

Chapter 17

Kaelani jolted awake, breathless, her body arching against the sheets as if the dream still held her captive. A hot pulse shuddered low in her abdomen, shame heating her cheeks even in the empty room.

Her breath caught as the fragments returned—the dream. His hands gripping her as if she belonged to him. The sound of his voice against her ear, rough and demanding. The way his name had ripped from her throat even as she tried to resist. The raw hunger in his eyes as he fucked her senseless until she shattered around him.

She squeezed her eyes shut. Goddess, it had felt real. Too real. She had come in her sleep. And she came hard—to that asshole.

Her pulse hammered in her ears. “It was just a dream,” she whispered into the stillness, forcing the words past dry lips.

Kaelani pressed her thighs together, trembling, but it did nothing to ease the ache. She buried her face in her pillow, willing her racing heart to calm, willing the memory to fade.

But the truth clung stubborn as his mark still etched on her neck. It was the most vivid dream she had ever had.

Kaelani flung the sheets back, the heat of her skin unbearable, and stumbled to her feet. The wooden floor was cool beneath her toes, but it wasn’t nearly enough. She crossed the room and flicked on the bathroom light, the glare almost harsh after the shadows of her bedroom.

She leaned over the sink, twisting the faucet until icy water poured out.

Cupping her hands, she splashed it onto her face, the shock of cold making her gasp. Droplets clung to her lashes, slid down her cheeks, and offered refreshing relief.

When she finally looked up, the mirror exposed her. Her nipples pressed stiffly against the thin silk of her nightgown, her skin flushed, damp strands of hair curling around her face. Worse, the slick heat between her thighs hadn't ebbed; it clung to her, undeniable proof of how deeply the dream had touched her.

Kaelani pressed her palms to the counter, breathing deep until her pulse slowed. Then, with a sharp shake of her head, she turned from the mirror.

By the time dawn crept in, she was already in the bakery, hands deep in flour and dough. The familiar motions steadied her—measuring, kneading, shaping, sliding trays into the oven. The hum of the ovens, the scent of yeast rising, the rhythm of work... it was her anchor. Her peace.

By the end of the week, Kaelani had buried herself in routine—up before dawn, sleeves dusted white, hands shaping loaves and pastries until muscle memory carried her through the day. The work should have been enough. It usually was.

But her sleep betrayed her.

She dreamed of him again in her garden. Standing beneath the moonlight, eyes burning with hunger. She resisted, denied him, swore she would not yield. But he didn't listen. His strength pinned her, his mouth silenced her—until she was once again convulsing around him, milking his own release as he buried himself deep inside of her.

The sun had long dipped by the time Kaelani locked up the bakery and began the walk home. The streets glowed faintly with the last traces of daylight, light fixtures flickering to life one by one.

She had begun to hate this part—the end of the day, the quiet stretch between the bakery and her front door. With nothing left to busy her hands, her thoughts crept in. Thoughts she didn't trust. She didn't want to think about that bastard. She didn't want to wonder if she would see him again when she closed her eyes.

She pressed her lips together, frustration burning under her skin. She quickened her pace, eyes fixed on the corner ahead—

A low hum cut through her thoughts. Tires against gravel.

A sleek car pulled alongside her, the gleam of polished black catching the last threads of light. Kaelani's steps faltered.



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