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Endgame

Aaron and Maddy are talking and I watch them from the other side of the bar even though it bothers me. I have no right, no claim on her, but the green-eyed monster is present and there doesn't seem to be anything I can do to stop it.

I can hear what they are saying and know they are simply discussing the latest political scandal just announced hours ago. It's an innocent discussion. Overall, it means nothing – at least to her.

Unbeknownst to Maddy, she is the grand prize in a long standing game of chess taking place between Aaron and myself. The rules were set in place through a silent agreement months ago. We knew where the boundaries end and are both well versed enough to know better than to step over the line. Aaron thought I'd brushed that line two days ago when he caught Maddy and I standing in a darkened corner. He'd come whistling down the hall and saw us in a suspiciously compromising position. Needless to say, it wiped the shit eating grin right off his face.

It didn't matter that he misinterpreted what he saw, that's not my problem. You aren't going to find me volunteering that information to him, that's for sure.

I could tell by the way his hand was resting lightly on her elbow that he was going to test those boundaries in his own way because he thought I'd

stepped over the line. He wanted to see how far he could push it before I'd step in to protest.

I had news for Aaron. He could fuck her on the bar right in front of everyone and I wouldn't lift a finger to stop him. I wouldn't even say a word, but that didn't mean I wouldn't have a few words with him later. Okay, maybe a whole lot more than just a few and I can't say that my fists wouldn't get involved in the discussion. I refused to give him the satisfaction of knowing he'd gotten through my steel resolve.

A slow, weighty jazz tune began from the band and I watched as Aaron leaned forward slightly into Maddy. His voice carried back to me despite the louder melody of the song and I heard him ask her in a breathy voice to dance with him. As hard as it was, I fought not to roll my eyes as he sent a beaming grin my way when she accepted and he led her out to the dance floor.

I swallowed the last of my bourbon and signaled to the bartender I could use another round. Her teeth flashed garishly as she plunked down the fresh drink in front of me and began flirting with me almost as once. Don't get me wrong, I've got just as many needs as the next guy, but this was one woman that didn't do it for me. The only one that did was currently drifting across the dance floor with another man draped around her.

I smiled back half-heartedly and tossed a ten dollar bill on top of the table. The bartender's megawatt smile disappeared as she palmed the cash before mumbling something about returning with my change. It didn't matter. Seedy place like this? I wasn't expecting to see her, or my change, again.

The music was still deliberately sinful and the two of them were still swaying back and forth on the meager excuse for a dance floor. I was trying

to act as nonchalant as possible, but when his hand slipped down to her lower back, it raised the hairs on the back of my neck. A chill raced down my spine and I inhaled deeply to fight back the rush of adrenaline.

I knew I couldn't let it show to him. Doing so would be a glaring sign he'd won. As I said before, he could do anything he wanted to her, but I was determined not to lift a finger in protest.

I watched, enamored, as Aaron's hands slid over the crushed blue velvet of Maddy's dress so his fingers grazed a trail down her spine. I sat there silently screaming inside as one of his hands wore a pattern of circles across the fabric. She glanced up with her crystal green eyes and gave him a smile.

I wanted to be the one she smiled at and jealousy swelled in the pit of my stomach as it now paced unchecked and closer to the point of unmanageability. I could feel the temperature of my blood start to rise as anger began fueling the blood racing through my veins.

Aaron's hand dropped lower and I could see him holding it in preparation to give her a gentle, but firm, squeeze. Just as his hand caressed the elegant curve of her ass, I slammed my hand down on the table and pushed myself towards the bathroom.

His sneer as I walked past was vivid and unmistakable and it was all I could do not to punch that smug attitude into tomorrow.

I shook my head in disgust as I stepped through the swinging door and looked around. Classifying this restroom as dingy would have been putting it too nicely, but I was at least alone. A cold sweat swept over my entire body as I leaned against the wall of the badly lit room and my suit suddenly felt tight and confining.

I'd let Aaron get to me.

It was irritating because I'd planned so carefully to prevent this exact thing and yet, it happened anyway. The snot-nosed rich putz was pushing buttons I didn't even know I had.

Why the hell was this happening? Had I been blind to what was really deep inside of me? I suppose I'd been so busy trying to one up him that I'd been blind to the fact I really did want her in my bed. Hell, it didn't matter as long it as it was horizontal surface.

I wanted her underneath me, sweat slicking her skin and I wanted to swallow her screams when she came.

My head tapped idly against the discolored tiles on the wall as I arrived at the realization the game didn't matter anymore. It didn't matter who won or lost. Who the better man was. I just couldn't stand the fact his hands were touching her.

I wanted my hands on Maddy.

Over her.

Inside her so she tumbled over the edge just from my touch.

The tiles exploded as I spun around and slammed my fist into the far wall. How I wished it was his face. Heavy breathing echoed throughout the tiny bathroom and I slowly came to the realization that I'd truly lost it.

The door creaked as someone entered the men's room to use the facilities. I stepped to the row of faucets and quickly washed the blood and ceramic tile pieces from my hands.

My eyes lifted and I flinched at the image staring back at me.

Old.

That's how I looked – old and well past each of my thirty-two years. My dark eyes were even dark, shaded with exhaustion. There was no healthy glow to my skin and the smudges of darkness under my eyes were

something that frightened me. I'd become someone – something – that I didn't recognize anymore. What had once been a form of entertainment no longer brought the thrill it once had. Need fueled me now and I could no longer deny myself what I wanted the most. I'd grown weary of the game and the time had long since passed when it should have ended.

Tonight it would.

I tossed the blood stained paper towel I'd been holding against my knuckles into the trash and narrowed my eyes as I stepped back out into the bar. The band wasn't playing the same song as my eyes found the dance floor. If I had thought the one before was purposefully sensual, this one was out right erotic.

A single, melodic saxophone drifted out over the faceless crowd. Aaron and Maddy were drifting across the dance floor pressed tightly against each other. Her arms were wrapped around his neck so his head rested on her shoulder. Aaron's hands rested against her hips and I could see him guiding her hips against his crotch.

The blood raged in my head.

Yes, it was time to end this right now.

I stalked across the bar with purpose and my goal was painfully clear to me as something had been awakened inside me.

Aaron's head snapped up seconds before I reached where they stood, as if he sensed my approach. Aaron's green eyes narrowed and a scowl darkened his face. He was clearly pissed off and he seemed to know he'd lost the game because he hadn't made his move sooner.

My hand closed over Maddy's arm and I spun her around to face me. I saw the shock filling her eyes as the realization came over her just what I was about to do.

The boundary we'd all set up shattered. Without a word, without any sort of explanation, my mouth dropped to hers and I staked my claim.

Maddy's surprise was short lived as her lips opened to mine and my tongue slipped past them to slide into her mouth because I just couldn't wait any longer. I had to have her. A whimper vibrated in her throat and her arms wrapped around my neck to pull me closer as she surrendered to me.

Aaron growled loudly in protest and I heard the sound of his fading footsteps as he stormed away.

Check and mate.