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Her lungs just about collapsed, he was deadly gorgeous. There was a slight glint in his eyes and she knew he was satisfied that she stood in his building, that he had gotten his way. She ground her teeth, positive if she had any more strength they would shatter. It was fire that burned in her soul, both of sexual affliction but also pure unruly anger.

"Come." She hate that her feet followed to his command. On autopilot she trailed behind him as he passed the front desk and push through large wooden doors. Only then did she notice that the man who had been with him had disappeared.

Imani immediately put distance between herself and Richard, his scent an intoxicating weakness to her knees. "You wont always control me, Richard." It was the first time she had ever said his name with such courage and determination. The fire that tore through her soul came to surface with a new set of claws. She was grateful for the man, of course, he saved her from a much less comfortable life, however she was grown and capable of looking after both herself and her mother now. She would forever be indebted to Richard, but not controlled.

Richard took his time, always patient, it was unsettling how the world seemed to gravitate around the man. It was as if nothing could destroy or harm him. It drove Imani mad. She always felt humiliated and weak near him.

He took a seat behind his desk and watched the small woman as she crossed her arms against her chest, nibbling at the bottom of her lip. He could see her mind running a mile a mind, it was interesting to watch the images in her mind contort the gestures and creases of her face. "It's not about control, Imani, it's about securing an asset," Richard spoken in a matter of fact tone.

It took every thing in the man not to release a smirk as he saw Imani's eyebrows raise. "Are you referring to me as an asset," he could hear the disbelief in her tone. Richard had the audacity to nod. She swallowed hard, "what will it take to repay you?"

He seemed disinterested, his eyes flickering down to the files before him, "you won't like the answer to that."

It was wrong but Imani's mind conjured up the devilish of thoughts, her entire form heating up and a blush rising to her cheeks. "Tell me." She demanded.

Finally Richard gave her his full attention, he looked her over before resting on those tempting lips and then her deep brown eyes. "Time. I want all your years, Imani, but lets start with one." He watched her lips part, "work for me, for one year, if after that you want to leave I wont stop you."

Was it really going to be that easy? Imani was sceptical. "That's it? One year working here?"

Finally his jaw curved up, "here and at home, Imani."

She practically threw her hands up while walking to his desk, "fine, I am sick of this cat and mouse game. I want a contract." Imani was no longer the little girl that hid behind her mother.

At that moment his intercom buzzed, he did not break their gaze but he answered, "yes?"

"Sir, its her again, she's at the lobby." Richards jaw tensed and Imani wondered who could've caused such a reaction out of him.

Of all the years she'd known Richard, he has never once invited anyone home, let alone a women, she felt something else creep into her system, something she wasn't privileged to allow.

He released a deep breath, "tell her I will see her this evening." He ended the call. "Imani what I am asking of you is more than you think..." Richard did not mean conventional work. "I am asking for you to be my stand in wife, there is a lot of pressure on me to settle down, the board of directors feel I need more emotional attention."

She scoffed, "okay, so what do you really want from me." Imani almost wanted to include, why don't you ask the lady at the lobby to partake in that particular job, but she resisted.

"I am being serious." He stood to his feet, "I've a meeting soon, do we have a deal." Richard wasn't foolish, he knew she didn't believe him, fuck he didn't believe himself. But it was the only thing that came to mind, the only way he could guarantee some time to show her what he felt.

Imani gave it little thought after that, one year and then she was free... do you really want to be free? She hushed her subconsciousness and grabbed the notepad and pen next to his laptop. She flipped to an empty page as he rounded the table and came to a stop behind her. She felt his breath caress her head as she bent over slightly and began writing.

I, Imani Sai, am indebted to Richard Bassette for one year commencing today. In which I will work within his company as an employee and within his home as a temporary partner. This is a business arrangement in which the terms of this contract will end on the 19/11/2017.

During the duration of this contract, Imani will only be required to ACT as a wife when in public setting and to further portray a real relationship she will reside in Mr. Bassette's personal residence.

At no time during this contract will the two parties involved share the same bed or partake in any unorthodox activities

"Sex. Imani. I think that is the word you are searching for," Richards husky tone broke through her words. He felt her breath sit tight within her chest, "are you sure that is what you want?" There was a confidence and arrogance in his words. She nodded numbly against him, his proximity making her want to do the exact opposite. He held his resolve, she would come to him, he was sure of it.

He wrapped his large hand around her petite fingers and continued writing the contract.

any unorthodox activities unless Imani Sai comes into Richard Bassette's arms within her own free will.

Before Imani could scribble the last bit out Richard signed the bottom and placed his hands above the written words, only leaving space for her to sign her name under his. "It will never happen," she glared at the page as she signed her name.

"Good girl," he snatched the paper before she could go back on her words. "Go home, tell your mother of the news and I will see you this evening, Imani." She could feel his satisfaction through the air between them. She turned her back to him and made her way to the door, before she could leave he dug one more needle into her grave, "better tell lover boy to hit the road, while you're at him."

Imani let out a quiet inaudible, "piss off" before she attempted to slam the un-slam-able large wooden doors to his office as she found herself unconventionally bound to the billionaire. The fucking gall of this man, she was livid. Of course she was going to tell Ben the truth, but it was a truth she had kept from herself just as much as him. She owed him at least that much.

Making her way home, she tried to construct the best way to tell her mother. She knew it would break her mothers heart if she told her she basically sold herself to the brute. Imani would lie, but she would also give her mother the chance to live. While she had been away at college, she had saved enough money to invest in a small home.

Arriving home, she found her mother outside in the backyard hanging out washing. Leela smiled as her daughter approached her, it soon fell as she could see the worry behind Imani's ever spilling eyes. She didn't push, she just allowed her daughter to assist with hanging the remainder of clothes. Once they had finished, they made their way inside the guest house. Finally Imani sat her mother down in the lounge room, she sat beside her and told her.

Leela was at a loss of words, "you're marrying him?" To be honest that wasn't the biggest surprise to her, Richard was a good man and she knew one day her daughter would see what she saw in his eyes, love. She trusted Richard with her daughter, what she didn't trust was Imani. "Are you sure you know what you are doing, don't do this for me..."

"Yes mum, I want to do this. I want you to enjoy your life, you've spent your whole life working." Imani pushed, "I finally have the ability to give you what you deserve, let me do this."

Leela's eyes watered, "I don't need this, Imani. You are my daughter, I look after you, not the other way around." The older woman did not know a life without work, she did not know of the life Imani tried to paint out for her. But she had never felt more proud of her daughter.

Imani gave her mother a hug, "yes mum, the other way around."

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Within the next few days, Imani and her mother found a small home on the outskirts of town about 30 minutes away from Richards manor. It was perfect, warm and inviting. Imani put down the deposit and they systematically moved furniture into the home.

Richard was no where to be seen, he didn't even show up for dinner during the evenings, they simply went back to leaving his meal on the table and it disappearing over night. It was only on the final day, when her mother was leaving that she accidentally glimpsed a side of Richard that she never knew existed.

Imani picked up the last bag from the hall way and was about to step out into the foyer when her feet halted, she heard Richards deep tone through the walls.

"Leela, if there is ever anything you need, you don't hesitate. You come home." Richard spoke the words in a hushed whisper. Imani peered around the corner and watched as Richard drew her mother into a warm hug. "Don't be a stranger. I had no idea you were going to leave, but I also agree with Imani, you need to stop looking after others and enjoy your own life now."

Her mother returned the hug, "you may not be my son, Richard, but I have watched you grow into a man I would be proud to call such. I trust you."

There was a connection between them, a warm homely feel, they had been there for one another in different ways. Imani's heart softened, was it possible Richard wasn't as much as brute as he seemed.

Imani waited until they pulled apart and cleared her throat as she entered. "That's the last of it."

Richard held his arm out and gestured for them to walk outside, "I'll drop you off." They all slide into his car and he made his way through the night to the house. Once they parked in front of the three bedroom home, he made a mental note to put up security and gates.

Leela gave her daughter one last hug, even though they both knew she wasn't far it still felt like a parting. "Be good." She kissed Imani's cheek and made her way inside.

Imani turned to look at Richard, there was warmth in his eyes as he held the passenger door open, she sunk into the seat and they drove back to his home. There was no need for words, they both processed exactly what this meant.

Stepping into the large house, Imani hugged her arms around her waist, "I will see you tomorrow morning," she began to make her way to one of the guest rooms, but Richard stopped her.

"Come with me," he took the small of her back lightly and nudged her up the stairs.

"Mr. Bassette-" He cut her off.

Nudging her forward again he continued, "don't start."

She was surprised when he passed his bedroom and stopped at the next one. She had never been in there, to be honest she hadn't been in a lot of the rooms on the upper level. Normally her mother cleaned up stairs while she did the lower floor.

Richard pushed through the doors and led Imani inside. He let her fully take in the room while he leaned against the wall beside the door.

"It's beautiful." Imani breathed out, there was a large king bed in the middle of the room against the wall that connect to his room, draped in forest green quilts with hints of burnt orange. Her favourite colours, how would he of even known. Opposite it was a large desk with a range of stationary, she didn't miss the selection of paint and canvases. Next to it was a door, that led into the en-suite. There was a large window with a window seat that had a build in bookshelf underneath it, on the furthest wall that looked out into the surrounding forest. "You did this?" She questioned.

Richard smiled sadly, "I don't want you to feel trapped here or alone, Imani, this is your home too, you can change it as you please."

Why did he have to be like this, why couldn't he remain the brute she believed him to be. Her heart pleaded to beat faster but Imani pushed it away. "Thank you." She gave him a genuine smile, she really was grateful. It was only then she realised he knew a lot more about her than she did him.

"Get some sleep, we will go to the court house tomorrow first thing in the morning." Richard said shortly, before pushing off the wall and closing the door as he left her alone.

Imani frowned at the closed door, "brute," she muttered making her way into the bathroom.

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Thoughts?

This book is unedited.

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