

Chapter 1

YURA

(CW: sexual content, stalking/harassment, public sexual harassment, body dysphoria/gender dysphoria, toxic relationship dynamics, infidelity, substance use, memory loss/blackouts, sex work setting)

When Yura woke up, he was in an unfamiliar bed and had no idea where he had been or why he was here. He felt disoriented, but not alarmingly so. This had happened enough times that it had become a routine.

He groped around the bed sheets – pilled and faded, looked to be once navy blue, now barely fitting over the yellowing mattress underneath – to look for his phone. The phone screen showed Tuesday, October 12, 5:20 PM. His heart leaped out of his chest: his shift at Sinkhole was at 6:30 PM, so he only had so much time to get out of here and get to work if he wanted to pay rent this month.

How did he get here? There was probably music and drinks, and maybe drugs. He couldn't remember the details, but there were probably multiple people, which usually happened when the people at Sinkhole decided that he was a fun dancer to be around and to take back home. Yura's body felt cold: he registered the fact that he had been naked. The sheets were stuck between his legs, and as he moved the sheets to shuffle off the bed, a waft of his bodily fluids (and possibly others) lingered in the air. When he walked around the bed to gather his clothes, he caught a vision of his naked body in the mirror. His long, coarse hair had become a black bird's nest after an evidently long time of him staying on the bed. There were bite marks all over his shoulders and nipples, as if there was a blind vampire who couldn't seem to find where to drain his blood out most efficiently. His full, round tits looked bigger in the mirror. He looked down and groped his right boob – he wondered if he had gained weight after last night. Maybe that was okay: he was still in a female's body, after all, and men liked holding boobs in their hands or mouth. The bigger the better, it seemed. The remnants of his work clothes pooled by his feet, and he reached down to slip them back onto his naked body: a metallic silvery latex mini dress, vinyl body harness with a collar, and thigh-high platform boots.

Yura's phone buzzed. He looked down at his phone: a new message from an unknown number. Yura didn't see this earlier when he first checked the time on his phone, but the unknown number had apparently also called him ten times during however long he hadn't picked up his phone. He had seen this number before, calling him at random times in the day and texting him esoteric messages: the first time he picked up the phone, it was just silence, followed by some heavy breathing noises, and so Yura had put it down, thinking that it was just a weird spam call. It was getting persistent, though. After clearing out the missed calls from the number, Yura checked his messages.

[13:14] XX: I missed you so much, babygirl.

[17:25] XX: Please call me back. I just want to know how you've been doing.

It was always messages like this. Was this number an ex that Yura couldn't remember? He didn't always (well, ever) remember his encounters with people, hence his current predicament of not knowing where he was. He decided, as always, to mute the texts. He had tried blocking the number before, but it only resulted in other new numbers calling him, so he gave up on that.

After Yura got dressed, he rummaged in the kitchen to try to get some food, but all he could find in the fridge was a plain bagel, some cream cheese, and half a bottle of stale Dr. Pepper. He looked through his wallet, which contained a crumpled receipt from a bodega and a business card that said "Marcus - Event Planning," which didn't ring any bells. (Was this apartment he was currently in Marcus's?) He also found a note in his handwriting that said "Wednesday - Important," but he didn't know which Wednesday or what was important about it.

He sighed. The plain bagel and cream cheese would have to work for now until tomorrow, after he would get paid after his shift today. He also hoped that, amidst the pounding sounds of the music at Sinkhole and the crowd of people jamming together like sardines in a tin, the fact that he didn't shower before work would go unnoticed.

Yura could already hear Sinkhole's music blaring off a block before he approached the nightclub. The baseline of the music thrummed in every step he took, and he quickly slipped past the crowd of people to make his way to the back of the club, pulling down the hem of his dress. A man whistled at him as he walked past him and slapped his ass, and Yura looked back to give the man a wink – before beelining to the bar. The bartender, Mika, slid a drink across the sticky surface to Yura. He wore the black mesh tank top that Yura loved seeing on him, because it showed off his lean, wiry frame with tattoos snaking across his biceps. Eyeliner smoked the corner of his eyes.

"You eating today, Yura?" Mika asked, his voice cutting through the music. Yura shrugged dramatically, and Mika laughed softly before reaching behind the bar to pull out a plate of fries. Yura suppressed a squeal of gratitude before digging in; the sound of the nightclub's music successfully masked the rumbling of his stomach.

"Thanks, Mika! You're the best," Yura said as he shoved three fries in his mouth. Mika laughed, and continued to wipe the glasses behind the counter.

"Haven't seen you since Monday," Mika said. "Or was it Sunday? You busy?"

"... Isn't it just Tuesday today?" Yura asked. Then, a small mischievous smirk. "Did you miss me that much?"

Mika only smirked in response to that, which made Yura embarrassed that he appeared too eager, and returned to chewing on his fry. As he was deep in thought on whose apartment he just exited out of, when he turned over to face Mika, Mika was already in his space, fingers trailing up the back of Yura's hand, sending a chill down Yura's back. Mika leaned in close, his breath brushing Yura's ears.

"Come back to my place later?" Mika asked.

Yura squirmed. He was always weak to Mika: he was weak to the way that Mika grabbed him by the back of his neck and rammed into him against the headboard like he was just a hole. He was weak to Mika when Mika clawed onto his back and thighs, leaving marks to claim him. He was also weak to Mika when Mika would say sweet things like this, and feed him so considerately like this, but also was never the type to get tied down, to get serious, to get complicated. If Yura ever told Mika that Yura felt more like a man underneath his very obviously female body, he wasn't sure how Mika would respond. That would be another layer of complication that Yura would inflict on Mika, and Yura knew not to demand anything further with Mika.

And yet, Yura and his body yearned.

"... Okay," Yura said quietly, shuffling in his seat. Mika smiled, and placed his hand on Yura's bare thigh. Yura let Mika's hand linger there for a moment before Yura forced himself off the small bar stool, pulling down the hem of his skirt again before rushing off to the stage to do his actual job. He hoped that the seat was not soaked with him.

The floor was sticky underneath Yura's boots as he weaved past the crowd of leather jackets and smoke-slick shoulders. By the time he reached the stage, a DJ faded trip-hop turned into something slower and more hypnotic, a cue for the dancers to get in place on stage. Yura stepped up, brushed the dust off his thigh highs, and rolled his shoulders once before grabbing the pole with one hand.

A spotlight followed him as he started slowly spinning around the pole. The crowd stirred; some with cigarettes still halfway in their mouth, some already leaning forward with bills in their fingers. Yura danced like how he always did: like the room was his, weaving his body amidst the cigarette smoke and the stage light. He arched his back as he worked the pole, letting his long hair cascade down his back as he dipped low, making eye contact that lingered long enough to rile up and tease people. He relished every hungry gaze as tips found their way into the top of his tight dress.

As he continued to spin and grind, just behind the fog and colored shadows, Yura caught a face that he hadn't seen in seven years.

It was Sunny.

The floor beneath Yura spun slightly, and Yura's heel caught on a warped floor panel. He almost slipped off the stage, catching himself with a sudden jolt that snapped the music back into focus.

"Careful up there, baby!" A voice called out from below.

"Yura's trying performance art now, apparently," a snicker from a voice that Yura didn't bother to register who it was from. Yura snapped himself back and recovered smoothly, spinning the stumble into an intentional flourish, and the crowd cheered harder. Yura's eyes searched frantically in the crowd, but Sunny had vanished into the smokey darkness.

By 1:00 AM, Yura's shift was over. Yura had stolen Mika's hoodie as he slipped out of Sinkhole's back exit. There, bundled in layers against the October cold, stood a figure that Yura would recognize anywhere. Sunny was bundled up in mismatched layers: a camel brown parka that engulfed his thin frame, a striped cream scarf that looked like a grandma's knitting project.

When Sunny turned back to look at him, his face had looked older now, lines etched deeper around his eyes, but his long, sandy blonde hair was still kept in a long braid atop his shoulder. He still looked so warm, so inviting, so comforting, before everything changed between them. Yura watched as Sunny's gaze swept over him; suddenly feeling too exposed, he tugged Mika's hoodie past his mini dress, and he braced himself for Sunny's confusion and potential questions. But Sunny's expression didn't change – if anything, his expression grew warmer.

"... It's not good for a boy like you to dress like that, you know," Sunny said softly, his breath floating in the air. "You'll catch a cold."

Yura felt a dam break inside of him. Even after all these years, Sunny still saw him for who he was underneath this female body without Yura demanding the affirmation. Sunny still saw him as a boy, when no one else knew – when he had been too afraid to let anyone else know.

As Yura stared at Sunny, Sunny tentatively walked closer to him, as if worrying that Yura would shatter at any moment. Yura's body tightened, and he took a step back — his expression must have scared Sunny, enough to make Sunny take a step back, leaving a tense pause between them. Sunny

shoved his hands into his pocket, and Yura saw a glint of a wedding ring before Sunny tucked his hand out of sight.

As if on cue, the first snow of the winter started to fall.

Against Yura's better judgment, he decided to follow Sunny back home. He clutched Mika's hoodie close to his body as they walked parallel through the city streets. Mika's lingering scent encompassed him, creating a barrier around him from the man walking alongside him. Yura pulled up the hood, and glared at Sunny through the shadows it casted across his face.

Sunny caught his gaze and offered only a sheepish smile in return. Yura's heart clenched at the sight. Sunny looked so warm, so... harmless under the streetlights. His expression was achingly familiar, just like the one Sunny used to wear when they were younger, when everything was simpler.

Was he overreacting? He hadn't seen Sunny in a long while — seven years, to be exact. But the memory of Sunny's betrayal burned fresh in his mind, like it happened yesterday. Actually, it felt exactly like it was yesterday. After that night with Sunny and Vivian, a gray fog obscured his mind from remembering anything more. He couldn't remember what happened from the moment he discovered Sunny's engagement to Vivian to when he somehow ended up in New York, but his head throbbed whenever he tried to think about it too hard, so he had learned to stop trying.

The subway platform was nearly empty at this hour. When their train arrived, they were the only two passengers in their car. Sunny initially moved to sit close to him, but upon seeing Yura's glare, he retreated to a seat an arm's length away. His hands, now gloved, folded neatly on his lap. Sunny looked so comfortable and cozy bundled up like that, wrapped in his gloves and thick winter coat, a scarf that obscured most of his face except for those warm, familiar eyes.

The rumbling of the subway tracks filled the silence between them. Yura felt his heart hammering against his ribs, his palms growing slick with sweat. He didn't understand why he still reacted this way around Sunny, why his body betrayed him with these involuntary responses.

"Yura," Sunny said finally, his voice barely audible over the train's mechanical rhythm.

Yura snapped to attention, jolted by the sound of his name out of Sunny's mouth.

"I'm sorry about that time," Sunny trailed off, his words careful and measured. "The time you had to... run away from me, because of Vivian. I didn't think... she would show up there, at Goldhart."

"That's a funny way to say 'I cheated on you and proposed to my fiancée after I shoved you into a literal closet,'" Yura said. Sunny squirmed in his seat, which delighted Yura in a twisted way.

"I... I had to do something to get her off my back," Sunny said.

"You're still married to her though, no?" Yura said. Sunny stared at him, and Yura rolled his eyes dramatically.

"What? You think I didn't notice your ring from earlier?" Yura gestured towards Sunny's left hand, now gloved up. Sunny shoved his hands back in his pockets, and looked down at the floor of the train.

"You're married to her now, and you still manage to 'run into me' here, at a nightclub in New York City, hundreds of miles away from Goldhart? I won't even bother asking how you found me after all this

time, or how you even ended up here in the city. But I can imagine your wife wouldn't appreciate you inviting a stripper back home."

"... She's out on a business trip," Sunny said, quietly.

Yura guffawed. The nerve of this guy — still a coward, still pathetic, just as he always was. Whenever Yura thought about Sunny, his heart ached and he tried not to dwell on it too much. However, it satisfied him to know that Sunny had clearly kept him in his thoughts, that Yura had been living rent-free in Sunny's mind after all these years.

They fell back into an uncomfortable silence as the train carried them through the city's underground veins. Yura followed Sunny's lead when they exited and made their way to Sunny's apartment building — a sleek, modern tower in the Upper East Side, complete with a doorman who stood guard even in the middle of the night. A stark contrast against Yura's own apartment: a make-shift one-and-a-half bedroom that he shared with Henri, his roommate, that he still struggled to pay for.

Sunny walked ahead to the building. As the glass doors to the building slid open with a quiet whoosh, Yura stopped in his tracks. Sunny turned back, looking at Yura expectantly.

"... Do you think it'd be that easy?" Yura asked, his voice cutting through the empty streets. As the flurry of snow fluttered in the night, he clutched Mika's hoodie tighter to his body. "Do you think that after all this time, we'd just fall back into our old pattern: you fucking me, then hiding me away like some dirty secret?"

"I—" Sunny started, but quieted down — and looked down at the floor again.

"You can't bear to admit the truth of what you want, Sunny. You can't bear to live the life you actually desire, which is a life with me, even if it means living in sin. You're too busy maintaining your appearance as the perfectly normal man with the perfectly normal wife. That's why you're a coward."

At those words, Sunny's eyes widened — his hands shot out to grip Yura's wrist tightly. Yura could feel Sunny's pulse racing beneath his fingers, and a smirk spread across Yura's lips.

"You want me," Yura stated, now with certainty. "If you want me so badly, then prove it. Prove it to me that you'll be with me no matter what I look like, no matter what I do for work."

"You can't demand anything from me," Sunny said, but his grip on Yura's wrist softened even as he spoke.

"Oh? Then I'll leave," Yura said casually, but before he could take a step, Sunny pulled him into a desperate embrace. His arms tightened around Yura, as if he was afraid Yura would evaporate.

"Don't leave," Sunny pleaded, his voice breaking. "Don't leave me. It's been too long... I can't lose you again."

Yura allowed himself to linger in Sunny's embrace for a moment, feeling the familiar warmth of Sunny's body. Then, he pushed against Sunny's chest, creating distance between them.

"Then prove it to me," Yura said.

"How?" Sunny asked.

"Divorce your wife by the time I finish transitioning," Yura said, the words tumbling out before he could stop them. He didn't expect to make this demand: it felt too big, too impossible, too sudden for the first instance that they reconnected. But now that the demand was out there, hanging between them in the cold night air, he couldn't take it back. "You said you see me as a boy right? Then we can be together properly. No more hiding, no more shame."

The proposal felt reckless even when he spoke it. He didn't actually expect Sunny to agree; this was the same man who chose to hide him away over honesty, who chose a convenient marriage over love. Yura braced himself for the inevitable rejection, the careful excuses, the gentle letdown that would confirm what he had always feared — that his transition had been worthless in the eyes of the one person whose opinion still inexplicably mattered.

Sunny stared at him, and Yura could practically see the wheels turning in his head, weighting his options, calculating the costs.

"Alright," Sunny said, finally.

Chapter 2

SUNNY

(CW: explicit sexual content (solo play, sex toys, chastity, pegging fantasy), infidelity/adultery, mention of body dysphoria, manipulative/toxic relationship dynamics, marital conflict, food waste/destruction, secrecy/hiding sexuality)

Sunny had stayed downstairs and watched Yura until Yura's silhouette had disappeared down the windy hill. Then, he sped past the receptionist as he walked to the elevators to return home; he didn't want the receptionist to ask him any questions about the scantily clad woman he was talking to that wasn't his wife — thankfully, the receptionist was busy attending to some late night deliveries.

When Sunny opened the door to his apartment with Vivian, the apartment was cloaked in a cold darkness. He was truthful to Yura this time, at least: Vivian *was* on a business trip, and this place would've been empty for his and Yura's reunion.

Yura. The thought and image of Yura swirled in his mind — the way that Yura swayed on the stage, shadows enhanced by the lights. Even when he first met Yura, Yura has always looked much more mature than what her age actually was — but it seemed like all these years of them being apart had brought out a new, more erotic side to Yura. Yura's breasts were barely being contained by the tight tube dress, and the legs that had wrapped around him before seemed to have grown even longer, more toned.

It also seemed that Yura's mental illness was still evident, with her wanting to transition still, after all of these years. That was fine — if anything, Sunny had hoped that to be the case. He had hoped that Yura would continue to stay broken, and that he just needed to say the right words to allow Yura to believe that she was being heard, that she was being believed.

Though, he thought, it would be a shame if Yura actually went through with changing her body physically.

Sunny changed out of his thick winter clothes and into his pajama shirt. Without putting his pair of pajama pants on, he reached for the shoebox at the bottom of his closet, where he had stored his metal chastity cage and jelly rubber dildo. Vivian had never accessed his side of the closet — even when they did their laundry together, he had insisted that he wanted to fold and put away his own clothes — but even then, Sunny had to make sure to store his toys away where Vivian wouldn't have seen them, or had any questions about them.

He hadn't had sex with Vivian in years. In their five years of marriage, and when he was still in love with Vivian, they had tried — but his cock always softened whenever they tried. Sunny hadn't ever found it in him to admit to Vivian that he found it actively discomforting to use his dick during sex, but he didn't know how to phrase it. It was a feeling of unease, like he was just handed a part that he was expected to use, but didn't want to.

Sunny had always tried to reassure Vivian that he could do other things with her: kissing, cuddling, eating her out — but he knew, in his heart of hearts, that it was because even when he could love Vivian, Vivian was only as sexually enticing to him as a piece of wet cardboard. After enough times, even when Sunny pushed himself to ask Vivian for sex, because he thought it would've made her happy, Vivian had turned him down.

Sunny laid on his and Vivian's king-sized bed, sheets still fresh with the scent of lavender from the detergent. He took off his briefs, and, after giving his cock a couple of pumps, he clicked the chastity case around the tip of his cock; the feeling of steel against skin made him shiver. Then, he lubed up the dildo that had smelled faintly of chemical, and turned on his stomach and onto his knees before

slipping in the toy. The first contact was a cold shock to his body, but he breathed quietly, willing himself to loosen up — the heat built up quickly, and his tightened jaws slackened as he grinned his hips into the slippery length.

Whenever he did this, he thought of Yura. He imagined Yura's slender fingers clipping the cage onto his cock, and making him stay ass up as she entered him. He fucked himself harder when he imagined the feeling of Yura's long hair brushing against his back, her large breasts slapping onto her own body as she pounded in him with the dildo. The imagination of Yura being the one forcing him into this situation made the cage pressed deeper as his cock swelled with arousal; the bed creaked with every movement.

By the time he caught his reflection in the blank television screen at the end of the bed, his long braid had given up the illusion that it ever was one, with his hair now spilling in all directions, and his body was now flushed and shaking, unable to stop.

Sunny had made sure that the sheets remained clean for when Vivian returned home from her trip.

When Vivian came home at eight PM, she angrily tossed her leather work bag onto the hardwood floor. Sunny was on the couch, watching reruns of *The Office* mindlessly as the welcome dinner was already prepared and cooling on the dining table. Vivian usually texted him when she was heading home, especially after a long trip; when she didn't message Sunny by six PM, he assumed that she was going to be late, and that her mood was going to be horrible when she finally walked through the front door.

"Hey," Sunny said, pausing the TV. "Welcome back! You must've been so tired. The pasta primavera is ready."

"... I don't want it," she said, not even looking toward the dining room where Sunny had set out their good plates and lit a small candle. "I want something else."

Sunny stared at her. He had spent an hour making this: chopping vegetables, timing the pasta perfectly, using the expensive parmesan he knew Vivian liked. It was supposed to make her happy, to lift her from the horrible mood he had predicted. He had prepared it so she couldn't tell him that he didn't pay attention to her needs. He made the effort, and she couldn't even pretend to be grateful for it.

"... The only way you like to eat pasta is with lots of vegetables and that garlic sauce," Sunny said, his mind desperately reaching for any semblance of goodwill in their relationship.

"I don't feel like eating it," she said again, finally looking at him with those tired, angry eyes. "And I didn't ask you to make it for me."

"Well, excuse me for making dinner, I guess," Sunny said, his voice turning bitter. He told himself that he was calm. "Sorry for making food for you even when you didn't ask me to. You complained about me not making dinner for you enough before; you said I never took initiative. Now you want to toss this out?"

"... If that's the way you take my words, then sure," Vivian said, her voice flat and emotionless. "You can toss it out. I don't care."

Sunny froze, not expecting Vivian to call his bluff. He would've thought that she would've backed down, apologized, or maybe even tried the food just to keep the peace. But then again, he felt like he was constantly misstepping around Vivian these days, like he was walking through a minefield in his own home.

Sunny looked at the pasta primavera, steam no longer rising from the ceramic serving bowl, his stomach growling. It would've made a good lunch tomorrow, but Vivian has already dismissed it completely.

Before he could register what was happening, Vivian had already come over to the dining table, taken the serving bowl, and walked toward the kitchen sink. She scraped the entire dish down the garbage disposal, the fork shrieking against the ceramic.

"There," she said, tossing the plate and the fork into the sink with a loud clang. "Now I don't owe you anything."

Sunny stared at the sink, now splattered with olive oil and bits of zucchini, as Vivian walked off to the bedroom to change out of her wrinkled travel clothes. He turned on the faucet and washed down the food particles sticking to the stainless steel, feeling numb. The sound of the garbage disposal grinding filled the silence between him and Vivian.

It felt pathetic, being disrespected like this in his own household, by the same person whose life was legally bound to his by the white gold band on his ring finger — all because of his own actions. He resisted the urge to throw up, his hands shaking as he rinsed the bowl.

At this moment, Yura's ultimatum came to him — that he had to divorce Vivian by the time Yura finished transitioning.

If Sunny had to admit to himself, he would've wanted neither of those outcomes. He didn't want Yura to go under the knife and become a version of herself that he wouldn't have recognized, yet at the same time, he couldn't bear to divorce Vivian — divorce was just simply unacceptable, especially not in his family and community. He knew that, even when he and Vivian had barely functioned as a couple internally, people were in unhappy marriages all the time — Sunny simply couldn't bear the shame of giving up and having it known to everyone. He had upkept his "love story" with Vivian to people for so long — perfect college sweethearts that got married — that he was scared to be perceived as a failure for not being able to hold onto Vivian.

Even so, Sunny thought about Yura. Was being perceived as a failure worth losing Yura, even when Yura may become someone that he wasn't sure he could still be attracted to? He didn't know the answer to it. The question looped in his mind as he washed the now-empty serving bowl, watching the last traces of his wasted effort swirl down the drain.

Chapter 3

YURA

(CW: gender dysphoria, body image issues, explicit casual sex, rough handling, toxic/possessive relationship, sex work setting)

Yura's shift at Sinkhole was going to start in about an hour, but Yura had spent another hour before that staring at himself in the full-length mirror hung over the door in his bedroom, mindlessly groping the droopy bags of fat on his chest. After seeing Sunny, after being reminded of the one person that he had trusted to show how he was inside, his curves had somehow felt more intrusive — and if he had to admit to himself, more... undesired.

Yura slapped himself gently with both hands: this mindset couldn't do. To earn money to live, his job was to present to the world how desirable he was, how hot he was. He knew he was good at it — if anything, it was one of the only things he was confident he was good at — and he welcomed the jealousy of how well he did his job from the other dancers. He knew, objectively, that his body was easily a nine out of ten, and that on good days, he enjoyed being in this attractive meat sack, because the hungry compliments from people at least made him feel something.

Even then, he couldn't quite shake the desire — a dream — to shed his skin like a reptile, and to emerge with a different body.

But still, he faltered. Why try to get rid of something good to chase after the unknown? What if he wasn't going to look good anymore after he became different? He had long felt like he didn't belong in this body, but what was it exactly that he was looking for?

He took a step closer to the mirror to stare at his face — and, for a moment, he couldn't recognize who he was looking at in the mirror. It felt like he was looking at an alien, at the remnants of someone long passed, familiar but unfamiliar at the same time. He grimaced, and then —

He jolted; he tasted the sharp tang of iron in his mouth. He had, apparently, bit down on his lip so hard that he broke skin, and he didn't notice.

After dabbing away the blood on his lips, Yura looked over to the clock on his nightstand: fifteen minutes until the start of his shift. He yelped, and quickly slipped into his clothes before leaving his room.

On the way out of the apartment, Yura saw that the door to his roommate's room was open. Henrietta (or just "Henri"), his roommate, was sitting by her vanity as she brushed her long, bleached silver hair, her figure looking voluptuous in her skintight pink dress. Her room smelled of vanilla; Henri must've just spritzed on the Britney Spears Curious that she had recently been obsessed with. Yura had grown to cozy up with its sugary sweet smell.

"Whoa there, Henri! You're looking so cute today!" Yura chimed.

Henri turned back from the vanity; catching sight of Yura, she smiled sheepishly as she finished tying her hair up into a ponytail. "Hey, Yura."

"What's the occasion? Not that you don't always look cute, of course," Yura said.

"Oh, this? This isn't much," Henri grinned. "But I'm just going out on a date with Blaise, so I wanted to look a little nicer."

"Blaise?" Yura asked.

"Yeah, Blaise? We've been dating for... about three months now?" Henri said.

Yura continued to smile, though he could feel an ugly sense of jealousy rearing its head. Henri was the first friend that he made when he arrived at New York, was his first and now only roommate, and was a trans woman. Henri looked unclockable, though, even when they first met — and that had translated to Henri having no problems at all dating people, and retelling Yura all about her adventures. Yura wasn't sure what he was more jealous of Henri about: that Henri felt so self-assured in knowing who she was in order to transition, that she was self-disciplined enough to commit to transitioning, and that she found people who accepted her for who she was.

"... Three months?" Yura said, trying to wrack his brain on whether he had heard Henri mention the name before, but no dice. Was his memory so terrible that he couldn't remember someone that Henri had been seeing for so long? "Already? Wow, that's a long time! Are you feeling serious about him?"

At that, Henri beamed, and Yura regretted asking a little.

"Yeah," Henri said. "I'm having a good feeling about it."

Yura's chest tightened.

"That's great!" Yura said, beaming. "I'm so happy for you. Keep me updated, yeah? Maybe I won't see you tonight... or just let me know if I should stay out and not come back," Yura winked.

Henri laughed and tossed a pillow towards Yura before Yura ducked out of the apartment, and rushed towards Sinkhole, feeling weighed down with each step.

The Sinkhole shift came and went in a blink. Yura unloaded at his locker in the back room, wiping down the sweat from his dancing. As he checked on how his bitten lip was looking, a familiar scent of incense and tobacco invaded his space. When he turned to look, Mika was leaning against the locker next to his, his arms crossed in front of his chest. His muscles bulged from how tight his shirt was.

"Thought we said you were gonna come over to my place later, Yura," Mika said with a smile. "Did you forget?"

Yura stared at Mika — and the memory of that day rushed back: the day that he saw Sunny. His heart clenched at the memory, though he schooled his face into a smile.

"Did I say that?" Yura said, twirling a long lock of his hair as he leaned in closer to Mika. "Gosh, my memory's so bad. How about you help me remember?"

Mika laughed, though he moved himself off from the locker to tower over Yura, pressing Yura more against the locker. Yura was already tall for being in a girl's body, standing at about five foot six, but Mika was easily six foot two — and whenever Mika towering over him like this, he felt like a small, submissive girl around Mika.

Usually, he liked this. He had liked being around Mika. Today, though, he felt a little different.

Pushing the thoughts away, his fingers found their way to Mika's buckles.

"Poor baby," Yura cooed. "Are you sad because I forgot? Do you want me to make it up to you?"

"You better," Mika said, and Yura smiled as he got down on his knees. He palmed Mika's now erect cock, sprung it past the boxers, and took the length in his mouth. It didn't take long for him to get Mika to come, and he swallowed as he had always done it. It felt good, seeing how his body and his skills made Mika come undone. His body still had some worth. Clearly, he still had some worth.

"Do you like this?"

But before Yura realized it, the question tumbled out of his mouth.

"Huh?" Mika asked.

"I mean— do you like this?" Yura asked. "What we have right now, as it is?"

"... What kind of question is that?" Mika's brows furrowed.

"I mean," Yura said, closing his eyes, unable to bear the honesty of what he wanted to ask. "Do you like me enough not to want me to be with anyone else?"

"... Are you trying to get with anyone else?"

"... Who knows," Yura let out a small laugh. He should've known it was futile to ask; Mika had only ever answered his questions with more questions, and Yura felt stupid for probing further.

If it had been Sunny, he thought, he could've just asked these questions easily. The memories with Sunny when they were together flooded back in his mind — Sunny telling him that he was worth protecting, that Sunny had loved Yura for who he was inside. It felt easy with Sunny.

When Yura blinked back into awareness, Mika was kissing him, Mika's tongue already slipped into his mouth — Yura winced; Mika had bitten down onto the wound on his lip from earlier. Yura tried to slip away, but Mika had gripped onto his wrists so hard that they felt like burning. When their lips finally parted, Mika held Yura's wrists above his head as he bit down hard on Yura's neck, leaving behind a vampire-sized hickey.

"Don't play games with me, Yura," Mika said. "You don't want to see me when I'm mad."

Had it not been for Mika holding Yura's body up, Yura would've crumpled on the floor. Yura saw, now — this was how he could get Mika to be honest. He licked his lips.

So what if he wasn't honest to Mika about who he was? He liked seeing Mika being possessive about him. For the first time around Mika, he felt powerful.

He felt in control.

Chapter 4

SUNNY

(CW: explicit sexual content, adultery, infidelity, marital conflict, sexual dysfunction, family pressure, divorce research, hurt/comfort turned toxic)

November 11 was Sunny's dad's birthday, and so both sides of the family had wanted to do a gathering at Golden Unicorn to celebrate his birthday.

As Sunny drove Vivian to the restaurant, he thought about the divorce procedures in New York the whole time on the road. Since he had been trying to keep his research on the down low, he'd been sneaking trips to the library during his lunch breaks to look for any books possible on the law. As they were in New York, if Sunny had wanted to divorce Vivian, he would've needed to prove that she was at fault for the divorce falling apart, which meant that he would need to prove that she was committing either adultery, cruel and inhuman treatments, abandonment, or imprisonment — neither of which, to his knowledge, Vivian had done to him. Ironically, Vivian would have a much stronger case against him, and if that was the case, he might need to pay alimony, and he winced at the thought.

Mariah Carey's *Always Be My Baby* played softly on the radio. He automatically turned it up — it was Vivian's favorite song. He looked over to Vivian, expecting her to notice him, but she was looking out of the window, leaning her head onto her hand. He looked back at the road, feeling a bitter taste in his mouth.

"...ry," Vivian said, her voice muffled by the wind.

"Huh?" Sunny said.

"... Sorry," Vivian said, still not looking at Sunny, "that I threw away the food you made when I came home from my trip. That wasn't very nice."

"Oh," Sunny said, gripping the wheel. "It's fine." It wasn't fine, he wanted to say. It wasn't fine the way that Vivian treated him, but then again, wasn't he the same, or even worse, to her? It was astonishing how he only felt conflicted about his behaviors behind Vivian's back when Vivian was nice to him.

"I know you hate me," Vivian said. "I'm horrible to be around. I don't know what's wrong with me."

"I don't hate you," Sunny said, lying. "And you're not horrible to be around. It's really okay... I'm not mad at you."

Vivian turned to him — and it almost shocked Sunny to see tears crystallizing in her eyes. In these moments, Sunny found Vivian the most beautiful — and he cursed himself for it. He reached out to hold Vivian's hand, and she allowed him the whole ride to the restaurant.

The round banquet table gleamed under bright red lanterns, dishes clattering as waiters rushed past with steaming platters of Peking duck and sizzling beef. The air smelled of soy, garlic, and cigarette smoke drifting from another table.

Sunny sat stiffly next to Vivian, and Sunny's dad, the birthday guest of honor, was laughing loudly with his brother, waving his chopsticks around as his cheeks had already turned rosy from a bottle of

Tsingtao. Sunny and Vivian's moms sat side by side, and both leaned forward towards Sunny and Vivian in practiced unison.

"So," Sunny's mom said. "When are you guys gonna give us the good news? Your dad's not getting any younger."

"Yes, a child makes a marriage complete," Vivian's mom chimed in. "Look at your cousin: she already had two kids, and she's younger than you!"

"Angela isn't an investment banker," Vivian said. "And she doesn't have to pay rent to live with her parents. I don't get time off from work either when I have a baby, so—"

"What's wrong with living with your parents?" Vivian's mom said. "If you have a kid, you two can move in with us so we can take care of your baby. It's not good to work too hard. No point in a wife earning a lot of money when you don't have kids yet. You're not getting any younger. Aren't you thirty-three already?"

"Mom," Vivian hissed, which finally managed to quiet down her mom.

"It's okay, Vivian," Sunny's mom reached out to hold Vivian's hand. "Sunny's working hard so you two can focus on building your family."

Sunny stood up from his seat and raised his shot glass filled with oolong.

"To *baba's* health," Sunny said, "and to many more years with all of us."

The table erupted in a round of cheers. In the corner of his eyes, Sunny saw Vivian balling up her hands into white fists on her lap.

Vivian was quiet on the whole ride back. Sunny had always known that Vivian didn't want any children. It wasn't hard to see: being an investment banker, Vivian was so busy with her career (and, to be fair, so was he), that the conversation about children just never came up. From what Vivian had told him, she would only receive unpaid leave if she went on maternity leave — and she made a lot more money than him, even when he was working as a psychiatric therapist at Mt. Sinai. Vivian hadn't ever expressed that she wanted to stay at home to take care of children, and actively derided her schoolmates who got married and had kids immediately after graduating from their school. They were so busy that they couldn't even adopt any pets together. Sunny had always wanted a cat, but Vivian was allergic, and so the law was set.

They continued to stay in silence when they arrived home, changed out of their day clothes, and settled into their bed together, laying side to side. Sunny was about to drift off into sleep before he could feel Vivian's arm draping over him, her leg hooked over his lower body.

"Vivian," Sunny said, sleepily, "if this is about your mom's comment—"

"Who said it is?" Vivian said, which confirmed to Sunny that it *was* about the comment at dinner. Vivian then kissed him, tentative at first, then with more insistence. Vivian then reached down, fingers brushing against the front of Sunny's pants, and Sunny let out a small groan from her touch, and internally tried to will himself to get his cock to rise, and for him to perform — but from all of his time experimenting with fucking himself, he knew that it would take more than just this to get himself

going. He could only get hard now from getting his ass fucked, but he couldn't possibly dare to tell Vivian that. Futilely, he tried to think of Yura to get his arousal going, but everything about Vivian was just so not-Yura that he couldn't even fool himself.

Vivian paused after a couple of minutes of stroking him. Sunny could only imagine Vivian's glower in the dark.

"Are you fucking broken or something? What kind of a man are you?!" She spat at him, and then, much later, with a small sob, "am I that disgusting to you?"

"No—" Sunny said. "I'm sorry, it's just... been a long day. I'm sorry." He cradled Vivian close to his body, and kissed her forehead as she rolled into him, suppressing her sniffles into his body. Vivian was easier to manage when she was sad. Sunny leaned in to kiss Vivian gently on the lips, and her small sobs softened into moans when her body was pliant under his touch. When Sunny groped Vivian's small chest as he ate Vivian out, the thought of it being Yura beamed in his mind — flat-chested Yura with a pussy — and Sunny's cock immediately got hard.

Caught off guard by his body's reactions, he paused eating out Vivian abruptly — and just as Vivian was about to ask him to continue, Sunny slid his cock into Vivian, eliciting a loud cry from her. Sunny gripped both hands onto Vivian's waist and slammed hard into her, his mouth suckling on Vivian's nipples, the whole time thinking about how this was Yura that he was eating out, that it was Yura he was creampieing inside, with Yura's pussy and future boyish flat chest.

After they were finished, Vivian slipped off into the bathroom to wash herself. Sunny stared at the ceiling, and at that moment, his phone flashed with a text notification.

[2:03AM] Yura: Wanna meet up? :)

Sunny texted back immediately.

[2:04 AM] Sunny: Of course. Where?

Yura didn't respond. Sunny glanced over to the bathroom — Vivian hadn't yet finished with washing up yet. Sunny sent another text.

[2:06 AM] Sunny: I'll see you at Veselka.

When Vivian emerged from the bathroom, Sunny had already pretended to fall asleep, the messages to Yura deleted from his phone.