

From Substitute To Queen

Chapter 5: Truth or Dare

"Should I?"

The confusion on his face was almost comical. This wasn't the script he'd written in his head.

"Sable." His voice dropped lower. "I know what you're thinking."

"Do you?"

"You're upset about Camila. About what people might say."

I finished my wine. "Are you upset about something?"

"No, I just..." He fumbled for words. "I thought you might be feeling... I don't know. Jealous?"

"Why would I be jealous?"

The question hung between us. Darrell stared at me like I'd grown a second head.

"Because..." He gestured vaguely toward where Camila was laughing with Marcus. "Because of how things looked."

"How did they look?"

"Fuck, Sable." His voice cracked with frustration. "Where's the fire? Where's the fight? Why aren't you..." He stopped himself.

"Why aren't I what?"

He said nothing. But I knew what he meant. *Why aren't you breaking down? Why aren't you giving me the messy emotions I can manipulate?*

For three years, he'd counted on my insecurity. My desperate need for his approval. My fear of losing him.

Tonight, he was looking at a stranger.

"Want to keep playing?" I gestured toward the group reforming around the coffee table.

"Yeah." His voice came out hoarse. "Sure."

The bottle spun again, this time stopping on Camila. She clapped her hands together like a delighted child.

"Truth or dare?" Emily asked.

"Dare, obviously." Camila's smile could have powered the city. "I never back down from a challenge."

Someone shouted out suggestions. Others laughed and called for something scandalous. But it was Ryan who delivered the killing blow.

"Kiss any guy in this room. Your choice."

The room erupted in wolf whistles and cheers. Camila stood gracefully, her hips swaying as she surveyed her options. Every male eye followed her movement.

"Such tough choices." She bit her lower lip in an exaggerated show of consideration. "They're all so handsome."

Darrell sat rigid beside me. His hands clenched into fists on his thighs.

Camila walked slowly around the circle, pausing behind each man's chair. When she reached Darrell, her fingers trailed across his shoulders.

"Tempting," she murmured.

His breathing hitched. The sound sent ice through my veins.

But then she moved on, continuing her circuit until she reached Marcus. She stopped behind his chair and placed both hands on his shoulders.

"You'll do perfectly."

Marcus grinned and turned in his seat to face her. "My lucky night."

That's when Darrell exploded.

"No."

The single word cracked through the room like a whip. He shot to his feet so fast his chair scraped backward.

"The game's over."

Camila's eyes widened with false innocence. "But Relly, it's just a game."

"I said no." He crossed to her in three quick strides and grabbed her wrist. "We're leaving."

"Hey!" Marcus protested. "She picked me fair and square."

Darrell turned on him with Alpha authority blazing. "Touch her and I'll break your fucking neck."

The threat silenced every voice in the room. Camila allowed herself to be pulled away, but I caught the satisfied smirk she thought no one would see.

They headed for the stairs leading to the private rooms. Darrell's grip on her wrist was possessive, claiming.

"Where are you going?" The question escaped before I could stop it.

Darrell paused without turning around. "To talk. Privately."

The door upstairs slammed shut with finality.

I reached for another glass of wine with steady hands. The group sat frozen, uncertain how to process what they'd witnessed.

Then Lisa Morrison started laughing.

"Well, that was fucking spectacular." She raised her drink in a mock toast. "Our Alpha finally stopped pretending."

"Poor Sable." Ryan's voice dripped false sympathy. "Getting abandoned at her own boyfriend's reunion party."

"Technically it's Emily's party," I corrected.

"Doesn't matter whose party it is." Jennifer leaned forward with vicious glee. "What matters is who Darrell chose to disappear with."

"And it sure as shit wasn't his live-in girlfriend," Tommy added.

The pack members erupted in cruel laughter. I sipped my wine and let them have their fun.

"This is better than reality TV," Lisa continued. "Watching the fake Luna get replaced in real time."

"Replaced implies she ever had the position to begin with," Marcus said. "She was always just the placeholder."

"The practice girlfriend," Ryan agreed. "Keeping the bed warm until the real woman came home."

Jennifer's eyes sparkled with malice. "I bet she thought she actually mattered. Three years of playing house and she probably believed her own fantasy."

"The delusion is strong with this one," Tommy gestured in my direction. "Still sitting here like she belongs."

I finally stood up and walked out.

The bathroom door closed behind me with a soft click. I made it to the nearest stall and locked the door before the first tear fell.

I sat on the closed toilet seat and buried my face in my hands. The perfect makeup, expensive dress, thirty-thousand-dollar shoes – none of it mattered. I looked successful on the outside, but inside I was crumbling.

My chest felt crushed, like someone had reached inside and squeezed until everything important stopped working.

Three fucking years of believing I meant something.

I pressed my palms against my eyes, trying to stop the tears. That's when I heard the bathroom door open and voices filter in.

Jennifer's voice rang out clearly. "Oh my god, did you see her face when Darrell chose Camila?"

"Priceless," another voice agreed. "I thought she might actually cry."

"Too bad she didn't. Would've been the perfect ending to this shitshow."

I froze.

"Three years of pretending to be Luna material," Jennifer continued. "Finally getting the reality check she deserved."

"Darrell didn't even try to hide it," the second voice laughed. "Just grabbed Camila and walked away like Sable was furniture."

"Because that's all she ever was. Expensive furniture that happened to have tits."

Their laughter echoed off the bathroom tiles.

"I give it a week before he kicks her out completely," Jennifer said. "Why keep the knockoff when you've got the original back?"

"Poor little orphan girl. Nowhere to go, no family to run home to."

"Maybe she can find another Alpha to leech off. Though after tonight, good luck with that. Everyone knows she's just a used-up placeholder now."

My hands shook as I pressed them against my mouth to keep from making any sound. They had no idea I was here.

Let me out, Esme snarled in my mind. Let me tear their fucking throats out.

No.

They're insulting us! Our honor! Fight back!

What's the point? I closed my eyes against the rage burning in my chest. *They're not wrong.*

They ARE wrong! Esme's fury blazed hotter. *We are strong! We are worthy! Show them what happens when they disrespect us!*

And prove what exactly? I pressed harder against my mouth as another wave of cruel laughter echoed outside. *That I'm the unstable, emotional mess they think I am?*

Better than being their victim.

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