Odin's teacher. Mom got her to meet for coffee and encouraged her to be her authentic self. Marsha said she would wait until Odin graduated because she didn't want to embarrass him."

"It wouldn't embarrass him."

"Are we talking about the same guy? He's a judgemental asshole."

"Not where his mom is concerned."

"Really? How well do you know your buddy, Cruz? His penchant for insulting women isn't only geared to us. You know why he doesn't have a girlfriend right? Because while ninety percent of the time to anyone but me or mom, he's a decent fella." She held his gaze, "the other ten percent he's a mean, cold prick. Mom and I were at Marsha's one day to visit. She still has one of those old-fashioned voice mail machines. He left her a message which made my mother cry."

Cruz seemed shocked. "He loves his mom."

"He was pissed off when he got in s**t at the rm and Dad stopped his paycheck. He called Marsha a weak woman who couldn't keep a man and didn't ght for her family. He was going off about how if she'd been any kind of a real woman and mother, she would have kicked the mistress w***e to the curb and made sure he was better provided for."

"I don't believe you."

"I don't care. For the record, it was about two years ago. He wasn't a teenage boy grappling with his emotions. He was a grown man who still thinks he deserves something for nothing. Dad red him when he got embroiled in a s****I harassment lawsuit from the admin assistant he f****d on his desk because the woman provided evidence of how he coerced her. Dad paid her off a s**t ton of money to make it go away. He lives entirely off his monthly trust fund stipend. The only way he still gets it is by coming to brunch once a month. He's usually sweet to his mother but that day he was a drunk bastard, and he broke her heart."

"You're a liar."

"Whatever, can you get out of the way so I can go back downstairs? I need to be the buffer for Mom."

"Buffer?"

"Yeah, if Odin is picking on me, he leaves her alone."

He frowned, "no, you can't leave. You owe me fty million."

She laughed in his face. "No, I don't."

"You don't think?"

"No. I don't think. You're a grown man who's been harassing me since birth. I could sue you for emotional distress, pain and suffering from all the bullying you put me through. You were a grown man right up until you moved away when you were twenty-four years old, and you were bullying me from birth. You're no better than the bastard downstairs. I owe you nothing."

"You're accusing me of ruining your childhood with bullying?"

"I lived a great childhood, except when you came to visit. You weren't around enough to ruin my childhood, Cruz. He was here every other weekend, and you weren't with him every time he came over." She saw his shoulders relax, "however, you are as much a monster as the misogynistic bastard you call your best friend. Every chance I get, the child in me who lived in fear of every single time he would show up with you in tow, is going to get her revenge. Any opportunity I get to f**k with you, I'm going to do on behalf of the child in here," she tapped her chest. "I don't care if it costs you millions or billions."

She was so caught up in her spiel she missed how he was slowly cornering her against the wall separating her bathroom and bedroom. She couldn't help but feel intimidated. He was as a huge man, and she was on the petite side. She needed to crane her neck to look into his eyes as he towered over her, his bulk taking up the space as he put his hands on either side of her head.

"Fifty million dollars."

"Chump change to you. I know your net worth."

"My company —"

"Won't go under."

"My PR team is working double time because of your stunt. The guy who livestreamed it was a nice touch for you, huh?"

"I actually didn't have anything to do with him. Anderson messaged Sloane and asked if she knew why you were cursing me on the internet. We looked it up and found it. The guy apparently knew who you were. We did some digging, and he'd actually posted a photo of you when he was dining in the restaurant. Apparently, he works at the hospital where you're doing research."

"I know. He's going to regret setting me up by calling the cops, but you are the one who got the ball really going." His jaw was set.

At this distance she could see his eyes were a hazel, a smidge more brown than green with little ecks of gold in them. His eyelashes were a pale brown or dark blonde as were his eyebrows which were neatly groomed. The beginnings of crow feet at the corners of his eyes weren't anything to detract from his good looks. He might be a giant asshole, but he was an attractive one.

"Here's the thing, Ladybird," he rested his elbow on the wall over her head, "my company is taking a hit in stock values. I lost a big contract. I run my own business. This isn't my father's money I'm playing with. My PR team thinks the only way to get things back on track is for you and me to make a few public appearances to support the dating thing. They want to play it off we've been doing long-distance over the last six years. I'm not going to get my contract back, but we can mitigate some losses which have happened in the last ve days."

"You and I to make public appearances? Together? f**k no!"

"I'm not suggesting we f**k. I'd rather chew nails. However, you're going to do these dates with me or I'm going to make your life a living hell. You're going to come with me to a b**m club to nish out your little dialogue about our alleged s*x life. We'll be seen going and coming."

"I'll never come with you," she mocked him with wide eyes.

He c****d his head to one side. "Agreed but I wouldn't mind taking you to a club and putting a whip on your ass."

"Never going to happen. I'm not having my memberships revoked because you don't know how to play by rules or follow consent."

"Your membership?"

She shrugged ghting to not laugh in his face. "You need to move before Mom comes looking for me. She's always wanting an excuse to get away from Odin when he's here. I've been up here twenty minutes now."

"I don't think so."

"Cruz, I know you think this macho display is supposed to scare me and honestly, if I was anywhere but in my childhood bedroom, it might because you're a big motherfucker, but this is my home. You don't get to have power over me here. Not anymore."

"Let me rephrase this. You're going to play nice with me and come on three dates which will depict us in a consensual yet alternative relationship or I'm going to sue you. My lawyers are at the ready."

"Go ahead," she smirked. "You do know most of the s**t you guys did to me as a child is documented right? I can easily say it's a lifelong game of pranks which has escalated all along or I could countersue. I've been in therapy since I was ve thanks to the three of you. I named names."

"I haven't seen you in years. I've been working in Toronto."

"You should go back because Vancouver is not big enough for both of us."

He surprised her when he gripped her under her armpits and lifted her clear off the oor and held her against the wall effortlessly, his eyes staring right into hers which were now eyelevel to him.

"Listen here, Ladybird, you're going to play along or else."

Fuck he was strong and the girly, uber-feminine side of her which gravitated to meat heads with urge to squeeze than brains was squealing like a sorority sister in a wet t-shirt contest. The more to squeeze his biceps and orgasm from the sheer girth of his arms was nearly impossible to avoid. Instead, at this position, her knee was exactly the right height.

She balled her sts and caught him in the throat right as her knee connected with his d**k. As he dropped her to the oor, staggering backwards as he choked and grabbed at his d**k, she noted two thoughts. The rst was run, which she did. She'd never unlocked her door so fast.

The second thought however was the far more disturbing one. Cruz Hawley had been hard as a rock when she'd kneed his c**k. What was she supposed to do with that information?