Agnus Dei

by ladyhungerhurst

Summary

Follows the development of Joan and Vera's relationship throughout the series.

'Joan allowed her mind to wander to Vera and how eager she was to please. With proper training Ferguson would find her to be a most loyal follower, one that would obey her orders without question. It was her naivety and innocence that piqued the Governor’s interest. How had this woman survived in corrections for so long and not allowed the walls to thicken her skin? Everyone had changed because of this line of work, but Joan imagined Vera was the same wide eyed fawn that walked in the door on her first day.

The music had stopped playing. Joan looked down to her still pen and frowned.

I am going to have to be cautious with this one. It is always the lambs that lead the wolf to slaughter.'
"Ferguson scanned the room before speaking, looking at the employees under her watch. She noticed all their familiar faces from the files she had previously studied, to understand exactly what drives each and everyone of them. Her eyes landed on her young deputy, she was shorter than she imagined, much shorter. Their eyes locked. Ferguson smiled.

A soft blush crept up Vera’s neck.

This was too easy. Joan thought before beginning her address.

Governor Joan Ferguson sat at her desk in her new office at Wentworth correctional facility. She looked over the files of the officers under her charge, her fingers glossing over the name “Will Jackson.” She did not have to open his file--she knew his story, following him closely over the last years. Just reading his name left a sour taste in her mouth, his time would be coming soon.

My partner and I are writing this story together as we are both obsessed with FreakyTits. This will follow from the start of their relationship and on. It will stay closely to the show but may venture into slight, but plausible, AU territory. This is our first Wentworth fic! Thanks for reading :)

The loud cracks of the foils testing one another echoed through the studio, sharp waves of pressure reverberating off of the windows that were bursting with the golden light of early dawn. He watched as Joan parried and lunged, legs wide, always disapproving. She felt a bead of sweat start at her neck and slowly crawl its way down her arched back as she held her ground, waiting for the right moment. The bead continued slowly past her shoulder blades, down her spine, over the curve of her waist, and when it reached the top of her buttocks, it was time for her to act. She lunged, every muscle contracting with a surge of force as the tip of her foil found its mark on her opponent’s weakest spot, their heart. The edge of her lip curled with satisfaction, and she glanced to the empty corner of the room.

She stepped out of her lunge, quadriceps aching, and pulled her mask from her neck. She shook out her hair, it's sweat-soaked sheen drinking up the sunlight into its darkness. Pulling the fingers of her glove one by one, she loosened and removed it, reaching out to shake the hand of her defeated opponent. She inclined her head slightly, respectful in victory, as she had learned. A gloating winner earns only jealous adversaries. Briskly, she gathered her effects and strode to the locker room.
She placed the file neatly under the stack and picked up another one, the name “Vera Bennett” typed neatly on the file. Her new Deputy. She carefully opened the file and was greeted by the blue eyes of her Deputy. Her hair was pulled back in a french twist, soft curls framing her face. She had a soft smile, but her eyes, Joan looked closely, her eyes held a sadness, years of disappointment and failure, Joan thought. There was a soft naivety in her features, an innocence that both confused and intrigued the Governor.

Vera sat in her car in the parking lot. Her heart was beating rapidly in the chest, the palms of her hands sweaty. She wiped them against her uniform. She didn’t know why she was so nervous, she had been a Deputy for awhile now, too long to count, but this time it felt different. Perhaps it had to do with her always being the interim Governor and the board never seeing her as being capable to run Wentworth. She shook her head.

*I am just not ready yet, and the board knows that.*

She didn’t know anything about her new boss except that her name was Joan Ferguson.

“You are capable of anything.” The audiobook told her. She didn’t know why she listened to self help books—they never seemed to help. All the positive thinking bullshit just-

“And if you visualize it, you can accomplish it.” She hit the eject button, throwing the cd in her back seat. It didn’t help, it wouldn’t help. She grabbed her bag and exited the car, slamming the car door behind her.

*Hello Governor, I am Vera Bennett your Deputy, it is a honor to work with you.*

She didn’t know why she was practicing in her head the same line she had said many times before.

*Hello Governor, I am Vera Bennett your Deputy, it is a honor to work with you.*

The air in the officers recreation room was thick with anticipation. All the officers sat and stood around the room waiting for the introduction from the new Governor. People mumbled, spreading rumors about who she was and what she had done in the past.

“They call her the fixer, the last prison she was at she got rid of all the contraband.” Miles said. There was scoffs of incredulity. The room went alive with people mumbling about different rumors they all heard. Vera stood in the center of the room straining to hear everything that was being said.

She felt the hair on the back of her neck rise. She turned her head to the left and she saw the sheepish grin on the face of Fletch. Her stomach turned. The sight of him brought up everything she was desperately trying to forget. That night when she was pinned down...she shut her eyes tight.

“Hey Vera, are you okay?” She heard the voice of Will Jackson. She opened her eyes, looking up at him and smiled.

“Yes, thank you. How are you?” Her eyes were grateful for the distraction.
He smiled and shrugged. “Another boss, another day at Wentworth Correctional Center.”

They both laughed and the room went silent. Everyone looked towards the opening door.

Vera looked in the direction that every head had turned to and felt a tightness in her chest. The new Governor stood in front of them, tall, very tall, with the comfortable stance of a wildcat in the mountains she calls home. Her obsidian hair was streaked with the telltale steel of a long career in corrections and combed tightly into a bun, not a single strand out of place. In fact, as Vera looked her over, she could not find even a single detail out of place anywhere on the woman. Her uniform was pressed with machine precision, her heels polished to a shine typically reserved for optical glass. It was her eyes that caught Vera, though, their mahogany darkness so enveloping that they reminded Vera of the time she looked into the old well at her Aunt’s house. The darkness so deep that you lose sight of the time she looked into the old well at her Aunt’s house. The darkness so deep that you lose sight of the walls around you, leaning as far as you can, eyes straining to see any sign of a bottom, any glimmer of water, when all there is is the dark, waiting patiently for you to lean just a bit too far.

Vera bit her lip.

Ferguson scanned the room before speaking, looking at the employees under her watch. She noticed all their familiar faces from the files she had previously studied, to understand exactly what drives each and everyone of them. Her eyes landed on her young deputy, she was shorter than she imagined, much shorter. Their eyes locked. Ferguson smiled.

A soft blush crept up Vera’s neck.

“Good morning everyone. For those of you who do not know me, I am Joan Ferguson your new Governor. After looking over reports from the disastrous policies of Erica Davidson, it is clear to me that this prison was run with the lackadaisical attention to our duties.”

The room felt even more tense than it was previously, Vera noticed that Fletch seemed upset. She heard rumors that he was in talks to become the next Governor. The thought of him running Wentworth tightened her jaw until she felt her molars ache. Vera brought her hands behind her back and clasped them tight, her eyes focusing on the new Governor’s mouth.

“The name says it all, Wentworth Correctional Center.” Joan said each word intentionally. She felt it was of the utmost necessity to let these officers know how much they have failed, in such a short amount of time. This failure would end under her charge. She noticed the flush had darkened to anger in her new Deputy, but could not place where that anger was directed, certainly not at herself, she noted.

“It’s written all over the building, it’s on our name badges, and our employment contracts. Think of it as a mission statement. Society has deemed these women defective, and it is our job to fix them.”

Defective? A furrow of Vera’s brow flitted across her face before she stifled it. Sure, many fought with drug addiction, anger issues, or other maladies of self-control, but she could think of just as many officers with the very same troubles. She shifted her weight to her left foot and broke her stare to glance at Will, who seemed to be having the same trouble with this new mission.

“Not to pander, to to befriend, to indulge, or to accommodate. We exist to correct. Now for three months these women, these women have had it easy. Your instability has given them opportunity. They’ll have established new systems and networks, their confidence will be at an all time high.”
Joan had taken stock of which faces flickered when she declared Wentworth’s new mission, and was disappointed to see her ermine Deputy among those who disagreed. She was heartened by Vera’s agreement at the laxity of control during this time of upset, and the room was warming as she rounded to the motivational portion of her address.

“Today that confidence ends. Today we shut their systems down.

We stamp on their opportunities, we destroy their networks.

Each and every person here will know their place. This is a prison, and we are in charge.”

Joan was getting a few nods and smiles around the room, and was pleased with how easily they all were whipped up by a bit of lively rhetoric.

“Now, let’s show the inmates how this prison will be run. Good day, go to work.”

Joan was hoping to catch her Deputy, but saw Vera dart out the side door. Curious, she thought. Joan was swarmed by officers eager to introduce themselves. She grimaced for the onslaught of handshakes.

Vera walked quickly down the hall. She needed to call and check on her mother, tomorrow they would be moving her back into the house to live out her last days. There was a couple last minute planning items she needed, to make sure the nurse could work the hours Vera worked, and to ensure all the equipment would be delivered at the correct time. Vera felt sorry for the women who was to take care of her mother while she was at work. Rita was not a nice woman, far from that, she was unnecessarily cruel and demanding.

She sat down at the desk and dialed the hospital number and was greeted by a pained voice from the nurse looking after her mother.

“Hi, this is Vera.”

Her mind wandered as the woman told her about the details of her mother, it wasn’t that she didn’t care, it was just hard to focus when the new Governor’s speech was on replay in her head. She wondered if Ferguson would be a fair Governor or unnecessarily cruel. They had strict Governor’s in the past and the prisoner’s never responded well to the “tough love” approach. Strong disciplinary actions never seemed to work when the prisoners already knew they were being punished. Their daily surroundings reinforced the very idea of atonement, it was a visual reminder time and time again. They were surrounded by 6 meter walls and barbed wire fence in every direction the eye could see. They were just steps away from the ocean, but they never could see it, only smell the salt in the air and feel the dampness that the sea carried in. Wasn’t that punishment enough, to feel your surroundings but never gaze upon the shores?

She tapped her pen nervously on the table. Then there was Fletch, back fresh from a Holiday from Bali. She wondered what it was like to visit Indonesia, to feel the fresh sand underneath your feet and the warmth and humidity against your skin. She imagined laying on the beach all day, soaking up the sun, drinking beverages out of fruit shaped cups and finding, somehow, some sense and understanding of spirituality. She was dedicated to her work and her mother would never allow her such a folly of expenditure.

*Maybe when mother dies I’ll visit.*

She shook her head of the terrible thought. Guilt pained her heart for momentarily wishing for her mother’s death.
“Vera?” The voice on the other line brought her out of her thoughts.

“Yes, sorry. Thank you for the update, I’ll have to go.” She hung up the phone not waiting for the other woman to say goodbye. She pushed back from the desk, throwing her hands back and stretching before standing up and smoothing out her skirt. Her head throbbed.

She got up from the desk and briskly walked towards the recreation room. She needed aspirin or a large stiff drink. Considering that she was at work, the aspirin would be easier to obtain.

A sigh escaped her lips.

She walked into the room and went rigid at the sight of Fletch. She didn’t want to talk to him, but she knew this moment would have to happen eventually. She opened her locker, silently praying that he would leave her alone.

Joan watched from the doorway at the interaction between her Deputy and Mr. Fletcher. There was an obvious tension between them, Joan paused for a second, reading every interaction. Joan noted how Vera’s body language was very stiff, Joan could tell that Vera wanted nothing to do with the man, but was too afraid to tell him what she really felt.

Ex-lovers, he hurt her.

“I’m sorry to hear about your mother, Vera.” Joan overhead Mr. Fletcher say, she took a mental note. Vera’s mother had cancer and was only given a couple weeks to live. This would leave the Deputy at a vulnerable state, Joan thought. And when people were at their most vulnerable they were the easiest to bend to your will.

Emotions, after all, make you weak.

“It’s a Buddha, they reckon it’ll help stimulate positive energy.” Joan grimaced at the words that came out of Fletcher’s mouth. Could this man not tell that Vera wanted nothing to do with him?

Vera looked at the Buddha statue in her hands. She wanted to vomit, this was all too much for her to handle. Here was Fletch giving her a gift, apologizing to her in his own way for what he did to her. He had blamed it on the grog, and his “Holiday” in Bali was just a month long rehab she thought. Was this one of his steps?

“There you are. I wondered where you have been hiding.” Vera’s head snapped up and saw the Governor looking at her with stern eyes. She was thankful for the distraction and for an out to the rather awkward interaction between her and Fletch. Did she notice a slight raise of the eyebrow? Was it in disapproval of or interest in the interaction Vera and Fletch were having?

Fletch looked at Ferguson with disdain in his eyes and the Governor smiled at him watching as the neanderthal of a man shuffle out of the room to start his rounds.

“I need you in medical.” Ferguson stated matter of factly before turning to walk down the hall.

Vera grabbed her aspirin, swallowing it dry, and quickly followed the Governor.

It required an extra half of step for Vera to keep up with the much taller woman. Finally, when she was by Ferguson’s side, Vera repeated the line that was on the play in her head earlier. “Hello Governor, I am Vera Bennett your Deputy, it is a honor to work with you.” Instead of the simple and regimented introduction she wanted to say, it came out “Governor Ferguson, I’m your Deputy


Vera uh Bennett. It’s exciting and a honor to work with you.” She cursed herself for the unnecessary pauses and the falter in her voice. She felt a blush hotly in her ears.

“Yes Ms. Bennett, I know who you are. I did go over your file.” Ferguson’s voice was flat and matter of fact, but graciously without malice. Ferguson’s heels echoed throughout the hallway with a deep thud, warning everyone of her arrival. She observed the deputy as they rounded a corner. Vera was a foot shorter than Joan, a petite frame that was only accentuated by the skirt of her prison approved uniform. It was tight enough to give you a sense of her compact but womanly figure. Vera couldn’t be described as wildly beautiful, but others could describe her as pleasantly plain. Ms. Bennett could easily pass through a crowd and go unnoticed, Joan thought. She imagined her teenagers years against the wall at a school dance watching as others were chosen while Vera was left to observe. She probably blossomed much later in life, but by then it was too late. Her confidence was shattered, but she always felt like she could be capable of more.

She listens to self help books.

The two of them must have looked like an odd pair as they walked down the halls of Wentworth. Joan carried herself with the confidence and pose of a woman who knew her value and power, while Vera still felt unsure about where she stood in the world. This intrigued Ferguson the most, Vera was a woman who had obvious aspirations for Governorship, yet lacked the self confidence or self belief that she was indeed capable of the job.

Joan noticed the other woman still had a deep blush present on her ears, probably from the awkward introduction she gave Joan, Ferguson smiled inwardly.

“You have a rapport with these women, do you not Vera?” Joan asked, arms crossed observing the woman in the medical unit.

Vera looked up at Joan, her doe blue eyes wide, before she squinted. She bit her lower lip.

“Why don’t you talk to them and see if they will explain what their fight was about. They may respond better to a senior officer than to a Governor who is new.” A soft smile graced the Governor’s lips as she gestured Vera into the Medical unit. She stayed on the outside observing the scene unfold in front of her.

Vera entered the room, the two women were severely beaten up, each having deep lacerations all over their faces and bodies. This was alarming to her, they both were close friends and she often saw them sitting together in the yard, talking and laughing. They seemed close. Prison had a way of pushing people to extremes, friends became deadly enemies and sometimes enemies became lovers. It had to do with how heightened everyone’s emotions were, because they had nothing else to focus on, they focused deeply on the darker sides of humanity. Revenge was common.

“Who forced you to fight it out?” Vera asked, it was a question she had asked a million time and she knew no one would lag. She was a screw after all. They said nothing, holding onto their pounding heads, looking at one another with distrust and sadness in their eyes.

“Did this have to do with the contraband found today in Laundry?” She asked again, grabbing on the railings of the bed.

She was again met with silence, she clenched her jaw. She changed her tune.

“Listen, I understand. If you talk, you’re in deep trouble. But I promise we can protect you if you let us know who made you do this to each other.” Vera’s tone was soft and nurturing. One of the women looked up as if to speak, but the other cut her off before anything could escape her lips.
“No one made us do anything to each other.” She spat at the words and Vera winced, feeling the hatred behind what was being said at her. Even if Vera was just trying to help, she was seen as the enemy.

“So are you saying you did this to each other?”

The both shook their head in a negative. “We don’t know who did this to us, we didn’t see the attack.”

And with that Vera knew the conversation was over. Without a witness or someone willing to talk she wasn’t going to get anything out of the two girls. The prisoners liked to handle matters themselves. Vera leaned over the railing and touched one of the women gently on their forearm. “If you feel the need to talk, you know where I am.”

Vera stepped back, crossing her arms. She knew in her gut this was Franky Doyle’s doing. She was Top Dog and was desperately trying to remain in control. It was a barbaric tactic, something Vera had read in her history book that the Roman’s did to one another, forcing whoever they thought could be informant for the enemy to fight, often to the death. It wasn’t necessarily that they believed someone would eventually tell the truth, but it was a flex and show of power. The one who survived would have been beaten down, physically and psychologically, and their allegiance would be set in stone, solidifying the power of the one in charge.

*Look at what she made you do, this is your Top Dog?*

Vera watched closely at the nurses attended to the prisoners. Despite seeing these horrific beatings weekly, they still treated each prisoner with the utmost care. They cared deeply and never forgot about their humanity. It was endearing.

She could feel the eyes of Ferguson on her, watching how she interacted with the prisoners, studying her. She felt a hotness creep up her neck and a warmth envelop her body. It embarrassed her to be watched so closely. Vera desperately wanted to make a good impression for her new boss, but she knew mistakes would be made when she was feeling so...awkward.

How would Joan react to the ways that Vera handles the prisoners? Governors in the past made it clear to her that she was no friend to the women here, but Vera didn’t feel that was necessarily true. At times she felt as if the women needed a friend, someone who wasn’t a prisoner to confide in. Vera cared deeply for the women and took the “corrections” part of the job very seriously--she had seen remarkable change at many women who were under the watch her in the past. Women, who coming in were a mess, and when they left were capable of being productive members of society. Vera felt a sense of pride knowing that in a small part she was responsible for the positive change she saw in many of the women. She hoped she never was a negative influence, always toying the line carefully between an authoritative figure and a sympathetic one.

*Am I the type of Deputy Ferguson wants?*

Ferguson looked at Vera and raised a single eyebrow, signaling the younger women to come to her with any information.

Joan’s eyes were dark and foreboding, but it made Vera want to know more about her. Was this woman always like this, so demanding in presence that it made everyone else around her shrink away? Ferguson exuded confidence and power, and here Vera was meek as a mouse. She sighed.

“It is clear that Erica Davidson did not have the leadership to run this prison effectively and these last three months have been a free for all.” Ferguson stated, her arms crossed and face filled with
disappointment and disgust.

Vera immediately felt the need to defend Erica, “Well, she did her best and we’ve been understaffed since she left and Mr. Channing was hardly...here.” Before even finishing her thought Vera could feel the disapproval stare from Ferguson it was clear that the Governor did not tolerate any type of failure at all. No excuses allowed. Vera swallowed hard hoping Ferguson would divert her gaze and attention elsewhere.

“Which of the inmates stepped up when Jack Holts was killed?” Ferguson changed the subject. She couldn’t stand seeing her Deputy make excuses for the ineptitude of Davidson. Didn’t she see that Erica was not a friend but a formidable enemy? She coerced her way into the favor of Mr. Channing and the board and took the Governor position away from Vera? Vera’s innocence baffled Joan.

“Well Bea Smith was the favorite, but since she wasn’t around Franky Doyle took over, she’s in H2.”

*The infamous H block.* Joan inwardly smiled, she was excited to see some of Wentworth’s most notorious criminals.

“I’ll see her.” The command was accompanied by a slight tilt of Ferguson’s head. When she saw no movement in the periphery of her vision, she turned her eyes to meet Vera’s, who stared back, startled by her decisiveness. “Now.” Ferguson watched as her little mouse scurried away to comply with her command.

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After the first day with Governor Ferguson, Ferguson takes the evening to settle in and muse about the day. Vera takes advantage of the last night without her mother in the house. Mature.

A long and guttural sigh pressed out of Joan as she leaned back into the black leather embrace of her office chair. *The Governor’s Chair*. She ran both hands along the armrests while rolling her shoulders, the supple leather was comforting beneath her palms. After bunching her shoulders, she moved to her neck, rolling it from one side to the other, the satisfying cracks and pops were the only sound in the now quiet office. She reached down to the sore on her left heel, pulling off the shoe and stroking the sensitive skin softly through the nylon of her stockings. The moleskin in her second kitchen drawer would take care of that tomorrow.

The sun had long since passed the horizon and her office enveloped in a darkness that soothed her. The only light came from the flickering florescent lighting that shone through her windows from the prison yard. She looked at the stack of paperwork that greeted her on her table, reminding her of the responsibilities she had left to do before she could go home.

She turned on her desk lamp, a soft golden glow illuminating the stack of paperwork, the light competing with the dark grey walls of her office.

Unlike most governors she had known, Ferguson didn’t mind this part of her job, when the prison was asleep and she was left alone in her office to do the menial work. She rather preferred the quiet moments, it gave her time to go over the nuances of the day, the personalities she met, and it allowed for her to strategize for the weeks ahead.

The soft horn of a passing train could be heard in the distance. She noticed precipitation gathering at her windows, the fog from the bay slowly rolling in.

She took the pen out of its holder and began filling out the forms of the day. The work was monotonous, and she could fill out the forms without thinking--she had been a Governor for some time after all. Wentworth was not the first, nor would it be the last, prison she would operate.

There was a rhythm to the filings of bureaucracy that etched it's way on paper, her pen composing a simple symphony. The rhythmic nature of her work could be akin to Chopin Nocturne, but with an added string section, subtle, but there. It was pleasant to the ears and mind, but not complex.

Joan allowed her mind to wander Vera and how eager she was to please. With proper training Ferguson would find her to be a most loyal follower, one that would obey her orders without question. It was her naivety and innocence that piqued the Governor’s interest. How had this woman survived in corrections for so long and not allowed the walls to thicken her skin? Everyone had changed because of this line of work, but Joan imagined Vera was the same wide eyed fawn
that walked in the door on her first day.

The music had stopped playing. Joan looked down to her still pen and frowned.

*I am going to have to be cautious with this one. It is always the lambs that lead the wolf to slaughter.*

The arrangements to bring her mother home didn’t happen as planned. Vera opened the door to her home, her childhood home, and was met with silence. This comforted her, to not have the verbal claws of her mother immediately upon her, a moment’s rest from a long day. She hung her purse on the hook near the door, kicking off her shoes. Her mother wasn’t around to scold her for the mess she had made, so she allowed herself the disobedience, her pulse quickening.

*Just tonight.*

She found herself throwing off her jacket on the back of the couch, pulling her tie off along with it. Her uniform scattered to the four winds. If someone didn’t know Vera, it would seem as if she had come home with a lover and they were lost in a passionate affair, oblivious to the strictures of the outside world. What mattered was the moment, not the consequences. She stood at her bedroom door, nothing covering her nakedness but her bra and underwear. She ran a dry hand over the softness of her belly, looking at herself in the full length mirror she had had since she was 13, the stickers along the edge of the mirror frame, stars and hearts and peace signs. As she released her hair from its twist, it fell in messy curls past her shoulders and framed her face like a tangle of ivy. Vera liked the mess, and pushed both hands through it, tousling the waves.

Her calves were sore from the long day, finally over. She spent most of it walking Ferguson around the prison introducing the older woman to the key players in the prison community. The peer workers seemed to especially capture the interest of the Governor, and Vera had noticed how Ferguson had lit up at the sight of Doreen. Anderson had a good heart, and worked hard to support the women of the prison, it was amazing that Ferguson could sense that in her in such a short time.

Vera sat on the edge of her bed and then threw her body back. The bed was old and creaked as her body bounced against it, her hair splayed like a 13th century halo. Her hands traced along her decolletage feeling the softness of her skin. She did this absentmindedly as it was a self soothing mechanism she picked up as a young child. Every Governor was unique in their methodology to governing, some, like Erica Davidson, focused solely on rehab and education, forgoing the need for punishment at all. Some were punishment heavy and seemed to thrive on unnecessary punishment to assert their control over the prisoners, Meg Jackson was a Governor who often found herself playing that role. Vera couldn’t say for certain what type of Governor Ferguson would be, but she was certain after day one she wasn’t an Erica and she wasn’t a Meg Jackson. She seemed to walk a fine line between wanting to know and understand the women under her watch while also having a no nonsense policy for those who tried to cross her.

From shadowing her, even for a single day, Vera had learned a lot about how a Governorship should be run. The way she handled the press was exciting to witness, she was able to diplomatically finesse a potentially damaging story about Wentworth to the waste bin by offering the potential for future exclusives. It had made Vera laugh, the politically savvy nature that Joan seemed to have, whether effortlessly or through being taught how to do so, was a skill Vera lacked. When she was the interim Governor she had failed to handle the press appropriately which was one of the main reasons she wasn’t chosen for the job by the Board.
She rolled onto her side. She didn’t want to think about her failures tonight. She wanted to enjoy the last night alone in the house before her mother would come back. She propped her head up on a pillow and grabbed her iPhone, turning it on and finding her favorite porn site. Vera scrolled through the choices and was slightly overwhelmed by the amount of categories. Some of them confused her, some of them made her too embarrassed to even look and some just disgusted her. She scrolled down countless options before finding a thumbnail that pulsed a warmth from between her legs.

It wasn’t that Vera had never masturbated to lesbian porn before, it was just atypical for her to do so. The thumbnail that caught her interest was of two women, one face down on a desk, legs spread wide, while the other had her back to the camera. You couldn’t see their faces and the woman standing had her head cut off in the picture.

Vera’s finger hovered over the image momentarily before pressing down decisively.

The sound startled her, every time she watched porn she did so with the sound off out of fear of her mother overhearing. This was a new experience for her. She turned up the volume, reveling in the fact that she was alone.

The video started where the thumbnail left off, but something dropped into the frame, the woman standing had a riding crop in her hands.

“You’ve disappointed me.” The woman slapped the crop in her other palm. The camera pulled back and the scene became more clear. The woman standing was wearing a black corset and black heels, but didn’t seem to find any need for underwear. She had a sharply cut brunette bob and angular fringe. The woman on the desk had legs to die for, but she seemed more petite than the woman standing, her blonde hair pulled back into a tight ponytail. She was completely naked.

Vera bit her lip and reached her right hand down her underwear, feeling the heat and wetness from her core.

“I didn’t mean to misbehave.” The blonde said, turning her head to look at the brunette. *That was a mistake.* The brunette smacked the blonde on her ass with a resounding snap from the riding crop. Vera inhaled sharply.

“I didn’t ask you for your opinion, did I?” The brunette was a powerful woman, domineering and incredibly sexy. Vera closed her eyes momentarily imagining that she was the one on the desk. This thought made her blush.

A whimper came out of the blonde as the brunette ran her hands gently on the mark she left behind, the welt now red and visible. It looked painful.

*But enticing.*

The brunette leaned over the blonde and licked her earlobe, this causing Vera to shiver. As her fingers played between her folds she noticed how wet this video was making her. She pushed two fingers inside herself, feeling her warmth envelop her fingers. She moaned softly.

Her breath became labored as the video continued.

“My pet, you will do as I say, do you understand? If you want me to please you, you will obey me. Have I made myself clear?” The woman’s voice was low and raspy, thick with lust.

“Yes.”
The brunette smacked the blonde again, causing her to recoil against the desk, her cry out a mix of pleasure and pain.

“Yes what?”

Vera was close, extremely close. As she watched the scene she felt a tightness in her stomach that radiated down her thighs. She was on the brink of losing all control.

Vera closed her eyes, focusing on the what was being said, the afterimage of the petite blonde’s pink welt flashing against her eyelids with every quickening heartbeat. Her breath was picking up as well, her chest rising and falling with increasing intensity. She felt a bead of sweat begin to form on her furrowed brows. She put more pressure on her G spot, her hips matching the rhythm of her hand thrusting inside of her.

“Yes Mistress, I understand.”

Vera felt as if she was the one being punished on the table, spread eagle, ass sore. As the sound of another smack came from the video, the image of Governor Ferguson was thrust in her mind.

The otherwise empty house reverberated with Vera's scream.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for the comments and kudos everyone! Keep it up, it really motivates us to pump out the chapters faster
Chapter Summary

Joan becomes Vera's mentor and enjoys a night at home. Slow burn. Text Messages.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Joan didn’t particularly like men. She always had difficulty with the men under her charge and it usually was due to their fragile masculinity. She scoffed watching the interaction between Jackson and Fletcher on the CCTV. Their sexist remarks and banter about Joan’s rigid presence annoyed her. She chose to look severe because it intimidated those around her, why else would these men bring up her appearance if it didn’t unsettle them to their core?

She never had this trouble with women, and much preferred their company. Women officers understood the aesthetic choices she had made, understood the power behind her statuesque presence and cold demeanor. They may not agree with it, but they respected it and respected her for being who she was. Many wished they could pull off the facade she had carefully crafted throughout her years in corrections, to be who she was. Robust, calculating, even tempered. She was always in control. She aligned her pencils in their neat row before picking up Ms. Bennett’s file.

Alliances were essential when running a prison. She found it crucial for the Governor to make an alliance with the Top Dog, or to orchestrate a new one when the one in charge failed to deliver. Her money was on Bea Smith, in time she would ascend to become the new woman in charge of the prisoners. Ferguson would see to that, even if it meant disposing of Franky Doyle somehow. Someway.

There will be no drugs in my prison.

“What is up with that bun? It’s pulled so tightly back her eyes are going to pop out of head head!” Fletcher said as he continued to mop up the vomit from the wet cells. She grinned, it fascinated her to hear what the men had to say about her and it didn’t surprise her that all Fletcher could talk about was her looks. Such a shame, she had wished for a more intellectual adversary.

She muted her computer, no longer needing to hear what the officers would be saying. It would be similar to conversations she had heard about her in the past and would most evidently accumulate to her needing to be fucked. To fix the uptightness and to dismantle the cold statuesque veneer. She chuckled in spite of herself. She never was the one who got fucked, she was the one who did the fucking. What was the saying?

Silly boys, trix are for kids.

She opened Vera’s file one more time. She needed to create an allegiance within the officers’ ranks immediately, and she knew she couldn’t choose Miles. Within one day she understood that she played for herself, how else would she have given Ferguson the tip off for the drugs if she hadn’t been the one turning a blind eye to them previously? The prisoners must have been giving her money and it seemed logical, she noticed Miles often checking on stats about a variety of
activities. Ferguson surmised she had a bit of trouble with her luck at the track.

Then there was Vera, little Vera, so eager and willing to please. Vera had thought she was clever when she suggested for the cell toss. The tightness in her jaw and soft, but quick smile, showed Ferguson just how willing she wanted to be noticed, appreciated. She needed to hear praise desperately. Joan ran her fingers against her lips. It almost pained her heart when she informed Vera she would handle it in her own way. A slight look of defeat and then a realization: it was not about the cell phone, but about using it as leverage against Franky, to divide her crew and isolate her. The sudden sparkle in Vera’s eyes let Joan know what the woman thought of her. She was not like other Governors, no, she was much more complicated and played a longer game.

There was a sense of understanding between the two women, Joan felt. Vera was eager and willing to learn a new strategy behind corrections, and Joan was the one capable of giving it to her.

Joan watched as Franky and Kim put on a rather public display of affection towards one another. Franky dry humped Kim and the rest of the woman around them cheered, oohing and ahhing, it seemed primal, and was obviously directed at Ferguson, a show of power and persuasion. Franky enjoyed being the center of attention and would try to control any situation so that all eyes were on her. As Franky leaned in and kissed Kim, mouth wide, tongue deep within the other woman’s mouth, she looked over at Ferguson and winked.

“You’re not my type at all, Francesca.”

“Governor, I need a couple of hours off tomorrow morning, for my mother’s transfer back home, but I will make it up by taking extra hours later in the day.” The words that came out of the Deputy’s mouth were rushed, she was obviously nervous to ask for any time off in front of her new boss.

Ferguson glanced up and observed her young Deputy whose nerves had caused her to absentmindedly pick up papers and place them down, stacking and restacking sheets. Ferguson wanted to reach out and grab her hands to still her, to make her calm and to let her know that it was going to be okay. This job obviously meant a lot to Vera, here her Deputy’s mother was dying and instead of asking for time off, she was asking for a couple hours to be made up later in the day. She was willing to sacrifice the little time with her mother to be at work. Perhaps she was more free in prison than she was around her mother? This thought alone made Ferguson glance over Vera, eyes curious, she wanted to know the whole story.

“This job is important to you, isn’t it Vera?” There was a soft smile on the Governor’s lips as Vera looked up at her, blushing, before looking down.

The power of recognition.

“Yep.” Her voice was barely a whisper. Vera kept her jaw tight, desperately trying to stop herself from smiling. The appreciation was so foreign to her, from growing up with her mother, as a middling student in school, or in her lackluster career in corrections.

“I am very impressed with your work ethic, corrections need more people like you.”

Vera couldn’t believe the words that were coming out of the Governor’s mouth. She was unable to look Ferguson in the eyes, a soft smile forcing its way onto her lips.

Be professional Vera, keep your shit together.

“I read somewhere that you had been passed over for promotion several times, that must be
frustrating for someone with your … potential.” Ferguson actually believed that Vera had a great
deal of potential, and with proper guidance she could learn how to run a correctional facility with
finesse and diligence. Joan needed someone she could trust to deliver anything she needed without
question and with the right handling, and with some mentoring, Vera could be the one to do just
that.

“I wish the department saw it like that.” There was a softness to her voice, yet a subtle hint to the
gnawing pain that ate away at her self image. The little voice that cut her down any time she felt
big was getting louder. Joan suspected that voice sounded very much like Vera’s mother.

“You just need a mentor. I’m a great believer in succession planning.” Joan was a bit surprised by
her own candor in this moment. As she had learned, you often achieve victory not on the mat, but
after the match is over. Many of her greatest achievements were secured by the efforts of those she
had installed to continue her work.

A legacy was built, not formed through coincidence.

“I’d really appreciate that.” Genuine appreciation with no ulterior motive is refreshing, Joan
thought seeing how little it took for Vera to accept her proposition.

“You stick with me and we will achieve great things together.” Joan took a step closer to Vera,
invading her personal space, and could smell her shampoo of choice. Ferguson inhaled hints of
warm vanilla and sugar, she quickly licked her bottom lip. A soothing smell, one that reminded her
of the warmth of home, of cold fall nights underneath a blanket reading a good book.

“Thank you and I promise that I won’t let personal issues get in the way with of my work.” Vera’s
eyes shyly locked with the Governor’s, a wide smile and a deep blush invading her face.

There was a pause in the conversation as Ferguson looked down at Vera, taken by her open
acceptance and immediate focus on solidifying their alliance. Joan knew that this would be a
mentorship she would enjoy, as well as benefit from.

“Get me Kim Chang’s education paperwork, I’d like to take a look at her study preferences.”

“Yes, Governor” Vera grabbed the clipboard and hugged it tightly to her chest, as she walked away
she could have jumped with joy and skipped down the hallway. There was an intense sense of
satisfaction, her stomach clenched. When she rounded the corner to head to records she let out a
giggle. She felt the flush in her, a warmth enveloping her body. She smiled during her entire walk
down the hallway, and continued even after she realized she was in the wrong corridor and needed
to double back to pull the paperwork Joan had requested.

Joan entered her house carefully placing her keys in the tray by the door. She took off her shoes,
neatly placing them in their cubby and slipped into her house slippers. She breathed deeply,
satisfied with the day’s accomplishments. The soft plush of the sheepskin hugged her toes, their
warmth a respite from another day almost entirely on her feet. It was not a bother, but simply a fact
of the career.

She hung up her bag on the hook next to the door, everything had its place in her house and she
preferred it that way, it made getting ready in the morning, and really, every process of life, go so
much more smoothly. She took off her jacket, and began walking towards the stairs.

“Good evening, Bob.” She said to her goldfish who swam happily in it’s little bowl on the kitchen
counter. She smiled, he seemed to be adjusting well to his new home, this pleased her. She
carefully walked up the stairs, feeling the work day begin to wear down on her. Each step was more difficult than the next, and by the time she reached the second story she was ready for a shower.

Entering her closet, she diligently straightened her coat out and hung it next to the other black coats in her closet. Each section was meticulously organized by function and color, a simple palette of blacks and neutrals. She stripped off her pants and placed them in her laundry basket, before stripping off the rest of her clothes and discarding them as well. She stood naked in her closet with nothing on but her slippers.

Joan entered her bathroom, turning on the shower and listening to the water course across the tile while she waited for it to warm properly. She liked it when the steam was thick in the air before she entered. She undid her hair from the tight bun, placing each bobby pin in its rightful place next to the soap dispenser on her white quartz countertops. Her hair cascaded wildly past her shoulders, the streaks of grey shining brightly under the moonlight that shone through the bathroom window.

The steam started from the edge of the mirror, working its way toward the middle with a plodding inevitability while Joan looked herself in the eyes, a moment of contemplation catching her where she stood. When she could no longer make out the darkness of her irises, she turned to the shower and reached a hand in, the hot water causing her to draw a sharp inhalation. She stepped in and turned her back to the water, it was just the slightest bit too warm for her to expose her chest just yet. There was always a time to expose your softest area, but it was never right as you stepped into the fire.

The heat metamorphosed from stinging to soothing as she stepped underneath the stream, running her hands through her hair and arching her back to let the water rinse through her locks. She stood a moment longer, the warmth pervading her scalp, loosening thoughts that had calcified earlier in the day.

Joan was interested in the merits of the gardening program. It was painfully obvious to her why she had gained such an interest to Doreen Anderson already, even if she didn’t want to admit it. She braced her hand on the shower wall. She reminded her of Jianna. Her head dropped, the thuds of the shower head hitting the spine of her neck. She didn’t want to think about this right now, she banished the thought to the back of mind.

She reached for her shampoo, hints of honey, ylang ylang and jasmine filled her senses. She scrubbed her scalp aggressively, scraping any remnants of the prison out of her hair. She scrubbed the rest of her body just as aggressively as she did her scalp, pink lines forming all over her skin. She inhaled sharply, a second pass was more painful than the first.

She wondered if Vera could handle pain.

She rinsed off in cold water, the shock hitting her senses.

She turned off the water, grabbing her towel and drying herself off. She put on her long fluffy robe and stepped into beloved slippers. She would enjoy a glass of wine tonight, just one, anymore and she’d be indulging.

She walked back down the stairs into the kitchen, grabbing her already prepared meal from the fridge, she placed it in a bowl and then in the microwave, before pouring herself a glass of shiraz.

As she sat down she heard a buzz from her phone. She sighed, standing up and reaching into her bag and grabbing out her phone. Unlocking her screen she noticed she had a new text message
from Vera Bennett. She smiled.

Thank you for today Governor. I really appreciate it.

Hmm… Joan pondered, walking back to the dining room table twirling her phone between her thumb and forefinger. She placed the phone on the table. She would respond after dinner and her wine.

The dark liquid felt heavy on her mouth, hints of blackberry and tobacco lingered. Most people didn’t enjoy a syrah, or shiraz, as it’s full bodied tannins left the mouth dry, but Joan felt the need for it to be accompanied by another drink, letting the wine linger momentarily before swallowing. One of the blessings of Australia, to be able to produce such wonderful shiraz options.

Joan finished her dinner and absentmindedly poured herself another glass. She cleaned off her plate, dried it and put it away. She picked up her glass and her phone and went outside to her patio. She bought four chairs to sit around the patio, but it was usually only her. She was always alone.

A waste of money.

She sat down under the warm night sky, lighting a fire and watching as the flames engulfed their small inclosure. The fire was a chaotic whirlwind made of wisps of flames, batting against the metal edge of the fire pit, wanting desperately to be released. Despite knowing its unyielding constraints, still it begged. Fire was wildly beautiful to Joan.

Her phone buzzed again, and Joan looked at another text message that Vera had sent.

Sorry for texting you so late, didn’t mean to bother you. Have a good evening.

Joan could feel Vera’s squirming, knowing that she read the message but didn’t answer right away. Ferguson decided to be gracious, placing her glass down beside her, she responded.

I wouldn’t have offered my guidance if I didn’t see a unique quality in you.

She sent it, immediately seeing the bubble that let her know Vera was texting back, but she wasn’t yet finished.

And, for the record, you weren’t bothering me. That would be difficult to imagine.

It sent over the radio waves. Joan noticed that Vera had stopped typing. She grinned, Vera would have difficulty responding to the last text message sent. She turned her phone face down on the arm of the chair, Vera would take some time to collect herself now. Joan looked back to the fire, weaker now, but still struggling against the confines set for it. A satisfied smile pulled at the corners of her mouth.

At least a beautiful night like this hadn’t gone to waste.
The dull din of breakfast chatter mixed with the clamor of silverware and cups of tea and coffee as Vera fought to keep her eyes open. Her pen lay flat against the morning’s paperwork, and the thrum of background noise was a welcome relief from the echoes of her mother’s admonishments that lasted through the night. Warm sunlight filtered through the safety glass, filling the dining hall while women filtered in and out of the room. As far as the start of a shift, it didn’t get too much better, and Vera let a deep sigh, a breath that she had been holding it since crossing the threshold of her home yesterday evening, escape from her. It was on days like this that she deeply appreciated the simplicity and monotony of a typical work day.

Last night was a difficult night for Vera, the first night her mother was home from the hospital. After the nurse left Vera was completely overwhelmed by the amount of attention and care her mother required. A cocktail dose of pain medications that didn’t seem to work. Her mother finally asleep at 2 in the morning. But, one detail stuck out in her mind more than others. A simple text message from her boss.

And, for the record, you weren’t bothering me. That would be difficult to imagine.

What did that mean? It wasn’t unusual for Vera to read too heavily into anything, she was a chronic over analyzer, but was Ferguson subtly...no, it couldn’t be. Was she subtly flirting with her?

Vera closed her eyes, resting her head in the palm of her hands. It is difficult to imagine that Vera could bother Ferguson? Surely this was just a simple platitude that Vera was taking too far.

But what if it wasn’t?
The door to the observation room opened abruptly and Ferguson walked in, as if materializing due to the young Deputy’s thoughts. Vera sat up looking at the taller woman, quickly averting her eyes, a soft smile formed on her lips, Vera’s hands fumbled for the paperwork. She quickly swallowed before speaking.

“Morning Governor.”

Joan closed the door behind her as she spoke, “Vera.” It was a polite greeting as she stood next to Vera, centimeters away from touching her. Ferguson noticed how the hairs on the back of Vera’s neck rose in response. “Everything okay?”

The room was filled with a soft smell of ylang ylang, jasmine and honey. The scent overwhelmed Vera’s senses and she found herself taken a back. She didn’t expect such sensual perfume to be the Governor’s preference. She imagined a simple clean scent, like fresh soap or cotton. Not this.

“Uh Yes.” Vera muttered, grabbing a folder and flipping through it. She needed to remain calm and professional.

“Rough night with your mother?” Ferguson asked looking directly at her, her voice was soft, a kindness etched behind her deep voice. Vera stopped fidgeting and looked directly at the Governor, Ferguson noticed the Deputy’s eyes dilating.

Ferguson turned her head away to look at the inmates eating. “You know I think it is admirable what you are doing for her, but you shouldn’t forget to take out time out for yourself.”

Ferguson turned her head, eyes locking with Vera’s, a soft smile gracing the severe features of her face.

Vera bit her lip.

Ferguson straightened her jacket and leaned towards Vera slightly. Vera smiled, thankful that someone cared.

“I’m fine.” Vera replied with a smile.
There was a beat in the conversation, both of them looking at one another.

“Why don’t we have a drink after work? Just the two of us, a bit of a debrief.” The change in conversation was abrupt, catching Vera off guard. The way Ferguson’s eyes glittered when she mentioned “just the two of us” created a knot in Vera’s stomach.

“Oh I um...the nurse finishes at six.” Vera wasn’t giving an excuse, she simply was flabbergasted at the question. Out of all the Governors that Vera had been Deputy for, she had never once been asked to drinks, there was never any interest in her as a person outside Wentworth.

“Then tell her to stay on. She’ll appreciate the overtime.” There was no room for rebuttal as Joan turned her head, smiling and walking out the door.

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Joan walked through the hallways of Wentworth noticing with delight how the hallways parted for her. There was fear in all the eyes of the prisoners as she walked past them, but what delighted her the most was the look Mr. Fletcher gave her, a mix of disdain and panic. As she walked passed him mopping up human urine, a smile formed on her lips.

“Keep up the good work, Mr. Fletcher.”

He glared at her as she walked down the hallway. A soft chuckle escaped her lips, she had hoped Fletcher had heard it.

“Governor Ferguson?” There was a call behind her, the voice that could only belong to one person.

“Miss Westfall.” Joan said, turning around. “How can I help you today?” The blonde woman looked up at her, one hand in her skinny jeans, the other holding her clipboard on her hip. She had the confidence of a woman who knew exactly what she wanted.

“I need to schedule a time with you to go over weekly reports.” There was a soft demand behind her words, this intrigued Ferguson. Westfall was not afraid of her at all. Ferguson smiled.

“I was just heading to my office, perhaps you’d like to join me.” Ferguson turned and walked down the hallway, and the other woman followed her.

“We need to work together Governor. I know you think I am a spy for the board, but I can assure you I am here for the women.”

“That I find highly unlikely as you were placed here by the board without my input.” It was a conversation they had before and Ferguson wanted to remind her.

“Wouldn’t you know a thing or two about that? We all have connections to get where we want to be Ferguson, you are no more innocent than I.” Bridget followed Ferguson into her office, keeping the door slightly ajar. There was a moment of silence as Ferguson took her seat and motioned for Bridget to do the same. A moment of quiet understanding between the two women, Westfall had no interest in playing for any sides, but her own. She wished to be left alone. This notion was
unsettling to Ferguson, to have someone who worked in her prison, but did not feel the need to answer to her. Ferguson placed her hands on her desk and glided her chair in, grabbing her notebook and a pencil.

“A weekly meeting would be crucial to making sure the women here are mentally healthy.” Ferguson looked over her calendar. A weekly meeting would also give Ferguson more insight into what exactly makes Westfall tick.

Bridget smiled, a flash of white teeth and her dark blue eyes softened. “I can’t tell you what the women tell me, that would violate every oath I’ve taken, but I can give you a general sense of the mental well being of the women here.” She crossed her long legs, the heels of her mule hanging off slightly from her heel.

“How does Wednesday at noon sound?”

“That works for me, also I will be attending all Tuesday morning staff meetings. If you didn’t want me to know about them, you shouldn’t have put them on the staff calendar.” Bridget stood up and walked out the door.

Joan leaned back, it was so easy to control the staff underneath her, and the ones she couldn’t she would get rid of. For now, she would enjoy the power play Westfall threw her way. The struggle excited Joan, allowing her to focus on something other than the mundane bureaucracy of the job.

She turned on the CCTV curious to see how Smith was doing with her new transition back into general. She seemed to be communicating with her old friends a there was sense of clarity within her walk. She just needed to get off the sedatives, and a cold hard approach seemed to work in Smith. Ferguson smiled with satisfaction. She noticed Vera coming up to Smith, genuine concern in her face. Ferguson imagined that Vera was asking Smith how she was doing, considering that she just got off months of doctor prescribed sedatives.

Vera gently and briefly touched Smith’s wrists before pulling back, a soft smile on her lips. Did she feel pity for this woman? It was always the soft heart that got guards in trouble. Smith understood this, Ferguson surmised, she had the inept ability to pray on the emotional weakness of other people, to manipulate and mold them to do what she wanted. Here was Vera, good innocent Vera, showing her weakness, her ability to care, to someone who could use it against her later.

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At 5:58 Ferguson looked at the clock, grabbing files that needed to be signed off quickly. She would be upset if Vera came late. The reports were about overtime allowances and prison transfers. As her pen filled out the boxes, the symphony began to play, this one a quick paced and filled with excitement.

The clock moved one more minute and a soft knock came from her door.

*Early mouse gets the cheese.*

“Come in.” Ferguson declared, still finishing up the reports.

Vera entered her office awkwardly, bag on her shoulders looking at the scene in front of her. Wasn’t she suppose to be here for drinks? She hesitated to enter fully, unsure what to say.

Ferguson noticed the tension in the room, amused at how nervous Vera was being. Ferguson decided to keep Vera slightly off guard, if she started the night with the Deputy being coy Ferguson could use the situation to her advantage.
“Yes Vera, can I help you?” She tried desperately not to smirk, reveling in watching Vera squirm.

“Oh, I thought we were, um...” Vera stammered, feeling her face turning red hot. Did she not understand what Ferguson had suggested earlier? Was this a bad time, should she have come exactly at 6 or a couple minutes after?

Ferguson took pity on Vera, not wanting to toy with Vera any longer.

“Having a drink, yes.” Joan finished up the last bit of paperwork she had, closing the file. “Come in.” She looks up at Vera, a small smile gracing her lips.

Vera stood at the doorstep, her heart beating heavily in her chest. She wanted to die. She felt incredibly embarrassed for making a fool out of herself.

Why do you have to be so damn Awkward?

“Don’t be nervous Vera, I don’t bite.” Hard. Ferguson stood, pulling her uniform jacket down, and walking around her desk and leaning against it.

Vera looked at the desk, and then back at Ferguson, a memory of her night alone flashing through her mind. “Yes Mistress, I understand.” A nervous chuckle escaped her mouth. “No, I’m not nervous.” Vera smiled, and set her bag down, taking the seat directly in front of Ferguson. She swallowed, looking up at the woman who was looking down at her, arms crossed tightly against her chest and a smirk planted squarely on her face.

“So, uh...did the rest of your shift go well?” Vera asked looking up Ferguson who was towering above her. There was something about the image of her boss that she found deeply erotic, the powerful stance and the way Vera felt so...submissive. She blushed, wishing she wasn’t thinking these thoughts in front of her boss.

Ferguson cocked her to the side, wondering what the younger woman was thinking. She intrigued the older woman, how easy it was to make her blush, but Ferguson had a sense that Vera was not as innocent as she led on. She walked passed Vera, her fingers softly brushing the tips of Vera’s shoulders. Ferguson smiled as she heard the woman take a quick inhale of air, and shifted in her seat.

“Vodka and soda okay?” Joan asked from her private bathroom.

“Yes, it’s fine.” Vera started to unbutton her coat, feeling an immense amount of heat throughout her body. Did the Governor just touch her? So soft and briefly, and yet, it still sent shocks throughout Vera’s body. Vera successfully unbuttoned the top two buttons of her coat before Ferguson walked in. Her fingers paused on the third button, as if one more button would leave her exposed.

“I’d make us mojitos, but I’m fresh out of mint leaves and lime.” Ferguson handed Vera her drink, their fingers touching momentarily. Vera bit the inside of her cheek as their drinks clink. Vera took a swig of the beverage, expecting a much lighter pour, but instead she was in the face with what seemed like pure vodka with a splash of soda water.

“Couple of these and I’m not going to be much use to Mum tonight.” Vera pointed to the drink, trying desperately, and failing to control her face from contorting into a look of disgust.
The look Vera had on her face almost made the Governor laugh. “Your mother will be fine, this is our time, Vera.” She finished the sentence letting out a breath. “You know, I think we’re going to make a terrific team.” Ferguson began unbuttoning her coat and she was delighted when Vera followed suit. “So, here is to … Trust, the basis of teamwork. And to having someone who can share the load, God knows in our line of business, you need all the support you can get.”

Joan went in for another clink of the glasses, and cursed herself at how awkward it was.

“That’s true.” Vera replied, taking another giant gulp from her drink. “This is very strong.” Vera stated, feeling the liquid coat her tongue. The more she drank it the more bearable it became.

“Is it too much for you to handle?” Joan asked, leaning in, her onyx eyes glittering in the darkness of her office.

Vera rolled her eyes, “Please, I’d let you know if it was too much.” There was a slight sass behind her words, yet a playful innuendo that didn’t go unnoticed by Ferguson. Vera took off her jacket, placing it behind her on the chair. She licked her bottom lip slightly.

“What made you want to come to Wentworth Governor? Of all the places you could have picked you chose this one.” The question was innocent enough, but it made Ferguson lean back in her chair, carefully planning on how to approach it. She wouldn’t tell her the truth, that she came here to end the career and perhaps life, of Will Jackson who was responsible for the death of her Jianna.

“I heard the staff here was excellent.” Ferguson replied, a thickness to her voice. Vera laughed, placing her face in her hands before looking back up at the Governor.

“Well I hope we don’t disappoint.” She took a quick sip from her drink, crossing her legs tightly.

“Some less than others.” Ferguson replied, dead panned.

“I am glad I only slightly disappoint you.” A giggle escaped from Vera.

“I haven’t been disappointed by you yet, Vera.” There was a deepness to her voice, a husky undertone that made Vera unconsciously bite her lip. Vera quickly looked away, grabbing her tie and loosening it. She felt incredibly warm, a mixture of her nerves, Ferguson’s sexual innuendos and no doubt the alcohol.

Ferguson looked hungrily at Vera as she undid her tie, quickly licking the bottom of her lip, before distracting herself by taking a swig from her drink.

“Is it true…” Vera asked, leaning in, filling the space between Ferguson and herself. There was a pause in her speech as if her lips desired to speak a different question, before her courage faltered, “that Fletch wanted your job?”

Ferguson didn’t retreat from the advance, instead she used it to her advantage, straightening her back and tilting her head upward.

“Indeed he tried. But it seems he didn’t quite have the qualities the Board was looking for, despite Channing’s support.” Vera smiled coyly, clearly enjoying the derision of Fletcher. Joan took advantage of her closeness to reach to Vera’s collar, running her fingers along the fabric to fix the lapel that had been left up after Vera loosened her tie. She paused, her hand hovering next to Vera’s cheek as she looked down, Vera nearly needing to crane her neck to meet Joan’s gaze. There was a small, silent moment of pause before Vera broke her gaze, smiling at her drink.

“Y’know, I still can’t imagine Fletch as Governor.” The tension cascaded into a bubbly sense of
adolescent teasing.

“Yeah… I’m not sure how he’d go with policy management, budgets, and that sort of thing. Not to mention the daily minutiae of prison bureaucracy.” These were only the lightest criticisms that came to Joan’s mind, but a wall always fell after the first crack formed.

“He’d be lousy at the…” Vera’s head was swimming from the brief touch Joan had left on her neck, the skin her fingers had brushed against still electrified. Her thoughts were muddled from the drink as she searched for another word in vain. “Minutiae.”

Joan watched the tiny drama unfold on Vera’s face, and felt an unfamiliar drop in her stomach as she laughed. She tousled her hair while she laughed, its soft fragrance filling her nostrils as it cascaded against her cheeks. There wasn’t an ounce of deception to be found in this young Deputy.

“He’s a big boy, isn’t he?” She watched carefully for Vera’s reaction, hoping to see that her judgement of Vera’s interaction with Mr. Fletcher was accurate.

Vera coughed as a bit of vodka caught in her throat, well, not that big.

Joan smiled inwardly, seeing her strike had landed with accuracy. She continued, “Not much going on between the ears… He’d be handy in a riot.” Now, time to pull back just a bit… “God, I am being incredibly indiscreet.”

Vera giggled, not wanting her Governor to pull back from the boisterous talk. “No!”

“You understand that this is all in the strictest of confidence.” There was a reminding seriousness to Joan’s tone, making Vera aware that there would be consequences to breaking this confidence.

“Yeah, of course!” Joan could see that Vera was quite capable of keeping a secret or two, and so desired to break her open.

“I’m saying all of this because…” Joan caught Vera’s gaze again, locking eyes with her to convey the fullness of her meaning. “I trust you, Vera.” There was a pause of silence, both women locked into the moment. Vera slowly inhaled, the tension between them thickening. “You know, I feel like I can depend on you.” Joan reached over, touching Vera’s leg, squeezing gently.

Vera suppressed a moan as she looked at Joan’s lingering hand on her thigh. Desperately wanting for Ferguson to keep her hand there, for it to explore her body, to throw her on the Governor’s desk, to do unspeakable things to her. To discipline her.

Joan slowly removed her hand and let out a single intentional breath.

“God! It’s good to… debrief with someone, isn’t it?” Each word out of Joan’s mouth was intentional, she enjoyed watching the younger woman agonize over her double meanings.

Vera finished her drink in one final gulp, feeling her face flushed again. She was confused about the thoughts drifting in and out of her head, unable to control her body in the process. What is happening to me?

“Another drink?” Joan asked, looking down at Vera, a bewitching smile on her face. Joan grabbed the drink out of Vera’s hand, answering the question for her. She stood up, walking into the back
and pouring two new drinks.

“Are you trying to get me drunk, Governor?” Vera asked from the doorway, her body leaning against it, there was something incredibly erotic and inviting in her stance. Ferguson didn’t expect Vera to follow her.

*Think Think Think.*

“Do I have to get you drunk Deputy? Would it loosen your lips?”

Vera scoffed walking into the room and grabbing the bottle of vodka out of Ferguson’s hand. “Would it loosen yours?” She took the glass that had barely any alcohol in it and filled it to equal measures. She handed Ferguson the freshly poured drink and picked up the other one, eyebrows raised. They both clinked their drinks, letting the liquid coat their mouths before swallowing. “After you Governor.” Vera motioned towards the doorway, letting Joan pass her before returning to their seats.
Vera let out a moan.

It was quick and followed with a giggle. She grabbed her tie, and tried to take it off, grumbling at her inability to continue the task. She had drunk fingers and by her third glass of mostly vodka, splash of tonic, she could care less about finishing any task.

Joan watched her and joined in with the laughter.

“It was awful! It was the worst moment of my life.” Vera wanted to die remembering the night she had spent with Fletch.

“You know, I had my suspicions about you and Mr. Fletcher, but I had no idea that you’d been…” Joan wanted to know more details, there was nervous tension in Vera’s voice, as if there was more to the story. A fire reignited under her ribcage, she had to know what needed to be done.

Vera waved a hand to stop Ferguson from continuing, a look of disgust washing across her face.

“It’s all in the past now…” Vera shook her head, trying to throw loose the memory that came back now.

“Well, what happened?” Joan’s curiosity burned, the fire showing in her eyes, the sparkle of a predator of the night.

“Nothing, nothing…” The rebuke struck Joan, her instincts compelled her to strike back, in her own way.

“Vera-a!” Joan smacked her playfully on the arm, “What happened to trust?” Joan’s mind raced, letting out a giggle to try and soften the moment, “I mean, I confided in you, because I trust you, and…” Joan paused expectantly, wanting so badly for Vera to fill the void. Her smile shattered against the floor as Vera’s lips formed a placating smile. In this moment, Joan learned everything she needed to know. A combination of Vera’s lacking social skills and implacable earnestness betrayed a deep desire to halt the momentum of the conversation entirely. Joan watched as Vera fough the current, fascinated that she had come so far without learning you could only steer the conversation, not slam the brakes. She knew that Vera needed to be chastised if she was ever to learn this valuable lesson, “I’m not sure I can effectively mentor you if that trust isn’t
reciprocated.”

Vera’s vanishing smile let Joan know she had used the appropriate tool for Vera’s reeducation.

“No, um…” Vera bit her lip, a hot flush invading her face. Vera felt a tightness between her thighs, and a warmth throughout her core. Her blue eyes flashed upwards towards Joan. Even though she wanted to, she couldn’t hold the lingering gaze of the Governor.

“Nevermind.” It was short and curt. Joan had to fight back a smile as Vera began to speak.

“I found a journal. Fletcher’s journal.” Vera glanced around the room as if the walls were recording everything she was saying.

A Journal? “You were snooping!” Joan was very pleased that such a small punishment elicited an insightful reward.

“No! … Yes!” Both women laughed heartedly.

“So, so what was in this.. This journal? Mr. Fletcher’s fantasies?” Joan hoped that Fletcher had deep and dark sexual desires, an infatuation with prostitutes, feet, maybe tentacles. Joan almost giggled, pushing her hair back from her face. Vera took a drink, her hands shaking.

“There was some stuff. About him and a previous Governor. Meg Jackson.”

A silence enveloped the room.

“That casts serious doubts on her judgement as Governor, if she found Mr. Fletcher….” Joan’s voice trailed off and both women began laughing, the vodka hitting both of them in that moment. Vera’s body rocked with laughter as she threw her head back, tears of laughter falling from the corners of her eyes.

Joan watched as Vera’s body was taken over by exaltation. Leaning forward and backwards as if having a mind of its own. It fascinated Joan, Vera’s ability to lose control, allowing herself the full pleasure of the moment. As Vera’s head pointed towards the heavens, Joan was taken back by the smallness of her neck, she imagined her hands wrapped tightly around it, an image of Vera begging Joan to stop flashed in her mind.

Joan shifted in her seat, crossing her legs.

“From Fletch’s perspective, I could understand why he was attracted to Meg.” Vera responded, swirling the liquid in her glass.

Joan cocked an eyebrow. “And why is that?”

“There is something intoxicating about a woman who wears the crowns.” Vera responded, her voice low and smooth. She reached over, her fingers brushing the crowns on Joan’s epaulettes. Joan roughly grabbed Vera’s wrist, pulling the Deputy to the edge of her chair. There was a quick and soft gasp that escaped Vera’s lips, that were trembling now. She tried to gently pull away from Joan’s grasp, her eyes locked tightly with the Governor.

“Vera, I believe you’re under the table.” Joan said, mere centimeters from her lips.

“Governor, I have no interest in being under the table, only on top of your desk.”

Joan’s opponent had lunged, catching her off guard, but her parries had been trained since childhood, and were automatic in their response.
Joan growled, using her grasp on Vera’s wrist to wrench her small body from her chair and lay her palm flat against the chill surface of the desk. Vera had found herself bent over, both arms outstretched in compliance, as Joan was leaning over her and whispered in her ear with hot breath, “Vera, Vera, Vera, aren’t you full of surprises.” Joan, grabbed the zipper on the back of Vera’s skirt, pulling it down. She was surprised there was no resistance from Vera, had she done this before?

A challenger more prepared than they had let on, clearly versed in the feign both on and off the mat. Joan needed to assess this spar more carefully than she had first thought, she would not allow herself to be caught underestimating her opponent.

Vera was wearing nude colored lace undergarments, Joan licked her lips with surprise as she realized that Vera preferred to wear a garter belt to hold up her stockings. She was sure she’d be wearing modern nylons, pulled up tightly past her navel, tucked in neatly.

What a delightful surprise.

She grabbed the elastic on the back of the garter belt, tracing her fingers along the edge and following it down Vera’s buttocks as it connected to her upper thigh. Joan snapped it, the metal clasp hitting Vera sharply on her thigh. Vera bit her lip, looking back at the Governor, a small squeak of a moan escaping her.

“Governor…” Vera began, trying to push herself off the desk, only to be pushed back down brusquely by Ferguson.

There is a reason that we shake hands both before and after a match.

“Vera, I will do what I want to you, when I want to, but if you ever must, or need me to stop, only speak the word that started our encounter, Crown. Do you understand Vera?”

“Yes.” Vera responded, only to be met with a quick smack on her ass. She gasped, moaning.

“Yes, what?” Joan asked, her voice sultry in Vera’s ear.

“Yes, Governor.” Vera responded, placing her head back down on the desk, feeling the cold wood against her incandescent cheeks and thighs.

The first few advances and repartees were always the most simple, but it was the details that separated a minor challenge from an invigorating partner. Joan felt that she had crossed foils with the latter.

Joan walked around her desk, meticulously picking up items from her desk, and moving them from their specific place into drawers. Vera looked up at Joan, their eyes meeting, Joan removed her tie and wrapped it around Vera, blindfolding her. Joan looked at Vera below her, as she took off her jacket, placing it neatly on her chair. Joan unbuttoned her shirt, letting it fall open. She enjoyed seeing Vera squirm in anticipation on her desk, not knowing when or what was going to come next.

Joan let her instincts guide her as she retreated, allowing room for her new opponent to show her form, to observe, and learn from what she saw. She saw a youthful competitor, exuberant for the assault, and hungry for victory. But Joan had experience on her side, and she knew that no conclusion would come hastily.

“Vera, I want you to take off your shirt for me.”

Vera blindly pushed off the desk, feeling her feet hit the floor. Shakily, she gained her bearings and
began unbuttoning her work shirt. Vera felt the hairs on the back of her neck rise as hands touched her collarbone, moving down her chest, pushing off her shirt. She could feel the fabric glide down her body like a gentle breeze.

Joan was delighted to see that her bra matched, nude lace almost blending in with Vera’s skin tone.

Joan’s hand reached around Vera, pulling her back tightly against Joan’s body, Vera’s back arched into Joan’s curves. Joan’s hands snaked up Vera’s chest, one grabbing Vera’s jaw, pushing her neck back, opening it up for Joan’s hand to tightly grasp it. Joan leaned forward, biting the Deputy’s ear.

Vera moaned in response.

Joan traced bite marks down the length of Vera’s neck, stopping at the crook, her tongue dancing along the softness of the younger woman’s skin. It was the slightest of touches that made Vera moan the loudest, the Deputy grabbing onto her Governor as if she were to collapse on the ground.

_A connection of the coils electrified the air, Joan felt the sweat begin to bead under her mask, her breathing labored with the intensity of the assault. She gripped the hilt tightly, moving her wrist ever so slightly to change her attack angle. She would strike._

Joan trailed up along Vera’s jawline, before pushing Vera’s head back and taking Vera’s mouth as her own. Her lips and tongue claiming ownership of the younger woman.

She is mine.

Joan’s hands reached underneath the soft fabric of Vera’s bra, cupping her breast. They were soft underneath her hands, pieces of flesh that had never been weathered by the sun. Joan found herself momentarily lost by the tactile sensation of the exploration of Vera’s body, she let out a growl, pulling her head away from the Deputy, placing a finger on her lip. She looked at her finger, a small burgundy bead on the tip of her finger.

“You bit me, Vera and drew blood.” Joan grabbed Vera’s shoulders, pinning the Deputy’s arms to the side.

_A red card fell onto the mat, Joan’s opponent making contact in an off point area. Joan grinned under the mask, now knowing what motivates her opponent. Loose, hard, fast. This kind of behavior would not be accepted and Joan felt it in her bones to teach them a lesson. She would control the dance. Victory would be hers._

“Do you know what is going to happen to you?” Joan asked, wrapping her arms tightly around Vera’s body, incapacitating the Deputy’s ability to move. Vera shook her head in response, she had no idea. She felt a shiver run down her spine. Joan spun Vera around, pushing her back against the edge of her desk, with a little more force, Vera was on her back. She instinctively reached out, trying to regain her bearings.

“You’ve been a very bad girl and I am going to punish you.” Joan stood in between Vera’s legs, preventing the woman from being able to shut them. Joan ran a gentle finger down Vera’s body, stopping and teasing at the hem of Vera’s underwear, before she traveled back up, enjoying the sight of goosebumps forming on the younger woman’s skin. With a swift motion, Joan released Vera’s breasts from her bra, watching in delight as Vera’s nipples were erect. Joan leaned over, taking one in her mouth, a deep moan escaping the smaller woman.

Joan’s tongue flicked over Vera’s nipple, before biting down aggressively.
Vera screamed in response and Joan stopped, pulling away and watching as the flush ran down the body of the younger woman.

“Are you Okay Vera?” Joan asked, softly rubbing her hands on the sides of her Deputy.

“Yes Governor,” Vera responded, reaching down and softly touching Joan’s hands squeezing them gently, “I can handle anything you throw my way.”

*It was always the kindness that she gave her opponent that would land Joan in trouble. She pitied their weakness, a very human part of her wanting to make sure everyone was okay. The game would still go on. As her opponent fell to their knees, a position that put Joan in the favor of winning, she stepped back, allowing them to stand again. She didn’t want the match to be over. Not yet. She wanted to toy with them a little longer.*

Joan parted Vera’s legs further and she ran her fingers gently up Vera’s thigh. Joan stopped for a second, noticing small scars on Vera’s inner thighs. Joan leaned down, kissing gently the marks on Vera’s inner thighs.

Vera gasped, reaching down and placing her hands in Joan’s hair. Vera fought the urge to push Joan away as she came closer and closer to her sex. Joan grabbed Vera’s knickers and pulled them off of her, discarding them on the floor. Joan could smell Vera’s arousal, the younger woman’s scent filling Joan’s nostrils. Joan licked her lips.

“Suck on my finger, Vera.” Joan instructed, gently putting two fingers in Vera’s mouth. Vera eagerly and hungrily licked them. As Joan pulled them out of Vera’s mouth, a string of saliva followed. Joan ran her now wet fingers along Vera’s labia, feeling the soft tendrils of hair brush against her fingers. Vera let out a moan and pushed her hips closer to Joan’s hand. Joan entered Vera’s folds, feeling the smaller woman’s hot wetness. Joan entered one finger, then two, and slowly, but rhythmically fucked Vera.

The younger woman arched her back in response, matching her hip thrusts with Joan’s hand. Vera reached out to find Joan, but couldn’t with the blindfold on, and instead found herself grabbing her breasts with her own hands. Vera whimpered, a gasp escaping her lips as Joan’s speed increased.

Vera sat up, leaning against one hand to arch her hips up and off the table, while using her other hand to grab the back of Joan’s neck, steadying herself. Vera could feel the hot breath of Joan over her chest as Ferguson’s free hand reached up and wrapped around her throat, squeezing gently, but slowly increasing the pressure and force.

“Fuck…” Vera squeaked, feeling herself begin to build. Joan turned her fingers inside of Vera so that her thumb could tap rhythmically on Vera’s clit. Joan could feel the tension building within Vera, her walls were constricting against her fingers and the closer she was to cumming, the harder Vera dug her nails into the back of Joan’s neck.

“Are you going to come for me, my little pet?” Joan asked, her speed and pressure on Vera increasing.

“Yes, I am so close. I am so fucking close.” Vera’s hips were rocking wildly in the air, pushing harder and faster onto Joan’s fingers. Just as Vera dropped her head back, expecting her release, Joan pulled out her fingers, wiping them sloppily on Vera’s inner thigh. Vera sat up, pulling the tie from her eyes. “Governor!!!” Vera whined, reaching out towards Joan who pulled back, a grin on her face.

“Bad girls don’t get rewarded, Vera. They get punished.” Joan slowly began buttoning up her work
shirt, watching Vera intently as the look of annoyance and hunger flooded the younger woman’s features. “Get dressed Vera, I will follow you home to make sure you get home safely, and I will see you tomorrow.”

Vera jumped off the desk, grumbling as she reached down and picked up her underwear, putting them back on. She walked around the office and got dressed, stealing peaks at the Governor who was fully dressed now, and looking at the window. Why won’t she look at me?

Vera suddenly felt a wave of emotions hit her, a combination of alcohol, pleasure and shame. She felt the tears sting her eyes. As if sensing the emotional cascade of the younger woman, Joan turned around and walked over, bringing Vera into a soft embrace.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know why…” Vera said, her shirt still unbuttoned, as she buried her face into the chest of her Governor. “I think I am just a little overwhelmed with my mom, the alcohol….” Silent sobs wracked through her tiny frame and she clung desperately onto Joan for comfort, apologizing.

“Shh...It’s okay.” Joan reassured her, stroking her hair and whispering sweet nothings into the air. “You’re dealing with a lot right now, everything is going to work out.” Joan observed the woman at arms length, wiping the last remaining tears from her cheeks. She smiled at Vera. “Are you okay?” Joan asked.

“Yes.” She let go of the older woman, and finished buttoning her blouse and put on her shoes. There was an unspoken understanding between the women as Joan followed Vera out of her office and away from Wentworth.

As the foil touched the chest of her opponent, the match concluded. She was victor once more. Joan steadied her breath as she took off her mask, watching intently as her opponent did the same. Their eyes locked and for a minute she connected with another, diving into the limpid pools of the eyes of the woman in front of her. Joan took off her gloves and her hand reached out, connecting with the soft skin of the woman. A chill ran down her spine and she softly smiled.

It was sweet victory.
Solum

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for the continued support! Glad to read so many of you are enjoying this fanfic, my partner and I are enjoying writing it together. Keep all the comments, suggestions, squees & kudos coming. Ya’ll the best!

Deep within her heart, Joan knew she would spend her life alone. Even as a young child, she found other people supremely disappointing. Her mother was the first person to teach her this, one day dropping her off at school and never coming home again. It was a sobering lesson to learn as a 5 year old. Her father had forbidden Joan to speak of her mother ever again.

As a young child Joan learned the importance of duality, of having an external reality and an internal truth. After losing a match, particularly when it was due to a misstep or poor technique, she would be taken home to run drills in the living room. Perfection required constant conditioning.

Her father’s brusque voice was punctuated by the snap of the switch that sent fiery pain up the back of her calf, “Knees forward, again!”

Joan’s calves would ache and every muscle in her body felt as if it was giving out. As she lunged forward, she tripped, catching herself before crashing onto the floor. Her father grabbed her by the back of her collar, hoisting her up.

“You’re a disappointment.” His words would sting, but the real pain happened when her tears fell as they did this time.

She was bent over the armchair, her shirt pulled up, exposing the skin of her back. The switch was put to its full purpose for the crime of showing the greatest weakness, emotion. As the young wood met her skin she would often remember her mother, silently incanting her name over and over.


As the whips from the switch intensified, the burning engulfed her body, morphing instead into a warm calmness. Joan would continue the chant, summoning her mother. And like Miriam who
watched Moses from the shore, Joan knew her mother would never save her.

People were insufficient, and that meant Joan disappointed herself the most.

As she lay naked in her bed, her soft sheets wrapping comfortably around her body, she felt a pit in her stomach, one that began to devour her entire being. It was in moments like this that she knew that the gale of emotional self degradation would begin. She braced herself for a turbulent night.

_Tell me Joan, what have I done now?_

She couldn’t understand why she allowed what transpired between her and Vera to happen. Why she continued into the trap she knew the little mouse had set. It was unusual for the cat to be trapped by the mouse, but here she was, up at night, still thinking about it.

It wasn’t that she didn’t enjoy it, God knows, it had been a while since she felt the warmth of someone underneath her, but she didn’t understand. Why _her_? Why the little Deputy who seemed so lost and confused and seeking approval, but secretly powerful and in control?

Joan turned onto her side, sinking into her soft bed, letting her hair splay wildly around her. Her hand reached back and felt the small indents that Vera had left behind, marking her, claiming her. Joan had never let that happen before. She was the one who made the marks of ownership, and she was laying in unfamiliar territory. Joan had made the mistake in thinking that she had won the match, she was the one in control, but the path was set by her opponent and she giddily followed down it. She rubbed her stomach gently, hoping that the nerves would dissipate.

Her father spoke to her.

_Emotions make you weak._

She knew this, but she didn’t believe it, she couldn’t believe it because she didn’t feel it. Every ounce of her was an emotional being, but the intensity of her emotions made her vulnerable.

Joan rubbed her fingers against her lips, and bit the edges of her nail beds.
She needed to be strong and push this part away, to reclaim some sense of control. No one, not even Vera, would prevent her from accomplishing what she had set out to do. Her plan was already in action, she had made it to Wentworth after all, and Will Jackson would be ruined.

Rolling onto her stomach, she splayed out on her bed. She often wondered what it felt like to share this space with someone, her sacred space, her bedroom. Under the silk sheets she felt that her bedroom was the place for indulgences, to relish in what made her feel comfortable. Everything else in her life had been regimented, controlled, and planned out since she was a child. But her bedroom is where she laid defiantly against the demands of her father. This was her inner truth.

Joan never lied to herself -- she knew loving her would be difficult, an impossible task for anyone. She had high expectations, many rules, and a past that would weigh down any sane person. She read that everyone deserved love, but Joan didn’t agree with that. She saw a lot of people who needed it and wanted it, but at their core they didn’t deserve to be loved. Those who lived in the darkness of humanity should never receive the light, and the darkness is where Joan felt alive.

*The darkness is where I belong.*

Joan got out of bed and walked to the window, the moonlight cascading over the town. She looked in the direction of where Vera lived, only blocks away from Joan’s townhouse. It was within walking distance, she imagined that Vera had probably run past her place many times on her early morning runs, stopping at the park at the end of the block to stretch out her tired muscles.

She didn’t expect the evening to end as it did, Joan followed Vera to her house ensuring that she drove home safe. Vera turned into her driveway and Joan parked on the opposite side of the street waiting for her to enter the house before driving off. Instead of walking to her front door, Joan watched as Vera walked towards Joan’s car, tapping on the passenger side window. Joan unlocked the door, and Vera slid into the seat.

“Are you alright, Vera?” Joan asked, confused as to what the Deputy wanted from her.

Vera nodded her head, her doe eyes looking up at her. “I just wanted to say Thank you.” Vera reached over and placed a delicate hand on top of Joan’s, pulling Joan’s hands towards her lips and kissing the older woman’s knuckles delicately.

Joan inhaled sharply, no one had ever kissed her so softly before, and the unfamiliar sensation of a reward after a match caught her off guard.
“I’ll see you tomorrow, Governor.” Vera said, letting go of Joan’s hand and exited out the door. Closing it softly behind her.

Joan sat in front of her house for longer than usual, staring off into the direction Vera left.

*What was she planning?*

Joan looked out her bedroom window, her eyebrows furrowed. She couldn’t place the intentions of the Deputy yet, but she knew one thing: she had underestimated Vera deeply.

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Vera pulled into her parking space, she stepped out of her car, pulling her hair back tightly into a bun. She straightened her uniform, grabbed her bag, and briskly walked towards the gate, as she reached for her swipe card a familiar voice came from behind.

“Good morning Vera.” Vera felt the long arms of the Governor pass her, touching her swipe card to the pad.

Vera turned around. “Good morning Governor.” Vera felt a cold distance between them, a jarring difference from their time spent together the night before. She looked up at the much taller woman, trying to figure out what to say, “You have a hair out of place.” Vera noticed, reaching up towards Joan, Joan took a quick half step back, running her hands against the sides of her head. She wasn’t going to allow Vera to touch her here, not out in the daylight.

Joan opened the gate, letting Vera enter before her. The silence between them weighed heavily in the air, both women could feel it upon their chests. They entered the building, had their bags checked, and didn’t say a single word to one another as they walked their separate ways.

Vera entered into the officer’s recreation room, putting her belongings in her locker, confused by the interaction she just experienced.

*Was she having regrets about last night?*

Vera felt a pang of sadness, closing her eyes, she tried to banish the feeling from taking her over. She cursed herself. She always felt too strongly about things to her detriment. She was too
passionate, too excitable. She should have realized that the night before was nothing more than an alcohol induced fling—one that would probably, and should never, be repeated.

A slow sigh escaped her lips.

“Rough night Vera?” Fletch said, breaking her from her revery. She looked up at the man standing next to her, a small smile on his mouth.

_Did he know?

“What?” Vera asked, nervously shifting her weight to her other foot.

“How’s your mother doing?” He asked, genuine concern in his eyes.

“Oh, well...she’s the best she can be considering her prognosis.” Vera pulled down her uniform jacket.

“If you need anything Vera, anything at all, don’t hesitate to ask.” He reached out and gently touched her shoulder, giving her a reassuring squeeze.

She fought every instinct in her body to pull away. “Thank you Fletch. I appreciate it” Vera looked up at him, a smile planted squarely on her face. Fletch looked down at her, almost...longingly. Vera sensed that he wanted to kiss her, for whatever reason, and she pulled back, putting a stop to any advance.

“Ms. Bennett.” A powerful voice echoed throughout the recreation room. Vera looked up towards the doorway to see Ferguson standing there, lips pursed, and her arms crossed against her chest.

Vera wanted to smile—it was as if Joan had sensed the awkward moment and came in and saved her from Fletch. “Yes Governor?” Vera asked, walking past Fletcher and towards the Joan.

“We need to go over overtime expenditures and scheduling. My office. Now.” Ferguson was annoyed—it was obvious in her voice and the tight tension in her jaw.
“Oh, okay.” Vera grabbed the folder out of her locker and followed the older woman out of the room and down the hall, keeping in steady pace with the long strides of the Governor. Vera looked up at Ferguson as they walked swiftly down the halls wondering why Joan was in such a foul mood.

Joan swiped her key card, entering her office. “Shut the door behind you.” As Joan took her seat behind her desk, Vera stood at attention in front of it.

“Is everything Okay, Governor?” There was genuine concern in Vera’s voice, she scanned Joan’s face hoping that the woman would look at her. Instead, Ferguson grabbed a pencil and opened up her notebook, gesturing Vera to sit.

Vera complied, smoothing her skirt out and opened her folder with the months overtime.

“I’d like to go over this month’s schedule.”

Vera flipped through her folder, grabbing the paperwork with everyone’s schedule. She placed it on the desk and pushed it towards the Governor, nodding slightly in attempt to catch the Governor’s eyes. Joan grabbed the paperwork and looked it over, leaning back in her chair as she read the roster.

“I kept the schedule relatively the same, keeping in mind everyone’s overtime allowances. The night shift is filled with the newer staff and a rotating senior officer to advise the group accordingly.

The casual conversation was driving Vera crazy, did she imagine the night before, face down on the Governor’s desk begging and pleading for her release? Was she that drunk that she hallucinated the softness of Joan’s hand as she thanked her and kissed her goodbye?

“Why is Mr. Fletcher in the morning shifts?” Joan asked, putting the paper on the table and circling his shifts. “He doesn’t seem to have any night shifts.”

Vera furrowed her brows knowing that to be incorrect. “He does, he rotates with the rest of us, Governor.”
“I see he is often placed with you doing rounds…” Vera watched the subtly in Joan’s expression, the slight way her mouth twitched when she saw that her and Fletch would be working together.

“If it pleases you, Governor, I can move him to wet cells.” Vera could shout with joy as she saw the tiniest almost hidden smile of the Governor form momentarily on her lips. Finally, Joan looked up at Vera, locking eyes with her.

“It would.”

Vera’s heart skipped a beat and couldn’t help the smile that spread across her face. She reached over the desk, her hand touching Ferguson’s briefly.

A knock came on the door and before Vera could pull away, Officer Miles walked in. Vera awkwardly grabbed the paper and stood.

“Alright Governor, I’ll...uh...correct the schedule, sorry for my mistake.”

Miles watched with inquisitive eyes at the interaction she walked in on--it seemed innocent enough as if Vera was reaching for the paper on the desk, but her exaggerated cover up proved otherwise.

“How’s the patient?” Joan asked the nurse, what was her name? Joan had found that nurses never stayed longer than a year, finding the demands rather taxing. Nurses tended to bring their work home with them and Joan could tell that Nurse Atkins was no different.

“Walking wounded, she’ll live” Atkins responded. Joan could tell that this woman had no strong feelings towards her one way or the other and after responding she went back to her computer finishing up her report.
“Leave us.” Joan demanded and Atkins complied, standing up and walking out of the unit, grateful for a break.

“It seems that your attacker got herself arrested to get into this prison. She’ll be moved into protection with an attempted murder charge tacked onto her sentence.” Joan needed to play carefully with Bea Smith, every word spoken with intention and purpose. She needed Bea to understand that Franky was not her friend, and creating a crew was essential to her survival and Joan’s end goal--getting drugs out of her prison.

She looked down at Bea, and she wanted to smile--she saw some of herself in the woman, the way she masked the pain in her soft features. Bea’s breath slowed and became more controlled as Joan approached, a subtle way to hide your intentions from your opponent. Despite having deep cuts all along her body, she seemed as if she was in the medical unit on vacation.

“Glad to hear.” Bea’s response on the surface seemed as if it was gratitude, but underneath, its tone was as if Joan had just completed a task for Smith. If only the redhead knew Joan was the reason that woman came back into prison. Money always speaks louder to the desperate.

“You were very lucky to have that transgender person there to help, hmm?” Joan needed to see how Bea would respond--would she defend Maxine showing Joan that allegiances were forming?

“You know her name is Maxine.” Bingo. A soft smile crept on Joan’s face. Her plan was unfolding as she assumed it would. Of course I know her name. I know everyone within these walls.

“It’s useful having friends isn’t it?” Her arms were crossed across her chest as she continued. It was useful to have friends, even if those friends only served one purpose.

“None of these people are my friends”

Joan leaned in, centimeters from Bea’s face, invading her personal space.

“I understand you Smith, you are a loner. But it doesn’t pay to be alone in here. That is why people form alliances.” This wasn’t the first prison Joan had been in, nor would it be her last. She had seen the importances of a crew. So much so, that she utilized similar tactics with her staff. Having allegiances within Joan’s own staff was necessary, and at every prison she had been the Governor.
at, she had staff that would die for her. *But Vera’s the first one who went so far, so quickly…*

She wanted to shake her head and banish those thoughts from her mind, not here, not now. Not when the next move was crucial in understanding her opponent.

“Who are you suggesting I form an alliances with? You?”

There was a small glimmer in Ferguson’s eyes. Smith believed that Ferguson truly wanted an alliance with her, as if that was a possibility. What a silly question. Joan didn’t make alliances, what she had instead was individuals who believed they were equals, willing and eager to do whatever she asked. Smith would find herself in that position soon enough.

“I am simply stating there is strength in numbers, you’re vulnerable when you’re alone.”

Joan turned on her heel and walked out to the sound of her own footsteps echoing through Wentworth. In that moment Joan understood another meaning behind her words: she was vulnerable alone.

She clenched her hands tightly behind her back.
It was well past 11pm by the time Vera got her mother to sleep. She laid on her bed exhausted, still in her work clothes. Her entire body ached and she was mentally drained. In quiet moments like this, exhausted and weak, she was honest with herself--she wished her mother would let go.

Vera knew this was no way to live, her mother bundled up in pain screaming for help every five minutes, crying and gasping for help, continuing to berate Vera for things that had nothing to do with her. Vera had learned from a young age the importance of being silent, to be able to sit and take whatever her mother said to her without absorbing the abuse.

At times this facade of hers would begin to crumble and the words would sting--especially when she was exhausted from a rough day at work.

“You know, if you weren’t such a disappointment, you wouldn’t still be Deputy. I don’t know what that new Governor sees in you, you are nothing but a worthless little girl.”

Vera would bite her lip, not because she was hurt, but because she was stopping herself from lashing back, and saying words she knew would hurt her mother. “If you weren’t such a disappointment, your husband wouldn’t have left you.” Every time she would, she would feel ashamed, and mostly, disappointed in herself.

You can’t control how others react to you, you can only control your own reactions.

Those damn self help books.

Her relationship with her mother was complicated. It wasn’t that she didn’t love her mother--she did. She loved her mother with her entire building, but she felt as if her mother needed her more than she needed her mother. She saw the way her mother cried the day her father left, how she stopped her mother at a young age from cutting herself. How she’d hold her mother at night until she fell asleep and wished that her father would return, saving her mother from herself and Vera from her mother.

That day never came.

And despite Rita’s incessant need to control, Vera knew it was due to her mother’s own insecurities. Even as suffocating and domineering as Rita was to Vera, Vera still saw the goodness in the woman who she was bound to stay with.

It broke her heart.

At night like these Vera often played the ‘If’ game. If her mother wasn’t so domineering would she be married by now? She imagined herself being a daughter who would visit on Sundays for family dinner and keep a distant, but warm relationship with her mother. She’d imagine them sitting over plates of speg bol, laughing and idly chit chatting about the week they just had.
“I think my boss is into me mother.” Vera would say to her mom, stuffing a fork full of pasta into her mouth.

“What makes you say that, dear?” Her mother’s cheeks would be rosy, she would have a plump and happily round face. Her mother would be happy.

“She kissed me.”

And without batting an eye her mother would laugh and ask her the details.

They would be friends.

If only Vera had the strength to leave her mother alone when she was younger. Life would be different.

Vera shook her head banishing the what if back to the recesses it belonged, it deserved to crawl in the gutter, never coming to the surface. She exhaled slowly. She had to focus on the life she had.

Vera’s phone buzzed and she reached over grabbing it.

*Are you awake Vera?*

Vera stared at her screen, was Ferguson really texting her so late at night?

*Yes. What are you doing awake?*

She sat up, holding the phone tightly in her hands. She bit her lower lip, waiting anxiously for the response.

*I’m outside your house, may I come in?*

Vera pushed herself off her bed, silently rushing to the front door. She opened it.

Joan stood, arms resting calmly in front of her. She wore a soft grey tunic and a black jacket over it. A single piece of jewelry adorned her neck, and her hair fell gently to her shoulders, parted to the side.

“Mom’s asleep, you have to be quiet.” Vera said, motioning for the older woman to come inside.

Joan did not hesitate, and padded into the living room. Joan noticed the careful organization of the knick-knacks around the room, far too much clutter for her taste, but clearly well taken care of. The dated couch sat in the middle of the room, it’s faded green fabric was clearly well loved and used. Despite the age of the house, it was clean.

Joan walked over to the couch and sat down, sinking into the plush cushions. It was a remarkably comfortable piece of furniture, much more so than the rigid furniture in her living room. Vera sat next to her.

“I am sorry for showing up on your doorstep unannounced,” Joan began, turning to look at Vera, “but I felt it necessary to apologize to you in person.” Joan carefully looked at the change of expression on Vera’s face and Joan knew, that if her next plan would to be fulfilled, she needed to ensure the next step go smoothly.

Vera looked at Joan quizzically, a soft smile and a slight shake of her head indicating that she had no idea what was going on. “Apologize for what?”
“What transpired between us the other night was a first for me.” *Liar, Liar.* “I have never been intimate with a co-worker before, nonetheless someone under my charge. When I saw you this morning, I…”*Intentional pause, make her believe you’re faltering.* Joan looked down at her hands clasped tightly in her lap. “I didn’t know how to reconcile our intimate night with our professional relationship. If you feel that I no longer can be an effective mentor to you, Vera, I understand. I’m sorry.”

“Oh! No! It’s okay, no need for apology.” Vera nervously patted Joan’s knee, but immediately pulled her hands back together into a wringing clasp. Joan paused carefully before continuing.

“Thank you, Vera, your kindness means a lot to me.” Joan’s hand landed lightly on Vera’s, stilling their constant motion, and Vera looked up into her dark eyes, lost for the moment. Before she knew what was happening, their lips met with force, a brief and passionate kiss, and all at once Joan stood up from the couch. “I… I should be going home. See you in the morning, Vera.”

*It is all too easy.*

Joan walked swiftly to the door, letting herself out before Vera had a moment to respond. The sound of the knob quietly closing snapped Vera from her stasis.

*What in the hell just happened?*

She pulled her hands, still clasped tightly together, to her chest and slid slowly down to lay on the couch, pulling her feet to her buttocks. She slowed her breathing and softly touched her lips with her fingertips, feeling the slight warmth underneath.

*What in the hell just happened?*

She kicked her feet in a silent giggle, finally letting the air out that had been trapped in her lungs for the last few minutes. With the breath, some of her glee left, and she went to pondering on the couch, only missing a psychoanalyst to listen to her thoughts.

*Like a phantom that haunts me, she appears and disappears.*

Vera rolled onto her side and closed her eyes, sleep taking her quickly.

Vera escorted Fletcher and Jackson into Ferguson’s office. There was an obvious tension between men, the way that their bodies were rigid around one another. Fletch and Jackson both kept tight jaws and the silence screamed for a violent altercation.

This didn’t surprise Vera, after seeing the CCTV footage of Jackson punching Fletch square in the face. It was almost comical really, the way Jackson tapped on his shoulder and as Fletch turned his jaw meeting with Jackson’s fist.

Vera surmised that Jackson had found out about Fletch and Meg’s affair somehow and couldn’t help but wonder if Ferguson had given away her secret. The thought alone knotted up her stomach—she didn’t think Ferguson would easily betray her, not after everything and especially after last night, but the thought still remained.
Perhaps, she is just using me.

The door to Ferguson’s office was already open and Vera guided them in, keeping her distance and observing the situation from the wall.

Joan sat behind her desk, a stern, cold look on her face. She could not let her expression betray how much this happy accident pleased her. Will Jackson could have chosen any moment to be watching the CCTV, but his timing in this case was impeccable. Men made such effective pawns. She stilled her internal dialogue and turned around the computer, hitting the spacebar to play the clip of comedic violence.

“Explain.” Joan kept her voice harsh and level, tamping down the laughter that threatened to bubble up at seeing Fletch spin as if in a slapstick comedy. She glared expectantly at the men in front of her.

“There’s nothing to say Governor, it’s sorted.” Fletcher shifted his jaw and adopted a know-nothing expression while determinedly staring forward as if Joan didn’t exist. Joan turned to Will for answers that she already knew.

“What is?” The pair looked like schoolboys putting on a brave face after a lunchtime brawl.

“A personal issue we had to sort out.”

“Which was?”

“Personal.” Joan was duly unimpressed with Jackson’s attempts at privacy. She might be annoyed, if she wasn’t already in full control. What interested her more was Vera’s reaction in the corner of her eye. The Deputy looked down, licking her lips in disbelief that betrayed her thoughts entirely.

Goddamnit, Will. Could you be more of a dipstick?

Joan fought back another smile as her attention returned to the boys. This charade had played long enough.

“So there’ll be no ongoing issues?” She looked expectantly at the two.

“No Governor.” Fletcher responded. Aha! The neanderthal can speak! But he still can’t meet my gaze. How pitiful.

“Don’t disappoint me again, go back to work.”

Joan shut the lid of the laptop to finalize the meeting, and the schoolboys filed out with their tails between their legs. Vera watched them leave, her hands on her hips and a visage of unadulterated annoyance on her face. She uncrossed her arms to take the pose of the equally disapproving hands on her hips. Joan pretended to open paperwork while she watched the Deputy lean away from the wall and shrink as she approached Joan’s desk, unable to look her in the eyes.

Vera’s throat caught with all of the words she wanted to say, but knew she couldn’t. She cleared her throat, searching for a way to break the silence.

“Thank you for not saying anything.” More than just a gesture, Vera was grateful for Joan’s discretion.

“I am on your side, Vera.” The words came from Joan with startling gentleness, a stark departure from the icy exterior she showed only moments before.
“Governor…I…” Vera couldn’t feel whether to stand or sit as she took another step toward the desk, her body betraying the chaos in her mind. “I don’t know how to say this. You didn’t say anything…” Joan saved Vera from the mess of a conversation she was attempting to start,

“Stop, struggling Vera. I know what you’re asking and the answer is No.” A slight look of disappointment crossed Joan’s face. She knew she could never vocalize this, as any expression of disappointment would reduce Vera to her childhood self again.

Joan briefly looked over at the woman in front of her and read her body language. Perhaps, I shouldn’t have left in such a hurry last night. Joan thought momentarily, wondering Vera would be more confident today. Joan realized that Vera needed confirmation and uncertainty left her feeling unstable. Vera needed to know where she stood with Joan.

“Of course not. I gave you my word.” Joan’s words rested softly on Vera’s lips as if they shared a kiss.

“I’m sorry I asked.” Vera smiled, shaking any uncertainty from her mind. Of course I can trust Joan.

“Vera, avoid letting others’ personal issues interfere with your work.”

Vera finally met Joan’s gaze knowing that she was not speaking of Jackson and Fletcher.

“Don’t make that mistake”
Boomer was missing and the entire prison was on lockdown. Vera knew that Boomer had to be somewhere in the prison, she wasn’t clever enough to escape on her own. Boomer was the type of prisoner who was emotionally unstable, but important for regulating other inmates. Her size, stature and strength guaranteed her a valuable place amongst the women.

After the conversation she had with Ferguson in her office, Vera’s mind had been preoccupied. She had barely eaten her lunch, instead she found comfort in pushing her salad back and forth in its container.

It didn’t help that she ran into Fletcher during this madness, and she could smell a lingering scent of alcohol still on his breath. She cursed herself for going to his house the night before, but she needed to clear the tension between him and Jackson. It was affecting the entire staff.

*Or is it just affecting you?*

As Vera walked down the hallways of Wentworth, her mind went to the past. She could curse herself for being intimate with Fletch, for liking him once. He didn’t care about her, that was obvious enough, but she still felt as if their lives would always find themselves tangled in a mess with one another. She brushed between her brows with her hand, trying to stop her thoughts from continuing with her touch.

“I thought I told you not to let other’s personal issues interfere with your work, Vera.” The booming voice of Ferguson snapped her out of her thoughts and she turned around sharply.

“They aren’t.” Vera said, taking a step towards the Governor who stood in the middle of the hallway with her arms tightly to her side. Ferguson wore a look of supreme dissatisfaction as she looked down at the smaller woman.

Vera didn’t know why she was being chastised, especially now when a prisoner was unaccounted for.
“You visited Mr. Fletcher at his private residence last night, and why was that?”

Vera wanted to tell Joan everything that was happening between the two men, but she felt incredibly protective of her work mates, and despite their flaws, they had all been at Wentworth longer than Ferguson and in a way they were a dysfunctional family.

Vera was determined to protect that.

“It was a personal...umm...matter, Governor.” Vera responded hoping that the line Jackson had used on her earlier would work as effectively.

Joan could feel her temple throbbing as she raised an eyebrow. “Oh, really?” She watched as Vera floundered under her gaze, her prior allegiances crashing into her newly formed one. Joan was glad to see everything under her control again. “And will this … personal matter with Mr. Fletcher be resolved shortly?”

Vera could hardly stand the pressure of Joan’s dark eyes drilling into her. It took every ounce of self-control she had to keep the well of secrets inside of her capped. She took the escape provided by Joan instantly, “Yes, Governor.”

Vera’s panicked, breathless response nearly brought a blush to Joan’s neck. A brief reminder of their night not twenty meters from where they stood now. Joan pursed her lips and took a controlled breath through her nose. She reached down and softly picked off a stray piece of lint off of the shoulders of Vera’s jacket. “Good.”

“There is nothing between Fletcher and me.” Vera said softly, answering the question Joan would never ask.

“I didn’t ask.” Ferguson responded curtly.

Vera wanted to roll her eyes, instead she turned around and continued walking towards H Block. Joan followed Vera, quickly catching up to her.

“What happened to Trust, Governor?” Vera said, looking straight ahead as the hallway seemed to
A soft chuckle escaped Joan’s lips and the older woman grabbed Vera roughly by her upper arm, stopping any advancement. She yanked Vera towards her, so that their bodies were pressing into each other. “Vera, you shouldn’t play games you can’t win.”

Vera could feel the hot breath of the Governor against her lips, Vera bit her bottom lip and a growl escaped Joan’s mouth. Joan yanked Vera across the hall and opened a supply closet, pushing the smaller woman inside. Ferguson closed the door behind her, as she turned on the light. There was a chair in the middle of the closet, one that Vera had often hidden away to when she needed a moment away from the chaos of prison life.

Joan sat down in the chair and pulled Vera towards her, bending her over her knee. She yanked up the back of Vera’s skirt and pulled down her underwear. Before a word could escape the deputy’s mouth, Joan rose her hand and spanked Vera swiftly on the behind. Vera gasped.

Joan covered Vera’s mouth with her spare hand, quieting any sounds that could escape Vera.

Joan spanked Vera again.

“This is for your own good, Vera. I warned you not to let other’s personal affairs get in the way of your work.” Another smack, one leaving a red handprint on the Vera’s soft skin.

“Your mouth today has landed you in trouble and it is not appreciated. Do you understand?” Joan spanked Vera once more, the sound of the slap reverberating in the small closet. After a brief pause, Joan removed her hand, allowing Vera to speak.

“Yes, Governor.”

Joan patted Vera’s buttocks, signaling the smaller woman to stand. Vera quickly pulled up her underwear and pulled down her skirt, bashfully looking at the taller woman. Joan grabbed Vera’s chin and softly kissed the Deputy on her lips. Brief and sweet.

“Good.”
Joan opened the door and let Vera out of the closet, and they continued towards H block side by side.

Joan was disappointed. She knew it would only be a matter of time that even Vera would begin to dull in her eyes. At first it was endearing to have such an eager student answer to Joan’s beck and call without hesitation, but now it annoyed Joan. At work, Vera needed constant guidance and approval despite Ferguson giving Vera a steady foundation.

There were drugs back in the prison. But most importantly, Joan wasn’t in control of them. Vera stepped into her office for the morning briefing, and Joan collected her thoughts and her morning paperwork, tapping it on the desk. Most mornings, Joan looked forward to the quiet moments in her office alone with Vera, it was a time that they could set aside and resituate their working relationship, shedding off any baggage they may have been carrying from their time spent alone outside the walls of Wentworth.

But this morning, the sight of Vera irked Joan, the pleasant smile plastered on her face and bounce in her walk did not match Joan’s mood adequately.

“Good morning, Miss Bennett” Vera’s head cocked slightly at the sound of her surname.

“Good morning, Governor Ferguson.” Vera’s tone peaked at the end of the sentence, as if it was almost a question, and a smirk tugged at the corner of her mouth. All of this left an uncomfortable itch in Joan’s side, and she shifted in her chair.

“I am concerned by the incident yesterday with Pierson on the roof. There are drugs in my prison. Again.” The crowns on Joan’s shoulders were high, her neck tense with the stress of disorganization in her prison.

The tone in Joan’s voice made Vera feel uncomfortable. She felt as if she was the one at fault for the influx of the contraband. She wrung her hands in her lap and shifted her gaze towards the floor. She noticed how her black shoes almost blended in against the dark grey of the carpet. The contrast between how Joan was alone with Vera late at night with that of the mornings at work was disorienting.

There was a small, but vocal part of her that believed the drugs in Wentworth were her fault. Had she let her personal life interfere with her job? She was guilty of letting her mind wander to thoughts of Joan on occasion, but she thought she was always diligent enough in her day to day duties.
And yet, drugs were back in the prison. Vera had failed.

“Governor, I’m sorry…” She clenched her jaw, cursing herself for apologizing.

The platitudes were too much for Joan’s nerves to stand on this particular morning. “Vera, you are my Deputy, not my pen pal. I need solutions.” The sharpness in Joan’s voice broke the quiet of the morning like the ice on a puddle.

“Y-yes, Governor.” Joan’s mind was racing now, she knew there must be a technique, some footwork that could be executed to maneuver out of her current position. Joan stood, pacing for a moment while Vera sat, a gargoyle foretelling the disappointment she brought to everyone around her. After a moment, Joan had a tactic. It did not hold the finesse that she preferred, it was blunt, but it was better than wearing a patch in her carpet with worry.

“Bring me Birdsworth after breakfast, she could be a valuable ally.” This ray of hope lit up Vera’s face, her eagerness to be of service annoying Joan once again.

“Of course! After the incident with that young woman in her unit, she will certainly be-” Joan cut Vera off, exasperated with waiting for the seemingly rusty machinery in the young woman’s skull to grind out an eager response.

“Yes, yes, Vera. Thank you.” She turned mid-pace to dismiss the Deputy “Go to it.” Her gaze cast expectantly to the door, and it wasn’t until Vera passed back into her line of sight that she realized the damage she had done.

Vera did not bounce out of the Governor’s office this morning.

Rita cried out in pain, her screams echoing in the room in which she was held.

“It won’t be for a couple more hours until I can give you pain medication mother. I can only give you some oxycontin for now.”

The look on Rita’s face bore into Vera’s soul. She was a disappointment even here.
At times, she wanted to shake her mother, smack her, tell her mother she was doing her best. When her mother would finally fall asleep sometimes Vera would cry. She wished her mother would let go and leave her be.

Rita refused to take the pill, instead spitting it out and making Vera’s life more difficult than it needed to be.

“What are you doing? You have to swallow it!” Vera felt exasperated. The doorbell rang and Vera wiped up her mother’s face, leaving the sounds of her moans behind as she ran down the hallway.

Vera did not expect to see Joan at her front door, not again and especially after the way she was treated today at work.

“Governor.” Vera answered

Joan looked over the woman standing in front of her. She was still wearing her work uniform but her shoes were replaced with slippers. She was exhausted and beaten. *What have I done?*

A soft smile graced Joan’s lips, hoping that her gesture would be appreciated. “I know you’ve got your hands full. I’ve just brought you some food.”

Vera was taken aback, the Joan standing in front of her, with her hair softly pulled back into a ponytail and the kindness she held in her eyes was a stark difference between who Joan was at work today.

She didn’t know how to respond, a mess of jumbled words flew out of Vera’s mouth. “Oh I’m...Thanks. Thank you. I’m just I’m...in the middle of something at the moment.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Joan looked at Vera then, holding up the food, a soft quiet moment between the two women held onto the night air clinging desperately to the secret that both the women shared. Vera looked at Joan, her features softening, wanting desperately to push the woman away.

“Would you like to come in?” Vera asked, forgetting about everything and wanting to take the woman standing in front of her into her arms.
“No, no, no, no. I don’t want to interrupt.” Joan said, handing Vera the bag. They stared at each other for a long moment, time seeming to stretch out in front of them. Vera reached out and touched the necklace that Joan was wearing admiring the simplicity. Vera wanted to say a million things to the older woman now, how she had hurt her this morning, how Vera refused to be the emotional punching bag for another person in her life, and if Joan continued she’d resent her like she resented her mother. She didn’t want that type of relationship with Joan, she wanted to know all of her, what she looked like in pajamas, how she preferred to take her coffee in the morning. Vera felt it in her gut they’d never get there, not with Joan toying with her as she did.

Like a car crash, breaking Vera and Joan out of their quiet moment, Rita screamed for Vera. “Vera!”

Vera looked up at Ferguson, letting go of her necklaces, sadness creeping onto her features.

“I have to go. Sorry. I have to see to her.” Vera turned around and ran down the hallway and Joan followed her, shutting the door behind.

“Mum, you’re fine.” Vera said to her mother, an annoyance behind her words. Why did her mother break her away from the moment she was sharing with Joan?

“Who’s that?” Rita asked, looking towards the doorway. Vera turned seeing Joan standing there rather awkwardly, her purse tucked tightly to her side. Vera smiled.

“Um...Mum...this is my boss, Governor Ferguson.” Joan smiled towards Vera and then at Rita, taking her purse from her shoulder and walked over to the frail woman.

“Hello. I’m very pleased to meet you, Mrs. Bennett. Vera’s told me so much about you.” Joan reached out and touched Rita’s hand feeling the softness of age underneath her fingertips.

“Um, Miss Ferguson’s kindly brought us some dinner.” Vera stated, holding up the bag of whatever was inside.

“Be a damned sight better than what you’ve been feeding me.” Vera could have died. This was not how she envisioned Joan meeting her mother--as a matter of fact, she didn’t ever want Joan to meet her mother.
“I have to puree her food. She has difficulty swallowing.” Vera felt the need to justify and explain herself especially when her mother was being so unnecessarily cruel.

The forced smile Joan has on her face was starting to ware thin, she was having a difficult time listening to the way Rita talked about Vera, her Vera. She sat down next to Rita, grabbing her hand, hoping to stop the woman from speaking.

“I am sure Vera is doing her very best, Rita.” Joan said, no longer gracing the woman with the dignity and respect of her last name.

_Didn’t she know that she was beneath Vera?_

“She tries, but she can’t cut it. It’s the story of her life. She’s like this at work, too, I bet, huh?” The words that came out of Rita’s mouth made Joan want to strangle the woman, but instead, she squeezed the dying woman’s hands and leaned in, whispering so that Vera could not hear.

“No, but she’s the best. She’s nothing like you.” The words were like venom coming out of Joan’s mouth and the look of Rita’s face let Joan know everything she could possible want to know--she was a coward.

“Mum, I think that’s enough for now, don’t you?” There was a soft sternness in Vera’s voice that made Joan smile. She stood and looked at the smaller with pride in her eyes. Vera smiled back.

Rita witnessed the softness the two women seemed to share. “Vera, I need something for the pain.” She moaned.

“Yeah. Yep, I’ll get you something.”

“Look, why don’t you do what you need to do. I’ll just heat one of these up for the two of you.” Joan took the bag of food out of Vera’s hands, gently and quickly brushing her thumb reassuringly against Vera’s hand.

“Oh no no no. I don’t want to put you to any trouble.”
“No trouble at all. Just point me in the direction of the kitchen.”

Vera had finally gotten her mother to sleep. She was exhausted, she padded her way down to the kitchen remembering that Joan was still there.

She walked around the corner stopping for a moment to witness the domestic side of Joan, the simple gesture of her preparing dinner for her was an odd sight.

“I’m sorry about Mum. She’s a bit delirious with all the pain medication…” Vera began, looking Joan in the eye, shame and embarrassment creeping in akin to when she was a child and her friends would come over.

They would never come again.

“Hey, hey, don’t apologize.” So much pain in such a small body, Joan thought momentarily as she continued to slice the tomatoes. Joan was surprised that Vera had survived as long as she had under the rule and thumb of her narcissistic mother. Witnessing Vera in her domicile, Joan understood where the need for approval and attention manifested itself, it appeared to Joan that Vera received little love from her mother unless it served her mother’s purposes.

As it turned out it was not Vera who had disappointed Joan, it had been herself.

There was a brief moment of silence before Vera spoke.

“Thanks for this.”

Vera grabbed plates out of the cupboard and helped Joan serve, “Should I make a plate for your mother?” Joan asked.

“Oh God know, she’s finally asleep. She wouldn’t eat it anyhow.” Vera grabbed her plate and sat at the kitchen table, letting out a deep and resounding sigh. “First time I’ve sat all day.”
“I hope you don’t mind, I found this bottle in the cupboard.” Joan poured Vera a glass of wine and joined the younger woman.

“You...uh, were unnecessarily cruel to me today, Governor.” Vera stumbled, taking a quick sip of the red liquid, letting it coat her tongue and give her courage.

Joan coked an eyebrow at the younger woman, sucking on the inside of her cheek.

“I...I understand that you’re upset about their being drugs in the prison, but I won’t be your professional punching bag. A team can not work effectively like this.” Vera took a large gulp from her wine glass, nearly emptying it.

There was a soft beat before Vera reached out and delicately touched Joan’s hand, squeezing it reassuringly.

Joan was careful about how she responded next, unwilling to admit a mistake, but deeply aware about Vera’s need to hear an apology. “My intention is not to be cruel, Vera. I know I can be demanding at times and unyielding in my vision, but I value our work as a team tremendously.”

Vera scoffed, a soft smile creeping on her lips, “You could have just said sorry.” Vera teased leaning back in her chair.

Joan watched the expression on Vera’s face change, exhaustion and contemplation taking over her face. A slow sigh escaped the smaller woman, shrinking her even further into the chair.

“What are your parents like?” Vera asked, the abrupt change in conversation unsettling Joan, causing her to lose grip of her fork. Vera looked up from her plate, surprised by the clatter of the fork against the plate. “Oh, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to-”

“No, it’s fine...” Joan looked up from the utensil, still sitting where it had fallen amongst her greens, a pained smile crossing her face, “My mother left when I was very young, while my father...” Joan rarely found herself at a loss for the words to meet the needs of a situation, but it was little surprise that the subject of her father would do exactly that.

Vera glanced back to the room where her mother was silent, for now, and met Joan’s eyes, “I understand.” The two women locked eyes for a moment, and in that moment those two simple
words had an eternity to chip away at two lifetimes of abuse. “My father left when I was young, as well. Sometimes I wonder, who would I be if he came back for me?”

“Istel still alive?” Joan asked.

Vera shrugged. “Your mother?”

“I have no doubt she still is tormenting others as she has tormented me.”

There was a sober realization between the two women, a strange commonality that comforted them. They continued to eat the meal in silence.

At the end of their meal, Joan insisted on doing the dishes as Vera sat on the couch with a glass of wine in her hand, the tv dull in the background.

Joan scrubbed the dishes, feeling the suds suck the oils out of her hands. The hot water no longer burned her skin like it did when she was younger, years of conditioning had led her to find a dull comfort in the heat of the water.

Talking about her parents to anyone brought up too much shame for Joan’s comfort. She looked down realizing she had been scrubbing the same dish for five minutes now. She rinsed it and picked up the second plate, methodically scrubbing in small circles around the periphery, spiraling inward to the center. The only way to clean a dish.

She rinsed off the plate and rinsed off her hands before turning off the sink, finding a dishtowel to dry her hands with. She walked over to the couch and found Vera, curled up on it, asleep, the wine glass still in her hand, precariously balancing against the armrest of the couch. Joan leaned down, carefully plucking the glass out of the sleeping woman’s hands. Vera slightly stirred in her sleep and Joan quietly placed the glass on the side table. She stood for a moment, looking at the soft features of the woman below her. Vera looked at peace, the stress she carried in her shoulders and calves no longer visible.

Joan gently stroked Vera’s hair. “Vera.” She whispered, trying to coo the woman awake.

Vera did not respond, her exhaustion had taken its toll.
Joan placed one arm under the crook of Vera’s knee and the other behind the woman’s shoulder and lifted her up off the couch, careful to not wake her. Vera was light in Joan’s arms and she found little difficulty as she walked down the hallway, quietly past Rita’s bedroom and up the stairs to what she assumed was Vera’s room. Joan entered the room she knew was Vera’s, the soft pastel sheets and stickers on her mirror were a dead giveaway. She carefully placed Vera on her bed and the younger woman sprawled out before slowly opening her eyes, realizing where she was.

Vera slowly sat up, in her tired state, not realizing Joan was still there. She took off her slippers and began unbuttoning her shirt before seeing Joan sitting on the edge of her bed.

“Did you carry me up here?” Vera asked, slowly taking off her shirt.

Joan nodded, taking Vera’s shirt and placing it in her hamper.

Vera stood then, letting her skirt pool on the floor and she stepped out of. Vera reached back and pulled free her hair, letting her soft curls fall wildly down her back. Joan gulped as Vera continued to strip in front of the older woman before curling up in her bed.

“Joan? Will you lay with me until I fall asleep? You don’t have to spend the night...I just...I just need to feel someone right now.”

The streetlight cascaded amber light throughout Vera’s room, illuminating the two women on the bed.

Joan’s shoes were off. She had never taken her shoes off anywhere besides her own house. The cardigan she wore was neatly folded and placed on top of Vera’s dresser, alongside her pants. She laid under the soft covers of Vera’s bed, on her side, an arm around the smaller woman, holding her gently. Vera was much warmer while she slept than Joan imagined, and she clung to Vera like a tiny soft fire, wrapping her long limbs around Vera’s petite frame.

Joan knew that what she was doing was a mistake. But in the moment, it felt right.
Joan stroked Vera’s arm, feeling the softness of her skin underneath her fingertips.

Joan sighed.

Vera turned around face to face with Joan, and wrapped her arms around her. Joan could feel her breath, hot in sleep, against her neck, and found her eyelids began to weigh down. The last sensation she remembered was the rapid rise and fall of Vera’s ribs underneath her forearm.

Joan woke with a start far before daybreak, the morning still night in the window beside Vera’s bed. Her heart began to race, cold sweat forming on her brow as she returned to the reality of her Deputy’s bed.

Joan shot up, starting Vera awake.

“Unnnggg” Vera moaned, turning over, pushing herself to a sitting position. Vera looked at the clock. “There is still 2 hours before the alarm goes off.” Vera turned around then, realizing that Joan was still in her room. “Joan?”

“Perhaps for your alarm.” Joan replied, confident her excuse would satisfy the younger woman, and reaching down to pick up her pants.

“Why in God’s name would you wake up at 3 in the morning?” Vera said, exasperated, falling back into bed, pulling the covers over her nose.

Joan smiled at the coy brunette, still warm with her body heat. “Go back to sleep, I’ll see you soon.” Her smile faded as she turned to the door, pushing it open and then half-shut silently, and disappearing into the night.
Lapsarian

Chapter Summary

Vera makes her conditions known and Joan begins to plan her downfall.

Chapter Notes

We wanted to get this out before Thanksgiving to thank you all for your continual support, kudos, comments and reads. Always appreciate suggestions and direction you think the characters and story should go. All the best! <3 The Hungerhursts

It had been a busy couple days at Wentworth since Joan had seen Vera outside of work.

And after that brief night in Vera’s bed Joan knew she had to keep her distance.

She was getting too close.

Yet, it was hard to stay away.

Despite Vera finding the contraband in the shed, they still had no conclusive evidence to link the drugs to Franky. Joan knew that Doyle was the one behind the contraband in her prison. If she couldn’t pin Franky directly, she would ensure that her crew and the entire prison would turn against her. And it was as simple as making a public spectacle of the garden’s destruction.

A knock echoed from her door, one that Joan knew by its tentative nature.

“Enter.” Joan said, straightening her jacket as Vera entered, shutting the door behind her.

There was a light bounce in the Deputy’s walk and a rather rosy expression on her face despite being exhausted from taking care of her mother all night. Vera smiled at Joan as she entered, “Good morning Joan.” Vera said sheepishly, still feeling naughty for using the Governor’s first name within the prison walls.
“Good morning, Vera.” Joan replied, smiling momentarily and motioning for the younger woman to take a seat in front of her desk. She licked her lips unconsciously as she watched Vera cross her legs, the hem of her skirt riding up, exposing her milky thighs.

Joan shifted in her seat, “I need you to ensure that all of the prisoners who worked on the garden project are in the yard today during the first exercise break.”

Vera looked quizzically at Joan over yesterday’s notes, “What for? I don’t see anything on the schedule.” She commented, opening her binder to the pastel green tab that held her week-at-a-glance calendar.

Joan had always appreciated Vera’s organizational skills. “Your investigation in the garden was a breakthrough in ridding this facility of contraband, but we still lack any evidence as to who was masterminding this supply chain.” Joan watched with wonder as the small woman inflated in her chair, she responded in such a predictably Pavlovian manner to criticism and praise. “Therefore, an example must be made to demonstrate the seriousness with which we will treat drug offenses.”

Vera thought it odd that Joan would make a public example of Boomer for something she obviously was only a lackey for, but remembered the key that Joan and her had discussed in their partnership. Trust. She nodded silently and took notes as they continued discussing the morning’s activities and plans for the day.

“Vera, I would like for you to see this.” Joan said, motioning for Vera to walk over to her side of the desk as she pulled up CCTV footage. The two women were close to one another, their body heat intermingling. Vera briefly touched Joan’s arm and felt a flush rise up her neck. She didn’t know where her and Joan stood, she hadn’t seen Joan outside of Wentworth since the day the Governor showed up on her front step unexpectedly. Vera realized that was how Joan preferred their relationship, if it could be called that.

Joan pressed play and began talking to Vera, but she was not paying attention. Instead she was focusing on the proximity the two were to one another and Joan’s desk. That damn desk.

“No, Joan. I do not.” Vera said, bending even further over and closer to the screen. Vera felt Joan’s hand begin its way up the inner of her thigh, slipping past the hem of her skirt. She gasped,
Looking back at Joan whose face was still fixed to the screen, her mouth still explaining the importance of the interaction between the two prisoners.

“The basis of psychology needs to be applied when you’re dealing with prisoners, Vera.” Joan said, her fingers moving their way upwards, feeling the heat of Vera’s center grow with intensity.

“Yes, Governor.” Vera responded, gripping the edge of the desk.

“Women here are guided by two basic principles: punishment and…” Joan slid Vera’s underwear to the side and slowly inserted one finger inside of Vera, “Reward.”

Vera arched her back in response, a guttural moan escaping her.

“The principle behind this is that you pair a desired action with a something the other desires.” Joan inserted another finger into Vera’s cunt, increasing the pace of her thrusts. Vera’s thighs began to tighten around Joan’s arm and Vera reached back, grabbing Joan’s knee to steady herself.

“An undesirable action is met with a punishment. In this case, you are being rewarded.”

Vera grabbed Joan’s arm then, stopping the older woman from continuing. Vera pushed Joan’s hand away, straightening herself and turning around. Joan raised an eyebrow in response. “Vera?”

“I am not a prisoner, Governor.” Vera said sternly, “And I do not need to be rewarded.”

Vera noticed the subtle way Joan clenched her jaw, a look of supreme dissatisfaction crossing over her face.

Vera crossed her arms and looked down at Joan. She felt rage build up in her belly and she wanted to say a million things to her. “You can’t treat people this way, Joan.”

“I don’t know where this is coming from, Vera.” Joan began, grabbing a wipe out of her drawer and cleaning her hands.

“People aren’t dogs, and I’m not your pet, for fucks sake.”
Joan tilted her head back. “I would disagree, you are my pet. Haven’t I made myself clear?” Joan paused, touching one of the pencils on her desk briefly to straighten it, despite it already being lined up with the others beside it. “You seemed to enjoy yourself that first night, here on my desk.”

Vera groaned. “I don’t know what we’re doing here. Why we’re even doing it here.” Vera pushed a stray strand of hair behind her ear, and leaned back against the desk.

“If you’re unsatisfied with our arrangement, we can end it.” Joan said, moving to stand, entirely displeased with the track of this interaction.

Vera placed a hand on Joan’s shoulder, forcing the surprised woman back down into her chair. “We need new conditions.”

Joan had to hide a smile, suddenly very proud of the way Vera was controlling the conversation. “And those conditions are, what exactly?”

“I will not be, in any way, shape, or form, likened to the prisoners. I require that you take me on a date outside of these walls once a week.” Specific. Well done, Vera, Joan thought. “And no more of this hot and cold, spontaneously showing up on my doorstep, then not talking to me for days on end.” Vera stopped, hands on her hips and looked at Joan. “If you want me to be a proper submissive to you, you need to remember who has the power here.”

Vera bent over then and kissed Joan on the lips, lingering for just a moment before exiting the office, leaving Joan stunned.

The mouse has teeth.

Vera walked out of Joan’s office shaking, and the secretary asked Vera if she was alright.

“She can be a little mean sometimes, huh?” The sweet woman said. What was her name? Vera smiled at her politely.
She walked down the hallway, her pace quickening. She slammed open the door the officers recreation room, forgetting that other’s may be in there. Vera walked into Fletch picking up a white substance in a small package off the floor.

She walked past him to the coffee station and poured herself a cup, letting the hot black liquid coat her throat. She winced. She almost didn’t believe she handled the situation with Joan the way she did, but she needed some sort of sanity in her life. Joan had an unnerving cruel streak that Vera did not understand. At times she could handle the prisoners with grace and finesse and at others she was unnecessarily cruel.

Vera shook her head.

She didn’t pretend to understand the Governor’s actions, with her, or the prisoners.

“The Governor?” The voice of Will Jackson came from behind and Vera turned around.

“She’s going to destroy the entire garden project because of Franky. The women were really enjoying working on that.” There was a hidden sadness in Vera’s voice that Will understood, both of them cared deeply about the women here.

“I don’t know how you do it.” Jackson shook his head smiling. “Everyday in her office like that. Does she ever take in account your suggestions?”

*That is to be determined.*

Vera rose her eyebrows and shook her head, “She values my input.”

“From where I stand it seems she only values her own opinion.” Jackson laughed and Vera chuckled.

There was a moment of silence and Will could see Vera’s internal debate before interjecting, “Hey, listen. If you disagree with this garden project removal, tell her.” At that he gently patted the smaller woman on the shoulder and went on duty.
Vera knew nothing she would say would change the Governor’s mind.

*You’ll fail at this as you always do, Vera.*

The roar of the bulldozer cut the morning air, shaking the chain link that held the small gathering of prisoners back from saving the patch of natural life they had fostered between the walls of Wentworth. Joan looked away from the machine, glancing down to find Vera with a slight scowl on her face, her disapproval of these methods obvious. *You may have some fight, but you’ll require motivation to do the things that must be done.* She cleared her throat, catching the deputy’s attention. “They need to see this.” She glanced to the left, signaling exactly who she meant, as if there were some possible misunderstanding. “I had a contract with these prisoners and they broke it.”

“You’re punishing everyone for the actions of maybe one or two.” Vera understood that all of this was part of the corrections already happening because these women had violated the law, but she just couldn’t see how this mass punishment would lead to a positive outcome for these prisoners. Everyone had agreed that the garden would be a useful space of rehabilitation, taking it away for Doyle’s actions seemed… vindictive.

“Exactly.”

Vera looked up at Joan, concerned by her actions, but also perplexed. When Joan looked down to meet Vera’s gaze, Joan could feel the woman’s confusion and realized that she had not made herself clear. This was a moment that Vera could learn from.

“Look at them, Vera. It’s the herd mentality that drives these women.” She was pleased to see Vera followed her motion and was looking upon their flock. This was a crucial cornerstone to Joan’s success in corrections, and elsewhere. “And if we show an ounce of weakness, the herd will sense it.” Joan felt a pang of reflection strike her, memories of stinging calves and burning muscles rushing back to her as she heard her father’s voice coming from her own mouth.

*Animals will always be animals. It’s a mistake to think humans are not.*
Vera looked up to Joan’s deep brown eyes, hoping to see where this reductionary line of thought might be coming from, and was surprised to see a flickering moment of pain cross her face. She was startled to realize the Governor was not practicing these outmoded concepts in corrections out of a resistance to new thought, but rather that some carefully guarded part of her heart held a wound so deep she could never forgive the world that was cruel enough to inflict it. The Governor felt every ounce of the pain she caused, but saw no other possible outcome. Vera looked back to the beast that was turning over mounds of soil and spouting dark smoke into the crisp sky, a single tear hiding in the corner of her eye.

The golden light in the fencing studio was a solace to the perpetual blue of the florescent lights of Wentworth. Joan put on her mask. Her opponent was younger than her, smaller in stature and seemed green. As the first few lunges of the match began, she felt pity in her stomach, his youthful grace evident with the flourishes he embellished his parries with.

She engaged.

“If you want me to be a proper submissive to you, you need to remember who has the power here.” It had been a while since someone had spoken in that way to Joan. For many years her partners had all been afraid of Joan. She didn’t blame them.

Joan retreated for a moment to deflect an advancement, tingling with delight as their foils collided against one another. She felt the burn in her calves begin and she let out a controlled breath out of her nose. She advanced.

*Underdeveloped and weak. Yet, Vera. Vera, Vera, Vera.*

Was more complicated that Joan had thought. She was still insecure about her job duties despite being in corrections for many years, but she was very sure about the direction she wanted their...relationship...to head to. Joan felt a sense of pride in Vera’s ability to find power in defining the role she needed, and needed Joan to perform.

Vera was a distraction.

Joan shook her head to clear her thoughts forcing herself to focus on the match in front of her, rather than the one occurring under those blue fluorescent lights.
The pity in her stomach for her opponent’s lack of skill began to grow again. He was new at this sport and was making elementary mistakes. Joan didn’t want to end this match just yet.

Vera was a distraction.

At first, their little game amused Joan, but she had found herself thinking about the mouse more often than she’d care to admit.

“I am not your pet.”

Didn’t Vera understand she belonged to her? That she was being groomed by Joan’s own mentorship to become who she was meant to be. It was happening before Joan’s eyes, she was on this path to craft perfection.

My greatest project yet.

Joan advanced forward once more and her opponent lost his footing. She hesitated hoping he would rise from his feet. Instead he landed a touch decisively on her chest.

She had lost.

She took of her mask, angry at herself for losing, and angry at herself for letting her thoughts wander during the match. She slapped her opponent's hand, too furious to complete a sportsmanly shake.

Vera was a distraction.

“Your hesitation cost you. You have the instinct and the desire. What you lack is the ability to follow through.” Her father chastised her from the empty space beside the window.

She knew this. She understood. She didn’t feel it to be true, however. She took a deep breath to steady her rising temper.
“My opponent lost his balance.” She responded curtly, cursing herself for responding at all.

“That made him vulnerable. Why did you stop?” He was never interested in her answer. She had made a mistake and no excuse would be accepted.

“It was the sporting thing to do.” Joan responded, placing her gloves in her mask, pushing her hair away from her face. She knew this excuse would be ignored, like all of those from years ago.

“It was the weak thing to do. The time to strike is when he is on his knees. A lesser opponent will rise up if you give him the slightest opportunity. You must be ruthless.”

Joan felt the echo of her father’s words as if he was next to her. He was right, he was always right. Joan had to be ruthless to reach her objective.

To test the strength of her own creation, Joan knew that she would have to give Vera an impossible task, to fully break her before the phoenix could rise.

Vera’s strength would be beautiful.

Vera entered Joan’s office past lunch. She was surprised the Governor had called her in again, she had usually reserved the rest of the day catching up on paperwork. There was a slight bounce in Vera’s walk as she entered.

“You wanted to see me Governor.”

Joan turned around to face Vera. Her mouth agape for a moment as she took the sight of the woman in front of her. Joan hesitated. She didn’t want to continue down the path she had set, she wanted to save Vera from the worst part of herself, the controlling part, the destroying part.

The fire had been lit and Joan knew she had lost to herself once more.
**Why are you the way you are?**

Vera looked up at Joan, licking her lips before looking at the floor. She couldn’t look at Joan here. Not now, and not after everything she had told her this morning. Her confidence was fleeting, a vast ocean this morning but now, it was nothing but a puddle.

**Why are you the way you are?**

Vera forced herself to look up at Joan. Their eyes met.

“Yes, Vera.”

Joan strangely found herself unable to meet Vera’s eyes as she continued, the knowledge that her next words would break the woman before her, but only in time. “We need to get to the bottom of this, uh, garden contraband racket.”

Joan walked over to the front of her desk, sitting on it, directly in front of Vera. Joan felt the ache in her chest, her arms so wanted to reach out and touch the younger woman. Instead, she found herself picking off a stray piece of lint off of Vera’s jacket sleeve before continuing.

“And to be perfectly honest, I am stuck.” Joan needed this moment of feigned vulnerability to draw in Vera, faltering her speech slightly and looking up at the woman who was standing in front of her, their body heat intermingling with the distance that professionalism dictated.

Vera shifted her weight onto her other foot. Joan saw that her opponent’s stance had faltered and knew it was time to shift the balance of the match to ensure her victory. *You must be ruthless.*

“Why don’t you personally take charge of that investigation? I’m giving you a full mandate to do whatever it takes to pin Doyle for it. We both know she was behind it. It’s important that we make an example of her. Just get someone to talk.”

Vera smiled now, she was pleased to see that her questions this morning had swayed the Governor into targeting the single person who was actually at fault. But one obstacle still bothered her,
“The women won’t lag.” Joan smiled inwardly, the smile of a child hovering over an anthill with a magnifying glass.

“Well, then you will find another way.”

*Or you won’t.* Joan paused, giving a moment to ensure her point was clear. She felt that some clarification might still be necessary.

“Just bring me proof.”

And with that, the words fell to the floor like hot wax sealing Vera’s fate. Joan leaned forward and walked around her desk to put the physical barrier between Vera and herself. Even the small distance helped with this difficult task, keeping the words from catching in her throat. “Is there a problem?”

Vera gulped, she wanted so desperately to please the Governor, but this … Echoes of her mother’s voice pounded a chant of disappointment in her skull.

Joan saw that her Deputy had already begun grinding herself to ash, and knew that a bit of encouragement would give Vera the height to gain the terminal velocity required for her rebirth. “Time to step up, Vera. I’m giving you a chance to prove yourself. Come on, help me here. I believe in you. You just need to believe in yourself.” Joan felt the words’ truth vibrate like strummed strings in her chest, and a brief panic began to flap its wings before she stifled it.

“Thank you Governor.” Joan’s words had an inflating effect on the smaller woman.

Vera turned to walk out a bounce in her step half anxiety and half excitement, but Joan stopped her. “One more thing, Vera.”

Vera stopped and turned on her heels, curious at what else she could possibly handle in such a short meeting. “Yes?”

“As per our discussion with regard to your conditions laid out this morning?” Joan had to be sure that she was not revealed as the cause of her mentee’s coming challenges, but this had ulterior motives as well. More … primal motives.
Vera felt a blush creep up her neck before she could even respond, “Yes?”

“This evening, eight o’ clock. Have hospice stay over for overtime.”

Vera nodded, a glowing smile crossing her face like a sunrise.

“I’ll see you then.”
Joan arrived at Vera’s house at 8 PM sharp. The amber islands cast by streetlights lit neat rows of well groomed lawns and the uniquely styled homes of a bygone time and architecture. Vera has not moved, Joan thought as she parked her car in front of Vera’s home, her childhood home.

Joan exited her car and walked to the front door with brisk steps on the concrete pathway surrounded by lawn that hadn’t seen a mower in a week, judging by the growth. She rang the doorbell, triggering an electronic tune that grated her nerves, and Vera answered.

Vera’s hair was down and straightened, curled at the ends. She wore a tight fitting black dress that hugged her body perfectly. The two women smiled at one another.

“Good evening.” Joan greeted, offering her hand, palm upward, which Vera took. She pulled Vera onto the front porch and into the pleasant night air, wishing to keep this evening free from the confines of Vera’s home.

Vera shut the door behind her and was guided to Joan’s car, her heels clicking against the concrete of the driveway.

Vera felt her heart began to race suddenly and nerves took over her body. Every slight touch of Joan’s hand on her made her blush. I have to look like a lobster by now. Vera couldn’t understand why she had so many butterflies in her stomach, after everything the two of them had experienced together, eating dinner together was oddly normal, but it was the intimacy that excited Vera. She was determined to know more about Joan this evening.
“You look wonderful.” Vera told Joan as she sat in the car. She did. Her hair was down, loosened from the confines of it’s daily bun and fell in soft waves around her face. She wore loose black trousers and a form fitting blouse that accentuated her womanly figure.

As Joan drove off, a comfortable silence settled in the car and Vera was able to take deep breaths to calm her nerves.

“Is everything okay Vera?” Joan asked, reaching over and placing her hand on Vera’s thigh. Joan felt the softness of the younger woman’s skin underneath her fingertips and pulled away, gripping the steering wheel tightly.

“Yes.” Vera responded, looking over at Joan who kept her eyes fixed on the road in front of her.

They arrived at Kaizen, a bayside restaurant that Vera had never heard of, and would never have found amongst the four menus she kept atop her fridge. They were in an area of the city Vera had also never been to, considering it was neither her home, the grocery store, pharmacy, or Wentworth. She stepped out of the car, feeling the breeze, and pulled her jacket tightly around her body. She looked around, seeing yachts bobbing in the harbor, and the distant sound of a tugboat calling out to the sea.

Vera did not expect Joan to pick such a location. She wasn’t sure what Joan would have picked.

“Have you been here before?” Vera asked as the two walked towards the restaurant.

“I have.” Joan responded, opening the door.

“Do you bring all your dates here?” Vera teased.

“Only if they’re good.” Joan responded flatly and Vera felt a blush begin to form.

“Ms. Ferguson, it is nice to see you again.” The host exuberantly greeted Joan in a carefully lightened accent, shaking her hand eagerly.

“Andrei, vsegda priyatno.” Joan shook his hand and they exchanged pleasantries in Russian while
he walked them through the establishment. Large windows lined the south and west walls, flaunting a panoramic view of the Port Phillip Bay. The city lights in the distance created a romantic scene on the waterway.

The two were seated towards the back of the restaurant, secluded and private, with complete command of the stunning view, and the waiter came and poured wine for both women.

The whole scenario was surprising to Vera, she had never experienced such prompt service in her life. She had never been a regular at any restaurant, unless you counted the familiarity she had with Trent, the chinese takeout delivery boy.

The two clinked their glasses.

“"This wine is delicious.” Vera said, taking another quick sip after her first.

“Shiraz, my favorite.” Joan said, setting her glass down and looking over the view. “I do come here often.” Joan responded, answering the question lingering in Vera’s mind. “It’s a Japanese restaurant run by Russians, it reminds me of a simpler time.”

“A simpler time?” Vera asked.

Joan nodded. “I was born in Korsakov, Russia. I lived there only as a young child, until I was seven, and have returned only a handful of times. There is an interesting mix of Russian and Japanese culture there, considering how close it is to Japan, and the Japanese occupation.”

“I was born in Melbourne and pretty much have stayed around here my whole life.” Vera chuckled, suddenly feeling inadequate.

“How far back does your family go in Australia?” Joan asked, leaning into Vera’s personal space.

“On my father’s side, they supposedly go back to the First Fleet.” Vera responded and Joan smiled.

“And here you are, working in corrections?” The two women laughed, understanding the irony of the situation.
“Are you still fluent in Russian?” Vera asked, shifting in her seat, suddenly very excited.

“Not as much as when I was young, but yes.”

“Tell me something.” Vera bit her lip then, looking Joan in her obsidian eyes.

Joan leaned again into Vera’s personal space, lips brushing her ear and whispered hot words that sent a shock down to Vera’s core.

As Joan pulled away, she brushed a stray finger alongside Vera’s neck, causing a sharp intake of breath from the smaller woman.

“I...uh…” Vera began as the food that they didn’t order was delivered to them. “Have no idea what you said, but I think I liked it.”

“I think you will like it.” Joan responded, picking up her chopsticks and deftly sweeping her napkin into her lap.

“You don’t order here, they just bring you food?” Vera asked looking at the feast of sashimi in front of her.

“The perks of being a loyal customer.” Joan said, placing a piece of mackerel in her mouth, she closed her eyes for a moment, letting the sublimely fresh flavors of the fish mix with the delicately balanced sauce hidden beneath it. “Delicious.”

“I don’t even know where to begin.” Vera said looking at the platter in front of her. Each fish glistened under the dim lighting of the restaurant, some more inviting than others. She played it safe, picking up a piece of Tuna. It melted in her mouth as soon as it hit her tongue, and Joan reveled in the sight in front of her. Vera was in pure ecstasy.

Joan poured Vera another glass and watched hungrily as the woman drank from it, the liquid staining the younger woman’s lips an ever so subtle red. They continued to savor the meal set before them, finishing the first bottle of wine well before the first pair of uni shooters arrived. Vera looked quizzically at the contents suspended in the glass, and then turned to Joan with raised
Joan chuckled good naturedly and took both glasses, sliding one to Vera as she explained, “It’s an uni shooter, made of sea urchin, a quail egg, and a ponzu sauce and garnish. Many people have different ways of eating them, but I prefer to swallow it whole like liquor, though a bit more slowly to savor the flavor.” Vera picked up the double shot glass with false bravado, the wine instilling her with far more courage than she felt in her heart. Joan stayed her hand, “The texture can be … challenging, but I promise you it is worth it.” Vera paused for a moment, confidence wavering, then met Joan’s eyes and tilted the glass and her head back.

Vera gagged. Her eyes watered as she forced herself to swallow whatever that was. She placed her napkin over her mouth, fearing that she may puke. As the contents finally found itself down her esophagus she wiped her eyes.

Joan laughed. “It isn’t for everyone.”

“You’re telling me.” Vera grumbled, grabbing her wine glass and washing down the lingering taste in her mouth. Vera found Joan’s eyes on her, devouring her and she suddenly felt a warmth engulf her body. It was as if Joan was wholly consuming Vera in that very moment. Vera’s heart skipped a beat and she clenched the napkin tightly in her hand.

“Joan?” A voice jostled the two women out of their moment and they both looked at a tall blonde woman standing in front of their table. Vera quickly looked over the woman, her green eyes shimmering, her high cheekbones catching the light, she was fit and curvy and stunning. Vera looked over at Joan who smiled up at the blonde.

“Alex.” Joan greeted the women. There was no emotion behind Joan’s words and Vera noticed a subtle clench form in Joan’s jaw. Joan repositioned the napkin on her lap, smoothing it out before looking up at the woman again.

“What are you doing here?” Alex asked, looking down at Vera who suddenly felt very visible. She shifted in her seat uncomfortably.

“I should ask the same of you.” Joan responded a polite smile forming on her lips.

Alex placed her hands on the table, leaning over, exposing the swell of her breasts. Vera caught Joan’s quick glimpse down the blonde’s shirt and suddenly felt very possessive. Joan leaned back,
turning her head away from Alex. “Enjoy your meal, Alex.” The words came out as a command, mirthless.

The blonde pushed herself back, looking once more at Vera before walking away.

Vera picked up her glass and took a sip, looking at Joan who was still looking over the bay. Vera placed her hand on Joan’s arm and the older woman looked at her then.

“Joan, take me to your place.”

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Vera pushed herself into Joan’s townhouse, kicking her shoes off in the doorway, noticing Joan’s slippers and pushed her feet in them. They were plush and comfortable, the sheepskin and size swallowed Vera’s feet and she giggled before taking them off. Vera walked in, feeling the hard wood cold under her feet, the open kitchen to her right and the stairs that lead upwards, which she only guessed was towards Joan’s bedroom.

Joan’s house was very nice, Vera thought. It felt cold, lacking of personality, but it was nice. Vera noticed the credenza by the dining room table, and how it was decorated with a picture, a fencing helmet and a violin.

She turned to Joan who was hanging up her purse and taking off her shoes. Joan picked up Vera’s shoes and placed them in a shoe cabinet, out of sight. Organized. Neat. “Do you play violin?” Vera asked.

“Yes.” Joan replied, taking off Vera’s jacket and hanging it on a hook by the doorway.

“That’s neat.” Vera responded, “You have a beautiful home, how long have you lived here?”

“Not long.” Joan walked past Vera, into her kitchen. “Care for a drink?”

“Whatever you’re having.” Vera replied, suddenly very aware that she was in Joan’s space. Her private space, a placed touched and owned by Joan outside of their work life. Vera leaned her back
against the kitchen island, looking at the room in front of her. She didn’t know what she was expecting to see in Joan’s house, but she didn’t think it’d be so...sterile. There were no pictures on the walls, no art, nothing that gave any insight into the person who lived here.

Except that she fenced, had a dad, played violin and watched the telly.

Vera turned around and saw that Joan was pouring Vodka shots. “Vodka?” Vera said, watching as the double shot was filled to the brim.

“You can take the girl out of the country, but not the country out of the girl.” Joan replied with a smile, handing Vera the glass.

They clinked glasses and knocked the shot back, feeling the icy liquid spreading fire down their throats and into their stomachs.

The alcohol punched Vera right in the forehead, sending her reeling. “Whew!” She swept the fringe of her hair away from her face, feeling the flush start immediately in her cheeks. “Vodka always hits me so fast!” She wafted a bit of air on her face and neck, the coolness refreshing and the gesture exaggerated.

Joan watched the younger woman react to the compounding effects of the beverages of the night with amusement, curiosity, and desire. Vera’s incessantly adorable behaviour both frustrated and entranced Joan. “So … You might say that Russians have a powerful effect on you.”

The smallest hint of a smile lingered on Joan’s lips as Vera turned her flushed face to examine the Governor and determine the amount of seduction in her features. Vera decided to play the game. “Someone has a big head.” Vera teased, putting the shot glass down and asking for another.

Joan poured both glasses full. “Take it easy. I have a much higher tolerance than you do.” Joan said, giving Vera her shot. They both clinked their glasses.

“I don’t know if you have a higher tolerance. I have always been the one in the compromising positions, Joan.” Vera said, her voice slow and sultry. Joan felt a warmth began to grow in the her center as she drank the liquid in one easy gulp. Joan chuckled as she saw Vera flush from the alcohol, her body swaying to the sounds of inaudible music.
Vera walked over to the bookshelves in the living room and read the titles on the spines of the novels. *The Prince, The Art of War, Discipline and Punish.* These were works that Vera had expected Joan to read, philosophical works that discussed the philosophy behind power.

*Sometimes, people are exactly what you expect.*

“I’d like a tour of your place.” Vera declared, still reading the title and author names on Joan’s bookshelf. There was a part of her that felt as if Joan was going to push her away for asking her to show more of herself than Joan was willing.

She was surprised by the touch of Joan’s hand on her own, leading her up the stairs, the metal was cold underneath Vera’s feet and she understood why Joan had her slippers at the front of the door. Vera grasp on Joan’s hand tightened.

“This is my office.” Joan said, opening the door to a rather cozy room filled with bookshelves lined with books. In the corner sat a minimal desk with nothing on it but a handful of pencils, lined up in a row, and her macbook.

Vera walked over to a bookshelf in the office, reading the titles on the spines of the novels. Joan liked poetry, Vera found a stark contrast to what was presented downstairs. Her shelves were dominated by different poets and their works. She smiled inwardly, there was a romantic within those porcelain walls after all. Vera ran her finger down the spine of “The Bell Jar” and looked over at Joan, “I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead; I lift my lids and all is born again. (I think I made you up inside my head.)”

“Do you find yourself to be a mad girl, Vera?” Joan wondered, immediately recognizing the reference, surprised by Vera’s familiarity with Sylvia Plath’s works (or at least The Bell Jar).

“I think she captures exactly what it is feels to want something you can not have.” Vera looked at Joan, a beat passed between them. “I didn’t expect you to have an affinity towards poetry.” Vera walked passed Joan, wanting to tell the older woman so much, reflect on how she kept such a romantic private life. One so private that it was behind closed doors away from the eyes of any typical guest. Vera felt her heart restrict and knew the weight of how intimate this gesture was for Joan. Vera leaned her back against the banister eyeing Joan as she walked towards her, closing the door to the office with a soft click. “Thank you.” Vera whispered.

Joan looked down for a moment, and Vera realized it was the first time that Joan would not meet her gaze. “You’re welcome.” She paused briefly, as if to settle her nerves, “I didn’t realize we had such similar interests, Vera.”
“I think you know a lot more about poetry than I do.” Vera laughed, grabbing the hem of Joan’s shirt.

Joan leaned in closer to Vera, pressing her body against the smaller woman.

“So...that woman at the restaurant…” Vera stated, her tone light.

“She was a pretty arrangement…” Vera suddenly feeling self doubt grow in her stomach.

As if sensing Vera’s insecurities, Joan brushed Vera’s hair behind her shoulders, exposing her neck. “She was like a bouquet, beautiful at first, but withered quickly. She was dull, she bored me after awhile.” Joan leaned in and claimed ownership of Vera’s neck, kissing and leaving small bite marks.

Vera moaned and gently pushed Joan off teasingly, “You haven’t finished the tour.”

Joan looked at the temptress in front of her smiling. She gripped Vera’s hand as she hesitated to open her bedroom door. She had never let anyone in there before. All her previous encounters had been at other’s homes, or on her couch. Not in her space. Her bedroom. The intimacy of the moment almost weakened her.

She opened the door to her sanctuary, and led Vera inside, releasing Vera to allow her to look around, as she stood by her bed, hands clasped in front of her. Vera was surprised by the room that surrounded her, it lacked the sterility of the downstairs. Despite the whiteness of the room, her bedroom was plush and warm.
Sheepskin rugs lined the floors, dimly lit lamps on each bedside table illuminated the room in a soft glow. Joan preferred silk sheets, Vera felt under her fingertips and enjoyed the comfort and warmth of faux fur throws.

Vera looked at Joan then, seeing how uncomfortable she was in front of Vera in her bedroom. It dawned on Vera, Joan had never let anyone into her private space before and this very act alone was a great leap of trust and faith on Joan’s part. Vera felt humbled by the gesture. She patted the bed next to her, signaling Joan to sit.

Joan’s legs did not dangle off the side of the bed like Vera’s, her feet were planted squarely on the floor.

Vera noticed how Joan wrung her hands in her lap, and she placed her much smaller hands on Joan’s, stilling them. Joan looked at Vera, her obsidian eyes widening at the simplest of touch.

“I love your bedroom.” Vera said, squeezing the older woman’s hand. “Thank you for sharing it with me.” Vera leaned over, finding Joan’s mouth with her own and placing a gentle kiss on Joan’s lips. A sigh escaped Joan’s mouth, anxiety leaving her body.

Vera stood, pulling her dress off, exposing the black lace of her undergarments. She kneeled down, her knees sinking into the softness of the rug, between Joan’s legs.

Submissive and willing.

Joan looked down at the woman below her, the simplest of gestures speaking volumes. Joan slowly unbuttoned her shirt, her breathing slow and steady as she tried to calm her desire to pick up the small woman and throw her on her bed. Joan reminded herself that the best rewards were for those who are patient.

Joan saw something special in Vera, that she couldn’t place it. She had other arrangements with woman in the past, ones that would be considered more physically attractive, more experienced, more suitable, but none of them gave her what Vera had. Her mouse had a certain je nes sais quoi that tantalized Joan, a mystery and puzzle that had to be unlocked.

Joan still hadn’t found the key yet. She placed a finger under Vera’s chin, forcing her submissive to make eye contact with her. Joan brushed Vera’s hair gently behind her ear.

“Vera, here you are allowed to call me Joan, is that understood?” Joan held a softness to her voice
that Vera had never heard before, one that caused goosebumps to rise on her arms.

“Yes, Joan.” Vera said, her eyes smiling.

“Do you remember our safe word?” Joan asked, softly playing with the tendrils in Vera’s hair.

“Yes.” Vera replied, shifting her weight from one knee to the other.

“I need to hear you say it, it is very important to me.” Consent and open dialogue was important to Joan and cleared up any potential grey areas, she didn’t want to make the same mistake as last time.

“Crown.” Vera said, causing Joan to smile.

“That’s my good little pet. And now we can play.”

Vera reached up, placing her hands on Joan’s knees, awaiting instruction.

“Take off my pants.” Joan instructed.

Vera wove her hands along Joan’s thighs, snaking up to the button and unclasping it. Joan stood, allowing Vera to slide off Joan’s trousers, they fell to the floor with a swoosh. Vera was surprised to find that Joan was not wearing any underwear, and even more elated to find that Joan preferred a brazilian. She felt Joan’s hand weave along the back of her scalp, pulling Vera into her sex.

Vera started lightly, matching her lips to Joan’s and working her tongue in light circles along Joan. Joan let out a quiet moan, tilting her head back and closing her eyes. She leaned back against the bed as Vera dove deeper, running her tongue along Joan’s folds. After a few moments, Vera slipped her tongue into Joan, eliciting a sharp inhale as the woman found herself no longer standing, but on the bed.

Joan was taken aback by Vera’s ability and assertiveness, but found it all the more arousing. Vera slid both hands on to Joan’s thighs for purchase, and wrapped her lips around Joan’s clit, flicking her tongue rhythmically. Joan wrapped her second hand around Vera’s head, urging her onward,
feeling herself reaching the point of ecstasy. Vera felt Joan begin to writhe, and continued the same motion, quickening the tempo little by little, feeling Joan build up beneath her lips.

Joan let out a moan, primitive and deep that almost startled Vera.

*There is an unhinged woman underneath the alabaster.* Vera bemused, wanting to see how wild she could make Joan become.

Vera pushed Joan’s legs further apart, taking the moment to wet her fingers with her own mouth and slid them into Joan’s wanting cunt. Joan’s back arched in response as Vera began to finger fuck her, while her mouth claimed ownership of Joan’s clit.

Joan grabbed Vera’s shoulder, kneading her nails into Vera’s soft flesh.

“Vera…” Joan moaned, her brow sweaty, strands of her hair sticking.

Vera applied suction to Joan’ clit, rolling it between her tongue and teeth.

Joan cried out wildly, gripping fistfuls of the bedsheets.

Vera could feel that Joan was close, her pussy contracting against her fingers. Vera felt that Joan was ready for her little death. As she continued, Vera dug her fingernails with her free hand into Joan’s thighs, the mixture of pain and pleasure was what was needed to push the woman over the edge.

Joan’s body began to shake uncontrollably, her fingernails digging further into Vera’s shoulder. As the waves continued to crash, she felt a calm wash over her.

Vera slowly removed her fingers from Joan, wiping her fluids off on the inside of Joan’s thigh, a reminiscent gesture of their first night together. She kissed the inside of Joan’s thigh where she left angry red nails marks, causing a slight twitch from Joan.

Vera stood up, lying next to Joan, brushing the sticky sweated hair from Joan’s face. Her eyes were still closed, a look of serenity washed over her. There was no slight furrow in her brow, no
sense of disapproval. In its place, Vera saw only satisfaction. She smiled and kissed Joan softly on the temple.

Joan slowly opened her eyes and turned her head to face Vera.

*It’s always the lambs that lead the wolf to slaughter.*

Joan had recovered, her limbs cooperating, and she found herself pinning Vera against the bed. It was remarkable how frail Vera was underneath her, each bone seemed as if it was hollow and easily breakable. Joan felt her chest heave in anticipation. There was a mixture of fear and seduction behind Vera’s blues that lit a fire within Joan, one that was satisfied once she found her hand against Vera’s throat.

Joan leaned forward catching Vera’s lips with her’s, evoking a moan out of the smaller woman. Joan pulled back, releasing her hand and flipping Vera onto her stomach.

*She is made of hollow bones.* Joan thought surprising herself at how easy this was. She took off Vera’s bra and ripped off the underwear Vera was wearing, a panicked gasp escaping the younger woman’s lips. Joan pulled Vera’s waist up roughly, forcing her onto all fours. She took a moment to take in the sight in front of her. Vera was breathing heavily, her skin tinged pink from Joan’s handling. Vera looked back at Joan.

Joan smacked her on her ass, causing Vera to yelp.

“I didn’t say you could look at me.” Joan snarled, forcing Vera’s head forward. She ran her hand softly against Vera’s spine, causing goosebumps on the younger woman.

“I’m sorry Joan.” Vera whimpered, her inner thigh muscles tightening, awaiting her next punishment.

Vera felt Joan move off the bed, her focus and attention on the window in front of her and the glittering lights of the town below them. It was like a jewelry box, all the lights lit up, waiting for you to reach in and put on your earrings.

Vera heard Joan open a drawer, and then closed it. She wanted to look, wanted to see what was going to happen to her, but she forced herself to continue forward. She would be good, this time.
Joan held the cat ‘o’ nine tails in her hand, feeling the weight of the leather handle in her hands. She pulled on the leather straps, feeling their slight elasticity, frowning slightly that she wouldn’t be using the one with the knots. *Perhaps in later days.*

Joan ran the tail along Vera’s spine.

“Do you know what this is, Vera?” Joan asked, dangling it just above to create another sensation, one that seemed to tickle Vera.

Vera gulped. “No.”

“Have you ever been whipped?” Joan asked.

“No, but I’ve seen it.”

Joan cocked an eyebrow, intrigued. “Where did you see it?”

“This one time...I was invited to the local BDSM club, they were putting on a show…” Vera closed her eyes, remembering her first time that lit the flame in her stomach. The way the girl on stage begged and pleaded with her master, whimpering in pain and pleasure, awoken something deep and hidden in Vera.

“Would you be interested in trying it out tonight, Vera?” Joan asked, her voice commanding, but the question serious.

Vera looked back at Joan, disobeying her orders. “If that pleases you, Joan.” She responded, a twinkle in her eye.

Joan’s breath was caught in her throat as the little mouse played her, knowing full well what her disobedience would bring out. Vera responded instinctively, snapping her wrist to bring the strips of dark leather flashing against Vera’s pale flesh. Her teeth tightened together as she growled a reply, “I didn’t say you could look at me.”

Vera gasped, and before she could utter a reply, Joan had a hand against the top of her back,
pressing her head against the silken pillows. Vera bit down on one when the second strike quickly followed, a tingling sensation spreading outward from her buttocks up her spine and settling at the base of her neck, where Joan’s fingertips rested lightly. Joan’s voice came from behind her, softer, “How are you liking it so far, Vera?”

Vera released her hold on the pillow to answer, “Very much, Joan.” Joan smiled, snaking her fingers around Vera’s neck and under her chin, drawing the smaller woman’s face up off the pillow and capturing her lips in a kiss potent with lust.

“How are you liking it so far, Vera?” Joan’s voice came from behind her, softer, “How are you liking it so far, Vera?”

“Good.” She concluded, letting Vera’s head fall back to the pillow, eyes still closed, as she let the leather fall on Vera’s bare skin, increasing the swiftness of the cat’s bites as she drew her fingertips slowly up Vera’s back, around her waist, and to her waiting folds.

Joan was surprised how aroused she found Vera to be, and timed a landing of the flogger to match with the exact moment that her moistened fingertip found Vera’s clitoris. She started slowly, in gentle circles, twirling the leather strips on Vera’s now pink flesh and a muffled moan came from her, behind pillowcase and teeth.

After a moment, and Vera’s second vocalization, Joan’s finger thrust into Vera, just as the leather fell again, and a gasp muddled by a moan, let Joan know that her strike had found its mark. She continued vigorously, fingers rhythmically timed to the wildness of the flogger. Vera was overcome by the mixture of pleasure coupled with the well-timed stings of the toy, the waves of sensation washing over and through her as she was astonished by the sounds coming out of her mouth. Sounds that soon fell away as she forgot the world around her, leaving only her and Joan.

A loud and demanding cry left Vera’s mouth as she shuddered under Joan, allowing herself to fully release, an intense orgasm washing over. She suspended out of her body momentarily, looking at herself from above, before slamming back into her body, eyes wide, forehead slick with sweat and panting.

She rolled onto her back, the sensation from the flogging and the silkiness of the sheets created an itching sensation. She moved her torso like a cat trying to get to an itch it couldn’t reach, before she settled in, feeling the warmth from the welts spread throughout her body. She was satisfied.

Her eyes closed.
Vera entered her house, her feet softly creaking against the floorboards. It was past midnight, and she cursed herself inwardly for making the hospice nurse stay as late as she did.

The woman was asleep on the couch, and she stirred awake.

“Hi, sorry.” Vera said.

“It’s okay.” The woman responded, sitting up and stretching. Her long red hair fell in beautiful curls down her back, and her eyes were heavy with sleep. “I could use the overtime.”

Vera smiled. “Thank you again, how’s mum?”

“Finally asleep.” The woman responded, there was a sense that Rita had been difficult. “She’s in so much pain, I wish there was something we could do.”

Both the women shared an understanding look. “Me too.” Was all that Vera could say before the woman exited the house into the night.

With her shoes in hand, Vera crept towards her mother’s room, seeing her asleep. She sat down in the chair beside her.

“Hey, I had a good day at work today.” Vera said, leaning against the chair, stretching out. Her mother slept in silence, slow snores escaping her. “I think Joan’s starting to trust me.”

Vera crossed her legs, imagining a different mother, one who would support and care for her.
“Is that so, Vera? Who is Joan, again sweetie?” Her mother would say, sitting up in bed, smiling at her daughter.

“Joan? Remember, she brought us tea? The Governor. She let’s me call her that.” Vera whispered, a smile on her lips as she bit down on her bottom lip. If only you knew why she let me call her that. Vera thought.

“She’s given me a very important job.” Vera said aloud, and before she could continue, her real mother’s thoughts came into her mind.

“You’ll fail. Like you always do.”

Vera stood, leaving her sleeping mother behind, and walked up the stairs.

Vera spent another night contemplating her bedside table, the cracks in the old wood were the last thing she remembered before her alarm woke her far too soon.

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Vera had been at Wentworth for a long time, longer than most. She had seen her share of Governors, some more cruel than others, but none of them had the mission to eradicate all drugs within the walls.

There was a small, but vocal part of Vera that believed Ferguson’s mission, crusade, to remove all drugs to be a naive one. There was another part of Vera, the quiet part that she rather liked, that thought a drug free correctional facility was an interesting idea--one that she’d like to witness and be a part of.

And yet, Vera felt a pang of guilt in her stomach. Franky may have been the puppeteer behind the drugs drop in the garden shed, but she didn’t believe that she deserved to be punished. Not the way that Joan wanted Vera to punish her, to “find” a way. Vera wasn’t dumb, she knew what that implied.

She wasn’t going to do that. Not when Franky cared about her. Genuinely cared about how her mother was doing.
I am sorry about your mum, Miss Bennett.

It wasn’t a lie. Vera knew that.

She walked down the hallway towards the rec room, thinking about Franky’s warning about Fletcher. She had noticed a change in behavior in him as well, he seemed more aggressive at work—there was the incident with Conway when he struck her with the broom. He was temperamental and angry and seemed as if he was drinking again.

But would he be selling drugs?

She shook her head, it seemed unlikely, however, the evidence seemed to point in his direction. He knew where the drugs were in Boomer’s cell, he had been spending a lot of time talking to the Walford guard while supervising the gardening project. He was … different.

Vera entered the recreation room, looking around, seeing that no one was there. Her heart started to quicken in pace as she opened up Fletcher’s locker, digging through the contents. She went straight for the top drawer that she had seen him pulling something quickly from earlier. Towards the back she found a tupperware container with pre packed ziplock bags filled with a white substance. She was sure the pounding of her heart would give her away now.

What is this?

She put it back into the locker, shutting the door. She needed to talk to Joan, needed to tell her what she found in his locker. Vera knew Joan wouldn’t be happy, this wasn’t what the Governor had asked for, but Vera felt like it was the proper course of action.

She didn’t want to see someone innocent take the fall.

---

The drumbeat of Vera’s heart had not slowed one bit as she rounded the hallways, careening into Joan’s office. Vera knew that Joan would be displeased with the direction Vera was taking the investigation. She didn’t want to disappoint Joan, but she couldn’t, in good conscience, do what Joan was asking her to do. She rubbed her palms against the fabric of her skirt, wiping away excess moisture. She entered the office immediately after seeing that Joan was alone, and shut the door
behind her with a snap.

Joan blinked slowly, mentally pulling focus from the bid for repairs to the security camera in cell block H, and only mildly annoyed by Vera’s evidently necessary theatrics. She attempted to tone down the strain in the smile that crossed her face.

“Yes, Vera?”

Vera felt as if her heart was going to beat out of her chest. “I’ve called in the SESG to conduct a formal search of all prison officers for contraband—”

The words ran out of Vera’s mouth in a jumbled mess and she cursed herself for her inability to speak in front of Joan. Her eyes faltered as soon as she saw the look of disapproval on Joan’s face. Vera grasped her arms behind her back, squeezing them together, hard.

No. A flicker of flame sprung up within Joan. She tamped it down to keep from burning them both. “A search of all the officers? I asked you to get to the bottom of the garden shed drop box—”

“That’s what I’m doing—”

“And pinning Franky Doyle for it.--”

“I think there’s another line in the investigation--”

“Not to conduct an investigation on colleagues.”

“I do understand that.” Vera dug her nails into the palm of her hand.

“A security search on the officers reflects very poorly on my staff and especially me.”

“It is not my intention to embarrass you Governor.”

Do you understand? Joan thought, fighting every urge to stand from her seat and chastise Vera.
As soon as words began to leave Joan’s mouth, she realized their tone and ferocity.

“Well than explain to me why you’ve gone and completely ignored my orders.”

Vera felt flustered and tired of Joan’s inability to look at the situation from another perspective. “I’m doing exactly what you ordered.”

Vera’s rise in tone and volume, ignited a different kind of flame within Joan.

*My mouse has teeth.*

Any response was caught in Joan’s throat, loosing eye contact with Vera for a moment, fighting a blush from forming on her cheeks.

Vera looked down, and then back up at Joan, finding her feet beneath her. “I have reason to suspect Mr. Fletcher of smuggling in the contraband from Walford.”

*Now that...* Joan leaned back against the leather of her office chair, *That is an interesting proposition.* Joan thought on the implications of Vera’s idea, relishing the scene of Mr. Fletcher being taken from one prison to another in her mind’s eye. She felt a glimmer of hope, like catching a glimpse of a Fairywren between the branches of a Bay Fig, and felt her heart grab hold of the feeling, despite her protest.

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Joan sat in her office, a single lamp casting dramatic shadows across the room. Her fingernails drummed rhythmically on her desk.

Her eyes couldn’t focus on the report in front of her. Her glimpse of a rare wren had turned out to be a common finch after all. Vera would have to burn to ash before she could rise and become what Joan knew she could be. A long sigh escaped her lips. She tried to control her breathing, but failed as waves of disappointment came crashing in.

Vera had failed.
Joan slowly inhaled, her fingertips stilled and she found herself pushing an invisible strand of hair in to place. Her nostrils flared and she lined up her pencils, perpendicular to the edge of the desk.

This was the fourth time Joan had done so.

She looked over the report again, hoping that her eyes had deceived her. It was plain as day. Mr. Fletcher had not brought in the contraband.

Joan leaned back in her chair, folding her arms across her chest, and her nails dug into the palms of her hands.

She looked at the clock, watched as it turned to 8:32, and then 8:33. Each tick and tock slowing down until she finally found her hand on the phone receiver dialing Vera’s number.

“It’s Governor Ferguson”

“Governor, yes?” Vera sounded shaken, it must be a difficult night with her mother. Joan’s jaw tightened, knowing what must come next.

“The lab results came back on the suspicious powder found in Mr. Fletcher’s locker.” Joan expected an exuberant response, and her heart sunk to the seat of her chair as she waited, Vera clearly was rattled by Rita tonight.

“Right.” Vera’s voice was shaky, barely keeping up. Joan’s opponent was already on her heels.

“It’s a common amino acid supplement. Biologically dubious, but perfectly legal.” Joan waited again as Vera processed this information, and heard a voice clearly in her head that had been ringing for the past half hour, You are hesitating, strike!

“I am extremely disappointed in you, Vera.” The emphasis struck through the phone receiver with such force that Joan could feel Vera’s hands shaking on the other end of the connection.
She needs this, needs to feel failure to appreciate her triumph. Joan went for the finishing strike, “You have really let me down.”

“I’m - Sorry.” Vera’s voice quivered, and Joan knew that she was cursing the words as soon as they left her mouth, aware that they were fully inadequate to remedy the trouble that she had caused.

Joan’s heart knotted as she felt the torment she was putting her young protege through. She took a ragged breath before continuing, “Well, I’m not the only one you should be apologizing to. We’ll speak tomorrow.” Before her voice could catch in her throat, Joan hung up the phone, pausing for a moment, and then stood and lifted her coat from the rack.

--

The scalding hot water burned her skin, but Joan stood in the shower, vigorously scrubbing. She caught a glimpse of her reflection in the glass of the stall, and scrubbed harder.

People were disappointing. Vera had disappointed her, as expected, but even more so, Joan had disappointed herself. This inevitable failure was far too difficult and had tormented her far too much.

Vera was a distraction, Joan needed to remember why she was at Wentworth.

*For the greater good. For Jianna.*

She stepped out of the shower, wringing her hair and wrapping herself in her bathrobe.

The doorbell rang faintly beyond the steam of the shower.

Joan opened the door of her bathroom, a dense wave of steam rolling along the floor, hot and thick with humidity.

It rang again, this time with more urgency.
She walked down the stairs and before she could answer the door, a rapid knock.

Joan answered the door to find Vera forcing herself inside with a strength that belied her frail form.

“Vera…” Joan growled, but was cut off.

“I’m sorry.” Vera said, reaching out and touching Joan’s hand gently. “For failing you.”

Joan observed the woman standing in front of her, dark circles set deep under her eyes, her hair a mess.

**Disappointing.**

“There is nothing to be sorry about, Vera.” Joan said, walking past her, grabbing a glass and filling it with wine. “You simply lack the ability to follow through.” Joan took a long and slow drink from her glass before continuing, letting the words permeate the younger woman, “A failure.”

Vera reeled back, silently, her eyes scanning the floor. Joan could see the years of abuse flutter on the woman’s delicate features. Joan bit her inner cheek, advancing.

“I don’t know why I thought you could handle the task, I must have had a lapse in judgement.”

Vera looked up at Joan, tears threatening to spill from her eyes. Joan wanted to look away, but she continued the path she had laid.

“If anything, I am disappointed in myself, Vera.” Joan sighed, taking another sip from her glass, placing a hand on Vera’s shoulder, “For letting myself think you were different.”

Vera shrugged Joan off of her wildly, her arm making contact with Joan’s glass and sending it flying in the air. It fell to the ground, shattering into pieces, the deep red of the wine seeping out like a fallen victim. Joan rushed over and grabbed paper towels, sopping up the mess. Vera was picking up the broken pieces of the wine glass when one of them nicked her, and she stood
suddenly, blood falling from her fingertip.

Joan looked up at Vera who was sucking on her forefinger and felt guilt hollow her ribcage, leaving only space between the bone.

“I’m sorry about the glass.” Vera mumbled, fingertip in mouth. “Sorry for not being who you want.” A tear mingled with the spot of blood on the floor.

*But you are who I want, Vera.*
Ave Maria

Chapter Summary

She buried herself into the crook of Vera’s neck and for the first time in her life she did not know how to control the situation. She felt weak. Every instinct in her body wanted to push away, but instead she clung on. Desperately. Pathetically.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for reading and commenting. <3

Joan watched as events unfolded with delight, the ways that the prisoners orchestrated the dining room takeover in order to get their revenge on Fletcher. She despised Fletcher and his hatred towards women. She hated that he had once touched her Vera. She was almost...giddy to see him humiliated by the prisoners.

What Joan didn’t expect was that Vera would reach the dining hall before Fletcher. Standing abruptly at her desk, her pounding pulse shook her vision like a great drumbeat. She reached for the radio on her desk, and had it at her mouth, thumb poised above the call button, but she hesitated. *How do I explain watching while prisoners mastermind a plan before my eyes? I am either in control, or I am not.* A deep ache formed in Joan’s chest as she set down her radio and watched Vera continue to the back of the kitchen.

Vera had shown her weakness and the prisoners had taken advantage of it. Joan watched with shame and disgust as Vera was mocked out of the dining commons, grasping her wrist, covered in some unknown substance.

Joan’s heart beat dully in her chest and her breathing slowed. She rearranged the pencils on her desk and cleared the last hour of CCTV activity from her computer before leaving her office and walking to medical.

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Vera sat in medical, the smell of vinegar stinging her nostrils.
The mocking of the prisoners looped in repeat like a scratched record. She sat numbly as the words of torment throughout all her years came crashing into her like a tsunami. *Stinky pants. Failure. Worthless. Loner.*

A single tear fell from her eyes, and before anyone saw it, she quickly wiped it away. Every movement of her wrist sent sharp pain throughout her body. Joan would be disappointed in her. Done with her. She was surprised Joan had stayed around as long as she had.

“Vera!” As if summoned by her thoughts, Joan loomed above her, jasmine and ylang ylang snapping her from her reverie.

Joan looked down at Vera, her crumpled form was pitiful, but Joan was surprised to find that she actually felt pity for Vera. Her pity was washed away by disgust as soon as a stinging smell met her nostrils, “What’s that smell?”

“It’s vinegar.” The words that left Vera’s lips were barely a whisper, and she could feel the hot stare of Joan burning into her brow, but couldn’t find the strength to lift her chin to meet it.

“Oh, Vera.” Pity took over once again, and Joan sat down next to her broken protege. “Vera, Vera, Vera.”

“The prisoners…” Vera needed to explain, but knew deep in her chest that there was no explanation. Joan cut her off before she could even try.

“There is no point looking to the prisoners for blame. What do you expect from them? They smell weakness, of course they’re going to attack. It’s as instinctive as breathing.” As the words left Joan’s mouth of their own accord, she realized that her eyes had been fixated on Vera’s breasts, which were tantalizingly visible through the translucency of her soaked and oiled work blouse. Vera was so weak and vulnerable, Joan could feel her impulses driving her to dominate the humiliated woman, to buckle smooth leather around Vera’s slender neck, to own her completely.

Joan turned her head before she lost what little control remained. After a momentary pause, she remembered what needed to be done.
“I think it might be best if you took some time off. You’re too distracted. Your mother’s illness, it’s taking away your focus. Ms. Miles can resume your responsibilities. I guess I was wrong about you.” Joan spoke in a rush, feeling that if she didn’t make the attack swift, she would never land the point at all. She felt a flush in her cheeks as she fought the impulse to grab ahold of Vera, to hold her tight and let her know that everything would be alright. Now was not the time for comfort, she had to continue. “You’re just not up to it are you? Go home Vera. Take care of your mother.”

Her stress of the last sentence was provocative, intentional, and judging by the tortured nod that followed, understood.

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She entered into her house, her feet heavy underneath her. She dropped her shoes at the doorway, the smell of vinegar still weighed in her nostrils. She saw the hospice nurse out.

“Thank you.” She said to the woman, before shutting the door behind her. She closed her eyes, feeling the slight dull of the day pound at her temples. She walked slowly to the kitchen, opening the fridge and grabbing the morphine.

Vera knew what to do. For the first time in her life, she felt completely sure of her actions. The next step was so very clear to her.

She found herself standing above her mother asleep. Vera expected resistance from herself at this moment, but instead, with steady hands she loaded the first two syringes into Rita’s IV with ease. She hesitated as her mother’s eyes fluttered open, but she knew this is what her mother would want. This is what they both deserved.

Peace.

As the third syringe entered the IV, her mother’s breathing slowed considerably until she was no longer breathing. Vera threw the syringes in the trashcan, a resounding thud reverberating throughout the room.

Vera took the seat next to her mother, surprised at how calm she felt. Surprised at how easy it was to end her mother’s suffering, and surprised at how peacefully death arrived. Rita’s features were considerably softer after life had left her, almost as if her soul was straining against its confines. It seemed as if she was able for the first time to relax her body, to let go of the pain and the hatred.
Vera had given this to her mother, her final gift, the gift of peace.

She reached over, checking Rita’s pulse. Nothing. The panicked rhythm she had learned to expect when monitoring her mother was gone, her wrist still warm, but heavy and loose, yearning to join the ground below them.

Despite the peace that had settled, Vera could still hear the rasping chants all around her.

_Vinegar Tits. Stinky Pants. Vinegar Tits. Stinky Pants Vera._

Vera sat back in her chair, rubbing her temples, her pulse quickening. She stood, rubbing her hands against her skirt, trying to wipe away the sweat. Vera unbuttoned her shirt, letting it fall to the ground, and unzipped her skirt, leaving a trail of discarded clothes behind her. She found herself naked in staring at her reflection in the bathroom, the bright florescents stinging her eyes.

She ran a bath. The roar of the water sounded distant in her head. She felt distant, within, but not present, as if she was viewing her experience from afar. _Was this happening?_

She slowly lowered herself in the scalding hot water, letting the burn envelope her body. She inhaled sharply, forcing herself all the way in. Her skin reddened in response, and she leaned her head back, letting the tears fall freely from her eyes.

Her mother was dead.

And Vera was the one who killed her.

The sobs wracked her body, and she howled like a wounded animal. She sunk deeper into the water until her head was beneath the surface, sobbing until she was choking on the water, forcing herself to sit up again. She rubbed her face and let her hair down, it fell in a wet clump, messy and smelly against her face.

She reached for the soap through blurry eyes and scrubbed her body, leaving angry red marks against her skin. She suddenly stopped, suds thick, the house was silent, so silent she could hear the bubbles pop as the suds began to fade.
There was no screaming for her, no one telling her how worthless she was, nothing, but silence. Vera sighed loudly, she was free from her mother. Free from her torment.

Free.

The water was cold by the time Vera stepped out. She wrapped herself in a towel, drying her hair and found herself lying naked in her bed, blankets pulled tightly around her.

It was the first night in a long time she slept soundly.

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Vera awoke at 4:30, the time her mother was usually crying out in pain. Instead, Vera heard nothing. She stood from her bed, pulling on pajamas. Her feet entered her slippers, soft and cozy. She looked out towards the street, the street lights cascading dramatic shadows into her room. She stepped outside her room, the hallway seemed brighter, wider. She walked down the stairs, her hands feeling the smoothness of the railing. Vera turned the corner, seeing the house phone, she reached out and called hospice.

They came and took her mother’s body. It was as if Vera was in a scene of a movie, a montage of death playing in front of her. Paperwork was signed, and equipment was moved. Vera found herself standing in an empty room.

She walked over to the couch in the living room, cell phone in hand, she laid down on the couch and called Joan.

“Vera.” There was the familiar tenderness in the woman’s voice that Vera had missed dearly.

“My mother…” her voice trailed as she played with the fraying edge of a couch she had been sitting on her whole life.

She heard the older woman’s breath through the phone.
“She’s dead, Joan.”

“I’m coming over.” Joan hung up the phone and Vera found herself in the unnerving silence of her mother’s house. The clock that had hung since her mother had moved into the house in the early 80s ticked loudly, each second passing by slower than the next. Her eyes scanned the wall in front of her, old oil paintings of pastoral scenes, knick knacks of porcelain figurines lined the shelves. She hated it all.

Vera stood suddenly, rushing into the kitchen to grab the trash can. She looked at the shelves in front of her and in one large sweep knocked the figurines into the can. She cleared out the shelves until there was no space left in the bin, before setting it down and pulling off the paintings from the wall, laying them on top. Finally, she looked at the clock and grabbed it. It was heavier than expected and was stuck to the wall. With one forceful heave she found the clock crashing to the ground, rolling next to the trashcan. She picked them all up and opened the door, finding a startled Joan on her porch.

“Joan.” Vera greeted the woman, pushing past her and walking barefoot towards the trashbins, emptying the bin.

She hurried back inside, putting the bin back in the kitchen and washing her hands. Joan shut the door behind her, quietly, looking at the empty wall where Rita’s knick knacks once called home. Joan sat down her purse and walked towards Vera in the kitchen, moving carefully, as one would if walking around a dark warehouse piled high with kegs of gunpowder.

Vera dried off her hands on a towel and turned around, facing Joan, who reached out and pulled Vera into her arms, holding her tightly against her chest. She inhaled the sweet aroma of Vera’s shampoo and kissed her gently on the top of her head. Vera did not resist. She wrapped her arms tightly around the taller woman, burying her head in Joan’s chest.

“I don’t have any words that will make a difference right now.” Joan started, remembering the day her father passed and the emptiness she felt. Joan gently rubbed the small of Vera’s back, “But, I can say with certainty she will always be there guiding you when you need it the most.”

Vera pulled away slightly and looked up at Joan, “I never want to see my mother again, Joan.”

“Then let’s help her move out, Vera.” Joan grabbed a trash bag, opening it up and giving it to Vera. She grabbed one for herself, filling it with air with a loud crack.
The two walked back into the living room, emptying shelves of lace doilies, old national geographic magazines, and ceramic figurines. The two went from room to room until they ran out of trashbags. Vera sighed, looking at the empty walls and empty shelves, realizing how little of herself was within the house.

“There is nothing of me here.” Vera mused, moving the trash bags into the garage.

“It will take time to make it your home.” Joan found the empty space comforting, and the act of removing the junk quite cathartic. She hoped the same applied for Vera as well.

“I don’t want to live here anymore. After the funeral, I’m selling it.”

Joan turned to Vera, a trash bag in each hand, and a look of incredulity on her face. “Vera, don’t blame the house for what happened within it. Give it a chance, then decide if you want to sell.” Tears welled up in Vera’s eyes, memories flooding back with lucid force.

“You’re probably right.” Vera said, throwing the bags into a pile in the garage. “A lot has happened.”

The two spent the rest of the morning moving Rita’s things into the garage, as the last bag was thrown in, Vera shut the garage door, dusting off her hands on her pants.

They walked back into the house, which felt barren without the clutter adorning the shelves and walls. There were parts of the walls where pictures once hung, darker in color than the wall surrounding it, a haunting ghost of what was before.

Vera collapsed on the couch, exhausted.

“Why did you come Joan?” Vera asked, playing with the frayed hem of the couch again.

“What do you mean?” Joan asked coyly, leaning against the couch, peering down at the exhausted woman before her.

“You confuse me.”
There was silence, and Joan slowly inhaled, carefully planning her next move.

“Told you once before that I have never done this before,” Lies. “It is all very confusing for me…” She carefully regarded the woman who was staring up at her, eyes inquisitive.

“I wish you wouldn’t lie to me.” Vera said, pushing herself up in a sitting position, arms crossed.

Joan gripped the edge of the couch, “I am not lying to you--”

Vera cut her off, “Find it hard to believe, you, Joan Ferguson, Queen of control, haven’t done this before.” Vera motioned between them. Vera got on her knees then, so that they were face to face, “Don’t mind if this is your thing, if you’ve done this before with every last one of your Deputies to ensure we have fully submitted to our great Governor. Stop lying to me. Just stop, we are past that. My mother’s dead Joan. I’ve done what you asked.”

Vera found herself wrapping her arms around Joan’s shoulders, standing as Joan stood, Vera sank delicately into the couch, even with the added height she was still shorter than Joan. Like a magnet Joan found herself wrapping her arms around the smaller woman, pulling her close.

Joan felt something unusual spring within her, a feeling she had never felt before. She exhaled, trying to gain control of whatever was wrapping itself around her, clawing and tearing at her heart. She buried herself into the crook of Vera’s neck and for the first time in her life she did not know how to control the situation. She felt weak. Every instinct in her body wanted to push away, but instead she clung on. Desperately. Pathetically.

Joan had gotten what she wanted, she had crafted the woman that stood before her, and yet she was terrified. What had she done? Who had she created?

Vera pulled away from Joan then, stepping off the couch and entering the kitchen, making herself tea. She looked back at Joan and asked if she’d like some, and Joan complied, watching in a daze the woman in front of her.

What have I done?
“Do you not want me here?” Joan asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Vera laughed, “You know I always want you.”

Joan grasped the counter, feeling the snake begin to wrap itself around her again, tearing a hole inside her, exposing her, leading her to slaughter. She never wanted to believe her father, but she found herself belly up, waiting patiently for the final blow.

“I have done this before.” Joan said, taking the cup of tea from Vera. “With other officers in the past.” Joan cursed herself for telling the truth, but the cold distance Vera was putting between them was making Joan feel unsteady.

She wanted to say more, tell Vera that they were different, meaningless. When her human urges presented themselves in an attractive younger officer who was dying to please. A quick fuck. They didn’t belong to her like Vera belonged to Joan. They didn’t occupy her mind late at night. They didn’t make her feel.

They weren’t Vera.

*Who have I created?*

She waited for an acknowledgment from Vera, but instead received a hum from the woman before she sipped on her tea. Vera tucked her feet underneath her as she settled back down on the couch, beckoning Joan to join her. “Why did you come Joan?” Vera asked again, running a hand through her hair and letting out her ponytail, letting her unruly locks free.

“To protect you.” Joan said, putting her cup down on the coffee table. She had only said those words to one other person in the past. Jianna. Her Jianna. Her greatest failure.

Joan felt disgust begin to bubble up in her stomach, disgust in herself, disgust at how pathetic she was being. *To protect you?* Joan expected Vera to reach over, to kiss her, to show some sort of affection, but this new Vera kept her distance. Cold. Calculating.

Joan knew she was going to have to break the distance between them. She reached over, cupping Vera’s face with the palm of her hand and sighed with relief as the younger woman leaned into her touch. “Vera, I know what you are feeling. I had to do the same thing for my father.”
Vera searched Joan’s eyes and only found the truth behind her words. She grasped tightly onto Joan’s hand, kissing the inside of Joan’s palm.

“I was conflicted when I had to do it, but he was in so much pain, dying of cancer. There was no other way. Like your mother he was cruel and strict. There was one thing I didn’t expect to feel when he passed--”

“Power.” Vera said, finishing, Joan’s sentence. “I’ve never felt more powerful in my life.”

*Shame. I felt shame.*
Gloria

Chapter Summary

The metamorphosis of Vera & the unraveling of Joan.

Chapter Notes

Hope you all enjoy, and thank you for being patient with us. Our 5 year old niece is living with us and we are in a whirlwind of a transition! I hope you all comment on this <3

Vera’s heels snapped against the hardwood floors of her hallway, reverberating louder than she remembered as she passed dusty silhouettes of the clutter that once surrounded her morning routine. She pivoted on the ball of her right foot, turning to the austere face that greeted her in the mirror that remained as the last item still on the wall. She ran her hands against the sides of her hair, wrapping stray wisps back into place until every strand was exactly where it ought to be. Under complete control.

She noticed that the mirror seemed as if it was lower on the wall today, or tilting downward, as her head was closer to the top of it than she had ever remembered. She ran her fingertips along the side of it, but found no catch or space, the mirror was laying flat against the wall, as it always had. A half smile formed on Vera’s lips as she turned and she walked out the door, into the brisk morning air toward Wentworth.

As she rounded the corner, headed toward Joan’s office, Vera saw Boomer start to smirk at the sight of her, but reconsidered, and shuffled backward, shrinking herself against the wall, the other prisoners in the hallway followed suit. This development amazed Vera, and she thought to herself how foolish it was that she had waited so long to make these changes, to prowl this concrete jungle, rather than scurry as she so often had in these hallways. She turned another corner and sauntered with confidence into Joan’s office.

Joan swiveled about in her chair to greet her deputy, pulling the day’s schedule from its file for their morning brief. The sight that greeted her was an entirely different deputy, hair pulled tightly into a bun, back straight, and exuding control, Joan felt electricity in her center as she took in this new Vera, and she fought back a smile that threatened to break her composure.

She was strangely attracted to this change, but also bemused by the lack of imagination in Vera’s
choice of hairstyle. Amused, but not surprised. When Vera had only learned one archetype of power, it would be the only one she could emulate when attempting to express it.

“Vera, Welcome back.”

“Thank you Governor, I’ve spoken to the contractor and they’ll pick up the garden skip this morning.”

Joan was pleased with the way this new Vera jumped straight into her work. This behaviour must be rewarded. “Good. And good work with Maxine Conway, by the way.” Vera inflated ever so slightly from the reward.

“Thank you.”

Joan paused, as she looked over this new Vera, she noticed a flicker of doubt cross her face, clearly a brief remembrance of her actions at home. Joan knew this wriggling worm of guilt in Vera’s gut would need appeasement if Vera was to develop fully.

“You took the right course of action.” The words hung in the air, bouncing from wall to wall.

“Will that be all Governor?” Joan was once again pleased with Vera’s newfound drive and efficiency. She also found a worm of doubt in her own gut, aching for the Vera that first bound into her office.

Joan took a deep breath, calming her own emotional parasite.

“I need to see Smith.” She looked away from Vera, back down at the schedule in front of her, occupying her mind and eyes as best she could.

“Right away” Vera turned to leave immediately, but was stopped by Joan’s voice in her ear.

“Vera? Condolences.”
Vera made the slightest gesture of acknowledgement and turned to stride out the door.

*You didn’t come.*

---

Vera entered Joan’s office without knocking. She didn’t have time for pleasantries, not with Joan. Joan looked up at Vera, clearly annoyed.

“I found a pregnancy test in the garden area *And* it’s positive.”

Vera placed the test on the desk, watching with hidden delight as Joan squirmed.

Joan swallowed, “Do we know who it belongs to?” She couldn’t look at Vera, instead her eyes focused on the test, and then towards her computer, everywhere but Vera.

“No.” Vera replied, staring at Joan, demanding that their eyes meet.

Joan was surprised by her mouse’s demanding presence, the way that she controlled her office. A part of her was annoyed by Vera’s gesture, and yet another was proud. Proud that she paid attention, proud that she learned, proud that she was able to unnerve Joan just a little.

There was a gnawing under her ribcage where her shame lived. It crept throughout Joan’s body and made her feel nostalgic. She never thought Vera would use the game against Joan. Not her Vera. Not like this. A silent sigh escaped Joan’s lips.

Joan felt ashamed of herself, like she did that night clinging desperately to Vera, wanting the affection the younger woman withheld.

*Let me remind you who has the power here.* Vera had once told Joan in her office, at the time Joan thought it was an adorable assertion from her submissive, while true, she controlled the sexual limits of their interactions, Joan owned Vera. She enjoyed how Vera begged for her attention, needed and craved it. And yet now, Joan found the tables had turned.
Joan needed Vera on her knees begging and pleading. She longed for it. Craved it. It ached in her belly and she was kept up late at night trying to fuck her own desire away.

“I’ve organized for testing of all inmates to begin immediately. To maintain confidentiality, I’ll run it as a random drug test.” Vera’s tone was curt and to the point, her hands clasped behind her back.

Joan looked up at Vera then, meeting her eyes for a moment. “That’s good. Excellent initiative. We need to find the guilty parties, quickly and quietly.” Vera’s gaze was too much for Joan, too demanding. She felt small under it and she averted her eyes back down on to her desk. Joan bit her inner cheek.

Vera kept her gaze locked on Joan, “Yes, Governor.”

That simple phrase sent a chill down Joan’s spine, flashes of Vera’s flesh and stockings overflowed her memory banks. Whimpers and cries of ecstasy. Yes, Governor.

“Vera, just…” Joan started, but caught herself. Emotions make you weak. Stop. Joan wanted to say, stop whatever you’re doing, this new look of yours, this new persona of yours. Come back to me.

Joan couldn’t say what she wanted, so helplessly, she continued down the same path that Vera had laid.

“Let’s also keep the nature of these tests from the other officers, for now, particularly the male ones.”

Vera furrowed her brow, realizing the implications of what Joan was saying, “Of course, Governor, Only medical staff will know.”

Vera turned around to head out the door, but was stopped by Joan.

“Vera, remove that.” Joan gestured to the pregnancy test on her desk. Vera looked at the test and then quickly at Joan, realizing how little it took to make the Governor uncomfortable. Vera slowly picked up the test and walked out of the room, smiling.
Joan disinfected the spot where the test once laid. She stood up, throwing the wipe in the trashcan, shutting the door to her office. Her back rest against it for a moment, feeling the air in her office lighten as the thickness of tension left. Joan was no fool, she knew in Vera’s eyes Joan had made a mistake.

Joan closed her eyes, if only Vera knew that what she wanted was impossible for Joan. Joan locked the door to her office and walked towards her bathroom, turning the cold water on and splashing her face with it. She needed to gain control, to let go. She gripped the edge of the countertop, bowing her head before looking at her reflection in the mirror.

---

She longed to be touched by Vera. With every passing encounter, Joan Ferguson felt an ache deep within her stomach and it fell whenever Vera walked out of her office, confident, poised, and efficient. Joan sighed, the paperwork beneath her fingertips looked foreign to her and she found it difficult for her eyes to focus on the task at hand.

Joan was frightened of Vera, the way that she commanded the room and established her presence was a foreign vibration that resonated on an alternative frequency. It was dissonant. Jarring. Achingly attractive.

Joan placed her head in her hands.

*What have I done?*

The new woman before Joan was beautiful, impressive. Everything Joan knew Vera could be, but she was no longer Vera. No longer *her* mouse. She longed for the woman that she once knew, the one who whimpered and stuttered and needed Joan’s approval. Whose eyes were full of wonder and innocence, a softness that held Joan and made her long for a home she’d never had.

Vera’s eyes were darkened, hardened, acutely aware of the reality of her existence, and who had lost all wonder, and yet, in passing moments, Joan felt as if she witnessed a ripple of the Vera who lived beneath her calm surface.

Joan shut her file and called for her Deputy on the radio. She waited. She lined up her pencils once more. She sat up straight and pulled at the edge of her jacket. She watched a bird dance
along the fence and fly away. And then she heard the soft knock at the door.

“Come in.”

“You wanted to see me Governor?” Vera’s voice was commanding and filled Joan’s office. Joan found it hard to look up at her Deputy, but she forced herself to lock eyes with the smaller woman who seemed so large standing in the doorway.

“Shut the door and take a seat.”

Vera complied and sat down in front of Joan. Joan stood up and occupied the seat next to Vera, moving it so that she was facing the younger woman. “Vera…” Joan began, unsure what to say. She sighed and bowed her head, before sitting up and regaining her composure. “Debrief?”

Vera nodded and Joan stood, grateful for something to do. She filled both glasses generously with vodka and tonic and handed Vera hers. Her deputy was already taking off her jacket and loosening her tie, no longer waiting for Joan.

No longer needing me.

Vera took a long and slow drink from her glass, watching Joan intently. Joan felt exposed under Vera’s steady gaze, hot and uncomfortable. Joan found herself hastily loosening her tie and removing her jacket, she cleared her throat.

“How was your first day back?” Joan asked, desperately trying to fill the silence between them.

“It went by quickly.” Vera responded, uncrossing her legs and recrossing them. She took out the pins in her bun and let her hair free, running a hand through her tendrils.

Joan shifted uncomfortably in her chair, bit the inside of her cheek, sipped her drink, and cocked an eyebrow. Vera was playing her, observing Joan and seeing what made her uncomfortable. Vera was making a mental checklist of Joan’s weaknesses. This thought stilled Joan, and she drummed her fingers on the arm of the chair.
“Am I boring you?” Vera asked, her tone softening, she leaned back in her chair and unbuttoned the first couple buttons of her blouse, slowly, deliberately.

“I enjoyed your new look today.” Joan replied, changing the topic and stilling her hands. “You exude a certain confidence that I haven’t seen from you within these walls.”

Vera smiled. “Me too.” The smaller woman chuckled and drank from her cup.

“You didn’t come.” Vera said, changing the subject as she placed her drink down, no coaster, on Joan’s desk.

Joan noticed the condensation building at the bottom of the glass, and stood, grabbing a towel to wipe down the droplets of water pooling on her desk. She pulled a coaster out of her desk drawer, placing Vera’s drink on top of it.

“No, I didn’t.” Joan stated, sitting back in her chair.

Vera cocked an eyebrow and a mirthless chortle escaped her mouth, “Care for an explanation?”

“With my Deputy on leave, I couldn’t leave the prison without proper supervision.” Joan said, placing her hands in her lap and crossing her long legs.

Delicious legs.

Vera rolled her eyes, letting the rage bubble inside of her for a moment. She let it sit there, filling her veins with poison. “It was my mother’s funeral, Joan.”

“I couldn’t attend my father’s funeral, I would be no use at your mother’s.”

Vera leaned back in her chair and licked her lips, running a hand through her hair. She regarded the woman in front of her, speechless. Vera had come into her office with a plan of attack and yet, she was completely derailed by one sentence.
Underneath the impenetrable alabaster, was a vulnerable woman.

Vera moved silently onto Joan’s lap and wrapped her arms around the woman, kissing her gingerly on the lips. “I need you all the time and it pains me that I will never have you.” Vera whispered, holding Joan’s face in her hands.

*She will ruin me.* Joan thought, taking Vera’s mouth onto her own, holding her tightly against her body.

*She will ruin me.*

Even as they found themselves in Joan’s house, grasping for one another, meshing flesh with mouth, Joan felt undone. They both kicked off their shoes hastily and retreated upstairs, a trail of clothes behind them.

Vera kneeled in front of Joan and asked, “What do you want me to do?” Joan felt a fire ignite in her belly and she cast of her shackles, picking Vera up and throwing her on her bed, devouring her. Joan’s mouth found itself exploring the smaller woman’s body, leaving bite marks and trails of pain and pleasure in her wake. Taut limbs meshed with soft lips and sweet tender flesh was marked by Joan, claimed by Joan. *Owned* by Joan. Vera was hers.

Joan paused for a moment, sitting up and looking at the woman sprawled underneath her. Vera’s breathing was heavy and shallow, the pink had returned to her cheeks. Their eyes locked and Vera’s were filled with so much passion and trust it almost knocked Joan off her feet. She reached out, fingers locking with Vera’s. Joan lay down next to the woman, kissing Vera’s fingers gently.

Joan sighed and closed her eyes. She felt Vera shift in the bed and she opened her eyes, finding the smaller woman on top of her. *Straddling* Joan. Joan eyes were wide, but she did not push away, instead she found her hands on top of Vera’s toned thighs, her gleaming thighs, soft underneath her fingertips. Vera’s hair fell in wild waves down her back and her taught stomach glistened under the light. Joan gasped. No one had ever dared to mount Joan, nor had Joan ever allowed anyone to be on top of her. She was always the one towering from above, looking down at the women she fucked. She felt powerful that way, in control. And yet, Joan felt powerful underneath Vera, a ship skipping fast across choppy waters, rudderless, but flying free.

Vera dipped her head down, catching Joan’s lips, exploring Joan’s body as Joan had done to Vera countless times. This time Vera took her time, placing soft kisses down Joan’s body, tongue darting out for the taste of Joan’s flesh. Hands exploring and caressing the goddess that lay underneath her.
“You’re perfect.” Vera breathed, and Joan sharply inhaled.

No one had ever touched Joan the way Vera had. No one had ever said those words to Joan before, or any words of affection. Joan was always becoming, a work in progress, but Vera thought Joan was perfection. Everything. In no need of change.

“I worship you, I’m grateful that I am yours.” Vera whispered, her breath hot against Joan’s collar bone, her fingers entering Joan. The older woman gasped, head arching back, eyes wide.

“Yours.” Vera said, her whispers matching the rhythm of her fingers inside Joan. Vera’s mouth found Joan’s nipple and Joan felt herself being taken over, being consumed, totally, by Vera.

“This is all I ever dreamed about, to be owned by you. To be used by you. I never thought I could find someone like you.”

Joan growled, her orgasm crashing through her body.

Vera slid off Joan’s body and curled up next to the taller woman, Vera held Joan tightly against her small frame.

As Joan ran her fingers along the curves of Vera’s body she felt an ache begin to form at the pit of her stomach.

Her undoing was imminent. Joan closed her eyes.

But not tonight.
Sorry for the delay everyone! We've had some drastic changes in our lives, but we are back to normal. Enjoy!

It was a test. Joan watched carefully as Vera entered Channings office, looking for any sign of what information he was trying to extract from her Deputy. Joan had to admit that despite the smoothness of her plans, she was derailed by the sight of Channing in her office, bald head gleaming under the fluorescent lights. He was disgusting, glistening and posturing like an alley cat. She felt her knee drumming impatiently under her desk as she watched the live camera feed and stilled it with her hand, taking a breath to calm her nerves. She couldn’t stand the thought of that pig interrogating her mouse.

Her mind skipped to the thought of how she must look, anxiously staring at her computer screen, eyes drilling through the glass and silicon through to aluminum. She watched the clock in the top right of her screen, counting the minutes until finally her Deputy reappeared, steps brisk and confident. The smug stride of a person who believed wholeheartedly that they were walking the righteous path told Joan everything she needed to know about the Pig and the Mouse. She smiled with unbridled satisfaction and turned from her screen to the paperwork on her desk, a fiery passion in her abdomen. And then Joan saw it, the way Channing grabbed the parole officer’s butt and it was all Joan needed to know to begin his downfall.

My place here remains unchanged.

What Joan didn’t expect to find was what Channing was actually doing. Disgust bubbled in her stomach as she looked over the documents again. The women were effectively missing, sex trafficked into a brothel, one in which Channing was a founding member of.

Joan spread out the files on her desk, the women in the documents staring back at her, her heart sunk. Joan knew that the information her henchman had procured had been true. The women were attractive with slender figures. None of them had any family members who would notice or care if they disappeared, and Channing preyed on this information. Channing had latched on to the women’s social vulnerability. She despised men like Channing. Joan gripped the edge of her desk, leaning in, feeling the muscles in her arm tighten under the weight of the situation.

She called for her Deputy. She needed to see Vera, needed a moment of levity in the shit storm that was before her.

Vera walked in, shutting the door behind her. She could feel the distress radiating off of the Governor, a stack of files displayed in neat rows on her desk. A sign of control, stability. She briskly walked to Joan’s side, placing a soft hand on the small of the taller woman’s back, before dropping her touch. Joan inhaled softly and Vera relaxed, looking at the woman staring back at her.

“You wanted to see me Governor?” Vera said, trying to figure out what the files had to do with anything.
“Take a look at these women, Vera. Do you see a pattern?”

Was this a test? Vera thought, looking over the files for any information. “They are reoffenders.” Vera said confidently.

“Yes, seventy percent of parolees are reoffenders, take a closer look.” Joan was dismissive to Vera’s findings, instead guiding her to the information she wanted Vera to discover.

Vera looked up at the Governor, who was standing closer to her, their scents mixing. Vera closed her eyes for a moment, biting the inside of her lip.

“They were all paroled to the same halfway house. Standstead.” Joan, said, leaning over Vera, touching the files.

Joan motioned her Deputy to another pile of files, lined neatly in rows on her desk. “Take a look at these, look at...look at the photos. You notice anything?” There was a quivering in Joan’s voice that Vera picked up on.

Vera looked down at the women again, “They all are quite attractive.” She surmised, staring at the women again.

“And young.” Joan finished, looking at the files.

Vera looked up at Joan, “So?” She crossed her arms, her face reddening with confusion.

“These five were all billeted to Standstead House, but with no family, no support. And they all left within one week without giving a forwarding address.” Vera’s eyes widened with realization.

“They’re effectively missing.”

“Joan.” Vera started, holding on to the edge of Joan’s jacket. “What is Channing doing with these women?”

“Whatever it is, it will end tomorrow.” There was conviction behind her words that sent a shockwave through Vera. So much power and force, she found her body against the Governor, in dangerous territory midday.

Joan took a step back, “Vera, that’s wildly inappropriate.” Her eyes glanced nervously out her office windows, hoping that no one saw the interaction between the two women.

Vera’s gaze faltered, her cheeks reddening with embarrassment. “I...I...” she began, straightening her jacket. She looked behind her, Joan’s newest admin assistant was busy inputting data into a
spreadsheet and had not looked over at their direction once, not even with both women looking at her. Vera turned to face Joan again, “I’m sorry Governor, your concern for these women is admirable.” She told Joan, looking at her, biting her lip.

Joan looked down at the smaller woman standing in front of her, envisioning her own teeth on Vera’s bottom lip, teeth sinking into flesh. It had been awhile since her teeth had graced Vera’s delicious lips in Joan’s office, a sight she dearly missed.

Joan walked coolly past the younger woman, stacking up the files, in neat rows. Vera turned around wincing at the sight of displeasure on Joan’s face.

“We have strict rules, Vera, for conduct within these walls.” Joan said, tapping the files onto the table to align them.

“I know, I’m sorry. I just…”

“I wasn’t done.” Joan said, cutting Vera off the chance for an excuse. She lowered her voice with her next words, “Your reprimand will come this evening.”

“Yes, Governor.” Vera said, lowering her head.

Joan took a long step over to Vera, lowering her head, her core humming from those words that had escaped the lips of her little Mouse, “You would do well to remember your place.” The words were as much for Joan as they were for Vera.

“Is that all Governor?” Vera asked, slowly looking back up at Joan, placing a quick kiss on Joan’s lips.

Joan nodded her head in affirmation, a grin on her lips and a flush on her cheeks, as Vera bounced out of her office. As Joan turned to walk back towards her chair she caught the eyes of her administrative assistant on her, then the young blonde quickly averted her gaze. Joan’s heart fell to the pit of her stomach, cracks snaking across her marble facade.

She walked to her desk, taking her seat in a daze, and turned to her iMac, hands resting on the keyboard, her user name staring back at her with the same level of recognition she was giving it. Her eyes drilled through the screen, looking directly at her assistant, heart pounding with the force
of a Taiko drum. She saw us. Never had Joan been so foolish, so unaware, so giddy. The gears of Joan’s mind finally began to turn as she slowed her breath and heart.

"Damn. A good assistant is so hard to come by."

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At long last, Vera was on her bed hands tied to ankles, a gag in her mouth. With each twitch of the cat o’ nine tails against Vera’s back, sent shockwaves of warmth and pain throughout Vera. Her eyes filling with tears. Just before Vera felt like she couldn’t take anymore, she felt a smooth velvet glove rub the welts on her back gently. Vera shuddered.

Joan removed the gag and kissed Vera gently on the cheek, praising her for pleasing Joan. Joan released Vera from the restraints and the smaller woman stretched out, feeling the blood return to her limbs. She turned over and looked at Joan, the first time since their scene began and noticed she was still fully clothed, and Vera was stark naked. Vera curled up on herself, grabbing the throw blanket from Joan’s bed and wrapping herself in it.

“You look stunning in fur.” Joan purred, wrapping her arms around Vera and kissing her neck gently. Joan pulled away and walked into her bathroom and began running a bath. She stepped in, wincing at the heat of the water engulfing her skin. Her instincts told her to get out, but she sank deeper in, letting the water sting her skin until she felt nothing. She leaned her head back against the rim of the tub, letting her hair fall over the edge. She felt each of her muscles release and she sighed.

“Want me to wash your back?” Vera asked standing in the doorway. She was wearing one of Joan’s baggy t-shirts and it fell mid thigh, her hair was up in a messy bun on top of her head.

"She is beautiful," both women thought as they looked at each other.

Vera grabbed the lufa and drenched it in soap, gesturing for Joan to lean forward. She took the time to smooth the suds over Joan’s body, enjoying every freckle, she ran her hand softly over the scars on Joan’s back, countless small and larger scars that confused Vera, she had never seen them before.

“Joan, what are these from?” Vera asked washing off the suds and placing the lufa back in it’s place.
Joan’s body became rigid as Vera delicately traced over the web on Joan’s back. Feeling Joan’s body language change, Vera removed her hands, drying them on a towel. Joan’s head hung low, remembering the source of them all, every time her father found her to not be living up to her potential, the rod would come, stinging her flesh until it split open. Warm liquid running down her back. Joan leaned back, running her hands over her body, looking at Vera.

“I was a disappointment of a child, Vera.” She smiled at her deputy, “I am sure you can understand that.” Vera nodded, feeling the intertwining threads of their pasts weave tighter. While Vera’s mother rarely physically abused her, her words cut deep, often causing her to self harm. She had believed them. *I am nothing, but a failure.*

Joan was molded by her father in a different type of way. Joan was not allowed to ever fail. Success was her only viable option.

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It was strange to Vera how easy their lives seemed to mold together. It was easy to be at Joan’s house, to sleep in her bed, to wake in the morning to the smell of freshly ground and brewed coffee, and toast in the oven. Vera had found herself taking a liking to Bob, feeding him in the morning before she sipped her own coffee and laughing at his little bubbles.

And yet, how easy it felt, there was a nagging ache in Vera’s stomach. She knew this was unable to last forever. She didn’t know how long or when Joan would decide that she was done, but Vera felt it. She could sense it when she kissed Joan on the lips and cuddled up next to the sleeping woman, Vera’s time was numbered. Joan held Vera at a certain distance, Vera couldn’t surmise if it was to protect Joan or to protect herself, but either way, a space was always between them.

There were times when Joan allowed the space to disappear, but it was so sudden and alarming, it was as if all atmosphere had been removed between them, only a vacuum remaining. As quickly as it disappeared, it was back again.

*This is what junkies feel like.* Vera thought to herself, they were always chasing the original high, that feeling of euphoria, and Vera was always aching for the space to disappear, even for a moment.

Vera looked over at Joan who was reading in bed, hair loose, silk sheets touching bare skin.
“I love you.” Vera whispered to Joan. Vera’s eyes widened with fear at her own admission, and for a moment she almost believed she didn’t say it.

Joan put her book down in her lap, leaving a finger between the pages, slowly looking over at Vera. She carefully regarded the woman beside her. If she told Vera how she really felt, their relationship would be over and Joan would find herself with a less than willing Deputy. Joan wasn’t made to love. She had loved once before and her lover was found dead. Love was dangerous, it unraveled all those in its path.

Joan leaned over and kissed Vera gently on the lips. “Thank you for saying it first.” She searched Vera’s eyes and found that her mouse was happy with that response, that Vera believed that Joan loved her as well.

Joan turned back to her book. Her heart racing. The words began to jumble on the pages in front of her, but she stayed starring, unable to let Vera know the torrid of emotions bubbling inside of her. Joan had pushed love deep inside of her, buried where Jianna was. She couldn’t bring it up and out in the open now. Not ever. Not even when Vera curled up next to her at night and Joan found herself holding her tightly in the middle of the night.

She couldn’t love her. Love was dangerous and Joan couldn’t allow a variable in her carefully crafted plan.

Liar.

The word resounded in her head, clawing on her skull. She put her book down on her bedside table, turning off her lamp and wrapped herself around the smaller woman.

“Joan? You’re squeezing me.” Vera laughed.

“Oh? Sorry.” Joan loosened her grip on the younger woman and kissed her gently on the top of her head.

She let go of Vera, rolling on her back, the darkness consuming her.
The blood that pooled on the floor of the medical unit was starting to thicken from exposure. Vera watched as Bea Smith was transported out of Wentworth. Something didn’t feel right to Vera. She heard the rumblings that Smith had rightfully positioned herself as the new Top Dog, but the amount of damage that was inflicted on her, and not on her adversary, Franky, seemed to counter the whispers of the women.

The crimson landscape before her seemed to stretch from wall to wall, Bea and Franky’s vitality smeared and pooled across the floor, an archipelago of suffering. The sight of it used to turn her stomach, but now it seemed almost..beautiful, amongst the blue grey of Wentworth.

“The paperwork for this is going to be miles long.” Miles smirked at Vera.

_How could she find a time to joke in this chaos?_ Vera thought, and for a moment envied her ability to bring levity to the situation.

“And I’m the sucker that has to do it.” Vera smiled, thanking Miles with her eyes.

The blonde hair on Miles almost glistened under the fluorescent lights, with a smirk on her lips Miles responded, “Better you than me.” Both woman shared a quick chuckle and separated, Miles returning to her rounds and Vera to the computer in the officer’s lounge where she would be chained to the keyboard for hours.

The echoes of her heels through the hallways brought forward memories of Vera pleading to Joan earlier in the day.

“_The women are up to something, we need to place a lockdown._” She had felt this shift before. It couldn’t be rationalized by the mind, but she knew something was on the rise when the murmurs started and the women’s energy felt different. On edge. Quiet. Scared.
The transition of leadership always was difficult.

“Can you prove it? I can’t just initiate a lockdown based on a gut feeling, Vera.”

Why not? Vera thought then, she had witnessed the Governor make much larger changes on what seemed like a feeling.

Vera had been right, the cuts along Smith’s arms were the proof Joan was seeking. Too late.

It was hard to process everything of the day, a whirlwind of events cascading into one another. Vera felt as if she was rolling under the waves of a tidal break, only coming up for just enough air to be crushed beneath the water’s surface again.

And then there was Fletcher, telling Vera that Joan was not who she thought she was. That Joan was a monster that had an affair with a prisoner in another prison. That she had tortured prisoners. That she was evil.

The smell of liquor was thick on his breath made her question everything that he was saying, but the conviction behind his words lingered.

Is Joan who I think she is?

Vera found herself in front of Joan’s office. A silent knock.

She opened the door and found Joan gazing out the window, unconcerned that Vera had entered without permission, her gaze and focus elsewhere, contemplating the day just as Vera had done--was doing.

Had Joan done those unspeakable things that Fletch had accused her of? A part of Vera didn’t believe it, but there was a small part, the part that was opened to potential of possibility, that needed to know.

“They’re not true are they?” Vera asked, the words escaping faster than she could stop them.
Vera felt fear wash over her temporarily. She was seeing another side of Joan that was previously hidden to Vera, this side shook Vera to her core.

Joan carefully regarded the situation that presented itself. Her eyes closed and her mindscape flooded with images of Jianna, of Blackmoore, of the torture that she inflicted on the hands of the woman who took part, directly or indirectly, in Jianna’s death. She pushed the pictures back down, crumpled photographs in a tattered folder that’s ashes Joan would carry in her mind until she was ash as well.

Joan returned her thoughts to Vera, and the task at hand. If Vera was ever to become useful to Joan, and even rise as a leader in her own right, she would need to forge the commitment to corrections, the commitment that her Governor required. Vera must be capable of staring deep into the inky tenebrosity of humanity, stare unwavering until she knows there is only one monster present. She must be capable of doing, and accepting, what is necessary.

“And what if they are?”

Joan’s eyes were hardened and cold, not mesmerizing as Vera had usually found them. Joan’s body and strength that usually made Vera feel safe and protected, suddenly was a reminder of Vera’s own vulnerability and weakness.

This is what Vera had wanted, to know Joan, to see her in all her forms, and yet, Vera was terrified and incredibly humbled.

“I know my conscience is clear, how is yours?”

This was Joan’s final test as she carefully observed the smaller woman in front of her.

Vera looked up at Joan then, eyes wide, heart pounding in her ears.

She took a step forward. “My loyalty is with you, Joan.” Vera grabbed the edge of Joan’s coat, feeling the thick fibers between her fingers. Joan took a step back and Vera followed, not allowing Joan to disconnect.

Vera could see in the slightest twitch of a smile in Joan’s face. Her response was not expected, but deeply wanted.
“You can’t push me away.” Vera’s voice was barely above a whisper. Vera took a half step back, looking up at Joan, understanding now where the distance came from. Jianna. Losing her had provided the bricks with which Joan had built the fortress that surrounded her now.

Vera felt a pang of jealousy for the woman, the situation and Joan’s dedication to her even after her passing. The twisting fire in her gut was wreathed in a dark sadness. This loss was a part of Joan now, a part of this woman that she loved. “I am not going anywhere, Joan.”

Joan stood rooted to her office carpet. Icy fear had filled her veins, and was compounded by the constant reminder of how much her Deputy meant to her. There was no escaping the jaws of this trap without pain, without losing the leg that was caught in it.

“I- I’m sorry, Vera. I…” The words caught in her throat, her plans flooding back in an instant, washing away the messy emotions bubbling within her. Vera watched with care as the woman before her removed a few bricks from her fortress walls.

“My conscience is clear.”

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Dust rose in a tiny cloud around her shoes as Vera dropped her bags in her hallway. She looked around, the darkness of her once familiar home seemed foreign to her. It had been weeks since she had visited, the living room thick with that same dust, a must filling her nostrils. She walked through the house and opened up the windows, allowing the warm breeze in. She kicked off her shoes, no longer caring about placement and neatness. This was her home. Her rules. She dropped her coat on the ground next to her bags in a rumpled heap.

Vera found herself in front of the bathroom mirror. The shifts had been longer since Bea Smith’s escape, and the dark circles under her eyes testified to the stress of her job.

But most of all, her face displayed the disgust she felt for herself. Agreeing to Ferguson’s plan without hesitation, out of dedication and loyalty. Vera knew in her bones that claiming Will was having an affair with Bea was unethical, against the core of who she was, and yet she found herself agreeing in an instant, without hesitation. As if she was being controlled by something else. Someone else.
Vera mused as she took down her hair and ran a bath, taking her time to release her waves from their tight bun while the tub filled in a cacophony of flowing water. Sinking into the hot liquid, she let the suds fill the space around her, her knees tiny islands amongst sea foam. She leaned her head back, closing her eyes as the warmth of the water spread through her body.

“Enjoying your bath?”

Vera’s eyes shot open, and she jolted upright, arms crossed and fists pressed against her neck. Joan was standing in the doorway to her bathroom, out of work clothes, a small smile on her face, and an affectionate demeanor.

“What are you doing here Joan?” Vera asked, slowly moving her hands lower, loosening her fingers, but keeping her arms crossed, a small wall between their bodies.

“Why didn’t you come home?” Joan asked, kneeling next to the tub and taking a washcloth, dipping it in the water, and lathering it with Vera’s body wash.

“I did, I came to my home. I haven’t been here in weeks.”

“The dust everywhere would attest to that.” Joan smiled and motioned for Vera to sit forward as she washed her back.

“These last two days have been a challenge. I needed time to think. To decompress.”

“To be away from me?”

Vera looked up at Joan then, eyes softening. “Yes, in a way. To just be away from everything.”

The words drove needles into Joan’s stomach. Suds ran in a thick stream down Vera’s back as the washcloth was squeezed, crushed, in her hand that sat motionless against Vera for a brief, endless,
“Of course. We all must have time to center ourselves. And it has been a difficult few days.”

Vera imagined she could hear Joan’s teeth grinding, stopping whatever it was that the older woman really wanted to say from escaping her clenched jaws.

Vera leaned back against the tub then. “I love you Joan, but I feel that your love comes with many conditions.” She bit the inside of her cheek.

Joan set the washcloth on the edge of the tub, nudging it with the tip of her finger so that the fold would line up precisely. “Well yes, Vera. We agreed upon a number of conditions when this relationship began.”

Vera unplugged the drain, suddenly feeling annoyance clawing inside her abdomen, howling to leave the steaming room. She rolled her eyes. “At the beginning, but this, what we have now, this is different.” She grabbed the towel, drying off herself quickly. She pushed past Joan and walked into her bedroom, pulling on sweatpants and a t-shirt. “You’re so frustrating.”

Joan took a step back, sitting on the edge of the bathtub and folded her hands in her lap. “Really, Vera. I understand that we all need time alone on occasion, but there is no need to lash out.” The pitter patter of Vera’s tiny feet stomping back across the hallway brought a warmth to Joan’s heart that she was not prepared for in this moment.

Vera emerged, hands on hips in the doorway, “You’re not listening to a single word I am saying. You demand and you push and you press and everything is on your terms.” Vera’s anger was clouding her ability to form logical cohesive sentences, the words tumbling from her lips at a frantic pace, which only frustrated her more.

“Demand, push, and press? My, my… What are we talking about, Vera?”

“Will.” The words came out in an exasperated huff, Vera’s eyes momentarily flickering away from Joan. Joan flinched reflexively at hearing his name in this environment, hearing the name of the murderer. She felt the impulse to act and stood, swaying lithely as she stalked to Vera, stopping only inches from her.
“You acted of your own volition, Vera.”

“It was the situation, you put me in a place where I couldn’t disagree with you.” The words were trembling out of Vera’s mouth as she felt the tears threaten her eyes.

“Well...” Joan curled a long finger around one of Vera’s curls, toying with it momentarily before brushing it over her shoulder, her fingertips just grazing across Vera’s collar, trailing to the nape of her neck as Joan flowed past her toward the bed. “You could have disagreed with me.” A patronizing smirk filled Joan’s eyes along with the extra emphasis on could.

Vera stood staring at Joan, tears flowing silently from her eyes. “You can be so cruel.” Vera said, poison dripping from her mouth. She wiped the tears from her eyes and walked swiftly over to where Joan was sitting on her bed. “Two can play this game.”

Joan cocked an eyebrow in response, her lips pursing as she sat ready, foil poised for the parry.

“I find it rather pathetic, Joan, that you blame Jackson for the death of Jianna when you were the one having an affair with her. A prisoner. That’s rape by the way.”

Joan could not stop her response, despite knowing it’s tactical loss, “Who else could possibly be responsible, Vera? Jackson was professionally charged with her safety, and performed the single action that put her at risk. He. Took. Her. Child.” Joan was shaking with each of those last words. How could Vera not see?

Vera threw her hands up, releasing an exasperated laugh, “Joan. You’re responsible. You failed Jianna.” Vera could taste Joan’s furious breath, centimeters from the formidable woman’s barely contained rage.

Vera’s lunge had pierced mercilessly through Joan’s defenses, and the scars on Joan’s lower back tingled as she fought the urge to double over with a heaving sob. She inhaled sharply, the now cold air of the room slicing her nostrils, and breathed out with her response, “I can see that we’ve released all reason in this discussion. Enjoy your alone time, Vera.”

With that, Joan strode from the room as fast as her legs would allow without more than one foot to leaving the floor at a time. Joan heard only the blood pounding in her ears as she shut her car door and gripped the steering wheel, knuckles strained and white. The pit of dread in her stomach told her exactly what she needed to know, and she finally let out a sob with the realization.
She had succeeded. Her Phoenix was exactly as strong as she needed to be.
Joan felt the rift between them widen by the day. She felt it in the way that Vera nodded her head in agreement, but only after careful consideration at work. In the way that Vera’s confidence grew with every step she took down the hallways opposite Joan.

Joan felt it when Vera came over less and less.

“I’m stressed with work Joan, I just want my own bed.” Vera would respond.

_Is she getting tired of me?_

And then there were times when Vera would show up on Joan’s doorstep after a double shift, eyes sparkling, with a bottle of wine in one hand and an overnight bag in the other. Vera would wrap her arms tightly around Joan on those nights, her diminutive limbs a powerful constrictor, her doeful eyes the snake’s hypnotic trance.

Joan would forget about the nights when Vera wasn’t there. She’d forget about the times when Vera wouldn’t answer texts or return her calls. For a night.

Joan looked up from her desk and tower of paperwork to find at the smaller woman standing in front of her.

“Take a seat, Vera.”

The Deputy obliged.

“The women are on edge with all of their privileges taken away.” Vera stated calmly. Her tone irritated the Governor who put her pencil down in its place.

“We need to be clear that Bea’s actions are unacceptable. They are suffering because of _her_. That
needs to be incredibly clear to the women here.”

This conversation was starting to bore Joan, every other meeting Vera would come in, sit down and say the same thing.

“I understand Governor. I am concerned about the amount of press Smith is getting after the murder, she’s dragging you down with her.”

There was a tenderness in Vera’s voice that Joan hadn’t caught before in their previous meetings on this subject, a genuine concern about her and her position as Governor.

“Your concern is noted, Vera.” Joan smiled at the woman sitting in front of her.

Vera handed over the shift schedule to Joan. “I have the schedule for the next month, Governor.”

Joan looked over the schedule. “Vera…” she began, but the younger woman cut her off.

“I think we could use the time away. It’s only two days.”

“This is highly inappropriate, the Governor and the Deputy gone? Surely, it’d look suspicious.”

“I’d have the first day off anyways, and you’d have the second day… I can always come down with stomach flu.” Vera smiled coyly at Joan, hands on her lap, the picture of innocence.

Joan’s stomach filled with butterflies, but at the memory of the last weeks, they metamorphosed into wasps. The buzzing intensified as she fought back the excitement in her heart with her oldest adage. *Emotions make you weak. Think Joan, think. Why? Why is she asking this?*

Her mind raced from the improbable to the dreadful, from a fairyland holiday in the hills to a plot of public humiliation and professional shame. As the buzzing subsided, she evaluated Vera’s face, finding nothing but caring and concern, she calculated that the time was worth the risk of betrayal.

“Alright, Vera. Hookie it is.” Joan said calmly, sitting back in her chair.
A smile flooded Vera’s face.

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Vera didn’t know what she was doing. The hours were stretching out in front of her as she laid awake in Joan’s bed. She turned to the side and stared at the sleeping woman, her face so peaceful and relaxed she almost looked angelic. Almost. But even in her sleep, there was a tension that was built in the woman’s brows. One that Vera wished would wash away.

It was nights like these that she felt the impending end of their relationship. She hadn’t apologized since her last outburst at Joan, cutting deep into the flesh of a still raw wound.

She wanted to hurt Joan, she wanted to see the woman run away, Vera wanted to feel powerful. And she did.

Since that night Vera had noticed a change in their relationship, Vera was no longer begging, it was Joan’s silent plea for approval that Vera craved now. The sudden flicker of sadness when Vera informed Joan that she wouldn’t be coming over, or the subtle hints of Joan’s need for Vera to return her phone calls.

Vera didn’t know why she was behaving the way she was. She always imagined herself as a kind and gracious lover, one who would be attentive to the needs of her partner. She didn’t know when or why she was becoming this cold woman that she was.

Vera didn’t like it either.

And yet, the script had been written.

The holiday was as much for them as it was for her. Staring at the blank wall in front of her, visions of the time laying in the sun was a silent prayer for her rebirth. To be herself again. To be kind again. To love deeply without resentment again.

She blamed the prison. She blamed the women. She blamed Jianna. She blamed the past, present, future, God. But most of all, she blamed herself.
She tossed again, this time more forcefully than the time before. Joan stirred in her sleep and placed a strong arm around Vera, pulling her tightly against Joan’s body. Vera smiled and snuggled into the crooks and curves of Joan’s body.

At least this hadn’t changed. Vera still felt safe within Joan’s arms. Her solace.

“Can’t sleep?” Joan’s voice was thick with sleep and hot against Vera’s neck.

“My mind won’t shut up.” Vera whispered.

“Mmm..” Joan hummed as she nuzzled against Vera’s neck. Quietly, Joan sang.

“Spi mladyenets, moi prekrasný,
bayushki bayu,
tikho smotrit myesyats yasný
f kolýbyel tvayu.
Stanu skazývat' ya skazki,
pyesenki spayu,
tý-zh dremli, zakrývshi glazki,
bayushki bayu.”

“Joan, do you ever get tired of this game of tug of war we keep playing?”

Joan stopped singing then, her body becoming rigid.

“What game, Vera?”

Vera turned into Joan’s arms, coming face to face with her. “This power game. This struggle for control.”

Joan weighed her options, such an unexpected attack had sent her sleepy mind spinning, echoes of a foil’s snap in an empty studio reeling in her mind. “Vera, I simply don’t have the energy for this
right now. Can we pick up again in the morning, over coffee?”

Vera buried her head in Joan’s chest, “In the morning. My mind is racing…” There was a burning pressure in Vera’s chest as shame began to take over and before she could stop the words from coming out they did anyways, “I’m sorry, you’re right.”

Joan wrapped her arms around the smaller woman, stroking Vera’s hair and kissing the top of her head. “Sleep, Mishka.”

Vera obeyed.

---

Vera awoke to the smell of coffee wafting throughout the bedroom. She sat up, noticing their bags were already packed and stacked neatly in the corner, hers beneath Joan’s.

Vera found Joan downstairs, pouring each of them a cup, the mahogany liquid swirling with milk and sugar, spiraling and lightening in hue.

“Good morning, Vera.” Joan smiled reservedly, offering the beginning of the day to her, still steaming.

“Good morning, Governor.” Vera responded coyly, taking the cup from Joan.

Vera sat on the couch, pulling her feet underneath her, praying for the coffee to waken her. And by the time she hit the bottom of the cup she was alive.

“What game were you talking about Vera?” Joan asked, continuing the conversation from the night prior. Vera turned around then, realizing that Joan had been watching her the entire time she drank her coffee, and shifted on the sofa.

Vera let her feet fall to the floor, leaning off the couch, and continued to hold the mug in her hand as she walked over to Joan.
“I’m not sure what you’re playing, but I know that I don’t like who I am becoming in our personal life.” Vera said each word carefully as she placed the cup on the counter.

This was a reticence that Joan was familiar with, the horror in the mirror as one reaches for their full potential. It was a shame that Vera had reached this point so soon. A shame, but not a surprise.

“I understand. I’ll unpack our bags.” She set down her mug on the counter, with more force than she had meant, and turned toward the stairs.

“Joan, that’s not what I’m saying--”

“Vera, if you’re going to end this, make it swift.”

Vera laughed.

*My mouse is cruel.*

“Joan, I don’t want to end this. I love you.” Vera reached over, pulling herself against Joan, who was rooted to the spot with a perplexed expression on her face. One that softened, as soon as her pale skin touched Vera’s.

---

Joan and Vera laid on the beach soaking up the sun. Correction, Vera soaked up the sun and Joan sat under an umbrella, shielding herself from the harsh UV rays.

Vera had delightfully kept their location a secret. She felt proud, the cabin she rented by the sea was perfect and matched Joan’s need and specifications for cleanliness.

“Enchanting.” Joan remarked as she placed her bag down and explored their home for the next two days.

“You like it?” Vera asked, wrapping herself around Joan.
The taller woman hummed at Vera’s touch and kissed the woman on top of her head. “It took a lot of trust to come here without knowing. I’m pleasantly surprised.”

Joan sat underneath the umbrella with a book in her hand, tilting her hat to shade more of her face. Vera walked over to the woman, sitting next to her.

“You’re turning pink, Vera.” Joan said, grabbing sunblock and motioning for Vera to turn towards her.

“I didn’t take you as a Tolkien fan,” Vera remarked, plucking *The Hobbit* out of Joan’s hands.

“Everyone has their simple comforts Vera.” Joan began applying sunscreen on Vera.

“I always imagined you only reading novels and works of importance.” Vera remarked, flipping through the pages.

“You never dreamt of a simple life with a greater adventure in it?” Joan asked, working her hands underneath the flimsy ties that held up Vera’s bikini top.

“I always imagined I’d be a Hobbit, but one that stayed in the Shire.” Vera laughed

“You might be surprised, Vera, even the most humble life leaves opportunity for one great adventure.”

--

In some strange way the fluorescent lights reminded Vera of the sun that day on the beach. Or perhaps it was the riot in the yard that was making her dream of being elsewhere. Their brightness held the same hope of adventure, the riot a chance at excitement, but the harsh blue flickering was a reminder that the beach, just like a wayward stop made in Lothlorien, was a reprieve, a deferment from reality. As she rounded the corner she barely stifled a jump, seeing masked prisoners make their way towards her.
“What’s going on? Get back to your units.” Vera pauses a moment, her heart pounding in her chest as she comprehended the masked women in front of her. It was then she realized, she was in trouble. She wasn’t going to go down without a fight. Blood thick with adrenaline, she yelled.

“Get back to your units!”

Her fingers touched her capsaicin spray. *Deescalate the situation.* Turning to check her retreat, her chest tightens with fear, blood surging. *Information is power.* Her hands reached for her radio, jerking it to her mouth. The words came out powerful beneath the leather gloves of fear.

“Assistance! Assistance!”

Her yells never left the hallway, as she felt the radio pulled from her hand, finger on its rubber talk button for such a brief moment that she knew in her gut that it had issued nothing more than beep at Joan’s hip.

Vera’s instincts snapped into focus. *Defend yourself.* She sprayed the two attackers behind her. *Your fellow officers are your lifeline.* She dug her toes into concrete floor, lunging, every fiber in her body taut, reached for the panic button. *But I’m not panicking yet.* She heard their cries of agony as the liquid burned their eyes, hers focused on that red button. She pushed through the two women, but they slow her significantly as she reaches. A body slams her instead against a glass door next to the button, just out of reach.

Her size betrayed her.

Vera feels the pain rip through her body as she is pressed against the glass door, her arm twisted roughly behind her back. *Your fellow officers are your lifeline.*

“Help! No, No, no! Assistance! Joan help!” She struggles against their hold on her, but no matter how much she fights against them, pushing her entire body weight against her assailants, she is overpowered.

Vera’s heart beat loudly in her chest. A cold sweat formed on her forehead.
She inhaled sharply, filling her lungs with enough air only to have it knocked out from her with a swift punch to her gut.

She blinked back the tears, anger rising within her. She bit her lower lip. Fighting against the women as they took her keycard. *Joan help.*

Vera screamed again, “Help, help!”

Darkness meets her gaze as a bag is pulled over her head.

Vera realized there would be no reason to keep resisting, she would have to change her tune.

The women pushed herself forward down the hallway and Vera bit her lip, thankful that her face was hidden from the prisoners. It would have betrayed her confidence.

“This is a really stupid thing you’re doing. The prison’s in lockdown. The Governor will call SESG anyway!” She hoped her gusto would be effective, but she was tugged roughly by the crook of her elbow, causing her to lose her footing.

“Whatever you’re trying to do, it will end badly. If you let me go now, I will vouch for you!” The end of the sentence raises into a squeal, she cursed herself for allowing her fear to seep through. *Joan will not allow this to continue.*

A prisoner growls to mask their voice,

“Shut up!”

As their rough fingers gripped around her wrists, an icy panic enveloped her mind.

Perhaps she was going to die today.

She had so much more to do so much more to say.
She heard a voice behind her crackle into the radio.

“Ferguson. Ferguson, ya fuckin’ freak, answer me.”

“This is the Governor.”

“We’re outside the slot, have a look.”

She was hauled roughly in front of the door to the slot, and realized her captors plan. As the bag was pulled from her head, she got her bearings. With a rough hand around her neck, she struggled to swallow the spit in her mouth and looked up to the CCTV camera above her, and the ice in her veins washed away as she felt Joan’s eyes watching intently through the camera.

*I will be safe.*

--

Vera rolled over onto her stomach, giggling with Joan. “Honestly, Joan, the amount of Lord of the Rings knowledge you have is cracking me up.”

Both the woman laughed in harmony. Their small trip was exactly what the two had needed to rebalance their relationship. Joan was the mountain and Vera the sea.

Vera curled up against Joan. “I’m sorry for what I said about Jianna. I wanted to hurt you. I don’t know why, but I did.” Vera’s heart beat heavily in her chest, the tell tale signs of an ego collapsing into humility.

Joan stroked Vera’s hair delicately. “I accept your apology. I need you to never use her against me again.” Joan asked softly.

“I understand,” Vera replied, taking a moment to soak in the silence. “Joan, will you promise me that you’ll always protect me?”
“Everything within my power.” Joan responded, holding Vera tightly against her body.

Joan looked down at that woman lying next to her, her golden skin dewy from the slight humidity that the ocean brought with it. It clung on Vera’s skin beautifully, highlighting her toned frame. Her Selkie.

There was a tightness in Joan’s chest and she inhaled deeply, willing the feeling to dissipate. It lingered and this annoyed Joan. She knew where it was coming from. Her inability to protect the one she loved before.

How could Joan make a promise to Vera that she had shown she was unable to keep?

This time, she promised to herself, it would be different.

Chapter End Notes

We swear that "Joan help or Help Joan!" was actually said. At least...that's what we heard.

Also: We want to start doing the story non linearly, would that be okay with you all?
The events unfolded as Joan watched from above. She saw her responses, a split psychosis between who she was eclipsing and pushing aside who she was becoming.

Joan hated herself.

She knew she would fail Vera, it was written in the past, written in the future.

Etched in granite and marked in her skin.

*Nothing but a failure.*

“We’ve got Vinegartits. Open the door, or we start fucking with her.” Joan inhaled sharply, willing her body to stop the telltale signs of fear. She gripped her radio, her heart pounding in her chest.

Her mouth opened to scream into the radio. *I will rend you limb from limb. Your disgusting mothers will feel the agony I inflict in their very being, you wretched insects.* Her super-ego closed her jaw before the words could escape, and formed a more rational response while her id broke its teeth on the bars of its cage. She tilted her head back, speaking quietly to the camera operator.

“Zoom it up.”

As her precious Vera’s face came into focus, heads darting to the side to look down the hallway, intelligently evaluating the precarious situation she was in, only one thought gripped Joan’s conscious.
“To whom am I speaking?”

“Don’t try that shit with me.”

“The management unit is in lockdown. I am not able to open that door.”

She sounded robotic. She dissociated and entered a role that was comfortable to her, her second skin.

“You got a phone, use it. Tell the screws in there to open the fuckin’ door, and then fuck off outta there now.”

“All right. I will need some time to speak with the officers inside.”

“You got two minutes.”

Joan looked behind her, seeing the concerned face of Miles.

“Miss Miles, round up all available officers. Send a group to the admissions corridor, another one to the kitchen stairs. Take the prisoners from two directions.” “And be ruthless, no one gets away.”

Joan wanted the woman to pay, to hurt. To bleed.

Their bodies to be smashed against the floor and pummeled from above.

*Righteous retribution.*

“Yes, Governor.”

It was as if her destiny was written in the stars. A lifetime of failure. She had failed her father. Failed her mother. Failed Jianna. And now she had failed Vera.
Her hands hovered above the door handle of solitary. She inhaled sharply, unlocking it and opening it.

Vera sat in the cell.

Silence enveloped the room.

Joan unlocked the handcuffs. The turn of the key screamed at both of them.

Vera’s wrists were bruised and bloody. Her little mouse had fought hard against her attackers. Joan touched them gingerly and Vera pulled away. They locked eyes.

Joan’s heart beat loudly in her ears, anger, concern, empathy, it all colliding over her at once. She wrapped her arms around the frail woman in front of her.

Vera’s sobs echoed down the hallway.

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Vera woke up screaming, startling Joan awake.

“What, who, are you alright Vera?” Joan gasped, reaching out in front of her.

Both women sat up in bed, Vera’s heart pounding in her chest, cold sweat running down her back. Her breath came in wracking bursts that bit at her throat. Vera reached out and grabbed onto Joan’s arm tight, squeezing, desperate to connect to the physical world around her.

But she still felt the bag over her head, the needle entering into her skin. The hot humid breath of her attackers against her neck.

Vera got out of bed, making her way to the bathroom, cold tile beneath her feet. She turned on the faucet, splashing fresh water on her face, desperate to feel anything other than sweat. But after every casting of water to her face, the cool respite would warm, and the drops of water on her face became salty and hot again. She gripped the edge of the counter, her head bowed by the weight of
the memories it held, and closed her eyes.

“If you keep struggling I’ll do more than stick ya with this needle.”

Bile swirled inside of her, rising in waves to her heart, then crashing down to her gut. Her knuckles whitened under her grip.

A hand touched her waist, Vera whipped around and pushed her attacker away from her.

Instead, Joan crashed to the ground, slowly, her hair rising in an inky cloud as she fell, her mouth open in surprise, but her instincts pulling a foot beneath her in time to cushion the fall.

Vera’s vision swam back into focus on the darkness of the moonlit bathroom as her mind struggled to regain a grip on reality. “Ohmigod, Joan.”

Vera was at Joan’s side, helping her up to her feet. “I am so sorry,” Vera began, but Joan raised a hand to silence the smaller woman.

“Vera, you don’t have to apologize, what you experienced was traumatic.” Joan gently cupped Vera’s face and was dismayed when the younger woman didn’t lean into her touch. Instead, she turned away, leaving the gesture meant to comfort hanging impotent in the air.

“It’s been weeks, Joan.” Vera began, returning to grip the edge of the counter. “As the days go on, I feel sicker and sicker.”

“These things don’t just go away in an instant, they take time. Years even.”

Vera shook her head, “I don’t want it to take years. I want myself again.”

There was silence between the two women as Joan searched for Vera’s eyes.

“Being here, it’s too hard on me.” Vera began, barely a whisper.
Joan took a step forward, “What are you saying?” She felt her heart rattling against her ribs, breath caught in her throat as her hearing was filled by the absorbing rhythm.

Vera shook her head, “I don’t know, let’s go back to bed. We have work in the morning.”

Even as Vera’s breath slowed, becoming deep and regular, Joan could not slow the hammering in her chest as Vera’s words ran across her dark ceiling over, and over, and over. They only stopped when the ceiling began to redden with the light of daybreak.

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It was then the secrets began.

Vera was hiding the truth from Joan, taking extended lunches to “clean up her mother’s estate”, when she was visiting the doctors.

It didn’t come as a surprise to her when the diagnosis came.

Hepatitis C.

She had been vomiting for weeks. Her skin looked sallow. When she looked in the mirror she only saw a disgusting woman stare back at her, she felt disgusting. And now she knew--she was disgusting.

She couldn’t let Joan touch her. Every soft hand that caressed her skin, Vera shook off. “I can’t, not yet.”

And yet, the urges remained.

It was a late night. The halls of Wentworth were empty, the only thing that filled the halls were the echoes of her own foot steps. As she looked into the cell blocks of the prisoners the same tormenting melodrama would cross her mind.

“Who was it that infected me, who ruined me?”
She would close her eyes and shake her head. She wasn’t ruined, the disease had given her a new feeling. The need for revenge. She felt powerful and strong as the rage built up inside of her.

A warmth would build in her center.

She would find herself filling her need, hidden away in a supply closet as images of vengeance would flood her mindscape. Pushing the woman down the stairs, beating their heads in. Laughing while doing so.

This night however, she walked past the supply closet and into the Governor’s office.

A single light illuminated the room in ominous shadows. Joan was sitting on her desk filling out paperwork. She looked up, a small smile on her lips.

“Hello, Vera.” There was a purr to Joan’s words as she greeted her Deputy. Vera locked the door behind her and Joan cocked an eyebrow.

It was almost as if Vera stalked across Joan’s office, as she grabbed Joan roughly by the tie and kissed her, hard. Joan felt like the prey.

Tongues meshed with tongues and teeth with lips, each pulling and tasting one another.

They were devouring one another, weeks of no intimacy colliding into a single moment of catch up.

As they pulled away they were both gasping for air.

“I need to be punished.” Vera told Joan.

Without missing a beat, Joan pulled open a drawer and pulled on her leather gloves. “My dear, I thought you'd never ask.”
She flipped the smaller woman around so that she was facing the desk and pulled off her pants, Vera’s utility belt crashing to the floor. Joan pulled down her underwear and exposed her ass to the cold air of her office.

Vera’s fingers clawed into the desk beneath her. She waited patiently.

Joan smiled when she saw the goose bumps rise on her Deputy’s skin.

“Now tell me, why do you need to be punished? What have you done wrong?”

Vera bowed her head, ashamed. “I can’t stop my thoughts.”

“And what is so bad about them?”

“They are violent.” The clarity and strength behind Vera’s words sent a shock through Joan’s body. She responded with a resounding slap on Vera’s ass.

Vera gasped in response.

Joan’s tone turned mocking, “Is poor little Vera ashamed of her thoughts?”

Another slap, this one much harder than the one before. Vera’s gasp turned into a moan as a warmth enveloped her body. Joan took Vera’s response as a need for more punishment, quicker and harder slaps, one right after the other. Joan’s breathing became labored as she watched her Deputy’s ass turn from pink to red and was delighted by the pool of arousal forming on her desk.

She stopped then, pulling on Vera’s hair, forcing her to arch her back towards Joan. “Tell me, Vera. Tell. Me.”

Vera bit her lip, trying to catch her breath. “I want to kill those who attacked me, I want to watch them suffer.”

Joan was filled with a sense of pride as she kissed the woman passionately.
This is my design.

Joan gently turned Vera over, spreading her legs wide so that she could worship at her altar.

Juices flowed and Joan eagerly drank from the everlasting cup, the cup which gave her life, an oasis in the desert.

And as Vera cried out in ecstasy, the voices of angels descended from above in a glorious harmony, but Vera’s cries turned to sobs and Joan found herself wrapping the smaller woman in her arms.

“It is going to be alright, it’s going to be alright, It is going to be alright…”
The days and weeks began to blur together. As each day passed so did Vera’s distance from Joan, finding herself more often at her house than in the bed of the woman she had grown to love. Joan was working late nights, it didn’t surprise Vera. She’d wanted the distance as much as Joan seemed to as well.

Blame fell on no one’s shoulder but her own and she forced herself to look at her own multitude of inadequacies.

She was not without flaws.

The walls of her home were finally cleared of any remnant of her mother, the knick knacks gone from the shelves, the walls freshly painted and new furniture was in the place, rearranged to feel like the space finally belonged to her. It was her. The memory of her mother as the omnipresent shadow of the space had begun to fade away.

And in its place was a different type of suffocation, her obsession with the only woman she’d ever loved. The same women who promised Vera she would protect her only to put her intentionally in harm’s way.

Joan was never going to open the door, she was willing to put her pride and power above the safety of the women she loved.

It disgusted Vera.

She was disgusting, she still loved Joan.

The women that loved Vera was also the ones who hurt her the most.
She was a fucking cliche.

She opened the windows and let the morning breeze filter into the house, the songs of birds riding in on the zephyrs that swirled in her bedroom.

Vera wrapped her robe tightly to her body, entering the kitchen to start her morning off with her cocktail of drugs. They were helping. Her skin was no longer sallow and her color had returned. She was looking more and more like herself.

She couldn't, however, feel more different.

Doubt had begun to creep in her mind--if Joan could hurt Vera could she in turn do what Spiterri and Bea were accusing her of?

Did Joan treat Spiterri the same way she treated Vera, with sensual brutality and unabashed affection? The pit of Vera’s stomach fell and her gut told her everything she knew was true.

She was not special, especially not to Joan Ferguson.

The kettle rang snapping herself out of her anxious haze.

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As the engine of her car rumbles to a halt, Joan grips her steering wheel tightly, dread leaving her stranded in the driver’s seat, unable, unwilling to open the door into her empty garage, her empty house. With a sigh that started in the depth of her gut, she pulled the handle and stepped on to the cold concrete. She moved, vacant, through the door to her coat rack, hung up her coat, and slipped her heels from her feet with her toes, the cold of the floor catching her breath. The cold brings a spark of memory to the surface, a memory that only bubbles up at night, when the lights are stark.

Joan can feel the strain of the leather as she recalls pulling the black gloves on to her hands, flexing against their supple hide.
You're worthless.

The edge of Joan’s lips strain to hide a cruel smirk from forming, and her eyes flash wildly with a mixture of euphoric sibilation and fear. She forces the memory back down and slips her feet into her slippers, beginning the shuffle to the kitchen.

She reaches for the freezer, pulling the plastic handle to reveal her first priority. The icy glass sticks to the layer of sweat on her palms as she pours a double shot of crystal clear amnesia. She throws the frozen fire down her throat almost by instinct, and pours another to accompany dinner. While returning the bottle to its frigid home, she grasps the tupperware container labelled “Wednesday”. It was only Wednesday, after all. While the chicken and veg danced in its irradiated cave, Joan turned away, the thin beams of light filtering through the darkness catching her eye.

You're pointless.

The gloves were back on again, and Joan returned, the ecstasy breaking through her walls like a tidal wave, unrelenting and inevitable. Her heart pounded, and she gripped her countertop to regain control, eyes dilating with the strain. The screeching electronic tone of the microwave woke her from her reverie, and she went to the table to eat her bland meal in an eerie peace, watching herself from the ceiling, unable to do anything other than the same thing she had done every night that month.

She snaps back into her body in a jolt, eyes fixed on Bob, who it floating at the top of his bowl, a comedian even in death. Joan pauses for a moment, recognising her kinship with this tiny ichthyological friend.

You're nothing.

The darkness of Spiteri’s cell swallows Joan whole as she watches herself pick up Bob from his bowl and cradle him in her palm. She follows her animate body as it carries his inanimate one up the stairs to her bathroom. She cries into the ether around her at Bob’s loss, but it is the scene on the other side of her nightmare that disturbs her more deeply.

As the bodiless Joan watches one of her walk up the stairs, the other Joan is throwing a crumpled mess of a woman to the floor of her cell, dipping a cotton swab in a small vial of urishiol, the oily compound found on the leaves of poison ivy. This Joan grabs a cowering Spiteri by the arm, pulling it towards her as the woman cries, writhes, and screams, and swabs the tender inner skin on
her forearm, repeating,

“No one misses you.”

The watching Joan reels as if struck by a sledgehammer. She continues to watch as one Joan rounds the stairs into the bathroom, and stands before the toilet, Bob in her hand. She can feel this Joan’s utter detachment, complete lack of understanding at the pain she has caused those she loves. At the same time, Joan can feel the electric thrill of inflicting immense pain on a woman who never desired it. She can feel the wet between her thighs as she rips the pants from a frozen Spiteri, now silently wracked with sobs as she is in rigor on the floor. Joan screams into the void as she forces her legs apart, tracing sensual lines along the waste of a human’s thighs, watching with fiery eyes as the red welts begin to form. She drops her blue sweats to the floor, breathing in this weak fool’s misery for as long as she can. Joan’s screams devolve from animal howling to wretched wails.

“No one cares.”

The Joan in her bathroom prods Bob’s side, partly in morbid curiosity, but partly to see if any feeling arises in her gut. Nothing.

“What’s wrong with you?”

The Joan watching knows that the question is not for Bob. She feels the welling darkness rise as tears in the ether as she watches Joan wistfully swish Bob’s tail back and forth, a macabre imitation of lively dances around his bowl, until she rips his tail from his frail corpse. Joan watches and feels her own tail ripped from her body, the sobs returning. She comes crashing back into her body, and her face is contorted by disgust. She drops both pieces of Bob into the bowl and flushes.

Once his tiny golden tail is gone, she can still hear her last words as she closed the door of Spiteri’s cell, just loud enough to be heard over the woman’s whimpering cries,

“Cut Bea Smith, and you can rest.”

Joan’s raven strands fall in a halo around her head as she crumples to her tile floor. Tears dot the milky tile beneath Joan. Tears for Spiteri, tears for Bob, tears for Vera. Her empty house did not hear her cries, did not care. Her Phoenix could not be burdened by a horror like Joan during her ascent. While Joan doubted her own schemes, she knew that Vera was better without her, better without her Freak.
The steam from the boiler room stifled her. Vera unbuttoned her jacket and loosened her tie. She walked around the pipes and imagined Joan bringing Spiterri down to the hot humid room, as the images flashed through her mind, her stomach became hot with anger and envy. She placed her hand on the wall to steady herself and control her breathing.

She felt a presence directly behind her and she turned around, Joan right behind her. Joan’s mere stature made Vera push her back further against the wall. Joan took a step forward, mere inches away from Vera, forcing the smaller women even further against the wall.

She looked down at the mouse in front of her, how disappointing, Joan thought. She thought Vera was unconditionally loyal to her, perhaps she had been neglecting to give her the attention that she needed. Joan caressed Vera’s face, but quickly pulled her hand away.

“Just, being thorough.” Vera whispered looking up at Joan. There was no hesitation in her words, no bite of her lip. No signs of self doubt.

A warmth began to form in Joan’s center.

Her hand found itself underneath Vera’s jacket caressing the women’s small waist, her thumb rubbing the smooth cotton of the dress shirt. Joan’s other hand found itself wrapped around Vera’s tie pulling her upwards towards the Governor’s lips. “Indulging in prisoner’s fantasies?”

Vera found herself wrapping her arms around the neck of the taller women, nuzzling her face in the crook of Joan’s neck. Ylang Ylang and Jasmine. Vera closed her eyes and inhaled. A sadness swept over Vera, an intense realization of the end. Vera gently pushed Joan away from her.

This was the game they would continue to play.

“She seemed quite adamant.” Vera finally responded.

Joan felt bile in her throat at these words from her Mouse. Even if she knew betrayal was necessary for her transformation, the contention still struck Joan deeply. Her natural defenses lashed out in response akin to muscle memory.
“Oh, did she? Well, in that case…” saccharine sarcasm dripped from Joan’s lips like molasses. Joan turns, leaving Vera alone.

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It surprised her that Joan had time to take care of another fish, when Joan hadn’t had time for Vera. The weight of the box swayed in her arms as she walked towards the Governor’s office.

Vera knocked and waited to be allowed in.

“Yes?”

Vera slowly enters into Joan’s office. Anger is boiling in her stomach, she was tired of the rumors, tired of the distance between them. She was tired of her feelings for a woman who let her down and broke her promises.

“I’ll always protect you Vera.”

It was a beautiful lie.

“Uh, this arrived for you yesterday. Must have got held up in reception.” Vera holds the box for Joan, expecting her to want it. Instead, Joan stares at Vera confused. What was her Vera doing in her office carrying a gift for?

“It’s a fish.” Vera declares annoyed at Joan for not responding.

*So this is what it has become.* Joan thinks. She breathes in a slight gasp, bringing her fully to the present.

“Matthew Fletcher,” Vera rolls her eyes, As if Vera didn’t know his full name already, “Why is he back in General?”
“I think he’s ready.”

“Really? You didn’t think to discuss it with me, first?” The words came out sharper than intended, the fire in her heart must be quelled if she can function. Her words had nothing to do with Fletcher, they were a cry out to Vera and her distance. “Why have you stopped coming over? Why have you not slept in my bed?” This is what Joan wanted to ask.

*Emotions make you weak.*

“Staff roster is my responsibility.” Vera barked back with equal amounts of fire. Her fists clenched behind her back as her nails dug into her skin.

An arched eyebrow. A beat.

Joan looks Vera in her eyes and is startled by the rage within. Her masterpiece shone before her like a fallen angel. Joan feels a warmth build in her center and an ache at her core.

Vera noticed how Joan’s eyes dilated. “It’s my opinion that he’s ready to be reintegrated into the normal work routine.” Vera felt the strength of her own words, her back flexed in confidence. A small smile tugs at her lips.

Joan crossed her legs and leaned back in her chair. She licked her lips.

“What’s going on here? What’s the matter?” Joan paused a brief moment to feel the room, evaluate the events that unfolded in front of her, “I’m sensing some tension.”

Vera stayed silent, she tightened her hands behind her back and tilted her head slightly.

*Was Joan that daft?*

If Joan had taught Vera anything it was to not show her hands quickly. She stood where she was, starring Joan down.
“We cannot be an effective team, Vera, if you put up barriers between us.” Joan straightened a piece of paper on her desk, unable to look Vera in the eyes.

“Team?” Asked Vera. She rolled her eyes and shifted the weight on her feet.

Joan looked at Vera perplexed, she had calculated that her candor would work well in her favor and help open the door to reestablish a relationship that she had allowed to lapse in her time with Spiterri.

“Is that what we are?” Vera asked, her arms crossed in front of her.

Anger rose up in Joan’s belly. She could no longer take the insolence from her sub, especially not after tasting true and entire submission from Spiterri. It will not stand.


“Excuse me?”

“What? You have other plans?”

Bring a bottle of, uh, something nice. Red. Shiraz. That’d be good. I have vodka.”

Vera stood baffled, completely off guard. She wasn’t even sure if the door was open or closed. Vera took a step closer to Joan’s desk feeling the pull once more. A soft hand grazed the Governor’s desk.

Joan shuffled her papers on her desk again, before turning her full and commanding gaze to her Deputy. Joan, pleased to see her affect still present within the Deputy, “That’s all.”

Vera is confused, aroused, and amused. She won’t bring Shiraz.
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