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Prologue

The air within the lavish household was still, not a sound to be heard, as the marble columns reached to the ceiling, casting shadows blotted out by the moonlight filtering in through the crystalline windows and cascading to the ceramic tiled floors. In a

room hidden away by vanilla silk curtains pouring down the doorway, rested multiple warm bodies of fur, sleeping soundly as their internal clocks began to twitch and tick for the early hours still to come. Many beds, carpeted with the finest velvet, were filled with kittens, paws hanging over the edges or noses stuck in a sibling's ear, the inner fur tickling delicately with every breath. One kitten, fur as white as the finest apparel one would wear to a gala, rested herself upon one of her brothers, her eyes fluttering open as she stretched and kneaded her paws gently against the fur, the action lulling her back into rest.

In a magenta cat bed fit for a queen lay a grey-blue she-cat, fur as soft and delicate as the petals of the rarest daisies, well groomed and claws gently filed. The pampered feline adorned a soft cornflower blue collar, fit with a tag of pure gold that glinted in the moonlight falling over her. Her blue eyes began to groggily open as she stretched, and without warning a sharp pang shot through her body, making a startled hiss slink out of her. She fully awoke in an instant, a deep rooted instinct within her screeching the reason for her physical distress. Shakily, and without full control of herself, the female stood in her richly textured bed, paws sinking with her weight into the cushion. Her heavily swaying belly brushed ever so slightly against the bed, and more sharp pains began to fall upon her, making the feline gasp.

It was time.

She heaved herself from the bed with unsure steps, her belly convulsing with unrelenting pains. Her ears flattened, and her bushed tail began to lash back and forth. Her breaths were short and fast, her exhales heavy as her paw pads met chilled tile, black

and white swirled together like two storms clashing above. As she began to wearily move forward, her pelt brushing past the silk curtains, the sharp pain began to morph into agony. Swallowing back a yowl, the feline stumbled and desperately forced herself to continue. Her mind shrieked that she must get to her nesting box, must experience these unwanted sensations in her area of safety.

Her belly was convulsing again, contractions gripping the expecting mother as she struggled to breathe and turn the corner, nearly ramming herself nose first into the carved bottom of one of the many marble columns throughout the massive household. The edges of her vision were inching towards darkness, and with a pathetic whimper that was more fit for a kitten, the she-cat pulled herself forward.

Once she entered one of the high-ceiling hallways, she reminded herself she was tantalizingly close to her goal. Her muscles threatened to give out as searing pain gripped her whole body, the sensation akin to countless pristine porcelain plates shattering all at once. The blood roared in her ears, and she picked up the pace despite the agony, clenching her teeth until her jaw faintly creaked. Just one more turn and she'd be there.

A concrete archway met her glinting gaze, and she scuttled towards it, the contractions increasing tenfold. Tears prickled in her eyes, welling up and threatening to spill and moisten her whiskers and fur. She knew this pain like she knew her own paws- and it could only get worse from here.

As she painstakingly stumbled into the dark room, she saw, beneath one of the spherical windows that bulged from the outer walls of the house, her violet nesting box.

Her relief didn't make it past the pain, and as soon as she bumped past a chair with a sheet draped over it, she stumbled so harshly she fell over, not able to reach the comfort of the box. She unsheathed her claws, trying to drag herself forward, but the floor was too slick and lacked any grooves.

She was going to give birth on tile instead of linen blankets.

The blue-esque she-cat let out a low wail as the strongest contraction yet slammed against her belly, the skin rippling and twitching. She tried not to bite her tongue as she clenched her teeth, instinctively pushing with the force, her muscles tightening.

A yowl was ripped from her as blinding agony traveled down her spine- and she hardly registered the squirming, slick being by her hindquarters. In her growing struggle to breathe or stay awake past the pain, she swept it close with her tail, nipping the thin layer of flesh covering the little kitten and its muzzle. She roughly licked the little creature's head until a shrill mew released it, drowned out by the screech from her mother that echoed against the walls, bouncing back and peircing her ears, another slick form sliding onto the bitterly cold floor. Once again, the she-cat swept it closer and nipped it free to the world. This one was a tom, and the feline assumed this would be the last kit, as the agony was now sinking back into a dull throb.

But then she felt, without any pain, another kitten. A very small kit. Exhausted, the mother repeated the instinctual process she knew by heart to get it breathing. The mewling bunch of kits squirmed and wriggled their way to the warmth of their mother's belly, latching onto teats and kneading milk towards their awaiting mouths. Dizzy, the

she-feline rested her head on the floor, paws folded underneath her, the stink of coppery blood filling her nostrils. She gazed longingly at the box just steps away- warm and soft. The floor was cold enough to make the newborn kittens shiver, their folded back ears and tightly closed eyes not able to make sense of why they weren't warm enough.

Just as the she-cat began to fall into a dreary rest, she heard the faint pattering of paw pads on tile approaching her slowly. Her ears pricked and swiveled, and she forced her eyes open, lifting her head as her mind protested, digging claws into her face and begging her to just go back to the world of drifting and uneasy sleep. A familiar golden brown tabby tom was approaching her, his green gaze lidded as he blinked slowly at the shuddering kits still nursing off their mother. He was incredibly stocky, ruffled fur shagged over his wide shoulders and making him appear to be a threatening foe.

"Robin." The she-cat's soft voice cracked as she coldly regarded the tom in front of her, ears flattening in distaste of the unappealing tom, the mere presence of him making her stomach churn.

"Three this time?" Was all Robin, the tabby, responded with, whiskers twitching as he moved closer and sniffed at the kittens, their thin layer of fur rustling at the whispers of hot breath.

"Two girls, one boy," the she-cat glared at the male, her pupils thinning to slits as she worked her jaw into a clench, tail beginning to thump silently against the tiled flooring as her annoyance grew at rapid speeds, burning her chest like an internal flame, fed with the heat of a million summers stacked together.

"Named them yet?" Robin sat down casually, as if his presence was welcome, not an issue in the entire world. He twitched his ears as the other feline grew visibly irritated, and he lifted a paw to his muzzle to lick and drag across his head.

"No. It's none of your concern. Go away."

"Are they pretty enough for you, Gloria?"

"Shut up before I rip your tail off and leave you running away with nothing left to tuck between your legs," Gloria, the she-cat, growled lowly, her fur beginning to lift and bristle threateningly. The tom did not at all look alarmed, as if this were a game to him, as simple as chasing a mouse down or swatting at a stray thread dangling from the throws on the leather couches.

Seeing as Robin did not again speak, Gloria leaned her head down grumpily to her kittens, who were fed up with nursing, detached from her teats and snuggled into her belly, pathetic little paws occasionally pressing into her sleek pelt. She was already noticing a distinct, terrible smell coming from all of them, that faintly made her want to give an undignified sneeze. It almost resembled the terrible reek of the old woman, the runner of the house, and her little box of orange tipped sticks that she'd light and haze up the room with any given day. Something deep within her sank, and she pressed her nose to the pale grey she-kitten, and the smell intensified.

The smell was strongest in the dark grey she-kitten, and barely traceable in the grey-blue and white patched tom kit- but it was still there, and made her feel like heaving up bile. Her throat stung, and she looked away, her heart thumping with panic and anger

in her chest. Of course they would turn out this way, this ugly, disgusting way. After nine other kits, this was bound to happen...how foolish she was.

The pale grey she-kit began to squirm and cry out with her little shrill voice that she could not even hear yet, tiny head shaking with every movement. She began to open and close her mouth for a few seconds, before she sneezed, the tiniest wisp of smoke swirling into the air as she settled back down again.

"So. I'm guessing they're not to your liking?" Robin questioned in obvious amusement, dipping his head down to lap at his chest fur, smoothing it down.

"It's your fault!" Gloria sputtered out, feeling frantic and furious, her head swimming with too many thoughts about this situation, this imperfect litter who just *had* to take the ugliest, most disgusting gene of hers. "I'm beautiful! Perfect! You're a messy, good for nothing pile of trash that makes his way into this wonderful house as if he belongs! You're garbage!"

"Ah, but I'm not the one with the imperfection," Robin responded in such a way that Gloria was absolutely sure he was purring. "Can't blame me for it. Don't see any qualities of me, so they're all yours, and ya know it. If you hate them so much, why not just snap their necks instead of whining? Not like the little lady will know you killed 'em when she finds out."

Gloria froze at his words instantly, her tail stiffening out and her breath hitching. She didn't look at him or snap at him for such a hideous suggestion, her gaze falling upon her kittens, as her mind began to go a mile a minute, unable to fathom any thought of

analyze anything.

She honestly considered it, a dark urge igniting deep within her. Now that she could breathe properly, she realized it wasn't as shocking as she initially thought...they were just born, unable to see, hear, or speak. Or...think. They wouldn't feel it, they were so fragile...

With a shuddering breath, she placed a paw lightly on the dark grey she-kit, who wriggled in her sleep at the contact. She could feel Robin's gaze burning into her, watching her every move, every rise of her flank as she breathed lightly, the room silent with tension, with the heavy decision of ending three little lives before they began. Heavy with the darkness inside her that quelled her to do it, quelled her to feel the breaking of-

Then the white splotched tom yawned pitifully, and squirmed close enough to reattach himself to a teat, suckling gently and working his prickling paws into his mother's soft belly fur.

She couldn't bring herself to kill kittens. What was wrong with her?

Drawing her paw away, she clenched her eyes shut. No matter how imperfect they were, she wouldn't murder them. Her heart throbbed and clenched painfully in her chest, as if her body couldn't bear to feel empty inside.

"Leave."

Robin blinked slowly at her sharp, whispered command, before he rolled his eyes and stood, stretching with a jagged arch of his back. And with that, he turned tail and

exited the room, the faint sound of his receding paws on slick flooring drowned out by the loud shout of a human, the lights in the room flicking on and briefly blinding Gloria with an array of dazzling colors carressing the yellow-tinted light.

The old woman of the household rushed towards Gloria, adorned in her finest sleeping gown, embroidered with the furs of creatures Gloria was unfamiliar with, and fabric embracing her feet encrusted with shimmering, green gemstones. She cooed and placed a wrinkled hand upon Gloria's head, stroking the elegant fur and gently hovering above the kittens. The she-cat simply watched as the woman scooped up her kits, and her, and placed them all within the nesting box, and leaving Gloria yearning to separate from her imperfect creations.