

Tycoons & Tearaways

by anex

Disclaimer: This is a work of uber fiction. All the characters are mine even though they may resemble another familiar female dynamic duo. This story is my own work any resemblance to anything else is purely co-incidental. No copyright infringements intended. This story is only for pleasure not profit.

Sex: There is reference to a romantic relationship between two women which is sometimes graphic. Go read something else if this is not your cup of tea or you are under 18. If it's illegal where you live then move somewhere else!

Violence & Language: Some F words are here but not much plus some physical violence all of which are in context and not gratuitous - unlike the sex!

Teaser: Darcy is presented with an offer she can't refuse from her ex girlfriend. Do the consequences spell disaster for the blossoming relationship between the heiress and the former harlot?

Authors Note: This story is the sequel to my first novella entitled Heiresses and Harlots. If you have not already read it - SHAME ON YOU! Constructive feedback always welcome: anex@hotmail.co.uk.

Now on with the show...

It was still early (too early) but sleep eluded her. Darcy began her day quite often in the middle of the night. She slipped silently out of bed careful not to wake her sleeping partner.

Catching her reflection briefly in the hall mirror she chuckled to herself thinking she resembled some sort of burglar; she was dressed in faded navy blue Chicago Bears sweats and a black beanie hat. With her ipod strapped to her arm she selected 'run1' from a multitude of playlists each carefully designed for a specific mood or event. 'Beautiful Day' by U2 began playing appropriately as she stretched and readied her body for the gruelling 7 mile run she was about to endure.

The route which started at her home near Lincoln Park took her down North Lake Shore Drive alongside Lake Michigan. This had always been a favourite of Darcy's. She had a gym of course in her spacious 3 story townhouse, but somehow nothing compared to running on the open road, through the streets of Chicago in the dead of night. Her fitness had suffered these past few months due to her polo accident which she was lucky to recover from.

Muscles strained and lungs burned as feet pounded the tarmac eating up mile after agonising mile whilst the city around her slumbered on regardless. The biting chill winter air stung her determined face as she increased her pace for the last stretch of her run.

She finally eased up and changed her gate to a slow jog before eventually stopping on the deserted beach at the very south end of Lincoln Park; she bent, hands on knees drawing in lungfuls of sweet recuperating air. She checked her watch "53 minutes... PHEW... not bad for an old girl!" she panted aloud to herself.

The great lake was eerily calm like black glass; small waves lapped and burbled, grasping at the wintry shoreline. The night time sky black as coal bejewelled with a billion stars still cloaked the world with its infinity. The air around her was unusually still for the 'windy city'. She took a long moment luxuriating in the serenity of the vast expanse of water before her; recalling with fondness from her college days 'the peace of wild things' a favourite poem by Wendell Berry which she felt befitted the moment perfectly. Darcy had a deep sentimental side to her which she kept a tight lid on most of the time; moments such as

these were sacred and profoundly personal to her, they gave her peace in a world where she was often at war.

Eventually she felt the sweat chilling her heated skin and decided to head back.

The lure of freshly baked produce caused Darcy to detour slightly from her route. Lazio's bakery around the corner from her home (and the only place open at this ungodly hour) was always a diversion. She stocked up on an assortment of fresh pastries and two large lattes with extra shots of caffeine to help kick start the day.

The pastry filled paper bag fell on the floor as Darcy tried to juggle cups of fresh brewed java, a newspaper, an empty water bottle and a set of house keys. She kicked the bag in through the front door in frustration as she finally managed to open it, swearing softly under her breath.

It was still pitch dark. The bedroom door creaked open releasing a dim beam of light which fell upon a lumpy misshapen object buried underneath the duvet. Silently a plate of warm pastries and an aromatic steaming cup of coffee were placed on the bedside table next to the lumpy object.

Amazingly the lumpy object began to stir.

Darcy watched in rapt fascination as a hand emerged and homed in on the yummy treats as if it had sight of its own. The hand removed a warm pan au chocolate and disappeared once more unto the cover of darkness. Even more strangely could be heard a soft mewling sound as the lumpy object consumed the tasty morsel.

Unable to sustain her curiosity much longer Darcy approached the lumpy object and tentatively peeled back the covers. And there she was, like a baby chipmunk tucked snugly into its nest feeding itself greedily with two little hands. Cass grumbled at the intrusion to her pre-breakfast snack but her eyes remained firmly closed. Darcy wisely replaced the covers and backed away toward the bathroom chuckling to herself.

After her shower Darcy returned to the bedroom to find Cass sitting up in bed savouring the last drop of her coffee.

"Morning, mmm that was delicious, thanks." Cass managed through a contented yawn.

"It's all part of the service." Darcy smiled brightly as she sat on the bed next to her sleepy partner. She leaned forward and kissed Cass tenderly on the lips and drew back to regard her beautiful girlfriend. "Mmm good morning."

"You've not had much sleep." Cass noted with some concern.

"I'll be fine, don't fuss." Darcy playfully ruffled the young blonde's hair.

"Sure you don't want me to come with you?" Cass again offered her support but Darcy flatly refused it.

The simple truth was she was terrified about seeing her father today and if there was any kind of scene she'd rather not let Cass be party to it.

"Have you got everything you need for your interview?" Darcy questioned by way of changing the subject her playfulness waning.

"Yeah, I'm all set." Cass frowned slightly at the sidestep but let it slide.

"Alright then, be sure to keep eye contact and don't fidget. Oh, and remember the sequence..."

"Darcy!" Cass interrupted somewhat exasperated. "I'm well prepared, now who's fussing?"

"OK, OK," the brunette raised her hands in mock surrender. "Just call me as soon as it's over and tell me how it went." Darcy kissed the top of Cass's mussed blond head as she rose off the bed to get dressed. "I'm going to the office first, then I have the thing with 'daddy' at noon, I'll try and be back for around 5pm. We still on for the movies?"

"Yeah sure." Cass absently replied.

One thing Cass was starting to find frustrating about Darcy was her inability to discuss her thoughts and feelings concerning her family. She knew very little about Darcy's childhood and even less about the cause of the feud with her father.

Cass was a polar opposite in this regard. She was an open book emotionally and had no qualms about telling Darcy intimate aspects of her life; no matter how painful a lot of it was. There was however, one significant detail that Cass felt uncertain of sharing with her beloved. Their relationship though strong was still in its infancy and it didn't seem appropriate to mention at the moment. When the time was right Cass would tell.

Darcy looked stunning as usual, dressed in a charcoal grey Armani jacket and matching tailored skirt that hugged all the right places. Cass simply admired the view of this amazing woman and had to mentally pinch herself that she hadn't dreamt her up.

"That's not a suit, that's an Audrey Hepburn movie!" Cass flung back the duvet and prowled naked like a tigress toward her prey. "C'mere and let me have a piece of you to keep me going for the rest of today." Darcy's dark eyebrows arched in pleasant surprise.

"Whoa!" Darcy had to tear herself away from hungry questing hands and lips. "I-I've got to go." Her feeble protests were again quashed as Cass connected passionately with another searing sensual kiss.

Cass eventually released her willing prey somewhat breathless and slightly flushed from the impromptu display of passion. "OK, that ought to do it; you may go now Miss Edwards." She said in an official voice and smacked her playfully on her firm rear ushering her out of the room to face her day of reckoning - with hopefully one pleasant memory to hold on to.

The elevator doors slid smoothly open. Two elegant and deliciously long legs strode purposefully toward the CEO's office. The distinctive click clack of Jimmy Choo's on fine Italian marble created an eerie echo and alerted several startled members of staff to the presence. Amy watched the owner of the legs approach with foreboding.

"Amy" Mel acknowledged Darcy's assistant inconsequentially as she attempted to breeze past the 'guard dog' unchallenged.

"I'm sorry Mel but Darcy is in a meeting." Amy said firmly and stood defiantly blocking her path.

The swirl of Mel's expensive perfume and her impeccable attire were all carefully designed to evoke and assault the senses - fear and lust being two primary targets. Amy however, had seen all this bravado before (many times) and was more than immune to the 'Melissa effect' as it became known at Edwards Enterprises.

"Coffee then. Strong and black." Mel ordered with a healthy glare and took a seat in the small reception area outside Darcy's office to wait.

Amy reflected the look contemptuously and moved to call her boss before she did anything else. Just as she turned away Mel sprang up like a cat and before Amy could stop her she flung open the large walnut double doors to Darcy's office with dramatic flare.

"I'm sorry Darcy she just barged through." Amy explained whilst manoeuvring past the uninvited guest.

"It's alright Amy." Darcy smiled at her P.A. and calmly offered Mel a seat; her hand cupped the end of the receiver she was holding to mute out the interruption.

She returned to her telephone conversation markedly making Mel wait. Amy retreated and scowled at the intruder behind her back giving her the 'finger' which made Darcy smile appreciatively at the insurgent gesture. Mel missed the gesticulation but caught the air of the sentiment and turned round to give Amy a look which Medusa would have found petrifying. The P.A. simply smiled inanely at Mel, turned and closed the doors behind her.

Eventually Darcy finished her conversation and casually replaced the receiver, she leaned back comfortably in her custom made executive black leather chair, crossed her equally elegant legs and regarded Mel with a cool gaze before she spoke.

"To what do I owe this pleasure." She asked, smiling falsely as she rested her elbows on the arms of her chair and lightly touched her fingertips together.

"I've come to offer you joint custody." Mel's opening shot momentarily hung in the air before Darcy registered it.

"I see. And what exactly are the terms?" Darcy's finely chiselled features remained unreadable.

Mel reached into her Louis Vuitton attaché case and slid a thick neatly bound document across the desk. "This should explain everything. You will no doubt want your lawyers to review it."

"A little presumptuous aren't we? Why don't you just tell me what you want, I'm through playing games with you Melissa." Darcy didn't look at or move to touch the document, she simply held her glacial gaze on Mel waiting for her direct explanation. The mercury was now rising in her blood. "Well - I'm waiting."

"I want another baby." Mel eventually said almost matter-of-factly.

"Ah, now I see where this is going." Darcy shook her head and laughed humourlessly. She serenely rose from her chair and turned her back on Mel. Pouring herself a cup of coffee and not offering any to her 'guest' she continued. "You've got some nerve; I almost admire you for that."

Mel cut in attempting to sound amicable. "I understand your reaction after everything that's happened I can't say I blame you, but please think about it. Gabriella would have a blood sibling..."

"STOP!" Darcy slammed her cup down on the desk spilling most of the contents into the saucer. "Altruism is not a quality you possess. What sort of fucked up parallel universe are you living in? No let me guess - the one where you didn't put any restraining orders on me or have my garbage rifled through for incriminating evidence or my relationships scrutinised under a microscope for the slightest impropriety!" Darcy was now leaning menacingly over her desk seething with barely contained rage.

Amy tried not to eavesdrop but she quietly chuckled to herself as she listened to the verbal tirade Darcy was lashing out. Stick it to the bitch boss! Darcy must have really been furious for her voice to carry through the walls that clearly she thought.

"Darcy..." Mel tried to reason the unreasonable.

"I suggest you leave now, or I will have security escort you out of the building and thrown onto the street." The dark woman regained her composure but remained standing with her hand resting on the receiver to illustrate her point.

"Think about it, being an only child yourself I know you wanted Gabriella to have a brother or sister, this is a win win situation."

Darcy took a deep exasperated breath. "It's not about winning, don't you see that; are you so deluded you genuinely believe your actions are unselfish?" Mel drew breath to interject again but Darcy held up her hand in a silencing motion. "I would not in all good conscience bring a life into this world unless I loved the person I was creating it with. I certainly would not do it to simply avoid a custody battle - which I might add - I have a very good chance of winning."

"You loved me." Mel stated almost teasingly.

"Excuse me?"

"We had Gabriella together so you must have loved me once according to your 'code of good conscience'." The redhead noted with some intrigue.

"Mel, if I knew then what I know now about love I would not have gone near you with a ten foot pole. You don't know the first thing about love, your actions are born out of pure selfishness, bitter resentment and unmitigated greed. You would deprive our daughter of a mother who loves her more than life itself to simply spite me. Now get out of my building and stay the hell out of my life." Darcy shoved the custody agreement back in Mel's direction where it spilled onto the floor at the red heads feet.

Mel disregarded the fit of temper as she gracefully stood up and straightened her \$3000 Chanel suit. She had, after all fully expected this reaction. "I'm sure you'll feel differently about my proposal given time."

"Don't count on it!" Darcy yelled at the retreating form as Mel threw open both doors again and swept out with an air of perfected nonchalance.

Cass spent the morning at her tutorial on interview techniques. She had elected to study journalism at Columbia College. The course was intense and the work demanding but Cass was more than equal to the task.

She also had an internship at one of Darcy's lifestyle publications 'The Look' in the city. It took a lot of persuading on Darcy's part to get Cass to take the job. She did not want any preferential treatment because of who her girlfriend was. In fact Cass was very insistent they kept their relationship under wraps. Darcy for her part respected this and had adopted the soubriquet 'Francesca Dubois' whenever she needed to speak to Cass at work. It was a source of much amusement every time she heard the name.

Being an intern Cass feared she would spend most of her time making coffee or running errands; but from the beginning she was making real contributions to the magazine. Her editor in chief, a flamboyant character called Suzie Sanderson, made certain to ensure Cass was involved in every process from research to print gaining her valuable experience in all aspects of media publication.

Cass had a fierce determination to succeed now she had the opportunity she was not about to let it pass her by. Journalism seemed to come naturally to her somehow. She had already penned several stories for the

College paper. Her article on date rape drugs and student awareness was actually published in the Chicago Tribune. Although she suspected Darcy may have had a hand in it as she knew the editor personally.

These little 'leg ups' were germinating a source of concern for Cass. She had on more than one occasion been aware of Darcy's indirect influence on her academic and professional life. It made her somewhat uncomfortable, but whenever she mentioned it to Darcy it was summarily dismissed.

Aside from this, life with Darcy was good, very good in fact, she had found a kindred spirit in the most unexpected place. Had Darcy been as poor as a church mouse it would not have made a difference to Cass. She loved this woman unconditionally with all her heart and wanted nothing more than to be devoted to her and make her happy and proud.

Her class on interview techniques with her tutor had gone exceptionally well; as soon as she got a break she called Darcy as promised to tell her all about it. Darcy's cell was switched off, Cass checked her watch, it was a little before noon. She figured Darcy was at her parents by now, her stomach churned in sympathy, she knew this day was going to be hard for Darcy, quite how hard she would later find out.

"General?" The tall woman moved tentatively into the darkened study observing the frail figure sitting in his favourite old carving chair. He appeared to be sleeping. The heavy curtains were drawn closed, blocking out the brilliant winter morn save a piercing shaft of light that pooled on the 18th century Persian rug. Tiny specs of dust sparkled and wafted in its wake, framing the haunted man in an almost ethereal pose. He looked, however, peaceful.

Bizet played softly in the background, Darcy recognised the current track of music as 'Je Croix Entendre Encore'. It was a sombre piece, and it would later remind Darcy of this moment; she feared.

"I'll make some tea." Darcy's mother spoke softly as her daughter took a seat quietly next to her estranged and ailing father.

The deep chime of the antique Westminster clock on the mantle ushered in the noon, slowly he roused from slumber sensing the presence next to him; his sorrowful pale blue eyes tracked gradually upwards to rest upon those perfect duplicates of his long lost prodigal daughter. His breathing was laboured and his once robust 6 foot 2 inch frame was emaciated and gaunt. A ghost of his former self Darcy was shocked at his appearance but outwardly she remained almost impassive.

"You came...?" His words were slurred and unnatural as he strained almost painfully to announce them. His voice now a distorted meagre shadow of the booming baritone he had once possessed.

"Yes... I'm here." Her voice softened almost to a whisper, Darcy reached out and took his withered hand in hers; an action of measured affection she could never recall performing before. His skin was cold and dry to the touch, the delicate membrane that covered his skeletal hand seemed tissue thin and equally as brittle as it feebly embraced hers.

Lieutenant General Mitchell 'Mitch' Edwards was a highly decorated officer in the US Marine Corps. He was an imposing and formidable character. Driven by an unbending iron will and gripped with a fierce patriotic sense of duty; he was a man of honour and great courage. Attributes which afforded him the respect of the men he commanded, and struck fear into the hearts of those who would oppose him. A veteran of numerous campaigns in Vietnam and the Middle East conflicts, he had risen through the ranks quickly, at the age of 28 he became the youngest serving Colonel in the Armed Forces.

He was 'The General' to all who knew him; even to his wife and daughter. Regrettably to Darcy he was not a father figure, to her he was an affectionless man who viewed any show of emotion as a weakness; he was

to be feared and respected. Her entire childhood and teenage years had been a constant struggle to appease this tyrant of a man, who, in a way Darcy saw as a contradiction in terms. For his country he fought for liberty and freedom yet in his own private domestic republic he was a ruthless dictator, practicing a brutal totalitarian regime.

She wanted to hate him, to despise him and everything he had stood for. His unattainably high standards and strict moral code had been a source of conflict and deep seated rebellion for Darcy for as long as she could remember. But seeing him now, this wasted empty shell of a man at merely 60 years of age; she felt not hatred or anger or bitter resentment but... compassion and pity.

He was dying, he had suffered several strokes but the last one had finally robbed him of his dignity and essence. He was incontinent, unable to dress or feed himself. He wanted to die; Darcy could see it in his tortured eye's which spoke clearly of his pain and misery.

It would have been easy for Darcy to be gratified by his pathetic state; 'divine retribution' she would have called it several months ago. A lot had changed however in that blink of her life's eye. She had changed, meeting Cass had been a catalyst for a number of life altering attitudes, not least of all the need to reconcile on some level with her father.

"I'm proud of you... Darcy." He said barely comprehensible. A single tear tracked down his smooth hollow cheekbone.

"Thank you" Darcy reached over and gently wiped it away with the pad of her thumb; her own well of tears stinging the back of her throat as she swallowed hard to suppress them.

There were simply no words to repair the damage he had caused, or to atone for wasted years and squandered opportunities to be a father to Darcy. He could not have spoke of them even if he were able, instead he sobbed like a child. It was enough for Darcy to know at the end of his life, he was truly sorry.

He died two days later, peacefully at home.

The funeral took place at Rosehill Cemetery in Chicago; 'The General' was buried with full military honours. Darcy stood stoically at his snow covered graveside with her mother receiving condolences from friends and well wishers after the ceremony. Cass stood a respectful distance away with Darcy's close friend MJ; Darcy would intermittently glance over her shoulder at the pair for reassurance.

"Why do you cry for him?" Darcy uttered to her mother as their limousine started to pull away from the cemetery.

"I loved him" was the simple answer she received.

Cass tightened her grip on Darcy's hand conveying a reassuring message of her love and support.

"It's hard to explain, he did some terrible things..." Judith's words suddenly died in her throat as she recalled some painful memories. It took a moment for her to continue. "When you both had your 'disagreement' he regretted it instantly but was too proud to take it back. I watched it eat away at him all these years. It changed him." Judith pulled another tissue from her purse, dabbed her eye's and continued. "Your father loved you Darcy, he may have had a funny way of showing it but he loved you." She smiled suddenly remembering something. "He framed that copy of Fortune magazine you were featured in last year - went on for weeks about it to the boys at the Veterans Club. I just wish you two could have put your differences aside."

Darcy stared blankly out of the window. A painful chapter in her life was closing, but somewhere in the back of her mind burned a candle of regret that she had not tried to broker peace with him sooner; to salvage something of their shattered relationship. She desperately wanted to extinguish it but feared it would somehow never go out.

After making sure she was comfortable the two women left Judith in peace at home.

Darcy was predictably quite on their return to the high rise town house.

"We need a drink" Darcy stated exhaustedly, she flung her keys on the night stand and kicked off her shoes as they entered into the hallway. She slumped her weary body down onto the long sofa and rubbed her temples which were beginning to throb.

Cass went into the kitchen and took a bottle of vodka out of the freezer and poured them both 2 glasses. Darcy's doctors had told her she shouldn't drink for at least a year following her accident a few months ago. But Cass figured now was not the time to remind her of this. In any case it was hopefully just going to be one drink and Cass could not see the harm in it.

"Thanks." Cass pressed the chilled glass into Darcy's hand and moved to leave her alone with her thoughts. "Stay... please."

"Alright, do you need anything else?"

"No, just you." Darcy tried to offer a smile but it didn't reach her face. She laced her fingers in the younger woman's hand and pulled her into a tight embrace on the sofa. They lay there quietly for several minutes watching the snow fall steadily outside; the muffled hum of traffic and Darcy's strong and steady heartbeat began to lull Cass into a light slumber.

"He beat me."

"What?" Cass lifted her head off Darcy's shoulder not sure she had heard her correctly. She looked searchingly into those cornflower blue eye's now tainted silver by pools of tears which started to tumble down the sides of Darcy's noble face.

"I was just a kid when it started, 5 or 6, I can't really remember... I guess I was just a big disappointment to him..." Darcy's voice trailed off with her thoughts.

"Oh, Darcy I'm so sorry." Cass kissed her reassuringly on the cheek and pulled her into a firm comforting hold.

More silence, Cass didn't want to force anything out of Darcy if she was not willing to tell her. She knew she had to be patient, Darcy had never spoke of these things to anyone, not even MJ she was sure.

"He was a violent man. I have him to thank for this." She sniffed and gestured to the bridge of her nose.

Cass traced the tip of her finger lightly along the angled plain of Darcy's nose noting the slight bump only just visible from a certain angle.

"Why?" Cass was now barely able to speak. Her own emotions taking a firm grip.

"It was my 'coming out' present." She shrugged sardonically and laughed a hollow laugh. "When he found

out I was a 'fucking queer' - as he so eloquently put it. Now that was a doozy, boy I'll tell ya!" Darcy moved to sit up and Cass went to the kitchen to top their drinks up.

"Do you want to tell me what happened?" Cass sat back down and sipped her drink feeling she was pushing too much now.

Darcy rolled the tumbler in her hands for a moment staring into the chilled clear liquid lost in her dark memories of that fateful night.

"Being a forces family we moved around a lot. I was nearly 18 when this happened," she gestured to the bridge of her nose again "we were living in San Diego at the time. There was this girl I used to hang out with called Katie, we were just kids fooling around on the beach under the pier - first and second base stuff - you know. We stayed out late and my dad came looking for me and caught me red handed making out with Katie. She ran for it when she saw him coming, but I stood my ground staring at him defiantly. This was who I was and suddenly I didn't give a fuck what he thought anymore."

Darcy straightened unconsciously mimicking the defiant posture; her eyes still fixed on the glass she was holding, a contemptuous smirk played briefly across her lips.

"I read the rage in his eyes and I knew what was coming. Without uttering a word he slapped me hard across the face but I barely flinched." The tone of her voice had transcended to a fierce whisper. "I didn't want to give him the satisfaction this time. I could taste the blood in my mouth, it... it sparked something in me I'd never done before."

Cass could feel Darcy's body tensing up and trembling as she again held her close urging her wordlessly to continue.

"I fought back, I lunged at him whilst he was spouting abuse at me and I knocked him down. We fought like rabid animals in the sand, he hit me and I hit him back with every ounce of strength I could find, but he was too strong. He eventually dragged me by the hair into the surf and held my head under the water until I stopped struggling. I somehow managed to break free and I ran and ran until I reached Katie's house. She helped me inside and cleaned me up."

"Didn't you call the police?" Cass questioned, like she'd ever rely on their help anyway.

"No, I just wanted to get away from there altogether, the police would only complicate matters. The next day, after my dad had gone to work, I went back to the house to get my stuff and say goodbye to my mom. I was going back to college soon anyway so I figured I'd just go a little earlier."

"What did Judith say?"

"I didn't go into the specifics, I guess my dad hadn't either, she had no idea about what happened at the beach. She just assumed I spent the night with friends and had got into a fight with one of them."

"Did you tell her, eventually I mean?"

"No, it wouldn't have done any good, my mom never really possessed the strength of character it took to stand up to that bastard, and I didn't want her to suffer on my account."

"After I graduated university I went home to visit them, well I wanted to see my mom at least. They had moved back to Chicago by then. I figured he would have been proud of me, graduating from Harvard business school with a first class MBA. I wasn't at all surprised when he virtually threw me out of the

house screaming all sorts of obscenities at me whilst my mother tried to restrain him. I never saw or spoke to him again after that."

"Darcy, I understand how painful this must have been for you. I was abused too remember, but keeping all that hurt locked inside of you can eat your soul away."

"I never meant to shut you out Cass," Darcy turned to look at her soul mate for the first time since she had begun this appalling confession. "I guess... I just thought that I'd dealt with it. I convinced myself I didn't need him in my life. But I think I still needed his approval."

Cass reached up and gently cupped Darcy's face in her hands. "Just remember, you're not alone."

"I'll never shut you out again." Darcy eventually whispered.

"Promise?" Cass brushed her soft lips against the older woman's forehead as she spoke.

"I promise."

"I love you Darcy." It was a simple statement but it had a profound effect on Darcy and she broke down and sobbed heavily into the young woman's arms.

Her vulnerability at that moment was painful but she had lost the ability to care about it. Cass would have to be strong for both of them for now.

A few days later Darcy and Cass were dining out at an exclusive restaurant in the city called Carriages. It was a large venue but had lots of intimate dining areas where two people could feel very comfortable expressing their closeness without creating a public display. Darcy dined here regularly and Cass was delighted when she suggested it, in fact she knew exactly what she was going to order and hopefully a tall stunning brunette would be on the desert menu.

They were deep in conversation enjoying the evening and one another's company. The topics ranged from favourite kids TV shows to words you hate or could never say because they didn't suit your character.

"Broody" Cass said, "Ewww!" she shuddered as she said it.

Darcy repeated the word slowly with her best deep sexy voice making Cass cringe even more. "See, even you just can't make it sound nice."

"Nah, you're right. Here's one." She licked her lips suggestively, "Peachy" she purred. It reminded her of an elderly aunt who used the term all the time; "she was mad as a brush and smelled of lavender and moth balls." Darcy threw her head back and laughed as she recalled the character.

Cass loved to see and hear Darcy's laugh, it was rich and full and very infectious. Laughter had been in short supply of late which was understandable but Cass was relieved to see it had returned with a vengeance.

Cass too had laughed herself senseless, so much so that she eventually had to excuse herself and went to the bathroom to freshen up.

She was re-applying her lip-stick in the mirror when an all too familiar and unwelcoming figure appeared behind her.

"Hello Cass" Mel used her perfected ice queen intonation. "I see Darcy finally managed to let you out of bed."

"Mel, what an unpleasant surprise." Cass smiled sweetly at her partners ex girlfriend. They regarded each other with an air of contempt that was almost tangible.

"Frankly, I'm amazed the old girl would resort to paying for it though, she must be desperate to bang a skank like you."

Cass could sense the swell of rage boil up in the pit of her stomach. "Considering she slept with a refrigerator for the past five years you could hardly blame her." She began to feel her self control slipping away.

"Well Darcy needed a certain kind of slut to satisfy her needs and it looks like she hit the jackpot with you." The redhead retorted.

"You know, I usually don't resort to violence, but in your case I'll make an exception." Cass suddenly wheeled around and connected her right fist squarely with Mel's jaw. Mel was sent reeling backwards into a cubicle where she sat down unceremoniously on a toilet seat in a semi conscious daze.

Cass instantly bolted from the bathroom to find Darcy.

"We have to leave, NOW!" Cried Cass, her whole body was shaking with anger.

"Hey what's going on?" Darcy immediately stood up and moved to comfort the frantic young blonde. But Cass turned and started for the exit before Darcy could get a response.

Darcy threw a bundle of notes on the table and chased after her whilst the other diners looked on in curious surprise.

"Would you mind telling me what the hell is going on?!" Darcy ran along side the fleeting woman.

"Where's the limo, god where's the fucking limo!" Their limousine was parked around the corner and Darcy had not had chance to call her driver. By now Cass was storming down the street trying to hail a cab and Darcy was having trouble keeping up with her. It was bitterly cold and Cass had not got her jacket on.

"Cass stop, please talk to me." Darcy wrapped the jacket she was carrying around Cass' shoulders.

A cab pulled up along side them and Cass jumped in with Darcy hot on her heels. Darcy gave the driver her address and they set off.

"Alright, would you mind telling me what this is all about?" Darcy again moved to comfort Cass and this time she managed to slip her arm around her shoulders.

"Mel"

Darcy looked confused "Mel?"

"I just saw Mel in the bathroom and we got into a sort of argument, except..."

"What, except what?" Darcy hurriedly urged her to continue.

"She said some really nasty things so I... I'm afraid I lost my temper and punched her."

"You did what?!" Darcy was now mortified.

"I hit her, really hard and knocked her out." Cass hid her head in her hands and began to sob.

"You're kidding me right?" Darcy could hardly believe her ears. "Driver turn around and take me back to Carriages!"

Cass looked up incredulously at the taller woman and sniffed. "You can't possibly go back she's going to call the cops and I'll get arrested."

"I can't leave it like this, god what a stupid, stupid thing to do, don't you realise it's exactly what she wanted. FUCK!" Darcy's head was spinning, this could spell real trouble and she'd have to do some fast talking to recover the situation if at all possible. The cab screeched to a halt outside the restaurant. "Stay here." Darcy barked at Cass who stayed put.

She found Mel still sat in the cubicle nursing her left eye trying to compose herself.

"I suppose you've come to finish the job." Mel hissed through clenched teeth.

"Mel, I'm really sorry. Here, let me help you." Darcy helped her up and walked her over to the counter. She lifted Mel's chin up to survey the damage noting the swelling and bruising starting to show on her eye, cheek and jaw line.

"That whore of yours sure packs a mean right hook."

"I can see how this happened." Darcy tried to make light of Mel's cutting remark. "It's not too bad." She ran a napkin under the cold tap and pressed it to Mel's Jaw.

"If you think you're going to talk me out of pressing charges then you're sadly mistaken." Mel concluded and took a slightly more dramatic intake of breath for effect as she surveyed the damage for herself in the mirror.

"I'd hardly call it an unprovoked attack." Darcy could tell Mel was already calculating some sort of scheme to capitalise on these events.

"We'll let the police decide that."

Just then the maître d' came in to see just what the commotion was all about. "Miss Edwards is everything alright?" She gasped when she saw Mel and looked accusingly at Darcy.

"Justine, would you please call the police I'd like to report an assault. And can you ask Peter to come in here please." Mel was now hamming it with false tears up for maximum effect.

The maître d' left hurriedly and did as she was asked. Moments later Mel's boyfriend came storming through the door and made a beeline towards Darcy's throat with a large hand slamming her hard against the wall.

Mel screamed at him to stop and wrenched his hand from around Darcy's throat before he could do any damage.

"You fucking idiot!" Mel shrieked at a bewildered Peter. She angrily smacked his hand away as he tried to console her.

Moments later two police officers appeared closely followed by Cass who immediately froze when she saw Darcy's icy glare. The scene was chaotic, Peter tried to relay his version of events to one of the officers but Mel intervened to make it clear that Cass was the perpetrator of this assault and levelled her accusing finger at the panic stricken blonde.

Within moments the female officer had Cass in an arm lock whilst reading her Miranda rights.

The 23rd district police station was not on the evening agenda Darcy had planned. Yet that is where she was heading to bail her girlfriend out of jail. Now there's a job I'd never thought I'd have to do! Darcy thought sardonically to herself whilst recounting the situation to her lawyer.

When she got to the police station Darcy explained her presence and was pointed toward the waiting area by a very disinterested desk sergeant. It was just as she had imagined or had seen on TV, dead beats and prostitutes were the main clientele. And Darcy desperately tried not to make eye contact with the crack-head that had seated himself very closely to her right.

"You got a cigarette?" The grubby man reeked of body odour and breathed stale alcohol over Darcy who tried not to heave as she mutely shook her head and looked away.

To her relief her lawyer arrived and immediately took control of the situation.

Karen Sharpowski was considered one of the finest criminal lawyers in the state of Illinois. Recommended by Darcy's best friend MJ she set to work on arranging for Cass's release.

Unfortunately Cass was in violation of her probation which meant she would have to see the judge in the morning before Darcy could post bail. However, Karen managed to secure a brief meeting between the two women alone.

"I'm so sorry Darcy" Cass cried into the taller woman's shoulder as the door closed behind them in the tiny interview room.

"Shh, it's OK," Darcy comforted and stroked the wheat coloured hair of the distressed young woman.

They held each other tightly for a long moment and Darcy was suddenly struck stiff with terror at the prospect that Cass might actually go to prison. Mel had the advantage here and Cass's future was in that despicable harpy's hands. It was a thought Darcy could hardly bear to contemplate.

"I'm going to get you out of here as quickly as I can, and I promise you we'll straighten his whole thing out." Darcy tried to re-assure her beloved but even as she was saying the words she already feared the worst.

Cass was placed in a holding cell with three other women. A few months ago she would have blended in quite well to these surroundings. She'd have probably laughed and joked with her fellow inmates and maybe have made some friends. But now, she looked and felt like a 'new fish' which was an endearing term used for first time offenders in jail. The other women regarded her that way now - she could tell. If her alter ego 'Candy' were here she'd have no problems fitting in.

"Hey, hot stuff." A young woman not much older than Cass tried to get her attention.

Cass knew that ignoring them or showing any kind of false bravado would only serve to provoke an argument or worse.

"Yes?" She turned and smiled at the woman.

"Oh, so you think you're hot?" The other women sniggered at their newly elected ring leader.

"This is just great! A fucking tough nut, there's one in every cell! She thought wearily. Her response now regardless would cause more provocation. It was time to use the fight or flight rule.

In a millisecond Cass launched herself at the woman's throat, slamming her hard against the brick wall. "If you want a fucking piece of me come and give it your best shot!" Her small hand was now locked in a vice like grip around her startled inmates windpipe.

"Well, do you want some!?" Cass bore her green glare deeply into a pair eyeballs that were now bulging out of their sockets. The shocked woman was unable to voice a reply and vigorously shook her head from side to side.

"Anybody else want some?" She scanned the small room menacingly. The other two averted their eye's. "Good, now lets play nice or I'm gonna have to fuck you over - got it?" The would be bully turned victim nodded her head up and down even more vigorously. Cass released her and sat down on an empty mattress.

"I'm Donna, this is Paula and Simone." Donna offered a hand in reconciliation whilst rubbing her tender throat.

"Cass." She offered back nodding her head once in acknowledgement.

It turned out that Donna, Paula and Simone were all in the same 'profession' Cass had suspected. After that little ice breaking incident things settled down and Cass prepared herself as best she could for the long night ahead. Her thoughts turning quickly back to Darcy and the nightmare that had unfolded just a few short hours ago.

Darcy eventually arrived home to darkness - alone. Her heart was breaking. Mel had sunk to an all time low. She was tired and couldn't think clearly anymore. She poured herself a large neat scotch and downed it almost in one; gasping as the fiery liquid scorched her throat. Downing at least two more she eventually slumped onto the sofa and covered her face with her arm feeling the room beginning to spin.

The heavy crystal tumbler slipped from her fingers and clattered on the hard wooden floor but somehow it didn't break. Her mind swirled with images of Cass in jail and Gabriella living in a foreign country and the thought of her losing everything she loved and lived for was utterly overwhelming, eventually she succumbed to exhaustion and alcoholic oblivion.

She woke still fully clothed on the sofa to piercing sunlight and a throbbing hangover. It had snowed heavily that night and everywhere seemed to be covered in a brilliant white blanket intensified by the brightness of the low winter sun. She fumbled on top of the coffee table for a pair of Ray Bans and slipped them on in a vain attempt to abate the stabbing hot needle pains behind her bloodshot eyes.

Slowly and painfully she shuffled to the guest bathroom and promptly threw up. She had reached an all time low. She dimly registered the phone ringing. Finding the source long fingers frantically clawed at the receiver but body and mind were disconnected which only served to knock the handset on the floor. Blearily she crawled around trying to recover it but the ringing stopped as the machine took over.

'Hey this is Darcy, I'm not available just now so leave a message after the beep.'

BEEP

"Darcy, are you there?" There was a long pause, Cass drew a shaky breath and continued. "Please pick up." Another long pause.

"Hey, it's me, are you alright sweetheart?" Darcy answered trying to cover the cracks in the veneer of her voice.

Cass exhaled a sigh of relief. "I'm alright, Karen posted bail, I'm on my way home."

"I'll be right there."

"There's no need, Karen's going to drop me off."

"Alright, I'll see you shortly, OK?" The dark woman strained to keep the tears from her voice.

"Kay." In that single moment Cass wanted to say everything all at once, how much she loved Darcy, how sorry she was to have caused all this trouble, how frightened she was of losing her. She hesitated then decided to wait until she got home and was safely in the arms of the woman she loved beyond all reason.

In that single moment Darcy wanted to say everything all at once, how much she loved Cass, how she forgave her and how terrified she was at the thought of losing her. But she decided to wait until she got home and was safely in the arms of the woman she loved beyond all reason. "OK, bye."

CLICK

The tall woman curled up into a foetal position on the floor her face crinkled and contorted as she began to sob with a dizzying mixture of relief, anxiety, torment and anger.

Darcy finally pulled herself together, she was supposed to be on a flight to New York later that evening and had planned on taking Cass with her for the short business trip. She collected her thoughts and picked up the phone to call Melissa before Cass came back. The phone barely rang once when Mel picked up.

"Darcy" Mel drawled smugly as she answered the expected plea for mercy - her plan was clearly coming together nicely.

"Mel I want you to drop the assault charges." Darcy fought to keep her rage at bay.

"Ah, that's right, your little whore's looking at 3 years in the pen isn't she." It was a statement of fact, Mel had been kept well informed by her own legal sources.

"Please don't do this, she's done nothing wrong, you provoked her for Christ sake."

"I'm sure the courts won't see it like that. Have you seen her previous convictions, my my such a teenage tearaway. I'm holding all the cards darling, I could make all this go away of course. You know what I want, and I'm sure my proposal is very tempting now the love of your life hangs in the balance, hmmm?" Mel loved the sound of her own voice especially when she was on a self righteous rant.

There was a long moment of silence. Mel revelled in her pending victory as Darcy struggled to come to terms with her imminent defeat. 'Sometimes one has to lose a battle to win a war' she thought to herself.

"Alright, I'll sign." The words tasted like bile in her throat. "Meet me at the office, 2pm." Darcy slammed the phone down.

Darcy closed her eyes in relief at the sound of Cass opening the front door and jumped up to greet her.

Cass stood in the hallway trying to compose herself before facing the woman who held her heart.

The tall figure emerged at the other end of the hallway and immediately rushed to embrace the subdued young woman.

"I'm so sorry Darcy. I suppose you must be pretty pissed with me huh?" They held each other as though their lives depended on it.

"Nah, she had it coming. Boy I'd have given my left tit to see you smack that bitch." She heard Cass chuckle in between anguished gulps.

Darcy pulled back and gently brushed an errant strand of hair from Cass's ruddy tear stained face. She gently placed a finger under the smaller woman's chin so she could look into those lush green eye's once more. "We both look like shit." She joked trying to lighten the mood.

"Yeah, I need to get cleaned up, a night in a police cell can play havoc with a girls appearance." She mocked her somewhat dishevelled state and bowed her head again shamefully reminded by the serious nature of her offence. "I'm going to go to prison for this aren't I?" Her chin quivered as her hand came up to her lips to stifle another desperate sob.

"No you're not, It's OK, Mel has dropped the charges."

"I-I don't understand?" Cass pulled back in utter disbelief.

"After Peter tried to strangle me we kind of called it quits." A tiny white lie, Darcy justified to herself - Darcy wasn't going to mention the deal she planned to make with Mel, she needed to pick her moment to tell Cass and now was not the time.

"Oh my God did he hurt you? I'm such an idiot this is all my fault."

Cass began to cry again.

"Hey shhh, I'm OK it's all OK, except..."

"What?" Cass could scarcely breathe.

Darcy met Cass directly in the eyes conveying the most serious look she could muster. "We're banned from Carriages!"

Cass let out a huge sigh of relief and managed a small chuckle. Darcy again embraced her kissing the top of her head and hoping beyond all hope they could pull through all this with their relationship in tact.

"Look I've still got to go to New York, it'll just be for a few days; what say we go together and have some fun, take our minds of all this crap huh?"

"Sounds wonderful, but are you sure everything's OK and you're not just saying it."

"Everything's just 'peachy'." Darcy knew that would make Cass laugh and she wasn't disappointed.

"I've got to go into the office to sort a few things out. You get some rest and I'll be back before you know

I'm gone." The tall woman spoke soothingly and Cass felt a little more reassured.

"I don't deserve you." The smaller woman pouted and looked again at her feet.

"Yeah ya do." Darcy bent and placed a soft kiss on her lovers velvet yielding lips. It deepened briefly then ended with a chaste peck. Each woman conveying the simple relief to be back in the others arms.

Mel wore a huge pair of dark glasses to conceal her swollen face from curious eyes as she marched through Darcy's offices. Amy was expecting her this time and wordlessly escorted her and her entourage of overpriced ambulance chasers to the main board room.

Darcy and her team of just 1 legal advisor, her trusted family law attorney by the name of Catherine Roscoe, mutely greeted the gaggle of suits as they filed into the room and seated themselves around their client at the other end of the long table.

Catherine meticulously picked through the custody agreement making copious notes as she clarified each point. It appeared to be very generous, Darcy was granted full parental rights, with equal access including a liberal holiday concession that meant she could even spend Christmas day with her daughter and her potential offspring.

The last section detailed Darcy's obligation to surrender her DNA for the agreement to be valid. Darcy watched Catherine raise her eyebrows as she read through the final paragraph, she had not told her about that part over the phone. Catherine requested a recess to confer with her client.

Catherine sighed and shook her head once they were alone. "Are you sure you want to go through with this Darcy?"

"Could we get this much by going to trial?" Darcy said flatly.

"I doubt it." She said honestly.

"If she doesn't conceive after 10 treatments, will the agreement still hold?"

"Absolutely. But it's a big gamble you're taking."

"It's not a gamble Catherine. It's a calculated risk." She stated with such a degree of certainty that the lawyer knew there was more to this than she was willing to share, even with her.

Darcy requested a moment of time alone with Mel before they reconvened.

"Well, I guess you've got what you wanted." Darcy resignedly concluded.

"Haven't you?" Mel smugly retorted.

"Not until you drop the assault charges against Cass."

"But of course, in fact it's all being taken care of as we speak."

Darcy turned and looked thoughtfully out of the 64th story window down over the bustling city below. Mel could always tell when Darcy was covering something up by the way she either changed the subject or

turned her attention to something else temporarily.

"You haven't told 'her' about our little agreement have you?" Mel tested out her perceptiveness.

Darcy evaded the question by asking one of her own. "If by 'her' you mean Cass, the answer is no, not yet anyway. What does Peter have to say about all this?" Touché. Darcy realised she was not the only one keeping secrets.

"Peter and I are no longer together. He's going back to England."

Darcy felt a sudden unexpected wave of relief wash over her, she had always disliked Peter. She would no longer have to put up with the thought of her daughter associating with that arrogant English prick. "So, who's the daddy?"

"I thought we could stick with C6764." This was the reference number of the donor they had chosen for Gabriella.

Her plan suddenly didn't sound so repugnant, nonetheless another child with Mel was the last thing she wanted. She knew the chances of a successful pregnancy were approximately 20 per cent for each IVF cycle.

Her calculated risk was (that with a little 'intervention' of her own) Mel would not conceive at all. And maybe Cass would never need to know about all this.

Their private jet touched down at JFK a little before 9pm EST. As soon as they stepped foot on the tarmac a dark Mercedes saloon was waiting to whisk them away to the city that never sleeps.

A moment of déjà vu swept over Cass as she entered the luxurious park view suite at the Trump Plaza. Strawberries and champagne were already awaiting their pleasure. Darcy gave Cass a demure sideways glance and Cass punched her playfully in the arm. "You old romantic you!" She cooed as she popped one of the succulent juicy fruits into her mouth and did the same for her true love.

She then proceeded to rush around the multitude of rooms like a demented puppy gushing her delight at the opulent luxury she was surrounded by.

She promptly stopped bouncing on the master bed (which was the size of Texas) when she heard a low chuckle.

Darcy stood in the doorway holding two chilled flutes of champagne watching the crazy blond woman with pure joy. "Thirsty?"

Cass jumped down slightly breathless and a little embarrassed by her exuberance. "Is that the 69 you promised me?" Cheekily referring to the vintage tipple, her double entendre caused the signature dark eyebrow to rise.

"This is the 73, we'll try the 69 later." The eyebrow remained firmly in place as Darcy approached the young woman and offered her a glass. Cass smiled knowingly at the suggestion.

"To destiny." They said in unison as their glasses touched. Each recalling the first time they toasted to that particular blessing.

Cass took a large draught and shuddered at the tart chill, "I prefer a 69."

"Oh I know you do..." Darcy took the glass from Cass and placed both of them on a small table.

As she turned back Cass gathered Darcy's strong hands into hers lightly thumbing the backs. Then, drawing her tall lover's soft mouth within a hair's breadth of her own she huskily whispered against those inviting lips "make love to me."

Her answer was a fiercely passionate kiss. Their love making usually was un-hurried and intensely passionate. However, tonight their need was such for the other to re-connect and affirm their bond that a slow seduction seemed an almost impossible act.

Dexterous long fingers worked their magic to relieve the breathless blonde from her outer garments. Smaller equally agile hands did the same, insinuating themselves into the waistband of Darcy's jeans whilst simultaneously thrusting a bare hard thigh into her aching wet crotch. She gripped and massaged Darcy's firm buttocks building their passions into a rampaging frenzy.

"God, that makes me want to come" Darcy murmured breathlessly, "hey, you're going to have to slow down baby... ungh... jesus!"

Cass's lips were everywhere as she pushed Darcy with some force toward the waiting bed, she fell backwards bouncing slightly on the springy mattress. The sheets were soft and cool, contrasting to her overheated skin, she was close to the ultimate pleasure but Cass would not let her claim it just yet.

A primal growl escaped deep from Cass's throat as she straddled the prone goddess and proceeded to rake sharp teeth over aching erect nipples, scraping and biting the soft yielding flesh causing it to sting before enveloping it in soothing kisses, like a cool balm on sunburn she repeated the stinging soothing torment over and over until Darcy thought she may go insane. Suddenly she stopped and sat up with a wickedly hot idea.

"I want to watch you." Cass pulled back and reached for Darcy's right hand guiding it compellingly toward her open fly, "touch yourself," she commanded.

Darcy swallowed convulsively at the order but nonetheless she acquiesced and slipped her hand down the front of her jeans and into her molten hot slit. She had never masturbated for anyone before and felt almost shy as she began the familiar activity. Oddly though, her own ministrations were more intensely stimulating than she had ever experienced. Cass read her lover's vulnerability and reciprocated by kneeling up along side her and slipping her lacy panties half way down her thighs. She sucked her index finger suggestively into her mouth then slid it lazily down her chin to her throat then to her round firm breasts, teasing the hard pink tips; then moving further down her torso, flattening her hand against those delicious abdominal muscles before burying her fingers deeply in between her own legs.

Needing to see all of her actions, Cass virtually ripped the rest of Darcy's jeans off her smooth legs. Without further conscious thought Darcy stroked herself with frenzied abandon whilst watching Cass do the same. Cass temporarily withdrew her fingers and delicately ran them across the dark woman's soft lips coating them with her own must. "Taste what you do to me," Darcy flicked her tongue out to gather the hedonistic flavour. She began groaning loudly lost in the divine taste and sensations. All too soon she was panting rapidly heralding her approaching orgasm.

The scene was wildly erotic and Cass felt her own burning release beginning, her breath came fast and she exhaled a stream of incoherent words as they loudly exploded in climax together. The moment was tender, raw and lustful but above all the moment was pure love.

Cass fell forwards and captured Darcy's lips kissing, panting, moaning. Savouring the last rippling effects of pleasure as the sensations gradually abated in both women. Darcy brought her hand up between their lips so they could both taste the fruits of her labour.

"Mmm, now that's a vintage I definitely love the taste of." Cass giggled somewhat bashfully under the intense scrutiny of her lover's gaze. She silently marvelled at those brilliant eye's, how their colour changed to depict her state of mood; silver, powder, cerulean, azure and finally the richness of cobalt, her favourite, it was the colour that spoke of desire and love. 'Blue eyes, hmph' there was no such thing in Cass's book, not when she looked at Darcy.

"Your eyes are amazing, do you know that?" Cass gently brushed a wayward strand of damp hair from Darcy's flushed face. "You should never shut them," she whispered and kissed, "not even at night." Still whispering, still kissing. "In fact, I think you should learn to sleep with your eyes open."

"You say the craziest things sometimes." Darcy laughed and quickly rolled her small blonde bombshell onto her back to begin a more leisurely seduction.

"Now to sample that 69..." The dark woman purred.

Christmas was the happiest time of Darcy's life and Cass's too for that matter. She was at last spending it with her family, Cass, Gabriella, her mother and MJ. Together they spent a whole 10 days at La Boveda, Darcy's vineyard in Napa Valley. Cass and Gabriella were inseparable, it was a dream come true for Darcy and they relished every second of it.

Cass was standing on the terrace sipping a delicious margarita made from MJ's 'secret' recipe. She watched with some amusement at Darcy giving Gabriella a riding lesson, however, all the little girl wanted to do was gallop round and jump over things. Darcy looked imploringly over to her love from the coral and shrugged her shoulders in defeat. Cass gave her a sympathetic nod and chuckled.

"Thank you."

Cass turned to see MJ also watching the spectacle.

"For what?" Cass looked in question at MJ.

"For bringing Darcy back to life." MJ's compliment was very sincere.

"I think you're giving me too much credit."

"Well, she's a new woman and I'm happy for her, happy for you both."

"What about you MJ? Anyone special in your life?"

"Ah, that would be a miracle, I can see the personal ad now. '30 something career-obsessed-workaholic-control-freak seeks saint to put up with her over inflated ego, constant mood swings and delinquent mongrel dog'.

"Well, Darcy managed it, except without the dog." Quipped the young blonde.

Just on queue the said mongrel dog joined in the riding lesson creating even more chaos. Darcy flailed her arms wildly trying to shoo the animal away and shouted at MJ to get her beast under control.

The spectators on the terrace simply looked on in hysterics.

Gabriella swung happily in between the two women as they strolled down the leafy path toward the duck pond chatting about nothing in particular until...

"Are you going to be my new mommy Aunty Cass?"

The question momentarily stunned both women.

"Er, no princess, Cass is mammas special friend." Darcy gave Cass an affectionate smile which she gladly returned.

"I want you to live with mommy again, Aunty Cass can come too." The little girl added enthusiastically.

They stopped walking and Darcy turned and bent down to Gabriella's level taking both the tiny hands in hers. "We can't princess," Darcy smiled sweetly into her child's wide innocent eyes, "but mommy and I love you very much and we will always be with you no matter where we live, OK?"

"Don't you love mommy?" Gabriella was using her nearly six year old reasoning skills to understand their predicament.

"Yes I do darling." Darcy lied.

A change of subject is in order I think. "Hey Gabriella! Here I've got some bread for the ducks." Cass handed the little girl some slices and took her by the hand to the waters edge. They fed the ducks and chatted about the animals that lived at La Boveda. Cass looked back at Darcy and shook her head as if to say 'leave it be'.

They ate dinner at the large farmhouse table in the kitchen. Afterwards Darcy and Cass took Gabriella out into the garden to play hide and seek before bedtime. It was Gabriella's favourite game although she had not quite grasped the hiding concept. Nonetheless the two women pretended they couldn't find her which made her hysterical with laughter.

Cass taught Gabriella how to do a cartwheel and the pair frolicked around on the lawn getting covered in grass stains but they didn't care.

Darcy eventually persuaded a very unwilling 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ year old it was bedtime with the promise of a story. The little girl reluctantly bid goodnight to Cass with a fierce hug and a sloppy kiss.

After Gabriella was bathed and dressed in her favourite Nemo pyjamas Darcy settled her into bed and began reading to her. The little girl yawned and clutched her favourite teddy but focused attentively on her mother's words.

Cass was walking past Gabriella's partially open door when she caught Darcy's soft melodic voice reciting a familiar story. It stopped her dead in her tracks, and she listened intently to the tale of The Sand Horse.

It was a very touching story about an artist who creates a horse out of sand on the beach. When everyone goes home the horse comes to life but is unable to move. The white horses galloping on the ocean waves call to him. Eventually the tide washes him away to frolic and play forever in the surf with his new friends.

It was Gabriella's favourite story and Darcy had to read it twice before the little girl went off to sleep. As Darcy slipped silently backwards out of the door she noticed Cass sitting at the top of the stairs sniffing quietly.

"Hey, what's the matter?" Darcy whispered in concern as she sat down next to Cass.

Cass turned her head away embarrassed at her tears and the fact she had been eavesdropping on the story.

"I'm sorry, I never meant to listen." Cass said in exhale.

"It's OK, there's no charge." Darcy joked but she could see it was more than that that was bothering the young woman.

"I remember that story from when I was little." She quickly wiped her tear stained cheeks with her finger tips and continued. "You read it so beautifully, just how a mother should read to her child."

Darcy placed her arm around her and pulled her close kissing the top of her head as she did so. "It's a lovely story, and I would like it very much if you'd read it to Gabriella next time, OK?"

"I'd like that." Cass smiled and laughed a little at the silly sentimental moment. She stood and turned to help Darcy up.

"By the way, very impressive gymnastics Miss Miller. I had no idea you were so... flexible." Darcy virtually growled the last word as she led Cass toward their bedroom.

"You like those moves huh?" She tilted her head to one side and regarded Darcy rather cockily.

"Not bad, but let me show you a few of my own." Darcy opened the door and ushered Cass inside.

It was the last evening of their Christmas break, the four women were in the den watching 'Aliens' for the 100th time Cass protested but it was Darcy's favourite movie (go figure?).

Cass got up to get some more peanuts from the kitchen, as she was rummaging around in the cupboard she heard a beeping noise. It sounded like a message alert. She tracked the noise to her new blackberry on the kitchen table and sure enough she had a message. Darcy had gotten them all blackberries each for Christmas and they had been sending each other dirty jokes and silly messages ever since.

'appt at McKinley clinic mon 8th @ 2pm. BE THERE! Mel'

'The message was from Mel?' She pondered how... then her stomach flipped when she realised she had picked up Darcy's blackberry and not her own.

She froze staring at the message wondering what it meant.

"Hey, come on you're missing the best bit. And I'm not just talking about Sigourney Weaver in her underwear!" Darcy had come in to get another beer from the fridge. She found Cass staring at the blackberry screen. "Another filthy joke from MJ?" Darcy presumed but Cass was not smiling. "What's up?" She flipped the top off her beer and took a good slug.

"What's at the McKinley clinic?" Cass still had not moved or taken her eyes off the small device.

"What do you mean?"

"Answer my question first."

Darcy put her beer down on the counter. Her stomach was now tying itself in knots.

"We need to talk..."

Continued in part 2...

Tycoons & Tearaways

Part 2

"You were going to end up in PRISON!" Darcy was starting to lose her temper now.

"I can't believe what I'm hearing!" Cass almost screamed. "Don't you dare blame this on me!" The angry young blonde hissed.

"I'm not blaming you; I'm saying I did it for you, for us." Darcy tried to explain her view of things again.

"You've lied and manipulated to get what you wanted, you're no better than her. You think everybody has a price and will just do as you say for the right amount of money." Cass stormed on.

"You did." Oh no GOD I didn't mean that. SHIT! Darcy tried to back-pedal but it was too late. "I'm sorry, Cass I-I didn't mean it..."

It was the final straw. Cass pushed passed Darcy, her face the picture of grief. She ran up the stairs to their bedroom and slammed the door behind her.

Judith and Mel appeared in the kitchen doorway to see what was going on.

Darcy summarised everything that had happened up to that point. "I just couldn't stand the thought of losing her and Gabriella." She finished still convinced she had done the right thing though and surprisingly found she had no allies.

Whilst Darcy had been pre-occupied with her mother & MJ in the kitchen, Cass had flung a few essential items into a holdall and called Darcy's driver round. She had to get away, she could not bare to be in the same place as Darcy right now.

The front door clicked shut as Cass left the house and got into the chauffer driven Bentley Continental. "Take me to LA please Brian."

"Er, yes miss." The young man complied slightly confused to be going such a long way at this hour.

When Darcy realised Cass and her Bentley were gone she immediately called Cass on her cell phone. To her surprise it rang from somewhere inside the house, she found it in the kitchen. Next she called Brian ordering him to turn around; the driver started to comply with his Boss's orders, except...

"Brian, if you turn this car back I swear I'll jump out." The countermand was causing poor Brian the biggest dilemma of his life.

"I-I can't she say's she's going to jump out!" He stammered over the phone to Darcy. "Darcy wants to speak to you miss." He passed the phone back to his passenger who took it and then threw it out of the window where it smashed to pieces on the i5 highway.

"Just drive Brian, please don't stop!" The young woman began to sob and Brian reasoned he had better do what Cass wanted; he would just have to face the consequences with his boss when he got back.

Shelly figured her friend was in trouble and this wasn't necessarily a social visit when Cass turned up at the club where she worked in the small hours of the morning. They spoke briefly but Cass was exhausted so Shelly gave her a spare key and said she could stay as long as she needed. Shelly found her former room mate asleep on her couch when she got in from work.

In the morning Judith agreed to take Gabriella back to Chicago whilst Darcy and MJ flew from Napa to LA to find Cass. Brian had told his boss precisely where he dropped Cass off the previous night and was grateful to hear he still had a job.

The two women arrived by cab in the suburb of West Hollywood in the evening. The last time Darcy was here was when she first met Cass, she only vaguely recognised the garish neon lights of run down bars and convenience stores. Darcy was not exactly certain where Cass lived, Brian had dropped her off at questionable looking lap dancing bar.

They stood outside the same questionable looking bar now about to go inside. "The Birdcage?" MJ looked with some trepidation towards the grubby looking building with an assortment of bouncers and surly looking clientele hanging around the entrance.

Darcy ignored the intimidating crowd and determinedly made her way in.

The pair headed for the bar amidst catcalls and wolf whistles. MJ regarded the women on the podium with some surprise. "I guess Thursday nights not exactly their 'A' squad. I can actually see bullet wounds!" She joked nervously and stuck behind her tall friend for protection.

She produced a photograph of Cass to the bartender, he looked at Darcy suspiciously then shook his head. That was the reaction she got from most of the people who worked there. Suddenly she noticed a familiar face across the room she recognised as Shelly. Though she never actually met Shelly she had seen pictures. Unfortunately she appeared to be 'working' and was at that moment getting a note inserted into her fluorescent pink g string from a very grateful client.

They ordered a couple of beers and went to sit at an empty table nearby. Immediately the exotic dancer noticed the two women. It was not unusual to get women in here but these two looked most definitely out of place. She moved over to offer her 'services' then realised with some visible shock who she was addressing.

"Darcy!" She quickly took a spare seat next to her girlfriends 'girlfriend'. "Wow, I can see the appeal, I thought you guys looked mostly like Rosie O'Donnell! But damn you're hot!"

Darcy smiled inanely at the typical hetro assessment and continued. "Please tell me where she is Shelly."

Shelly gave the women directions to her apartment and a piece of her mind at the way Darcy had behaved. Darcy took the verbal tongue lashing off her partners protective friend. She was just grateful to know Cass was safe. She also hoped she had calmed down in the 24 hours since they had last seen each other.

She took a few deep calming breaths as she stood nervously outside the door to apartment 34C. 'How appropriate' she briefly thought. MJ waited downstairs in the lobby trying to avoid any association with the

dubious looking residents.

She knocked twice a little more loudly than she intended and winced thinking it sounded demanding.

The door opened on a chain, as soon as Cass saw Darcy she shut the door. Darcy knocked again, a little more softly this time. "Please let me in Cass, I'll stand here all night if I have to."

A few agonising moments passed until the door unlocked and swung angrily wide open, Cass was already walking away. Immediately the tall woman moved inside and closed it behind her.

Cass stood near the only window in the place, her arms folded in a defensive posture. Darcy ignored the body language and attempted to touch Cass, to make some sort of comforting contact, for her benefit or her love's she wasn't sure.

"Don't touch me." Cass physically shrunk back at the gesture like it burned her.

Those words stabbed the older woman right through the heart and she clutched the rejected hand to her chest at their pain. "I'm not leaving till we've worked this out?" She choked.

"I don't know who you are Darcy." The smaller woman spoke barely above a whisper. "You only tell me what you want me to know. What else is there you're not telling me? I can't trust you, I'm sorry." She wiped her silent tears on the cuff of her sweatshirt. "After your dad's funeral, remember what you said?" Darcy closed her eyes remembering only too well as Cass again reminded her. "You said, 'I'll never shut you out again.' Well the truth is you did, you sold both our souls to that 'devil' and you never gave me a choice."

"There was no choice."

"Yes there was, but you took that away from me. I'd have rather took my chances going to jail than let that bitch get her way and so should you."

"So you're saying you'd rather go to prison than be with me?"

"Of course I wouldn't but you are going to give that woman another child to use you with. I'd rather go to prison than see her do that to you."

"It won't come to that, she's not going to get pregnant, I'll make sure of it."

"This is insane you're gambling with our lives as well as the life of an unborn child."

"I never gamble. I have arranged for the clinic to inseminate Mel with unfertilised eggs."

"Oh well that makes it all alright then." Cass concluded sarcastically.

"We can't let this come between us Cass."

"It already has wouldn't you say?"

Stalemate, it was time to quit for the moment and let the air between them cool off.

"I'm staying with MJ for a few day's, I think we both need some time to think things over." Darcy concluded.

Cass kept her focus on the window and didn't respond.

"I'll see you soon then." Darcy offered hoping to at least garner some eye contact before she left. Nothing.

Cass heard the door open and close then she sank to the floor and cried like never before.

The End... for now.

Part 3 – Moguls & Mistresses