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Introduction

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CHAPTER 1: DOMESTIC ISSUES

SHE GOT UNDER MY skin in a good and bad way and I wasn't sure why. That Vega girl. The one who's family beat her as a child and almost left her for dead in the hospital ten years ago. Yeah. That one. We happen to share similar backgrounds and grew up in disturbing, violent, broken homes. We also just so happened to be on bad terms with our intermediate families, hated them and openly loathed their existence daily. Ruby was more fortune than I and was placed in kind, caring relative's care. Megan Vega, her older and very wealthy aunt, lived in an affluent mansion house on the coastline of Ocrum City.

While Ruby was allowed to grow up in that and reap the benefits of having a rich relative provide her needs, I was placed in foster care at some point during my messed up childhood and was bounced from house to house. The things I saw in those homes were wrong, sick and unfair. I saw how jaded the foster care system was and was often verbally and physically abused by my foster families. Oh. But wait. There's more. *Apparently*, my mom and dad felt bad for what they did to me and wanted to make our family work. They got off the Blue Crystal, alcohol and went to couple's consoling. I wasn't compassionate for them. Why should I be? After what they did to me, this attempt to rekindle seemed like a sick, cruel joke on my parent's part.

The courts made them attend couple's consoling and anger management, as it was part of the conditions they had to meet before I could return them and *after* I was back in their custody. When it came time for our reunion, I had to go to the court hearing and had to listen to my parents proclaim their woes and regrets over what they did to each other and to me, their only child. I wasn't there mentally and was trying hard to tune out their sap stories of repentance, but then you know, they started crying and I suddenly caught my breath and found myself looking over at them. As much as I didn't want my heart to ache and yearn for them, it did and just like that, I was crying too. The deal breaker of course was my own choice. I was asked by the judge directly if I wanted to leave the foster home I was currently in and return to my parents.

If I said no, I would remain in the dark hole with those wretched foster parents until I called my case worker and complained about them, just like so many others before them. That would be a long, emotional and tiring process. If I said yes, then I could leave the foster family and return to my own flesh and blood, even though the circumstances for the return were awful, I would be with the very people I have secretly found myself thinking about. I'm not sure why I agreed, outside of the obvious. I hated my parents, but at the same time, I wanted my parents and I wanted to near them. They were required to attend couple's consoling and anger management, so maybe that played another factor that day and maybe that was why I looked up at the judge and told him I wanted to go with them.

Okay. Fast forward to my first year of middle school, exactly nine months after the court case. I'm home with my parents, life is basically normal at home, I'm not in danger and my parent's marriage is as a healthy marriage should be. Meaning, dad wasn't going to work cheating on mom with random women he worked with and mom wasn't cheating on dad with random lovers of both genders. Plus, no drugs and drunken fights between them. They really were clean of the addictions and they were faithful to each other, they just seemed really awkward and unsure of how to romantically approach the other. Eh, can't really blame them. I would be awkward too if I spent a majority of my married life cheating on my spouse in the open and starting fights over everything and anything and made it my mission to find a way to hurt my supposed significant other.

Now when it came to me, they were much better and kinder to me in words and in action. But you know what? Words are pretty. Action is better, but their actions of the past left damage. Mom and Dad can buy me gifts—all they want. They can say they're sorry for what happened when I was a kid and what led up to me being taken away—all they want. The damage is done and the bloody scars they left on me ran deep and were very much at the fore front of my mind when they did these gestures towards me. I suppose I could have made it easier on us all and just accept their gifts and apologies, but that didn't seem right to do. In fact, that seemed far too easy. They caused me deep and I suffered several years in foster homes. That was a type of trauma they couldn't even begin to express to them. I was so conflicted at them over the issue, I ultimately decided I would not make it easy for them to approach me, touch me, hold me or even so those three words that is an instant trigger for me. Those three words were:

I. Love. You.

Maybe now, they truly do love me, but I'm not going to be convinced easily. They say those three words so easily because I was well behaved when we first reunited so you know what I did? I made their lives a living nightmare and purposely rebelled against their wishes. I did things in school and in the community that made it hard on them socially and coals of shame over their heads. They never corrected me over my behavior though and I knew why they hesitated to do it. They, my parents, were guilty of setting the stage for me as a child. Bringing strangers in the house, committing adultery in front of me, domestic violence, getting high and drunk out of their minds... it was all the lessons I needed to become just like them. The difference? I'm smarter than my parents. If I do something unpredictable or socially concerning, I do so quietly and in the shadows.

I never told them what those activities were, but the smell of strong smoked herbs on my leather clothes, the stench of strong alcohol and the bloodshot grassy eyes they looked into when I came home past curfew told my parents exactly what kind of things I was doing without their permission. Despite their looks of worry and guilt, they said nothing apart from a few cautious warnings. That was it? Some half-hearted warnings about protected sex and to not become a drunkard or drug addict? Oh honey. No, no. That's not how this works. Here I am. Flaws and all and very much on my way of becoming a drunkard and drug user. The current lifestyle I am creating for myself is the new me and I am stronger and more daring than they ever thought I would be. Are they shocked? Are they mad that they were missing out on who I've become? Too bad! They can look and they won't see the little girl I use to be.

And the answer for that is simple. That little girl is dead and gone. She's so gone and I never want to see her again. Weakness is just that. Weak. If there is anything my parents taught me it is that if I want anything out of this, I must fight to get it and fight to keep it, for better or for worse. Speaking of things I *want*, I need to get my hands on a fake ID so I can finally get my dream motorcycle. Obviously, I don't have the money and neither do my parents. Not a problem though. Today after school I will approach the Harpy who vexes me and as much as she entices me and ask for the fake ID and the money. We're friends and have a notable rivalry respectful relationship with each other, so she shouldn't be to put off by my request.

The following morning, I woke up early, took a shower, got dressed and ate quick breakfast. I should have cleaned up after myself, but I'm trying to ruin all hopes of being the ideal daughter my rehabilitated parents wanted, remember? I stood up from the wooden chipped and cracked table and left the outdated bowl and spoon, as well as the evidence of what I put together to make my breakfast out in the open. I grabbed my backpack off the uneven chair and slung the slightly heavy annoyance over my shoulder and started to head for the front door. Mom, who I refuse to give that title, came down the stairs, saw where I was going and called out to me, stopping me in my tracks.

“Davina, wait. We need to talk about last night.”

Ugh. Scolding. Wonderful. I gripped the sleeve of my backpack, forced a somewhat polite smile on my face as I turned around to look at her. When I was little girl, I remember Sabrina being an unstoppable force of nature. She was the alpha in the marriage, sexually dominating, and so alluring it never took much to get Baylor excited. And that was just using her voice and body language. Sabrina was naturally ill-tempted and mean spirited towards Baylor and the look in her eyes when she looked upon Baylor was so vicious, I couldn't help but marvel at her radiance, even as a kid. Baylor and Sabrina are both Exubus so they are physically very attractive people. Her dark hair was straight with a very pretty bluish tint that shone under the night's light. Her hazel eyes were very pretty and had a sunflower burst effect in the middle of the iris. I inherited this eye trait and it makes me exceptionally desirable, just like Sabrina.

Sadly, she no longer has the fiery spirit that made her so beautiful outwardly or inwardly. The Blue Crystal was responsible for her overall decline in health, some of the drugs she abused, damaged her physique. Her sunflower effect in the iris faded and hazel coloration of the eye faded slightly. Her raven hair remained, but was not nearly as healthy. It was once thick and silky. Now, her hair is thinner and if she's not careful when she brushes it, it will fall out from the scalp. That bluish tint that shone under the night's light, turned permanently ashen. It looked like highlights, but it wasn't highlights. It was a result of damaged hair and the stress she endured when she was a slave to her addictions. She was still pretty, but was like a duller, water down version of her former self. Baylor was the same way, but he somehow didn't come out with damaged hair or body. He basically looked like he did when I was a kid, but the slightly noticeable wrinkles around

the edges of his eyes and the blunt crease lines in his neck was defiantly not common for someone of his age. If anything those new features on his skin was all the stress he had endured until now. The most drastic difference I saw of the current Baylor verses the Baylor from my childhood, is his tidiness and appearance. His beard was never more than scruff under after shadow. His light brown hair was short and spiky and nicely buzzed along the sides. Now his beard has patches of gray in it, is unkept and has grown past his collar bone. His is hair is very shaggy and trails down to the middle of his beck and the bangs droop down over his eyes, hiding his blue eyes. Baylor was stocky, muscular and toned when he first met Sabrina and several years into their marriage, but not anymore. He has a hefty belly on him and although his gut is not unattractive per say, he defiantly has let himself go and like Sabrina, Baylor is just a small fraction of the handsome man he use to be.

“Oh yeah? What about last night, Sabrina?”

Sabrina frowned and gave me firm, pointed look. “Please call me mom, Davina. Your foster parents I can understand the formal titles,” Sabrina pointed at herself and her expression hardened. “but I am-”

I didn’t let her finish that sentence. She was walking towards me so I did her favor by going to meet her in them middle, all the while making sure to glare at her unforgivingly. “The woman who wrecked my childhood. The woman who beat her own kid nearly to death with her man on a certain day at a certain time that marked the cruel reality of your feelings towards me. The woman who choose drugs, Blue Crystal and sexual intimacy with strangers over her own child. Yes, we have established who you are in this relationship, *Sabrina*.”

She caught her breath and the look of betrayal on her face was so satisfying to see. I tilted my head to the side and made my smile smug on purpose. “See, you don’t get to decide whether or not I treat you with the respect and dignity you automatically inherit simply because you gave birth to me.”

“Did you not choose to come back and live here with us?” She argued softly, glancing away to blink the unexpected tears from her eyes. “Davina, how many times will you punish me?”

Punish us for the mistakes we made so long ago?” Sabrina looked back me and quickly wiped the remaining tears from her eyes. She took a breath, centered herself and tried talking to me again. “Your father and I messed up. Bad, but we’re trying to fix it, but you keep fighting our methods, disobeying our orders and breaking the law, apparently.”

Sabrina went into the living room, needing to sit and quiet herself. She carefully lowered herself down onto the couch and reached up to wrap the couch’s comforter blanket around her frail body. She didn’t leave me there like that because she was lazy. Due to the abuse of drugs and Blue Crystal, she tires easily and has no stamina hardly left to do simple routes, such as trying to win an argument against her daughter.

“Why do you hang out with those Exubus delinquents, Davina?” Sabrina finally asked, leaning back into the support of the couch’s cushions. “Why purposely taunt the law? Do you despise your father and I that much or are you just desperate to find an excuse to hurt us some more? How much longer do you intend to make us suffer under your cruelty? Don’t get me wrong, your father and I expected resentment and resistance, but now I think you’re just being sadistic and getting off on our pain. With all do respect that makes you far worse of a monster than us, darling and I wish you would stop for a while. Granted, your father and I lost it in front of you and on that fatal day, one that I know you will never forget, we did cause you pain. We assaulted you, but we never got off on causing you pain. We were just mad at each other and took our aggression out on you.” She placed a hand over her heart and clutched at the fabric of the blanket that covered it. “I am in such poor health now and honestly, I can’t take much more of this Davina. Please, please at least let us recovery so we can properly face you with what little honor we have left as your parents.”

Sabrina looked over her shoulder and gave me such a wounded, exhausted stare, it actually made me cringe with guilt. Sabrina said I was being sadistic. Wait, wait. Was that really true? When did that translation within myself happen? That wasn’t the intention, I just wanted to make life hard for them in general, I wanted them to feel my pain, that was all, but for Sabrina to say that so easily, it made me wonder if the tables had turned.

“Sabrina, I...” My voice wavered as did my resolve. Sadistic. That word kept repeating in my mind and for the first time in a very long time, I took Sabrina’s feelings into consideration and discovered that she was right. “Is that really what I’ve been doing?” I asked, anxiousness evident in my voice.

Sabrina looked forward, bent her head deep in thought and shut her eyes, breathing slowly. “Yes. Your father and I have thought this for quite some time now and we are clueless as to how to make you stop. If we say anything in our defense, you belittle us. If we try to love you, you mock us and say very hurtful things that have cut us so badly, we both wait until you go to school to have our mental and emotional breakdowns. We just cry and become powerless heaps on the bed, the floor, the couch or where ever it is we are when you shut the door and leave for school.”

Wait. What? *What?* They cry? Over *me*? In that moment I felt like I had been smacked across the face by solid ice. I lost my voice, my eyes widened in shock, mouth parted, but no words came out. My hand twitched and instantly I dropped my backpack and rushed over to the couch where Sabrina was sitting. I quietly and slowly sat down next to Sabrina and for the longest time, neither she or I said a word to each other. This realization that I had become the villain and they were no longer the villains, but victims of my unkindness, sincerely messed with me.

“I’m sorry, mom.” I mumbled, raising my hand to rub at the back of my head ruefully. “I’m sorry I hurt you and dad.”

The title she longed to hear slipped out of my mouth before we could register what just happened. I honestly expected her to laugh at me and not believe my words. I sounded convincing enough, but at the same time I was awkward in how I said the response and unsure of how to approach the situation.

“It’s okay.” Sabrina cautiously turned to me at the same time I faced her. “I forgive you.” She gathered up my hands up into hers and gave them the most caring, reassuring squeeze I’ve experienced from her. “I just ask that you acknowledge our efforts on rare occasion, okay?” Sabrina leaned forward a little and gripped my hands desperately. “We really *are* trying to repair the damage we caused Davina.”

My slanted eyes held her desperate stare for several prolonged seconds, but the sound of sudden incoming traffic passing down the street snapped me out of my daze and back to reality. I looked down at our hands, up at her, back down at our hand and finally held her worried gaze, mentally considering my options. After a brief minute of debating, I finally decided it was time to let my defenses down and see if our family could be mended, truly restored.

“Davina, thank you for this.” Mom genuinely appeared happy with my newfound resolve. She let go of my hands and drew me into a weak hug and squeezed me as hard as her body would allow her to.

“I will try to not hurt you and dad anymore.” I leaned in and returned the hug, but I minded how hard I hugged her as I knew the pressure would overwhelm her. It felt so weird to say that after I had addressed Baylor and Sabrina—I mean mom and dad so informally. Mom saw this conflict on my face and smiled a little, strangely amused at my reaction.

“Speaking of dad, where is he?” I asked, leaning back with an arched eyebrow. “I haven’t seen him all morning.”

“He should be coming home any second. I needed some medicine from the pharmacy and told him to go early so he could be there when they opened.”

I opened my mouth to say something, but closed it hearing the front door open and the puzzled grunting of my father.

“Why does the lock have to fight me every time I use the house key? I think the lock is going bad.”

With my assistance, I helped mom stand up and together we went over to greet dad by the front door.

“Hey dad. I have something I want to say to you.”

The way his head slowly raised and how his sleepy eyes widened in shock when he saw us side by side and at peace in each other’s presence, startled me at first. Was he looking forward to

such a moment? He must have because the scene moved dad so much that he dropped mom's paper bag of medication, the keys and he just started crying. Right there in the middle of the doorway.

“You're being kind to her.” He choked on a sob and tried to stop himself from crying, but it wasn't working. “You're actually being kind to your mother. I-I never thought this day would come. You even called me dad. Oh Davina, I'm not worthy of it, but would you believe I have selfishly been waiting for you to call me dad?”

“Dad, I'm... so sorry. I didn't mean to take things so far. From now on, I'll try to-”

Dad hurriedly stepped in and brought his trembling arms around me and mom. He pushed his face between ours and stood there in that pose for a few minutes. His sobbing gradually softened and when he was composed, he took a step back and beamed brightly at us and I could tell he was happy to have achieved such a precious moment with me.

CHAPTER 2: QUEEN OF OCRAM

THE NEXT FEW EVENTS that followed were ironic, considering the positives I just experienced with my parents. First, Dad offered to drive me to school so I didn't have to walk to school. We were poor, so I couldn't afford to pay for transportation like other students, so unless my parents agreed to drive me, I was on my own. Up until this morning, I had been walking and refused any offers to drive me. Dad was so thrilled at the development taking place, he insisted to drive me to school and treat me out to a meal.

I had eaten a small breakfast, but truthfully I was still hungry so I allowed him to take me out to get some quality breakfast food at a fast food restaurant. We went through the drive through, ordered our food and on the drive to Ocram campus, we ate and talked about the changes we expected from each other and I was truly willing to try to do better and make this family thing work.

Second, after I was dropped off with ten minutes to spare before class started I was already scheming how I would get my fake ID, something I know if I got caught, it would grieve my parents. Well lucky for them, I would play it smart and they would never know I have one or what I intend to use it for. Granted, I have already been illegally drinking and smoking herbs, but that wasn't because I used a fake ID. That was literally thanks to the courageous efforts of the Pillagers. The members of my gang all ha fake ID's and brought the spoils of their outings to then hideout, where I waited for them usually. Mom and dad already integrated me and thoroughly searched my belongings to see if I had a fake ID so when they didn't find one they quickly concluded someone was giving me the drugs and alcohol. Given with the restoration that took place less than 25 minutes ago you would think I'd respect their wishes about that stuff... but I wasn't about to give up that kind of high. I loved it too much to put it down.

“Have a good day at school.” Dad waved goodbye to me through the lowered window then quickly added, “Oh. Say hello to Principal Alcott. She was the only person I respected when I attend Ocrum and I want you to go to her if you have a problem, got it?”

Oh. He was being a dad all right, sounding all mature and instructing me to run to a safe adult. I humored him and nodded, promising him if I had a problem on campus I would go to her first. He smiled, content with thing and the window rolled up and I stood there, waiting for the car to leave the school’s parking lot.

“Okay. Now that dad’s gone. Time for Ruby.”

I walked up the stairs into the grand building and I sought out Ruby out in home room. I pushed past the other students, ignoring their existence and entered home room, seeking out Ruby. I saw her sitting at her desk with Kayden in the background a few desk behind her. He was standing there with his hands in his pockets, listening to Diego go on about how his race, the Leprechauns were the best thing to happen to Ocrum, but Kayden kindly disagreed, stating that the Hills, Remi’s family was the best thing to ever happen to Ocrum. They continued to banter quietly in he background with each other as I approached Ruby’s desk. She as dressed in a punk band outfit, had fishnet stockings, black knee-high boots, fingerless gloves and a signature tank top of her favorite brand with a plaid t-shirt tied around her waist.

“Hey babe.” I greeted Ruby lightly, smiling fondly after her. “Miss me?”

“Davina,” She sighed, tilting her head to the side in annoyance. “how many times do I have to tell you to stop calling me that when we’re public? People might start to believe I’m dating you instead of Blake.” She looked up from the book she was reading and stared off into the distance a moment, then gently cleared her throat. “Is what I want to say. We broke up last night, but even so, please don’t address me like that without my permission, okay? I don’t mind your flirting, but I do mind it when we’re around people who will get the wrong idea. You are a Exubus, after all.”

“But we’d make such a hot couple. As a maturing 8th grader who supports scandals, I think we should give people reason to start talking.”

Ruby chuckled and bent her head, returning her attention to the pages of her book. “You would say that, Davina. So, how can I help you? You don’t usually come to me so early before class unless you want something.”

“Oh, you know me so well for someone who isn’t my girlfriend.”

I stopped beside her desk, demanding to be seen.

“Davina, I can know you without being your girlfriend, okay? We’re friends, remember? We sort of made the choice to be close and learn more about each other two years ago.” Ruby closed the book she was reading and glanced up and squinted at me, quizzically. “Huh. You look pleased. This is rare. Did you get laid by a Pillager or manage to score with another girl outside of Ocram?”

“Actually, no. I did something far better. I officially made up my parents.”

Ruby laughed out loud and waved a hand as if to dismiss the announcement. “Honey, that excitement will fade once they betray you. Trust me.”

I shrugged, not convinced that would happen. “Maybe, but I don’t think that will happen. Not this time. Anyway, enough about my parents.”

I took a seat in the desk in front of hers, which was not mine. It was Melody Park’s, the only dark-skinned Human attending Ocram and that is partly why she stands out to people. The other reason she stands out is for modesty. Meaning, Melody dresses, behaves and speaks properly and never puts herself in a immoral situation that would bring shame unto her Maker. You know, I did entertain the idea of making Melody mine once or twice since my 8th grade year started, but I know it’s pointless to even try to approach her type. She is a follower of Tryst and her faith does not allow same sex romance or marriage, which is a shame. She is very pretty. Not as hot as Ruby, but she’s still attractive. Thankfully Melody wasn’t here yet so I just helped myself to her desk while I spoke to Ruby. I didn’t bother going over my reasons, I just plainly told Ruby I needed a fake ID and a large sum of money so I could get a motorcycle with the fake ID. Since Ruby and

I are friends with similar rebellion tastes, she loved what I was doing and promised she give me the money I needed to get the fake ID and for the motorcycle.

“Where will you keep it? The bike, I mean?” She asked, frowning a little. “I seriously doubt your parents will be happy about the fake ID and you bringing home a illegally purchased item without their consent.”

I cupped my chin and gazed up at the ceiling thoughtfully. When I thought of a good answer, I leveled my gaze with her and grinned. “I guess I’ll keep it at my gang’s hideout and on occasion, maybe stash it your place. Your aunt’s garage is basically a glorified guesthouse for three vehicles. Hiding it in there should be no problem at all.”

Ruby rolled her eyes as she crossed her arms. “Why am I not surprised you want to use my house as a base to stash your ride? Very well. Meet me behind the gym building after school and we’ll do this. I trust you know the risks that come with having a fake ID?”

I grinned, reached over and gave her cheek a fond pat. “I’m more than aware. Don’t worry. I’ll be careful, but I intend to keep with the Pillagers more than your place. Speaking of which, can I come over and spend the night? With Blake out of the picture, maybe I can finally have you all to myself.”

I was joking... partly. I did genuinely want to hang out and comfort her over the break up with Blake, but at the same time I wanted her. Bad. I mean, it’s Ruby Vega. She is the second sexiest girl in middle school and someone I consider my equal in looks.

“Are you that eager to have me and make me yours, Davina?” Ruby turned her head and gave me a tempting stare just using her eyes.

“No.”

I lied and made sure to sound convincing so she couldn’t see that I was lying. I very much so wanted to make Ruby mine in the most raunchiest way possible, but at the same time I wanted to show resistant and play it cool with her. Why? Because I didn’t want to come across desperate,

something I know would turn her off. Ruby never was fond of clingy or over anxious people. She hated seeing that in plain people and really didn't care to see it in a person romantically interested in her.

“I just think the best way to get over someone is to surround yourself with someone else who will treat you well, show you a good time.”

“Davina Quinn, your intentions are always so obvious. You know I'm into the guys.”

“I know, doesn't mean anything. Pleasure is fun and comes from both genders. Just ask the Pillagers.”

Ruby held a hand and motioned at me to calm down. “*Down girl*. I'm not saying I will date you, but if you want to come over and cheer me up, you may.” She leaned back into the chair and lazily draped her arm behind the head of the chair. “And if we happen to find ourselves in an intimate, suggestive position on my bed, let's just say, I'll be open to the concept of kissing a girl and seeing what it's like. But just as a heads up, I am very stubborn and set in my ways, don't get your hopes up.”

I was going to feed her curiosity and try to convince her it would be worth it—that I would be worth it, but Melody strode into the classroom, so I had to get up and actually go to my seat. I stood up from Melody's desk and started to walk past Ruby's desk when she reached out and took my wrist captive, stopping me.

“Come here a second.” She ordered, tugging on my wrist again.

I grinned and naturally lowered myself down to her face so she could speak softly into my ear.

“After school, meet me behind the gym and I'll hook you up with the cash you need and just in case you thought I was joking earlier. I assure I wasn't. Also, you can come over and spend the night and help me “forget” about Blake.”

She leaned back with a smirk, indicating that she was totally for this reckless and absolute defiance to the law, but that wasn't the best part she was silently communicating to me. It was the fact that Ruby was giving me permission to seduce her and if there was one thing I was good at, it was luring people into pleasure and making them feel pleasure. Perks of being a Exubus. I don't know if I would convince her to become a lesbian, but I was bent on trying and showing her my gifts as a Exubus. That dark, seductive part of me that made my peers fear me or want me. Boys I cares nothing for, women on the other hand, I wanted, yet all the girls in my class even the high school girls knew better then to get too close to me or be left alone with me.

To be fair, everyone at Ocrum, including faculty staff, kept their distance around me because of the fact that they knew what I could do to their hormones as a Exubus. I was pleased to know though that Ruby was coming willingly into my web. I didn't have to flex and mess with her hormones. All my Pillager lovers, where they are all Exubus, we all have a common bond that links us and we all know that our sexual activities with each other are solely the result of us using our gifts on each other. Which is why tonight when I get Ruby alone, it will be nice to actually be with her and attempt a seduction without relaying on that. What's it like to just have someone openly fall right into your arms? I was going to find out and if I can have my way, I will make sure Ruby stays in my arms.