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Westridge Valley, 2013

The seriousness in Richard's voice had Imani's spine sti ening, hesitantly she moved to her feet. "Turn around," he muttered when she kept her back to him.

This time there was need; needin his voice. Slowly, Imani pivoted and made direct eye contact with his chest. Her nose was centimeters from touching him, that's how close he was. Automatically she went to step back, but Richard wasn't having it. His arm banded around her narrow waist and he tugged her forward. Her hands came out to catch her fall and splayed across his muscular chest. "Mr. Bass-" she cut herself o as he pinched her chin and drew her eyes to his. "Richard, please let me go." She finished.

This was all new territory for Imani. She was confused by Richard's actions, but mostly shocked at her own response to him. A part of her wanted to play the dangerous game, taunt the beast she knew he kept locked up. Another part told her to submit quietly and wait until she was able to really challenge the man, wait until she had a degree and preferably a job under her belt. The latter won.

Richard tightened his hold on her body, it was so and silky against his much harder form. "No boys," he repeated.

Before she could so much as blink, he swooped down and captured her plump lips. If he was going to leave her in a college full of horny fuckers, he was going to leave her with a harsh reminder. And, harsh it was. He claimed her mouth as if it were already his as if he had every right over stealing her first kiss. Richard nibbled at her lower lip until she opened her mouth to him, he could feel her lungs seizing up and trailed from the corner of her mouth to the crook of her neck.

Yeah, the next few years were going to be hell without her, especially now that he'd gotten a taste of those so lips of hers! But fuck it, he was a grown-ass man, he needed to pull his dick into place and accept that this was an unavoidable evil.

Imani took in deep breaths as he finally allowed her the chance to breathe, in her dazed state she mildly acknowledged him sucking on the pulse at her neck. "Richard..." She meant to stop him, but her voice had taken a husky turn and the word came out sounding similar to a moan. She had no clue, no idea on how to handle the situation. How to handle the man that her mother worked for, it didn't make sense for him to even consider her a woman. But, she knew, something had changed.

Something had triggered Richard.

"You keep your legs closed, Imani. Nobody else touches you." Richard rested his forehead against her shoulder, he took a moment to calm his raging hormones. Only when he was sure he had control— that he wouldn't press her up against the wall and pound into her tight little cunt— did he step back. "Be safe, sweetheart." His final words were tender, gentle.

Imani remained a statue in the middle of the room, her mind racing and her nerves going haywire. Going over the events up until that moment, she still couldn't locate the trigger that had set the man o . Hell, he'd never really touched her back home, in fact, she was sure he avoided her. So what had caused the sudden outburst? Although a small fraction of her mind was contemplating Richard's actions, the larger portion still felt him on a more physical level.

She registered that he'd le , but regardless she could still feel him against her body. The feeling of his brawny figure pressing into hers, his mouth slanting across hers... Holding her so tightly she was sure she'd bruise, dammit!She clenched her thighs together as strange sensations crept along her spine and hit her right between the thighs.

He was a dangerous addiction, one without any source of rehabilitation or cure. Every part of him intimidating and utterly intoxicating, no other man seemed to lure her the way he did, consume her so completely without even uttering a single word... Somewhere in the darker corners of her mind, Imani knew that Richard wanted a lot more than her body, she was afraid he was a er her soul, but this revelation would only be theorised in her subconscious state.

Then the silence hit her full force. Almost as if her ears had popped from a numb state, Imani glanced around. It was the sudden emptiness that stumped her; that's when she really accepted just how deeply her emotions for Richard ran... She felt alone.

Without him, she felt cold.

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With her books pressed tightly against her chest, Imani made her way into the lecture theatre. It had been a little over a month since she'd moved in; since she'd seen Richard. Her days were consumed by study and her nights... those were Richards. Her dreams had been claimed by the brooding man and there was nothing she could do to stop him from taking control of her unconscious form. The reminder text she received, didn't help.

Legs closed.

Those words should have disgusted her, but she soon found herself craving them. Waiting until her phone buzzed and his message illuminated the device's small screen. Imani slipped down on an empty seat and opened her notepad, with a pen twirling between her fingers she waited for the lecturer to finish setting up.

Beside her, she felt a shadow fall, for a moment she'd almost believed it was the man who haunted her dreams. Quickly scolding herself, Imani turned to look up at the person beside her. The man was of average build, maybe a few years older than her. His blond hair was a mess and the glasses that sat atop his nose hid dark blue eyes. She looked further down and saw his mouth li into a so grin. The man was literally the polar opposite of Richard.

"Hi," he whispered, his eyes seeking hers.

Imani returned his greeting, "Hi."

The stranger chuckled lightly, he turned to face the lecturer and le Imani to realise this is the kind of guy she needed. He was safe, nothing like the dangerous beast that clung to her conscious. This man wouldn't kiss her brutally, he'd be so and gentle. He wouldn't command things in a ridiculously attractive manner, or be a brooding, dominating man the second he stepped through the door... Imani sighed, she missed Richard as much as she knew she shouldn't.

The class went as smoothly as it possibly could. She'd found out the stranger's name was, Ben Wilson. Ben has recently dropped his bachelor's in film and media, deciding business was a much safer and reliable avenue. Safe, there it was again. He'd unknowingly cemented the notion in Imani's mind.

"Yeah, I moved out at sixteen and gigged in every known joint this side, West," Ben spoke so ly as he waited for Imani to pack up.

She realised Ben was a lot taller than she'd first assumed, by no means the brawn of Richard, but still a man who kept himself healthy. "You still gigging?" She questioned. Imani needed to get her shit in order, she knew she couldn't fascinate over a man out of her league. What she needed to do was set her head on straight and communicate with someone less intimidating, like Ben. In fact, exactly like the lanky blond beside her.

He nodded, "every night, almost. It pays the bills and I enjoy it." Ben's irises lit up as he replied, his passion for music clearer than day.

"You're not secretly famous right?" Imani joked.

But, Ben donned a serious expression that had her sobering up real quick. He leaned in and responded, "no..." Moving back he laughed at her appearance.

"Not cool!" Imani slapped his arm, lightly and pushed past him into the hallway.

He caught up to her, "no?" Ben made sure to slow his pace, matching it with hers.

"No." She grunted back.

He grinned foolishly and gripped her elbow, "come to one of my sessions," he turned her to face him.

Imani went to reply but her voice caught in her throat as Richards cruel glare bit the insides of her skull. She'd promised him, no boys. As her thoughts ran rampage, students passed the two, completely unaware of her inner turmoil. Surely, one night won't kill— he won't even know.The dangerous voice in her head egged her on, she contemplated the o er and finally nodded, "okay." As soon as the word was out she knew she'd come to regret her decision.

"I'll pick you up at five, block twenty-seven, yeah?" Ben dropped his hold on her and began walking back towards his next class. A grin had widened across his face and she couldn't help but chuckle so ly.

Imani smiled a little more seriously, "yeah." She watched him walk away before she headed to the other side of the campus, for her last tutorial.

The two-hour class finished and Imani clenched her assignment sheet in her right hand, she had three weeks to complete the report. She hadn't really made any other friends or even acquaintances during the final class, admittedly she wasn't to bothered by the fact, she never really was a people's, person. Walking out of the room, she le the large building and took the trail down to the dorms. She had an hour before Ben arrived to pick her up, so she dropped her items on the benchtop in her kitchen and made her way to the bathroom.

Stepping under the shower, Imani cleared her mind. She needed to let go of her childish crush on Richard. Maybe this is what she needed. Yeah, she decided this move is exactly the kind of kick-up-the-ass she needed!

Fi een minutes later, Imani stood in front of her cupboards and shi ed through her clothes. She cursed herself for not asking Ben what she needed to wear, or even the theme of the venue. Those were basic questions any normal person would have inquired about, she groaned at her own stupidity and ran a hand through her hair. Screw it!She tugged on black skinny jeans and forest green, long-sleeved shirt. Pairing it with heeled boots, Imani drew her hair up into a ponytail.

It would do. A er all, it wasn't like this was a date! No this was her going out with a friend, who just happened to be of the opposite sex, people do it all the time. She was sure of it!

Imani grabbed a jacket just as a knock sounded through the room. She picked up her bag and phone, slipping the device into her front pocket she moved to open the door.

Ben smiled down at her, he scanned her attire and grinned. "A jeans girl," he commented. But from that one comment and a er scanning Ben, Imani knew she'd made the right decision with the attire.

Imani shrugged. She locked up and followed him as he led her to a grey Toyota. He opened the door and waited for her to get seated before rounding the vehicle and sliding in beside her. "A gentlemen," she teased. It was comfortable, the atmosphere was innocent and completely harmless.

"Sometimes," Ben winked at her in the darkened space. He pulled away from the curb and began driving out of the campus. The light humor kept Imani's nerves at bay, at least for the first minute or two.

As they drove further and further away, Imani couldn't help but feel a tugging need to go back. An ominous aura chained onto her and she closed her eyes begging for it to go away. She heard Ben question her, but she was unable to comprehend the words. Then she felt a hand on hers, just as the phone in her pocket began buzzing...

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