

Inside Dakota Willink's Heart of Stone...

After unwrapping the cellophane from the platter, I moved over to the minibar to choose a bottle of white from the wine cooler. I perused the selections, trying to decide what would pair best with the cheeses.

Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay? Both will go nicely, but which would she prefer?

I glanced over at Krystina, intending to ask her if she had a particular wine preference. However, she had a look about her that made me pause, and I didn't want to interrupt the picture that she painted before me.

She was running one delicate hand over the wooden top of my dining room table. She wore a soft smile on her lips, appreciating the craftsmanship of the design. She looked beautiful sitting there, feet up on the chair, seeming completely at ease. And in that moment, I realized that she had never before looked quite like that in my presence. She had never appeared so completely relaxed.

So unguarded.

I stood there studying every beautiful line of her captivating face. Seeing her that way, it was almost hard to believe she was capable of so many smart remarks and witty comebacks. Perhaps her sharp tongue and contentious behavior was a defense mechanism, one that she relied on when she was uncomfortable. If that were truly the case, then I would need to take corrective actions to remedy that problem. I had to calm her, or else I'd never get through the weeks ahead.

Weeks?

Since when do I think long term about these things?

The idea was novel for me and I was stunned to discover that I liked the idea of her being here more regularly. In my space. With me. It was a distressing sort of feeling.

This can all go to shit at a moments notice. Take it one step at a time.

A change of tactics was needed, for Krystina's sake as well as my own. My normal methods of operation would have to be thrown out the window. Attempting to take control by laying down the law would only backfire, so I began to construct a new plan – one that would make Krystina feel more at ease. Once she was relaxed, I would begin to work on her trust by giving her what she's been asking for.

Full disclosure.

Krystina would have no doubts about what I wanted from her after tonight. She would know exactly who and what I was. She would either run, or she would stay. If she stayed, then that's when the true test would come into play – tonight I would discover if Krystina could put away that independent mind of hers long enough to pass her first lesson in submission.

Finally feeling like I had somewhat of a solution to Krystina's argumentative nature, I turned my attention back to the wine selection. Smiling to myself, I settled on a bottle of *Joh. Jos. Prüm Riesling*.

Sweet. Like her.

I grabbed two crystal wine goblets and went back to the dining room, focused on the mission ahead. I could only hope that Krystina would keep herself open to what I had in mind.