6|SIX

Westridge Valley, 2016

Imani wrung her hands together, she was on edge, to say the least. Looking down at the sparkling band around the fourth digit on her le hand, she suppressed a groan. Biting her lip, she squeezed her eyes shut. Feeling beyond horrible with her prior actions; she hadn't been able to give the man a response. Something in her stopped her from outright refusing, something dangerously cowardly stopped her.

Ben had slipped the band around her finger, he knew she wouldn't respond right away. He was just glad she was thinking about it, he wasn't quite ready for direct rejection.

The ride to the station was quiet, a tension-filled quiet that had Imani practically clawing his seat the whole the second it was over shut. Feeling she couldn't lead the man on, but she liked the safety net it provided. It was selfish and downright shameless.

He watched Imani as she anxiously fidgeted, he knew he'd sprung the proposal on her, he hadn't meant to send her into a panic, he had been some sort of claim. He was a man a er all and she was beautiful, he couldn't risk another whipping her up in the time they were apart. Ben had never been the possessive type, though the sight of Imani wearing his band has him hooked.

Knowing he sounded crazy obsessive, Ben pulled the bag from the boot of his vehicle. He kept his thoughts to himself and placed a hand on the curve of her waist before she could flee. He couldn't let her leave feeling this wound up, he needed to leave the situation before she had time to think too imagine. Praying she couldn't freak out on him, he squeezed her flesh lightly and nudged her around to face him. The last three years had been good, he just hoped they were enough to keep her. "one month's too long, babe!" He decided distracting her would be the best solution.

"It'll fly by," she managed to form the words, he could see her pulling back. As the weeks drew closer to the completion of her course, he felt her draw away. Maybe, she'd decide him rush. Hell, he'd wanted to accompany her home, but she'd outright refused. Completely shutting down the idea with sudden words of it being too early. It had been three years, Ben knew nothing good would come from rushing her, so he bit his tongue and agreed reluctantly. Although he knew she was keeping something from him; something big.

Imani's mind ran a mile a second, she couldn't fully process Ben's words and her own responses came out reluctant. God, she had to say, no. No, to the engagement o er, she wasn't being fair to him. Her lips parted slightly but no words came out. Dammit!

Ben released a breath and leaned down, he quickly pressed his mouth to hers and savored the sensation. He could feel her sipping through his fingers and he hated that he had no control over it. With their lips still touching, he gave it one last shot. "Think about it, Imani." From her expression, it was clear she knew he was referring to the proposition of marrying him.

Needing to get away, Imani nodded against him. Pulling her bag from his grip, she turned and began walking away, but not before she heard him whisper a silent, "love you." As if the guilt wasn't already swallowing her whole, now she was drowning in it. Forcing her legs to continue forward, she concentrated on making it onto the train.

Spaca That's all she needed, some time to think this through. The further away she got from Ben, the more the ring felt like a weight on her, dragging her down. She quickened her pace while running her free hand through her long, loose hair.

Thankfully, she had arrived right on time. The train stood still and passengers boarded. Imani found a seat against the window. By the time she had relaxed with the carriage, her body had donned a fine layer of sweat – and it had nothing to do with the walk. She decided for her sanity's sake to push the proposal from her mind, at least until she'd calmed down and was able to think through it less emotionally and more rationally.

She was good at blocking things out, so that's exactly what she did. She pushed the past hour from her mind and closed her eyes, using the rough noise coming from the train as a sedative. Eventually, all sounds fell into numb ears and the travel back home past in a blur of trees and buildings.

Jolting in her seat, Imani sat up straight. She was surprised the voice through the speakers had cut through her almost-asleep state. Grabbing hold of her bag, she waited stood up and waited for the metal doors to open. Taking a breath, the young woman stepped out onto the platform. Her nervous were running wild, but she didn't miss the underlying excitement that zipped through her bones.

It had been that long since she'd seen her mother, as Leela visited Imani o en. But it had been years since she'd last seen her, she worried if he'd changed. Whenever her mother came up to the university, she'd always been too afraid to ask about him, too afraid her mother would find out just how much she obsessed over the man. Now, she regretted her cowardliness.

Edges|| Point, 2016

Leela was well aware of the time and date of Imani's arrival. She'd all to willingly agreed to meet her daughter at the station, what the older woman hadn't factored in was her slowly spiraling boss. Since her daughter had le , it almost seemed as if the house had lost its color. She missed cooking with Imani, singing so ly as they cleaned and helping her daughter with homework.

It was the night before Imani's arrival, Leela was situated in the kitchen and confirmed their meeting time. She was unaware of the owner of the house lurking in the darkened hallways.

Richard rested against the wall just to the le of the kitchen framing, he was silent. Unable to spend any more time confined in the o ice, he'd decided to call it a night. Thankfully he did, as in that moment, he heard Leela. Something forced him to remain hidden in the shadows, it was only then he realized it had been three years.

Admittedly the last couple of years where a vague memory, coated in hard liquor, work and sleep deprivation. If Richard hadn't of thrown himself into work, he was sure he'd have gone o the rails. It wasn't healthy by no means, feeling this strongly, but he couldn't help it. His mind became his very own enemy, supplying him with fresh, tormenting ideas, routinely. His only momentarily cure came in the form of whiskey, even then he still had the urge to drive down and kidnap the damn woman who played with his mind.

Each day dragged on, time had become a relative term. The season changed and deals came and went, it was only at that moment he felt a weight li ing o his shoulders, finally, he could breathe. She was coming home, coming back to him... he waited until his housekeeper had hung up before he entered the room and began his interrogation.

Leela was shocked as the large man entered the room, he seemed more alive than she'd seen him in the years a er Imani's departure. Deep down she knew, Richard cared for her daughter in a way a man cared for his woman and she was hurtful for that. She trusted Richard, knew that if something bad were to happen to her, her daughter would always be cared for.

It was the main reason she never argued matters that concerned Imani with him. When he asked if he could pick her up from the station, Leela agreed without the bat of an eyelid. In fact, she practically handed him the keys to his car.

That's how the large, brooding man found himself resting against the sleek exterior of his vehicle. With his arms and ankles crossed, he was a man who meant business and that business was Imani. Admittedly, Richard was a little frustrated. Why hadn't she called him? Surely, she wasn't that dense; she had to know his motives. He wasn't running a fucking charity here, just bringing in any random stranger under his roof!

He decided that he'd keep his annoyance to himself, just as long as she returned to his side. All he really cared for was claiming the woman who had him under lock and key. Bracing his form against the ride behind him, his sharp eyes scanned each commuter until they finally landed on his little prey...

Imani made her way out of the station and towards the carpark. She was on edge, something felt o and she knew her instincts had been right the second she saw the Range Rover parked several meters from the gates. She'd expected to find her mother, a er all, she was sure Richard was unaware of her happenings. Hell, a er that one situation three years ago she thought he'd moved on, realized she wasn't worth the effort.

What she wasn't ready for was the weakening in her knees and hair rising along her body as her gaze found his.

Dressed in jeans and a light t-shirt, Richard realised her attire wasn't anything special. Regardless of this fact, he still found himself completely intoxicated by her presence. The distance between them was wide and he hoped she'd close it before he was forced his.

She did, a e a moment. Her shapely thighs directed the movement of her toned legs, one step at a time she approached him. He kept his eyes on her, not once taking his gaze o , he was too busy taking in her form to notice anything else.

There weren't any big di erences, only small subtle hints of her maturation. There was something more refined about her beauty, something sexy. He had to admit, she'd matured well. From the widening of her hips to the narrowing of her already small waist, he couldn't help but imagine kissing each and every curve that defined her. Regretfully, her long hair was pulled back in a loose bun that seemed to be escaping its holds and whispering around her face. This allowed him to take in the sharpening of her high cheekbones and the plumping of her so lips, so lips he promised to redden by the end of the day.

His tight gaze didn't miss the hesitation in her steps, he was glad she was nervous. Glad that his appearance unsettled her in the manner hers did he. Releasing a breath, his fist unconsciously clenched. Almost as if his body was already preparing itself, the instant she entered his space, her scent rampaged through his senses. It was the familiarity that floored him and the pleasure that unnamed him.

Unable to control himself, Richard pushed away from the vehicle and closed in on the smaller woman. With their chests almost touching, he reached around her form and pried her suitcase from clenched fingers, e ortlessly.

From this position the scent from her hair travelled up his nostrils directly, he leaned down closer and took in the addictive odor.

"Mr. Bassette...?" She whispered out, it sounded like a question but he knew she muttered the words in shock.

Grinding his molars, Richard allowed her words to brush over him before he spoke through his teeth, "one day... My name will roll o the sweet tongue of yours without hesitation, Imani." He needed a taste of the ecstasy only she could provide, leaning down towards her parted lips, he absently trailed her arms and entwined their hands. And, that's when he felt it; the cold sting of the o ending band that tainted her slender finger.

A finger that always belonged to him...

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