



Jade's
Way

SHARON JONES-BIRD

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Strategic Book Group

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To my parents, who loved to read and shared that love with me. The many quiet hours when we read together were precious gifts of time I treasure. Mom and Dad, I love you. To my husband, for your silent encouragement during all the hours I spent ignoring you and focusing on my writing. To my son Rich, you inspire me with your courage and strength; you make me proud.

Thank you all.

Chapter 1

Her head ached and her mind was foggy. The pain pills the doctor had prescribed were too strong for her, but he had insisted that she continue taking them. Her injured arm burned and she felt a shooting pain with every step. Looking into the shop windows, Jade slowly walked down the street. She deliberately meant to blend in with the other pedestrians. No one seemed to notice that she looked lost and sick. People jostled against her as they hurried past. She began feeling smothered by the crowd and her anxiety escalated; she needed to escape. Pushing her way through the crowd, walking quickly, almost running, she didn't look at anyone in her rush to be away from them. *So many people, I have to get away from here.* Concentrating so hard on getting through the crush of people, she didn't notice the man stop in his tracks as he spotted her.

Josh froze as she walked in his direction, his heart stuttering and slamming inside his chest. He hadn't seen Jade in five years. He watched her flinch when someone brushed against her. There were dark shadows below her eyes and her face was extremely pale; she was much thinner than when he had last seen her. Her long brown hair hung loose over her shoulder and she was dressed in an oversized man's white tee shirt and baggy jeans. Frightened and

disoriented, she struggled on in his direction. Blocking her head-long rush with his hard body, he automatically grasped her upper arms to keep her from falling.

“Ugh!” Her knees nearly buckled at the pain as she jerked her injured arm from his strong grip.

He instantly released her. “Oh! I’m sorry,” she apologized, finally looking up to see him. There he was, standing right in front of her, the man who had haunted her dreams for the past five years.

“Josh,” she whispered as the world around her began to spin and turn dark. He caught her as she crumpled unconscious into his arms.

* * *

As she opened her heavy eyelids and focused on on sterile white ceilings and fluorescent lighting, the comfort of a soft bed and pillow soothed her. Closing her eyes again, she drifted drowsily as her memory began to return. The room spun for a moment and she braced herself by grasping the sheet beneath her body. “Josh!” Her eyes flew open and she quickly turned her head, scanning the room.

Yes, there he was, standing next to the door, looking down at her. It hadn’t been a dream. Though the past five years had matured him, he was still devastatingly handsome, especially his caramel brown eyes. They captured her gaze every time she looked at him. She imagined running her fingers through the slightly curly chocolate-brown hair, which he wore longer than before. His shirt strained against broad muscular shoulders. Her gaze moved from his broad chest to his slender waist and hips, on down to long, muscular legs. Her eyes slowly made their way back to his hips where his thumbs hooked into his jeans pockets. His large sun-tanned hands clenched into fists then relaxed, making her shiver with memories of his touch. Refusing to think about that, she made herself look at his eyes. She felt like they were drawing her in.

Moving closer, he sat down in the chair next to her hospital bed.

“Hello, Jade.”

Feeling at a disadvantage while lying in bed, she struggled to sit up. Josh stood again to his full height of a couple inches over six feet, and reached over to help her. He arranged the pillows more comfortably behind her and then returned to his chair.

“Where am I? Why ... What? ...” Trailing off because she couldn’t quite get her thoughts together, she leaned her head back on the pillow. *Oh dear*, she thought to herself. Jade lay there trying to get her muddled brain to work again. She wondered why every memory of Josh was crystal-clear but everything else was foggy. Deciding that she needed a little bravado to help get her through this uncomfortable reunion, she asked in a grumpy tone, “Josh, what are you doing here?”

Scowling, he studied her until she felt like an insect under a microscope. Finally, he leaned forward, “You’re in the hospital. What have you been doing to yourself? You’re a wreck!” She blushed in embarrassment and self-consciously brushed her tangled hair from her face. She didn’t immediately answer and he demanded, “Well? Answer me!”

She tried to shrug her shoulders and gasped at the pain in her arm. Breathing through the pain, she took a few shaky breaths and shook her head at him. She wouldn’t talk about her work. It didn’t matter that this was Josh and that she had never been able to keep anything from him. She had learned to keep secrets in the last few years; keeping secrets had become her way of life. Unfortunately, the look on his face did not bode well for her maintaining her customary silence.

“Jade, what happened to you? The doctor said you had been shot! Where have you been?” He was interrogating her.

“Wrong place, wrong time,” she answered flippantly. He growled at her and she hastily amended her answer. “Let’s just say that my job got a little bit out of hand and ended up rougher than it should have. I cannot discuss the details.”

“What kind of job do you have and what happened that caused you to be shot?” His dark eyes narrowed as he demanded an answer.

Jade took in the white bandages covering her arm from wrist to shoulder. She was strapped into a sling that immobilized her arm. She thought about how she sustained her injuries and tears caught her off guard. Using her free hand, she quickly dashed them away. “Bad neighborhood,” she replied sarcastically. Her lips trembled as she looked up at him. He glared at her and she thought to herself, *It's his fault. He's the reason I ran in the first place.*

“Jade! You will answer me. What happened?” He stood and leaned menacingly over her.

Ha, she thought, like I feel threatened. I've faced angrier men. “Back off, Josh” she said through gritted teeth.

Surprised, he did, but that didn't deter him. She had only startled him by her aggressiveness. Staring hard, but holding his breath, he silently willed her to speak.

“Oh, hell! You'll nag it out of me eventually anyway. Yes! I was shot. It was bad timing on my part and good aim on the other guy's part.” She stopped speaking at the look of shock on his face. Softly, she continued, “Josh, the bullet only clipped me. Unfortunately, I couldn't get to medical care right away. We did the best we could in the situation.”

His face was pale and he slowly sat back down. Gripping the arms of the chair so hard his knuckles turned white, he asked, “We? We, who? Where were you?”

She answered the best she could, “Somewhere I shouldn't have been and hope to never be again. Josh, this could get me in a lot of trouble if I tell you.”

He continued staring at her.

Shrugging her shoulders despite the pain, she let out a deep sigh. She couldn't believe she was going to tell him, but she had never been able to keep anything from him for long. “All right! I'll tell

you what I can, but you can't say anything to anyone. Swear to me! Swear, or you won't hear another word." Her earnest expression begged him to agree.

Clenching his teeth at her lack of trust, he nodded once. "You can trust me to say nothing."

"Mecca." When she whispered the location, he flinched. Her voice cracked and then grew stronger. "This can't get out, Josh."

"What in hell were you doing there? You had no business being in a place like that! Do you have any idea of the risk you took? Who knew you were there?"

He watched the worried expression on her face as she looked fearfully at the door and window. It was as though she expected someone to rush in shooting—maybe she was. Knowing that she needed reassurance, he told her, "Jade, no one knows you're here. You were admitted as a Jane Doe. You carried no ID on you; I didn't know what to tell them. I let them assume I was just a good samaritan."

Relaxing a little, she put up her hand to delay his next questions. "I didn't voluntarily go there, but I stayed by choice. I had responsibilities and I couldn't walk away from them. Enough questions for now, I just need to rest, and then get out of here. I need to check in with my boss."

Shaking his head, he disagreed. "Baby, you're not going anywhere quite yet. You just had surgery on your arm and the doctor will say when you can leave. You have been here for two days already and should be here for several more."

She snapped, "Two days! I have to go! I have to check in." Josh gently pressed her back as she tried to get out of bed. She instantly fell back on the pillows, flinching at the sudden jarring pain.

"You aren't going anywhere. Just rest, Jade. Rest and get your strength back. I'll watch over you and when the doctor says it's okay, I'll take you home."

"Promise?" She hated that she sounded so weak and helpless; it

was just that this conversation was exhausting and she knew she had to let herself go to sleep. She would have to trust Josh to protect her.

“I promise, baby. Go to sleep; I’ll be here when you wake.”

Reassured and feeling safe, she gazed up at him for a moment. Then her eyelids fluttered closed, and within moments, she was asleep.

Josh stood over her, his hand over his breaking heart. He took a long measuring look at the woman he hadn’t seen in five years. She still had the look of innocence. But now she was overly thin and had dark circles beneath her beautiful green eyes. Her lashes lay darkly against her pale cheeks. Her mouth had always tempted him to take advantage of her, not only for its lusciousness, but also for its sassiness. She looked so vulnerable laying there on the white sheets, her petite size emphasized by the very long, dark brown hair that tangled across the pillow. When she curled onto her side, he pulled her hair back and braided it, then tied it back with the band she had worn on her wrist earlier. It was obvious that she hadn’t been able to put her hair back by herself.

* * *

He stayed by her side as she slept restlessly through the night. She cried out with nightmares several times, but he didn’t understand most of what she mumbled. The doctor seemed to understand what she said, but wouldn’t translate for him. However, he repeated some of the same words after Josh called and woke him for the third time in the middle of the night. When she woke late the next morning, he was there just as he promised.

“Hey, about time you woke up.” He grinned at her. She turned her head and hesitantly smiled back. The splint kept her arm still and she breathed deeply past the first rush of pain. “The doctor will be here in a few minutes to check you over.” He approached her from where he had been standing in front of the windows.

“I’ve got to get out of here, Josh.” She tried to sit up and Josh

hurried to her side and helped her. She carefully slid her legs off the side and sat still while a wave of dizziness passed. She knew she was weakened but was surprised at her complete lack of strength.

Josh stood in front of her and put his hand on her good shoulder. "You're in no condition to go anywhere. Don't be in such a hurry, baby. Let the doctor examine you." He pressed gently to keep her on the bed. Just that small amount of pressure showed her that she wouldn't have the strength to stand on her own. She stubbornly remained sitting on the edge of the mattress.

"Listen, I've had enough of hospitals and more than enough of doctors. I should be able to leave whenever I want and I want to leave now. I'm going home, Josh."

She was still just as stubborn as he remembered her. Shaking his head at her he told her, "I'll take you home when the doctor says you can go, not until then. By the way, where is home now? You sold everything when you left."

A little embarrassed that she didn't really have anywhere to go, she mumbled, "I'm staying in a local motel, just until I find something a little more permanent."

He started to say something, but the door opened and the doctor walked in. He was an average-looking man with average brown eyes and hair. He was probably just less than six feet tall and of an average build. Jade thought to herself, *He is so average that he should be working undercover.*

"Well now, how are you this morning? Better I hope." He looked at the chart that he brought with him and nodded at what he read. "You were out a long time. Any reason for that, do you think? Your boss found you registered here as Jane Doe, and sent over the company doctor; he left your file with me and expects to hear from you sometime next week. What have you been doing since you arrived in town? When was that, how many days ago?" He asked one question after the other and she just stared at him. It was obvious by his manner that he always asked multiple questions of his patients.

Jade opened her mouth to answer then thought better of it and clamped her mouth shut. He wasn't finished with his questions and comments. "Do you realize that you could have gotten an infection?" He paused to take a breath and she shrugged her good shoulder. He scowled angrily at her. "You are obviously malnourished and should have followed the special diet as you were directed." He waved his hand at her arm. "This injury isn't helping you gain back any strength!"

She looked up at him in confusion because she didn't understand how he knew so much about her or why he was acting so upset. Did her boss really give him the information? "I've eaten every day. Oh! I forgot this morn ... no yesterday ... damn! What day is this?"

Sympathetically, Josh answered: "It's Friday, Jade."

Not really surprised, she told the doctor, "I guess it's been a while. I really didn't feel hungry. I got back Monday, I think, and checked into the motel. I was so tired and in so much pain, that I just took my pills and went to bed. When I woke up, I planned to get something to eat and that's when I ran into Josh. I'm not sure when that was." She was babbling. She realized they now knew how long she had gone without eating. Sensing motion behind her, she looked around the room. She saw that Josh had moved away and was again standing facing the window, his back to the room, and his hands clenched into fists. She knew that he hadn't missed a thing—he never did.

"Doctor Lawson, warned you about that. He also told you to call a specialist about your arm as soon as you got here. You haven't called him yet either. You could have had severe problems if Josh hadn't brought you here to me. Do you understand the seriousness of your situation?"

It was obvious to her that he had discussed her injuries with her boss. Firmly chastised, she nodded. "Yes, I understand." She started to make excuses. "Those pain pills knock me out." The doctor

glared at her. "All right, I'll see the specialist. I just haven't had the time to make the call. "

She was obviously a little embarrassed, so he took pity on her and nodded. "How about if I set it up for you?"

Jade nodded in relieved agreement.

"Josh, could you excuse us for a couple minutes? Tell the nurse to come in here please." The doctor's dismissal was accepted in silence and Josh left the room.

The nurse arrived and they began checking her over. When the doctor was assured that they had thoroughly evaluated her, they removed the IV from her arm and the nurse gently placed a bandage over the small wound. Patting Jade's hand gently, the nurse assured herself that Jade was all right, and she left the room.

"Now, I have a couple questions and I would like some answers. Why didn't you check in directly here at the hospital?" The doctor placed the chart on the bedside table and began writing in a fast scrawl that looked like shorthand. He had proven to her that though he looked average, his intelligence was not.

She looked down, glanced at the door, and then back at the doctor. His name tag read Matthew Rogers, MD. "Okay, Dr. Rogers, I'll tell you but Josh has no business hearing this." When he nodded, she resumed. "When I left the airport, I was so exhausted I could barely function. I hadn't slept for three or four days, not since I left on the airplane for Germany. It was a military cargo-plane; they weren't serving any food. As soon as I landed, I hailed a cab and told the driver to take me to a motel closest to this hospital. All I could think about was a hot shower, a pain pill, and bed. I took the pill as soon as I got to the room and I think I took a shower. Really, they are too strong for me and knock me out for several hours. When I woke up, I was disoriented and groggy. I must have slept for a whole day. I guess it's been about a week since I've really eaten anything. It's not as if I didn't want to eat, it just wasn't available. When I woke up and the meds finally wore off enough to

allow me to function, my first priority was to get something to eat. Next thing I know, here I am.”

“Well, we’ve been pumping nutrients into you since you got here. You need to eat soft foods for a few days to reacquaint your body with food. You may get sick a time or two or have stomach cramps. Just eat slowly, frequently, and very small amounts. You should be able to eat normally within a week or so.”

“I’ll do as you say and let you know where I go when I leave here. I don’t have a place yet but it shouldn’t be too hard to find an apartment. Surely, it will be better than the motel. It really doesn’t have much going for it, but it is nearby.” Realizing that she was rambling again, she flushed and carefully shrugged her good shoulder.

“Don’t be embarrassed, I’m quite interested. Now just one more question and I’ll have some food sent in for you and Josh. He’s been here with you the entire time and he too needs a good meal. He’s very concerned about you. Anyway, back to my question, how many languages do you speak? I heard so many from you last night that I lost count. Josh made me listen over the phone and demanded that I translate. I had to tell him I didn’t understand most of it. You were saying things he didn’t need to hear.”

Her face paled as she remembered the nightmares. She had them frequently, but not usually so vividly. Rather than comment on the nightmares, she replied to his question. “I speak several dialects of several languages. I pick up languages easily and the people I work with speak are multilingual. I encouraged them to teach me. My knack for language surprised me. It seemed natural to speak four languages growing up, but it never occurred to me that I could pick up the basics of new ones in only a couple weeks. So, to answer your question, I speak seven languages fluently and enough to get by of several dialects of those languages. Like Spanish, I speak Castilian, Mexican, and Cuban, and get by in most regions that speak Spanish. It’s what I do.” She grinned at him when he looked so impressed. “I’m finding that I have to translate my thoughts into

English. It's been a long time since I heard it."

He smiled and reached over to shake her hand. "Well, your Arabic isn't bad either. Thank you. You're amazing; do you know that? Josh said he knew you from a long time ago but I don't remember him talking about you."

"No, he probably didn't talk much about me; I wasn't that important to him. Why did he call you in the middle of the night? How did Dr. Lawson know to contact you?"

She looked confused and he laughed. "Josh is my step-brother as of three years ago. He thinks that gives him access to free medical advice. It usually works in his favor but I get some paybacks on occasion. Does that answer why he called me in to take care of you? But rest assured I know not to disclose information about my patients so that shouldn't be a concern for you."

She nodded her head in understanding and relief.

"Your boss contacted me personally and put me in touch with Dr. Lawson. He also told me that I would discharge you when you asked—it would be safer for you." That sounded like her boss; he usually handled things personally and decisively.

Matt could tell that she was trying to hide how much pain she was still feeling. He didn't say anything about that, but told her to rest a while and he would get her discharge papers and prescriptions ready for her. He added that she had better eat all of the gruel he had ordered for them. They both laughed at that.

Josh spoke from the doorway. "She's not going anywhere yet, Matt. Things cannot always be Jade's way. You are not releasing her until she is stronger. She's not fit to be wandering around on her own!"

"Josh!" Insulted that he would say she wasn't fit, she huffed in anger. "You have no business telling *my* doctor what he can and can't do! I am going to leave this hospital, whether he releases me or not." When he opened his mouth to argue with her, she interrupted him and waved him toward a chair. "Don't bother arguing

with me. I refuse to discuss it further. Why don't you just pull up a chair? Our meals should be here soon. You always were a bear when you were hungry."

Her intimate reference to their past made him go silent. The doctor ginned and looked from one to the other, but neither noticed since they were staring at each other. "Well, I guess that discussion is over for now. I'll be back in a while. Can you be ready in an hour, Jade?" At her nod, he turned to leave the room. As Josh moved to hold the door open, Matt leaned close and whispered something. Whatever was said made Josh smile and nod.

"It looks like you are feeling better after all." Jade didn't like the look in his eyes when he said that. He turned away slightly from her and seemed to be thinking something through. She remembered that look. He was planning something that she knew wouldn't please her.

"What?"

He looked up from his musing, "Hmm?"

"I asked you, 'what?' What devious plans are you making? Ah, I see the light of battle in your eyes." She let out a gusty sign. "Ok, let's hear this brilliant plan you have. But before you tell me, the answer is no! Go ahead."

"What, and let you say 'no' over and over again? No way, baby. I'll tell you what, when I get it all planned out, then I'll tell you. You have to keep an open mind and can't just say no without any consideration of my ideas. Who knows? You might just like it." The mischievous grin on his face concerned her.

She would hate it, whatever *it* was. Her chin set in a stubborn tilt, but she couldn't respond because the nurse entered the room with their meals.

"Here you go, hon." She placed the tray on the bedside table and helped Jade position herself to reach the food. "You both enjoy your meal now." She smiled flirtatiously at Josh and left them alone again.

‘Still charming them, Josh?’ She grinned at him across the tray as she uncovered her dish.

‘Of course. I had to stay in practice while I was waiting for you to come home. Now I can focus all that experience on you.’ He smiled but it didn’t fully reach his eyes until she looked nervously away from his gaze. ‘You won’t get away from me again, Jade.’ He laughed at the frown that appeared on her face. ‘Eat!’ he ordered and lifted the cover from his own meal.

His food looked a lot better than hers. The doctor hadn’t been joking when he said she would be eating gruel. Well, it was a white mushy cereal and looked disgusting. They ate in silence and she made faces at the bland taste. Despite the lack of taste, it was ambrosia to her body. There was some minor cramping when it hit her stomach, but it was worth it. *It’s no wonder I feel so weak.* She had gone far too long without food and even longer on reduced intake. As she finished the few ounces of cereal, she took her pain pill with a sip of juice. Glancing up she found Josh staring at her. He had barely touched his meal. She blushed and looked away.

Josh had been watching her eat and felt his anger building. ‘Why are you so malnourished?’ He stood up and pushed the table aside. Reaching out, he took her chin in his large hand and tipped her face up to his. When she lifted her eyes to his, he gently brushed a few long strands of hair from her face with his other hand. Their gazes locked. ‘How long has it been since you last ate?’ When she shook her head, he tightened his grip. ‘No, Jade, answer me. And it had better be the truth. How long?’

‘I ... we ... they didn’t have any food on the plane.’ Before she could finish her explanation, he dropped her chin and turned away with a curse. His anger was palpable and he stood stiffly with his back to her. ‘Josh?’ she whispered.

‘Stop! Just don’t say anything for a minute.’ He took several deep breaths trying to gain control over his anger and let his breath out on a string of swear words. She barely understood what he was

saying because the words were smothered by his growl.

"Please, Josh, don't." Her voice held a lot of pain and it stopped him instantly. He turned slowly back to her and let out a deep sigh. "It's over now. Forget it, please. I'm eating and I will be fine. I have to put the experience out of my mind or it will drive me crazy. Look, just get me out of here, will you? I can't tell you everything because this is highly confidential information, but I will tell you what I can. Then, I don't want to talk about it anymore."

He nodded in grudging agreement and said nothing else. Thinking about leaving the hospital, she doubted her plan to go back to the motel. It wasn't the cleanest place she had ever stayed, but it was better than nothing. No one knew her there; no one cared either. Now that Josh was here, she was reluctant to be alone again. She was also reluctant to be with him, but she couldn't say that to him after all he had done for her.

"Okay, let's get you dressed and I will take you home." When she glanced toward the bathroom he graciously took the hint. He carefully lifted her, carried her to the bathroom, and set her on her feet at the sink. "Okay?" he asked with concern. "Just call me when you're finished and I will come get you. Your belongings bag is there in the cabinet." He then left her standing on shaky legs and quietly closed the door.

Leaning forward to look in the mirror, she saw her reflection for the first time in nearly a year. The time hadn't been kind to her. Her naturally high cheekbones accentuated the unusual thinness of her pale face and her green eyes were sunken and shadowed by dark circles. Her long hair hung nearly to her waist and was dull and lifeless. The thought occurred to her that she too could have been lifeless and shuddered at the memories. Blocking them out, she decided she had plenty of time later to work through those memories.

She turned on the warm water, splashed her face with it, and let it trickle down her neck, wetting the front of her hospital gown. She wished she could take a shower but knew she didn't have the

strength to stand under the spray, so she washed up as thoroughly as she could. It felt so good to be clean. She pulled the bag from the cabinet and sat on the chair to dress. She didn't know how she would accomplish the task without help, but couldn't bring herself to call for Josh. She struggled into a pair of sweat pants and sat there with an oversized long-sleeved shirt in her hands. She took a deep breath and sighed, knowing that Josh was the only person available to call for help. Sighing again, she quietly called to him. "Josh?" Instantly the door opened, he must have been leaning against it all this time. "I could use a hand with this. Would you call the nurse in here please?"

He took the shirt from her and looking her over, he decided that the shirt was large enough to wear over her arm brace. "I can help you." When she shook her head no, he said, "Nonsense, just be still and I can do this." Reaching around her, he untied the laces of her gown and she panicked, holding it to her.

"No, Josh, just go get the nurse." She tried to pull away from him, but he stopped her with a hand on her neck.

"Jade! I'm not getting the nurse. Now be still!" The strength of the command made her instantly still. She looked up at him, her eyes begging, but she didn't struggle any more. He began pulling the gown from her shoulders and she lowered her head and closed her eyes. Pulling the material away, he brushed the bare skin of her shoulder and she flinched. The gown fell away revealing the still angry welts and red scratches across her back and shoulders. Josh stepped back suddenly and she looked up to see furious anger. He quickly veiled his expression by lowering his lashes and turning his head.

Jade saw him look away and her expression hardened; she lashed out in anger: "Forget it, Josh! Don't say anything. I don't want to hear it! Now, would you just go get the nurse?" She grabbed the shirt from his hand and started struggling to put it on. His hands shook a little but came back to help her, and when they finally got

the shirt on, he gently did up the buttons. He rolled up the long sleeves to her wrists. He didn't meet her eyes and when he was finished, he just turned and left the room.

Thinking that he was going to leave her there, she started slowly moving toward the doorway. It was only a few feet but it proved to her exactly how weak she was. "God," she whispered as she leaned against the doorframe. She wondered how much further she could go before she collapsed. Josh was there in an instant; he lifted her and carried her to the bed where she lay back down. He stood staring down at her; his expressionless face reminded her of the last time she had seen him over five years ago. The painful memories took control of her mind.

Five years ago, she had been so young, happy, and so in love with Josh. *So in love with love*, she thought to herself. The moment they met, she knew that he was the only man for her. He was sophisticated, strong, and so very handsome and six years older than Jade. She was only nineteen; a spoiled child who had never been denied anything she wanted. For six months, they dated; they went dancing, to parties, and on long drives to the country. Although he was a passionate man, he controlled himself and her, refusing to take advantage of her innocence. He hadn't proposed and when she asked him why, he would just laugh and say they had plenty of time to think about that.

Impatiently, she had tried to force the issue by teasing him and attempting to seduce him. He took her home and they had a night together that should have been a most treasured memory. He passionately stroked her body and touched her with experienced and talented hands, but still had adamantly refused to take her virginity. He petted, teased, and tasted her until she sobbed for him to make love to her. He teased more and demanded she tell him exactly what she wanted from him. She begged him to make love to her and begged even more for him to love her. She cried out her love for him repeatedly, at his demand. He never told her that he loved her

and had continued to refuse to fully make love to her.

By morning, she was exhausted and he was still in control. He was standing over her when she woke and looking at her with an expressionless face, told her quietly and coldly to get dressed and go home. He warned her never to try to force any man into doing something he didn't want to do. Marriage was the last thing on his mind and he wouldn't let her trap him into it. He then turned to leave and at the doorway said over his shoulder, "When you grow up, come see me. You'll be a hell of a woman one day." The absolute coldness in his tone froze her in the bed. The front door slammed behind him and she finally forced herself to move. Slowly dressing, she couldn't stop the torrent of tears. She stumbled out the door and somehow managed to get home and into her room without her parents seeing her. She hadn't seen him again. Her humiliation and shame were complete.

Her life went from bad to worse. Within a month she had quit school, sold everything and accepted a job offer with a ghost government department that she would have never considered before. The organization had recruited her for her language skills. She and her team were shipped out almost immediately; she hadn't been home since.

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