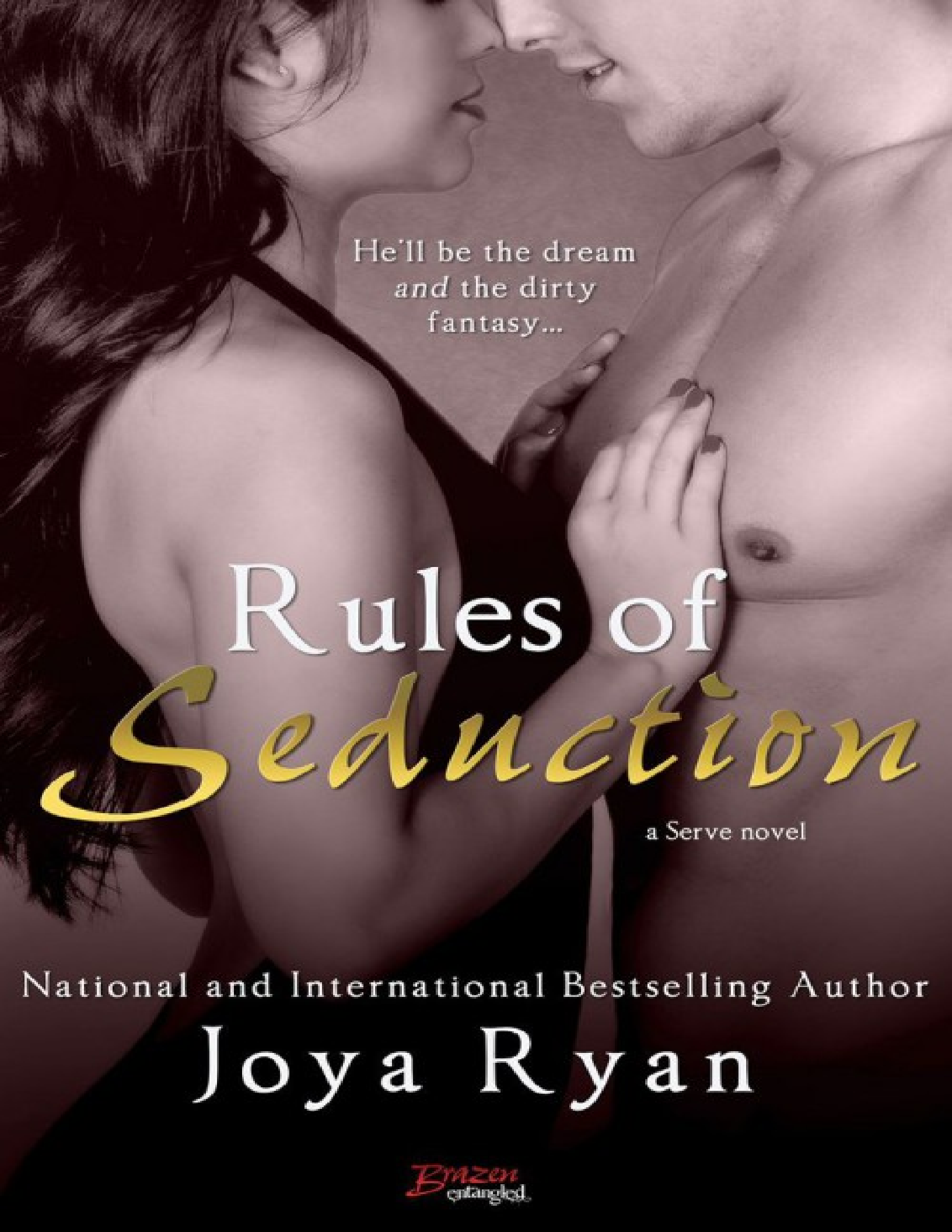
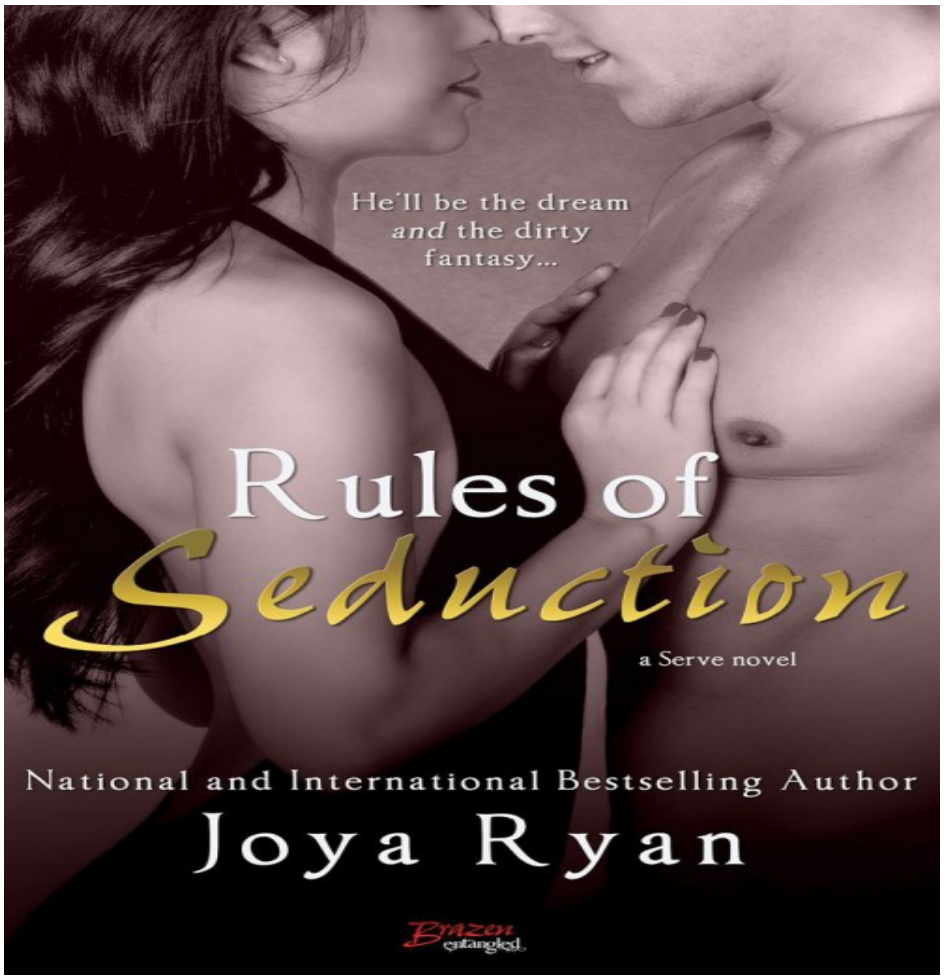
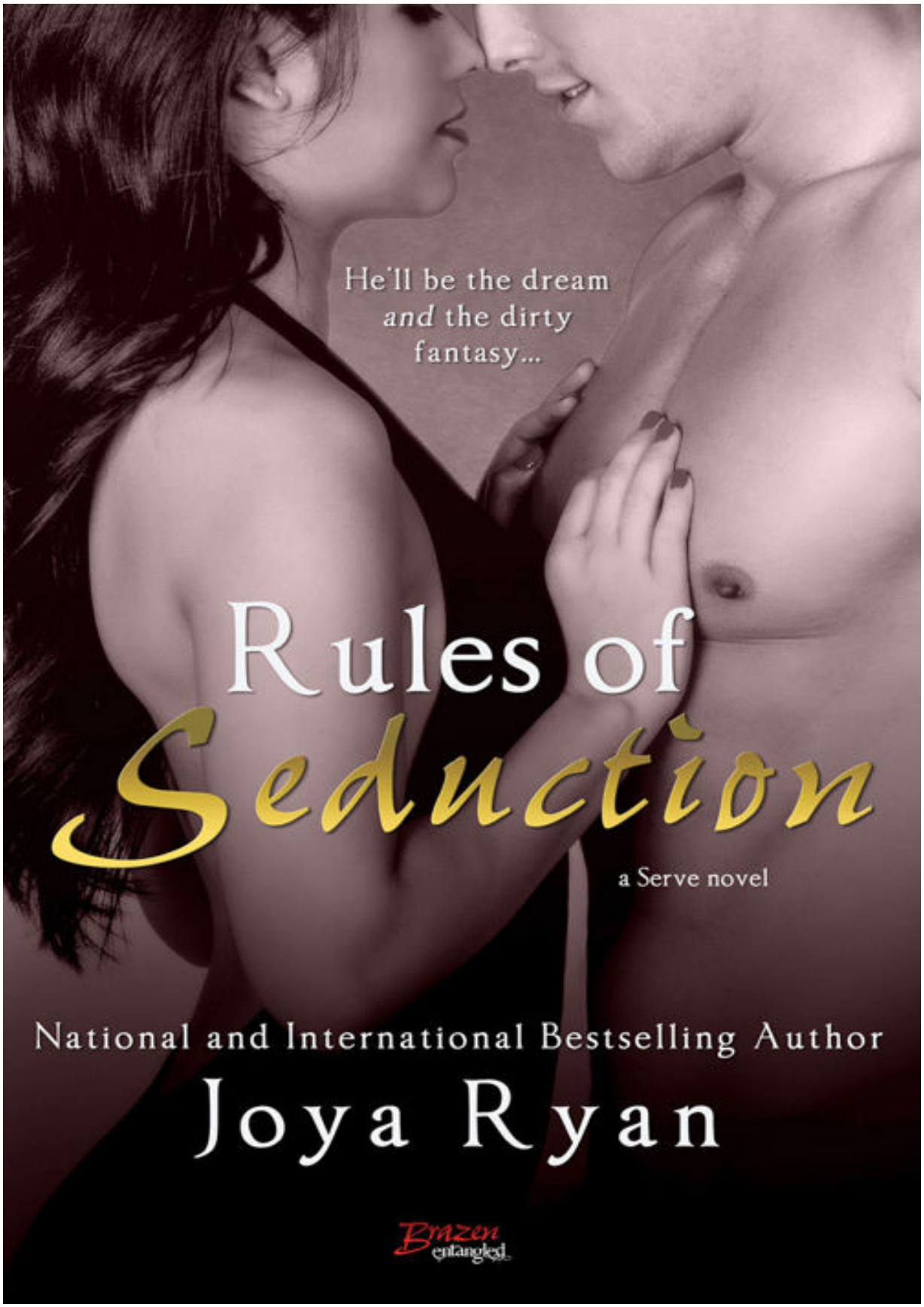

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He'll be the dream and the dirty fantasy...

Through with both her controlling ex and relationships, Ava Webber is determined to explore the spicy and sometimes forbidden appetites of the exclusive BDSM nightclub, Serve. Here, she'll get exactly what she needs...as long as it's from a man she *doesn't* know.

Nolan Hart ensures that Serve's clients get what they want, how they want it. But with one look at the curvy brunette, Nolan knows *he's* the man to fulfill her desires. As the anonymous lover, he's Ava's dirtiest fantasy. Outside of Serve, he's her charming, smartass friend.

But Nolan wants more. More than Ava is willing to give. And as long as the blindfold stays on, she'll never discover that the two men she's falling for are one and the same...

Rules of *Seduction*

a Serve novel

Joya Ryan

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To Stephen,
Thank you for your support and awesomeness!

Chapter One

The leather chair squeaked as Ava Webber shifted in her seat.

Waiting.

She was both excited and nervous about this interview. It was also unlike any interview she'd ever experienced. Process and procedure ruled her life, maybe one reason why a few months ago she'd found it so easy to land a finance job in New York at Wayne Marketing Firm. Apply. Interview. Accept the job. All standard procedure.

Except this interview for membership in Serve was anything but standard. Why would it be? Serve was New York's most exclusive sex club.

Her nerves flickered with anticipation. Based on the paperwork she'd filled out and the orientation class she'd attended last week, this final meeting wasn't about crunching numbers, spreadsheets, or analysis. This was about sex. Pure and simple sex.

"This is just another part of the process," she mumbled as she looked around the office. The lighting was set like something from a castle corridor—soft and illuminating—and the massive mahogany desk in the middle of the room was surrounded by rich leather and wood furniture. All tasteful and masculine.

Despite the many steps it had taken her to wind up sitting and waiting for membership at Serve, nothing would now deter her from the path she'd chosen.

It was time.

Time she truly moved on. Time she admitted what she wanted. Time to go after it.

The moment her lungs filled with oxygen on a heavy inhale, the door opened and a tall, muscled man walked in, flipping through what looked to be her extensive questionnaire.

"Ava Webber?" he asked, eyes fused to the paper.

"Yes."

He kicked the door shut with his foot, flipped to another page, and frowned. He still hadn't looked up, which was a shame, because even in the low light, she could tell his eyes were not only the iciest blue she'd ever seen, they were intense. Power and strength radiated from him as he took his seat behind the desk. His big body settled into the chair, and his muscles flexed beneath the thin black T-shirt he wore. Her mouth watered. Just the way he moved was hypnotizing.

"There's a problem with your application," he said, and now he looked at her. But the sound of his voice and the finality in his tone made a rise of panic swell in her gut.

"What? No, that can't be. I read through the entire handbook, and I'm confident I meet every requirement."

His eyebrows furrowed. He leaned forward and placed his hands on the desk, which did crazy amazing things to those impressive biceps of his.

"You didn't fill out section three completely," he said, flipping to the page in question and sliding it in front of her. "For preference in a partner, you put *male*."

"Is that a problem?"

He tossed her a lethal grin, and she suddenly felt a little giddy. Whoever this man was, he knew how to work a room—likely a woman, too—and had a special kind of swagger that was gifted from God and well honed over the

years. He glowed with confidence and an alpha intensity that matched the gleam of the laid-back charm in his eyes.

"*Male* is a good start. Narrows the options down by half. But usually I'm given more to work with. Like body type, hair color, eye color—"

"I don't care about any of that." Her response seemed to take him off guard, but it was the truth. "All I care about is that it's anonymous sex."

He looked at her for a long moment. "That's a problem. Because see on section five? Sexual preferences, boundaries, hard limits, personal wants and desires?"

She nodded, looking at the section in question. "What's your point?"

"You put *any*."

"I'm aware."

"As am I. Which is why I'm concerned."

Ava took a deep breath. Hottie McSexyGrin was grilling her. He was the last step before she could participate in this club. She absently gripped her ring finger. Even with the discarded ring sitting in a drawer at home, she still felt its weight.

She couldn't lose this chance. She needed a place like Serve. Needed to feel alive again and needed this man to stop blocking her from the path she'd discovered. A path that would finally let her be free.

"I don't understand your concern." She tapped the paper. "I'm open to any experience, hence the word."

He raised an eyebrow. "Yes, I can read, sweetheart. But I'm not sure you understand all Serve has to offer. If you leave yourself open to anything, I can assure you, you just may get that."

"I see we finally *understand* each other."

He sat back in his chair and looked at her with amusement. "In the spirit of *understanding* each other, let's go through a list."

"List?"

He shrugged. “Yeah, you seem to be open to anything, but I need to be clear on your desires, so we’ll start with your pussy.”

“Excuse me?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, did I offend you? Or are you not sitting in the middle of a sex club and claiming to be open to anything?”

Great, not only was this guy sex on a stick, he was a smartass trying to call her bluff. Fine, she could play along.

“What is it you’d like to know?”

“Several things,” he admitted, with a heat in his eyes that made her thighs tingle. “Do you like your pussy to be sucked? Fucked? Made love to?”

She held her posture as still as possible. “All of the above.”

“And what about your man? Assuming I assign you one. What do you want to do to him?”

“Whatever he wants.”

He tsked. “Oh sweetheart, that is the best and worst answer you could give.”

“I don’t see how me wanting to please the man you *will* assign me is a bad thing.”

He grinned, obviously picking up on her determination that she wasn’t leaving without what she’d come for.

“Not bad, just trying to keep your expectations in check. He may decide to fuck your mouth for a while before touching you otherwise.”

“Sounds great.” And it really did. There was something about sucking a man that really turned her on. Not that she was going to go into details about that to the guy baiting her from the other side of the desk.

He shook his head. “I don’t think you know what you’re asking for.”

That’s where he was wrong. She’d thought about this more than he could know, and she knew *exactly* what she was asking for. Time he understood she was confident in her choice.

“I want to touch him however he’ll let me, and he can have me however he wants. I don’t know how to be more clear than that. Unless you’d like to run through every single scenario?”

The sarcasm in her voice made his amusement fire into something a little more lusty. His shoulders stiffened. She was wearing him down, showing she could handle what she was asking for, and slinging him back a taste of his own medicine.

“Safety is my number one concern here,” he said. “I don’t want to set up a scene or situation for you that you’ll walk away from feeling…” There was a flicker of something sad in his eyes, but it passed quickly and he rasped the last word. “Traumatized.”

She opened her mouth to speak, but he cut her off quickly. The air changed around him. The sexy comments they’d been tossing back and forth had turned into a serious matter.

“Details are important.” He glanced at the questionnaire. “You’re not giving me any. So the risk that you’ll come out of a scene feeling worse rather than better is too high.”

Shit! She was losing him. He was going to close the book on her and send her packing. It was clear he took his job seriously, and she respected that. Whatever uneasy hesitation had danced behind his eyes a moment ago made her wonder how many times he’d had this same interview. Did people really put down every single detail like hair color?

“What if I give you all the honest details I can?”

“That would make my life much easier,” he said.

She nodded. “Okay. I went to the orientation class and know what Serve offers. You can sit there and ask me questions all day long, but I mean it when I say that I’m open to anything. I also mean it when I say that keeping the sex and any experience under this roof anonymous, including the man I’m with, is my number one hard limit. I don’t want to see his face.”

He leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest. “Go on.”

“I didn’t come here for an emotional connection. I came for sex. You set up these things, right? I was told you’re the best at what you do. I trust you’ll do that.”

“Why?” he said quickly, his eyes boring into hers. “In all the years I’ve been doing this, I’ve never had less to go on. You want to be at Serve? Want anything? I have to know you’re aware of all the rules and regulations and what you’re asking for. I can’t protect you otherwise. So tell me, Ava…” The way he said her name made chills run up her spine and heat gather low in her stomach. “Why?”

It was the question she’d been avoiding for years. The question she’d asked herself over and over again while she’d been with Peter and he’d controlled every aspect of her life.

Why had she stayed as long as she did?

Why had she let him run her life, take over her spirit, and crush her entire sense of self?

Why had she let him leave her an empty shell after trying for years to please him?

The answer was one it had taken her a while to find: because she was young, trying to be the good wife, and hadn’t known any better. She’d woken up and realized she’d never gotten a chance to know herself.

That was one thing she was set to rectify. She wasn’t his wife anymore. And she wasn’t interested in having any kind of relationship again. It gave the other person too much power.

Since she was eighteen, she’d known only Peter. He’d saved her from her small town, shitty life, and awful parents. In return, he’d controlled every aspect of her life, from how she’d dressed to her career prospects and her dreams. He’d never abused her physically, but the words he’d used had gotten harsher every day, until she’d had barely a shred of self-esteem left.

It had taken her six years to figure out he was slowly killing her soul. And another two years to divorce him and finally, *finally* move on.

No. she wouldn't do that again. Wouldn't trust or love or commit. She just wanted to live. To feel. To be free.

Serve was her saving grace. A chance to experience freedom, passion, and never *ever* have to risk anything more. No feelings. No emotion. No commitment.

No kind of relationship at all.

Just sex. Healthy, anonymous sex.

But first she had to get past the hulking, sexy interviewer. He wanted to know why? She took a deep breath and reached for the most honest answer she could.

"Every single day I live by rules, a structured schedule, and an outline. In here, I want to just feel. And I want to walk away when I'm done. That may not be a standard questionnaire desire, but it's my fantasy."

His blue eyes stayed on her, and goose bumps rolled along her arms. She sat, waiting for his verdict, and hoping to hell she hadn't just blown it.

• • •

Jesus Christ, Nolan Hart hadn't been this shocked since…ever.

The woman sitting in front of him was maybe a buck twenty, with big green eyes, caramel hair, and a completely serious expression. Though she hadn't smiled, her lips were a perfect kind of plump, which made him think of all sorts of things he wanted to do to that mouth. A mouth that was challenging him and fighting for a place at Serve.

He'd thought she was naïve, tried calling her out and flicking her shit, and she'd matched his every remark with a straight-faced answer.

He had to hand it to her, she was different. But if there was one thing Nolan understood, it was rules. His whole job—his whole *life*—was built

around them. He protected people, and he couldn't do that without full cooperation. It took only one instant for things to get out of hand, a scene to be taken too far, and a woman to be hurt. In his entire time at Serve, that had happened only once, but it had haunted him ever since.

Though it had happened years ago, he still thought about that woman's tears. About how he'd set her up with a Dom too rough for her.

He hadn't known it was too much for her, and even though the asshole got kicked out, it was still no excuse. No one got hurt on his watch. Serve was about pleasure, kink, and exploration. Above all, it was consensual.

Which was why Ava was going to be a problem. Because she was zeroing in on every kink he had…which was right in line with what she wanted: *everything*.

"I'm not a vague man," he said for himself just as much as her. He glanced at the one word she'd scribbled on the questionnaire:

Anything.

Yeah, this was a big fucking problem. She didn't know it, but she was tempting him in a way no one ever had before.

"So, what would you put on your questionnaire?" she asked.

Wasn't that a loaded question. Because if he were honest with himself, he'd put the same damn word she'd just used.

"This is about *your* wants and desires, sweetheart, not mine."

There was a hint of a smile and a soft blush. She was obviously strong and knew what she wanted, yet there was an air of innocence to her. Everything from her curious gaze to her body language sent him on alert to conquer, pleasure, and protect.

A couple of instincts he needed to get under control real fucking quick.

"I told you my fantasy. You haven't even told me your name."

"Nolan," he said, a little raspy.

Shit, the woman was getting to him. Because he didn't care about the

outer details like body type—though he was starting to be partial to slightly petite with incredible features and long honey hair—but he was still tempted by the thought of his fantasy wrapped up in a tight little package of sexy curves.

"Nolan," she repeated.

That was all it took. He was a goner. The way she said his name made him want to hear her moan it, scream it, whisper it, all while she was on the brink of coming and shuddering like she couldn't take anymore.

Except it wouldn't be for him. It'd be for whoever he picked for her.

"Many men here have certain kinds of preferences," he tried again, hoping to get some more information on what the hell kind of partner he was supposed to find for her. "Some won't be gentle. Some like inflicting pain. Some like receiving it." He raised his eyebrow. "Some want to dominate."

"All of that's fine. Is there a man that can do all that, depending on his mood?"

He frowned. Was she fucking kidding? "A lot is possible. But the men around here are typically specific with their wants—something I'm trying to get from you."

"I want to be consumed. In any way he wants to take me. Because the minute I step out of the scene, it's over and back to the real world."

It suddenly hurt to breathe. That sounded right up his alley. She wanted to get lost, taken over, but not in the real world. There wasn't a man alive besides himself he'd trust not to abuse that privilege.

Then an idea struck him:

Why not me?

She wanted what he'd happily give her. In this short time, he'd already gotten a good sense for her. He could read her body, expressions, and cues.

He could take things in whatever direction the moment led. It was a

dangerous notion, but he didn't trust anyone else to have her. He'd make sure she got what she wanted without someone going too far or hurting her.

And she was offering everything, with the only catch of not seeing the man she was with. That was her one hard limit, and he could give that to her. Because if there was one thing he understood, it was hard limits.

He'd spent years wrapped up in women, moving from each one to the next in a quest to feel…*anything*. And every time, he found the threat of the future—unpredictable, unknowable—too powerful to ignore. How could he protect anyone longer than one scene at a time?

So he'd resigned himself to doing just that. No relationships. No chance for love. But at least he could guarantee the safety of each woman at Serve by assuring she was paired with the perfect partner.

But to have a woman put herself in his hands—literally. To trust her fate to him for more than a single scene. It sounded better than good, and it was the one thing he'd yearned for but seen no way to experience. Anyone who wanted him for more than a single scene wanted him for a relationship, and he couldn't have that.

He hadn't found "the one," and he never would. His friends were being taken down one after another with emotional monogamy, but it wasn't in the cards for him.

This woman, though? There was a tiny gleam of something broken behind her eyes. Something she was outrunning. He could relate. She called to him in a way he couldn't ignore. She wanted a tightly controlled scene, and because the fantasy would never escape into the real world, he could fulfill her desires and know that as long as she was with him, he would keep her safe.

"You'd let him have you. However he wanted. So long as his identity remained secret?" He had to clarify this just one more time to be sure she knew what she was asking for. Because he couldn't turn her away, but he

couldn’t turn her over to another, either.

“Yes,” she said. “I’ll leave it to him, and to you, to read me.” Her green eyes met his. “I trust you to pair me with the man I need.”

He nodded. Ava Webber had just sealed her own fate, and maybe even his own.

“Tomorrow night,” he said. “You’ll have the man you want.”

Chapter Two

“You’ve done a wonderful job these past few months,” Gina said, her perfect blond bob swaying as she spoke. Gina was Ava’s boss and project manager for the entire marketing firm.

“Thank you,” Ava said. “I appreciate that.” Especially since her life in New York had mostly been spent in the office. She hadn’t really made friends yet. Unless she could count Nolan.

She almost laughed. No, he was definitely not her friend. He was her… hook up coordinator? Whatever. Either way, they weren’t on a friendly level, which was why she’d spent most of today trying to not think about what would happen tonight. Who would he pick for her? She also wasn’t thinking of the way his eyes got all stormy when he looked at her.

She would have been thinking about the man Nolan was going to partner her with tonight, but she’d asked to keep this anonymous, and that meant she’d never even see him. Only touch him. But if half the men at the club were even a fraction as hot as Nolan, she wouldn’t be disappointed.

“You’ve done such a good job,” Gina continued, “that I want to put you as lead consultant for XSpot Inc.”

Ava’s brows shot almost to her hairline. XSpot Inc. was a large, lucrative business that was shopping for a new marketing firm. They were also the most risqué business the firm had ever made a play for. Apparently, XSpot’s line of sex toys was second to none. Or so Ava was told. Toys or not,

between the lingerie and all things fantasy driven, they had a wide array of products and the equity behind them to go global.

"That is quite a surprise. I…I'm not quite sure where to start."

"Oh honey, don't worry," Gina said with a wave of her hand. "This is no different than what you've been doing. Only now, when the time hits to rope them in, I want you front and center instead of behind the scenes. We're all adults, and they have products to push."

"Okay. So what do you need me to do?"

"I need you to draw up a strategy for the next twelve to eighteen months. Show them a plan for how we can take them mainstream and international. They're taking meetings with several firms in the city over the next month, and I want to be ready. Let's nail them—" she winked "—so to speak."

Badabump-bump!

Yeah, Ava got it. Gina might be her boss, but she was only a couple of years older and already had an easy confidence and determination that put her in control of her world. Ava liked that about Gina. To be honest, she kind of envied it.

And now she had a chance to claim the same kind of success. The same kind of identity.

This was a big opportunity for her, and if Gina was behind her, Ava could really move up the ladder at this firm. She could finally have something of her own, that she'd worked for.

Seemed she was in the market to land a lot more than she'd realized. Between the anticipation about tonight and this new client who could take her career to the next level, she was flooded with excitement and nerves.

She could handle herself, professionally and privately. But she was still treading into uncharted territory in both areas. She was no virgin, but she was no wanton either. Something she'd soon change.

With a smile and a nod, she glanced at her computer, then watched Gina

click her heels and weave through the staff cubicles.

Ava was good with number analysis and running figures, but pitching in a meeting? About sex toys?

Looks like I have some research to do.

• • •

Nolan stood near the entrance of the mouth that lead to the various upper floors of Serve. His usual spot, watching women and men dance, drink, interact. Soon he'd hand off his shift to another security guy and he'd attend to the one thing he'd been thinking of for the past twenty-four hours.

Ava Webber.

He glanced around again. There were a lot of people there for Friday night, and he kept trying to catch a glimpse of caramel hair or a flash of green eyes.

Maybe she'd backed out?

Jesus, what was his problem? He was standing there, bouncing on his toes and staring at the front entrance like a damn tween waiting for a prom date. He shook his head. This was going to be sex. Nothing more. He'd had his share of it—had even recently helped his friend Will satisfy a particularly unique predicament with his now one true love.

So why was he so excited about being with Ava? Something about the witty, sexy woman he'd interviewed yesterday got him going in a way he thought wasn't possible anymore.

Sure, he liked sex, but at some point over the past few months it had tuned into just getting off. No connection beyond the physical.

Which is what Ava is looking for, jackass.

Except that wasn't quite right.

He needed to get this weird whisper in his mind to shut up. Connection? No. She didn't even want that much. She wanted sex, pure and simple. But

he'd bet his cock it wouldn't be pure, and it for damn sure wouldn't be simple. It would be hot and mind-blowing. And that's where it'd end.

Now he just needed the woman to show up.

"Nolan!" a thunderous voice came from behind him. Jake Sims, a Dom that frequented the club regularly, shook Nolan's hand.

"Hey man, how are you?"

"Good. About to be better," Jake said, his stare drifting to a pretty redhead that was all but drooling at Jake. The practiced avoidance of direct eye contact and perfect posture gave her sub status away immediately. "I just wanted to see if you've thought more about my offer?"

"Sorry man. You're cute and all, but you're not my type," Nolan said.

"Shut up. You know I'm talking about the job."

Yeah, he did know. Jake owned a high-end security company that ranged from personal bodyguards to state of the art systems. And he was looking for someone more or less to run it.

"I've thought about it."

"And? You'd be perfect. Jonah raves about you, you're great at what you do, and you'd be the right man for the job. You'd oversee the entire security detail."

"First off, I've never seen Jonah 'rave' about a thing in his life," Nolan countered. "Also, I'm happy here."

The minute the words came out, they tasted bad. Because somewhere deep down, he wasn't as happy as he used to be. Something Jake must have caught on to, because his friend took Nolan's words as an opportunity to press the point.

"You sure about that?"

No, he wasn't. But he wasn't going into it. Wasn't going to start gabbing about the weird hole that had started growing in his chest a while ago. It felt like…emptiness. Which was stupid, because he worked at a premier sex

club, got paid well, and could get laid whenever he wanted.

So why was he whining?

He was in the business of making other people's fantasies come true in a short term, safe, enjoyable environment. That was his focus. He set the scenes at Serve, even participated from time to time, but his problem remained: finding a forever girl wasn't likely. But at least here, he could indulge in a fantasy now and then. Connect to the self he wanted to be, even if at the end of the night, he had to let that man go.

If he left Serve—if he went to work for Jake—he knew what would happen. He'd lose what little opportunities for connection he had.

"I'm good," Nolan said. "I appreciate your offer, but—"

"Just think about it," Jake said. "But don't think too long. I've got to fill the position. Soon it will be too late."

"You can't afford me anyway," Nolan joked.

"Name your price, man. That's all I'm gonna say." Jake smiled and shot Nolan a wink as he walked toward the redhead.

Nolan nodded. Jake was a good guy. He would think about it. If he were honest, part of him was worried he wouldn't know how to function without Serve. It was something that was a little off the beaten path, not so normal, and if Nolan didn't have his job—his reputation—at Serve, then what was he?

As if God tossed him a bone, saving him from his own thoughts, Ava walked into the club, and holy fucking shit—she was smokin'. All that honey hair hung in waves down her back, and her lips had a pink tint that made her green eyes sparkle more than he thought possible. The little black dress she wore clung to her curves and hit just above her knees, leaving plenty to the imagination but a lot on display. She outlined the fantasy instead of giving it all away.

Anticipation was the best part, and damn it, he wanted to feel every inch

of skin she was hiding.

Leo walked up just then, ready to relieve Nolan. Thank God for awesome timing, because Nolan was ready to run toward Ava.

"Hey man," Leo said as he came up to him. "Busy night."

Nolan nodded. "Yep, stay sharp."

"Will do. You sticking around?" Leo nudged his arm.

His friend was talking about a different kind of sticking around.

"Probably not," Nolan said.

"Come on. You should blow off some steam. Go upstairs and have some fun. That blonde by the bar has been asking about you."

Jesus, what was it with people telling him what he needed to do tonight? Did he have a damn sign on his forehead that read "Give me your opinion on my life"?

Shit of it was, he was going to participate in a scene, but not as himself. As whoever Ava pictured being behind the blindfold.

"My night is booked," Nolan said, his eyes on Ava across the room. That was all he said, and that was all he needed to say.

Nolan trusted Leo. He had been part of club security for a couple of years and the perfect person to help him manage liaisons between members. Little did Leo know that by relieving Nolan for the night, he was going to free Nolan up to take on what—make that *who*—he really wanted. And he was walking in her direction.

He came up to her by the bar. "Decided to show up, I see."

She looked up at him with a steady face, but he saw the hard work her throat went through to swallow down the nerves she must be feeling. This wasn't his first rodeo. He dealt with nervous people and newbies all the time. The key was making them comfortable while reminding them of their own power.

She went to say something, then stopped as if to gather her thoughts.

Yeah, she was nervous but trying to tamp it down. If there was one thing Nolan knew, it was how to read people.

"Was there a doubt I wouldn't?"

He shrugged and held up two fingers to the bartender. "It wouldn't be the first time I've had to deliver bad news to a guy waiting on a beautiful woman."

Her eyes went wide and she looked around. "Is he here right now?"

The bartender placed two shots of vodka in front of them. Nolan handed her one, and he took the other.

"I thought you wanted this to be anonymous."

"I do. There's a ton of people here. I wouldn't know even if…" She glanced around again, then took a deep breath. Which made him notice the incredible breasts encased beneath the skin-tight fabric. "Never mind. You're right. I don't even want to know." With a smile, she took her shot and placed the glass on the counter.

"There's no rush," Nolan said, then took his shot. He relished the burn of liquor sliding down his throat. "We can hang out here for a bit. Have another drink. You can still back out—"

"We?" she interjected. "Why would *we* hang out?"

He frowned. "*We* would hang out because you're my personal charge, *Miss Anything*."

She bit her bottom lip, and he stifled a groan. Soon. Soon he'd put that lip and that biting to good use. He scooted closer, put an elbow on the bar, and faced her fully. He didn't miss the way her hips shifted just enough in his direction to cue him that she was getting ready, thinking the same way he was.

Only not with him…or so she thought.

"Think of me as your personal chauffer. I'll drop you off, prep you, make sure you get in and out okay, and pick you up when you're done."

"I thought it was right upstairs?"

He grinned. "It is." He leaned close and whispered in her ear. "But someone is going to have to help you get the blindfold on and off."

Her green eyes fixed on his, and a shuddering breath left her lips.

"I think I'll take that second drink," she said.

• • •

Ava downed her second shot in record time. She hadn't realized that Nolan was going to be her personal protector throughout this situation. She couldn't bring herself to be upset about it. Quite the opposite. She hadn't thought about the details beyond the sex. Like before and after. Getting cleaned up, taking on and off her clothes, figuring out where she was…all that stuff. Because yes, a blindfold would be involved. But otherwise, she didn't know what to expect, because, like Nolan had reminded her, she had said *anything*.

"Can you explain to me how this is going to work?"

With a deep breath, he clasped his hands in front of him and looked her in the eye. "You really do need my help. Okay, I'll try to explain. When a man and woman like each other very much, and they want to express that feeling in a physical way, they take their clothes off and—"

"I know how *that* works, smart ass," she said with a roll of her eyes. But she couldn't help but smile. He was fun. Easygoing. And just what she needed to calm her twitching nerves. "I mean the details of the execution of this exchange. There's a blindfold, but what else?"

"He won't speak. You'll simply wait for him to come and go." He winked, and yeah, she didn't miss that innuendo. "Then I'll come get you and make sure you're taken care of after. Anything you or he wish to address before or after goes through me. That way your hard limit of anonymity stays intact."

When she nodded, he clarified, “You realize that *hard limit* means no crossing that stipulation? You said you don’t want to take the blindfold off, and you don’t want to see him or know who he is. He won’t cross that hard limit, and if you do—”

“Game over,” she said. The term “hard limit” was a big deal around there, and she was onboard.

“You’re setting it, but he will respect it. Just like you must.”

She nodded, but she had a different question. “So if I liked something particular he did…”

“And wanted to let him know? You’d tell me.”

“And what am I supposed to call him?”

“I suspect you’ll likely call him, ‘Oh God,’ or ‘More, God, more.’ Either way, likely the title of ‘God’ will be used.”

She laughed. “This guy is that sure of himself, huh?”

He shrugged. “I’m not a gossip king, but I’ve heard a few things. He’s one of the best Serve has to offer.”

“Oh?” she asked. The second shot was kicking in just enough to warm her belly and take her to the brink of calm and happy. “Well, you aren’t going to hold out on me now are you?” She scooted closer.

He took an exaggerated breath and glanced over his shoulder like what he was about to say was top secret information. Then he leaned in, so close she could almost feel his lips graze hers when he spoke.

“You’re the one who’s going have to tell me what *you* think, sweetheart. Not the other way around.”

And she likely would.

“All right,” she said. “But don’t expect me to dish about every detail.”

He frowned as if truly offended. “That’s exactly what I expect. Right after you braid my hair and we have a pillow fight.”

She smiled. “Is that what you think women do? Talk about sex, do our

hair, then throw pillows at each other?"

"Hey, that's my fantasy. I'd appreciate it if you didn't ruin it." He winked, and the perma-smile he'd put on her face refused to leave. He was so charming and funny and damn it, she felt good. Just talking with him made her feel at ease.

"So, where will you be during…?" She didn't mean for that to sound as raspy as it did, but truth was, the easy air about Nolan, paired with the realization that he was, in fact, the closest thing she had to a friend, made her ribs tighten a little.

"I'll be at my assigned station."

She nodded. "Okay. I think I'm ready."

He raised a brow. "You sure?"

She nodded and straightened her shoulders. "Yes."

"Then there's just one more thing I need to let him know. What's your safe word, Ava?"

She swallowed hard and stared at the arctic blue eyes boring down on her. Only one word came to mind when looking into those hard glaciers.

"Ice."

"Okay. Then follow me."

Chapter Three

Nolan put in his tongue ring and looked himself over in the mirror. He only wore the tongue ring on certain occasions, and tonight was a special one. This particular barbell had a fun feature he was excited to try on Ava. It also would contribute to the illusion that the anonymous man in her scene couldn't possibly be him.

Ava was across the hall, in the room he'd placed her in, waiting for him.

He'd put her blindfold on, told her that it was to stay on until he came back to get her, and reminded her to use her safe word if she needed it.

Part of him felt a ping of guilt for not being technically honest with her, but he dismissed it quickly. First of all, because this was what she'd asked for. And second of all, because he wouldn't let another woman get hurt. One was already too many.

Ava wanted anything, and a lot of guys would give her just that. But he didn't trust them to know her body and read her signals. No, she was his. He would take care of her.

She wanted this. Wanted so much, and he wanted to give it to her. Her only requirement was anonymity. No reason it couldn't be him. In fact, he'd convinced himself he was perfect for this kind of request.

In a fresh pair of jeans and nothing else, he made the trek to the door she was behind, tapped once, and opened it.

The scene he walked into nearly stopped his heart. He'd just been there a

moment ago, dropping her off, but entering the room as her anonymous lover gave him a whole different class of feelings.

The dark gray color of the walls was brighter than a moment ago. The wood furniture was all antique, but tonight it looked like all the pieces belonged in a mansion. An oversized mirror hung in the middle of the far wall, facing the bed. Nolan could look left or right and have a perfect view of the four poster. The tiffany lamps illuminated the entire space and made him feel like he was stepping into a wet dream. Random hooks hung on the wall, and he grinned. He'd use those later.

He'd never appreciated a room before, but today was different. Because there, amongst white and gray sheets, was Ava. Her pretty face had a strip of black silk over her eyes. She sat on the bed, palms resting on the sheets, and turned her head toward him.

"You're here," she said, as if trying to gain her bearings. Though he couldn't talk, he wanted to put her at ease. They had the rest of the night, and he intended to take it. He didn't know if she'd come back after this, so he'd enjoy what he was given, which was this honey-haired siren with her come-fuck-me dress and perfect mouth.

He closed the door behind him, made his way toward her, picked up one of her hands, then ran his thumb along her knuckles.

She took a deep breath, as if gathering her senses. A small smile appeared on her lips. He coaxed her to stand, and she did. Using his palm, he traced from her stomach to her thigh as he bent to help her out of her heels.

The moment she stood barefoot, he had to bite back a curse. He'd known she was petite, but her heels added easily four inches. Now barefoot, she looked sexy, small, and delicate. Christ, he could break her. Easily a foot taller and a hundred pounds heavier, he'd have to be careful to reign in his roughness. Or at least take it slow and see how much she could take.

He tried remembering the strong woman in his office, the strong woman

at the bar just moments ago. She'd said she wanted anything, but looking at her in this state, she looked so…vulnerable. Could he really slake his dirty lust with her?

He cupped her hips and turned her so that he could unzip her dress. He let it fall slowly and was gifted with the sight of a matching strapless black lace bra and panties. And when she turned back to face him, he hissed. She might be petite, but her breasts were large and high. His hiss turned into a groan. He wanted to fall on her like an animal and start tasting every inch.

Her breaths picked up a little, all that creamy cleavage threatening to spill over her demi cup.

Slow, he reminded himself. She was delicate. Soft. He traced a finger from her throat to her sternum, reveling at her beauty.

He was hard as stone. For twenty-four hours, he'd thought of all the wicked things he wanted to do to her. Finally having her before him like this, looking perfect and juicy and ripe for plucking, he wanted this second to last a little longer so he could sear her into his memory.

She blew out a breath. "So, I thought you were some kind of god among men around here?"

Nolan's eyes snapped to hers. The blindfold was secure. She couldn't see him. But what she'd said… Was she…? She was. The little vixen was goading him.

"I know I put on my questionnaire that I was game for anything, but I didn't think that meant light touches and remaining clothed."

Oh no she didn't.

Nolan's whole body revved up. This sassy woman was challenging him, and he was happy to meet that challenge.

She wanted rough and dirty and hard? He'd give it to her. Small or not, he had to remember that she had a mouth on her—time she started using it.

He cupped her throat in his whole palm and backed her swiftly against

the nearest wall. She gasped, but a smile lit her face.

The signals were clear. She liked it. Liked his hands hard on her. And if that's what she wanted, then so be it.

• • •

When Ava's back hit the cool wall, a spark of adrenaline surged through her. She couldn't see, all she could do was feel. He'd been soft with his touch…the opposite of what she was looking for.

Because it made certain emotions rise that she didn't want. Emotions like tenderness.

She needed to be taken over. Fucked. Ravaged. This was just sex, after all. She needed to keep that line in place. Goading a stranger she couldn't see probably wasn't a good idea, but she was safe. She trusted Nolan was outside, nearby, and nothing would happen to her. He wouldn't pick a man that he wasn't confident in.

The gentle way the mystery man rubbed her hand, her feet, made her entire body relax. She couldn't get clouded on what her purpose was. She wanted to feel alive. Not cherished.

Not that this stranger was "cherishing" her per se, but the route he was going down made her knees weak and her heart beat a little strangely. She couldn't see his face, but she felt his eyes on her. Like he was staring. Marveling maybe? Hopefully not disappointed. She was aware that she wasn't the thinnest or the tallest. Certainly not the model type.

Stop.

There was no room for insecurities now. She'd found her strength and come this far. Now, with a hard man against her front and his hand on her throat, she wanted to push whatever envelope he had and fall into the consuming moment.

No. More. Thinking.

Time to see what this guy could really do.

"Do you not like it when I talk?" she asked. Though his hand covered her entire throat, he traced the side of her chin, along her jaw, with his thumb. He wouldn't speak, she knew that, so she'd have to go on physical cues. "Or maybe you like a challenge?" She leaned forward the best she could, and his minty breath hit her face.

She looked up and felt his mouth so close to hers. He was tall, strong. She placed her hands on his torso, and Holy Mary Mother of God, was he ripped. She could wash her clothes on the abs she was groping. The feel of his hard muscles and hot skin made her lick her lips, desperate for a taste. And a taste was what she'd take.

"I hope you weren't expecting a sweet girl." She lifted to her toes and nipped his chin. He growled low. The finger at her chin tapped as if in warning. She was getting to him, could feel all his sexual predatory instincts build up, and for whatever reason, he wasn't giving in quite yet.

She felt strong, powerful, calling him out and seeing if she could make him snap and give in to what they both wanted.

"Maybe you are just a myth after all," she whispered.

That was all it took. A low rumble broke from his chest, and he crashed his lips down on hers.

She gasped in surprise but was cut off by his firm tongue plunging inside and drinking down every single ounce of desire she had. A cool bead of metal danced between their mouths. A tongue ring?

That made her body flush hotter, and when it scraped against her teeth, the light clicking sound was the most erotic thing she'd ever heard. Her pulse beat like a drum in her ears and threw her body into high gear. Every little sensation was magnified by a thousand.

He pulled her bottom lip between his teeth and bit. She scraped her nails down his stomach, then gripped the waist of his jeans and yanked him

closer. He was hard, and if she wasn't mistaken…big.

He ground against her, and she had no choice but to spread her legs. But she was so pinned between him and the wall she could barely move.

He broke from the kiss that left her dizzy, and before she could register his movements, he gathered her wrists in his hand and wrapped a cold strip of fabric around them. In record time, her wrists were fastened, and he placed them overhead and hooked them on the wall.

Clever man. She remembered seeing those hooks around the room and had wondered what they were for.

She stood there, stretched out like an offering. His heat left her momentarily, as if he had stepped away from her body. She wiggled a little, partly to see how strong the hook was and partly because her skin was prickling with goose bumps. She was desperate to find the warmth of his body again.

She didn't have to wait long because, in a whoosh, he tugged her strapless bra down and cinched it beneath her breasts, then ripped her panties away.

She smiled. He wasn't being gentle. And she didn't feel gentle. Didn't feel pretty and feminine. She felt naughty, sexy, and on display. Everything she wanted.

Her breasts were heavy and uncomfortable from the way the lacy cups were digging in, but her nipples were bare and beading so hard that she moaned with desperation. She wanted him to touch her, lick her, anything. But she was his captive now. That much was clear. And she loved it. She had no room to think or feel anything except the moment.

"Please," she whispered. The whole room went still, as if his energy took up the entire space, and she felt it wash over her. "Please," she said again. This time it definitely sounded like begging.

She didn't care. She wiggled again and thrust her breasts out the best she

could. She just needed him. But he'd paused. Maybe on purpose? Maybe to watch her twist and toss—to make her beg?

"Do you like this?" she asked in a raspy voice and tugged on the bindings again. "You like watching me squirm?"

She felt his finger run up the inside of her thigh and meet her slick folds. He teased her just enough to moisten his finger. Then he was against her again, his face by hers, mouth brushing over her lips but not kissing. Then his wet finger came between their mouths. Wet with her arousal. She heard him suck it into his own mouth, and then she felt his smile against her lips.

"I'll take that as a yes," she breathed. She'd never been so turned on in her life. She'd also never connected with anyone on this level. Though she was blindfolded, she could feel him, read him, and he seemed to read her just as well. Maybe it was the loss of her vision that heightened every other sense she had. But all she sensed was his presence. He used his body to communicate, and she was picking up the messages perfectly.

He traced her lips with that same slick finger, and she pulled it between her teeth, then answered his silent question in return. "I like it, too."

She couldn't see him, and yet she felt his intentions. Could read him without her vision. It was a bizarre unity, one she thought he was tapping into as well.

Maybe this was what she'd needed all along. A connection made all the more intense by its temporary and specific nature.

A low groan broke from her anonymous lover, and it was the only warning she had before his hot mouth was on her breast.

"Yes!" she cried out. Her nipples had always been sensitive, so much that a light brush was all it took to get her fired up and ready. But she'd never had much attention paid to them. Judging by this myth of a man before her, that was going to change, and she wanted to go to her knees in thanks.

He sucked hard at the peak, and his whole mouth surrounded her breast

and took in more of the plump flesh than she thought possible. When he flicked his tongue over the hardened peak, the tongue ring he wore added to the sensation, and a fresh dose of need surged between her thighs. It might have been embarrassing if she wasn't so turned on, because she was certain that she was one good suck away from coming.

He moved to her other breast, and she so badly wanted to pull his hair and tug him closer. His hands splayed over her sides. She felt so small within them. All she could do was stand and take it.

He bit down on her nipple. She moaned, and her head lolled back against the wall supporting her.

She could barely hold out. She squeezed her legs together to keep how wet she'd become a secret, but he released her breasts and pressed her legs apart.

Clearly he didn't like her crossing her legs.

The air moved, and she felt him shift, on his knees now, she thought. His hands gripped her thighs and spread them wide. Cool air rushed up against her hot, pulsing flesh.

She also felt moisture on her inner thighs. She was literally dripping with so much need that it made her hesitate. She'd never been this wet before. Was this weird? Would he think she was abnormal for being so turned on already?

Whatever questions raced through her mind, she didn't have time to answer because his wicked tongue glided up her thigh and licked her clean.

"Oh, God…" she gasped.

He groaned and licked her other thigh, then hovered just over the place she needed him most. Nolan's words buzzed through her head. He'd warned her she'd likely call her mystery lover "god" at some point. Now, with him on his knees, on the brink of tasting her, she was ready to scream it to the ceiling.

He gently spanked her sex, then sucked the upper area into his mouth and gave a long moan, she guessed from how smooth she was down there. She got waxed regularly and was completely bare.

"Are you telling me you like it?" she asked—or more like murmured. Words were becoming more difficult since his breath was skating over her clit.

She felt him nod, causing his hair to sweep along her lower stomach with the movement.

"I'm glad," she said. And she was.

He kissed her folds, as if hammering home his approval, and it made her feel even more sexy and wanted.

His hand moved, and she heard a slight clicking, then a low hum, as if a bee was buzzing. What was that?

He put one of her bent knees on his shoulder, cupped her hips, and drove his tongue into her folds. She almost lost her footing, because holy hell, she knew what the buzzing was now. It was his tongue ring. A *vibrating* tongue ring, and it was currently running all over her clit. He licked and sucked, only to dive deep again.

She'd never felt anything like it. She'd sat in Nolan's office twenty-four hours ago claiming to be able to handle anything. Now she was on the verge of toppling over the edge of pleasure she never knew existed. This was already beyond any expectation she'd had. Now, with his firm, wet tongue combined with suction and vibration? She stood no chance of holding out.

"Yes, oh God, Myth, please…"

She didn't even recognize her own words. Or what she'd called him. Because right then, he felt like a myth of man. Her pleas seemed to spur him on, and he licked faster, plunged deeper. His grip on her hips tightened, and he rocked her body into his mouth, urging her to fuck his mouth back.

He was in control—moving her, eating her, helping himself to her body

however he wanted.

Her legs tingled like goose bumps were coming from inside her skin. A hot pleasure built and clawed its way up her stomach until she gave in to the flames.

“I’m coming,” she screamed, but it came out a broken sob. Her whole body lit up, fire racing over her skin while her blood chilled. She shuddered so violently that she was sure the hook that held her wrists would break from the wall.

It didn’t. But even if it did, he’d be there to catch her. He held her tight as her orgasm flooded her veins and threw her over the brink into pleasure so intense, it almost hurt.

Breathing hard, he brought her down and slipped her leg from over his shoulder. Another click sounded, and then the humming was gone. Tongue ring now turned off. Lord, she hadn’t known such things existed, but she was a fan now.

With his hands still gripping her hips, he lifted her up like she weighed nothing and unhooked her wrists.

She instantly threw her arms over his head and wrapped her legs around his waist as he carried her across the room. She didn’t wait for anything, she just kissed him like crazy. He groaned in her mouth as she clung to him as tightly as she could. She could taste mint and her arousal mixed in his mouth, and it made her insane with need.

She squeezed her legs, pressed herself against him, and felt his erection prod her. All she could think about was getting her hands on it. Her hands that were still tied.

“Want to feel you,” she said between kisses.

He shifted her weight to one arm, and she heard a snap and zipper. He sat down with her straddling him, and she felt her skin against his. And when he rubbed his erection between her legs…

Hello…

His jeans were gone. Nothing between them now but desire.

He continued to kiss her jaw, her neck, down to the swell of her breasts as he reached behind and unfastened the tie around her wrists. When her hands came free, he grabbed one and placed it between their bodies.

With his hand covering hers, he traced her palm from his chest, down his cut abs to his cock. It was hard and, like she'd thought, big. But what was different was that he didn't coax her to stroke it, he simply wanted her to touch it. He tapped her hand once, as if telling her to keep her hand there. A rip of cellophane sounded, then she felt him roll the condom on.

Something in her chest tugged. He wanted to make sure she knew he was keeping her safe.

She nodded in understanding. She wanted to tell him that she meant it when she said she wanted to feel him. Everywhere. In every way. And she was dying to feel him in one way in particular.

As though he could sense her desire, he wrapped a strong arm around her back, scooted her even closer, rubbing the head of his shaft between her folds. Her head fell back at the incredible contact. She was sensitive and the feel of him driving along the bundle of nerves sparked to life another dose of lust. But she felt empty. Tilting her hips, she silently begged him for more. In one long, powerful thrust, his massive length impaled her.

"Ah!" she gasped and stilled. He filled her up, so hard and big she could barely breathe. It was a stretch, a little sting, but it was good. So insanely good she didn't want to stop. This was what being consumed felt like.

He didn't move. Simply sat there. One arm kept her in a vice grip, the other cupped her face, his thumb brushing back and forth along her cheekbone.

Tenderness.

He was doing it again, and she was getting swept up in it.

“I’m okay,” she whispered. “Keep going.”

He let out a heavy exhale and did just that—thrust up and hit a spot deep inside that, like the man currently wrapped around her, seemed so good it may as well have been a myth.

Her fingernails sank into his shoulders as she held on, and a low burning pleasure rose in her core. Another orgasm was simmering, but this was different than the first. This was a slow, burning heat that started like a single match and built to a wildfire with every pulse of his body entering hers.

“More,” she said. “Please.” She was lost, but not lost enough. She was thinking of how good his hands felt. How well he read her. How perfect he played her body. She needed the distraction of sex, of crazy lust, to keep from thinking of anything deeper than that. Because that’s where emotions crept in—emotions she wasn’t interested in feeling.

He rocked in and out, a punishing pace that was hard, rough, and deep. But slow, so measured and precise, as if calculated to deliver maximum pleasure. Like he couldn’t get deep enough. And she felt the same.

Then he intertwined their fingers and laid back. He lifted his hips at the same time as he pulled her hand. She got it. He was giving her a piece of control to set the pace. A grin stretched her face. She liked this guy. He held her up by the hands while she started to ride him hard and fast.

He bucked up with every one of her downward glides and hit her so incredibly deep that each thrust cut off her gasps and moans.

“Yes…God yes…”

She fucked him hard, and he let her. He also met every move, bouncing her up, her breasts jutting with every swift thrust. She gave back as best she could, circling her hips and taking in every inch and curve of his amazing cock.

It was a duel, and it was pushing her toward the brink of bliss. Because

she was determined to use every ounce of strength she had to feel him, while letting him take her just as roughly in return.

"I'm there," she said. "Come with me…"

With a strangled groan, she felt his shaft grow impossibly hard, and she spiraled over the edge into another incredible orgasm. She didn't know his name. What he looked like. But she felt him. Felt him come. Felt his body quake beneath hers. He continued to piston, as if not ready to be done.

"Myth," she whispered. It was his name to her. One that would likely whisper through her dreams and thoughts from here on out.

With heavy breaths, she squeezed his hands, and he squeezed back. She had said she'd wanted anything. And while that encompassed a range of things, tonight was exactly what she needed.

He'd read her perfectly. Tapped into what she needed. Given. Taken. Demanded and played. All of it more engulfing than she thought possible.

Just like him.

"Myth…" she whispered again, half wondering if she'd dreamt this whole moment.

Chapter Four

Nolan splashed water on his face, then dressed quickly. He'd left Ava sitting comfortably with a blanket wrapped around her.

Myth.

That's what she'd called him.

He picked up his shirt…and saw his back in the mirror. The vixen's fingernail marks tracked down his shoulders. He smiled, recalling the memory of her tight little pussy gripping him while the sting of her scratches shot his body even higher.

It also meant, though, that if he were to keep this up, the less she touched him—Myth—the better. One flash of a mark and she would figure out it was him. He couldn't risk it. From now on, he had to limit when and how she touched him. Which kind of sucked, because her hands on him made him feel more wanted than he had in a long time.

Get over it, it was just sex.

He was keeping her safe and enjoying himself. Nothing wrong with that. Anything more was unwise. He was glad, though, that it had been him to see to her needs tonight. The way she'd responded, a lot of men would have jumped on her cues and likely misread them. Yeah, she wanted hard and rough, but there were still limits. She wasn't ready for everything—certainly not all at once—despite what she thought.

He finished tugging on his clothes, took out his tongue ring, and did

everything he could to look normal. He felt anything but.

Christ, he could still taste her, like wild honey. She was incredible—the way she challenged him, clung to him, begged him. She was strong, feisty, and yet completely trusting. She let him take over when he needed, but also stepped up and took what she wanted.

Lord, he'd never met, felt, or experienced a woman like her.

He could only hope she would return for a second session with her mystery man. Everything from his brain to his cock to his damn chest was pulling him toward her.

This might be just physical. And she wanted anonymity. But he hadn't had enough of her yet, in or out of the club.

He needed more.

He'd just have to be creative on how to get it.

He opted for the cinnamon mouth wash instead of the mint and swished it around, hating that he had to disguise his scent. More so, he hated that he couldn't keep her taste on his lips a little while longer. He finished off with a shot of vodka. He was officially Nolan again.

He walked back into the room where Ava sat, just as he'd left her. Her head didn't even turn toward him as he moved her direction.

"It's me, sweetheart," he said, sitting beside her on the bed and unfastening her blindfold.

Her hand came up and brushed across her eyes. "I'm okay…" she murmured.

When he saw her face, it felt like an invisible hand reached out and sucker punched his gut.

"Tears?" He lifted her chin with a single finger and looked her in the eyes. They were glossy. Oh God…had he hurt her? That was the last thing he wanted to do. "Are you okay? Did things go too far?" Christ, he'd never forgive himself. He was ready to beat his own ass—

“He didn’t hurt me,” she said, and a smile split her beautiful lips as a single tear rolled down her cheek. “It was perfect.” She shook her head and hugged the blanket closer. “I don’t know why my eyes are watering.”

He grinned. Stubborn woman wouldn’t admit she was tearing up. No, no, her eyes were simply watering. Sure.

He ran his hand down her back, and she arched into the touch. For whatever reason, it felt like a small victory to him. She was seeking comfort from him. Not Myth. Him. And he was there to give it to her.

“Sex can be intense,” he said. “Especially when one of your major senses is taken away. You just felt things on a deeper level than you would have if your sight wasn’t blocked. And that can be overwhelming.”

“I’m not emotional.” She rubbed the back of her hand over her eyes.

“Of course not.” He nudged her a little. “You’re strong, and you know what you want.”

She looked at him. Those big green eyes would be his undoing.

“Did you see him?” she said. “Talk to him?”

Nolan nodded.

“Can you tell me what he said?”

“I can tell you anything you want.” He would do whatever she wanted, so long as he didn’t violate her hard limit. Talking didn’t go against the rule. It was another veil to maintain anonymity. He looked at her sweet face and plump lips. Lips he’d just kissed, sucked, and bit. God, she was gorgeous. He had to keep it in check, though. “Do you really want to know?”

She took a deep breath. “Yes.”

“All right then.” He waited until she looked at him. “He said you were incredible.” She smiled and glanced down. “He also wanted to know if you’re coming back.”

She thought for a moment, then nodded slowly. “I just might.”

Nolan chuckled a little. She wouldn’t give an inch. Nope, she had to keep

his ego in check.

"Is there anything you want me to tell him? What you liked, didn't like?"

He held his breath as she worked his question through her brain. Her face was so damn expressive, he could almost pull out the memories she was recalling.

"I liked it all. I just…"

He coaxed her gaze back to his. "You just what?"

"I didn't get to touch him as much as I thought." She blew out a breath, as if just now realizing where she was. Nolan followed her gaze to her dress on her floor and the ripped lace panties on the other side of the room. "I think I just need time to process all of this."

"Processing is good," he said. Because he needed to do a hell of a lot of that himself. Especially since he was set on getting to know her better, in any capacity he could. Didn't mean he wanted anything with a label, or long term. It just meant he felt responsible for her.

And in her, he'd finally met someone different, challenging, and delectable. She walked the line of strength and innocence, and he couldn't quite figure her out. Sure, he liked her. But this went beyond affection. The arrangement required something more. She was his to look after, pleasure, please, and care for.

"If you ever have questions, or want to talk, to *process* by getting another perspective maybe…" He winked at her, and she smiled. "You've got me if you need me." She nodded. He bent and picked up her dress. "Can I help you dress?"

She looked at him like there was some kind of emotion behind her eyes, reserved just for him. He wasn't about to point that out, since she seemed to have an aversion to emotion. And to be honest, that was better for them both.

"Yes, please," she said, and damn if Nolan didn't feel like he'd gained a

bit more ground. Because he wasn't just playing a hand against the stubborn woman before him. He was playing against himself.

• • •

Ava crossed and uncrossed her legs. Her thighs were still sore from the other night. Not to mention her core. Every time she moved, she felt where Myth had been.

She'd taken the whole weekend to process what Nolan had said. If she ever had questions or wanted to talk, could she really reach out to him?

He was easy, uncomplicated. Not too close, but close enough to keep things on a semi-surface level.

She pinched the bridge of her nose. God, even her own thoughts contradicted themselves. Nolan was intimate but only surface level? How the hell did that make sense? It didn't. Her mind was messing with her.

Surely he wasn't new to this situation. He worked at a sex club, interviewed people, and set up scenes, for God's sake. His kindness and care must be part of his persona and job.

She wouldn't delude herself into thinking she was the only woman he treated that way. It was his duty to make sure everyone was happy at Serve. Protected. Taking it personally wasn't smart. Especially since she didn't want to take anything personally.

She'd gone there knowing what she needed. Total anonymity. No chance of being tempted by intimacy. It was the only way for her to ensure she didn't make the same mistakes that had gotten her into her current mess in the first place.

No. Nolan was part of this journey. Any affection she felt for him was an illusion, and any affection he seemed to feel for her was him doing his job. That was it.

Keeping that in mind, there was no reason not to explore a learning

opportunity. After mulling over the amazing sex with her anonymous lover, she did have lots of questions, and she wanted to talk about it. Nolan was the best person for that responsibility. Since it was literally in his job description. And he *had* offered…

She'd gotten good work done for the day. And she couldn't go into the next phase of her marketing proposal for Xspot Inc. until their sample shipment came. Maybe a trip to Serve was just what she needed to gain some perspective.

Chapter Five

Nolan didn't expect to see Ava walk into Serve tonight. It had been a few days since he'd been inside her, and he'd thought of nothing else. Sure, he had her contact information, since he'd handled her admission to the club, but he couldn't reach out to her. Not without breaking their boundaries.

He needed her to come to him.

After a grueling weekend that left him worried she might not come back, she finally graced his presence.

He checked the urge to run over like a fucking school kid desperate to play tag. Because he would chase that woman and her perfect ass all around this club if she wanted him to.

No. She wants Myth.

That was the only reason she'd have returned to the club. He needed to remember that. But he'd take what he could get. She intrigued him, and he had a responsibility.

Yeah…responsibility. Keep telling yourself that, buddy.

His brain was suddenly fixated on the way her legs moved when she strutted through the crowd in that short red dress. He had a responsibility all right. And it was to that dress. Clearly it belonged on the floor, not covering up such amazing curves.

"Nolan?" she called as she made her way to stand before him.

"Hey, sweetheart. Here for another scene?"

She folded her lips and glanced around.

"Are you working right now?"

"Yes." He looked at her hard, because her face fell in…disappointment? He wasn't sure, but he did know he didn't like it. "There's other security around, though. Is there something I can help you with?" He couldn't stop himself from looking over her incredible body. There was a lot he'd gladly help with. Including inducing orgasmic bliss in under thirty seconds.

"I was just curious if I could buy you a drink. Talk maybe?" Her words sounded straight and confident enough, but her right foot turned in slightly, and her fingers fidgeted. She was nervous.

Man, this woman drove him all kinds of crazy. Mostly because he couldn't quite pinpoint what made her tick. She was determined, for sure. Then he'd catch a glimpse of something deeper. A kind of soul-deep insecurity, or damage that had left a permanent scar. He knew that look. He'd caught it that first night he'd interviewed her, and it called to him even now.

Still, he needed some kind of wall, at least for himself. He was a single person, but really, he was two in her world. Doubly tempting to forget her boundaries…and to forget his own. But he knew better. For both their sakes, he wouldn't forget himself.

"I'll talk to you about anything you want," he said. "Hold on."

He looked across the room at Leo until he caught his eye. The guy was awesome. Nolan just gave him a raised brow, looked at Ava, and Leo understood. He'd cover for Nolan until he returned.

Nolan led Ava to the bar, got a round, and then took her to a quiet corner, where they sat on an empty couch and faced each other.

She scooted a little closer and turned her knees toward his. He did the same to let her know she had his full attention.

She opened her mouth, then shut it. Opened it again. Glanced around.

He smiled and leaned back. “Jesus, sweetheart, the suspense is killing me.”

She scoffed, took her shot, and slapped her knees with her palms, as if gearing up to pitch a case.

“I just have some questions. I wanted to talk about the other night, and I realized you are…”

When she didn’t finish, he took the opportunity to help her.

“Handsome? Charismatic? Charming? Sexy?”

She laughed. “Good thing I wasn’t about to say humble.”

He smiled. “I’m not tossing out these adjectives to impress you, simply informing you that I can inhabit each and every one to be what you need. Say the word, sweetheart.”

“And you can just magically turn it on? Charm? Charisma? Sexiness?”

“Well, the sexiness never really turns off.” He smiled.

“Of course.” She grinned back. “You’re just the only person I can really talk to about certain things, like Serve and the guy from the other night. I’m still kind of new to the city and don’t really have…um…”

Jesus, it hit him just then. “Friends?”

She shrugged like it was no big deal, and then her mask of confidence was back in place. “I trust your opinion and knowledge, and I just thought we could chat, that’s all.”

Not a glowing compliment, or an admission that she enjoyed his company, but he’d take it. If it got her in front of him more, he’d take whatever she gave him.

But more questions arose, like why were people assholes and not snatching her up, as a friend or otherwise? And what, or who, the hell put that flicker of unease behind her eyes?

“Well, I’m here for your every need.” It came out as casual, but he meant it.

“I was wondering if there was a plan for next time. Or is that something to discuss?”

He searched his brain and recalled her application. “You work in marketing, right?”

She frowned. “Yes. I’m at the Wayne Firm, but I don’t know what that has to do with anything.”

“You like a plan. Structure. Data crunching to find and sell the best possible outcome. Yet you came in here wanting to be taken over.” In the real world, she seemed to cling to control, and the walls she’d built around herself. It was no wonder she was finding it difficult to embrace spontaneity, and surrendering to another person.

“Like I said, that’s the fantasy.”

Did she really not have a single person to hang out with? Talk with? Take her to lunch? The thought was a sour one for him. A woman with her charm, her beauty, her kindness…she deserved someone who would cherish her.

At least in the club, he could provide her fantasy.

“The man that walks into that room to take you is on your time, sweetheart. If you want something, tell me. We can make it happen. You want a plan? Something specific? Let me know and I’ll arrange it.”

She glanced at her hands in her lap. “It’s not so much that I need a plan. Like you guessed, I have all the organization I need in my real life. I really do want Myth to take over. And he did.” She shook her head and smiled at the ceiling.

Nolan felt a surge of pride at the thought that maybe she was recalling their time together. “Go on,” he said.

“Something came out in me that made me push him to be harder and rougher. I like how he took over. I just wonder if there was more I could do.”

He took a deep breath and tamped down all the things he wanted to say. Instead, he wanted to hear her say what she'd experienced.

"Why don't you tell me what happened? How you felt. Your point of view."

She bit the inside of her lip as if to keep from smiling. "He was very skilled at everything he did."

"Like what?" He had never wanted to hear a woman talk so much. He sat there, falling over himself to listen to every word. He knew she had it in her. He'd been there when she'd talked to him blindfolded and begged for more.

"Like going down on me. Touching me," she admitted.

"So, he ate your pussy well?"

A hint of a blush traced her cheeks, but she recovered quickly. "Yes, he did."

He gave himself a mental high five.

But when her eyes met his, he knew he was in trouble, because there was much, much more going on behind those gems. She wanted something, and without knowing what she'd ask for, he already knew he'd deliver.

He just hoped to God she wouldn't stop talking now. Myth could have it all, but talking was all Nolan was going to get.

• • •

The minute Nolan's thick words hit Ava's ears, it was like a stroke against her clit. Silly maybe. But just him asking if she'd liked Myth going down on her got her hot. The way he said it was direct and no different than asking about her favorite ice cream.

He was accustomed to personal boundaries not existing. Um, hello, he worked in a sex club. She'd learned right away that he was honest and demanded the same in return, from anyone he interacted with.

So she'd talk. Tell him *honestly* how she felt. Why not? He was a professional if nothing else. Granted, he could make panties melt with a single grin and wink, but that wasn't the issue. After all, it wasn't him she was sleeping with, and that boundary made her believe his concern for her was genuine. He was her go-to ear for venting, communicating, and learning.

Talking was one thing she'd done in her scene with Myth, but in that regard, there was no give and take. Part of her wished she could hear her mystery lover say the kind of words Nolan said to her. Nolan was uninhibited and blunt. But the casual charm paired with the predatory gleam in his eyes made her flush.

She glanced around. This was a sex club. Something Nolan likely partook in regularly, just like she'd partaken. No reason to be shy, or put too much emphasis on anything.

She had questions and wants, and he'd said he'd help her with that. All she had to do was ask.

"I know that Myth won't talk, and that makes sense," she started. "Part of me wants to hear something, though. I don't know…" She waved her hand in the air.

"You like dirty talk?" Nolan guessed.

She nodded. "Yeah. I know that can't happen with him, but I've never been talked to in an explicit way."

He leaned in. "Knowing what you want is a good thing. And admitting it is better. But asking for it is gold. Your partner may not be able to speak, but if you want dirty talk, I can give you something to take into the scene with you."

Her eyes sparkled. "Yeah?"

He nodded. "Just say the word."

"I want that, Nolan."

He grinned in a sexy way that made his blue eyes shine, and she felt like she'd just shaken hands with the devil.

"Do you remember your safe word?"

"Yes." Though it didn't make sense why he was asking. They were sitting in a shadowy corner and weren't going to do anything…right? Not that she hadn't thought about Nolan, or his body and incredibly chiseled face. But these boundaries were in place for a good reason.

"So you like explicit?" he said, his hand resting on the cushion beneath her, barely a millimeter away from brushing against her thigh. Crap, he wasn't even touching her and she was getting instant tremors. She glanced at the small space between his hand and her thigh. So close, but so far. Crazy thing was, her body was responding.

"Look at me," he said in an authoritative tone.

Her gaze snapped to his, and her body zinged with anticipation.

He leaned close to her. "I asked you a question, Ava."

She licked her lips, realizing just now how close his were getting to hers. "Yes. I like explicit."

"And you liked what your man gave you?"

She nodded.

"You said he ate your pussy well." He tilted his head. If he were a few inches closer, his nose would skim her neck. But he wasn't. Still, she could visualize it. Just the image sent a dose of heat between her legs. "But he couldn't tell you what you wanted to hear…"

"No," she murmured. "He couldn't."

Between his thick voice and close-but-so-far-away touch, she was going a little stir crazy. She didn't remember when she'd become wet, but Nolan seemed to have that effect.

"I bet you're a tasty thing, sweetheart."

Her entire spine shuddered.

“Your mystery man may not be able to speak, but I wouldn’t have set you up with him if I didn’t trust him. If I didn’t know him well. And I can tell you what I’m sure he’d say. What any man would say if they had the privilege of your body.”

She wanted to reach out and clutch the flexing bicep that was in her view. He was strong, dark, and saying all the things that yes, she wished Myth could say.

“I bet he’d say that you’re tight and so fucking hot. That you taste like honey, and the thought of your sweet pussy squeezing his tongue as you come keeps him up at night.”

Her inner walls clamped down as if his words were a thrust inside of her. God, she was already on the brink and feeling empty. Needy for more. But he gave her only words. Knowing they were the ones she’d asked for only left her aching to be filled.

“He’d want to hear you say how much you want him. Tell him how bad you ache for his cock. Beg him for it.”

She nodded.

He tsked. “Not good enough, Little Miss Anything. Say it. You want dirty talk? You have to reciprocate.”

“I…I want it.”

“What do you want?” His breath hit her earlobe, and another surge of pleasure raced through her blood.

“Him. So much.”

“No, he won’t want to hear you say ‘him.’ Talk to me like you would inside your scene.”

“I want you,” she said, and that made Nolan grin.

Her breaths were coming faster, harder, enough to make her breasts nearly pop out of the top of her dress. Her nipples had to be close to the seam, because she felt the hard bead scrape against the fabric that was

subtly slinking down her chest with each inhale. She was aware of every atom of air skating over her body. His fantasy inducing words kept her on a brink of desperation.

"Not good enough. He'd be specific. He'd tell you how he'd bend you over and fuck you hard while slapping your ass. How he'd fuck you until you ached with pleasure." His eyes glanced at her lips. "He'd tell you how he'd come in your pretty mouth…" Then at her breasts. "…or on these perfect tits."

She licked her lips. Would he say that? Want that? She wanted to hear more. Was ready to straddle Nolan and beg him to do the things he was selling her on.

No, not Nolan. Myth. Because the mystery man wasn't real. So long as she couldn't see him, he remained distant. Nolan was too close and too real. She couldn't get so lost in this fantasy that she forgot who she could be with…and who she couldn't.

"Is this what you want to hear, sweetheart? This dirty enough for you?"

"Yes," she gasped, surprised that her breath had left a while ago. He wasn't touching her, and yet her entire core pulsed and ached.

"Then say it. Say what you want. All the naughty, dirty things you're thinking. Say it out loud like you would to him."

"I want to feel you come, swallow it down. I want to please you. I want the pleasure to hurt because it's so good. I want you to work for it, fuck me hard, take me anywhere, however you want."

"Yes…" he groaned "Then what?"

She couldn't hold out anymore. Her skin felt too tight, and her words slipped past her mouth and gave sight to amazing fantasies. She closed her eyes to picture the scene. Picture Myth playing her body like Nolan had described, only in her fantasy, the gaze that looked back at her was blue and intense.

She snapped her eyes open and found Nolan staring at her.

Deep breath.

Intimate. It was a feeling she didn't like. Intimacy led to weakness. Led to being vulnerable and easily taken over. She made a fist and fought against the phantom weight of the ring that, under the command of her ex, may as well have been a handcuff. He'd told her what to do. Where to go. Who to be.

Nolan had just watched her face, listened to her words, and strung a few sentences together that made her wet from the mere timbre of his voice alone. That was fine in a scene, because a scene wasn't reality. A scene had an end date. Hard boundaries. But Nolan? No, he was too…real.

She blinked several times, half hating herself and half loving what had just happened. It was amazing, but too close. *He* was too close.

"Then what, sweetheart?"

She said the only thing she could. The only thing that reminded her why she liked things surface level and distant. Because right then, she was too near to a man she was coming to actually like.

"Then I'd leave," she said.

She stood up, straightened her dress, and did just that. She had to get some space. She'd come here to get clarity, talk about another scene and what she wanted. Nolan had given her what she'd asked for, but he'd given it himself, and that was dangerously close to crossing her hard limit.

It took her three steps to fake the easy stride she'd perfected over the past two years, but nothing was easy about walking away from what had just happened, or the man that made her feel weak and strong at the same time.

• • •

What the fuck had just happened?

It was the same question Nolan had asked himself since Ava had sat in

his office last week. Now sitting in the corner at Serve, watching her leave, he was back to square one.

Because when it came to her, she managed to throw him off his game and shatter his expectations to hell. He couldn't let her leave. Not like this.

"Ava," he called and cupped her waist to turn her to face him. "If I went too far, you can say so. That's what your safe word is for."

"You didn't," she said quickly. But her body language told a different story.

Shit, he was only trying to give her what she wanted. Say what he couldn't say when with her in a scene. Hell, he'd say a lot more than that if he could. Like how she was amazing, and he'd never felt so spent and elated in his life than when he was inside of her.

Just sex. It's just good sex.

Yeah, really good sex. That was why he was reeling for the woman with a brassy mouth. She was his charge. Being attracted to her came with the territory.

And if he wanted to take care of her, he needed to know her. Figure out why that flash of pain would streak through those beautiful green eyes from time to time. Figure out what made her smile, made her light up, made her crave.

Eventually, she'd move on. When that happened, he wanted her to be the satisfied, complete person she'd gone to Serve to become.

He wanted to purge her of pain and regret. For that, he'd have to make sure she left with memories of Myth. Not him.

Yeah, good plan. Time to get back to what he did best: Laid back swagger.

"I can tamp down the talk to PG-13 next time if you need it."

She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. "Please. That was barely R-rated."

Now there was the girl he knew she could be. No way in hell would that girl let him get away with calling her out and feigning this unshakable wall of indifference.

"Well, movie ratings or not, I sense you have more you want to say," he said.

She looked at him for a moment but didn't say a word. Just smiled in response.

Damn, he liked her stubbornness.

He straightened his shoulders. "Why don't I take you out to lunch tomorrow? We can chat in a place where we can actually hear each other, and you can use me however you want…purely for educational purposes, of course."

"So, no talking about sex in public?"

"Oh, I made no promise about that." He threw her his best smile, and she gifted him one in return. "You in?"

"Lunch…" She said the word like it was some horrific notion of commitment. After a moment of pondering, she finally said, "I guess that's fine."

She guessed that was fine? "Shit, sweetheart, don't pull any punches on my ego or anything."

She smiled, and her gaze drifted over him like he was a dessert case. Nolan found himself standing taller, even flexing a little.

"I'm sure your large ego can handle a little hardball."

"Indeed. And I can assure you that my *ego* is, in fact, large, and handles hardness just fine."

She gave a short laugh, and her smile lit something in his chest.

"I'll see you tomorrow for lunch," he said, then went to turn to head back to his post.

"Wait." Her breathy voice caught his ribs like a lure and tugged him back

around.

Funny how all it took was one word from her for him to instantly respond. Funny or pathetic. He wasn't splitting hairs at this point.

"What is it?"

"I need details," she said. "Like where to meet?"

"I have your information and phone number on the paperwork you filled out. Do I have your permission to use it?"

Her eyes sparkled. Whatever he'd just said hit a good note in her.

"Yes, that's fine."

He nodded. "I'll be in touch."

He turned to walk back toward the mouth of the elevator. He couldn't look back, because if he stood there one more moment, verbally sparing with the sexy woman, he just might take the dirty talk to the next level.

Chapter Six

Do I have your permission…?

It was the single sentence Ava had replayed in her mind since last night. She could barely sleep, barely focus on work. Lunch time was approaching, and all she could think about was that she hadn't yet heard from Nolan.

He'd asked permission to use something personal of hers.

Sure, it was only her phone number, but he'd asked. Not controlled or demanded. It made her feel equal. Capable.

What went on at Serve was different. Exploration, passion, and uninhibited pleasure were the agenda. Outside of the club, she struggled to maintain the identity she'd worked so hard to get back from her ex. He'd never asked her opinion—much less her permission—on anything.

But that was why she was determined to be different now. The city was proving to be good for her soul, and Nolan was becoming the closest thing to a friend she had—even if he was just doing his job.

She felt silly for even thinking about what their relationship might be. This wasn't even a date. It was just lunch. A meal. He was flirtatious, and judging by the number of female eyes constantly on him—oh yeah, she noticed—every time he walked around Serve, she guessed he wasn't into long-term, either.

She glanced at her phone. Still no call. No text.

"I'm heading down to the café to grab a sandwich. You want one?" Cindy

from one cubical over asked. She was nice, and they'd tossed spreadsheets back and forth, but nothing beyond the simple talk of business.

"Um…" Ava glanced at her phone again. It was closer to one than noon, and the feeling in her gut was something she didn't like. It wasn't hunger. It was hope that she shouldn't have let herself feel. This wasn't even a big deal. Why was she so annoyed with Nolan standing her up—

"I was thinking along the lines of pasta, but if you want a sandwich, I can arrange that." Nolan's sexy voice made her spin in her chair and look up to find him hovering over her cubical, one elbow resting on the top, looking deliciously casual and way too muscular for his own good. She'd never seen a man fill out jeans and T-shirts so well.

"You showed up?" Ava blurted, hating how shocked she sounded. She really wanted to follow up with a casual flick of her hair and study of her nails and say, "Like I care." But she did care. And she knew it.

"I told you I would be in touch. Figured I'd come get you." He frowned, like he was surprised she didn't understand.

Which told her all she needed to know. She'd been overthinking this on a level she shouldn't. They were barely friends. And this was only lunch.

Snap of out this!

She smiled at Cindy. "Thanks for the offer, but it looks like I'm going in a pasta direction today."

"Okay," Cindy said happily, not hiding her appreciation of Nolan…a long drawn out appreciation that turned into a full on stare. Ava wanted to snap her fingers to break the trance of Cindy undressing him with her eyes.

"Bye," Ava said, a little sharper than she'd meant.

"Oh, okay. Yes. Bye," Cindy said, as she slipped past her cubical and down the hall.

"So, this is where you work?" He glanced around her cubical, then that icy gaze landed on her. "And that's what you wear to the office?"

She looked down at herself. Her black dress was form fitting but professional. Paired with her favorite red heels, matching lipstick, and a tight up-do, it was one of her favorite outfits. Not that she'd been dressing up for Nolan. She wore similar things to work all the time.

"Is there something wrong with how I'm dressed?"

He smiled and shook his head, and his heated eyes made another lazy sweep of her. "Not a thing, sweetheart. Just cementing it to memory. You've got a naughty teacher thing going on, and I love red stilettos."

She crossed her arms and sat back in her chair. "You done?"

"Well, I don't know. Are you going to punish me?" She laughed and playfully smacked his arm as she stood. "Oooh, that hurt so good, Miss Webber. May I please have another? Then tell me I'm a bad boy and you're going to fuck—"

"Are you ever serious?" she asked with a smile, gathering her purse.

"More often than you know."

She glanced at him, and something in his expression made her believe him. He was a flirt. His humor and conversation always lightened her mood. Just a minute ago she'd been stewing over what "lunch date" meant and staring at her phone. Now she was relaxed and excited to hang out with him.

The guy was just…easy.

Easy to be with. Easy to engage. And he made her feel like every horrible moment of her life before she'd moved here and joined Serve was fading further away.

Just lunch. Just friends. Sort of.

Surely Nolan as a friend—or whatever label was appropriate—was harmless. Flirting wasn't bad. Unfortunately, he paired that flirting with a hot body and wicked smile.

She wondered if her mystery man was half as sexy as Nolan.

Whoa, where had that thought come from? She shook her head. Myth was anything she could imagine, and that was the greatest appeal. He wasn't real in all the ways that counted, and so her commitment to no commitment stood. He could be one of the guys from *Magic Mike* and it wouldn't matter.

"Wanna tell me what has your mind working? Or do you just want to continue staring at my"—he cleared his throat and subtly thrust his hips —"cock."

Shit. She'd totally been staring and hadn't even realized it! Heat burned her cheeks.

"I'm fine either way, sweetheart. But if you stare too long, I'm going to assume you're trying to use the Force to remove my pants. Just say the word and I'll save you the headache."

She scoffed. His charm was unmatchable. She was starting to realize that he gave her power in subtle ways. All she had to do was "say the word." Any word. Yes, no, please…he left everything up to her.

Something she liked.

She smirked. "I'm hungry, and you said you'd feed me."

"I like where this is going." He winked.

"Maybe if you stop crowding the exit, I can actually get on with this lunch and stop having to stare off into space, strategizing a path around you."

"Ouch." He put a hand over his heart in fake pain, then leaned and whispered, "I'll let you say what you need to, but we both know what you were really looking at." He looked her up and down. "And I'm hungry too."

The prick of lust he'd just delivered strung her into silence.

"Shall we?" He straightened to his full height and opened his stance to let her pass.

She did and walked down the hall and toward the exit with a hot wall of

muscled man on her heels. What was worse was that his hand rested on the small of her back, as if guiding her and keeping her close as they walked. But the worst part was that her body responded, and she actually liked it.

Keep it together, girl.

Though she was with Nolan, she needed to keep the focus on her next scene at Serve with Myth.

It's just lunch.

How bad could it be?

Chapter Seven

After a few bites of amazing pasta and even fewer words, Ava finally decided to go with her gut and start talking.

"How do you like your job?" she asked.

Nolan sat across the restaurant table from her, cutting at his meal with his fork. "I like it very much."

"So you prep the scenes and vet people? Do you participate?"

"Yes."

Well, that was simple. "Yes to all of it?"

"Yes."

She frowned. "Are you being a pain in the ass on purpose?"

He smiled and took a drink of his beer. "I'm answering you, sweetheart. You want more details? You have to ask."

Fine, she could play this game. Because the truth was, she did want more details. Not just on Serve, the process, or even Myth. But details on Nolan. He fascinated her, and she enjoyed his company. As long as she kept the friendship strictly that, the blurred lines of attraction and flirtation were fine to walk. Because it would never be more. She wouldn't allow it.

"What are you into?" she asked.

"Outside or inside the club?"

"Both."

Gripping his beer, he sat back in his seat and thought for a moment.

“Inside the club I’m pretty versatile. I have several kinks, but nothing overly specific. Outside the club…”

He took a drink of his beer, and a faint flush came over his face. Her eyes widened.

“Outside the club?” she pushed, really interested in what he was going to say that seemed to embarrass him.

He muttered something so low that she couldn’t make it out.

“Huh?”

He sighed and looked at her. “I said, I’m into *baseball cards*. I’ve collected them since I was a kid.”

She looked at the large strong man sitting across from her and tried picturing him as a boy. She smiled thinking of his dark hair and blue eyes on an eight-year-old version of himself.

“Why baseball cards?”

He shrugged. “It was the one thing I had of my dad’s before he split. He left this binder with the entire set of Topps from the year I was born. I used to just want the packs because they had gum in them.”

Her breath hitched a little. The normally laidback Nolan was being…real. He’d always been direct, but not about anything personal.

“He left?” she asked quietly.

He nodded and took another swig of his beer. “Yep. My mom is amazing though. Raised me on her own. I barely remember the guy anyway.”

There was that casual façade he wore so well. He seemed to erect it effortlessly whenever he needed. She wasn’t fooled, though. He might say he barely remembered his father, but collecting baseball cards to this day said the man had affected him more than he would admit.

“Well, your mom must be amazing, because she raised a good man.” She meant it. She didn’t know Nolan well, but now his charm and protective spirit made sense. He’d learned those qualities from women at a young age.

“So your adorable little hobby…” she began. “Does that make you a Mets fan or Yankees?”

“Yankees all the way, baby.” He grinned. “Let’s talk about you now.”

“Hold up,” she said and twirled her pasta. “I’m not done with you yet.”

“As long as you don’t ask me anymore about my *adorable hobby*,” he said with an exasperated groan.

Okay, she could work with that. “Fine. New subject…sort of. You said that inside the club you have kinks but nothing specific. Explain that.”

“Some people are into the BDSM lifestyle. Some have more limited kinks. I’m just middle of the road.”

She frowned. “I’m going to need a little more than that.”

He grinned. “Well, for example, in BDSM, there are a lot of different directions you can go.”

He put his beer back on the table and returned his attention to his plate.

“Like spanking and binding?” she asked.

“Yeah, or collaring.”

“Collaring?”

“That’s right.” He took a bite of his lasagna and she was momentarily hypnotized watching his jaw move. “When you’re a claimed submissive and have a Dom, you get a collar to let others know you’re owned.”

Owned…

That word vibrated off her mind. She wasn’t out to judge anyone’s lifestyle. Hell, she was going to a sex club herself. She knew that however it appeared on the outside, bondage partners always had each other’s explicit consent, but she couldn’t stomach the thought of giving up control. Not when it came to sex, and most definitely not when it came to life. The idea of choice being taken away was the thing she feared the most.

That was why this arrangement at Serve was so perfect. Nothing would happen that she hadn’t asked for.

“What happened?” Nolan asked, and her eyes lifted to meet his. “You look sick all of a sudden.”

Great, glad he’d noticed.

“I’m just not into bondage. That’s all.”

“Which part?”

“The collar.”

“It doesn’t have to be like a choker or even a necklace. Some people use cuffs or bracelets.” He shrugged. “It’s like an intense wedding ring. The symbolism is what’s important.”

Exactly. Which was why anything along those commitment lines made her stomach turn.

“Not for me,” she said quietly, then took a bite of her pasta. A regular wedding ring had been too much. Too confining, along with the man that had come with that ring. She closed her eyes for a moment and forced the storm in her stomach to calm down.

“If it’s not for you, then you should have told me. You don’t like being spanked and bound? That’s not on your form.”

His concern for her safety and wellbeing chased off the chill of her previous thoughts.

“Spanking and tying me up is fine. I meant I was okay with anything, and I stand by that. But collaring goes beyond a scene and beyond the bedroom. That’s not a form-type question.”

“Fair enough,” he agreed. “So does that play into why you like things staying anonymous? It doesn’t allow you to go beyond the scene?”

Great, he was astute, too.

“I’m just a middle of the road girl,” she said, using his words from earlier. “Those four walls inside Serve, when I’m with Myth, are all fair game. Outside, it’s different.”

He nodded and looked at her. His intense blue eyes were dark, as if they

were seeing straight into her soul.

"I see." He cocked his head, like he was thinking of another question.

That wouldn't be good. She'd come here for a casual lunch, comfortable because she figured he wouldn't pry. Yet he seemed genuinely interested in her and how she worked, and the hell of it was, she felt tempted to spill her guts. Time to change the subject.

"So, tell me more about you. You've used the word 'prep' before. Do you prep women for a scene?"

His expression held a heavy lust. "If the person is right for my services."

"Details please," she said with a smile, anxious to get back to the sexy, flirty way they normally chatted instead of being on the brink of confessing her soul to him. Never mind that she wanted to spare him the details. She wanted to spare herself, too. She was done with those memories. Done with the person she used to be.

He grinned. "I make sure requests are fulfilled, desires met, like last night."

Her mind skated to the memory of him talking to her.

"If your mystery man can't do everything you need, I'm happy to oblige."

"Are you?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Do you ever get embarrassed?"

He raised an eyebrow. "What do you think?"

She swallowed. *I'll take that as a no.*

While she was trying to be more direct in general, it was tricky to not blush sometimes. Everything in her world, including Nolan and her job—which as of recently dealt in sex toys—had the ability to heat her cheeks every now and again. But she had questions and the man before her was the one she wanted to ask…and to know.

“Does your prep work ever leave you…cranky?”

“Are you asking if getting women close, only to pass them off to their scene, makes me cranky?”

“Yes.”

“Sometimes. Depends on the woman.”

Her chest flickered with heat. “So, for example, last night—”

“I got so hard from talking to you, the damn thing wouldn’t go down for the rest of the night.”

For some reason that made her stomach flutter. He really wasn’t embarrassed, and she liked that. It was refreshing how honest he was. He made her feel comfortable in his world.

What had he done after he left her last night? She hated the thought of him rock hard with no relief in sight. Had he made himself come? Found another woman to slake his needs?

The thought annoyed her, and she had no right to such an emotion. She was having sex with Myth, after all. Which was what she should steer the conversation back to.

“You said that you’re the go-between when it comes to Myth and me.”

He nodded. “That’s right.”

She intertwined her fingers and rested them on the table. “I’d like to set up another scene. Since I leave our time together up to him, I wonder if I’ll need prepping.”

“Is there something you have in mind?”

She lifted a shoulder. There was one thing she hadn’t ever done. Something she wanted to experience. But she had no idea how to go about saying it out loud. She wasn’t a prude, but in the light of day, with Nolan starring daggers at her over a bowl of pasta, the words refused to be spoken.

“I just want him to know I’m open to him…however he needs me. Even if it’s something I’ve never done before.”

Nolan stared at her for a long moment, as if mentally rattling off all the possible things she could mean. Surely he wouldn't guess—

"You don't have a virgin mouth or pussy…" he started. Damn, he was really good at deciphering her.

It's what he does for a living, moron.

She should have guessed he'd be on to her.

He raised his eyebrows. "Do you have a virgin ass?" He said it both intrigued and totally normal. Like this was standard lunch conversation.

"Y-yes." She hadn't meant to stutter over the word. But the slight tremble in her voice was unmistakable. "I just…" She cleared her throat, determined to present herself as the woman she needed to be. The one that went for what she wanted. The one that was strong. "I just didn't know what kind of prep, if any, was involved with that."

He ran his hand over his jaw, and she couldn't tell if he was on the brink of grinning or frowning.

"There is prep, especially if you've never done it. And it's up to you on how to go about that. Whether it's with me or Myth, I can assure you nothing will happen until you're completely ready."

There was that protector voice again. What she couldn't tell was if he had a preference who prepped her.

Me or Myth.

Did Nolan want some kind of sexual encounter with her? One that involved him actually touching her? She couldn't read him, and she didn't want to put herself out there either way. It was one thing to give herself to her anonymous lover, but Nolan had seen her face, and she'd seen his. If he thought she needed something in his *professional* opinion, she'd acquiesce. But asking for him to be with her—or knowing he wanted to be with her—would cross the boundary she needed to keep herself safe.

"Well, I'll leave it to the professionals to determine."

He frowned. “You are the most frustrating woman.”

“Why?”

“Because you want something, and you know you want it, but you’re very, very good at not asking for it while at the same time begging for it.”

That was because she didn’t want to make this more than it was. He was her club liaison. And maybe something of a friend. But she knew better than to cross the line with him. Best to keep anything personal with him on a surface level.

“If you’re willing to talk to Myth, that would be great. However you two want to handle this is fine with me.”

There. She’d said her piece. She’d put out there what she wanted, and she knew no matter who actually prepped her for such an event, she’d be taken care of. Because one thing she trusted was Nolan’s judgment. It was up to him and Myth to decide how the rest of this played out. And when she thought about Nolan touching her body, she couldn’t help but buzz with excitement.

Which, realistically, was why everything sexual needed to be kept strictly with Myth.

Yet looking at Nolan across the table from her, she couldn’t bring herself to say it. If he decided it ought to be him who prepared her for the scene, she wouldn’t be able to refuse him.

“Why don’t you come to the club this weekend? Everything will be arranged.”

She nodded. “Sounds great.”

It was only as she was leaving that she realized he still hadn’t answered her question. She had no idea if when she went to the club this weekend it would be Myth preparing her for new pleasures…or Nolan.

Chapter Eight

"Easy man, or you'll give yourself a hernia," Oliver Preston said.

Nolan just ignored him and went for three more reps of bicep curls. Meeting Oliver at the gym had become a weekly ritual, a way for Nolan to blow off steam and catch up with his friend. They used to see each other at Serve all the time, but Oliver hadn't been to the club since he'd met Eliza.

With a huff, Nolan finished his set and put the weights down.

Oliver smirked at him as he finished his own reps. "So do you want to talk about what has your shorts twisted, or do you just want to breathe hard and look at yourself in the mirror?"

Breathing hard and looking in the mirror sounded fine—if he had Ava with him. A thought he had no business having. He knew the rules. She'd been clear about those from the get-go.

"I'm just trying to figure out some work stuff."

Work stuff? That was the best he could come up with? He didn't want to come right out and say a certain blonde had his world tipping over.

"By 'work stuff', you must mean *woman* stuff," Oliver said.

Okay, clearly his friend knew too much for his own good.

"What makes you say that?" Smooth. Real smooth.

"You're never like this about Serve. Last time I saw you like this was…"

Nolan was glad his friend at least knew not to broach *that* subject.

"It is about work. And it's about a woman."

Oliver gave him a wide grin. “Oh yeah?”

Nolan shrugged. “She’s at Serve, Serve is work…” That counted.

“Uh huh.” Oliver set his weights down and looked at Nolan. “She with another guy?”

Nolan laughed. Honest to God laughed. How was he supposed to answer that question?

“Yes and no.”

Oliver frowned. “Are you high right now or something?”

“No, it’s just complicated.”

“Well, I can tell you that if the woman you’re into is even thinking of another guy, it’s fucking torture, man.”

Nolan nodded. Oliver had gone through his own kind of hell to get Eliza. But it had worked out for them. Still, Nolan’s situation was a tad different.

“She is with another guy.” He groaned. Anyone else and he would keep this to himself, but his friend wouldn’t betray his confidence. “The problem is that the other guy is me.”

Oliver frowned, then picked up the weights for his next set. “Drugs kill brain cells, you know. Might want to cut back.”

Damn it. “No, I mean, she came in wanting an anonymous man for anonymous sex—”

Oliver coughed. “And you thought you’d be the anonymous man.” He put down the dumbbells. “Do you see her outside of Serve?”

“Yeah, and that’s what’s getting to me. I’m two different people to her.” He picked up his own weights and started to do another set. “And she’s given me this choice regarding her, and I don’t know what to do.”

“What choice?”

Nolan would never give personal details away about anyone, especially Ava. But he needed advice from his friend. He’d just have to get it while staying vague.

“The choice is between having me, or Myth, prep her for the next scene.”

“Your alter ego is called Myth?”

“Yeah.”

Oliver looked up at the ceiling, as though considering the name. “I like that. Dark. Mysterious.” He picked his dumbbells back up and watched his biceps in the mirror as he lifted and extended. “Does she have any hard limits?”

“Only one. It’s that everything at Serve stays anonymous. She doesn’t know what Myth looks like, doesn’t hear his voice or anything.”

“Then you have your answer. Keep what happens in Serve between the woman and Myth. If you go too far as yourself, technically it’s not anonymous and you’re setting yourself up to dance a fine line with her hard limit. Like it or not, this is what she asked for. You have to respect that.”

Talking dirty with her had whetted his appetite. But that was talking, not touching. As Nolan, he could never go beyond that boundary. Except now she was practically dangling the opportunity to touch her as himself in front of him like a damn treat.

But Oliver was right, and Nolan knew it. Hell, he had been the one to tell her that no matter what, the hard limit would be respected by both parties. Which meant game over if he dared violate that boundary. And he sure as shit wasn’t going to risk a game over.

“Look,” Oliver said, and let the weights fall to the mat. “All I can tell you is that watching the woman you want walk around in front of you and not being able to take her is fucking frustrating and a little heartbreaking.”

“I’m not super serious about her or anything…”

“Yeah, sure, I can tell that by how you’re moaning and groaning and being an overall douche bag.”

“Fuck off,” he said with a laugh. “I’m fine.”

“Okay, while you keep telling yourself that, I’m going to tell you that

giving up your woman to another, even a myth of a man, is hard. If you really want her, in and out of Serve, you should at least try to go for her."

"I want her because I'm attracted to her," Noland defended. Sure he liked her, but his wanting more of her was not as serious as Oliver was making it sound. Still, he found himself asking, "What if the woman doesn't seem to want more than the myth?"

"You saw her outside of Serve, right?"

"Yeah."

"Did she run away screaming about your God awful face?"

Nolan scoffed. "No, we had lunch."

"Then she probably likes you at least a little. Not to mention, *you've* never seen a woman outside of Serve, which is a big deal. If both of you sat at a table and had a lunch date, that means you both wanted to be in the other's company. Not rocket science, bro."

Nolan laughed, because that's what it felt like. Everything with Ava seemed to balance on a thin wire. At any moment, he could lean too much one way and fall on his ass. The thought of having more with her was an idea that had snuck in and out of his brain on a few occasions. But his whole life was structured around single encounters. And Ava had made it clear that when it came to sex, she required anonymity.

She was new to Serve and leaned on him for advice. That was it. Whether he enjoyed her company, inside or outside of Serve, was irrelevant. He had limited time with her no matter how he looked at it. But if he wanted to touch her, he could only do that as Myth.

More was for suckers. Deep down, he knew that. Didn't stop his damn mind from giving him all these thoughts.

"Admit it. You like her," Oliver said.

"When did you get all preachy?"

"Just giving you advice, man. I almost lost Eliza because I didn't think I

was capable of more, but in the end, none of my hang ups mattered. I had to tell her the truth about what I wanted, and that was *just her*."

"Listen, you're blowing this up to be more than it is."

Oliver shrugged. "Okay. So you tell me what it is."

"I can't mess this up now. I can't ruin my woman's—" Nolan caught himself. "*Her*. I can't ruin *her* fantasy now. She wants to be at Serve. Wants Myth. I couldn't let anyone else take her because I was worried about her safety, so I'm in this. I won't take her fantasy from her." No matter how much it was tearing at his chest, like a tug of war between the real him and Myth. Who would win out today?

Oliver nailed him with a serious look. "You have to let go of what happened. That was years ago and wasn't your fault."

Nolan's blood turned to ice thinking of the memory. Remembering the woman crying and in pain. "I set her up with an asshole that hurt her. He took her past her limits."

"Right, but he's the asshole, not you. There was no way you could have known. On paper, they made a good match. The interviews went well. You vetted him yourself. What happened once they were in the room wasn't your fault."

Nolan thought of her and hated himself every day for his mistake. Because Oliver was right—Nolan had vetted the man himself, and look at what had happened.

Nothing like that would ever happen to Ava. He'd never let anyone hurt her. Not while he was at Serve. Not while she was under his care.

Oliver clapped his back. "I've got to go meet Eliza, but I'm here if you want to grab a beer later this week."

"Sounds good, man."

Oliver turned to leave, and Nolan couldn't help but ask, "Hey, do you have any last words of wisdom?"

Oliver smiled. “Yeah, always have ouzo on hand. That stuff is magical.”

• • •

Nolan had gone back and forth on how to handle what was about to go down. His talk with Oliver the other day had helped. His friend had read him all wrong, but in a weird way, it had reminded Nolan why his relationship with Ava had to function within certain boundaries.

But tonight was the night. Ava would walk into Serve at any moment, and she’d be expecting a scene to rock her world. A scene with Myth.

He took a deep breath and downed his shot of vodka. He was off duty, but she didn’t need to know that. After their lunch conversation, he now knew he hadn’t even scratched the surface of the mystery that was Ava Webber.

She was a walking conundrum. She wanted to be taken over. Wanted to just feel and let him decide how to have her and work her body.

But in real life? That wasn’t the case.

The very idea of commitment seemed to make her shake. Not that Nolan could blame her. Commitment wasn’t practical for him either, but his aversion was a matter of practicality, whereas the word seemed to make her afraid. But he didn’t know why, and unless he understood her, he couldn’t protect her.

Like a siren’s call, he heard the faint tap of heels drawing closer. *Her* heels. Even over the music and people, he heard her, smelled her, felt her before she even reached him. He looked up to see her coming closer, her eyes fused on him.

Hol-lee shit…

She was wearing a black leather skirt and tall boots that came just over her knees and left the slightest glimpse of her thighs between the two. The white crop top gave just a hint of midriff, and her hair was down in wild curls. Damn, the woman knew how to tempt a man without showing off too

much. In fact, it was the small peeks that got him instantly hard. Dying to see more, to feel her skin.

Myth. She wants Myth. Not me.

Either way, he'd get to feel her. Just not as himself. But her needs had to be met. And he had to deliver. Had to read between the lines to make sure she got what she wanted, all while sticking to her hard limits.

He slid his casual mask of charm in place.

"Looking good tonight, sweetheart. Let me find you a riding crop and the outfit will be complete."

She snickered and glanced down at herself. "I rarely get to wear leather. Seemed fitting for this club."

"You should wear it more often. I'm telling you, lot of guys in here would let *you* dominate *them*, especially dressed like that." She had an air of confidence and sexiness that was so intoxicating he could barely breathe.

"What about Myth? It's hard to dominate when I'm blindfolded."

Nolan smiled. "He doesn't want you to dominate him. He wants to consume you. Just like you want."

She nodded. "Good."

She bit her bottom lip and looked at him. He knew she wanted to know which of them was going to prep her tonight. Before she could ask, he stood and held out his hand.

"Are you ready to go to your scene?"

She nodded and took his hand. So soft and small. He couldn't remember the last time he'd held a woman's hand. It shouldn't have been an intimate thing, but on some level, it was. It was something two familiar people did. Something a couple would do. Before he thought about that too much, he led her through the mouth, into the elevator, and up to the same room she'd been in before.

The lighting was already set low. The big bed was in the middle of the

room and a mirror on the opposite wall. He stood her in front of the mirror. And then he pulled the blindfold out of his pocket.

"Is there anything you want to tell me before the scene begins?"

• • •

Ava opened her mouth to say a lot of things. To ask if Nolan was going to stay with her. Prep her. Or was Myth? Was her cryptic request really going to play out? She stood there, with Nolan behind her, his eyes glowing like blue fire. He'd been honest with her from the beginning. Time she was honest with him.

"I want…"

He waited. But she couldn't say it. Because what she wanted was a piece of Nolan. And that wasn't a good idea. It went against her hard limit of keeping her sex life at Serve anonymous. A limit that, if broken, would end everything. On a heavy inhale, she went with another truth.

"I'm a little nervous."

He nodded and cupped her hip. "That's understandable."

They continued to look at each other through the mirror, and it was somehow erotic, connected yet detached, and just what she needed. She looked at him in the mirror, able to see him without having to face him.

"You like explicit, sweetheart, so that's what I'm going to give you." His hand trailed up the back of her thigh, and tingles surged from his touch. When he stopped on her cheek, he gently squeezed. "Do you want to be fucked here?" His finger traced the seam of her ass, across the thin lace of her thong.

"Y-yes," she breathed.

"Then understand that it will feel different. There will be some discomfort. But then it will feel so fucking good, love. I promise." She glanced at him in the mirror, and he finished with, "I know Myth very well.

He won’t hurt you. He’ll take you over, demand that your body meet his. There will be slow moments and hard, rough moments. But you’ll like it. And you always have your safe word if you want to stop.”

She nodded. She believed him. But he was speaking for Myth, which meant…

“You’re leaving?”

He held up the blindfold.

“I’m not going far,” he said. “But Myth is in charge of your body and your pleasure. Start to finish.”

With that, the soft silk met her eyes, and her world went dark.

Chapter Nine

“It’s better this way,” Nolan mumbled to himself as he twisted the door handle and entered the room. He’d left Ava blindfolded, and she was still standing in front of the mirror, just as he’d left her.

Like last time, he’d removed his clothes, then put on only a pair of worn jeans and his tongue ring.

He tried not to think about the look in her eyes before he’d blindfolded her. If he didn’t know better, he’d think she’d looked momentarily disappointed that he wasn’t going to be the one to prep her. But he did know better. She might be tempted by the thought of Nolan, but it was Myth who would fulfill her fantasies. And she was waiting.

Waiting for Myth to take over.

He walked behind her, just like before. Only this time, she couldn’t see him. But he could see her, from the back and the front thanks to the reflection from the mirror.

“You’re warm,” she said.

Interesting statement, since her arms had little goose bumps all over them. If he were honest, he had a few himself. Because she was fucking breathtaking.

He’d thought it was just him who came into this room wearing a mask, but he saw the change wash over her. Miss Webber was good at wearing her own mask. This was her fantasy, and she knew how to play it.

And he'd play right back.

He lifted her shirt over her head and tossed it on the floor, then unclasped her bra. It fell next to her discarded shirt. The leather would stay on. But he reached beneath the skirt and snatched down her panties.

There. Perfect.

Seeing her topless, wearing nothing else but leather boots and a skirt, was the hottest fucking thing he'd ever witnessed.

He growled and palmed her ass.

"You like the skirt?" she asked.

He gently slapped her ass again, and she smiled. Did she like the idea of pleasing him? Just the thought made his cock impossibly harder, and he hadn't even tasted her yet.

He grabbed her wrists in both hands and raised them to the mirror. He knew it was sturdy, and it also bent her over nicely. With her high heeled boots and short skirt, her ass came on display, and he couldn't wait to get his hands, mouth, and cock all over her.

Her shoulders tensed a little. Did she think he was going to plunge home already? Shit, he needed her relaxed before he'd even consider taking her ass. But he couldn't say that. So he'd have to show her.

He knelt and lifted her skirt to bunch around her hips, and then he peppered kisses along her toned legs. Once he got to the fleshy part of her inner thigh, he bit down, and she gasped. He could smell her arousal already rising.

He wanted to tell her she looked beautiful. Looked like a damn sex dream come to life. Even though he was on his knees behind her, he could still see her face and breasts in the mirror, her expression as he leaned in and licked just once along her folds.

"Oh!" she gasped. Her delicate brow rose. She wiggled, signaling she wanted more.

Of course she did. So did he. This hot little piece was right in front of him, and he wanted to devour her. Best of all, there was nothing stopping him.

He leaned in and stroked his tongue back and forth along her folds. Every swipe parted her more, and he tasted her heat until finally he skimmed his tongue ring along her clit. She moaned. God, he loved that sound.

"So good," she said.

He gripped her thighs and spread her wider. He was done with mercy. Done with holding himself back from his desire for her. As Myth, he had no need for such boundaries. He drove his tongue into her soft sex and fucked her as hard as he could.

"Oh yes!" she cried. Her hands splayed more on the mirror. He flicked his tongue and surged deep inside her. She was on the brink, but he needed to feel her on his cock first.

He rose quickly, grabbed a condom from his pocket, and sheathed himself.

He grabbed her hips, rubbed the tip of his cock between her legs to let her know his intentions, and then drove into her.

She gasped and rocked forward, then tried to reach back to touch him. But he slapped her ass, and she brought her hands back onto the mirror.

Good girl.

He fucked her with all of his strength. Watching them in the mirror. Watching her lips part around short breaths. Her breasts bounced so wildly that they slapped against each other, and the sound made him fuck her harder.

His hips crashed against her ass, and never had a pussy gripped him like hers, like a wet fist begging for more.

His instinct took over. The instinct to possess her. Own her. Mark her. All of it. He just wanted her to feel him long after their time was done.

He cupped her throat in one hand. He wanted to see all of her when she came apart. He wrapped his free arm around her waist and hoisted her up until her feet were off the ground.

She was so small compared to him. Her sexy little body shuddered, and she clawed at his forearm, trying to hang on. He wanted to tell her he had her. Wouldn't let her fall.

"Yes, yes, oh please," she begged.

He reached up to her face and caressed her cheek.

He felt her sheath tighten around him, milking and sucking at him like her pussy was greedy for more.

He couldn't help but give it. He grabbed her hair and pulled her back as he surged into her, and with that, she went over the edge of pleasure and took her with him.

Gritting his teeth, he came hard, all while keeping his eyes on her, watching her whole body take his. The only thing of his he could see were his arms surrounding her and the peek of his eyes over her shoulder as he lost himself to the woman that he feared was taking him to the brink of a lot more than pleasure.

• • •

Ava tried to breathe, but it was hard. Myth held her like she weighed no more than a doll, and he was still buried deep within her. He'd simply picked her up and fit them together how he wanted. And nothing had ever felt so good. She wished she could have seen what he was seeing. She knew they were in front of the mirror, and she could only imagine how erotic that looked.

She flashed to the way Nolan's blue eyes had looked at her in that very mirror just moments ago…

No, she wouldn't think of Nolan now. She'd given him the choice of how

to go about tonight, and he'd left it all to Myth. And so that was who she'd think about, who she'd be with completely. That was who her body belonged to while she was here. He'd more than earned that right by reading her needs and taking her to new heights.

Myth withdrew from her and set her back on her shaky feet. But not for too long. He picked her right back up, the way Prince Charming would a damsel, and walked with her. The cool sheets of the bed hit her back as he laid her down. His hand rested on her stomach for a moment, then trailed away.

"Are you leaving already?" she asked, panic in her voice. She hadn't meant to sound so needy, but she didn't want the night to end, not when she thought they'd just started.

She heard him scoff low, then he grabbed her hand and raised it to cup his neck. He shook his head, and she felt the motion. He was telling her no. He wasn't leaving.

Her heart settled.

"Good. I'm glad," she said.

He moved away from her. She heard him walk around, the sound of plastic and rustle of clothes, a drawer opening and closing from the small hutch she remembered seeing in the corner. He was discarding the condom and shedding whatever clothing he had left.

She waited. Her core already throbbing for more.

His weight dipped the bed when he climbed on with her. She reached for him, but he caught her hands and placed them on the bed by her sides. So he didn't want her touching him. That made her chest sink a bit.

She could feel how strong he was from the brushes of his skin against hers. When he was between her thighs, she felt his muscles flex against her. But tonight, he didn't want her to reach out. Last time, he'd bound her wrists. Maybe he wanted anonymity as much as she did?

That didn’t mean her body wasn’t starting to grow needy for his touch. His power. His care.

This was inside the scene. As long as the blindfold was on, she could feel whatever she wanted, but when it was done, so was the scene. The real world waited outside. She wouldn’t waste her time thinking of that real world now, while she was in her fantasy.

“I assume you spoke with Nolan?” she whispered when she felt his breath hover over her nipple. She arched and reached out for contact he didn’t give. “Are you going to take me again?”

He sucked her nipple into his mouth quickly, then swirled his tongue and that barbell around the stiff point.

She moaned. “I’m going to assume that’s a yes.”

He sucked her nipple, hard and quick, once more. Definitely a yes. This could be a game she could get on board with. Nolan might not have prepped her tonight, but he had the other night when it came to talking dirty. Now it was her turn to say what she wanted.

“You came already,” she said. He bit her nipple, and she squeaked, smiled, and flashed with more lust. “I was just wondering if you can again?”

A low growl broke from his throat, and he thrust his hard cock against her thigh. Wow. The guy rebounded quickly.

“Good. Because I want to feel it again.” She leaned up on her elbows and licked her lips, inviting him to take her mouth. She wanted to taste him so bad.

His fingertip skimmed her bottom lip. She opened and sucked the entire digit inside. Another low groan came from him. He withdrew his finger and was on her in record time. But it wasn’t his cock he shoved at her mouth, it was his own lips.

He kissed her hard. Cupped her face. The vibration of his tortured,

animalistic groan boomed down her throat. He flicked his tongue, drank her down, as if he couldn't get enough of just kissing her. He kissed her the way he would kiss a lover he'd known for longer than two sessions. Like a lover he cared for.

She hadn't felt this conflicted since her lunch with Nolan. She'd known this experience would awaken her to new sides of herself, but she hadn't expected it to awaken the parts of herself she'd thought discarded. She'd come here to escape the temptation of emotion, yet twice now, for two different men, she'd felt the urge to open herself to something more than this purely sexual experience.

She kissed him back, wanted to touch him, throw her arms around him, and pull him down. Cradle him between her thighs. But before she could, he backed away.

He tapped her bottom lip with his finger as if in awe or in warning. In a split second, he grabbed her hips and flipped her to her stomach. He threw her skirt up over her ass and pulled her up so that she was on all fours and in front of him. He ran that thick, heavy cock along her ass.

He was asking again.

"Yes. I'm new to this," she admitted, even though Nolan had already told him. She felt the need to say it herself.

She was still nervous. Not of being hurt, but the unknown. She was giving everything—like she'd said she would, like she'd said she wanted—to a man she couldn't see.

It should be perfect. It was perfect. Yet Nolan's face flashed in her mind once more.

She shook her head.

He paused. Had he seen her motion?

"I'm ready," she said, thinking he'd misinterpreted her actions. "Please, just take me. I don't want to think anymore."

He ran a hand down her spine, and she arched into it like a stray animal begging for a single touch. She spread her knees a little wider, offering up everything.

His fingers ran from the small of her back, down her most private areas. He buried a finger inside her sheath, which was already dripping from her previous orgasm. She loved the feel of him. When any part of him was inside her, she couldn't think, couldn't reason or acknowledge the world. She didn't want to. She just wanted to feel.

He pumped in and out of her opening with his finger, and an orgasm was slowly building when she felt a cool liquid drip onto her ass. Then she felt pressure from his thumb against the rosette.

Slow. So agonizingly slow it was burning her up. The sensation was new. Not bad, not good, but new. She didn't know what to make of it.

He added more lubrication, his thumb pushed past the barrier, and she gasped.

He stilled his fingers. She felt full, felt naughty, felt wanton.

The sensation was foreign and…good.

So good she licked her lips and rocked back just enough to take a little more.

He growled and stilled her with his free hand.

"It feels so good," she told him, trying to rock back again, but he prevented it once more. She huffed with impatience. "You won't break me. I want more. Now."

A whoosh of air sounded, and then the sting of his hand slapping her ass echoed in the room. She hissed, but it only added to her desire.

He withdrew his thumb, then pressed back in while grinding his cock against the back of her thigh.

"I'm aware you're bigger," she said, picking up on what he was trying to warn her about. She thought again about what Nolan had told her during

their dirty talking session. She needed to be specific. “I want your cock.”

His deep breath hit the back of her shoulders. He withdrew completely from her body, then returned with more liquid. This time she felt a long finger slowly push inside. After a few strokes, a second finger joined. It was the most lit up she’d ever felt. She hadn’t known what to expect with ass play, but she hadn’t expected to like it this much.

The slight sting mixed with the overwhelming fullness was heady and sexy, and she just wanted more.

A sound of cellophane ripping and rolling as he put a condom on made her skin buzz with even more awareness. This was going to happen. She felt like a virgin again. Only this time, she was ready for what was coming. Wanted it. And would get it, on her terms.

She took a deep breath, trying to relax. His hand trailed down her back and rubbed her cheeks. Then he spread her wide and slowly pushed his cock against her opening.

Oh God…he was much bigger than the fingers.

Another deep breath.

He nudged further, and the head of his cock pushed past her tight ring and made her eyes water from the sting. She didn’t know if she could take more. This was what he was being careful about. Slowly, he guided himself into her, gently surged past the stinging spot, and sheathed himself completely.

“Ah!” She gasped and choked on the shock of feeling him go this deep.

He remained still and let her adjust. His hands shook on her hips, as if trying to hold himself back from whatever instinct was driving him.

“I’m okay,” she whispered. In fact, it felt better now that he was fully nestled inside her. When he pulled back, then gently thrust forward again, nerves she hadn’t even known existed sparked with dark pleasure.

He did it again. Slow. Then again. Fucking her ass with care but driving her wild with every movement.

She didn’t know what to feel. Her body was screaming for more.

“Full…I feel so full…but so empty,” she said. Her core was contracting around nothing, begging for stimulation and growing wetter by the second while his impressive cock brought out desires in a totally different way.

He pressed on her shoulders and made her rest her head on the bed with her ass high in the air. He took one of her hands and coaxed her to reach back, put her fingers over her clit, and rub.

She wanted his touch, but her words died in her throat, because his finger instantly disappeared into her pussy and filled her up.

“Oh fuck, yes!” she cried.

He was all over her, in her, in every way. She couldn’t breathe. Didn’t want to. He started picking up the pace. Fucking her harder, faster. His length slipped from her body just as his fingers plunged deep, then reversed. Back and forth, she was never not filled by him.

She rubbed her clit with the hand he’d placed there, and in moments she was done for. Her body exploded from pleasure she’d never known existed.

She felt his dick twitch, and a low groan broke from his throat as he came right behind her. Her knees couldn’t hold out. She collapsed to the bed, breathing hard, and Myth was right there with her. Kissing her shoulders, her neck, her hair. His muscular chest was against her, and a slickness of sweat coated them. She’d never felt anything so raw and passionate in her life.

He littered kisses along her spine as he slowly moved away from her body. With a final touch of his hand, he brushed a lock of hair away from her face. Though she couldn’t see him, she looked up to where he was and smiled.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

His hand disappeared from her face, and the sound of the door opening and closing echoed in her ears.

It was over.

Chapter Ten

“Okay everyone,” Gina said, winding down another Monday meeting. “A team from Xspot Inc. will be here in two weeks to hear our marketing strategy. Let’s all be prepared.”

Two weeks. Ava had two weeks to come up with something great and get Xspot to hire their firm to handle their marketing. If her mind wasn’t on sex enough, especially after this past Saturday, when Myth had opened her eyes to a whole other kind of sex, she was now knee-deep in all things risqué.

“Ava, how’s the proposal coming?” Gina asked, walking in step with her back to her office.

“Going well. I have the data they provided from last quarter. Some strategies I have in mind could work. I’m still doing some tweaking since they’re not the ‘average’ client.”

“Excellent, I can’t wait to see what you come up with,” Gina said, and then left Ava to sit back at her desk.

As Ava pulled her chair in, her phone buzzed with a text from Nolan.

On a scale of 1 to 10 hungries…how hungry are you?

She smiled. She could almost hear his voice, and all the charm that dripped from it, even in a text.

It was just after five, and she was packing up for the day. She’d been excited to spend a quiet night alone, but now she had an invitation from

Nolan. Tempting? Yes. A problem? That, too.

After the other night with Myth, things were heating up. But this had gone beyond the purely erotic experience she'd come to Serve for. Thoughts of Myth were trickling over into her normal life, while thoughts of Nolan were trickling into her time with Myth.

It was getting on the verge of foggy.

She needed some perspective, but she couldn't talk to Myth. That left Nolan. She'd have to take the risk that discussing this with him wouldn't blur the issue further.

She sent him a text.

I'm a solid seven and growing ravenous by the minute.

His response came quickly.

Ravenous huh? Please God tell me you want company. Ravenous is something I can work with.

She smiled and shot him a reply.

Depends on the type of food we're talking…

She wasn't sure what she expected him to say, but he didn't keep her waiting.

Whipped cream and chocolate sauce?

She laughed and wrote back:

While that sounds good…maybe add something with some protein?

She only realized the naughty implications of her text after she'd hit send, but thankfully, Nolan didn't rub it in too hard.

You can count on me. ;)

Another smile broke when she saw the little winky face he put with the

last text. She could count on him? She shook her head. He was bringing food. That's all. She just needed to be careful with this whole *feeling* thing. She felt pleasure with Myth. Simple. She felt happy with Nolan. Simple. But they both got her hot.

Not so simple.

Another incoming text lit up her phone:

So was that an invitation?

She thought for a moment. Was it? Inviting him to her house was tricky. She liked Nolan's company, and the guy knew how to push her buttons in every good way possible, while Myth literally pushed every button she physically had and left her panting for more.

But Nolan and Myth were both just doing their job. For Nolan, she was his charge, a client in need of his protection. And for Myth, she was an anonymous lover owed nothing more than sex. For both of them, she was one among many.

She danced around his question and sent another text.

My night involves relaxing and PJs. Not the glamorous night you're used to at the club, I'm sure.

Nolan's response came within seconds.

Is. That. An. Invitation?

Should have known he would call her out. He was nothing if not blunt. Would he really want to come over to her tiny apartment and just hang out instead of being at Serve with some hot woman or God knew what else a muscular Greek god like himself could be doing with his evenings?

She typed out another text.

You're welcome if you want to come over. Don't expect a party, though.

His response took a few moments, but it was as wry as ever.

I'd love to not party with you. But I need a direct answer.

She sighed and answered:

Please Nolan, come over. I want you to hang out with me so bad.

Hopefully her exaggerated tone came through in text, even though she couldn't help but smile.

Finally, his answer came.

Best text ever. I'm there. I'll bring the best carbo-loaded food for us too since you're such a gracious hostess. See you soon, sweetheart.

She laughed at the last text. Her night was looking up. She found herself excited to spend time with Nolan.

After a long subway ride, two flights of stairs, and a stop in her bedroom to drop her stuff, she finally had her yoga pants and tank top on and was ready to relax. A knock came at the door, and she didn't realize until she gripped the knob that she'd skipped from her room to the front door.

When she opened the door, her smile faded.

"Ava Webber?" the UPS guy asked.

"Yes."

He handed her a large box. She set it down near the door and signed for the package.

"Have a good night," he said and left.

She bent to open the box, and her eyes widened when she realized what it was: an array of sex toys, lube, flavored panties, and lingerie. It was from Xspot Inc., a sample of the products she had to work her entire pitch around.

"Holy shit, sweetheart," Nolan said. He was standing a few steps from her in the hallway and staring at the box in front of her. A wide grin split his

face. “I thought you said not to expect a party.”

• • •

Holding a bag of takeout in one hand, Nolan looked down to see Ava’s big green eyes staring up at him with shock and embarrassment.

“It’s not…I mean, this isn’t what it looks like,” she said, slamming the top closed. Which made something within the box of awesome start buzzing. “Shit,” she whispered, then dug back into the box until she found the source of the sound. Though everything was packaged, a button on what looked to be a pretty serious vibrator had switched on.

Ava ripped at the packaging and finally shut off the toy.

“If I’d known you were inviting me to a sex party, I would have brought my assless chaps.”

Her mouth hung open. She looked at him, then at the box, then finally stood.

“I wasn’t expecting this package today.”

“What *package* were you expecting?”

She rolled her eyes, but he couldn’t help it. Teasing her was fun, and she was cute as hell when she was annoyed.

“Are you going to come in or stand in my doorway like a creeper all night?”

He stepped through the door. “I think we should work on your hostess skills. Perhaps instead of calling the guest you invited over a creeper, you could offer a beverage, or at least a sex toy.”

A blush stained her cheeks as she closed and locked the door, but in true Ava fashion, she recovered quickly. “I wasn’t aware you enjoyed sex toys. And would you like a beverage?” she asked sweetly. Her sarcasm was sexy, right down to the little glare she gave.

“I enjoy using them on women,” he said and followed her into the

kitchen, setting the take out down on the counter.

She eyed him over her shoulder. When she bent over to take cookies out of the oven, he about went to his knees, because he had a prime view of her perfect ass encased in all that tight thin material. Christ, he hadn't thought about anything but that perfect ass since the other night.

His worlds were colliding, and he couldn't bring himself to pump the breaks. Not yet. When she was satisfied and moved on from Myth, which she would, Nolan would have to move on, too. But she was too good to let go of yet. Especially now that he had a piece of her she'd never shared with anyone.

Only him.

And he'd kept her safe. Hadn't hurt her. Only brought her pleasure.

A feeling of pride and ownership came over him. Something he shouldn't feel. Something he had no right to feel.

She didn't share it with me. She shared it with Myth.

He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to recall the moment when keeping himself and Myth separate had shifted from being a good thing to an annoying thing.

"Is that part of your job for prepping?" she asked. He opened the cartons of food, and she handed him two plates so he could dish them both up.

"Huh?"

"The sex toy comment. You said you used them on women."

He handed her a plate full of noodles, made a mental note to come back for a cookie, and followed her into the living room. With his dinner in hand, he sat in the chair across the coffee table from her, while she settled in on the couch.

"I just like using them from time to time with women. Not for a job."

She took a bite of her noodles and looked at him. "Sorry. Obviously you have a life. It's not all about setting up scenes."

He wanted to scoff. The thing was, lately, his life actually had been little more than setting up scenes. Even his ménage with Will and Penelope hadn't involved intimacy. It had been club business, nothing more.

And then Ava had come in. She was supposed to be nothing more than club business, too, but he couldn't help but care for her. He needed to know she was safe while she was under his care, and he wouldn't let her go without knowing she'd stay safe long after she left him.

"So…" He smirked. "Are you going to tell me why you had a trunk load of pleasure devices delivered to your door, or are we going to just keep ignoring the giant box of sex toys in the room?"

"Isn't it ignore the 'elephant' in the room?"

"You have an elephant in that box? I've heard of that model. Apparently it's huge."

She gave a small laugh. "It's for work."

"I thought you were in marketing?"

"I am. I have to pitch to this client that sells this merchandise. We want them to hire us as their new marking team."

"So it's only natural you get to know what they're selling."

"Yeah, only I wasn't expecting all *that*." She cleared her throat and looked at him. "So how was your day?"

"Not as good as yours, it would seem."

"Shut up." She laughed and threw a piece of carrot at him. "Seriously, what did you do?"

"I had the day off, actually. I don't get many, so I caught up on chores and errands."

"Chores and errands?"

"What? I like a clean home. And it's not like I never leave the club."

She nodded. "Fair enough. I just can't imagine you Swiffering."

"Oh, baby, I Swiffer a mean floor."

She laughed, and so did he. The sound was musical, and he wanted to hear it again.

"I admire that. Taking care of your home. Most men are slobs and expect women to clean up after them." Her eyes blinked fast, like she hadn't meant to say that out loud, then she looked down at her food.

"I'd never expect a woman to take care of me like that. I actually like taking care of others."

"That's because you were raised well," she said quietly.

"What about you? You seem to hate the idea of Swiffering. You like to be taken care of?"

She shook her head. "I like being alone. Taking care of myself. When you add another person, things just get…messy."

"Hence the Swiffer."

She smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. Whatever had happened to her went deep. Someone had hurt her, taken advantage of her in some way. He admired her strength, but he could see the hesitation in her eyes.

He'd give just about anything to know who'd caused her such pain. He'd hunt the son of a bitch down and promise Ava he'd never let anyone hurt her like that again.

He went to ask, but she sighed and smiled, and he remembered that this wasn't about what he wanted. He had to respect her boundaries, and if she didn't want to open up, he couldn't make her.

"So the other night…" Man, she was good. The breezy tone of her voice and gleam in her eye almost made him believe the illusion that she was back to confident Ava, and the moment of pain he'd glimpsed in her had never happened. "I was hoping to talk to you about it."

"Okay," he said. "I was hoping you would."

"Really? Why?"

Because he wanted to make sure she was okay. Because if he couldn't

help her heal the past, he at least wanted to keep her safe today. Because he'd walked out that door with a brick lodged in his chest and hadn't been right since.

"Because I want make sure everything is lining up with your expectations."

Smooth. Real smooth. The light in her eyes flickered, like she'd been hoping for more of an answer. But he'd gone with something casual. As always.

"Actually, I was hoping to get your advice." She set her plate down. "Myth has been great. But I haven't been able to really touch him or reciprocate."

"You want to reciprocate?" Nolan almost groaned, and his cock shot hard in his jeans.

"Yes. You know him, right? How do I go about doing that if he won't let me really touch him? What should I do? Every time I push him, he pushes back and just takes me over—"

"I thought that's what you wanted."

"It is," she said quickly. "But I want to please him, too." Her eyes met his. "Tell me. How do I please him?"

Damn it, he wanted to jump across the coffee table and kiss the hell out those pouty lips. He also wanted to tell her exactly what he'd love for her to do to him. But he couldn't exactly do that without violating their arrangement.

He set his plate on the coffee table and rested his forearms on his knees. How to keep a distance but get closer at the same time…

A light bulb went off.

"You want to know what he'd like and how to please him?"

She nodded eagerly.

Shit, Nolan was going straight to hell for this, but she had asked.

“He’d want to see you have pleasure. Watch you take joy in pleasuring him.”

“How do you mean?”

“You really want to know?”

“Yes, so much,” she said.

Nolan got up, went to the box of goodies she’d gotten, and grabbed the vibrator she’d opened earlier. It was long, not too thick, and just what he was looking for. He handed it to her and resumed his place in his chair across the coffee table from her.

“He’d want you to listen, but since he can’t talk, I’ll practice with you.”

She glanced at the silver vibrator in her hand, then back at him.

“When I say that he’d want to see you take pleasure in what you do to him, that means he’d want you to silently obey and love every second.”

He watched her throat work on a hard swallow. He read her easily. Perceptive woman, she knew exactly where he was going with this.

“You say you push his buttons and he pushes back? Okay, but let me ask you something. Have you let him truly take over since you started at Serve?”

She bit the inside of her cheek. “I guess not. I’ve goaded him. Tried to push for more. Tried to take over even on occasion.”

“Of course you have.” He smiled. “I would expect nothing less from a strong woman like you. But this is your fantasy, and you haven’t really embraced it yet.”

She nodded. “You’re right.”

“Take off your pants and spread your legs wide.”

Her eyes shot to his, and he cocked his head. She’d either tell him to fuck off… or she’d do what he said. Either way, he’d know how the night, and likely whatever semblance of a relationship they had, would go.

“Practice,” she said, keeping her eyes on him as she stood and peeled her

pants and panties down.

God, she was amazing. Whatever fear she had about commitment, or the real world versus Serve, she wasn't shy about her body. No, she was on a mission to experience everything she could. That much was clear, had been clear since the day she'd sat in his office with a single word scribbled on her questionnaire.

She sat back down on the couch and spread her legs, showing off that perfect pussy he knew firsthand tasted of honey. He stifled a hiss.

Stay focused. You're Nolan now, not Myth.

"Good." He crossed his arms and sat back in his chair. "Now, to please your mystery man, he'd want what any man wants—that lush little mouth wrapped around his cock."

She nodded.

"But he'd want you to love it."

"I would," she whispered.

"Oh? Show me how much just the thought turns you on." He lifted his chin at the vibrator next to her.

She grabbed it and ran it along her already glistening folds. Fuck, he wanted her so bad. He called on every ounce of will he had to get through this moment.

"He'd want to take you deep. Wrap his fingers in your hair and bury his cock until it hit the back of your throat."

A soft moan escaped her, and she slowly pushed the tip of the phallus into her pussy. She was getting off on just the thought of sucking him off.

Not him…Myth.

He cursed and told his brain to shut up and continue.

"No pushing his buttons. You'd be on your knees. Mouth open, waiting. Letting him fuck your pretty mouth however he wanted, and you'd say nothing but thank you."

She pushed the vibrator even deeper, and damn it, he was about to come in his jeans at the sight alone.

"He'd want to see this. See you take pleasure in his pleasure. Watch how much you love the feel of him down your throat. The taste of him. Prove to him how wet his cock makes you, even when it's not inside you."

She took the rest of the length into her depths and subtly began rolling her hips.

"Turn it on," he ordered.

She did, and her eyes went wide.

"Keep fucking that vibrator until it makes you come. Think of Myth. Think of everything he makes you feel. Think of every time he's made you come. Think of his mouth, his tongue, his teeth. You want to please him? Then let him really have you. Let him consume every inch of you. Every thought you have. Every ounce of touch. All of it. Give it to him."

She worked the toy faster and licked her lips over and over. She was thinking of his cock. Good.

"This is what he'd want," Nolan said.

She squeezed her eyes shut, and just when he thought she would come, she stopped and let the vibrator slip from her. Breathing hard, she closed her legs and looked at him.

"Okay," she rasped. "Now I know for next time."

It was all Nolan could do to keep his jaw off the floor. The woman had denied herself an orgasm to keep the line between Myth and Nolan firmly in place. Something he should be doing as well.

He nodded once.

"Yes, now you know."

On a shaky breath, she stepped into her pants and pulled them back on. "I guess all that's left is to set up another scene. Thank you for your advice, Nolan."

Something like a knife twisted in his gut. He smiled past the stab and said, “Anytime, sweetheart.”

Chapter Eleven

Ava shuffled through her purse, grabbing her keys, and opened her front door. It had been a long couple of days. The presentation was coming along nicely. The downside was that every time she even thought about her potential client, Xspot Inc., she thought of the night with Nolan.

Close call.

Yeah, there was little left between them in terms of exposure. He'd seen her naked after scenes, and now he'd seen her spread wide and pleasuring herself in her own home. But he'd never seen her come, never touched her, and she'd never touched him. There was still the distance she needed. And that was something she was clinging to, the only thing keeping her fear from rising up.

Fear that she was starting to think of him—to want to be with him—more than casually.

Stupid brain.

Stupid hormones.

Serve almost made things difficult in some ways. Because she couldn't see her mystery lover, her time with him was like a dream, and it was starting to bleed into her encounters with Nolan. Her mind couldn't keep them straight.

Maybe she needed to do better at keeping that line. Or walk away. But when she thought about fading away and going back to her "normal" life,

sadness crept in. Because everything she was looking to escape by attending Serve, like her past and her own self-doubts, was fading away. She had learned a lot about herself in the short time she'd been with Myth and Nolan, for that matter.

She didn't want to give up Nolan's friendship. And she didn't want to give up Myth. But if that was the case, she needed to get her head right and keep the hard limit she'd set. No emotions. Maybe she needed a do-over. Spend time with Nolan outside the club and not do anything sexual. Then she could convince herself that the line she was tripping over really wasn't an issue. Convince herself that her ex hadn't left a raw gap in her stomach that hurt every time she thought of the manipulation she'd lived through.

She shook her head, dislodging every black memory she could, and knew the one person that could make her smile right then.

She dialed Nolan's number and waited.

"Well, hello," he said, happiness in his voice.

She smiled, liking the idea that her call made him happy. "Hi. How are you?"

"Better now."

She heard the boom of the music from the club in the background. "I didn't mean to bother you while you're working." Suddenly the image of him being with a woman flashed in her mind, and she didn't like it. Would he really stop sexing up some chick to answer the phone, though? She hoped not. Hopefully he was there tonight as the manager, not as a member.

Not that she should care either way.

We're just friends.

"You're never a bother. How are you?"

"Feeling a little caged," she said, looking around her apartment. She hadn't exactly meant to let that slip, but it was so easy talking with Nolan. "I know I'm coming in soon for a scene, but I have half the day off

tomorrow and was wondering if maybe you wanted to hang out for a few hours in the afternoon."

Seconds passed. Then a few more seconds. She almost asked if he was still there, but she still could hear the music.

Should she have added "just as friends" to the end of her request? She knew he had his own hang ups about even the hint of a relationship.

Then he said, "Are you psychic?"

"Excuse me?"

"If you're a psychic, you should have put that on the form."

She laughed. "Uh, I'm not a psychic, and I'm very aware at this point that you think I should have put a lot of things on the form."

"That's true. It's just crazy, because I was going to see if I could pick you up this weekend to take you out."

She frowned. "Out where? And this weekend?"

"Yeah, I can bump my plans forward."

"Wait, what plans? I thought—"

"You're the psychic, sweetheart. But the answer is still yes. I'll pick you up tomorrow at three. Does that work?"

"Yeah, but are you going to tell me what we're doing?"

"No." She heard the smile in his voice when he finished with, "But I have a feeling it will cure your problem of feeling caged. See you tomorrow."

With that, the line went dead.

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After the phone call with Nolan yesterday, Ava had spent all of her brainpower trying to figure out what he had planned. Now she was living it. Problem was, she still wasn't certain what they were doing. She glanced around. What the hell was Nolan thinking? Standing in a massive dome, wearing a jump suit, she looked at the big spring mat they stood on, then

up, up to the high ceiling.

She leaned into him. “This is like a large cage.”

He just smiled. “Based on what you told me, a cage would be the exact wrong thing to put you in.” He nodded at the instructor that was coming over. “You’re going to love this.”

“Yeah?”

He held out his hand. “Trust me?”

She gave him a side eye, then cautiously took his hand. “Yes…”

“Then just go with this. You’ll have never felt more free.”

“Welcome to indoor skydiving,” the instructor said.

Ava’s heart picked up and adrenaline started coursing.

“While you won’t be jumping out of a plane, you will feel like you’re flying through the air with no restraints and no limits.”

After a few rules and instructions about safety and how to let the wind take them into the air, it was time for liftoff.

“Okay, ma’am, you stand here, and when the air comes in, slowly let yourself go horizontal. I’ll be here to steady you until you’re comfortable and we can turn up the gust.”

She stepped into the middle of the mat. In the dome, it was just them. Nolan moved to the side, but she stopped him.

“Will you do it with me?” she asked. She wanted him to stay close, because she did trust him. She had from the beginning.

He glanced at the instructor and gave him a nod. This obviously wasn’t Nolan’s first time here. “You mind if I take the lead?”

“Go right ahead, buddy.”

He walked to meet Ava in the middle and faced her. She smiled and kept her eyes on him as the air started to come in. A tinge of panic raced through her. Her body locked up, trying to keep her feet on the ground.

“Let go,” Nolan said next to her ear. “You have to give yourself over to it

and trust that the wind will catch you."

"It feels like I'll fall on my face," she argued, but Nolan just smiled.

"You have to give up control. Stop fighting and move with it."

She looked into his eyes and his words encompassed a lot more than that single moment. Stop fighting and move with it. That was Nolan. Everything he was in her world. A relationship she was trying to figure out, work around, or even make sense of. Instead she needed to move with it and just let it swoop her up.

She nodded and leaned forward. He held his hands out, not confining her or even touching her, but it was like he was there to catch her if she fell. It was enough to ease some of her nerves and she started to lay out. And *he* moved with *her*. Staying close, he let the wind take him as well. The air picked up and lifted them off the ground. She went fully horizontal and in a split second, she was next to Nolan, balancing on nothing but air.

The instructor gave some kind of gesture to Nolan, as if asking if they needed assistance, and Nolan waved him off.

Judging by the look on his face, Nolan saw the change come over her as she realized that despite giving up control, she was safe. She was free.

"Oh my God, this is awesome!" she yelled.

Nolan smiled and floated closer to her. The instructor watched but let them have the dome to themselves. Then she did something she hadn't expected, something her body did without thinking. She reached out for him.

Her heart stopped as wind rushed past her face. Waiting. He looked at her for a moment then reached back.

• • •

She was reaching for him. And Nolan wanted to do a lot more than reach back. He wanted to capture her. He intertwined their fingers, and they

hovered together on the wind. Her smile widened, and she laughed with such enjoyment that he felt every note beat deep in chest, as if she single-handedly made his heart work.

The way she let go and gave in to the unknown was incredible to watch. Ava Webber was brave. Brave in how she went after things, brave in her choices, brave in her life. Though she hadn't opened up a lot about her past, Nolan knew she was brave with that, too.

Her voice on the phone yesterday and the admission that she'd felt caged had almost done him in. Space should be what he was giving her. Instead, he'd had to see her. To help. To be something in her life that she deemed good.

Maybe that was selfish of him, because nothing about what he felt for Ava was secret or hidden. That was Myth's department. All the more reason for him to give her an experience that would bring light back to her eyes. So what if tomorrow night it would kill him to blindfold her and return to their game? Right now she needed him. Not an anonymous lover. *Him.*

He tightened his grip on her hands, and the tension must have spread through his entire body, because the air came close to flipping him over and tearing him away from Ava. But at the last second, so quickly that he hoped she didn't notice, he regained control and forced himself to relax his body, even if he couldn't relax his mind.

She deserved this calm, collected moment, but losing his balance was all it had taken to remind him how easily trying to hold on to her could make the entire thing fall apart.

• • •

"Oh my God, that was incredible," Ava said, clutching Nolan's arm as they walked down the streets of New York. She felt free and happy and… relaxed. "I can't remember the last time I had that much fun."

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

He hailed a cab with his free arm. She was all but gripping the life from his bicep. She was also riding on adrenaline and wanted to jump up and down. She felt light as a feather, ready to fly, with Nolan her only anchor to the real world.

He helped her in the cab, then slid in beside her. He gave the driver her address, and they were on their way. “Do you want me to walk you in?”

She looked at him. She wasn’t ready for today to be over. But with the sun almost gone and night falling, she had a feeling that if he walked her to her door, she would invite him in. And that would land her in a bad spot, since all she wanted to do was test out this adrenaline rush on Nolan. But tomorrow night she had a meeting with Myth, the person she *should* be testing adrenaline out on.

Logic was winning this time. “I’ll be fine. Thank you, though,” she said to Nolan as the cab pulled in front of her building. “Today has been amazing.”

A small smile crept over his handsome face and he nodded once. “Amazing.”

She got out of the cab and tried not to look back. *Fail*. She didn’t even make it to the sidewalk before glancing over her shoulder at him. Nolan had given her the thing she craved above all…freedom.

All while holding her hand through it.

This went beyond taking care of a club member. He cared for her. He was her friend. The one man she could trust. She wouldn’t sour the moment by overthinking it.

Chapter Twelve

Ava unlocked her front door and walked in. She scanned the pile of mail in her hand as she shut the door behind her, and then she glanced at the clock.

It had been twenty-four hours since skydiving, and all she'd thought about was what to do next. That whole "not overthinking it" idea was not working out. Her plan to keep that line between her and Nolan firm had backfired. After falling through the air with him, she'd obsessed over his words. How she needed to let go. That was the one thing she hadn't truly done. Let go. Myth had set her body free, but Nolan had helped her truly get out of the cage.

"Oh God…" She flopped her mail down on the coffee table and sank into her couch. "I like him."

And there, in her small apartment, she looked around, alone. She was talking to herself. *Alone*. Her phone only held contacts from work. It wasn't like she'd abandoned all of her friends from before New York. To tell the truth, she hadn't *had* much of any friends. Life with her ex had consumed everything, eventually for the worse.

And now she was here, in New York, so desperate to regain control that she hadn't allowed herself to connect with anyone.

She was totally and completely *alone*.

Except for Nolan…

Yet when she was with Myth, he made her feel alive, sexy, desired. When

she was with Nolan—he made her feel worthwhile.

She was set to have a scene tonight with Myth. Nolan would be there, of course, in his usual business capacity. But the idea of making it through another twenty-four hours without actually getting to spend time with Nolan seemed painful. She thought again about what he'd said, about her not truly letting go.

She spread out the fingers of her left hand and looked at the faintly lighter skin where she'd once worn her wedding ring. She'd thought it best to keep the ring as a reminder to never let herself be so vulnerable again, but maybe its weight was what was now keeping her from moving forward. Maybe a tiny part of herself was still tied to the past.

She shot off the couch, ran to her room, and grabbed the ring from the top drawer of her jewelry box. Then she grabbed her coat and hustled down the street to the nearest pawn shop.

She'd clung to this one object, and now she realized how it was holding her back. She was finally ready to get rid of it.

The other night with Nolan had brought a lot of truth to the surface. He'd been right. She'd never really let Myth take her over. Not fully. She also kept Nolan at a distance, when he was the one person she could trust.

It wasn't like either one of them were asking for a commitment. Far from it. So she could at least give herself as best she could to the two men who'd opened her eyes and soul in ways no one else had. It was time to really let go. Time to really move on.

The guy behind the counter of the pawn shop crossed his arms and waited. "What do you have?"

"This." She opened her hand. The small wedding band was burning a hole in her palm. She placed it on the glass of the pawn shop.

"Looking to sell?" the guy asked. He had a handlebar mustache and slicked back salt and pepper hair.

“Yes, please.”

He looked it over and seemed about to make an offer when something in the case caught her eye.

“Actually, how about a trade?” She tapped the glass over the item she was interested in. “Is that real?”

“Yeah, it’s real and certified.”

She nodded. “You give me that, and the ring is yours.”

He examined the ring, then looked at her. “Deal.”

A big smile split her face. She’d just gotten the bargain of the year. Now she needed to reach out to the man who’d inspired her to make this change.

She called him on his cell.

“Ava?”

There was a surprising lack of club music in the background.

“Are you not at work?”

“No. Not until tonight.” He chuckled. “Even I get a few hours off here and there. Don’t worry. I’ll be there to help you prep for your scene.”

“Wait… Are you saying you’re only coming in tonight to help me?”

“That’s right,” he said. “I wouldn’t trust anyone else to take care of you.”

Wow. After yesterday, she knew he cared for her safety, but she hadn’t guessed how deeply his protective instincts ran. She wasn’t sure what frightened her more: wondering whether this meant he cared for her more than just as his charge at Serve…or the question she was burning to ask him.

“What’s up?” he said.

She took a deep breath, opened her mouth…but the words wouldn’t come out.

Just ask him, Ava…

“Do you think it would be okay if we did something other than Serve kind of activities tonight?”

“You never have to do anything you don’t want.” He paused. “So what *do* you want?”

She swallowed. “I was thinking that tonight we could just stay in.”

“You’ve said *we* twice now.”

“I’m aware.”

Now he really paused. Seconds passed without him saying anything. What was he waiting for? Details? Damn the men in her life, always wanting her to spell it out. Still, she couldn’t totally give in and act like a moon-eyed girl.

“I was hoping to torture you with a chick flick and maybe some popcorn.”

He chuckled. “Do you think that’s appropriate?”

She hoped he could sense her smirking. “Why? Because you’re Serve’s manager and I’m a member?”

“Something like that.”

“We’re also friends though, right?” She swallowed. “Aren’t we?”

“Of course we are,” he said.

She heard something hidden in his tone, but she couldn’t figure out what it was.

“But you’ll come?”

“Yes,” he said. “I’ll come.”

“Good. Because I’m hungry and dying to watch my favorite film.”

From the sound of his voice, she could practically see the grin splitting his face. “That sounds like dinner and a movie, sweetheart.”

“Snack and a movie.” She swallowed. “Do you think Myth will be mad that I’m asking for a rain check?”

“I’ll make sure he understands.” The confidence in Nolan’s voice eased her concern that Myth would be upset. It wasn’t that she didn’t want to see Myth, but today had changed something deep, deep down in her soul.

Something that was telling her to hold on to these few moments with Nolan. She wasn't ready to say goodbye to him yet. Not tonight.

• • •

She chose me…

It was the single most awesome thought Nolan had had since he'd gotten into the cab to her place. When she'd called an hour ago and asked him to come over, he'd damn near run. It was set to be a popcorn and movie night, but he wasn't complaining. He just liked being in her company.

Now, sitting in her living room, he felt happy, even with a god-awful movie about some Beatrice woman and her diary playing in the background. The smell of popcorn lingered in the room.

She sat next to him on the couch, her feet tucked under her. He stretched his arm over the back of the sofa…

Christ, he felt like a teenager at the movie theater trying to cop a feel. He wasn't trying to cop anything. Well, he would if she let him, but his strategy was bigger.

She. Chose. Me.

Who cared if it was for a movie instead of his dick? Being with her like this felt more real. More intimate. And if this was what she needed, this was what he'd give.

Up until this point, he'd thought his only way to have her was by being Myth. But maybe he, Nolan, had a shot after all…in the real world. She'd chosen him after skydiving, and now again instead of entering another scene tonight.

"So…" She set the popcorn bowl in her lap and reached for a small, wrapped box on the coffee table. "I saw this today and thought of you." She handed him the box.

He took it and opened it.

“No way!” He pulled the treasure out. “A signed Joe DiMaggio card!” He knew he sounded like a damn kid on Christmas, but he couldn’t help it.

“You like it?” she asked, gently clapping her hands with excitement.

He met her eyes. Hopeful green eyes with some nervousness behind them. She’d really thought of him. Really tried to do something nice for him.

“I love it,” he said, the words catching in his throat a little. It wasn’t just the card itself. It was her interest in him, her knowing him and thinking of him when he wasn’t around, enough to want to act on it.

He cupped her face. “Thank you, Ava.”

She took a shaky breath. “You’re welcome.” She glanced down and lifted the popcorn bowl. “You want some?”

Oh, he wanted some, but he was staring at her mouth, not the bowl. He glanced away quickly. She might have chosen him tonight, but she still had a hard limit and wanted to be friends. But he still wanted to know her. Maybe he could finally get her to open up a little. Share with him.

“I want you to talk to me.”

She frowned. “About what?”

The hand that was resting on the back of the couch picked up a lock of her hair and brushed it off her face.

“Tell me why you like these two different worlds.” She breathed deeply and pursed her lips, as if wanting to physically keep the words in. “Tell me, love,” he asked softly.

Her expression softened. “I was married, up until two years ago.”

That caught him by surprise. The hard limit, strictly-anonymous woman with sass and a brassy mouth had been married?

“How long?”

“Right out of high school. My life wasn’t great, and he was my only way out. But I basically became his puppet.”

“Did he hurt you?” Anger rose in his chest. He’d kill the fucker if—

“Not physically,” she said. “He just…” She shook her head. “He took everything I was.”

The pain in her voice made Nolan’s gut twist. “You’re strong. You’re so much—”

“Now I am. Well, trying to be. I’m still working on it.” She shrugged. “I just don’t ever want to be back there. Serve keeps things in perspective. Let’s me explore who I am and what I want. There doesn’t have to be anything beyond that.”

“Nothing? And no one?”

She nodded and looked at him with a kind of desperation, longing, and sadness that made him want to reach out and hold her until everything bad she’d ever felt faded away.

“Yeah,” she whispered, leaning in a little. “But that doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy it while it lasts.”

When her lush mouth brushed his, he was a goner. He couldn’t think. Not about anything but her touch. Her taste. The feel of her. It was like the first time. Like he hadn’t experienced every sweet offering she’d given up over the past few weeks. Because this was different. She was kissing him. Not Myth.

And God help him, he kissed her back.

• • •

She should stop. She knew she was in trouble and breaking her own rules the moment she pressed her mouth against Nolan’s.

But he was so warm, so inviting, and she wanted to dive in and have him. Just this once, just for this kiss, she needed to finally feel the man he was.

“You haven’t touched me,” she whispered against his mouth, then kissed his bottom lip. “You could have several times by now. But you haven’t.”

He nodded. “Hard limit…” he said, then delved his tongue into her mouth and took her breath away, leaving behind tremors of need.

Something in Nolan’s kiss, his very touch, felt familiar. Her mind went to Myth and how with his every caress he seemed to know what she needed.

She wanted more, but he pulled back just enough to whisper. “Your hard limit was anonymity. I’m not anonymous.”

“No, you’re not,” she said, and looked into his eyes.

Nolan knew her and what she wanted better than she did. She was sliding down a slope that wasn’t just slippery, it was fucking terrifying, and it led to a cliff. One where she’d fly over and crash into a deep chasm.

“Nolan,” she said. “I’m…”

Scared.

Say it. Tell him the truth.

But her mouth remained still against his. She couldn’t tell him how badly she wanted to pull him close, because once the words were out of her mouth, she wouldn’t be able to stop herself from grabbing him. And she may not let go. She couldn’t tell him how terrified she was that she’d get lost again to another man.

She trusted him and knew he wasn’t like her ex. But that only made the problem worse. She’d given herself to her ex so completely that she’d left nothing for herself.

She couldn’t let that happen again. Not for a man who didn’t deserve her. Not even for a man who did.

But did that mean she couldn’t have him at all?

He cupped her face, silently coaxing her to finish her sentence. “You’re what, love?”

Her eyes met his. “I’m broken.”

He shook his head, as though ready to fight her on that, but he didn’t know. Couldn’t understand.

She pulled him back into another kiss. His mouth eagerly opened for hers, and again she found that aching familiarity. He kissed her with the intimacy of a lover who'd tasted her before.

Was she crazy? Was it possible Nolan…and Myth…that the line dividing them had never existed?

She was getting too caught up, too close. And now with this insane thought that this kiss could be the same. That these two men could be one and the same.

She released him from their kiss and backed away.

"I had a good time tonight," she said, keeping the strain out of her voice and digging her nails into her palms to keep from reaching for him. "I want to end on a good note."

The look in his eyes wasn't surprised or even disappointed. He looked… apologetic.

He didn't say anything, just stood up and walked toward her door.

He stopped and held up the card she'd gotten him. "This means a lot to me. Thank you." He turned to leave.

"Nolan…"

He looked back at her. "Yeah?"

What was she doing? She was close to reaching out and pulling him back. She knew the rules they'd agreed to, and she knew why she needed them.

And now she was on the verge of destroying those hard limits. But the taste of Nolan and the taste of Myth, so similar, so familiar, wouldn't be denied. She had to know.

"Would you talk to Myth for me? See if he can come in tomorrow night?"

A flash of something sad crossed his face. "Sure," he said.

"You don't think he's mad at me?"

He placed his palm against her cheek. "He could never be mad at you. I imagine he'll be thrilled to see you again."

She wanted to lean into his hand. She wanted to grab it and pull him to her and feel his lips on hers again. But she did what she needed, what they both needed. Because if she was wrong about him and Myth, this boundary was the only thing that would save them.

She took his hand from her face, gently squeezed it, and then let go. “Good night, Nolan.”

“Good night.” He closed the door with a soft click and left.

Her entire chest sank. A shocking thought pierced her mind. It was several minutes before she realized she’d whispered the words out loud:

“Come back…”

Chapter Thirteen

Nolan ran his hands through his hair and paced in his office. Ava had him spinning. He'd just left her apartment, and he didn't want to go home. But walking paths from wall to wall wasn't helping him clear his mind. She'd invited him to her place, given him that baseball card, and then…God, then she'd kissed him. But then she'd backed away.

And he finally understood why.

For her, Serve was about fantasy. It was why she'd come here. But Nolan wasn't a fantasy. He was reality. And she didn't seem to want that. She'd even stayed true to her word and asked to reschedule her scene for tomorrow-fucking-night.

"Shit," he muttered. This whole situation was a fuck-all storm waiting to crash, and he was going to lose her.

Not that he was trying to hang on longer than he could. He still had Myth. This had never been about finding a way to be in a real relationship with her, just about taking care of her, about making her whole again.

Even now, with his craving for her so intense it might destroy him, he knew her limits. And if the only way he could help her was as his alter ego, then fuck it all, he'd bury himself in the fantasy. She'd get what she needed, and he'd get to satisfy his craving for her.

Because that's what this was all about after all. Simply satisfying his craving. When she walked away, he'd walk away, too.

“Sure I fucking will,” he muttered.

“Did you say something?” Leo said, standing in the office doorway.

Yeah. But nothing he’d repeat to a man who’d see right through his bullshit.

“Is there something you need?” he asked Leo. The guy was in street clothes, not on duty tonight, which meant whatever he was doing at the club was personal.

“I thought you’d taken off after your shift earlier, but a couple of girls downstairs were asking about you, and one said she’d seen you. Just checking to make sure all is cool.”

He scoffed. “All is not cool.” He walked past Leo and headed down to the bar on the first floor of Serve. He needed a drink. Maybe ten.

Leo followed him, and before Nolan even ordered the first round, his buddy was already on the stool next to him.

“So it’s a woman, huh?” Leo asked, taking a drink of his beer.

Nolan shook his head. “Something like that.” Christ, he heard the snark in his voice. He didn’t know when it had happened, but the realization hit hard and fast.

I’m not happy at Serve anymore.

Worse than that, what he wanted was Ava. To himself. The one thing he couldn’t have.

“Sorry,” Nolan said, and took a shot of vodka.

“It’s cool. You want to talk about it?”

He laughed. “What I really want, I can’t have,” Nolan admitted, and that punched a hole in his chest.

“All right. Well, look, I don’t know exactly what’s going on, but I can tell you one thing.” Leo faced Nolan, and his eyes were serious. “If you really want something, sometimes you have to play dirty to get it.”

Nolan nodded. His friend’s advice made sense. Too bad Nolan was in a

battle against Ava—for Ava. He wanted to win a woman who didn't want to be won.

"To playing dirty," Nolan said, and clinked his shot glass against Leo's beer.

• • •

Ava smacked the keys on her laptop harder than she should have. But attempting to finish the Xspot Inc. presentation was the only way to keep her mind occupied and drown out the fact that she was sitting in her apartment, alone.

The fact that she wasn't with Nolan.

So she hit the keys harder, causing the "F" to get stuck and streak across her screen. Yeah, "FFFFFFF" was right…

She wanted to believe that she could be only friends with Nolan. But his words had proven a relationship with him would never be so limited.

She'd thought about going to Serve to see him. To talk about possibly canceling the scene with Myth. She couldn't explain why. She just knew she wanted to see Nolan. Which went against the whole "think of other things" plan she was trying to enforce.

Whether she canceled or not, the fact was that she'd quickly realized after Nolan left that last time how continuing to see him would lead her to repeat the same mistakes she was running from. She'd lose herself in him.

Then why was she thinking of canceling on Myth? Shouldn't she want to distance herself from Nolan?

She shook her head at the terrifying thought that had entered her mind as she'd kissed Nolan. God, had she really become so obsessed with him that she was fantasizing about him and Myth being the same man?

She slapped her brow harder than the "F" key, and it did little to dislodge her confusion. Nolan was her friend. She cared about him, so much. But the

line had been drawn since day one. It was clear now, more than ever, which side she belonged on and which side she needed to keep him on.

Best to keep her appointment with her mystery lover. Because the next scene with Myth would bring those boundaries back into place. It was her last chance to finally prove that she could have her fantasy and keep it separate from the real world.

She'd give herself over. Totally and completely. And then she would return to her life. Alone, but whole.

• • •

Thank God Nolan didn't have a hangover. He didn't know how he'd dodged that bullet, but he almost would have preferred it to the emptiness aching in his chest. He'd dreamt of Ava with him at Serve, but in his dream, he'd removed the blindfold from her eyes and revealed himself. Christ, he hoped he wouldn't do anything so stupid tonight.

It was time to get over that though, because he was about to transform into Myth. Nolan would go down to get Ava and bring her up to the scene, and then he'd become his alter-ego. The one that was allowed to touch her. The one she wanted.

A knock on his open office door. Whoever it was could get the hell—

It was Ava.

"Hey," she whispered.

He stood from behind his desk. "Hi."

She stepped in, looking as beautiful as ever in a simple white dress. She was like an angel coming to save him from himself.

"I'm sorry about yesterday," he said.

"There's nothing to be sorry about."

"I know, but…we agreed to these boundaries." She looked at him for a moment, long enough that he felt like she was searching for something.

“It’s my fault. I should have known better.”

Didn’t that say it all? Kissing him—Nolan—had been a mistake. Her ex had really done a number on her, and the only way she would allow herself to be open and intimate with someone was in the comfort and safety of a fantasy.

And now she stood before him. There could be only one reason she’d come back today.

Everything was ready for her, but he’d been sitting there hoping she wouldn’t show.

“You’re here to see Myth?”

Something flashed in her eyes, gone too fast to be sure what it signified. “If he still wants to see me.”

He slowly nodded. “Is there anything you want to talk about before I take you in there?” he asked, motioning to the room across the hall.

Her gaze stayed calm. “No. I’m clear on everything.”

He nodded and escorted her to the scene room without another word. He wouldn’t ask her why she’d come. He’d already given her the opportunity to say anything she wanted, and she’d chosen to keep her feelings to herself. So he wouldn’t push. This was business as usual.

He didn’t have to tell her to remove her clothes. She simply unzipped her dress and let it fall to the floor. Silence. Nothing between them but unspoken words.

He pulled the blindfold from his pocket and fastened it around her pretty face, then left her sitting on the bed.

Tonight, Myth wasn’t going to be gentle. He wasn’t going to let her have control, even in the smallest way. Tonight, she’d get what she wanted.

He’d held himself back out of fear that their make-believe scene would intrude on the real world. But this wasn’t real. It was a fantasy. All *her* fantasy.

And she’d been clear what kind of fantasy she wanted to have.
She wanted to be taken over? He’d do just that.

Chapter Fourteen

Ava sat naked, blindfolded, and chilled. Not from cold, but from anticipation. Nolan hadn't said a thing once they entered the room. She couldn't really blame him. She didn't know what to say herself. She just knew she needed to forget. Forget the real world. Forget that she had fallen for Nolan and was thinking of him in ways she shouldn't. Forget how easy it was with him. She didn't want to think. She just wanted to give in and be consumed. And Myth had the power to do that, especially since, thanks to Nolan's advice several days ago, she knew how to please him. Knew how to give in and really, truly let him lead.

"Just inside this room," she reminded herself. Where the blindfold removed her from the real world and put her into a fantasy. A place where she could simply feel. Let go.

And she would. Once and for all, she'd let him take over and she'd come out the other side better for it. This was the one place where she could give herself completely to a man and not worry that he would leave nothing left.

After tonight, she could go back to her life, her world, with confidence that she would always be able to hold on to her control. Her emotions. Her identity.

She would be alone, but that was the price if she wanted to feel safe again.

That's what you wanted.

A scene was one thing, but the real world? She'd seen the kind of mistakes she'd make with a real person.

So why, even now, was she unable to squash her thoughts of Nolan? Why couldn't she stop thinking about her time with him indoor skydiving, when he'd shown her that she *could* let go in the real world and still be safe? More, that she could trust him.

She shook her head. It was exactly that line of thinking that had led to her fantasizing that Nolan was actually Myth. One was her friend. One was her lover. It was that very boundary that kept her safe—

The door opened and boomed shut. Normally, Myth gently latched the door closed, but tonight it sounded as if he'd kicked it.

Was he upset she'd canceled the other night? He'd likely talked with Nolan, but how much did Myth know? Did he know she was going to submit the way he wanted? The way he needed?

A few strides brought him next to her. She sat there on the bed, unable to see him, but she could feel his heat, his presence. His intense energy radiated from his body.

"Are you—"

He clasped the underside of her chin and pulled up slowly, enough to gradually make her legs extend as if preparing to stand, but he stopped short of pulling her onto her feet. He stepped closer, and she felt his abs against her open mouth.

He was hard and strong, the ridges and grooves so delicious she wanted to suck, bite, kiss. But he held the entire underside of her chin in his big palm and again lifted slowly. Trailed her parted lips along his chiseled torso. The moment she reached his chest, he began lowering her, guiding her lips back down until she was seated again.

A dominant vibe drifted from him like fog off a lake. It surrounded her. She couldn't help it. She flicked her tongue out and tasted his hip bone.

He growled and kicked her feet apart, spreading her wide. Just like she'd been on the couch when Nolan had told her how he'd want to see her, see how much she wanted him.

She was happy to show him just that.

He stepped even closer, hand still cupping her chin, and he guided her lips from his abs and up his impressive body. Her thigh muscles burned trying to keep this slow pace. But he never let her stand fully.

She could taste him, though. Lick him. And she did. She went to grab at his low-slung jeans, but he flicked her touch away with his free hand.

He seemed to want just her mouth on him.

This was the moment she'd hoped for. He was taking her over.

He lowered her so her bare bottom rested on the bed, and the smell of denim hit her. His jeans and his cock were right in front of her. And she couldn't see it. Couldn't reach out.

She wanted to. Desperately. But she dug her fingers into the sheets and waited. Waited for him to guide her, instruct her, take her.

He gave a low growl. In approval? She didn't know. With his hand still on her chin, he pushed his thumb against her bottom lip and opened her mouth. She did eagerly, and her legs widened further.

His thumb traced her bottom lip, as if pleased with her. Then she heard him unzip his pants. A quick rustle of fabric, and then he was naked. Had to be. Because he was so close that she could feel his heat, smell him. All man and exotic spice.

He cupped her face in one hand and used his other to tap his hard cock against her open mouth. She couldn't see, but she knew exactly what he was doing.

She instinctively licked her lips, ready for her first taste.

But he just slowly teased her.

Tap…tap…tap…

She moaned and wiggled, that empty feeling in her core growing.

She thought of the night with Nolan. Those fiery blue eyes on her as she pleasured herself while thinking of sucking Myth into her mouth.

He'd want to see my pleasure?

While he teased her, she did her best to stay still except the one hand that drifted between her legs and began to rub.

His exhale was so heavy that she felt it on the top of her head.

Using her middle finger, she gathered her own growing moisture and rubbed her clit.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

She rubbed faster, matched his teasing until he ran the head of his cock along her lips, back and forth. She wanted him deep within her mouth so bad. To feel him. All she could picture were Nolan's eyes. His intense stare.

She stopped rubbing and slid her finger into her opening, and she heard Myth hiss. He shoved his cock deep into her mouth.

Her half moan, half gasp was muffled by this thick cock. The move had been unexpected, but she sucked greedily before he could take it away. Thank God he didn't, just let her taste him. Her mouth stretched to accommodate his thick length.

It took all her will to stay still and only move her fingers in and out of herself. She would let Myth take her how he wanted while she simply showed him how much she loved it.

He tangled one hand in her hair at the base of her head, while the other cupped her throat. He pulled his cock from her mouth, then thrust deep again.

She moaned and matched his pace with her fingers, spearing her sex in time with him plunging into her mouth.

He held her tight, used her how he wanted, and she let him. Got lost in it. She didn't have to think, have to move, she just had to please him and take

his pleasure as her own.

She hummed in satisfaction, something he seemed to like, because he continued to surge into her mouth, over and over, the way he would if he were fucking her.

She sucked and licked and took him deeper than she thought possible into her mouth and throat.

He gently stroked her throat. She knew what he wanted. He was close and wanted her to swallow him down.

She worked herself to her own release faster, harder, just as he did her mouth. Her orgasm split through her and lit her up like lightning. And just as she'd hoped, the sight of her pleasure drove Myth over the edge.

His body tensed, and his fingers in her hair tightened as his hot release flooded her.

She swallowed quickly, trying to keep up. He was huge in her mouth, and his orgasm was hard and powerful. She took him down, further and further, until she felt him shudder. For a moment, she thought she heard him murmur her name, and a part of her stilled at how familiar the voice sounded.

But that couldn't be right. The blood was pounding too loud in her ears. She didn't know what she'd heard.

His breaths rained heavy over her as he slipped from her mouth. He cupped her face in his hands and just waited. Was he looking at her? Cherishing the sight of her? She hoped so. He delivered a kiss to the side of her mouth, then the other side, then brushed her lips.

A thick gasp cut off her windpipe. It was the slightest touch, but he felt like…

Nolan.

No. She'd hoped that any kiss would crush those kinds of crazy thoughts. That Nolan couldn't possibly be Myth. That Nolan would never hide the

truth from her.

She had to be sure. Had to get a better taste, a better feel of him. And she'd do it without her sight.

She did the most dangerous thing she could…she blindly reached out for him.

He didn't deny her, just swept her up in his strong embrace and laid her back on the mattress. She felt his movements. He never strayed far from her as he adjusted so that he sat with his back against the head board, and she straddled him. His cock bobbed between them.

He ran that hard length between her folds, along her clit, and she felt like her skin would burst into flames. She was feeling him, skin to skin.

His hand slid along her body, over her back to her hips, then her ass. He rocked her into him. Never breaching, but feeling.

He dipped his head to lick her breast, then sucked a nipple into his mouth. All his touches, his caresses, were raw and gentle and consuming. So much power was right beneath her, and she felt him focus that power on her, giving her the freedom and the safety to feel however she wanted.

With every sweet stroke of his hands, she allowed herself to wonder again…could this loving touch truly be Nolan's?

She had to know. It was tearing her up inside, just the suspicion. She found his face with her palms and then held his face and kissed him.

The way his mouth opened for her. The way his heat instantly enveloped her, invited her to open up and be consumed by him. The perfect way he slid his tongue over hers.

She knew.

She squeezed her eyes shut, because right then, the blindfold could keep out her vision, but it couldn't keep out the truth. There she sat, surrounded by the one man she'd fallen in love with. The one man who'd lied to her.

She needed to pull away now. Leave him before she lost any more of

herself this man.

But she couldn't think beyond the warmth of his arms. Was she trapped again? No. She'd finish this. One final time to prove that she could live in this last moment without losing herself. One final time with him to say goodbye. Then she would disappear from his life forever.

He was who she wanted. Who she'd been falling for every time they'd been together. He made her laugh. Challenged her. Made her strong side stand up, while bringing out her submissive side, all at the same time. He was her source of hope. The catalyst for her happiness.

But she'd had this feeling before, and she knew that however much kinder Nolan was than her ex, it wasn't him that was the problem. She'd created the boundaries at Serve to protect herself, and as much as it hurt her to think that this would be their last time together, she knew that if it wasn't, she'd never recover. She'd give him everything she was and everything she would be.

He didn't break her kiss as he grabbed a condom, then reached between them and rolled it on.

"I need you so much," she said. And that was the problem.

There was a rip of a condom wrapper, and with a firm grip on her hips, he guided her to his cock.

She wasn't in pain, she was destroyed, mourning what she was missing. What was on the other side of her emotional boundaries.

So many times she'd imagined Nolan's steely blues gazing at her as he entered her. So many times she'd thought of him when she was with Myth. And now that she knew, she couldn't pull away.

He began to slide her down his shaft. She imagined Nolan's face as he inch by inch disappeared inside of her. When he was buried to the hilt, a small moan escaped her, and with it, a broken sob.

His fingers traced her cheek as if to ask, "What's wrong, love?"

She could almost hear his voice. It was him. Her Nolan. And they were connected in every way possible, except in reality. She might know it was him, but they were still inside Serve, inside a fantasy, and it was breaking her in half. She was buzzing with pleasure, with need, with sadness.

"Please, don't stop," she whispered and clung to him tighter.

He thrust up and took all the space she had to give him. He wasn't just taking over her body. He had her heart and soul, too. Nolan had it all. He'd had it from the beginning.

He loved her, all while betraying her.

She hugged him as he pumped harder, faster, bringing them both to the brink. She rocked her hips to meet him. Wanting him so much, but knowing she couldn't keep him.

Her chest felt like someone had ripped her heart out while her body screamed for release and pleasure. He was with her, and she felt complete yet devastated all at the same time.

She'd thought she could do this. Relish a single time with the real him. But she could feel her boundaries falling away the longer he stayed inside her. She needed to finish this soon.

She clung tighter, whipped her hips faster.

His big body tensed with his release, and she followed him down, her own body forsaking her and giving in to the most intense pleasure she'd ever felt, all while her world rained down in pieces around them like tattered bits of paper. So easily destroyed.

It was too much. The intensity. The connection. It was everything she'd wanted, but now with her fantasy fulfilled, she realized how wrong she'd been to think she could separate a fantasy from reality. She'd gone into this thinking she had control. That her hard limit would keep her safe.

But she'd never had power. Not when Myth had been Nolan all along.

From the beginning, Nolan was the only one who'd had power. The one

who'd set her fate.

Controlled her fate.

She pulled him toward her into a final kiss. She held his mouth against hers, no need for anything more than the soft touch of her lips to his. She wanted to stay like this for a moment longer.

But the game, and the fantasy, were over.

"Nolan," she whispered.

The second that single word passed her lips, he pulled away from her. "You knew?" he asked.

She slid the blindfold off. "I do now."

"I wanted to tell you. But I thought…"

"It doesn't matter," she said. "Not anymore.

His expression fired off a mix of devastation, fear, and…hope.

He didn't understand. And she didn't know how to explain it to him.

He pulled her close to him and held his face against her neck. "Now that you know…you need to know everything. How I feel. I want you to be mine," he rasped. "Say you'll be mine. Just mine."

She swallowed hard. She knew what he meant, and it terrified her to her foundation, the level of commitment he was seeking. It was all the reminder she needed that every fear she felt was justified.

She couldn't take this need. This hunger for Nolan. Not a fantasy. The real man. She'd been down that road before, and this heavy desperation could mean only one thing.

She was weak. Reverting back to the woman she once was. The one that had lost herself to a man.

"I can't," she whispered. "Not now. Not ever again."

• • •

Nolan couldn't believe what he was hearing. It was everything he'd feared

and everything he'd worked so hard to avoid. But here it was, a woman he'd sworn to protect, instead revealing that he'd hurt her. Deeply, irrevocably. And she was about to leave him forever.

Only now did he realize what he'd asked her in the heat of the moment.

Be mine.

He'd asked the woman who was terrified of losing her real self to a man to give herself to him. And he'd only given her reasons not to trust him.

"Ava, please—"

She shook her head and lifted herself off him. She stepped back and gathered her clothes in a bundle in front of her, and it said something about her desperation that she ran to the door without first dressing.

"Ava," he said again.

She stopped at the door and turned back to him.

"I can't just let you go," he said. "Not like this."

But even as he said the words, the look on her face told him he'd said the wrong thing.

"You have to," she said. "If you ever felt anything for me, please. Let me go."

She left the room and closed the door behind her.

His heart stilled as if slapped with wet cement.

She was gone, and the only thing left behind was the blindfold on the middle of the floor.

Chapter Fifteen

Today should be a great day. Ava was pitching to a major company. But she'd slept last night at her desk. Okay, "slept" wasn't the right term. After walking out on Nolan last night, all she'd done was lie awake, thinking of him.

After a cold shower and change of clothes, she at least looked the part of a confident marketing analyst, even though she felt anything but.

She couldn't think of Nolan now. Or last night. But she was just sleep deprived enough to lack the will to numb the memories of him.

Get it together.

At the doors into the presentation room, Gina stopped her and put a hand on her shoulder.

"You sure you're up for this?"

I have to be.

Because if she could make it through today, she could make it through anything. She would know once and for all that her future and her fate were hers to command. To control. Her love for a man—a beautiful, wonderful man—wouldn't be the thing that caused her world to collapse.

"I'm fine," she said. "Let's go get this account."

Gina smiled. "That's the woman I hired. Okay, let's do this."

She and Gina went into the presentation room and met the head executives of Xspot Inc.. Gina gave them a brief introduction, then threw

Ava a quick wink, turned off the lights, and left the presentation to her.

She turned on the projector and clicked through to the first slide. And then found herself at a loss for words.

So much had happened recently, and she didn't feel like her feet were quite on the ground.

She knew why: Nolan.

She looked at the clicker in her hand, then at the handful of CEO's and CFO's in the room. The executives were sitting around the table, waiting for her to say something, anything, and it was all she could do not to sweat through her dress.

She swallowed and forced herself to begin. "We've done extensive research on the best strategy for your company and how to launch your products and take Xspot Inc. to the next level," she started. "We've prepared a number of slides to demonstrate our strategy and assure you that signing the Wayne Firm for your marketing team is the right choice."

She clicked through to the next slide, a collection of sex toys. Among them? A blindfold.

She'd been trying for a long time to regain her strength and confidence, and she'd finally gotten to a place where she hadn't felt blinded.

Except she had been blinded. Literally, figuratively, in every way that mattered. The blindfold and the anonymity were supposed to set her free, allow her to indulge in her fantasy with no real world consequences. She'd been a fool to think that she could so easily escape her fear.

The realization came to her suddenly. The presentation. The slides. Her prepared speech. They were all wrong. Too carefully orchestrated to inspire the executives. If she wanted this to work, she needed to speak from her heart.

She pressed the power button on the clicker and shut the projector down, and then she went to the side of the room and turned the lights back on.

Gina's mouth dropped open with horror, but Ava went with her gut and returned to the front of the room. The executives of Xspot Inc. were watching her with anticipation.

"The truth is…numbers and projections only get you so far. I believe that for your company to truly take off, consumers need to understand your products on a visceral level."

Gina glanced at the executives, eyes wide. They hadn't yet given a sign if they were buying a word of what Ava was saying, but it was too late now to question her decision. She had to finish this.

"You sell a fantasy," she said. The CEO sat back in his chair, eyes on her, waiting for her to continue. "It's not about a single product or the launch of a new line. It's about showing customers what they want, maybe things they thought they could never have, and telling them 'yes' to choices they never knew were options. Whether it's a sexy piece of lingerie or a naughty toy"—she shimmed her shoulders a little, and a few chuckles rang out—"the end result is the same. Power. Giving your consumers the power to choose their own fantasy and the freedom to explore it in the real world. That is what your products offer. That is what we want to sell and market for you. And that is what I believe won't just expand your customer base, but will create longevity in those customers for many years to come."

Everyone's eyes were on her. She gave a gentle shrug and delivered the final line that summed up more than just the meeting she was standing in. It summed up her entire world for the past several weeks.

"Everyone wants to live in their own personal fantasy. Xspot Inc. offers them the chance to turn that fantasy into reality."

• • •

"Wow, man, you look like shit," Oliver said as he strolled up to Nolan at the bar.

Nolan didn't look up. Kept his eyes on his glass. He had one mission: find the bottom of the bottle. "Why are you even here?" he grumbled.

Oliver lifted his chin toward the bar where Eliza sat. "Role play night." The grin that took over his friend's face was genuine. He had his woman. Was happy. "What's the matter with you?"

"I lost her," Nolan said.

"The woman you've been dual personalitying with?"

Nolan nodded.

"What are you doing here talking to me when you should be getting her back?"

Nolan's chest felt like it was falling in on itself. "I don't know. I don't what I think." He looked around. Maybe he'd run to Serve because it was what he knew. It was his routine. Maybe deep down, he knew this was where he belonged. A myth of a man, not a real one worthy of Ava's life. "Jesus…" The truth hit him, and fuck, it hurt. So damn bad he thought God himself was squeezing his lungs. "I really lost her."

"Back up," Oliver said. "It can't be that bad."

"I lied to her from the beginning. I was playing both parts without her knowing."

"I thought she wanted anonymity?"

"She did. But I wanted her. Put myself in her path on purpose. She deserves better than that. Better than me."

Oliver stared at him, but Nolan just wanted to fade away. That would be better than feeling overwhelmed by the memory of her body, her skin, her smile.

"You need to pull your head out of your ass," Oliver said, and Nolan's stare darted to his friend. "You want this woman? You fight for her."

"You don't understand," he said. "Fighting for her is exactly what drove her away. The more I showed her I wanted her, the more she pulled away.

Until now. She's gone."

"Look, if there's one thing I've learned, it's that our minds can be assholes and get the best of us. You said she wants freedom? So give her what she wants."

"Walk away," Nolan said with a nod. That's what he should do.

"No, I mean support her in what she needs. You can figure out how to do that. If you really love her, there's a way. But that's the question, man. The one you need to answer. Do you love her?"

Nolan frowned at the floor.

"I do," he said. "With everything that I am."

"Good! Then go get her," Oliver said, slapping his back.

Yeah, Nolan knew just what he needed to do. If there was a shred of hope she'd forgive him, he'd take it. He may not know where she was, but she'd have to come home sometime.

Meanwhile? He would make sure he was ready for her.

• • •

Gina hung up the phone while Ava sat on the other side of her desk, trying not to fidget too badly. "Holy God," Gina said. "I almost had a heart attack when you went off script, but it was a brilliant move not letting me in on your plan. I got to experience the magic the same way they did."

"Did they buy it?"

Her boss looked at her and smiled. "They loved your presentation!"

Ava's eyes shot wide. "Really?"

"They didn't even wait twenty-four hours to let me know we got their business." She smiled and pointed at the phone.

Ava jumped up and clapped her hands. "We got it?"

Gina nodded. "Yep. We are now the official marketing firm for Xspot Inc. You brought in a multi-million dollar contract."

“The team helped.”

“Yes, but you spearheaded this. Start to finish, and you worked hard. That part about merging fantasy and reality? Whew!” Gina fanned herself. “I don’t know where you got your inspiration, but you sold all of us. You should celebrate!”

Ava let the good news of the day sink in. “Thank you so much,” she said, and then she all but skipped down the hall to her cubical. She reached for her cell to call Nolan—

Then stopped.

She wanted to share this with him. Tell him about her day. Hear his voice. All the things anyone would want with someone who mattered to them.

She closed her eyes. She couldn’t open up to him. She’d done that already, and it had gotten her burned. The problem was that wanting him felt so natural that she was fighting a devastating new instinct that left her broken, scared, and more alone than before she’d met Nolan. Because she knew what she was missing now.

She missed him. His voice. His eyes. His easy going spirit and challenging words. He’d coaxed everything good from her, and she’d accidentally fallen in love with him.

But how could she ever go back to him? Yes, he was the one man she trusted—but he was also the one man who’d betrayed her from the start.

• • •

“I was hoping you’d stop by,” Jake said. He rose from his desk and crossed his office to shake Nolan’s hand. “Actually, I’ve been hoping you’d stop by for weeks now.”

Nolan nodded. “That’s why I’m here. Is that job still available?”

Jake smiled wide. “Yeah. You finally going to take it?”

Nolan put his hands in his pockets and nodded. His time at Serve was

done. There were just two things left to do.

He wanted Ava. He hoped to God she could want him back. He'd fucked up bad and he needed to make it right. But before he went to her tonight, he had to do this one last thing: disconnect. From his old habit of living only one scene at a time. From the guilt over the woman that had been hurt on his watch. From the idea that he'd never have Ava all to himself. All of it. He had to cut ties to all the old shit that held him back.

There was one woman for him, and it was Ava.

It scared the hell out of him, but what was more terrifying was not having her. He couldn't work at Serve anymore. Had no desire to. Not because of the club itself, but because his position required him to be there for the club's members in a way that he no longer could. He only had eyes for Ava. Whether he could be with her or not, she was all he could think of, the only one he could see himself giving his heart and his body to.

He'd already talked with Jonah and given notice. He was understanding. And even if this job with Jake didn't work, then he'd find something else. The end was the same though. Serve had helped him realize his true self. His true desires.

But while he could no longer work at Serve, he did want to protect people. To help.

"Security is what I know, and I'm officially applying for the job," Nolan said.

"You've officially got it," Jake said. "I wasn't kidding when I told you I've been waiting. You have amazing recommendations and the experience we need. Jonah called me himself today to tell me that I'd be an idiot not to hire you."

Nolan grinned. There wasn't much Jonah didn't know about, so he wasn't surprised his boss—soon to be former boss—was already on to this. And he appreciated the hell out of him.

Jake shook his hand again and said, “When can you start?”

“Soon,” he said.

There was just one thing he needed to take care of first.

Now came the hard part.

Ava.

Chapter Sixteen

With blurry eyes and achy muscles, Ava let herself into her small apartment. She'd stayed at work late, until she was the only one left in the building. She'd finally decided to come home. Half sobbing and half sleeping on her computer keys wouldn't make for much comfort.

She should feel good. She'd landed a huge client. But all she felt was awful, like her entire spirit was gone. Worse, the soul she'd worked so hard to get back was now with Nolan. She seemed to be tossing it out like a bad hand of poker. Just her entire emotional capacity, no big deal.

"Sweetheart?" The soft whisper came from just outside the door. She jumped when she saw Nolan walking through the front door she'd left open.

"You can leave," she said, trying for strength and failing. She thought she'd have more time before having to face him again. No such luck.

"Not until I tell what you I came here to say."

Damn it, why had he come? She'd just gotten this aching desperation for him under control. She wouldn't get swept up again. She wouldn't lose herself to another man. She'd come too far to make the same mistakes.

She crossed her arms. "Really? Do you want to start with how you lied to me?"

"I didn't mean to lie. It started out that way because you wanted anonymity, and I didn't trust anyone else with you. I wanted to protect you."

“By deceiving me? At any point you could have come clean, but you didn’t. You manipulated me!” She wanted to cry, but instead, she felt empty. “You made me feel something for you, and the whole time you were…”

He stepped toward her, but she backed away. He froze.

“Please, love, don’t walk away.”

Her eyes snapped to his, because there was a roughness in his voice that sounded like he was drowning. He looked…devastated.

No. No, she wouldn’t be sucked in.

“I realize I asked the wrong thing when we made love.” He took a small box out of his pocket. Terror flooded her. He must have read what was on her face, because he held up his hand. “Just wait. Let me get this out. Please.”

She took a deep breath.

“Ava, you’re right. I controlled your world and your fantasy from the beginning. That was never my intention. I only meant to participate in your desires, but you hooked me. I wanted to see you smile just as much as to touch your skin. I wanted all of you. And I knew you weren’t interested in giving any part of yourself away.” He hung his head and looked at the box in his hand. “All I’m asking you now is to remember that I’m not the man that wanted to consume you and leave nothing left. I want you, need you so much, but I won’t ask or take anything from you that you don’t want to give.”

He held out the small box.

After a moment, she took it and inside found a leather cuff. Black and slightly distressed, it was masculine and simple. She looked at it, then him.

“What’s this?”

He swallowed. “It’s a cuff.”

“A cuff? Like you wear on your wrist?”

“Yes,” he said. “It’s meant to show ownership.”

A fresh dose of rage and unbelievable pain shot through her.

"You say you understand?" she said around clenched teeth. "That you get me and wouldn't ask anything of me? Except you want to put a cuff on me to show ownership." She shook her head. "You're just like everyone else. You want me to lose myself to you." He really didn't know her, and the last piece of her heart shattered.

"No, no, love." He reached out and cupped her face, forcing her gaze to meet his before she could push him away. "I'd never ask you to lose yourself again."

"So what is it then? You want to lose *yourself* instead? I can't do that, either."

"This isn't about losing anything. It's about gaining something."

Her eyes shot wide. "W-what?"

He held out his wrist, as though showing her where the cuff was meant to go. "I want to belong to you. If you'll have me? I want to give myself to you. And I want you to give yourself to me. Because together, we're more than we could ever be apart."

She didn't know what to say. He wasn't asking for domination, but the symbolism was there, and so was the commitment.

Did he know what he was asking? Know what it meant to totally surrender yourself to someone, to trust them on that level? Know how it felt to have that person betray you and eradicate all your self-worth?

Because she did. Her ex had done a number on her she'd barely recovered from. Hell, she was still recovering. And Nolan would just put himself out there and trust her like that?

"I could ruin you," she whispered. "Stomp all over your hopes and dreams. Use you and discard you."

He nodded. "That's a chance I'm willing to take, if it means I get to be yours. I trust you."

She bit back another sob. Anger and sadness from her past flooded through her. Love and longing for the man in front of her hit every nerve. She'd numbed herself to the pain for so long, sure that it was more than she could bear, but now his trust had opened her to more than pleasure. He'd opened her heart.

"You'd give yourself to me? Just like that?"

"Yes. Because you make me the man I've always wanted to be. You give me hope, not crush it. You're my every desire. There's no risk for me, sweetheart. Because whatever comes, no matter how bad, we'll face it together."

"Nolan, I…" She looked at the cuff. She was trying to be strong, trying to warn him, but she could never hurt him. "I'd never hurt you. I'd never steal any piece of your identity away from you."

"I know." He looked at her. "The question is, do you believe that I'd never steal your identity from you?"

She looked at those crystalline eyes. The same ones that had been haunting her dreams. The same ones that had been watching her, trying to give her everything she wanted. Yes, his tactics had gotten muddled in the middle, but the beginning and end were the same. He'd tried to make her happy and give her what she wanted. He'd respected her desire for anonymity even when it would have been easier for him to reveal himself.

"Yes, I believe you."

He sighed and kissed her hard. "I love you so much."

She smiled and then kissed him again and again. "I love you, too." She pulled back. "And that really terrifies me."

He nodded. "I know. Which is why I got a backup present."

She raised a brow as he went right outside the front door and came back with a Swiffer.

She laughed and wiped the tears away. "You're kidding?"

“No way. I never joke when it comes to Swiffering. You’ll never have to clean another floor for the rest of your life.”

“Now I really love you.”

He smiled and pulled her into his arms. “I really love you, too.” He kissed her, and in that moment, she found herself wrapped in the myth of her fantasy, the love of her reality, and the hope of their future.

Epilogue

“How do you like the blindfold?” Ava asked, skimming her finger nail down Nolan’s bare chest as she walked along their bed. It was the same room they’d been in at Serve when she first started there, but it was their scene, their bed, and she’d always think of it that way.

They came to the club these days merely as guests, now that Nolan had resigned from his position. He was totally and completely hers now. Officially off the market, and he would only come to the club with her.

“I wish I could see you,” Nolan said.

She tsked. “The point is to feel with your other senses, isn’t that what you told me once?”

He growled a little and she smiled. God, he was sexy, ripped, and laying on the bed in all his naked glory. Naked except for the blindfold and the leather cuff around his left wrist. She’d never had anyone give her so much. This big strong man trusted her with his world. Which was good, because she trusted him with everything she was.

She straddled his lap and his hands immediately went to her hips. She slapped them.

“Hey, not fair. You’re way too hot not to grope,” he said.

“No touching,” she said and leaned over him, just barely, so that her beasts hovered right over his mouth. “Remember all those times you bound my wrists and denied me touching you?”

He sucked her nipple into his mouth and groaned. She gasped and let him play because yes, she was weak. She loved his hands and his mouth on her. She'd never get enough.

He leaned up to suck deeper and take more of her into his mouth, and she wound her fingers in his hair, welcoming him.

"Every part of you tastes so sweet," he rasped and moved to the other nipple. Even deprived of his vision, he knew exactly where she was and how to strum her body. "Please, love, give me more."

"Begging now, huh?" she teased. His response was to gently bite her breast. It sent a shock of pleasure through her veins and she couldn't deny him. She stood on the bed, putting her pussy right in front of him as he sat up. She reached out and gripped the tall bed post for balance.

"I love you so much," he rasped, then delved his tongue into her core.

"I love you," she gasped. His tongue ring felt amazing. With Nolan turning out to be Myth as well, she got to take full advantage of all his tricks. The barbell was something she was quite keen on.

She threw her leg over his shoulder, opening herself up more. With one hand still on the post, the other dove into his hair.

"Fuck me, sweetheart. However you want."

God, she loved him. He was all things alpha, and yet he let her be and have what she needed, when she needed.

She rocked her hips into his mouth, doing exactly what he said. Fucking his mouth.

She felt powerful and free and…his. All at the same time. She was his. To her very center, all Nolan's. And she wanted that. Was happy to be his.

"I want you…need you so much, baby," she said. It was her turn to beg now. She needed to feel him, connect with him.

She tore the blindfold off of his eyes, and he didn't waste any time. Both his hands cupped her ass, and in one swift move he gripped her and lowered

her onto his waiting cock.

"Oh God!" she cried out when he speared her. Even after all the times they'd been together, he still felt so good, still shocked her system every time with sheer bliss.

She wrapped her arms around him and kissed him. He rocked in and out, taking her like he always did: completely.

"I'm yours," she whispered.

His eyes met hers and he stilled. Buried deep, he just stared at her in shock. She smiled and nodded her head. "I'm yours," she said again, and cupped his face. "Forever."

His blue eyes glittered in a way she'd never seen, like he was beyond happy and stunned at the same time.

"Baby, say something." She kissed his lips softly. He shifted his hips just enough for her to feel him deep and take her breath away.

"Say it one more time," he asked.

Another stir of his hips.

"I'm yours."

"For how long?" He thrust harder that time. Then again. Claiming her. Taking her over. Just like she needed, and just like he knew she needed.

"Forever," she said with a moan.

He plunged in and out, like those words were the best thing he'd ever heard, and she wanted to give him anything he wanted. Anything to make him happy. Even her entire self. Because he'd never take advantage. That, she knew for certain.

"Forever," he said, working her body and his to the edge, until they both tripped into the free fall of release. But he held her tight, and she knew he'd never let her go.



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About the Author

National and international bestselling author Joya Ryan is the author of the Shattered series, which includes *Break Me Slowly*, *Possess Me Slowly*, and *Capture Me Slowly*. She has also written the *Sweet Torment* series, which includes *Breathe You In* and *Only You*. Passionate about both cooking and dancing (despite not being too skilled at the latter), she loves spending time at home. Along with her husband and her two sons, she resides in California.

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